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Programa de Doctorado en Lingüística, Literatura y Traducción

TESIS DOCTORAL

**Abused Bodies: Irish Magdalene Asylums and the Restitution of Fallen  
Women through Fiction and Popular Culture.**

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**Directora:**  
María Isabel Romero Ruiz

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#### “Abused Bodies: Irish Magdalene Asylums and the Restitution of Fallen Women through Fiction and Popular Culture”

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## INTRODUCTION

Reformatory institutions in Ireland existed since 1767 and they maintained their hegemony for two centuries. Throughout all these years, thousands of women in Ireland who did not conform to the Catholic doctrine were silenced and confined in reformatory institutions. Yet, the Church's questionable practices to reform young women have come to light after the closure of the last Magdalene Asylum in 1996—the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity on Sean McDermott Street in Dublin. The exhumation of hundreds of bodies belonging to women who had died inside the Asylum and whose names were unknown after selling the property triggered an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding the Irish Catholic Church.

Since then, the press has echoed every step that the Church and the victims have taken. From 1996 to 2019 more than 2,000 newspapers articles have been published. The latest news about Irish reformatory institutions concerned Mother and Baby Homes and the adoption business that existed in Ireland during the twentieth century. In January 2019, *The Irish Mirror* covered the social media campaign initiated by survivors of Mother and Baby Homes. These women started to put pressure on the government to inquire into these institutions and the illegal adoptions carried out by religious orders (Pownall). As this article claims, survivors are still seeking restitution and help from the government and the Church. *The Irish Mirror* also put in the spotlight the scandal surrounding the Tuam Mother and Baby Home where thousands of infants died and were buried in unmarked graves (Flanagan, “Pat Flanagan column”). This article outlines the mistreatment and malnourishment thousands of women and their illegitimate children suffered inside these institutions. Thousands of children and women have died without being acknowledged, but many vulnerable women are still trying to reconstruct their lives and find their children.

To help these victims, several political and social demonstrations have been held throughout Ireland. The first organisation to raise consciousness about Magdalene Laundries was the Magdalen Memorial Committee which put pressure on the government from 1993 to 1996 to build a memorial for those exhumed and cremated women. In 2009, the Justice for Magdalenes organisation started its campaign to prove the State's involvement with Magdalene Laundries and to ensure the Church's accountability. In 2013 they achieved a State apology and a compensation scheme for Magdalene Laundry survivors. After achieving their goals, the group stopped its political campaign although their platform is still functioning for any survivor who may need help. At the same time, some Magdalene survivors offered their testimonies about their confinement in Magdalene Laundries as early as 1998 and 1999 in the documentaries "Sex in a Cold Climate" and "The Magdalen Laundries". However, these testimonies were not given too much relevance until the twenty-first century when the documentary "The Forgotten Maggies" (2009) and a book entitled *Whispering Hope* (2015) put the Magdalene survivors in the spotlight. Steven O'Riordan started his campaign in 2009 making this documentary with which he tried to link the pieces of the Irish past. After the success of this documentary, he published, together with Susan Leonard, the book *Whispering Hope* that gathers the testimonies of five survivors. Both the documentary and the book did not only serve O'Riordan to raise awareness of the crimes committed against these women, but they also aimed at giving voice and recognition to the victims.

It may seem that everything has come to an end with the State apology and the compensation scheme. However, the reality is that there are still many women who have been left behind, and who are fighting for their rights to be known and heard. That is one of the reasons why I am writing this thesis. As a political and social topic related to gender and human

rights, its relevance nowadays is still noticeable as many scholars are engaged in its discussion. Many issues are still unresolved and unknown, and this thesis contributes to the hearing of those women's voices. Although knowing the past may have had negative implications for those who have suffered, the unveiling of this part of Irish history has helped thousands of victims who had been silenced and forgotten. To get a complete view of Magdalene Laundries I should contextualise this topic first.

Throughout history, the Catholic Church has played a pivotal role in the development of Ireland becoming the identity sign of great part of the country. The Catholic Church, involved in political and social matters, imposed restrictions during the nineteenth century and great part of the twentieth century concerning morality and sexuality. In Ireland, as in many other Catholic countries, this religious discourse was gendered being women the main target of a Catholic habitus. Following the concepts of the "double spheres" and of the "angel in the house", women were required to be docile, passive, asexual and exemplary mothers and wives taking care of the family at home (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 1; Romero-Ruiz, "Shaping Female" 127).<sup>1</sup> During those centuries, sexuality was just accepted for reproduction and any deviation from the norm was prohibited. Hence, the Church and the State worked together to condemn sexual anomalies and deviations from the rule.

Given the high rates of prostitution during the nineteenth century, the figure of the prostitute became the main target of surveillance and control. To regulate the situation and prevent the contagion of venereal diseases, the State passed an Act for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations in 1864. This Act was hardened in 1866 until the passing of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1869 by which prostitutes were monthly examined to check if they were suffering from venereal diseases and sent to court if

they resisted what was known as the “rape of the speculum” (Romero-Ruiz, “Fallen Women and the London Lock” 146).

A public debate was open once women’s organisations raised their voices against the Act. Supported by the Ladies’ National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Acts (LNA), they achieved their suspension in 1883. Yet, prostitution continued even in higher numbers. The Rescue movement got involved sending women to Lock Hospitals and Rescue Homes where they were morally and religiously trained (Finnegan 161-168; Luddy, *Prostitution* 124-152; Romero-Ruiz, “Women’s Identity” 28-31). Named after Mary Magdalene, this sinful figure was used in these reformatory institutions as an example of repentance and virtue for all those women who deviated from the Catholic doctrine. Their stay there was accounted for their reformation as women who had committed sins and had to expiate them and purify their souls. In a symbolic way then, washing the clothes meant getting rid of the stains of the soul in favour of a pious and sinless life (Luddy, “Unmarried Mothers” 109-126; O’Sullivan and O’Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 17-20; Titley 9). The establishment of Magdalene Laundries, placed in Dublin, Cork, Limerick, New Rose, Waterford, and Galway, was originally aimed at regulating the situation of these women and protecting them from evil forces. Another target of moral intervention were unmarried women, who were secluded there and deprived of their children after being given in adoption or sent to Industrial Schools (Finnegan 161-168; Fisher x; Luddy, *Prostitution* 124-152; Mort 52-58; Romero-Ruiz, “Women’s Identity” 29).

Philanthropic work was of paramount importance in nineteenth-century Ireland for the establishment of these institutions for “fallen women”.<sup>2</sup> The Laundries were originally founded by middle-class women who were considered morally superior to the working class. However, the progressive occupation of the public sphere by those women was taken by the Catholic

Church as a danger. Hence, soon the Church got control of those refuges, Laundries, and hospitals. The original intention of the Founders of Magdalene Institutions to rehabilitate and achieve women's reinsertion in society seemed to be forgotten once the religious institution got control of the Homes. Indeed, very few women achieved social inclusion and employment after their reclusion. It seems that what started as an alternative for women who had fallen into prostitution became a tool for the nuns to promulgate the Catholic doctrine while they obtained free handwork. Women entered Magdalene Laundries voluntarily to be spiritually saved, to find shelter, and to work. However, they were also forced to enter Asylums at the end of the nineteenth century given the decreasing number of women who fell into prostitution (Luddy, "Women and Charitable Organisations" 304; Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 10).

There are opposite voices concerning the role of those priests and nuns who ran these Laundries. Whereas there is a small group that defends the work of the religious institutions as a social one to rehabilitate women, there is a vast majority who, in the light of recent investigation, denounce the abuse and repression they suffered during their stay there. According to survivors' testimonies, during their confinement, they had to endure long hours of work, prayer, silence, and constant surveillance which the nuns considered necessary for the rehabilitation of women whose destiny was to die in a state of grace within the Asylums. What we can see in the background is that the Irish identity as Catholic and respectable was being wavered due to the visibility of prostitutes and unmarried mothers in society. So, this social work the government encouraged could be just a mechanism to restore the Irish national image, as James Smith claims (19). It seems that what concerned the Irish State and the Catholic Church was not really prostitution and illegitimacy since they did nothing to improve women's situation in Ireland. Neither did they punish those who contributed to the maintenance of prostitution or the

abandonment of women so severely. Rather, the State and the Church were more preoccupied with this marginal group's visibility in society and the possible negative consequences this immoral practice could bring to the Irish national identity as pure and Catholic.

The disclosure of new data about the management of the Laundries, along with the testimonies of those women who had been confined in them, has opened a dialogue between present and past. The sexual scandals in which priests turned out to be involved, as was the case of Bishop Edmond Casey (1992) or priest Michael Cleary (1992), triggered an atmosphere of suspicion and a crisis of faith among the Irish population. The disclosure of morally doubtful historical facts about the Irish Catholic Church endangered the hegemony of this group especially after the publication of The Ryan and Murphy Reports (2009), which investigated cases of abused children by priests and offered implementation plans for those traumatised victims. These documents confirmed the rumours about the questionable immoral attitude of religious members who made use of their power to subdue women. Despite criticism to the contrary, such as The McAleese Report (2013)—it defends the Magdalene Laundries as voluntary institutions where women were helped and it focuses on the religious order's version leaving the victims' testimonies behind, assuring no violence or abuse acts were executed inside the Laundries—, the hard working and living conditions of those women within those institutions, along with the repression and punishment they experienced there, have left in them a profound wound difficult to heal.

Despite the Catholic Church's attempt to maintain in silence the questionable practices carried out in these reformatory institutions, social injustices and the reality behind the Magdalene Laundries have come to light thanks to the testimonies of several women. However, some victims of this “carceral system”—using Michel Foucault's term—remain in silence as a

result of this traumatic experience. The trauma of these women was caused by the psychological and physical damage they endured like sexual abuse, punishment, humiliation, loss of a child, constant surveillance, and so on. Considered “outcasts” and rejected by their family and society, these women bear the physical and psychological wounds of a traumatic experience within the Magdalene Laundries as a result of a “sinful life”.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, they have tended to repress this past and keep silent. Hence, a process of reclamation and healing is necessary now by making public this historical fact so that we could give them back their identity and place in society.

For those women, there is no doubt that their identity has been erased, anonymity being their hallmark during life and after death. I will prove that it was the Irish State in coalition with the Catholic Church, which stole their identities and denied their pasts, their memories and therefore their existence. However, the Irish country still bears traces of that past; during the 1990s the exhumation of Irish women’s bodies that crowded the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge’s Asylum gave clear evidence of the illegalities concerning death certificates. The nuns sold the land and a hundred bodies were exhumed—women who had died inside the Asylum and whose names were not known. To that, the Irish State turned a blind eye encouraging the cremation of those anonymous bodies. As a result, the United Nations (UN) paid special attention to this fact and the United Nations Committee Against Torture attacked the Irish government for not acknowledging the pain of those women (McCarthy 8). As Smith explains, this accomplice attitude was adopted at a time when Ireland enjoyed a great economic and social development so that the reinvention of Ireland, as a Catholic and independent nation, would not be jeopardised by the discovery of this sad reality (Smith 136-137). In this process of

reclamation of their identities and the ownership over their bodies, several organisations have played a pivotal role in helping these women as I have explained at the beginning.

In light of all this, the image of the Church and State as the main moral guardians of the Irish country, was crushed, causing a profound crisis of identity. Traditionally grounded on the Catholic faith as an individual and national symbol, Irish identity in the twenty-first century has collapsed and the path towards secularisation has triggered the necessity to reconsider and redefine what it means to be Irish nowadays. The outburst of new information about the reality behind the Laundries' walls, echoed by several historians and scholars, has triggered the necessity to reconsider the Catholic Church's position in Irish society, as well as the redefinition of Irish identity.

In this thesis, I adopt a Cultural Theory approach to study the Magdalene Laundries regime. Within this frame, I focus on vulnerability, biopolitics and trauma following scholars like Judith Butler (2016), Michel Foucault (1975) and Cathy Caruth (1995) among others, to explore the trauma and vulnerability of the Magdalenes and how popular culture has offered the victims resilience and healing. The main source of information I have employed to analyse the Magdalene Laundries' regimes—their origins, evolution and functioning—has been the testimonies of survivors, gathered in Justice for Magdalenes' Oral History Project (2013) and the book *Whispering Hope* (2016). For the second part of the thesis, focused on the cultural products that have been produced on this topic, my main sources have been novels, plays and films. In the last decades of the twentieth century, a new genre flourished in the Celtic country, known as Magdalene literature, covering a shameful chapter of Irish history. As an extended concept already, Magdalene literature has progressively become an established genre in Ireland and elsewhere since this historical event was discovered back in 1996 when the last Magdalene

Laundry was closed. People may know about the existence of these Catholic institutions, but the reality behind their walls came to light thanks to the voices of those who were confined there and to those fictional accounts of survivors' testimonies. Since the appearance of the first cultural product on this topic back in the 1990s, a considerable number of films, plays, documentaries, and novels have been released.

My intention here is not only to provide the reader with a historical account of the Magdalene Laundries. Rather, I would like to analyse those cultural products—novels, autobiographies, films, plays and documentaries—which were born during the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first out of the necessity to make the public aware of the Irish reality; a reality that has been silenced and hidden. I analyse these literary and cultural products as instruments of agency and healing for those women who have been deprived of the opportunity to tell their stories. Even though the majority are fictional narratives, they are based on the reality of thousands of Irish women who are given voice now in a process of reclamation of the Magdalenes' identities. Once more, it is literature and popular culture which fictionalise reality opening a dialogue with the past by which the nation's discourse is challenged, even its identity and foundation. It is through them, that the processes of reclamation and healing I have already mentioned can be possible.

Overall, my aim in this thesis is threefold: firstly, to question the social work the nuns and philanthropic women were believed to develop with the establishment of Rescue Homes and Magdalene Asylums in Ireland—I will demonstrate that these institutions served as means of repression rather than of rehabilitation for women, and to prove that I will employ Butler's theory of the body and Foucault's theory of power; secondly, to see how popular culture and literature have contributed to the understanding and reconstruction of the Irish past being faithful

to reality, contrary to what is generally thought—applying Gender and Trauma Studies, I analyse literary works and cultural products as supportive examples of what historians and scholars like Francés Finnegan or James Smith have published about the Magdalenes; and thirdly to revisit Irish identity and the place women occupy in Ireland giving voice to this group, always subjugated by a conservative and patriarchal society—applying Resilience Theory I will explore how women resisted the restrictions imposed. I believe it is through literature and popular culture that a process of healing can be achieved by giving voice to those silenced for so long. So, my analysis of these novels, documentaries, plays and films will be based on the abuse of women’s bodies, the resilient attitude adopted by the vulnerable, the trauma left in them, and the healing process they are engaged in.

When I took up the task of writing my doctoral thesis back in 2015, I decided to embark on the study of a current historical fact that has threatened the Irish national identity. As a student of Irish culture and literature, I found this topic quite interesting given its recent discovery. I found that James Smith, together with Francés Finnegan and Maria Luddy, were the first scholars in the twenty-first century to bring to light this controversial issue, disclosing the sad reality of the past centuries for so long concealed by the Irish State and the Catholic Church. With the outburst of new information about the Magdalene Laundries, many scholars and historians have analysed Irish reform institutions such as Magdalene Laundries, Industrial Schools and Mother and Baby Homes. Most of them have taken a historical point of view in their books and articles as is the case of James Smith (2007), Francés Finnegan (2004), Maria Luddy (1997; 2007), Eoin O’Sullivan and Ian O’Donnell (2007), Rebecca Lea McCarthy (2010), Brian Titley (2006), Maeve O’Rourke (2016), and Erin Costello Wecker (2015).

Smith's book *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (2007) focuses on the legislation that regulated Magdalene Laundries and the concept of "Ireland's architecture of containment" referring to the conspiracy of silence surrounding these institutions. His historical analysis of Magdalene Laundries through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, together with his analysis of some cultural products in the second part of his book, has been quite useful for my understanding of coercive confinement in Ireland. Finnegan's book *Do Penance or Perish* (2004) explains the origins of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland under certain religious institutions. Based on the annals of some of these convents she had access to, she offers the reader a view of the life within the asylums. However, her vision is based on the information registered by the clergy. This view has enabled me to compare the perspective of the perpetrators and the victims to obtain a more complete view of the Magdalene Laundries' regime. Luddy's focus on her articles (1997; 1988; 2007; 2011) and books (1995; 2007) has been on the prostitute, the politicisation of sex during the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the role and place of women in Ireland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the role of women philanthropists in the creation of Magdalene Laundries, and the unmarried mother in the twentieth century. Her analysis of women and Magdalene Laundries in Ireland from a gender perspective has been useful in my analysis of some cultural products. Finally, O'Sullivan and O'Donnell's book *Coercive Confinement in Ireland. Patients, Prisoners and Penitents* (2012) analyses Irish reformatory institutions in the twentieth century until their closure as prisons making the State responsible for the coercive confinement of many people in Ireland. This book has been helpful in my analysis of Magdalene Laundries as prisons following Foucault's theory of power. McCarthy's book *Origins of Magdalene Laundries* (2010) offers a historical overview of Magdalene Laundries from the Middle Ages to the twentieth

century and explores how these institutions became prisons for prostitutes. Following Kenneth Burke's theory of identity and Foucault's theory of power, she also coins the term "Magdanelism" here offering a different reading of Mary Magdalene. This book has been useful for the second chapter of my thesis where I expand the historical analysis of the Laundries, focusing also on unmarried mothers and analysing the testimonies of real survivors too.

Overall, these scholars' books offer a historical overview of Magdalene Laundries which I have complemented with the testimonies of survivors. The analysis of these institutions through the theoretical lenses of trauma, vulnerability and biopolitics has also enhanced the perspective we now have of Magdalene Laundries. Apart from these books, I have also found the articles of several scholars quite valuable. Titley's article "Magdalen Asylums and Moral Regulation in Ireland" (2006) focuses on the nineteenth-century religious congregations which founded Magdalene Asylums in Ireland, and how life was there. Her focus on the legislation of Magdalene Laundries has been useful to my analysis of these institutions from a political perspective. In her article "The Justice for Magdalenes Campaign" (2016), Maeve O'Rourke claims responsibility for the damage caused to thousands of women who were victims of abuse in Magdalene Laundries. She pinpoints the State's duty to protect those women and to take action to heal their wounds. In the same line, Costello's article "Reclaiming Magdanelism or Washing away Sin" (2016) focuses on the rhetoric of women's silence. In it, she explores the imposed silence on Magdalene survivors and the process of reclamation that has been initiated by survivors to recuperate their voices and power. These two articles have been useful as an introduction to the analysis of the healing process these women are involved in. Another main topic covered by scholars like Paul Michael Garrett (2010; 2016), Mike Milotte (1997) and

Lindsey Earner-Byrne (2007) has been the unmarried mother and the adoption business that existed in Ireland during the twentieth century, which I have analysed in chapter two.

Furthermore, the cultural representation of Irish reformatory institutions has also provoked great interest in some scholars like M<sup>a</sup> Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides (2013; 2016), who has extensively published on unmarried mothers in Ireland and on the cultural representation of Magdalene Laundries with her focus on violence against unmarried mothers; Paula Murphy (2006) who has analysed the negotiation between fact and fiction in these products; Leane McCormick (2009) who has published on the portrayal of Magdalene Laundries in popular culture offering criticism of some filmic representations; and Smith, in the second part of his book, who has also analysed some of the cultural products of the time focusing on cultural memory. The study of these and other cultural representations from different methodological approaches in my thesis aims at widening the current view we have of these reformatory institutions.

The Irish Magdalene Asylums topic has attracted a wide variety of critics. The problem is that access to the archives is a difficult task given the Catholic Church's refusal to make this information public. Hence, not much has been written about this topic apart from those scholars mentioned before, together with a doctoral thesis written in 2009 by Evelyn Glynn focused on the act of remembering and forgetting linked to trauma. In contrast, there are several studies on American and Australian and many other European countries' Asylums including Scotland and England in the UK. Overall, there has been a general tendency to analyse Magdalene Laundries from a historical perspective. On the contrary, I offer a more complete view of the Irish reformatory institutions' history paying attention to the oral testimonies of those survivors and to the analysis of certain cultural products which have not been considered so far. My thesis does

not only offer a historical overview of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland, but it also offers a socio-cultural point of view; focusing on the testimonies of survivors, I intend to see how literature and popular culture have echoed this social and historical fact and how they have contributed to the reconstruction of the Irish past.

The literary panorama on the Magdalenes is extensive; two of the four narratives I analyse in this thesis are autobiographies; one written by a former midwife of a Mother and Baby Home and the other written by a former inmate of a Magdalene Laundry. *The Light in the Window* (1998) by June Goulding and *Kathy's Story: A Childhood Hell Inside the Magdalen Laundries* (2005) by Kathy O'Beirne are innovative in the history of the fictionalisation of Irish Magdalene Asylums since they offer the testimonies of those who experienced the Magdalene Laundries' regime of power. Joan O'Neill's *The Fallen Star* (2005) and Lisa Michelle Odgaard's *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017) deal with the problem of unmarried motherhood in Ireland during the 1960s. These two novels are criticisms of the whole Irish system and of all those who turned their back on these young girls—family, nuns, society, and State. Due to its recent publication, I have not found any critical reception of Odgaard's novel, but I believe it is a valuable piece contributing to the understanding of the history of Magdalene laundries. Finally, V.S. Alexander's *The Magdalen Girls* (2017) highlights one of the main concerns of the Catholic Church during the 1960s, that is, sex, which caused the preventive confinement of many young girls in Ireland at the time. Overall, these historical novels are stories of resistance, of revealing the truth at all costs and of questioning the main values spread by the Catholic Church.

The representation of Magdalene Laundries has also extended to the film industry which has focused on the story of unmarried mothers. Peter Mullan's film "The Magdalene Sisters" (2002), which tells the story of three young rural middle-class girls (Bernadette, Rose and

Margaret) who, during the 1960s, end up in a Magdalene Asylum for diverse reasons, namely rape, pregnancy and vanity respectively, and Aisling Walsh's film "Sinners" (2002), which tells the story of an orphan Irish girl who fell pregnant out of wedlock, encapsulate the life of these women inside the Laundries. These filmmakers focus on the misfortunes these women suffer inside the Home—verbal, physical and sexual abuses, hard work, silence, surveillance, and strict discipline. These films lend themselves to be analysed following theories of the body. Finally, Stephen Frears's film "Philomena" (2013) is based on Martin Sixsmith's book *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee: A Mother, Her Son, and a Fifty-Year Search* (2010). The film fictionalises the sad reality of all those Irish unmarried mothers who lost their children, along with the arduous task of finding them after their release from a Magdalene Asylum. The whole film is about overcoming trauma and the difficulties the victim encounters when facing her traumatic past. Moreover, the film also stresses the victims' necessity to speak up and make their stories known despite the shame and fear they may feel. Finally, the film encapsulates the psychological havoc derived from a whole life of Catholic indoctrination and the aftermaths of such a cruel regime thousands of Irish women were subjected to. Thus, my focus here is on the analysis of this film with the theoretical lenses of trauma.

Finally, in drama, we find some plays like *Eclipsed* (1994) and *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2003) by Patricia Burke-Brogan which were the first cultural representations of the Irish Magdalene system. Both plays focus on unmarried mothers although they also include the perspective of the nuns. Burke's plays are critiques of the whole Irish system and of all those who turned their backs on these women—family, nuns, society, and State. These plays recover the past from the perspective of the "perpetrators" and offer stories of trauma and resilience, call for action and justice, and claim for the truth to be known.

Most of these products mentioned above have not been analysed yet, so this thesis is innovative in that sense as it offers an insight into the Magdalene Laundries' history from a cultural perspective. All these products are means of expression used, either by real survivors or distant witnesses, to reveal a harmful truth. These autobiographies, novels, plays, and films challenge a secretive system by openly exposing the reality behind Irish reformatory institutions. Thousands of women who were incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes have been able to tell their stories or listen to others' similar ones thanks to the literature's involvement in this issue. My approach is thus interdisciplinary and comparative and places these cultural products in dialogue not only with the historical recollection about this event but also with each other to foreground the different experiences these women endured and to see how popular culture has served as means of unveiling the past and as a restitution tool for survivors of Magdalene Laundries.

This thesis is divided into two parts: the first entitled "Historical Overview of Ireland (19th and 20th centuries); "Moral Deviance and Magdalene Laundries", and the second part called "Cultural Representations of the Magdalene Laundries". Within the first part, we can find a brief introduction concerning the chapters included in this section followed by chapters one and two. The first chapter, entitled "Catholicism and Moral Deviance", is devoted to the study of Irish Catholicism as a sign of Irish identity and how the religious doctrine has restricted the role and place of women in Irish society. Then I analyse those moral deviances which contest Catholic morality referring to those who did not conform to the Catholic moral doctrine. Here, I study the case of prostitution and of single motherhood in two main countries, namely Ireland and England, making a comparison between both during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter is guided by postmodern and feminist theories of the body.

Chapter two, entitled “The Carceral and Magdalene Laundries”, is a historical overview of these institutions in Ireland. Here I explore the origins and evolution of these Asylums. Moreover, I study the life within the Laundries focusing my attention on survivors’ testimonies. The analysis of this chapter is guided by Foucaultian concepts such as the “carceral method” and “biopower”. I give reasonable arguments to consider Magdalene Laundries prisons for “deviant women” during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which a strict religious discipline was imposed.<sup>4</sup>

Within the second part we can find a brief introduction concerning the chapters included in this section followed by chapter three—“Magdalenes and Narratives”—, four—“Magdalenes and Theatre”—and five—“Magdalenes and Films”. These three chapters are devoted to the exhaustive analysis of novels/autobiographies, films and plays based on Magdalene Laundries. I follow Postmodern together with Trauma studies, referring to scholars such as Maria Luddy (1997; 2007; 2011; 2018), James Smith (2007), Francés Finnegan (2004), Anna R. Harper and Kenneth Pargament (2015), historians and philosophers like Michel Foucault (1975; 1976; 1984), Judith Butler (2004; 2006; 2011; 2016), Dominick LaCapra (1999; 2001), and Adriana Cavarero (2011), psychiatrists like Judith Lewis Herman (1992), and writers such as David Aldridge (2000), to support my view on the Magdalenes’ history as one marked by violence, abuse and trauma. These theoretical lenses enable me to explore issues such as vulnerability, precarity, resilience, biopower, trauma, restitution, and healing in these cultural products. Finally, the last chapter is devoted to the establishment of general conclusions and to the reinforcement of those main ideas that I have explained throughout the thesis.

PART I: HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF IRELAND (19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES); MORAL  
DEVIANCE AND MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

The history of the Irish nation during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is a turbulent one during which important social, economic, and political changes took place. In the process towards independence, nationalism and Catholicism became extremely linked and religion became the symbol of the Irish identity. Since then, the Catholic Church has enjoyed great power both in politics and social policy. This hegemonic institution imposed restrictions on people's lives, especially on women. The religious discourse adopted by the Church was gendered imposing constraints on women's place and role in society and executing violence against those who did not follow social and moral norms. As Luddy claims in her article (2007), sex was not concealed in public, but restricted by those in power:

There is ample evidence to show that there was considerable discussion on sexuality in Ireland in the 1920s and '30s. Within the sphere of government the printed but unpublished 'Report of the Interdepartmental Committee of Inquiry Regarding Venereal Disease' (1926) and the 'Report of the Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1880-1885) and Juvenile Prostitution (1931)', known as the Carrigan Committee report, offer extensive and complex accounts of perceived sexual activity throughout the country and the fears raised by that activity. (Luddy, "Sex and the Single Girl" 79)

A culture of purity based on marriage and motherhood governed Ireland where political and religious discourses fused to create a disciplinary system in which women's bodies and sexuality were controlled, regulated, and disciplined. Moral deviances, which contradicted heterosexual

and monogamous sexuality based on kinship, were persecuted, and punished (Inglis, “The Influence” 243-259).

The concepts of sex and sexuality are old ones. However, it is people’s attitude towards them that has evolved throughout time. The history of sexuality during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries diverges from the past in that a more repressive and punitive attitude was adopted from a legal, religious, and medical perspective. The spread of religious ideas during the nineteenth century in Ireland had much to do with the consideration of sex and prostitution as evil practices (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 2). Yet, the twentieth century opened the way to a more liberal and secular mentality challenging the moral values imposed for so long. In *The Use of Pleasure* (1984) Foucault compared modern and ancient conceptions and approaches to sex. The central difference between both periods, he says, resides in religion; while modernity imposed a strict Christian moral code, antiquity offered alternative codes to the generally accepted one without enforcing them (*The Use of Pleasure* 21). In antiquity, the relationship between men and desires was not of renunciation as Christianity imposed, but of control and moderation (*The Use of Pleasure* 70); this relationship, based on a struggle of the soul against one’s desires, was linked to truth and knowledge of oneself (*The Use of Pleasure* 86). In classical and late modernity (nineteenth and twentieth centuries), though, sexual behaviour was problematised, and it became an object of study and moral concern (*The Use of Pleasure* 23). Foucault distinguished between “a history of moral behaviours” (actions consistent with the rules imposed), “a history of codes” (the rules and codes imposed in society), and “a history of ethics and aesthetics” (individuals as subjects of moral conduct—self-reflection, self-examination, self-knowledge, self-transformation) (*The Use of Pleasure* 29). Whereas the history of ethics and aesthetics predominated in ancient times, when self-restraint and moderation were rewarded, the

history of codes is what governed modern society, which was full of laws concerning morality. Moreover, the need to regulate sexual practices in antiquity was not because they were considered evil, but it had to do with medical issues—the excess of pleasure was regarded as detrimental for the body in medical terms (Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure* 29). This is exactly what happened in nineteenth-century England and Ireland when doctors took measures to prevent the spread of illnesses and venereal diseases. The difference, though, is that during the modern period the religious and medical discourses joined to regulate sexual encounters punishing those who broke moral rules (Mort 128-150).

This strict religious discipline condemning sex in favour of chastity is one of repression, using Foucault's term. In his previous work, *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault defined sexuality as something socially constructed which imposed constraints on individuals. He envisaged the relationship between sex and power as one based on repression. As he claimed, sexual repression has taken place since the seventeenth to the twentieth century; sex was condemned by religion first and then by the whole society. During the nineteenth century, sex became a secular matter controlled for the prevention of illnesses and the defence of normativity. Moreover, sex was not repressed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and liberated in the twentieth, but rather, it was a gradual process during which different methods and concepts of sex were developed (*The History of Sexuality* 119). As a result, modern society became perverse given the “encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures” and an “instrument-effect” used by those in power (*The History of Sexuality* 48).

In the nineteenth century, sex was prohibited and silenced, albeit some institutions, like the Church, produced discourses on sex. After the Counter Reformation, the religious body

incited the public to talk about sex in confessions condemning it as an evil force. The priest, engaged in a power relation with the confessor, was the authority who judged, punished and forgave. From the religious perspective, sexuality was just accepted for reproduction and any deviation from that—sex for pleasure—was considered immoral:

To deal with sex, power employs nothing more than a law of prohibition. Its objective: that sex renounces itself. Its instrument: the threat of a punishment that is nothing other than the suppression of sex. Renounce yourself or suffer the penalty of being suppressed ... Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 84)

Foucault claimed that in modern times, confession was a way of subjugating people; by confessing sins, the “criminal” was punished by the priest and the power balance was re-established, thereby confessions were means of control through which the subject being is purified of sin through discourse (*The History of Sexuality* 84). Contrary to this view, Butler says that confessions are not forms of control and power, but acts of agency, of liberating oneself of the guilt of the deed, and by which the body acts again but this time through the bodily act of speaking (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 165-167). Referring to women in Ireland, Butler’s argument does not hold water since confessions of sexual deeds proved to be a form of oppression and subjugation. Through confessions, women were recognised publicly, and they were given voice, but at the same time condemned and enclosed in reformatory institutions, so they did not get rid of that power.

Three codes were established to govern sexual practices, namely canonical, Christian and civil law. These codes made a division between the legal/illegal and the moral/immoral. Hence, a

code of behaviour, intended to normalise life, had to be followed otherwise people, considered criminals from the judicial perspective and sinners from the religious one, were subjected to punishment. Contrary to ancient times, structures of power in the nineteenth century did not decide the death of an individual who transgressed the law. Instead, the law aimed to regulate and normalise life executing power over the individuals through disciplinary institutions such as hospitals, prisons, schools, asylums, etc. (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 144). The transformation of the legal system during the nineteenth century supposed the turn of former sovereign power into “governmentality”—a form of power regulating population and goods and creating “docile bodies” (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 25-26).

Women’s bodies are disciplined, and they are required to embody ideas of femininity imposed by culture (Bordo 166). Additionally, the religious discourse imposes constraints on the display of femininity and sexuality according to moral demands. So, gender and sexuality are not natural but socially constructed through discourse; we are formed and dispossessed by social relations in a political community (Butler, *Precarious Life* 24). Given the public dimension of our bodies, we are involved in and affected by power relations that make our bodies vulnerable (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26; “Rethinking Vulnerability” 16). Engaged in this disciplinary system, Irish women had to follow a strict moral code of behaviour to be considered subjects under the law otherwise they would suffer violence and exclusion from the domain of the intelligible. These social rules tried to normalise bodies imposing constraints on them and using violence against those who fell out of these norms. The Catholic discourse has always been based, as Butler claims (2016), on structuralist anthropology which divides human reality into dual structures and categories—good/evil, prostitute/wife, fallen woman/saint, men/women, body/soul. These linguistic categories have reinforced hierarchical relations and forms of

domination which naturalise, homogenise, and exclude. Butler affirms that language discourse is political and that linguistic categories are created by those power systems. In other words, language is a hegemonic mode of signification and representation of human beings that produces and rejects bodies by their very materiality (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 16). Following Slavoj Žižek, Butler defines language as “performative”, that is, it creates the reality it designates—language has the power to create intelligible categories and to exclude others. But discourse is never a coherent account of reality (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 17). Therefore, the category of the Magdalene as abject was created in the nineteenth century based on Victorian morality including, in the beginning, prostitutes and, later, unmarried mothers and all those who deviated from the moral code imposed by the Church.

Despite moral restrictions, sex has always been practised in a wide variety of forms. As far as prostitution is concerned, it is a widely known phenomenon not particular to any country or the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Teela Sanders claims in her book *Prostitution: Sex Work, Policy and Politics* (2009), commercialisation of bodies is an ancient custom. In the past, prostitutes were not considered abominable until the arrival of Catholicism, when they were condemned as evil beings. With the development of capitalism and the economic development of countries, caused by industrialisation, sex seemed to become an industry granting the professionalisation of prostitution. This spread of immorality became an overriding concern in England and Ireland not only for religious people but also for politicians—they saw the national welfare in danger—and for doctors—they were concerned about the spread of venereal diseases (McCormick 80). Given the diverse problems prostitution poses concerning the welfare of women, gender inequalities, and moral issues, this matter of contention has gained great relevance in certain nations such as England and Ireland. In these countries, prostitution became

a political concern, and several laws were passed during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to control and eradicate this practice considered immoral by politicians and religious members of the Church alike. Nevertheless, these debates encountered dissenting voices which hindered the path towards moral reform and purity.

Several approaches to prostitution were developed; whereas prostitution was seen by some as something harmful which perpetuated inequality, others considered prostitution as a form of women's empowerment. The latter idea came from the feminist perspective which defended prostitution as a respectable job against those who saw it as a means of objectification and sexualisation of women. These two approaches to prostitution have been raised by Ronald Weitzer (2012) under the names of "the oppression paradigm" and "the empowerment paradigm" (7, 11). Nowadays, some scholars ascribe to the empowerment paradigm that defends women's agency in choosing this job (Turner 33-52). Yet, some others show themselves reticent towards the defence of prostitution as an honourable practice freely chosen by women. As Sheila Jeffreys (2012) and Meagan Tyler (2012) claim, prostitution is a global industry whose beneficiaries are men. The reality is that prostitution perpetuates inequality in the sense that women are subordinated to men and used for male sexual pleasure. Therefore, prostitution must be seen as a harmful practice for women which makes them objects to be used by men (Jeffreys 69-86; Tyler 87-102). Following Fredrickson and Roberts' theory of objectification, the constant social and moral pressure on the physical appearance of women and the use of their bodies as sexual objects can be considered implicit characteristics of prostitution. Having presented Foucault's relationship between sex and power, we can be drawn to the conclusion that prostitution may not be liable to be seen from the empowering perspective but the oppressive one. This practice implies the subjugation of the female to the male engaged in a power relation by which the

female body becomes an object to be used as her counterpart pleases. In patriarchal societies, this power-relation becomes more visible since women are weak and vulnerable always placed below men in the social hierarchy. Furthermore, this power-relation is not only established between men and prostitutes but also between prostitutes and the whole society—prostitutes are discriminated against since they belong to the lowest class and they do an immoral job in the eyes of the rest of society. Far from judging how moral it is to practice prostitution, what is suggested here is that prostitution is a denigrating act if it perpetuates social inequality and women's submissiveness. Hence, prostitution should be considered as an instrument of power following Foucault's reasoning by which women can only be seen as the victims and not the perpetrators of the sex industry.

Another figure which made questionable use of sex from the perspective of religion was the unmarried mother; maternity out of wedlock in Ireland was considered a sinful act contravening the religious morality of the time and bringing shame to the family (Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers" 109-126). The gender division which characterised the Victorian period was welcomed and supported in Ireland by the Catholic Church which imposed heteronormative principles as the norm. Materialised in the 1937 Constitution, gender requirements for women permitted reproduction within the marriage bond as the only legitimate form of sexuality (Perkin 20). This heterosexual and phallogentric economy, which envisaged women as good mothers and wives, rejected the unmarried mother from the domain of the intelligible, suffering exclusion and violence. By establishing the category of the Magdalene, in opposition to virtuous women, these women's identities were homogenised, and they were oppressed on the principles of sexual and class normativity. This denomination of "Magdalene", as a linguistic category created by power, has cultural, social, ideological, and gender implications—this category reflects: the power

relation between nuns and immoral women; it refers to low-class women who did not conform to sexual norms; and it stigmatises those excluded in society. Excluded from the domain of the intelligible, those women who were labelled as “outcast” were removed from the public gaze and enclosed in Magdalene Laundries to be reformed.

It is due to the presence of those who challenge the norm that power institutions justify their existence. Supported by judicial and religious laws, prostitutes and unmarried mothers were sent to different disciplinary institutions—Workhouses, Mother and Baby Homes, Lock Hospitals, Training Homes and Magdalene Asylums—during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Finnegan 2004, Luddy 2007, McCarthy 2010, Smith 2007). These institutions, which functioned more as prisons than as Rescue Homes, formed a carceral system in Ireland established in the seventeenth century which enabled the Church and the State to take control of women’s bodies and to discipline them:

County Homes, Mother and Baby Homes, Industrial and Reformatory Schools, and Magdalene Asylums formed a network of independent institutions that incarcerated women who transgressed society’s sexual norms as defined by Church and State, and the offspring of such a transgression, by physically removing them from their communities and placing them in supposed sites of reform. (Crowley and Kitchin 364)

As Hannah Arendt (1970), Slavok Žižek (2007) and Adriana Cavarero (2011) claim, the State uses fear and terror to control people (Arendt, “On Violence” 242; Cavarero 80; Žižek 27). The abject woman—the prostitute and the unmarried mother—was used by the Church and the State to educate women in chastity, purity, and passivity. This sovereign power executed terror and fear as forms of control to subjugate the population in order to maintain order and to preserve the

ideal image of the Irish nation; women and young girls were threatened to be confined in Asylums if they did not follow the norms. But violence was another mechanism of power used to subjugate women's bodies. Immoral women were excluded and not considered real; their lives were negated, so violence against them was justified in the sense that they did not really exist:

... certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanised, that they fit no domain frame for the human, and that their dehumanisation occurs first, at this level then gives rise to physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanisation that is already at work in the culture. It is another thing to say that discourse itself effects violence through omission. (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34)

Either by explicit violence—forced confinement and physical and psychological abuse—or by implicit violence—lack of recognition—women of dubious morality in Ireland were excluded, segregated, and silenced by power during their lives and even after their deaths.

Overall, moral deviances in Ireland were punished during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Church and the State; in Luddy's words:

Unmarried mothers and prostitutes were particularly targeted as sites of contagion. Women were central to understanding how both disease and immorality became so evident in society. Much of the moral legislation imposed, such as the Criminal Law Act of 1935, reveals an attempt by the State and Church to curtail sexual autonomy, particularly that of women. Clear also is an attempt to curtail any expression of sexuality and to curb, for instance through censorship, the assault on the Monto district, the

regulation of dance halls and the consumption of sexuality. (“Sex and the Single Girl” 89)

Despite the arrival of modernisation and the challenges it supposed to the conservatism of the Church, this institution has enjoyed great power being involved in matters of the State and in guiding people’s lives—especially those of women. The moral “habitus” imposed was based on women’s corporeal restrictions concerning sexuality and their place in society (Inglis, “Religion, Identity” 59-77). Immoral behaviour contravening this habitus was punished with people’s confinement in a wide range of institutions intended for their rehabilitation. As we will see, this humanitarian practice, based on a politics of compassion and solidarity, served as a mechanism to subjugate the most vulnerable sectors of society (Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason* 1-8). The discourse of vulnerability adopted by the Church and the State rendered them powerless and invisible, which should be interpreted as an attempt to avoid dissenting voices to destabilise the nation and its foundation (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 25). As Butler claims (2004), there is always a justification of violence from the part of the perpetrator (*Precarious Life* 6). The Church alleged to be entitled to incarcerate those women to avoid sin and the spread of venereal diseases. They acquired a discourse of victimhood depicting those women as a danger; but at the same time, those who confined them adopted a discourse of vulnerability considering these women vulnerable and in need of protection. In either case, women were stigmatised and excluded from society. By their confinement, these women underwent a process of dehumanisation being deprived of their freedom, their rights, their agency, and their voices by being considered mere bodies. Yet, the vulnerable condition in which they were rendered empowered them to perform several embodied resistance practices during and after their confinement by which they reclaimed their identities and bodies back. As Butler claims in her

rethink of vulnerability and resistance (2016), vulnerability is not ontological but politically imposed and unequally distributed. Those more vulnerable oppose to this condition by recognising it first and then through performative bodily acts of resistance (“Rethinking Vulnerability” 13-27).

Reclaiming the category of the Magdalene, giving it new meaning, and providing these women with voice and political signification, representation and legitimacy seem urgent now. Configured as abject beings by the religious discourse, these Magdalene survivors have suffered displacement, segregation and dehumanisation by the whole disciplinary system established in Ireland. Their sexuality has been curtailed, they have suffered violence taking advantage of their vulnerability, having been silenced and deprived of public recognition. The imperative of silence existent in Ireland after the crime executed against the Magdalenes seems to have been abandoned in the twenty-first century when survivors and charitable organisations have started to reveal the truth about the past. In this process, the press, State reports, and survivors’ testimonies have echoed these events and have raised awareness about them, but what about action? Do these means still stigmatise women as vulnerable and as Magdalenes? Do they question gender norms, or do they reinforce them? Do they offer alternative narratives? Do they account for personal experiences or do they generalise and therefore homogenise these women’s stories and identities? Can they be considered tools to build resilience for these women to overcome their trauma?

Although I will answer these questions throughout the first part of the thesis, it should be said in advance that these products have disclosed the reality behind Magdalene Asylums and that they have challenged the narratives of some historians and scholars who were on the side of

the Catholic Church. Moreover, these survivors have offered their testimonies as counter memory to achieve recognition and justice. As social and political beings, we are produced, recognised and represented by power but those excluded from the social system fail to be represented and to be considered human. In Butler's words, "... those who gain representation, especially self-representation, have a better chance of being humanised, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed not regarded at all" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 147).

Through these testimonies and organisations, women seek recognition in their community alluding to the necessity of not forgetting the past, of knowing the truth and of not committing the same mistakes again. Individual and collective responsibility is petitioned now by all those who suffered misfortunes on the part of the Church, the State, and the whole society. A battle has been started to achieve implementation plans, to break the silence, to restore their denied identities and voice, to help these victims in their healing of a traumatic past and in praising their resilient attitude against an oppressive system (Herman 1992; Kaplan 2005; Laub 1992; Caruth 1995; Ungar 2012; Pasteur 2011; Yates et al. 2015; Bracke 2016); a battle which I aim to join with this doctoral thesis.

## Chapter One. Catholicism and Moral Deviance

### 1.1. Catholicism as a Sign of Irish Identity

#### 1.1.1 The Modern era Hindered by Irish Catholicism: Church-State Relationship

The intrusion of religion in matters of the State and society is not something exclusive to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or to the Irish country. As Žižek claims, religion and politics always intertwine: “The game of redeeming the inner truth of a religion or ideology and separating this from its later or secondary political exploitation is simply false” (116). The involvement of the Roman Catholic Church in political and social matters is a widely known practice affecting most European countries. In the case of Ireland, the Catholic Church has been a powerful institution determining the development of the nation and the welfare of its society throughout time. As Timothy White discusses in his article “Catholicism and Nationalism in Ireland: From Fusion in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to Separation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” (2007), the Irish nationalists utilised religion to build a united national identity away from the English oppression (47). Yet, the acceptance from the part of the Catholic Church to support the political separatist cause was not just due to the willingness to end with the British political control over the island, but it was also the response to so many years of Catholic persecution and discrimination by the English Protestant group. With this mixture of interests, religious members occupied the political agenda as a powerful force defending the Irish cause (White 48-49).

Apart from other changes, the French Revolution brought modernisation and licentiousness to most European countries and a new moral order was created which aimed to end with the monarchical and ecclesiastical power. Consequently, the Church progressively lost its power in France and other European countries which followed the example of the former.

However, there were some other European countries, like Ireland, where the birth of nationalism made of religion a sign of identity. The French Revolution inspired the Irish emancipation movement but with a great difference, here Catholicism did not lose its power but became the leading force of the process (Killeen 9-18). After so many years of English subjugation, Irish national feelings started to flourish at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the following one. As a minority group, Irish national separatists confronted national unionists who wanted to remain part of the British government. Overall, this division of the country resulted not from dissimilar political ideas but from religious and cultural ones. Nationalism in Ireland was originally linked to religious sectarianism, namely Catholicism and Protestantism, and mainly headed by the former group. As Mac Laughlin (2001) claims, it was the conservative Catholic bourgeoisie who took control of the process of national formation in Ireland (17). In this context, a Church-State relation was established which granted the Irish independence from the English as well as the Irish identity formation as Catholic: “In addition, they served the useful purpose of giving the rural poor, if not the urban working class, a new sense of place in Catholic nation-building Ireland, including a sense of pride and an elevated sense of what it meant to be Irish both in the modern world and in the new Ireland” (Mac Laughlin 144). The human necessity to define who we are and where we belong, as Claire Mitchell (2006) affirms, justifies the existence of social categories and different social groups whose identity and values differ from others within the same country. On the other hand, religion plays an important role in the identity formation process of any individual (Mitchell 16).

In my case of study, the religious and political identity of the Irish go hand in hand; Protestantism has always been linked to English unionists whereas Catholicism has been associated with Irish nationalists. Partially due to this political alliance I have already mentioned,

religion in Ireland has been a powerful tool in defining people's identity. Yet, religion caused segregation and class division not only between the northern and the southern parts of the country but also within each of them. Processes of exclusion and inclusion divided religious communities becoming minority groups in certain parts of the country, as is the case of Catholics in Northern Ireland or Protestants in the South (Mitchell 59-67). Following Joe Cleary's words (2005), modernity arrived in Ireland thanks to the British intrusion breaking the homogeneity of the country and producing a cultural revolution. However, colonialism also brought problems concerning the status of the Irish Catholic Church which used to stand as a national symbol for Ireland. During the nineteenth century, religious groups—Catholics, Presbyterians, Protestants, Baptists, Congregationalists, and Methodists—enjoyed certain toleration and stability in contrast with the previous period. However, the rivalry between these religious groups did not take much time to come to the surface. The arrival of Protestantism endangered the supremacy of the Catholics relegating them to a second position for a long time. After years of subjugation, and despite the fact that Catholics achieved certain inclusion into the Union thanks to The Catholic Emancipation Act of 1829, the Irish Catholic Church incited a national feeling to fight against the British in order to improve the economic, linguistic and cultural situation of Ireland (Cleary 1-21).

To achieve their full independence, a Home Rule was encouraged by Irish republicans. Founded by Isaac Butt, the Home Rule League was turned into the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) by Parnell and William Shaw, who won the general elections of 1874, not without difficulties. Different parties and political movements were created in Ireland, promoting the independence from the English kingdom such as the Sinn Féin by Eamon de Valera—substituted later by “Fianna Fáil”—, the Fine, or the Labour Party. De Valera's party was born to put an end

to the Irish Partition, to improve the social and economic situation of the Irish, to safeguard the agrarian and industrial nation, and to do away with the British hegemony in Ireland; a process which culminated in the 1937 Constitution (Böss 20-21). This intrusion of religion in matters of the State has been interpreted by many as a prevention of modernisation (Geraldine Moane (2002); Michael Böss (2010); Michel Peillon (2002); and Nicholas Atkin and Frank Tallett (2003)). The religious inclusion within politics was fiercely criticised during the nineteenth century, especially by Revivalists who attempted to decolonise Ireland and to put an end to separatism focusing on a cultural and language rebirth rather than on religious matters. The persistent sectarianism and conflict of interests of each religious group complicated the remodelling of the country and prevented the Revivalists from achieving their goal of a unified and free Ireland, away from the English influence (Atkin and Tallett 43-44).

Nevertheless, Catholicism shaped not only politics during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also the society in which it was settled exerting great influence on people's lives; in White's words: "The Church has been able to influence the values and behaviour of the Irish people to conform to its doctrine and teachings. The Church's capacity to influence behaviour obviously extends to political concerns that the Church hierarchy interprets as impinging upon the faith and morals of the Irish people" (White 49). But soon, the hegemony of the Irish Catholic group staggered. Modernism posed certain challenges to the Catholic Church against which conservative Catholics reacted (Atkin and Tallett 84). In Ireland, this modern wage was contested by a "devotional revolution" through which the Catholic Church got control of the education and social practices of the Irish. Moreover, this "devotional revolution", that took place in the nineteenth century, altered the culture of the citizens during which Catholicism became a sign of identity and union. During the Famine, religious groups were engaged in

teaching Irish people good morals to end with drunkenness, sexual immorality and poverty. The Famine, for example, was interpreted as a divine punishment for so much corruption. Hence, the devotional revolution that followed helped the strengthening of Catholic Irishness (Whelan 139).

Historians like Emmet J. Larkin have studied this devotional revolution which enabled the Church to get control of the education of young people by imposing restrictions especially concerning sexuality and marriage. As the anthropologist Žižek claims, our ethnic identity is made up of habits, that is, legal norms based on informal rules which tell us how to apply them and when to follow or disregard them. Even though we are free, we are required to act according to those habits—non-written rules which govern social relations (158). During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a culture of purity was sought in Ireland making sexuality a public matter since the State and the Church decided what types of relationships were legitimate and since public recognition was only granted by marriage and childbirth. Sexuality was a vector of power the Catholic Church used to control and regulate the population to establish a coherent Irish identity. The laws and habits imposed by the Catholic Church repressed sexuality forcing people to behave according to gender and moral norms if they wanted to be included and represented in society (Butler, *Precarious Life* 147). As a result, moral restrictions have been rooted in Irish identity as William Crotty claims, “... Church teachings that emphasised humanity, docility, and obedience to authority, made for a particularly passive Irish personality: retiring, unassuming, obedient, self-deprecating, and self-critical” (119).

Acquiring the role of “the principal provider of social welfare and service agencies and the principal force of consequence in developing social policies”, the Irish Catholic Church took control of the education and health systems (Crotty 121). Secular thinking and new methods

were progressively adopted at school, but they were dismissed given the conservative attitude of the Church in control of the educative system from 1838 up to the 1940s. Apart from those schools built under the control of the Catholic Church, many religious congregations were set up throughout the nineteenth century to educate people in the Catholic doctrine. However, the reality behind these congregations, Tony Fahey (1998) claims, was that they were established just to secure the position of the Church within society losing sight of the population's necessities; rather, they reinforced social inequalities and did not do much to reform society. Moreover, their conservative attitude and moral teachings, Fahey states, prevented social advancement under the requirements of the modern world. Hence, the distancing effect this Catholic control had with respect to other European nations, where new social and economic orders governed, contributed to the widespread idea that Catholicism was an obstacle to modernisation (Fahey 204).

This involvement of the Church in people's lives continued during the first decades of the twentieth century. Globalisation was taken by the Irish as a new form of colonialism and, as an ex-colony, they developed "patterns of resistance and subversion" which stood in the way of the country's modernisation (Moane 111). Social inequalities and the marginalisation of minority groups became even more visible then. Higher rates of violence, drug and alcohol consumption, poor health services, and low levels of literacy are the other side of the coin of that idyllic image of modern Ireland (Kirby et al. 7-10; Peillon 40-43). Throughout the twentieth century, the social problems that started to emerge in the last decades of the nineteenth century were aggravated with the addition that social changes left some disadvantaged sectors of society behind leading to social inequalities and discomfort. As a rural country dependent on the British government, emigration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Ireland was caused by the Famine and

other social problems such as sectarianism, high unemployment rates, and economic crisis of the land. Those migratory movements made of the Irish a minority group not only in Ireland—given the high percentage of British people occupying the territory—but also abroad, especially in America, Canada, and Britain (Delaney 57, 117-128).

However, the presence of the Catholic Church in Irish politics, society and education progressively diminished during the twentieth century. Firstly, society became more urbanised and mentally opened, seeking self-realisation and liberty. Secondly, the migratory movements of the previous century reduced the number of Catholics in the island. And thirdly, the numerous sexual scandals in which clerics were involved at that time made people question their religious identity. In Crotty's words,

The changing economic and social circumstances since 1960 suggest to some that the Irish State is becoming less Catholic, that life in Ireland is no longer directed by religious values, and that the Irish Church is losing its power over the people's hearts and minds ... The new age of internationalism, economic and national success, diminished spirituality, changing lifestyles and sexual liberation evolved within a relatively brief period of decades. (121)

With the arrival of modernity, the progressive secularisation of society was taken by the Roman Catholic Church as a challenge to its position in society and in the political realm. The outburst of scientific discoveries triggered the reconsideration of religious doctrines and their usefulness in society. In Atkin and Tallett's words, "All in all, what was an offer from scientists, intellectuals, poets, historians, novelists and psychoanalysts was an interpretation of the origins, meaning and purpose of the world which owed nothing to providential intervention" (168).

Marx, Darwin, and Comte's scientific ideas rejected Catholicism as a social construction in favour of a new political order based on rationalism. During the twentieth century, conservative ideas were challenged by an emergent middle class who left religious ideas aside in favour of science, freedom, and progress. Hence, modernisation supposed the decrease of religious authority supplanted now by scientists and doctors, and mass attendance was substituted by an emergent leisure culture (Atkin and Tallett 181).

Another reason why religion collapsed during the twentieth century was owing to the arrival of psychoanalysis. Following this modern science, men have always been guided by instincts; therefore, society has needed powerful institutions to lead them wisely. Those institutions, namely the government and the Church, imposed restrictions and prohibitions to grant a prosperous and peaceful communal life. Those restrictions affected the social beings psychologically who, due to their natural tendency to rebellion, aimed to free themselves from those prohibitions; this is what Sigmund Freud differentiated in his work (1927) as "State of civilization" (order) vs. "State of nature" (chaos), favouring the former. Within the State of civilisation, religious faith was created as a kind of protection from fate and from those elements that escape our control. Thus, God was a necessary invention of the human being to be secure in life from nature and from other risks they may encounter. This dependency on a superior being is explained by Freud from a psychoanalytic perspective through the "Father complex" by which people see this supreme individual as the longing father who used to protect them during childhood. Following Freud's theory, religion was the "neurosis of humanity", a cancer that prevents people from true knowledge granted by science (Akhtar and O'Neil 49). Considered the basis of education and communal life, religion was described by Freud as a drug with which people were intoxicated from childhood, especially women who were influenced by sexual

repression (Akhtar and O'Neil 53-54). To this Freudian interpretation of religious faith as the necessity of men to believe in someone who could protect them, I would add that the fact of belonging to a particular religion provides the believer with the feeling of being part of a defined group. The security granted by the community is shared by all members of the group who, in exchange, build their identities both as individuals and as an integral part of that group. Hence, Irish identity is mainly based on the religious affiliation to Catholicism as a clear example of their national and individual identity.

The introduction of Ireland into the modern world, marked by industrialisation and scientific development, forged certain security which yielded a decline in Church attendance. Moreover, the sexual and cultural revolution that took place in the 1960s supposed a decrease in religiosity in favour of a more secular mentality (Brown 468-479; Inglis, "Origins and Legacies" 9-37). As a response to contemporary social, political and economic changes brought up since the 1950s, the Second Vatican Council (1962) was celebrated in an attempt to restrain the licentiousness that governed Europe and to re-establish the Church's position and power in society (Ferriter 539- 544). The main concern of the Church then was the problematic issue of sexual liberty; social advancements achieved during the first part of the twentieth century such as divorce, abortion, contraception, and homosexuality were seen as moral challenges to the Catholic power (Atkin and Tallett 195-299). During this council, certain moral teachings were forged such as respect for life (no abortion), sexual order (sex for procreation and no contraception), social justice (help the weak) and life according to Christ's teachings (O'Collins 97-104). Apart from discussing issues of marriage, sex, class, race, or ethnicity, the council recognised the right of the Church to get involved in politics, claiming its social mission. But this

time, a new social policy was adopted to help those in need by taking political action (Fahey 207).

Despite these secular elements I have discussed, Catholicism in Ireland came to terms with modern forces and remained as an essential part of people's identity. Despite the secularising process by which Church and State were separated in the modern world, the Church continued to play an important role in Irish politics and society (Mitchell 40). Surprisingly as it may seem, the Irish attachment to Catholicism as a differential sign of their identity continued despite the arrival of secular ideas in Europe even at present; in Tom Inglis's words, "What made Ireland exceptional throughout the twentieth century was that while the rest of Western Europe became increasingly secularised, religious affiliation remained a strong social marker for the Irish" ("Religion, Identity" 59).

#### 1.1.2. Women's Place in Irish Society: The Catholic Habitus

As I have already mentioned, the Catholic Church influenced social policies by getting control of the educational system during the nineteenth century and great part of the twentieth century. Catholicism, as a fundamental part of Irish identity, required individuals to behave according to certain moral standards. The religious habitus Inglis refers to ("Religion, Identity" 59-77), was a concept coined by Aquinas originally referring to a "dynamic view of the human person" (Cessario 35). But this concept was applied to morality and the training of morals afterwards. This religious training was supposed to provide Christians with the moral basis for a virtuous life. Ideals such as sacrifice, temperance, self-restraint, or prudence, among others, made up this Catholic habitus. This moral code taught people to make the right decisions following a balance of reason and instincts; it was this equilibrium between appetite and reason which made a person

virtuous. This last idea reminds us of Foucault's words about the conception of sex in ancient times when the relationship between men and desires was one of control and moderation and when moderation and virtue were linked to truth and knowledge of oneself (*The Use of Pleasure* 2).

In Ireland, the main target of this Catholic habitus was women. In Western philosophy and Christianity sexual difference has always been reinforced by the dualities nature vs. culture and body vs. mind where men represent reason and women are associated with nature and matter (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 7-10). In western Christian tradition the female has always been represented as a sexual temptress. From this perspective, women have always been manipulative and provocative when using their bodies, therefore, shame is inculcated in them (Bordo 7-8). But women have also been considered vulnerable and prone to fall, hence, moral restrictions and corporeal constraints have been justified from the religious viewpoint. Given these ideas, the disciplinary system established by the Church was aimed at women who were required to be pure, chaste, and passive.

According to postmodern and feminist theories of the body, our bodies are always invested in power relations, not only shaped by biological factors but also by cultural ones, modelled following a discourse which imposes norms on them (Bordo 35). The body is controlled and disciplined by those in power; a power that exists at all levels which normalises, homogenises, and excludes (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 183). As cultural constructions, our bodies are governed by cultural norms established through discourse determining what is natural, real, and intelligible (Butler, *Prearious Life* 26). In Ireland, the Catholic discourse of gender and sexuality, based on the law of kinship, was mainly heterosexual and monogamous excluding

other sexualities and genders and other uses of sex if not for reproduction. It was the religious and legal discourses in Ireland which brought gender norms and constraints to bear and which excluded all those women who did not follow this Catholic habitus considering them unreal, unnatural, and unintelligible.

Following the Victorian concepts of the “double spheres” and of the “double standard of morality”, women were required to be docile, passive, asexual and exemplary mothers and wives taking care of the family at home. As Luddy states in her work (*Women in Ireland* 1), the prevailing ideology of women’s role and place in society was that of the good wife and mother. Following the Victorians’ double standard of morality theory, women’s nature was to be kind, pure, chaste, humble, and passive. And following the double spheres theory, women, unlike men who occupied the public sphere, were secluded at home being devoted to their families. Perhaps, the 1937 Constitution under de Valera’s government may be the clearest example of the Catholic Church’s power in Ireland, especially controlling people’s lives. As a constitutional right, the family was acknowledged as the fundamental unit group in society linked to social and national stability (Wills 38). According to the constitution, women occupied an important place in the family overseeing the children’s education and managing the house: “Article 41: 2 1° In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. 2 2° The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home.” (The Stationery Office 164).

As the family was the most important institution in Ireland, so was marriage. Women during the Celtic period enjoyed great economic, social, and political status and legal rights

which they lost afterwards given the English and the Catholic Church's influence. They were protected under the Brehon Laws, which granted them equality, economic wealth, sexual freedom, and divorce, until they were replaced by the English Law (McCarthy 100). By the derogation of the Brehon Laws, as well as by the imposition of Catholic patriarchy, women lost their citizenship status and rights. In this process, marriage was placed under the Christian law—the family changed into patriarchy and divorce and property rights were denied to women who became mere objects of exchange (McCarthy 113-133). What is remarkable here is that while women in England progressively gained back social and political rights, in Ireland this lack of social and political status continued throughout the twentieth century. Article 41 of the 1937 Constitution states: “3, 1° The State pledges itself to guard with special care the institution of Marriage, on which the Family is founded, and to protect it against attack” (The Stationery Office 164). The marriage system was controlled by the Church which validated only those unions taken place in the Church of Ireland—1844 Irish Marriage Act (Wilson 34). As Joan Perkin (1988) claims, marriage was ordained for procreation and to avoid sin—sex out of wedlock (20). Although Perkin addresses the English marital system, Irish Catholicism promulgated the same values, as Luddy states in her work (*Women in Ireland* 4-11). Marriage was an indissoluble contract and divorce was not considered morally acceptable. However, in 1996 the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution was achieved which granted the access to divorce under the following circumstances:

- i at the date of the institution of the proceedings, the spouses have lived apart from one another for a period of, or periods amounting to, at least four years during the previous five years,
- ii there is no reasonable prospect of a reconciliation between the spouses,

iii such provision as the Court considers proper having regard to the circumstances exists or will be made for the spouses, any children of either or both of them and any other person prescribed by law, and iv any further conditions prescribed by law are complied with.

3° No person whose marriage has been dissolved under the civil law of any other State but is a subsisting valid marriage under the law for the time being in force within the jurisdiction of the Government and Parliament established by this Constitution shall be capable of contracting a valid marriage within that jurisdiction during the lifetime of the other party to the marriage so dissolved. (The Stationery Office 164, 166)

As in many other European countries, motherhood in Ireland was a necessary requirement for women (Inglis “Origins and Legacies” 9). The materiality of the body is an effect of discourse and of heteronormative power; as Butler says, our physical attributes are natural, but they gain meaning by the cultural system (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 155). Following this reasoning, I argue that the Irish woman became sexed by discourse and her body acquired signification by power discourse which imposed maternity as the natural and compulsory state for women. Female subjectivity then was based on her sexual attributes that determined her reproductive function and her identity as mother and wife.

Based on this essentialist view of women as mothers, the religious discourse founded the institution of marriage as the only legitimate form of sexual encounter between partners. Hence, conceiving children outside the marital bond was condemned as immoral, damaging the reputation of the woman, of her family and of the whole nation (Luddy, “Unmarried Mothers” 109-126). Therefore, many unmarried mothers resorted to infanticide or abortion. Concerning the

last one, the Irish government prohibited it until 1983 when the eighth amendment of the Constitution allowed access to it. Later, in 1992, the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments granted the right to travel and to get information on abortion (The Stationery Office 154). Prior to those amendments sex outside marriage, abortion and divorce were not allowed in Catholic Ireland and any behaviour which distanced from these moral teachings was considered out of the norm. The Church saw abortion, contraception, homosexuality, and divorce as immoral because,

... they corrupt moral order—a moral order that rests on an ideology which condemns individualism on the one hand and emphasizes the primacy of the duties that the individual has vis-à-vis the community and God on the other. By extension, these practices corrupt society at large because they undermine the family, the institution on which moral order is built, the basic unit of society whose main function is to maintain order, economically as well as ideologically. (Hug 3)

Indeed, it has taken eighty-one years for women to have access to abortion; in September 2018, the eighth amendment was repelled after President Michael D Higgins signed the thirty-sixth Amendment to the Constitution Bill.

The sociological perspective Inglis (1998) adopts when analysing the role of the Church in Irish society, gives us a glimpse of the power it enjoyed, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but also the extent to which religious discourse influenced Irish people's life and attitude. As he said, modernisation in Ireland brought a religious and a social crisis altering the family pattern and its practices. Yet the figure of the mother as a moral preacher educated in the Catholic doctrine of self-denial and purity did not change much. Irish women were supposed to follow this pattern of behaviour which enforced restrictions on them concerning their

participation in the public sphere and their female identity, both determined by their sex and by gender norms (Inglis, “The Influence” 243-259). As Luddy shows in her work (*Women in Ireland* 89-92, 157-161, 239-244), Irish women suffered marginalisation, discrimination, and displacement, especially in education, work, and politics. Marked by their gender, women were subordinated to men and relegated to the private sphere by this phallogocentric economy. Yet women progressively developed patterns of resistance to these discriminatory gender norms.

Before 1831, education in Ireland was provided privately for wealthy people and by philanthropists for the poor. With the establishment of the Commissioners for National Education, the teaching was improved but taken by the Church. The National School System was established in 1831 providing equal education for poor and wealthy people. The problem was that women were only taught in domestic service (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 89). Many lay women established schools throughout the nineteenth century as an economic sustain but also to counteract religion’s invasion of education. Boarding and convent schools together with reformatories and Industrial Schools made up the educational system in Ireland where girls were taught housework, the basic subjects, and moral values to become good wives and mothers. Some activists like Miss Alice Oldham, Mrs Jellicoe or Isabella Tod fought for women’s rights and asked for an equal and liberal learning away from the stipulated moral requirements. With the Intermediate Education Act (1878), schooling for middle-class women was improved but certain differences remained between girls and boys. Finally, proper and full education for women was not granted until the beginning of the twentieth century—although they accessed primary and secondary education in the late nineteenth century, equality and university entrance were not real until the next century. Despite this improvement women still experienced

segregation and discrimination at school and were always seen as belonging to the house rather than to the public sphere of school or work.

The successful introduction of Irish women in the world of work, as Luddy displays in her book (*Women and Philanthropy* 19-20), was not a bed of roses though. During the nineteenth century, the strict Catholic teachings of women's behaviour did not accept women's participation in the public sphere. In post-independent Ireland women's economic and social conditions were miserable. Due to the lack of job opportunities, many poor women were forced to resort to prostitution, begging or emigration. This situation was owed partly to the Church-State relationship I have talked about before. With the De Valera's Constitution of 1937 women were denied any right or freedom, relegated to the private sphere of the house and considered main breeders and moral supporters of the whole family. As early as the 1840s, emigration became a common practice especially among women motivated by religious constraints, social displacement, and lack of working opportunities (Daly M. 106; Ferriter 463; O'Haodha and O'Callagha 38). Being Britain one of the chosen destinations, the greatest wave of women's immigration took place at the outbreak of the Second World War, period during which women swell the ranks of the British army and industries, in an attempt to liberate themselves and to go away from the conservative gender-roles imposed in Ireland at that time. Yet, emigration was taken by the Irish Catholic Church as a danger for the morality and chastity of women given the liberal attitude reigning in most European countries (Muldowney 57-65).

Being Ireland a rural country, women worked mainly in agriculture, but industrialisation left women without much work. Social class and regional conditionings determined women's working opportunities. Whereas farming and agriculture were reserved for low classes, industry,

teaching, and nursing were middle-class professions. The textile industry replaced women's work at home, but it was badly paid. During the nineteenth-century working opportunities for women were limited but at the turn of the twentieth century, women got involved in a greater variety of jobs such as teaching or nursing thanks to the successful introduction of women in the educational system and the establishment of the Irish Women Workers' Union (1911) (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 160).

Other ways of transcending these social boundaries were to enter a convent, as a way of avoiding marriage, or to engage in charitable organisations which were considered an extension of their domestic role (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 4-10). Yvonne Werner (2009) talks about a “feminisation of Christianity” during the nineteenth century by which women gradually occupied a public space in the Church. There was a huge number of women who decided to embrace a pious life as a private choice displaying a degree of agency and authority they lacked in previous centuries. This growing number of religious women can be explained, on the one hand, due to the devotional revolution mentioned before, and on the other, due to economic reasons and the lack of working opportunities (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 34). In any way, religious women became a source of authority during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries; through the establishment of reformatories, orphanages, convents, and Industrial Schools, they were responsible for the education and health of thousands of children and for the spiritual salvation of thousands of women; in Inglis's and Mary Magray's words, “ ... attaining religious capital through being spiritual and moral became an important source of power for women, particularly mothers, who did not have access to other forms of capital. Religious capital enabled them to attain honour and respect—symbolic capital—which legitimated their position within the family and community” (Inglis, “Religion, Identity” 66),

A general explanation for the growth of the conventual movement links the growth in the number of nuns to the changing social conditions of nineteenth-century Ireland, especially those of the postfamine period. According to this explanation, the change in inheritance patterns, which fuelled emigration and led to decreased marriage opportunities for both women and men, created a supply of women who filled the convents. (Magray 33)

Little by little, Irish women occupied the public sphere doing philanthropy work. Most charitable organisations in Ireland during the nineteenth century were founded and run by men whereas women were normally in charge of raising money. But soon philanthropist women started to manage those charitable organisations and even to set up their own ones. Atkin finds five main reasons why women may have been willing to get involved in philanthropic work: firstly, because women were offered the possibility of a career and, therefore, an economic stability; secondly, they could contribute to the regeneration of a corrupted society; thirdly, the religious life granted them religious salvation; fourthly, they were exempted from the sexual demands from men and of marriage; and fifthly, philanthropic organisations were a recurrent alternative for lesbian women (Atkin and Tallett 113-114).

The origins of philanthropy are to be found in nineteenth-century England where several social groups were formed under the umbrella of the Social Purity Movement (the 1860s) to eliminate prostitution and educate young women morally (Romero-Ruiz, “Shaping Female” 125). As in England, Irish women’s charity was motivated by spiritual concerns of responsibility towards those in need (Luddy, “Women and Charitable Organisations” 304; Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 10). The philanthropist was a middle-class woman seen as morally superior to

those she offered help (Elliott 26). Philanthropic work was carried out by women to save all those “outcasts”, especially prostitutes and unmarried mothers; their task was to educate women according to Catholic values and to rescue those who had deviated from the path of virtue. At the end of the eighteenth century, the image of the angel as chaste, pure and virtuous was applied to women in England and Ireland. Yet, in the nineteenth century, that angel came out of the home to help those in need, especially working-class women and children.

As Williams Elliott claims in her work (2002), different attitudes towards philanthropic women were adopted. There were those who recognised the social work of those women who helped the “deviant” ones whereas there were others who saw their work and their occupation of the public sphere as a challenge to traditional morality and social order (Elliott 3). According to the former viewpoint, philanthropy was defended as an extension of women’s domestic role in taking care of others, and that idea granted them the possibility to work outside the home giving them an alternative to marriage (Mort 42). Some examples are Hannah More, Harriet Martineau, Frances Trollope and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, who considered philanthropy as a profession equating it to male jobs (Elliott 81-83). Conversely, opposite voices were raised concerning the immorality this independence and freedom would lead women to. Philanthropic work was considered a danger for the English and the Irish political economies during the nineteenth century; it was believed that these women’s work would subvert the current social order. But despite those obstacles, philanthropic women in England managed to make a place for themselves in the public sphere. Thanks to their work, middle-class women became a powerful authority and they could have access to the public arena challenging the male-centred discourse. In the mid-nineteenth century, two branches of charity were created in Ireland, namely the benevolent which cared for the spiritual welfare of the poor, and the reformist which sought the

legislative changes to improve the condition of the poor. While the first was concerned with the restoration of moral values, forged by the Catholic Church, it was the second one which was central for the politicisation of women in Ireland (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 201-202). In any way, both of them granted the progressive introduction of women in the world of work giving them voice and authority (Luddy, “Women and Charitable Organizations” 304).

Despite the attempts made by the Catholic Church to maintain its hegemony in Ireland, a substantial decrease in religiosity characterised the twentieth century given the new social and economic order governing Ireland. Industrialisation opened the way for women towards more job opportunities, and the access to a wider range of professions meant the decrease of women employed in religious congregations (Atkin 239). A lessening of mass attendance, ordered priests and marriages, together with a rise in cremations, divorce, abortion, and sexual encounters before marriage, were just some of the indicatives of the secularisation process Ireland got involved in (Atkin 299-313). In the last decades of the twentieth century, a process of secularisation became more latent and Ireland took a distinctive path especially concerning women’s place in society. It was due to industrialisation and public pressure that most social changes were achieved especially during the 1960s. The cultural and sexual revolutions which took place in Ireland at that time were urged by a general uneasiness due to Catholic conservatism. The role of feminist movements was of paramount importance in the achievement of women’s social improvements from the 1960s onwards. Ann Lovett and Hohanne Hayes’s cases, the X cases, and the case of the Kerry Babies fostered a public debate about the conservative values of the Irish Catholic society and favoured the path towards liberalism for the first time in Ireland.<sup>5</sup>

The twentieth century saw the improvement of women's working conditions with the establishment of a Trade Union and the introduction of women in politics. The representation of women in politics and their active participation was a gradual process in Ireland that took some centuries to be completed. In Mary Daly's words, "until the 1960s Irish politics was dominated by men who had played an active role in the struggle for independence. Given the conservative nature of Irish society, it was difficult for a woman to achieve a public profile that would ensure a Dáil seat, let alone a cabinet position, without personal or family connections to the Irish revolution" (Daly M. 83). Upper-class women were more prone to participating in politics although low classes also partook in riots and organisations fighting for better economic and social conditions in the nineteenth century. Women in these political organisations were mainly non-Conformists since Catholics were supposed neither to participate in the public sphere nor to talk publicly about women's issues. The first attempt to achieve women's suffrage was in the 1870s by Anna and Thomas Haslam when the first suffrage society was formed by Isabella Tod becoming in 1901 the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association. In 1896, women became poor Law Guardians given their philanthropic work and the belief in their moral superiority which implied their right to vote concerning Poor Laws. Yet, women did not obtain the parliamentary right to vote until 1918 after the Representation of the People Act was passed (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 241-244). Much of the opposition for women to enter politics was the idea that they challenged the moral values and gender norms which restricted women to the domestic sphere. The Church elevated the status of women within the private sphere and any attempt to transcend this boundary was contrary to the natural law imposed on women to be submissive to male authority. Their active role in society then would go against the Catholic

habitus which defined women as passive, self-repressed, patient, and pure (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 157-161).

Despite the difficulties, women got gradually involved in matters of the State occupying public spaces thanks to the arduous labour of feminist movements from the 1960s onwards. The renegotiation of the social and political boundaries women were subjected to allowed them to have a more inclusive role in society with the establishment of a Trade Union, and the gradual introduction of women in politics (Ferriter 569). Yet, it was not until the 1970s, coinciding with the introduction of Ireland into the European Union (EU), that we saw an almost complete change of women's conditions thanks to the pressure exerted by feminist groups, the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation, and the Council of Europe (Ferriter 574-575). During the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s women were represented in politics, but they suffered discrimination under the patriarchal laws imposed. The participation of women in politics was restricted and only a few occupied Parliamentary Seats; names like Maire Geoghegan-Quinn, Bridgid Hogan-O'Higgins, Mary McSwiney, Mrs Collins O'Driscoll, or Mrs Reynolds are just some examples of women in politics during the 1920s and 1930s. From the 1930s to the 1970s just nineteen women were elected to the Seanad (Upper House of the Oireachtas), as Maurice Manning claims in his article "Women in Irish National and Local Politics. 1922-77" (92-102). This low representation of women in politics, and also the few job opportunities that were offered to them, can be explained by the conventional and patriarchal character of the Irish country which has always left women behind. The 1970s saw the change of women's conditions thanks to feminist pressures and the introduction of Ireland into the EU. From their independence to the 1950s, Ireland had had a close economic policy trying to be independent and autonomous, but the economic crisis of the 1950s forced them to open their frontiers to the Western world.

Since then, Ireland received the influence of European countries which affected the mentality and the social policies. All those women did not only fight for the achievement of social equality and women's inclusion in the working world against a latent conservative and patriarchal attitude—legacy of the Catholic teachings—, but they also worked hand in hand with their male counterparts for the reconstruction of the country and the re-emergence of the Irish culture and identity in the post-independent period.

With the increase of women's action in politics, especially in the last decades of the twentieth century, issues such as abortion, sex, women's role in society, marriage, and abuse became part of the public policy in all Europe. In the case of Ireland, women started to form organisations which dared to challenge the Constitution of 1937, especially the power of the Church in determining women's place and role in society (Breitenbach and Thane 6). It was thanks to them that those amendments I have already mentioned were achieved, namely the fifth amendment in 1972 restraining the power of the Church in the State and favouring religious pluralism (Article 44), the eighth amendment in 1983 guaranteeing the right of the unborn, the thirteenth and fourteenth amendments in 1992 granting the freedom to travel or obtain information about abortion, and the fifteenth amendment in 1995 allowing the dissolution of marriage under certain circumstances (The Stationery Office).

The social and economic transformation of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period amounted to the improvement of women's conditions and to their increasing appearance in public spaces, granted also by the UN's 1985 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The new transformed economy contributed to the implementation of social policies that was accompanied by an improvement of educational,

health and working conditions. The arrival of the contraceptive pill and free secondary education, among other measures, changed women's lives in Ireland; a more liberal attitude was adopted and women's inclusion in society became gradually possible. All these changes altered the concept of the family based then on individualism and sexual freedom. The line between private and public spheres was progressively blurred from the late decades of the nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, when, ironically, the private sphere was made public through the strict control of women and their sexual activity (Wills 54).

Overall, women in Ireland, especially during the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century, were subjected to a patriarchal system endorsed by the Catholic Church which did not offer them more alternatives but to ascribe to the social role imposed on them (Crowley and Kitchin 355; Daly M. 101). Yet, the progressive decrease in religiosity and the new economic system of the twentieth century allowed the successful advancement of women in Irish society abandoning the home to occupy the public sphere (O'Connor and Shepard 22). Moreover, the development of different patterns of resistance allowed women to challenge the vulnerable and precarious condition they were relegated to by power. The contestation of that vulnerability discourse adopted by the disciplinary system which restricted them because of their gender allowed them to claim ownership over their bodies and identities. This proves, on the one hand, that women were not essentially vulnerable and in need of protection, as humanitarian governments affirmed, and, on the other, that neither power nor gender are natural, as some feminists have defended, but rather political constructions which can be contested adopting a resistant attitude (Butler, "Rethinking Vulnerability" 12-27). Nevertheless, religion continued to play a role of paramount importance, always imposing constraints on women's sexual freedom, battling moral deviance.

## 1.2. Contesting Catholic Morality through Moral Deviance

### 1.2.1. Prostitution in England during the Victorian Period

In my study of the Irish nation, it is clear that women's sexuality has been problematised given the religious perspective that has been adopted. Although this thesis focuses on Ireland, it is inevitable to refer to England firstly since the island was part of the United Kingdom until 1922. The English social, political, religious, and cultural context of the nineteenth century widely affected the Irish so that most that can be said about the English, can be said about the Irish prior to their independence. Oscar Wilde's celebrated poem *The Harlot's House* (1881) is an exemplification of the Victorian period and the thousands of pleasure gardens, theatres, music halls and brothels that crowded the cities of England and Ireland during the nineteenth century (Wilde 870-871).

#### *The Harlot's House*

*We caught the tread of dancing feet,  
We loitered down the moonlit street,  
And stopped beneath the harlot's house.*

*Inside, above the din and fray,  
We heard the loud musicians play  
The 'Treues Liebes Herz' of Strauss.*

*Like strange mechanical grotesques,  
Making fantastic arabesques,  
The shadows raced across the blind.*

*We watched the ghostly dancers spin  
To sound of horn and violin,  
Like black leaves wheeling in the wind.*

*Like wire-pulled automatons,  
Slim silhouetted skeletons  
Went sidling through the slow quadrille,*

*Then took each other by the hand,  
And danced a stately saraband;  
Their laughter echoed thin and shrill.*

*Sometimes a clockwork puppet pressed  
A phantom lover to her breast,  
Sometimes they seemed to try to sing.*

*Sometimes a horrible marionette  
Came out, and smoked its cigarette  
Upon the steps like a living thing.*

*Then, turning to my love, I said,  
'The dead are dancing with the dead,  
The dust is whirling with the dust.'*

*But she- she heard the violin,  
And left my side, and entered in:  
Love passed into the house of lust.*

*Then suddenly the tune went false,  
The dancers wearied of the waltz,  
The shadows ceased to wheel and whirl.*

*And down the long and silent street,  
The dawn, with silver-sandalled feet,*

*Crept like a frightened girl.*

Depicted as “shadows”, “ghostly dancers”, “skeletons”, “puppets” and “marionettes”, Wilde provides the reader with a grotesque reality of his time. From his tone we can appreciate he condemns prostitution, as it was considered at the time the Great Social Evil. Influenced by puritan thoughts, he warns about the dangers of entertainment which may lead to loosen morals. By calling these women marionettes it could be inferred that Wilde considers them victims of the capitalist system governing England. Yet, his attitude towards prostitutes as a marginal group echoes the sentiments of the period against this immoral practice which affected the whole society, especially the marriage institution.

This last idea can be seen in the last four stanzas when the poetic persona's lover abandons him and enters "the house of lust". We suppose the poetic persona and his lover belong to the middle-class, therefore, the fact that she finally surrenders to vice is worthy of analysis here. The distance marked by the use of the pronouns "we" (middle-class) and "they" (low-class) is shortened at the end when the female joins the prostitutes. What this reveals is the prevailing hypocrisy of the nineteenth century in trying to condemn just a particular sector of society for their sinful practices while all social classes participated in them. However, even though Wilde reacts against prostitutes and those who contribute to prostitution calling them "ghosts" and "dead", it is remarkable that only women are mentioned in this poem. In this poem, then, Wilde perpetuates Victorian ideas of female morality and sexuality which I am going to discuss now.

From a social point of view, the Victorian era was marked by a strong revival of moral reform, paternal authority, and sexual repression, which was gathering strength among the middle classes. Overall, the Victorian era was characterised as a period of moral repression, especially for women, based on the concepts of "purity" and "innocence". In Maria Isabel Romero-Ruiz's words,

Victorian society was informed by two prevalent notions, innocence in the case of children, and purity in the case of women ... Both terms, innocence and purity, were concerned with the lack of sexual knowledge both in children and women. Sexual impulse was the realm of adult males; and yet, prostitution, masturbation, homosexuality, incest, rape, white slavery and child abuse existed. ("Women's Identity" 29)

These notions were linked to others like respectability, chastity, frailty, delicacy, self-sacrifice, and subordination to conform to the image of the "good wife" relegated to the private sphere of

the home. On the contrary, prostitutes were seen as overstepping the limits imposed on women not only in terms of morality, but also concerning their place in society (Bartley 10). Given the clear-cut distinction between social classes, two names were given to prostitutes in order to differentiate their status, namely “common prostitute” for low-class women, and “fallen women” for middle-class women. The term “fallen women” was employed to designate those who were associated with sexual impurity having had sex outside marriage and got pregnant; repudiated by society, most of the time they prostituted themselves occupying, therefore, the public sphere ascribed to men (Romero-Ruiz, “Women’s Identity” 30).

As a legacy of puritanism, the strict moral code imposed by Queen Victoria and the Church was challenged by the high rates of prostitution which were found among the working classes during the nineteenth century. Many scholars have pointed to economic, social, and psychological factors as the main reasons for prostitution in England; poverty and economic needs became during the nineteenth century the leading force governing prostitution. Women’s financial independence was jeopardised by this double sphere theory I mentioned before. As a result, women entered prostitution illegally to improve their economic situation. Moreover, another reason why women got involved in prostitution was due to what was known as “white slavery”. Many women in England were recruited for sexual exploitation, especially those coming from the countryside to be employed in the city. As a result of Stead’s articles in the Pall Mall Gazette in the summer of 1885 on white slavery, the Criminal Law Amendment Act was enacted and the National Vigilance Association was established in order to criminalise prostitution, white slavery, and child abuse (Romero-Ruiz, “Women’s Identity” 42- 46). It was at that time when the link between sex and class was settled, as Frank Mort claims in his book *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-moral Politics in England since 1830* (21). Working classes

were seen distant from the moral code and the respectable behaviour middle-class people tried to impose in society. The immoral practices carried out by the low classes such as drunkenness, dirtiness or prostitution led to health problems which affected the whole society. Moreover, working-class women were “condemned as immoral pollutants” even by doctors according to Victorian values (Mort 37). In Mort’s words, “Motherhood, marriage and domesticity were basic female instincts which Acton compared to the unnatural sexual desire of the prostitute, the nymphomaniac and the courtesan” (61). Hence, an interventionist approach was taken by those who were considered morally “superior”—the middle class—to maintain public order.

Overall, the ideal of the chaste, virtuous, and modest female fostered by Victorian moralists became challenged by a new group of women whose sexual activity became the target of political, religious, and medical intervention during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Throughout the nineteenth century, prostitution became the main theme of political, medical, and religious discourses treating it as an evil force liable to damnation. For doctors, the prostitute was a source of contagion of venereal diseases; for politicians, they represented a public danger threatening the national welfare; and for religion, prostitution was a source of immorality challenging the former puritan values. Hence, the linguistic category of the “prostitute” or “fallen woman”, and the negative connotations of these words, were created by political power in an attempt to regulate the population and to establish a disciplinary order to follow. In Paula Bartley’s words,

Considered a ‘social evil’, prostitution commanded attention from the church, the state, the medical profession, philanthropists, feminists, and others, each of which offered a range of solutions to control and ultimately to end it. Fears that it would infect the

respectable world, destroy marriages, the home, the family and ultimately the nation led to attempts to regulate and reform the prostitute and to prevent and suppress prostitution.

(Bartley 1-2)

From the political point of view, several laws were enacted to put an end to prostitution. The first piece of legislation against prostitution was the Protection of Young Females' Bill in 1844. As Trevor Fisher claims in his book (1997), the moral laxity ruling the 1830s, caused partially by the arrival of industrialism, opened a crusade against prostitution driven from religious convictions to rescue and rehabilitate "fallen women". During the 1850s, the spread of venereal diseases led to the enactment of The Medical Act of 1858—a precedent of the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866 and 1869—by which the sexual encounters between prostitutes and soldiers and women's sexuality and morality were to be regulated (Mort 52-58; Fisher x). Feminists and philanthropic women began to contest these Acts seen as a deprivation of women's liberty. Then, the focus shifted from seeing prostitutes as criminals to considering them victims of a patriarchal system which granted men's elision of responsibility (Fisher 95-96; Mort 76). Later, in the 1880s, the problem of women's and children's slavery was added to that of prostitution. The result was the enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill 1885 and the Vagrancy Act 1898 which set a more punitive action against prostitution and the exploitation of women (McCormick 91-92). From the religious and medical point of view, the merger of the "medico-moral politics" during the first part of the Victorian era granted social intervention against prostitution. As Mort claims, venereal diseases were considered divine punishments given the corruption of society; this evangelical view was supported by doctors who started a campaign of reform led by middle-class philanthropic women (24).

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, sexuality became a main political concern triggering two distinct perspectives among women, that is, that of the purists and that of the feminists. Whereas the first group saw prostitution as a crime, the second defended it as a respectable job. Reformers and female philanthropists' perception of prostitutes was not one of victimhood but one of guilt, therefore, women's teaching of good morality was required (Bartley 158). Throughout the nineteenth century, all those women who did not follow this moral code of sexual restraint, self-denial, purity, docility, and obedience were considered "deviant" and consequently punished to be confined in Refuges, Penitentiaries, Lock Hospitals and/or Magdalene Asylums.<sup>6</sup> Created throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, those institutions lost power at the beginning of the twentieth century while prostitution continued to pose a problem in England. Hence, several female philanthropic organisations sprang up aiming to solve the problem. One example of this is Ellice Hopkins who established several Ladies Associations for the Care of Friendless Girls to save them from prostitution. In a puritan line, she considered women responsible for transmitting moral values within the family through a proper education at home. Her work— *The Power of Womanhood* (1901)— was a call for action to all women in England to fight evil and eliminate prostitution by safeguarding their purity and morality, following God's teachings, and by teaching their children in a proper moral environment. Although she attacked the double standards and she considered men responsible for social evils too, her discourse indirectly reinforced the puritan and patriarchal mentality prevailing during nineteenth-century England. By making women the only ones responsible for children's education and future she eluded men's responsibility and stigmatised middle-class standards of morality (Hopkins 14-20).

The work done by reformers and politicians to abolish prostitution, although defended as a social labour to help those in need, was seen in the twentieth century as a repressive one for women who did not ascribe to the moral code established. As Susan Bordo (1993), Adriana Cavarero (2011) and Judith Butler (2004) claim, the main characteristic of the human being is vulnerability and dependency from the moment we are born; as political and social bodies, we are all embedded in power relations which impose a set of cultural norms that condition us and render us vulnerable to others' power. But some lives are more vulnerable, less protected, and less grievable than others (Butler, *Precarious Life* 32). And this, Butler explains, is because vulnerability is not an ontological condition but a socially induced one; a condition imposed by those in power to subjugate "vulnerable" groups ("Rethinking Vulnerability" 25). Prostitutes, as a minority group segregated and excluded, were more exposed to violence and control executed by those in power in the name of morality. Control and coercion were the tools this Purity Movement made use of to educate young women; these techniques made women more vulnerable and placed them in a disadvantageous position in society with respect to men. In Romero-Ruiz's words, "The aim was to make women's bodies 'docile bodies', accepting the dominant cultural notions of femininity that involved the ideas of modesty and chastity associated with female sexuality" ("Shaping Female" 136).

Yet, thanks to the pressure feminists exerted during the last decades of the nineteenth century, the twentieth century became a turning point concerning sexuality. The puritan morality of silence and sex repression left way to a more liberal attitude. Vice was intended to be eliminated by educating people in sex. As a result, sex education was introduced in schools against some reticence especially from parents (Inglis, "Origins and Legacies" 23). Moreover, the medical advancement of the century encouraged people to discipline their bodies to avoid

diseases. In short, sexual education, health improvement and working opportunities became the key to moral reform then (Bartley 170). But again, this discourse was gendered and directed especially to women. The “medico-moral” political discourse was recuperated condemning female sexuality again as a danger; contention and repression were reinforced against vice, and sex was only accepted for procreation within marriage (Mort 128-150). Finally, prostitution during the twentieth century continued to be a problem for moralists and politicians. However, a distance between both groups was marked by the Wolfenden Report (1957) by which prostitution and homosexual relations ceased to be considered public offences (Kantola and Squires 62-82).

#### 1.2.2. Prostitution and Unmarried Motherhood in Ireland (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)

As we have seen, the nineteenth-century Irish and English histories are inextricably intertwined. Thus, not much difference can be highlighted between both countries especially during the nineteenth century. In fact, the traces of the English influence were still visible in Ireland even after the achievement of their independence. Concerning sexuality and morality, the image is quite similar in Ireland, being prostitution a major concern for politicians, doctors and members of the Church. However, this last group may have been of greater importance here especially during the twentieth century, when the Catholic Church got control of the education system and became the moral guardian of Irish society. In any case, all these groups attempted to set the abject prostitute and unmarried mother aside and bring the ideal-chaste-Christian woman to the fore in their political campaign of a national identity grounded on purity and social inclusion.<sup>7</sup>

As Luddy claims in the introduction of her book *Prostitution and Irish Society. 1800-1940* (1-3), Irish people refused to acknowledge the existence of prostitution given the purity and

high moral code imposed. But despite their negation, the figure of the prostitute was highly visible during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As I said in the previous section of this chapter, job opportunities for women were low during the nineteenth century, so there is a consensus about considering poverty as the overriding reason why these women may have fallen in prostitution in nineteenth-century Ireland. Given the poor economic conditions and working opportunities for women, especially after the Famine when they were employed mainly in agriculture and domestic service, hundreds of women turned to prostitution as a source of income. But McCormick also talks about low marriage prospects, discrimination, alcohol, having illegitimate children, and illiteracy as the main reasons why Irish women felt forced to engage in prostitution (30). Some of the names these women received were “women of bad character”, “women of abandoned character”, “dirty persons”, “night walkers” or “fallen women”, among others (Luddy, *Prostitution* 17). Different classes of prostitutes existed forming a complex hierarchy, namely the low class—“the Wrens”, placed in military camps—, the common prostitute, who was to be found in the streets, and the middle-class prostitute, who occupied brothels.

The negative consideration of prostitutes throughout the nineteenth century, seen as savages who cannot repress their impulses and also as a danger not only for respectable men and women but also for the whole country, was connected with moral and religious values which were violated by their sexual activity (Luddy, *Prostitution* 67). Following Foucault, Butler claims that the law establishes what is said and what is not, what is repressed and what is accepted, what is legitimate and what is not (*Gender Trouble* 89). According to religious discourse, the prostitute was not worthy of recognition, representation and social inclusion given her disrespectful attitude in society. Moreover, in the nineteenth century, the category of the

prostitute progressively incorporated any women who occupied the public sphere or who did not ascribe to gender norms. The mere appearance and occupation of public spaces by those problematic women were taken as causes of distress; in Luddy's words, "prostitutes clearly had a very public presence in Ireland in the nineteenth century and it was most often their visibility which caused anxiety. Concern with the visibility of prostitutes suggested fears about the use of public space, and perhaps more importantly, the contamination of that space" (Luddy, "Abandoned women" 485).

In this quotation, Luddy identifies two main issues which evolved around prostitution, namely containment and visibility. The separation of prostitutes from respectable women and men was a main concern for authorities trying to avoid the moral infection of "the pure" (*Prostitution* 61). In defining sexual identity, moral rules governed Irish society where the impure was necessary to be constantly purified, and the main techniques used for that purpose were confinement and segregation. Of important appreciation here is Butler's politics of visibility which distinguishes between those bodies who can occupy the public space and those who cannot; however, I do not refer here to public visibility in the media (*Precarious Life* 37). Instead, I refer to how certain bodies were not allowed public visibility in the street and in certain public places due to their gender and class. Prostitutes' visibility in society was a major preoccupation; therefore, they were either legitimately enclosed in Workhouses, Lock hospitals or Magdalene Asylums, among other reformatory institutions, or geographically restricted to particular areas in the outskirts of the cities (Crowley and Kitchin 368).<sup>8</sup> These institutions were just a copy of those English ones I have mentioned in the previous section. Yet, there is a difference I should point out here; whereas English Refuges, Asylums and Hospitals were run by

middle-class philanthropic men and women, Irish ones were led by philanthropists first and by Catholic congregations later.

The fact that prostitution, unlike in England, was conceptualised as a public offence led to much more control and repression in Ireland (McCormick 24). During the nineteenth century, as Finnegan (161-168) and Luddy (*Prostitution* 124-152) claim, the spread of venereal diseases became a medical and social problem which led to the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CD Acts)—1864, 1866, 1869. Since prostitutes were targeted as the main responsible agents for their spread, they were monthly examined and sent to court or to Refuges after the publication of the Acts. A public debate flourished once women's organisations raised their voices against the 1869 Act in favour of a single standard of morality. Groups of dissenters, such as the National Association for the Repeal of the CD Acts or the Ladies' National Association, were founded to fight for the suspension of the Acts on the grounds of several reasons; in Luddy's words, "Opposition to the Acts arose for a number of reasons. Their implementation was seen, by some groups, as interference with civil liberties and by others as the recognition and support of vice by the state" (*Prostitution* 147). Supported by the Abolitionist cause, these groups finally achieved the Suspension of the Acts in 1883 (Finnegan 163-164). This was the first time that women took an active role in discussing sexual matters openly. These women's organisations also tried to achieve better conditions for women in society, to eliminate the double standards of morality, and to give women voice in politics and public life. The Social Purity Movement, set by Ellice Hopkins in England in 1883, had much to do with the repeal of the CD Acts (Luddy, *Prostitution* 152). Thanks to this group, the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) was implemented in Ireland, as well as the establishment of patrol

work and home shelters for women. Yet, after the suspension of the Acts, prostitution continued even in higher numbers (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 138).

It was in the twentieth century when prostitution was no longer concealed and became a major concern for politicians, religious people and reformers, given its visibility in society. Analysing the data Luddy (*Prostitution* 242-250) obtained from the police and judicial statistics, we can see that there seems to be a decrease in prostitution in the last decades of the nineteenth century but a significant increase at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet, the twentieth century also saw a drop in prostitution as the century progressed given the pressure put by the Church and reformers on the police to control and eliminate prostitution. It was during the twentieth century when the laws were hardened and many more prostitutes were arrested on the grounds of soliciting, public disorder and the spread of venereal diseases. While prostitution continued to be a problem in the twentieth century, a political dimension was added to it. In the first decades of the twentieth century, morality became a differential sign of the Irish identity in their fight for their independence (Smith 3). In Luddy's words, "prostitution in early twentieth century Ireland became bound up with the cause of Independence. The prostitute became a symbol of British oppression and the means by which the British soldier infected the Irish nation with physical disease and immorality" (Luddy, *Prostitution* 156).

The presence of English soldiers in Ireland and the fact that they promoted prostitution became a political issue during independence. In the twentieth century, the English soldier became the target of moral denunciations given the political upheaval for independence. Nationalist and suffragists, as Luddy claims, were using the issue of prostitution as a political weapon to challenge male power and to achieve an equal standard of morality for both men and

women (*Prostitution* 166-167). Irish Nationalists pinpointed the English man as responsible for Irish women's moral corruption, to support their independence. As a result, more control was exerted upon working-class women by the local authorities, rescue workers and women's patrols. While the nationalists blamed the English soldiers for the spread of sexual immorality and supported the separation from the English to end with prostitution in Ireland, suffragist women blamed Irish men for not protecting women and for being more concerned about the public image of the country than about the problems these women suffered. Hence, suffragists advocated for the introduction of women in politics to end with prostitution and to grant women more rights and better conditions in society (Luddy, *Prostitution* 181). Yet, problems were to come when prostitution rates increased after the British soldiers left the country (Luddy, "Sex and the Single Girl" 80).

During the first decades of the twentieth century, women started to occupy the public sphere in politics and other jobs. As a result, twentieth-century liberalism posed a problem to Catholicism and its moral teachings (McCormick 80). Hence, a more severe attitude was adopted concerning women's sexual practices. After the 1912 Criminal Law Amendment Act was introduced the police obtained greater power to eliminate prostitution. At the same time, women's suffrage campaigns became successful and since then social issues like prostitution and women's roles and rights were debated. Doctors and suffragists took up the issue of prostitution claiming more treatment and information available to women and the abandonment of the moral perspective to cope with the problem. Despite the Church's refusal to widespread information about sex and to establish treatment centres, several reports on women's sexual activity came to light and public concern about sexuality gained importance (Luddy, *Prostitution* 186-188). A further attempt to control the spread of venereal disease was the enactment of the Criminal Law

Amendment Act in 1917 by which those who had consented sex and had infected others were charged. But this law was especially repressive with women, so women's organisations dared to revoke it and achieved its elimination in 1918.

The politicisation of sex during the twentieth century led to an increase in the regulation of women's bodies and morality to define the identity of the new Free State as pure. The liberalism with which sex was tackled by suffragists ceased, and the Church and the State joined forces towards sexual repression and the confinement of women at home. As Smith claims, the Carrigan Report (1933) and the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935) inscribed "moral purity into the project of moral identity formation" (4). This Act attempted to suppress prostitution through a coercive policy criminalising the prostitute and all those who contributed to the practice of prostitution in brothels or in the street:

13.— (1) In lieu of section 13 (repealed by this Act) of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885, it is hereby enacted that any person who— ...

(c) being the lessor or landlord of any premises or the agent of such lessor or landlord, lets such premises or any part thereof with the knowledge that such premises or some part thereof are or is to be used as a brothel, or is wilfully a party to the continued use of such premises or any part thereof as a brothel, shall be guilty of a misdemeanour and shall be liable, in the case of a first conviction of such misdemeanour, to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds or, at the discretion of the court, to imprisonment for any term not exceeding six months or to both such fine and such imprisonment and, in the case of a second or any subsequent conviction of such misdemeanour, to a fine not exceeding two hundred and fifty pounds or, at the discretion of the court, to penal servitude for any term

not exceeding five years nor less than three years or imprisonment for any term not exceeding two years or to both such fine and such penal servitude or imprisonment.

16.—(1) Every common prostitute who is found loitering in any street, thoroughfare, or other place and importuning or soliciting passers-by for purposes of prostitution or being otherwise offensive to passers-by shall be guilty of an offence under this section and shall on summary conviction thereof be liable, in the case of a first such offence, to a fine not exceeding two pounds or, in the case of a second or any subsequent such offence, to imprisonment for any term not exceeding six months. (Office of The Attorney General, *Criminal Law*)

It is true that the law was hard for both prostitutes and those who contributed to its existence, however, the reality was not such. Throughout the nineteenth century and great part of the twentieth century, prostitutes were made the only responsible party for the spread of venereal diseases and the corruption of female morality. Thus, they were criminalised and either arrested or sent to Asylums or Refuges. However, during the 1960s and 1980s prostitution changed and became a private activity consolidated in brothels. In 1993 the Criminal Law turned its focus towards the client condemning him and protecting the prostitute as vulnerable and weak (Ward 51-56).

Overall, even though a great amount of effort was invested to reduce the number of prostitutes in Ireland, either by the Church and/or the State, it has been proved to be useless. Women were punished and sent to Refuges or prisons on the ground of public offences in order to rehabilitate them and to protect the rest of society from these bad examples. In McCarthy's words,

Rehabilitating the prostitute meant working for the nation; as such it was a task of building both a nation and nationality, which is why most of the ‘Magdalen pamphleteers’ related these efforts with national reform ... a key element to Ireland’s effort at national identity throughout and after colonization was relating nationhood and citizenship to the spiritual and legal teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. In Ireland, Catholic morality became wed with both national identity and the economy, which in turn informed the Magdalene Laundries. By wedding national identity and the work of nation building so closely with the social attitudes of the Catholic Church, there ends up being a totally different understanding of the fallen woman and her place in the nation ... in this image, she is wife, mother, and sister but not wage earner (not legitimately). (182)

What we can see in the background is that due to prostitution, the Irish identity as Catholic and respectable was being wavered. So, this social work the government encouraged could be just a mechanism to restore the Irish national image. What preoccupied the Irish State and the Catholic Church was not really prostitution itself since they did nothing to improve women’s situation in Ireland, neither did they punish those who contributed to its maintenance. Rather, the State and the Church were more preoccupied with prostitutes’ visibility in society and the possible negative consequences this immoral practice could bring destabilising Irish national identity as pure and Catholic.

Connected to prostitution, another social figure which was the main concern during the twentieth century both in England and Ireland for challenging the image of the “ideal Irish woman” imposed by the Catholic Church was the unmarried mother; in Luddy’s words, “Unmarried mothers and illegitimate children were symbols of moral and particularly of sexual

failure. Motherhood became a State responsibility during the twentieth century and unmarried motherhood was considered contagious and unmarried mothers were themselves in danger of resorting to prostitution” (Luddy, *Prostitution* 203). Due to the lack of information about sexual relations, along with the prohibition of attempting abortion, many young unmarried women got pregnant during the nineteenth and great part of the twentieth centuries. The problem they faced was that, due to their lack of economic independence, they could not afford travelling to England. Therefore, thousands of women in Ireland interrupted their pregnancies illegally. Since contraceptives were not allowed, different methods were used to avoid pregnancy such as introducing a sponge in the vagina or sexual abstinence during ovulation. These methods were supported by feminists but not by the Church since motherhood was regarded as the natural state for women. Despite the use of these techniques, many women got pregnant out of the wedlock. Without marriage or any economic prospect, most of them resorted to prostitution or begging, others abandoned or killed their children, and others resorted to abortion clandestinely (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 32).

As the prostitute’s body became a public concern and the main target of religious power, so was the unmarried mother’s body. Catholic discourse established kinship as the norm which accepted sexuality only for reproduction. As a statutory right, family and marriage were recognised by the State and the Church as main institutions in Ireland. Marriage, in conservative regimes as the Irish, was the only way to legitimise sex between partners and to achieve public recognition (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 27, 104). Hence, the unmarried mother was equated to the prostitute since she used her body for pleasure and fell out of the scope of the intelligible worthy of social and political recognition.

As a result of the high rates of illegitimacy from 1923 to the 1970s, different laws were enacted to control and regulate women's sexuality. The report of the Commission of the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor (1928) made the Church responsible for the management of these women:

... the Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor called for alternative accommodation to the county home for the unmarried mother. The Department of Local Government and Public Health responded to this pressure by turning to religious orders to provide so-called 'special homes' and to open Magdalen asylums. The department categorized unmarried mothers according to moral degeneration, wishing the 'intractable problem' of the 'repeat offender' to be dealt with in Magdalen asylums. (Earner-Byrne 183)

During the War, the image of the "good woman" spending her time at home and behaving according to moral standards changed. The "modern woman" appeared; an independent woman, who worked, took decisions and who did not depend on men. This new woman posed a problem for the State and its moral values. Hence, Protestant and Catholic groups got involved seconding the laws passed by the government to rescue and prevent those women from falling. In 1921 The Legion of Mary was founded, a charitable lay organisation concerned with the morality of prostitutes and unmarried mothers, which set up several houses for women's retreat where they were educated. After the Carrigan Committee Report, this philanthropic organisation achieved the implementation of the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885) which elevated the age of consent to sixteen, introduced sex education at school, increased police intervention and

prohibited contraception. The Report came in with fierce criticism as being biased, based on Catholic ideas, and too repressive for women (Luddy, *Prostitution* 214).

In order to avoid that religious and legal persecution, and to be able to raise their offspring, many women migrated to England, but they were repatriated from the 1930s. Garrett (2010) talks about the emigration rate of unmarried mothers from Ireland to England, especially during the 1940s to the 1970s; despite these women's attempt to escape from their confinement in Mother and Baby Homes, Workhouses or Magdalene Asylums, the Child Protection and Rescue Society (1913) encouraged these women's and their babies' repatriation concerned with the moral dangers they were exposed to in England—proselytism. This practice came to an end in the 1970s, when a more liberal mentality was adopted and abortion was made legal (Garrett, “The Abnormal Flight” 330-343). It was not until the 1970s that attitudes towards unmarried mothers changed; thanks to the Commission on the Status of Women (1972), allowances to unmarried mothers were introduced, and thanks to the Social Welfare Act of 1973, social assistance to unmarried mothers and their children was provided:

- 8.— (1) An allowance (in this section referred to as a social assistance allowance) shall, subject to regulations, be paid out of moneys provided by the Oireachtas to a woman—
- (a) who is unmarried, (b) who has not attained pensionable age, (c) who has at least one qualified child residing with her, and (d) who satisfies the conditions as to means specified for the purposes of this subsection by regulations.
- (2) The rate of a social assistance allowance shall be the same as the rate of the widow's (non-contributory) pension which would be payable to the woman under the Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Acts, 1935 to 1973, if she were a widow.

(3) A child shall be a qualified child for the purposes of this section in relation to a woman if she is the mother of the child and if, on the assumption that she was a widow, the child would be a qualified child in relation to her for the purposes of the Widows' and Orphans' Pensions Acts, 1935 to 1973.

(4) Any question relating to the normal residence of a qualified child shall, for the purposes of this section and the regulations thereunder, be decided in accordance with section 5 (2) of the Act of 1946 and the rules under that subsection ... (Office of the Attorney General, *Social Welfare*)

It was thanks to second-wave feminism, with the establishment of the Irish Women's Liberation Movement, that a committee on women's rights was set in 1968, which resulted in the establishment of the First Commission on the Status of Women (1970) and in the formation of the Council for the Status of Women (CSW) in 1972 (Connolly 89; Ferriter 539). Moreover, different associations were created to help these women and to avoid their discrimination in society (Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers" 109-126).

Overall, marriage and the family were recognised by the State and the Church as main institutions in Ireland leading women's lives, so maternity out of wedlock was considered a sinful act contravening the religious morality of the time and bringing shame to the family. Motherhood outside the conjugal frame was a stigma that delegitimised women in society and by which they were excluded and removed from the public gaze confined in reformatory institutions and lowered to the status of the prostitute (Luddy, "Sex and the Single Girl" 85).

## Chapter Two. The Carceral and Magdalene Laundries

### 2.1. Irish Magdalene Laundries

#### 2.1.1. Origins and Evolution

The sexuality of the Irish female subject and the materialisation of her body in Ireland have been produced not only by conforming to gender and sex norms, but also by following the moral laws imposed by the Catholic Church. As I said in the previous chapter, the religious discourse imposed a Catholic habitus on women and all those who challenged it were rejected as abject beings. Displaced and defined as the “Other”, those who distanced from the Catholic teachings were punished with their institutionary confinement to be morally reformed. As a result, many women had to endure their seclusion in different institutions after being labelled “problematic” for society. To understand the existence of Magdalene Asylums in the modern period, we should look back first to the Middle Ages where the origins of these institutions can be found. Through the analysis of the evolution of these reformatory institutions, we will discover the motivation of enclosing a particular group of society there and the reasons why they became so punitive and coercive throughout time.

Sherrill Cohen’s book (1992) offers an overview of the evolution of these reformatory institutions in Europe. The first one he refers to is the Refuge which was created in the Middle Ages for prostitutes and poor families. At that time, the high classes’ code of honour, reputation, chastity, and purity for women was imposed on low classes. Two honourable paths existed for women, namely monasticism or marriage, and a dishonourable one—prostitution. High classes were required to enter monasteries whereas low classes were bound to marry (Cohen 14). The first Magdalene convents were created in the Middle Ages with the establishment of strict moral

laws concerning marriage and prostitution. With the arrival of Catholicism, marriage was reframed as a sacrament and thereby laws were imposed—exogamy, monogamy, no divorce, sex for procreation, etc. At the same time, prostitution was reconsidered by this same religious discourse as the counterpart of marriage (McCarthy 57-60).

The concept of the prostitute and the negative connotations attached to prostitution were the result of the Church's reading of Mary Magdalene as a repentant prostitute. According to McCarthy (2010), there are three Marys in the Bible—Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany and the sinner—, but their identities have been confused and reduced to that of the prostitute in Western history. This identification of Mary Magdalene with a repentant prostitute comes from Pope Gregory the Great who claimed that the three women were the same and that Mary Magdalene was the sinner that appears in the Bible. Although Mary Magdalene was originally portrayed in the Bible as a financier, the association of Mary Magdalene with a prostitute has been spread by religious discourse establishing a dual category between the saint and the sinner and requiring women in Catholic countries to pursue the example of the former, that is, of the Virgin Mary. Yet, the Virgin Mary, like Mary Magdalene, was also deprived of her true identity; she is represented in the Bible as an ordinary woman, mother and wife, but the Church mystified her making her an unattainable ideal for women. In contrast to her, women could only aspire to Mary Magdalene as a sinner who repented. The Bible represents promiscuity in female terms so, from this view, women have always been naturally sinful beings in need of protection. Hence, the fabricated image of the Magdalene, and in general terms of all women as sinners, justified the Church's power and control over women (McCarthy 85).

This identity inversion of Mary Magdalene marked the beginning of what resulted in the confinement and subjugation of thousands of women in Ireland justified by the necessity to restrain sin; what McCarthy defines with the term “magdalenism”:

Today, Magdalenism must be understood in a different, more complete way. Magdalenism must be now understood as the process of identity inversion for the sake of controlling a class of women in the name of moral righteousness and power. Just as Mary Magdalene was wrongly converted into the eternal repentant prostitute, the modern Magdalenes, most of whom were never prostitutes, have been labelled, punished, and sentenced to live out a life of punishment for crimes imagined rather than committed. (McCarthy 217-218)

These repentant Homes and Convents for the reformation of the prostitute in the Middle Ages served as inspiration for the establishment of Magdalene Asylums in the eighteenth century (McCarthy 64-89). During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, women who did not conform to the religious moral code were sent to convents and orphanages gathered under the name of “custodial institutions” (Cohen 21). At the turn of the eighteenth century, and quite into the nineteenth century, philanthropic workers sent women to Refuges and Asylums at a time when prostitution became a great social problem. These institutions, known as “Magdalen Houses”, were created throughout Europe and America, with a voluntary nature, for prostitutes’ rehabilitation (Cohen 132). Originally, the first Magdalene institutions created under the Order of the Penitents of St Mary Magdalen in 1750 all over Europe, Australia, Canada and EEUU were concerned with prostitutes, but they also hosted women of all types during the Victorian period (McCarthy 10). In Ireland, females’ sexual repression and confinement in reformatory

institutions were also common practices, especially during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the role of philanthropic women was of paramount importance concerning the birth of charitable organisations during the Famine (1845-1851). Several institutions were established for the “outcast”, the poor and the mentally handicapped such as Refuges, Workhouses, Lock Hospitals, Lunatic Asylums, Mother and Baby Homes, Orphanages and Industrial Schools, and Magdalene Laundries.

Refuges and Workhouses were originally designed for poor women although they took in prostitutes and unmarried mothers too. As for refuges, they offered not only shelter to “deviant” and poor women, but they also provided moral instruction (Luddy, “Abandoned Women” 494). These Refuges and Workhouses, later named County Homes, continued spreading with the establishment of Magdalene Asylums in England at the end of the eighteenth century among which we could find the Magdalen Hospital (1758), the London Lock Asylum (1787) and the Edinburgh Royal Magdalene Asylum (1797)—the former inspired the establishment of the first Irish Asylum in 1767.<sup>9</sup> These are a few of the numerous Refuges, the historian Finnegan (2004) highlights, which were set up throughout England and Ireland, with a protestant background at first and a Catholic one later, to protect women’s virtue or to rehabilitate those who “had ‘deviated’ from the paths of virtue” (Finnegan 9).

Luddy’s (2007), Smith’s (2007), Finnegan’s (2004), and McCarthy’s (2010) books depict Irish Magdalene Asylums in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The first lay Asylum in Ireland was established in 1767 by Lady Arabella Denny. It offered shelter to prostitutes and unmarried mothers in Dublin who remained there for eighteen months up to two years and who left only under the guarantee of work or to return home. The existence of lay Asylums was

encouraged by the public given the high rates of immorality in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As a result, forty-one Asylums were spread throughout Ireland in cities like Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Belfast, Kilkenny, County Tipperary, County Westmeath, or Wexford. Yet, right after their establishment, the insistence of the Catholic Church to get control of these Refuges hindered the work of laywomen who faded into the background. Contrary to laywomen, nuns were considered a source of absolute power and authority given their uncorrupted nature; in Luddy's words, "The nuns by their own example were the living embodiments of the ideal Christian woman and they tried to instil the same moral and religious standards in the women they helped" (*Women and Philanthropy* 47). Hence, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the majority of lay Asylums were taken and run by different religious orders, namely the Sisters of Mercy (operating in Galway and Dún Laoghaire), the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers (operating in Drumcondra and Sean McDermott Street), The Good Shepherds Sisters (operating in Limerick, Cork, Waterford and New Ross), or The Sisters of Charity (operating in Donnybrook and Cork).

These institutions, taken over the Catholic Church from the 1820s until 1996 when the last Magdalene Asylum closed—the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity on Sean McDermott Street in Dublin—, provided refuge and protection to those "deviant women" in exchange for laundry work, among other tasks. Their stay there was supposedly for their reformation as women who had committed "sins" and had to expiate them and purify their souls. In a symbolic way then, washing garments meant getting rid of the stains of the soul in favour of a pious and sinless life. These institutions were originally designed for prostitutes being the main concern of the State and Church. As we have seen in the previous chapter, prostitution and the spread of venereal diseases were major problems in Ireland, especially during the nineteenth

century. This hazardous situation encouraged the government to act, so punitive and coercive measures were adopted regarding women's sexual behaviour. In conjunction with the State, the Rescue Movement got involved sending women to Lock Hospitals where they could be medically treated. After their recovery, women were relocated to Magdalene Asylums to be morally and religiously trained. Once the Contagious Disease Acts were suspended, prostitutes ceased to enter Hospitals and Asylums; it was "unmarried mothers, women of doubtful chastity and bad 'simple' or abused girls the ones who crowded these institutions then (Finnegan 216).

During the twentieth century, many Homes were set for women who were considered "offenders" (Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers" 109-126; O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 17-20; Titley 9). Founded by laypeople, these organisations provided unmarried mothers with shelter and moral aid to save them from prostitution and other possible evils. In County Homes "first offenders" could hide their shame, rehabilitate and recuperate their lost reputation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, social aid was offered to those women by voluntary associations such as the "Legion of Mary" (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 125), "The Sisters of Mercy", or "The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge" (Smith 29), among others. County Homes, together with Mother and Baby Homes, were institutions founded to assist pregnant women in giving birth. After they had their babies, unmarried mothers were sent to Magdalene Asylums where pregnant women were not admitted (Finnegan 27). These institutions, which spread throughout the North and the South, also helped unmarried mothers with the adoption of their children after the enactment of the Adoption Act (1952), given the impossibility of their mothers to raise them (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 130; Smith 53). Even though the nuns helped with the adoption, the cruel reality was that this adoption was imposed; women suffered the loss of their children once they were forced to enter a Magdalene Asylum

(Finnegan 28). During the Second World War, a black market of adoption was set in America and they found Ireland a potential country to obtain babies (Milotte 22). De Valera opened the adoption flow supported by Archbishop McQuaid and although many doctors and members of parliament such as Dr Noel Browne, Joe Horan, Liam Cosgrave and Tom O'Higgins opposed it, this practice continued until the last decades of the twentieth century (Milotte 25-104). Sean Ross Abbey in Tipperary, St Patrick's Home in Dublin, Castlepollard in Westmeath, St Patrick's Guild in Dublin, St Clare's in Stamullen, Co Meath, and The Sacred Heart in Cork were some of the adoption societies Milotte highlights which were involved in the business of sending Irish illegitimate children to America until the single-mother's allowance in the 1990s ended with this black market (Milotte 83, 186).

Bordo claims that “some of the most resilient inequalities in our legal and social treatment of women lie in the domain of reproductive control” (71). Although the Irish legal system defends the bodily integrity of persons, low-class-unmarried-pregnant women seem to fall out. These women's personhood was attacked and even deprived of the subject-status of embodied subjects, seen as mere reproductive bodies within marriage. Whereas the status of the foetus was elevated to that of a human being (1937 Constitution), the mother's subjectivity and rights were disregarded.<sup>11</sup> The State, among other referrals like priests or family members, was responsible for sending unmarried women to Magdalene Asylums once they were charged with the death of illegitimate children (Rhattigan 123). According to article 40 of the 1937 Constitution, concerning the right to live of the unborn, the government had legitimate right to sentence those women who accessed abortion within the country. Moreover, the Infanticide Bill passed in 1949 criminalised women who murdered their children (Smith 58-59). To the naked eye, murdering a baby could only be motivated by a mental illness (Smith 54). But the reality

was much more different; women killed their children with their own hands once they were born or by interrupting the pregnancy due to several reasons: the lack of formal education on sexuality, the fact of being abandoned by their partners and the consequent isolation, the misfortune of having been raped, or the social pressure they received for being considered immoral, forced them to take desperate measures (Smith 61). What this practice reveals is the lack of privacy for women who were judged as immoral creatures not only by a jury but also by the whole society. Moreover, these cases of unwanted pregnancies proved, on the one hand, the lack of knowledge on sexual matters and, on the other, the huge pressure put on women to fulfil moral requirements.

In their study of Magdalene Asylums throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Luddy, Smith and Finnegan identified a sharp contrast between the functioning of these institutions run by laywomen and by nuns. During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Rescue movement lost its original aim and a more intolerant and repressive attitude was adopted towards penitents. The original intention of the founders of Magdalene institutions, to rehabilitate and achieve women's reinsertion in society, seemed to be forgotten once the nuns got control of the Homes. Although Protestant and Catholic Asylums functioned similarly, there were several differences scholars have pointed out—Finnegan 10, 37-38; Luddy, *Prostitution* 93; Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 117; McCormick 49; Smith 26-30. These scholars demonstrated that Protestant Asylums proved to be more successful in the rehabilitation of women since women did not re-enter them and they obtained a job after their short-time stay there. On the contrary, Catholic Asylums encouraged penitents to remain for a considerable number of years or even for their whole lives. And since no education was provided to them, finding a job after their release was a complicated task.

Many scholars have questioned the role of these reformatory institutions in the rehabilitation of “outcasts”. The common practice of sending “deviant women” to these institutions has been interpreted as a tool of oppression rather than of reform. McCormick and Luddy hold the views that social workers victimised the prostitute and the unmarried mother to support their role in society and that the law has been especially repressive for these two groups (Luddy, *Prostitution* 237; McCormick 50). Eoin O’Sullivan and Ian O’Donnell (2012) consider prisons, reformatories, Borstals, Homes for unmarried mothers, Industrial Schools and Psychiatric Hospitals institutions of coercive confinement under the criminal justice system (O’Sullivan and O’Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 2). Moreover, A.V. Simpson et al. (2014) analyse the role of the laundries as an instrument of compassion and as an instrument of power. They say that compassion is a form of dominance that establishes a social relation between the giver and the receiver (Simpson et al. 261). Common to all these interpretations of Magdalene institutions is the fact that the discourse of vulnerability and ethical demands towards those in need—prostitutes and unmarried mothers—adopted by humanitarian practices should be understood as a form of institutionalised violence (Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason* 1-8). In his book *Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life* (2007), Didier Fassin refers to humanitarian intervention as biopolitics in so far it manages and controls those named “vulnerable”, but also as politics of life since the victims are represented as powerless beings in need of protection. That division between the powerful and the weak is thus created by humanitarianism. Hence, this practice essentialises and objectifies the victim (Fassin, *Humanitarianism as a Politics* 501-519). According to Butler’s theory of vulnerability, by naming them vulnerable, prostitutes and unmarried mothers were deprived of their agency and identity, therefore better controlled and regulated (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 25). Vulnerability in this sense had been used by

those in power to justify violence against these women and their confinement on the grounds of security. These humanitarian enterprises do contribute to the stigmatisation and precarity of these women in Ireland claiming ethical demands on the witness of suffering without accounting for their role in contributing to their vulnerability; in Sabsay's words,

The construction of 'the suffering other' as a mute and helplessly un-nurtured, violated, or deprived body demands affective responses willing to commit to humanitarian enterprises, thereby moralising otherwise potentially political claims. By ignoring the role we all play in the differential distribution of vulnerability and its political character, humanitarianism does not really question the causes that produce this inequality. (Sabsay 180)

Overall, Magdalene Asylums during the nineteenth century proved to be coercive towards "deviant women" who were objectified and reduced to labour force by a religious discourse that justified the detention of "deviant women" as a way of preventing them from moral fall. The capitalist economy, then, was sustained by these reformatory institutions granted by the rhetoric of moral reform (McCarthy 160-161).<sup>12</sup>

It seems that what started as an alternative for women who had fallen into prostitution became a tool for the nuns to promulgate the Catholic doctrine at the same time they had a free labour force. Women entered Magdalene Asylums voluntarily to be spiritually saved, to find shelter, and to work, but they were also forced to enter at the end of the nineteenth century given the decreasing number of women who fell into prostitution. In Titley's words, "It made good economic sense to maintain a capacity workforce and one that was not subject to constant

change. The penitents persuaded or compelled to spend lifetimes or many years in the asylums formed the backbone of this unpaid labour pool” (4-5).

Yet, the degeneration of the Asylums, Smith claims, became even more visible at the turn of the twentieth century, when a more coercive attitude was adopted towards penitents (43). Illegal transference of women, or what O’Sullivan and O’Donnell called “transcarceration”, from one religious congregation to another, from Industrial Schools to Magdalene Asylums, or from Magdalene Asylums or Industrial Schools to Lunatic Asylums was a common practice (*Coercive Confinement* 260-261). This outside-the-law procedure was justified as necessary for the protection of women, but Smith claims they were illegally transferred inasmuch as workers were needed for the maintenance of these religious institutions (Smith 72). This network of religious institutions enabled the Catholic Church to get maximum control over women’s education in Ireland. This social reclusion reinforces the previous idea that women were sexually illiterate living in an idyllic Ireland the Church and the State had created away from reality. The seclusion of “fallen women” prevented other women to be morally “infected” and ensured the good functioning of the State. The problem was that the State was more concerned with punishing moral weaknesses, along with concealing the reality to spread an idyllic image of Irish society, than with giving solutions to social problems women faced such as rape, incest, or abuse. Contrary to promoting social policies, which would have improved women’s conditions, the Irish Church and the State preferred to enclose these “sexually deviant” women in diverse institutions. In Pérez-Vides’s words,

A widespread obsession with sexual immorality, which jeopardised the pillars of a Catholic and principal nation, led to a number of restraining policies that would set the

basis for the official approach to what was deemed as moral degeneration. As a consequence, the Irish Free State's extensive response to various groups of problem women and children rested on their removal from public view, with their institutionalisation in prison-like centres that spread throughout the island ... ("Disciplined Bodies" 3)

Yet, coercive confinement in reformatory institutions came progressively to an end in the late decades of the twentieth century. The economic and social transformation of Ireland during the Celtic Tiger period had as O'Sullivan and O'Donnell claim, "profound implications for the architecture of coercive confinement" (*Coercive Confinement* 254). The improvement of health provisions meant the diminishing number of patients in Psychiatric Hospitals; the progressive spread of secular mentality and the improvement of women's conditions in society since the 1970s were translated into fewer women sent to Magdalene Homes until the closure of the last Asylum in 1996. Moreover, as rural Ireland developed a new mentality and a new economy offering more job opportunities and abandoning the stem family, once they joined the European Economic Community, institutionalisation decreased (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 254-275). Yet, the vestiges of this past are still present in Irish society.

### 2.1.2. Life within the Laundry

Inquiring into the reality behind Magdalene Laundries is an arduous task given the religious orders' refusal to grant access to their records. Therefore, the only sources I could obtain for the development of this chapter were the books published by several historians and scholars about this topic who could have an insight into them too. Seeking the testimony of survivors has been a difficult task since most of them either refused to speak up about their experience for fear and

shame or were silenced by the government and the Church. Power resides in those who are placed at the top of the social hierarchy, so they decide who is worthy of recognition and who is silenced, who is the victim and who is the perpetrator, and who is likely to be grieved and who is not; without much support from the part of society and of power institutions, it is undeniable that Magdalene survivors' silence has been due to this rejection they encountered after their release (Butler, *Precarious Life* xv-xvi). Yet, throughout the last decades of the twentieth century and the twenty-first century we have had the opportunity to listen to hundreds of Magdalene survivors who have broken their silence and shared their experiences.

Some anthropologists dismiss testimonies as unreliable sources since personal accounts are subjective and based on distorted and incomplete memory. As an example, Žižek says that a victim of violence may not tell the whole truth since they are traumatised, so their testimonies would be unreliable in a way (4). Yet, scholars like Dori Laub, Sigmund Freud, or Dominick LaCapra, among others, have given prominence to the value and relevance of testimonies in the reconstruction of the past.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, the fact that some Magdalene survivors offered their testimonies as soon as 1998 and 1999 in the documentaries “Sex in a Cold Climate” and “The Magdalen Laundries” casts doubt on the fact that these scholars and historians have not drawn some of their conclusions from these data. However, these testimonies were not given recognition until the twenty-first century when the documentary “The Forgotten Maggie” (2009), interviews, newspapers, and a book entitled *Whispering Hope* (2015) offered these women opportunities to speak. Although Smith analyses the life within the Laundry in the documentaries broadcasted during the 1990s, he does not make a deep analysis but he rather focuses on trauma. Moreover, more testimonies have been offered after the 1990s which will be analysed here to complement this initial approach to the Magdalene Asylums' history. I strongly

believe that if we dismiss testimonies as subjective and unreliable, we are denying these women's political subjectivity, their past and their identities. Hence, I will place more emphasis on Magdalene survivors' testimonies to reconstruct the history of Magdalene Laundries.

Since not much information can be found about the nineteenth century, except for Luddy and Finnegan who could access some of the Laundries' records, this section will be focused on the twentieth century. Nevertheless, an approximate image of the Magdalene Asylums in the nineteenth century can be pictured in the reader's mind considering historical records and considering the socio-political context of the time I have already presented. From the 1820s—when the first Catholic Asylum was established—to 1996—year in which the last Magdalene Asylum closed—, life within the Asylums, as we know from historical records, clashes with the social work the nuns and philanthropic women defended. From Finnegan's (2004), Smith's (2007), Luddy's (1997, 2007, 2018), McCarthy's (2010), and Titley's (2006) investigations, as we are about to see, the coercive character of Magdalene Asylums proves they were a form of slavery for thousands of Irish women. In recent years the outburst of new information about Magdalene Asylums' functioning, thanks to survivors' testimonies, have offered us the possibility to obtain a more complete view of how life was within these institutions and to reaffirm the idea that they were undercover prisons utilised by the State and the Church to maintain public order.

The incarceration of problematic people did not coincide with the birth of the prison in the modern period as a judicial institution. As Antony Taylor (2011) claims, the detention of people in different places is an archaic practice in most countries (3-45). In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault finds the birth of the prison long before the penal code established

it. Using a disciplinary system, by which individuals were controlled and made docile, the idea of the prison came into being in the nineteenth century. Foucault places the birth of this “disciplinary system” at the turn of the eighteenth century coinciding with certain historical facts such as the arrival of capitalism and the growth of population, the appearance of a judicial form and the bourgeoisie, and the technological advancement of the time (*Discipline and Punish* 220-222). With the birth of the prison, imprisonment and isolation were adopted as techniques to reform the individual. Prisons were used to punish and to teach criminals while they were used as workforce. The incarceration of people in prisons was, and it is still, a way of putting problematic individuals aside, to isolate them for reformation. In Taylor’s words, “Their essential function is, and always has been, to contain people who threaten the social order and status quo. Their reason d’être depends to some extent on the prevailing explanations for deviant behaviour at different times, whether or not they hold promise for overcoming transgressions” (2). But not only the prison belonged to this disciplinary system Foucault talks about, institutions like hospitals, schools and Asylums also formed part of this “carceral system”, punishing departures from correct behaviour. The disciplinary mechanism that was applied in these institutions consisted in the confinement of those who were considered out of the norm. Hence, the aim of these institutions was to regulate, homogenise and normalise life producing docile bodies (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 183).

The tradition of placing “deviant women” in reformatory institutions such as Workhouses, Lock hospitals, Mother and Baby Homes, Lunatic Hospitals, and Magdalene Asylums in Ireland and England is a long one dating back to the eighteenth century. As I have already mentioned elsewhere, during the nineteenth century prostitutes and offenders were sent to prison under several laws such as the Criminal Law Amendment Act (1885), the Contagious

Diseases Acts (1864, 1869), and the Criminal Justice Act (1855, 1856), among others. In Ireland however, these “fallen women” have always been a main concern for the Catholic Church rather than for the State. Therefore, they were preferably coercively confined in religious institutions where they could be morally reformed under the guardianship of the nuns. During the twentieth century and given the high rise of imprisonment rates in Ireland, certain institutions—Workhouses, Industrial Schools, Lock Hospitals, unmarried Mothers Homes, and Asylums—worked as alternatives to the prison recognised under several laws, namely The Youthful Offenders Act (1901), The Criminal Justice Act (1960), The Probation of Offenders Act (1907), and The Children Act (1908), among others. Nevertheless, these remand places played the same role as the prison forming a continuum of punishment and control—what Foucault called a “carceral network”. In Smith’s words, “... the Magdalen asylum functioned as an alternative to the state prison and the courts understood these institutions as primarily recarceral and inherently punitive” (65). O’Sullivan and O’Donnell point to the interesting fact that from the 1920s to the 1970s, the prison rates were relatively low whereas those confined in other reformatory institutions amount to a bigger number. Conversely, since the 1970s, a significant drop in the number of people confined in these institutions, caused by several reports and Acts or by the closure of some of these institutions, led to the growth of prison rates. This data implies that reformatory institutions in Ireland were used as remand places recognised in the Criminal Justice Act (1960) (O’Sullivan and O’Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 7-8, 25).

My intention in this section is to utilise both historical records about the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and testimonies published in the twentieth century, sometimes complementary and sometimes contradictory, in the depiction of how Magdalene Asylums functioned in order to spread a silenced truth and to support the widely spread hypothesis that

these religious institutions were part of a disciplinary system which subjugated and abused thousands of Irish women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Analysed from a postmodern and feminist perspective, reformatory institutions will be defined as instruments of power which victimised thousands of women in Ireland, placing them in a vulnerable and precarious condition. However, I will also analyse how these survivors grew resistant claiming their identities and ownership over their bodies to get rid of the bio-power that oppressed them.

Let me begin by presenting the background of all those survivors who have given their personal account of their lives within a Magdalene Laundry in the twentieth century: Phyllis Valentine, Christina Mulcahy and Martha Cooney starred in the first documentary about Magdalene Laundries in 1998 entitled “Sex in a Cold Climate” and produced by Steve Humphries. Phyllis Valentine was an orphan sent to a Magdalene Laundry in Galway as a preventive measure—she was considered liable to fall due to her beauty—; Christina Mulcahy committed the “sin” of getting pregnant out of wedlock and was sent to a Mother and Baby Home run by the Sisters of Mercy in Galway; and Martha Cooney was raped by a relative after which she was sent to an Asylum in County Roscommon under the suspicion that her chastity had been threatened. Maureen Sullivan, Maureen Taylor, Josephine Meade, Mary King, and Mary Smyth were some of the women who starred in the documentary “The Forgotten Maggies”, directed by the activist Steve O’Riordan (2009). Maureen Sullivan, Maureen Taylor, and Mary Smyth were, as daughters of unmarried mothers, originally sent to Industrial Schools and illegally transferred to Magdalene Laundries later in life—Maureen Sullivan was sent to Mary’s Magdalene Laundry in County Westford, Maureen Taylor was confined in Hyde Park Magdalene Laundry in Dublin, and Mary Smith went to a Magdalene Laundry in Cork—; Mary King was abandoned by her family and sent by a jury to a Laundry; and Josephine Meade was an

orphan sent first to an Industrial School and then to a Magdalene Laundry. Some years after the documentary “The Forgotten Maggies” was aired, O’Riordan and Sue Leonard published a book—*Whispering Hope* (2015)—which gathered the testimonies of five Magdalene survivors. Kathleen Leeg and Diane Croghan’s stories are linked by the fact that they were daughters of unmarried mothers. In a Catholic country in which marriage was seen as the natural state of women, they suffered the consequences of their mothers’ sins; for her part, Kathleen Leeg was sent to a Magdalene Laundry in Dublin run by the Sisters of Charity, and Diane was confined in a Magdalene Laundry in Wexford run by the Sisters of Mercy. On the other hand, Marina Gambold and Nancy Costello’s stories can be put together since they were both orphans suffering the consequences of having no one to rely on—Marina Gambold was sent to a convent in New Ross run by the Good Shepherd, and Nancy Costello was enclosed in Magdalene Laundries in Cork, Limerick, Wexford, and Waterford. And Marie Slaterry suffered a life of sexual abuses for which she was punished by her family and by the whole society; she was, as a child, sexually abused by her grandfather and when she spoke about her devastating experience she was distrusted and sent to a Magdalene Laundry in Cork run by the Good Shepherd Sisters by a social worker. In 2013, Nick Carew produced a documentary entitled *The Magdalenes* in which a former inmate of a Magdalene Laundry in Dublin—Gabrielle O’Gorman—tells her story. She was working in a convent looking after children at the age of seventeen when one day the nuns and the police brought her to the Laundry under the conviction that she was becoming wild dating with men. After two and a half years she was released. It is in the present when she comes to terms with her past returning to the Laundry. Finally, the non-profit organisation “Justice for Magdalenes” (2003) published in its website the testimonies of several Magdalene survivors in 2013. Mary, Bernadette, Bernadette Murphy, Mary Currington, Mary Smith, and

Pippa Flanagan were born out of wedlock, so they were sent to Industrial Schools where they were raised and moved to Magdalene Laundries later. Some of them, like Bernadette, were sent to Mother and Baby Homes before being confined in a Magdalene Laundry. Kathleen R. and Angelina Mayfield were not born out of wedlock, but they were educated in Industrial Schools. The rest were sent to Magdalene Laundries during adolescence. Thanks to the testimonies of Angelina Mayfield and Lucy we learn that some of the women, as it was their case, were sent to training centres which were adjacent to the Laundries. These institutions were designed to shelter problematic young girls to educate them—at that time there were no borstals, so they were confined there—but most of them worked in the laundries during the day.

As we can appreciate from these women's backgrounds, there were different reasons why “deviant women” could end up in a Magdalene Asylum; most women who crowded the Laundries established in Limerick, Dublin, Belfast, New Ross, Sunday Well, Waterford, and High Park were unmarried mothers, orphans, sexually abused, and those whose beauty would lead them to fall. Despite the differences concerning the reasons for entry, the common element was the route of entry, which was mainly by referrals, namely parents, police/jury, or priests (Titley 10). Voluntary entrance was also common, at least in lay Asylums, but those cases collected in the Annals were not really voluntary; the reality was that the rejection these women encountered from their families and from the whole society—they suffered displacement and segregation for their immoral behaviour—left them with no other alternative than to enter a Magdalene Asylum (Finnegan 73; Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 124-127; Smith 30-31). As we have seen in the previous section, many women were also transferred illegally from other shelter institutions “ostensibly to safeguard their moral purity” (Smith 46). Most of these survivors' testimonies show that they were transferred from Industrial Schools to Magdalene

Asylums when they reached adolescence or from one Laundry to another mainly for bad behaviour. Therefore, women's voice and agency were curtailed by a disciplinary and patriarchal system which treated them as mere commodities. The fact of incarcerating an individual, either in a prison or in an Asylum, is a display of power executed by those who have the capacity to deprive someone of their freedom. Following Judith Butler (2006) and Achille Mbembe (2003), the State's power—and I would add the Church's power—dehumanises certain groups based on ethical and racial grounds appropriating and showing a sovereign power which reduces minority groups to bare life, destroys plurality and places them outside the political communities. The decision to enclose these women in reformatory institutions should be interpreted as the first display of violence against the integrity of these women's identities and bodies. Deprived of their freedom for being immoral these women's seclusion amounted to their reformation through different disciplinary techniques which undermined their minds and bodies.

Once they entered the Laundry women were organised into a strict hierarchy. This pecking order was established between nuns—according to their status (Finnegan 61)—, between penitents—classified in different ranks, namely penitent, child of Mary, consecrate, and Magdalene (Titley 6; Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 134)—, but especially between penitents and nuns. Inmates were considered a source of contamination given their doubtful morality. Hence, a socio-moral hierarchy was reinforced producing a yawning chasm between the “sinners” and the “saintly” (Smith 35). In Martha Cooney's and Phyllis Valentine's words, “The church was always right; you never criticised the priests, you never criticised the Holy nuns. You did what they said ... ” (Humphries 00:00:46-00:00:59); “You see the nuns, they were Gods to you; you did not dare question them. What they had done was right and you followed their instructions to the letter; you didn't care, it was as simple as that, you do what you're told”

(Humphries 00:21:12-00:21:28). The strict hierarchy between inmates and nuns was marked by several aspects such as the clothes they wore (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Bernadette and Francis Murphy" 55), the food they ate and the places they occupied within the Asylum (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Lucy" 34; "Oral History of Pippa Flanagan" 39; "Oral History of Kate O'Sullivan" 8; and "Oral History of Evelyn" 22). But even in funerals was this hierarchy present; as Kathleen R. and Angelina Mayfield comment, when a woman died she was buried in different places depending if she was a nun—in holy ground—, an auxiliary—inside the convent—or an inmate—outside the convent— (O'Donnell et al. "Oral History of Kathleen R." 78; "Oral History of Angelina Mayfield" 33). Despite this hierarchy, Luddy outlines several similitudes between penitents and nuns. Although they are on a separate moral level, their lives—based on seclusion, work, silence, and discipline—resemble one another. At the end of the day, they were all under a patriarchal system which dominated them (Luddy, *Prostitution* 110-111). Yet, the hegemonic power of the nuns rendered inmates helpless and subordinated to those seen as superior beings as some survivors claim: " ... if a nun told you to jump, you said, 'how high?' So, when the nuns told me to jump, I said, 'how high?' I never queried anything that the...the...they said or did ... they were nuns and because I was in this position where they had all the power and I had none" (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Bernadette" 50); " ... You did as you were told first time and when they say, 'jump' you say, 'how high?' ... " (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Evelyn" 41). This social system existing in Asylums was also present in prisons as Taylor claims—informal and formal network established between prisoners and staff. Hence, a parallelism between Magdalenes and prisoners can be claimed here. Yet, far from being a fruitful relationship based on instruction and reform, it was a power relation established between nuns and young women making them subjected and docile bodies. The unquestionable authority

of the nun, together with the continuous reminder of their sinful nature, made these women powerless, unable to speak up or to act otherwise.

Foucault defines several disciplinary techniques used by the body politic to exercise power and control over those “docile” bodies and some of them were the “distribution of individuals in space”—the organisation of individuals in particular spaces allowed their supervision and control at the same time it established a social hierarchy—and “the composition of forces”—the control of the maximum bodies granted the greatest results— (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149-170). Unsurprisingly, these techniques were used in Magdalene Laundries to control and regulate women. The rules of silence and surveillance Finnegan talks about reinforced the isolation of inmates and their imprisonment (Finnegan 88). These women talk about silence and constant vigilance in great detail giving us a clear image of the strict disciplinary system imposed by the nuns: “We slept in huge dormitories with 20 beds in each, and even at night we couldn’t talk. There was a large internal window and behind it was a room where a nun sat. It seemed to me that she never ever slept. If we so much as whispered she’d appear, and shove us out onto the balcony for a while to teach us a lesson” (O’Riordan 218),

First day, you just...couldn’t speak, you kept your mouth...your...that was it. Put your head down, do the work, that was it. You couldn’t move. From the first day we went into the laundry, you couldn’t speak to anybody. You had to go to the toilet—like I said to your man—she’d be sitting there, they didn’t have to move their heads, she’d watch you going in. Yeah. Bars, that...the soap was that size (indicates about 12 inches in length), right, like I said...cut it down and she’d throw it at you. (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Kate O’Sullivan” 5)

Through constant surveillance without the inmates noticing it, prisoners and Magdalene women were objectified and controlled thanks to Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. As Foucault argued, this architectural apparatus ensures the well-functioning of the disciplinary system and sustains the power relations established between supervisors and inmates (*Discipline and Punish* 203). Women's seclusion is contrasted to their high visibility here being exposed to the gaze of nuns; a technique which affected these women's subjectivity and reduced them to vulnerable objects. Not only were these women denied their liberty being enclosed in reformatory institutions, they were also deprived of their freedom of speech and of their privacy. The loss of human status is clearly seen here where the bodily and mental integrity of these women is hindered by the nuns holding power.

This isolation from the outer world, as a kind of punishment, was strengthened by the fact that friendship between inmates, correspondence or visits were prohibited in most of the Laundries (Finnegan 28; Luddy, *Prostitution* 86). As Martha Cooney claims, they "were told that special friendship wasn't allowed in there. And the only thing that made you happy was the love of God, and be detached from all things and people ... " (Humphries 00:21:30-00:21:46). Friendship was disregarded for several reasons, namely to avoid women's escape, as Kate O'Sullivan comments (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Kate O'Sullivan" 24), and to avoid lesbian relationships (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Bernadette" 21). Correspondence was discouraged but on those occasions in which inmates could receive and send letters, the nuns checked them first censoring them when they believed it appropriate, that is, when the inmates referred to anything that was happening inside, and which would damage the nuns' reputation. Concerning visits, Evelyn claims: "... they really did their darndest to keep visitors away, to keep you away from your family, and that was it yeah" (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of

Evelyn” 41). However, there were some exceptions in certain laundries where women were allowed to receive visits. Yet, the nuns were always present during the meeting. As Marina Gambold, Kathleen Legg and Martha recall, when they received a visit, they could not tell the truth about what they were experiencing there otherwise the nuns would punish them afterwards (O’Riordan and Leonard 40). Kathleen’s testimony shows the secretive attitude the nuns adopted concealing the reality behind the Asylum’s walls. The nuns offered a positive view of the Magdalene Asylums to society which contrasted with the reality inmates lived inside. As Martha comments, she was given nice clothes when she had a visit but then she was changed into rags again (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 30-31). This, together with Lucy’s testimony, shows the hypocrisy of the Church and its power in subjugating these women: “... The...the nuns used to put...put on this image that they were that they...they were doing everything for us ... it gave...it gave out to those people outside, it...it gave them a sense that we were so cared for, so happy, they were doing wonderful things for us, but when they went everything just kind of went back to normal ... ” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Lucy” 29).

Foucault argues that the body, involved in a political field, is always invested in power relations that control it (*Discipline and Punish* 25-26). These power relations make the body vulnerable and disposable (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26). So, our identity is formed, influenced by the relationship we establish with others and by social and cultural constructions. Yet, Magdalenes’ identities, like prisoners’ ones, were denied; this imprisonment refused privacy and therefore individuality and identity (Taylor 98). The distinction between inside and outside is reinforced by the suspension of contact with the outer world. Yet, the private-public dichotomy is blurred in both the Asylum and the prison by the deprivation of individual space and by constant surveillance. As we have seen, Magdalene Laundries did not offer private places to

these women. Even though women were all the time together, contact between them was not allowed. Therefore, virtual isolation, along with other punishing techniques, caused the erosion of their identities.

Women's seclusion in Magdalene Asylums implied the forgetting of their past except for the sins they had committed. They were sent there, as Marina Gambold was told, to be trained and to atone for their sins (O'Riordan and Leonard 99). At their entrance they were denied their former identity as a way of forgetting their past. In Kathleen Leeg's words, "our birthdays were never celebrated, so we weren't even sure of our age. Little by little, every sense of who we were before entering St Mary's was washed away" (O'Riordan and Leonard 41). Another method used to deprive women of their identity was by giving them new names at their entrance. As examples, Nancy's name was changed to Bernadine (O'Riordan 164), Marina Gambold's to Fidelma (O'Riordan 98), Maureen Sullivan's to Frances (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Maureen Sullivan" 4), Pippa Flanagan's to Theresa (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Pippa Flanagan" 46), Mary Currington's to Imelda (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary Currington" 20), Bernadette Murphy's to Theresa (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Bernadette Murphy" 22), Mary's to Elizabeth (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary" 15), Kathleen R.'s to Frances (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Kathleen R." 31), and Gabrielle's to Stella (Carew 08:06-08:27). It should be said that in the case of O'Donnell's Oral History Project, the names given by the women, both their real name and their House name, were pseudonyms for political and privacy reasons. Yet, what should be considered is the mere fact of changing these women's names. Metaphorically, the assignment of new names has been analysed by some scholars as penitents' embrace of a new life—a pious and religious life which replaces the previous sinful one (Smith 37; Titley 5; Wecker 265). However, this process can, more accurately, be interpreted

as the negation and loss of their identities given the consequences of their stay there (Finnegan 47)

Following Jacques Lacan, Butler claims that the name is what confers a stable identity to the subject in the symbolic order; names wield the power of subjectivation (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 41). In heteronormative societies, the name establishes subjects according to their sexed social positions. Therefore, the name is what gives social status and identity to a person and a stable gender identity allowing him/her to be represented in society (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 109). If the name provides a stable identity, the Magdalenes were deprived of it since their names were changed to those of saints which had religious and moral connotations. By this practice, they were dehumanised, normalised, and homogenised. Once they entered the Laundry, their identities, their past and therefore their history were dismissed, consequently losing their subject status and being rendered in a precarious condition. Among the names these women had received throughout time, one of the most common ones is “inmate”. In the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, the second entry of the word *inmate* reads: “An inhabitant or occupier of a house, esp. along with others. Now chiefly, an inhabitant of an institution, as an asylum or a prison”. Here, the word *asylum* is defined as: “A sanctuary, a place of refuge and safety, orig. and esp. for criminals” (Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). Hence, the mere fact of calling inhabitants of Magdalene Asylums “inmates” refers to the carceral character these religious institutions had as well as to the dehumanising and homogenising process they suffered.

Apart from losing their names, these inmates also lost their female identity. The female body has always been controlled and repressed following certain social and cultural constructions of femininity. Feminist theorists, like Butler and Bordo, believe that the body is a

situation defined in a social and cultural context, and its appearance and behaviour is determined by embodied social and cultural norms which impose what is feminine and what is masculine. In the case of Ireland, religious constraints concerning femininity and the display of sexuality should be added. As Beth Newman (2004) states, Christian morality imposed on women a renunciation of displaying their sexuality. Women were required to be invisible to the male gaze and those women who did not follow these conventions were moved away from the community and confined in Magdalene Asylums. During their stay in Magdalene Asylums, women were taught purity and chastity as main requirements for women who should avoid vanity and any display of their sexuality. Purity and chastity, as part of the Catholic habitus I mentioned in the previous chapter, were inculcated by the use of uniforms and the cutting of their hair (Titley 5; Finnegan 26). The following testimonies of survivors confirm these dehumanising practices executed against them at their entrance: “When we started to develop, we were told quite clear from the nuns that there was no way that we could show breasts, even though our clothes, we couldn’t show breasts. We had to make ourselves as flat as pancakes” (Humphries 00:02:54-00:03:11); “... when you started developing, they put a bodice over you, a bodice. And you weren’t allowed to look at your body when you started developing ... you used to have to put up your head, not to look at your body, we were told never to look at your body” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Smith” 11-12),

The nuns told you, if a girl was nice looking or she had nice hair, the hair was cut, you know. And then when you start developing, and when girls, you know how they look down at their bodies when they are young, the nuns will notice or one of the managers will notice and tell. You’ll be brought into the big office and you’ll be sat down and told

that it was a sin to be vain, it was a sin to go around swinging your hair, it was a sin to be looking at your body. You'll be told that by the nuns. (Humphries 00:03:38- 00:04:13)

As we can appreciate from these quotations, women's physical appearance and femininity were concealed and banned as sinful, therefore, their female identity was hindered at the same time their bodies were dispossessed. Recent feminists, influenced by poststructuralist and postmodern theories about the body, claim the body as one's property; individuality and the right to make decisions about our own body are ideas defended by this group (Bordo, 2013 and Butler, 2006). However, the Magdalenes' bodies were not theirs but the State's and the Church's property—their bodies and sexualities were made absent following Catholic moral values of self-denial and purity. The Irish State, but especially the Church, made the woman's body a public concern alluding to its vulnerability exposed to rape, incest, prostitution, and sexual illnesses. Women's bodies were also a family concern—the morality of the girl and the use she makes of her body endangered or preserved the reputation of the whole family and even of the whole community—and finally within the Magdalene Asylums these women were deprived of their rights over their bodies. Hence, the Magdalene's body was at the disposal of all except herself.

Education and morality were taught not only through constraints related to the display of sexuality; these women's bodies were further subjugated through hard discipline and work as main tools for their reformation. Inmates were deprived of education in most Magdalene Laundries; they were educated, though, in the Catholic doctrine and in hard work—domestic service. Survivors like Mary King (O'Riordan 00:17:32-00:17:40), Martha Cooney (Humphries 00:15:47-00:16:00), and Mary (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary" 5) claim they were not offered education since during their day they were engaged in keeping the convent polished.

Instead, these women were used as labour force engaged in a strict routine consisting basically in praying and working:

The days took on a punishing routine. Get up, kneel by the bed for a Morning Prayer; wash and dress, making sure to keep your nightdress on until all your clothes were on; go to chapel for Mass; eat a breakfast of bread and butter, or once in a while a kind of yellow porridge called stir-about. Clean the convent, scrubbing corridors on our hands and knees; go to the laundry. Slave there all day in silence. Then it was dinner of cabbage and potato, or maybe a watery stew, and back to chapel for more praying. (O’Riordan and Leonard 216),

We...we had to get up at 6.30 in the morning and we had to clean our section of our dormitory first, clean bathrooms, clean the whole...the whole house had to be cleaned before we had our breakfast. And then when we had our breakfast we went straight to the laundry then. Now we didn’t do the laundry every day, probably did the laundry maybe three or four days, and I always remember, there was one day we had two teachers come in and there was one who used to teach us Home Economics and used to teach us how to cook and there was another one who used to come in and do music with us ... (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Lucy” 25),

The women, they worked from 6 in the morning all day just doing the laundry and they sang hymns as well while they worked. They never would be allowed to talk and you’d always find the nuns walking about making sure everybody was doing the work. It probably was 12-13 hours a day. Then they’d have their meals and they’d go to bed. (Carew 04:28-04:51)

These long quotations demonstrate they were engaged in an exhausting routine which punished their bodies and minds. The fact of depriving these women of education can be interpreted as a mechanism of power used by the nuns to render these women ignorant and under control (McCarthy 149). Another two disciplinary techniques used by the body politic Foucault pointed out were the “control of activities”—time was a leading force of control; the body was taught through prohibitions and constraints to produce work, and recreation and possible distractions from work were eliminated—, and the “apprenticeship and the transmission of knowledge”—disciplinary training separated in stages under continuous vigilance made up a gradual process in which the authoritarian master guided the pupil towards perfection and the acquisition of knowledge through hard work and exercise— (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 149-170). These two disciplinary techniques can be recognised in these testimonies by which these women were largely used as a force of production invested with relations of power and domination.

Moreover, this dehumanising situation was aggravated by the poor meals they received, as we can read in the following testimonies given by Nancy, Diane, Evelyn, and Kathleen Legg: “Sometimes we had sausages, but more often breakfast was a large spoonful of porridge. Then we had a small roll with a pat of butter. There was a stale of bread left on the table too ... ” (O’Riordan and Leonard 32); “You had porridge in the mornings—wasn’t very nice—and I vaguely remember a stew, and I think they used to do boiled beef and cabbage, or corn beef and cabbage and mash on a Sunday ... ” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Evelyn” 21). Meals consisted of a bland diet like these ones were not enough, as survivors claim, given the demanding physical work they were required to develop (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Bernadette Murphy” 18; O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Kate O’Sullivan” 34). Bordo refers to eating disorders caused by women themselves to meet cultural expectations of the body. But in

the case of the Magdalenes, eating disorders and malnutrition were caused by the Christian ideology which considered the body a sinful entity and starvation as a way of achieving spiritual transgression of the flesh (dieting). The Victorian mentality of excess as sin, of hunger as a sign of spiritual superiority, of eating as a private act and of cooking as a female's act were still present in twentieth-century Ireland (Bordo 117). However, another likely explanation why women received these poor diets would be that they were a way of punishing and controlling them; punishing the body to educate it. If their diet was not nutritious, they lacked the necessary strength to carry out work and to revolt against the system.

From the previous analysis, Magdalene Laundries seem to have been more punitive and repressive than prisons in the twentieth century, as O'Sullivan and O'Donnell affirm ("Coercive confinement" 44). Yet, as Foucault claimed, there is no power without resistance. Inmates have always fought for their rights rebelling against oppressive systems by using the only thing they had—their bodies. Although some inmates adopted a resigned attitude inside the Laundry so as not to get into trouble, some others tend to rebel against this coercive disciplinary system by adopting a rebellious attitude or by going on strikes for which they were expelled, as was the case of Phyllis Valentine (Humphries 00:40:10-00:41:18), Nancy Costello (O'Riordan and Leonard), Kathleen R. (O'Donnell et al. "Oral History of Kathleen R."), Mary (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary" 46), and Evelyn (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Evelyn" 46-47). However, the most common subversive technique was escaping. As Phyllis Valentine claims, escaping was a great achievement given the difficulty in trespassing the Laundries' walls (Humphries 00:13:11-00:13:27); Angelina Mayfield and Gabrielle assure that the top of the walls was covered with cemented glass (O'Donnell et al. "Oral History of Angelina Mayfield" 58; Carew 06:30-06:59); and Lucy affirms: "There were bars on the windows and over the walls

there was barbed wire and it was kind of like...there was kind of bar...steel bars and in between all them steel bars there was barbed wire... so there was no way that you could actually climb up over the wall. The walls were too high anyway” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Lucy” 26). The result of an escape attempt was varied: some women managed to escape but nothing was ever known of them, as Mary Smith and Kate O’Sullivan tell us (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Smith” 28; “Oral History of Kate O’Sullivan” 18); some women died in the attempt as it was the case of an inmate, Lilly, who Nancy Costello remembers (O’Riordan and Leonard 180-186); most of them were unsuccessful and they were returned to the Asylum by members of society or by a Garda (police) and punished like Diane Croghan (O’Riordan and Leonard 221-222), Angelina Mayfield (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Angelina Mayfield” 95), Gabrielle (Carew 08:06-08:27) and Martha (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 38). What these testimonies reveal is, on the one hand, the desperation of all these women who risked their lives in an attempt to be free, and on the other, the coercive attitude of the Church as well as the collaborative attitude of society and the State in the confinement of these women. Furthermore, the fact that they escaped or attempted to escape proves that they were enclosed against their will and that the living and working conditions were unbearable. Religious and philanthropic women worked on the premise that penitents should not spend more than two years in a Magdalene Asylum and that inmates should be granted a job after their reformation. But testimonies and some historical records assure that most of the inmates spent more than two years of confinement and that they hardly ever achieved social inclusion after their release. Although there were different ways to get out of Magdalene Asylums, the nuns encouraged the inmates to remain for their whole lives there (Finnegan 65). This moral justification from the part of the Church and the middle class only demonstrates the power they exerted over vulnerable women. Despite the

existence of laws regulating the detention of women in Magdalene Asylums, these institutions seem to have imposed their own rules, in Smith's words,

Women who entered the Homes voluntarily, of course ... retained some possibility of leaving. Legally, as was the case with all the penitents, they could not be restrained against their will, and in theory, at least, they could quit the Asylum whenever they chose. The records indicate, however, that at the very least inmates could be pressured into postponing departure (until seeing the priest, for example) during which time every effort was made to persuade or frighten them into a change of mind. (Smith 44)

These embodied protests were a way of demanding their agency and a method of resistance challenging the State's and the Church's sovereignty. Following Judith Butler, Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay (2016), as political and social subjects our body is exposed to power and to vulnerability but that does not imply we cannot grow resistant. Against feminists who draw on paternalistic institutions to help vulnerable people and who think women are vulnerable, these scholars raised awareness of the dangers of stigmatising gender division by considering women naturally vulnerable. On the contrary, vulnerability is a general condition of any human being which can be resisted (Butler et al. 2). As Butler claims, vulnerability is part of resistance and it is through your speech and bodily acts that we can resist social norms and precarity ("Rethinking Vulnerability" 15).

Yet, these Magdalene women suffered the consequences of challenging the nuns' power. The identity of these women was also erased by the physical and psychological punishment the nuns exerted on women to "rehabilitate" them. Although there were some exceptions in certain Laundries, almost all survivors' testimonies underscore the constant physical abuses they

suffered for talking, for bad behaviour, for not doing the job, or escaping, and sometimes unjustifiably like for wetting the bed or for crying. The following testimonies confirm this idea some historians and scholars like Luddy (2007) and Finnegan (2004) have affirmed: “The nuns were very hard, and they were spiteful too. We knew we would be punished if we talked, but sometimes we were punished for things we didn’t know were wrong” (O’Riordan and Leonard 114); “ ... but you couldn’t let the nuns hear you crying because you’d get belting for that. You had no rights to cry because you were in there because you were being punished!” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Evelyn” 30-31); “ ... if you were slow at your work, the nun would come along with a stick and whack you with the stick ... if you did try to talk she had the stick, she always had that stick in her hand and whack ... ” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Smith” 56); “ ... If you refused to do what was asked of you, then you would get punished ... Took to the office. We wouldn’t see what was going on. And that’s why we were scared. We must do whatever we are told to do, no matter what” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Pippa Flanagan” 14). It is not only the reasons, but also the execution of the punishment narrated in the following testimonies which may strike the reader taking into account the supposed tender and kind-hearted nature of the nuns:

Well, if you can visualise a belt or a big cane, that’s how we were punished. You’d get grabbed by the hair, dragged into the office to see the Mother Superior, and you’d have to explain yourself—there again you weren’t always given a chance to explain yourself—and you’d get the cane across the backside, across the legs or the belt, depending on who...depending on who is in charge to give you... the whacking ... And then I was dragged down to the bathroom by the nuns and they would have to stand there and wash me. I wasn’t allowed to wash myself because they had to make sure that I was clean,

because God doesn't like a dirty person. And...and then they'd wash me and dry me. (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Evelyn" 27-29),

... another day I answered her back and she put me into a cold bath...do you know those scrubbing brushes, the hard ones that you scrub the...she scrubbed me whole body with that ... and I had sores and welts all over me body ... That was the point, scrub the devil out of you like, I mean, I [was only] a child. She did, and then she put me outside the door for ages in a flimsy...you know, I wasn't even dressed for it, and she left me there. Another day she locked me in a closet, but I think the worst frightening one of all was the day she put me head into the water and kept putting it down and bringing it up and putting it down and bringing it up ... (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Martha" 16)

Žižek distinguishes between "subjective" and "objective" violence. The first is the "perturbation of the 'normal' peaceful state of things" executed by an identifiable single person whereas the second refers to a subtle violence "inherent in the normal state of things" executed by the economic and political system in which responsibility is denied (Žižek 2). We find in the Magdalene Laundries both types—subjective violence executed by the nuns (physical and psychological violence) and by the State (incarceration), and objective violence since they were made labour force. From all these testimonies presented above we can see how these women's bodies were punished to reform their souls. The public dimension of the Magdalenes' bodies, using Butler's term (Butler, *Precarious Life* 26), made them vulnerable exposed to the violence executed by the nuns. Their bodies, as a material entity exposed to the power of others, were vulnerable to these nuns' reformatory techniques which aimed at imprinting purity on them through blows and humiliations. Even though their acts were justified as social work, we can claim that physical violence exerted upon the Magdalene women was an unjustified form of

subjugation which rendered them in a precarious condition rather than contributed to their reformation. This “spectacle of torture”, which ceased in the nineteenth century when it was abolished thanks to the work of the eighteenth-century reformers, was condemned as an atrocity, yet continued to be a common tool of subjugation and regulation used by the nuns during the twentieth century (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9). This institutionalised violence was justified by the nuns as necessary for the reformation of inmates, but by castigating their bodies and concealing this practise to society they reveal they were committing a crime against humanity.

Furthermore, the bodily integrity of women was endangered by the constant sexual abuses some of them suffered. Although no legal proof is gathered and some historians and scholars have denied the existence of sexual abuses within Magdalene Asylums, the testimonies of two survivors account for the opposite. They demonstrate that sexual abuses were not only common in Industrial Schools, but also in Magdalene Laundries. Pippa Flanagan was sexually abused by a priest when she asked him for help after entering the Laundry. He told her she had to be nice to him if she wanted to get out of there and she accepted since she was ignorant about sex and desperate. Although the nuns had suspicions that sexual abuses were committed, they remained silent (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Pippa Flanagan” 2-3). Martha, as other inmates in her Laundry, was sexually abused by three nuns who justified their acts by claiming they had to purify their devilish souls (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 18; O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 21). By reading these experiences we should question the veracity of historical records provided by historians and scholars who have most of the times refused the mala praxis of the nuns and the abusive character of Magdalene Asylums. Again, the

punishment of these women's bodies, seen necessary for the reformation of their souls, caused the endangerment of their corporeality and sense of self.

Apart from physical punishment, these women experienced psychological violence which undermined their sense of self. These women were called "prostitutes", "idiots", "fallen women" and many other offensive terms. They were made into believing they were worth nothing as Josephine Meade, Mary and Bernadette Murphy claim: "We were classed as nothing; we were told that we came from nothing; we never won't be anything; and we will always go back to nothing" (O'Riordan 00:21:25-00:21:36); "Yeah, you were always being told that you were...you were useless and that you'll never make anything of yourself and you're there because nobody wants you" (O'Donnell. et al., "Oral History of Mary" 31); "There was a...you were nothing, you...you were just nothing. You belonged to nobody, as far as they were concerned. You were a...a sinner" (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Bernadette Murphy" 70). Defending themselves as the saviours, the nuns tortured these women making constant references to their sins and making them believe they needed the help of the nuns. They became docile bodies manipulated by a group who punished their minds through humiliations, confinement in isolation, deprivation of recreation or food for a while, or extra work. One day Marina Gambold broke a cup during breakfast. The punishment she received was to wear a rope around her neck tied to the handle of a cup for three days and her chair was removed from the dining room (O'Riordan and Leonard 112). After that, she was obliged to kneel and ask the nun for forgiveness. Another day, she and two more inmates were locked up in the outside for the whole night as a punishment for having gone out to see the moon (O'Riordan and Leonard 115). Diane and her mates also suffered psychological violence when they were made to wear the sheets around their faces for having wet or bled them, or when they went on a procession through the streets to be recognised by

society as sinners (O’Riordan and Leonard 218-220). All these episodes demonstrate the cruelty inmates suffered which reduced them to mere objects of abuse. Attacking their self-esteem, their souls were also punished by being relegated to the status of an animal in need of correction. After listening to these testimonies one can only interpret these acts as sadistic; there is no reformatory educational effect in humiliating young women this way, but a way of enforcing their power over this vulnerable group. As Butler claims, “ ... it is already more than clear that those who gather to resist various forms of state and economic power are taking a risk with their own bodies, exposing themselves to possible harm” (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 12). So, these women found it useless to claim their ownership over their bodies and identities in a tyrannical system which punished them further for not behaving according to the rules.

Finally, another psychological technique of power used by the nuns was the instigation of fear on the inmates to control them. Žižek criticises modern liberal and capitalist societies, camouflaged under the name of democracy, which instigate fear to exercise control and power over us (27). He says that in our modern post-politics bio-politics, we are reduced to bare life; we are objects of knowledge deprived of rights (Žižek 42). In the same line, Arendt (*On Violence*, 242) Cavarero (41) and Mbembe (20) define terror as a political tool used by sovereign power to instigate fear in order to control people. In Ireland, the Catholic Church was a powerful institution everyone was afraid of; in Mary’s words: “ ... there was always the fear of the Catholic Church” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary” 4). As some survivors comment, women were threatened either to remain in the Asylum for their whole lives or to be sent to a mental institution if they did not behave properly (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Angelina Mayfield” 192). Concerning their release, the possibilities were to be rescued by a relative, to be expelled, to obtain a job, or to escape (Tittley 12). One of the alternatives to leaving the Asylum,

although exceptional, was being expelled for bad behaviour as Finnegan (66) and Luddy (*Women and Philanthropy* 131) claim. Some women left the Asylums to work in Hospitals run by nuns or in families as domestic labour—Mary, Bernadette, Bernadette Murphy, Mary Smith, Pippa Flanagan, and Kate O’Sullivan (O’Donnell et al. “Oral History of Mary”; “Oral History of Bernadette”; “Oral History of Bernadette Murphy”; “Oral History of Mary Smith”; “Oral History of Pippa Flanagan”; “Oral History of Kate O’Sullivan”). Unlike other penitents, who spent their whole lives within the Asylums until their death, some women were fortunate enough either to escape—Christina Mulcahy—or to be rescued by relatives after several years of seclusion—Martha Cooney, Marina Gambold, Evelyn, Chrissie Plunkett, and Martha. Like in prisons, women in Magdalene Laundries were subjugated and made “docile” bodies through time. Conviction sentences could vary from months to years. This indefinite detention causes great anxiety to the inmate. Moreover, time within these institutions is inexistent; inmates realise it just through meals or through the different activities they develop throughout the day. Criminologists and prison sociologists, like Wahidin or Cope, have analysed how imprisonment alters the inmates’ perception of time and how it is experienced biologically—ageing (Moran et al.). According to Foucault, the transformation of the legal system during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought the change from former sovereign power to “governmentality” in the modern period as a form of power regulating population and goods. During the nineteenth century, punishment ceased to be physical and turned to be psychological—it was executed through the association in the mind of the criminal between the crime and the consequent punishment they would receive. Hence, the fear of being punished prevented the criminal from committing the crime (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9).

What we encounter in Magdalene Laundries is both mechanisms of control Foucault talks about, punishing the souls and bodies of wayward women; a “spectacle of torture” which left on these women a profound wound difficult to heal and caused their internal death. Having presented and analysed these survivor’s testimonies, we can reinforce the spread hypothesis mentioned at the beginning that these religious institutions were part of a disciplinary system which subjugated and subdued thousands of Irish women during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We can redefine reformatory institutions as instruments of power which victimised thousands of women in Ireland, rendering them in a vulnerable and precarious condition unable to break the system despite their resistance to the power which subjugated them. That vulnerability imposed on them by the State and the Church was internalised by these women and reinforced by the treatment they received in the Laundries. For those fortunate enough to survive this experience, their identities became erased and their bodies marked by a life of abuse and incarceration.

## 2.2. The Aftermath of Irish Laundries

Many are those who have defended the social work and compromise of the Catholic Church with “fallen women”. However, was it really social work intended to save and protect women? Or was it a lucrative practise thanks to which the nuns earned money and maintained their power in society? Having presented Finnegan’s, Smith’s and other social historians’ arguments, together with first-person accounts of Magdalene Asylums, the answer to these questions seems obvious. It is true that the original intention of these institutions was to rescue and rehabilitate “deviant women”, but the problem was that, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the nuns’ work degenerated causing in those women a huge and irreparable damage after a life of

repentance and remorse. Long hours of work, prayer, silence, constant surveillance, and punishment were considered necessary by the nuns for the rehabilitation of women whose destiny was to die in a state of grace within the Asylums. As for the State, the avoidance of its responsibility towards those confined in Magdalene Laundries and their active participation in sending women there contributed to the damage caused to them. In this section, I intend to explore the aftermath of Magdalene Asylums to see how Magdalene survivors were welcomed back into society and helped in their reinsertion. Following Trauma Studies, we will see the techniques they used to overcome the trauma left on them and to heal their physical and psychological wounds.

As I said elsewhere, the religious practices carried out by the Church were not questioned before the twentieth century. As Smith claims, “for the vast majority of Irish politicians, civil servants, and members of the judiciary, publicly challenging the church’s moral authority was inconceivable. To do that was to challenge the very relationship binding Irish national identity and Catholicism” (47). Yet, after the closure of the last Magdalene Asylum in 1996, the social work of the Church was called into question; the discovery of Irish women’s bodies that were buried illegally in the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge’s Asylum triggered an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding the Irish Catholic Church. The nuns sold the land and hundreds of bodies belonging to women who had died inside the Asylum and whose names were unknown were exhumed. To that, the Irish State turned a blind eye encouraging the cremation of those anonymous bodies. As a result, the UN paid special attention to this fact and the United Nations Committee against Torture criticised the Irish government for not acknowledging the pain of those women. The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading

Treatment or Punishment (CAT) which was signed in 1984 and ratified in 1987 defined torture in Article 1 as:

1. ... any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions. (Office of the High Commissioners)

The phrases “punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed” and “intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind” reflect what Irish women were subjected to by their confinement and punishment within Magdalene Laundries. To that, the State failed to comply with the CAT’S fourth and fourteenth articles which recognise the State’s prompt response in cases of torture:

1. Each State Party shall ensure that all acts of torture are offences under its criminal law. The same shall apply to an attempt to commit torture and to an act by any person which constitutes complicity or participation in torture. 2. Each State Party shall make these offences punishable by appropriate penalties which take into account their grave nature (Office of the High Commissioners),

1. Each State Party shall ensure that any individual who alleges he has been subjected to torture in any territory under its jurisdiction has the right to complain to, and to have his case promptly and impartially examined by, its competent authorities. Steps shall be taken to ensure that the complainant and witnesses are protected against all ill-treatment or intimidation as a consequence of his complaint or any evidence given. (Office of the High Commissioners)

It was not until 1992 that the Convention against Torture was signed in Ireland and lately ratified in 2002 (McCarthy 8; Smith 136-137). Therefore, we can conclude that the Irish government, in compliance with the Church, committed a crime against these women depriving them of their human status during and after their lives; a crime they tried to conceal until 2011 when the social and media pressure forced them to discuss the issue and to take measures towards the victims.

The next year the CAT was ratified in Ireland, a non-profit organisation called “Justice for Magdalenes” was created by Katherine O’Donnell, Claire McGettrick, Maeve O’Rourke, Smith and Mari Steed (2003). It had a firm attitude in offering public recognition to Magdalene survivors and in promoting research into Magdalene Asylums and similar institutions. As it claimed in its restorative justice and reparations schemes for Magdalene Laundry survivors, this organisation asked the government to recognise its complicity in the illegal detention and abuse of thousands of women and to make a full apology to the victims. Moreover, it required the government to offer these women economic compensation and access to social and medical services. Finally, the organisation acknowledged the necessity to preserve this chapter of the nation’s history to transmit it to future generations—the organisation asked the government to fund a national memorial to avoid the erasure of those women’s identities and to restore the

dignity and identity of all those who died and whose names are unknown (Justice for Magdalenes).<sup>14</sup>

The disclosure of morally doubtful historical facts about the Irish Catholic Church endangered the hegemony of this group especially after the publication of The Ryan and Murphy Reports (2009).<sup>15</sup> These Reports investigated cases of abused children by priests in Industrial Schools and offered implementation plans for those traumatised victims. These documents confirmed the rumours about the immoral attitude of religious members who made use of their power to subdue young children and women. In the same year these Reports were published, the documentary “The Forgotten Maggies” was aired thanks to which Magdalene survivors were given visibility and voice. In chapters twenty-four and twenty-five of *Whispering Hope*, O’Riordan narrates the arduous task it was, although quite successful, to produce this documentary (O’Riordan 133-150). The documentary, he says, was broadcasted in several countries to reach the widest audience. He founded an organisation in those years called “Magdalene Survivors Together” to support these women. They set up a March in Carlow with an anthem to put pressure on the government to receive an apology and a compensation scheme for Magdalene survivors. But the government, led by Brian Cowen, denied its involvement with Magdalene Laundries. When the government changed in 2011, some ministers accepted meeting with Magdalene survivors; Minister McAleese listened to them and wrote a report—the Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State’s involvement with the Magdalene Laundries (McAleese). The Redress Board, established to inquire into the functioning Magdalene Laundries, invited ex-Magdalenes to offer their testimony. Yet, most of these women kept silent after their release. A suitable explanation of this silence may be due to the stigma attached to them (Luddy, “Sex and the Single Girl” 85). After their release people

tended to reject these women, so they kept silent about it for fear and shame as the following testimonies reveal:

When I came out of the laundry, I was always frightened. I would constantly look around me. And when I'd go to Mass, I'd feel the roof was going to fall in on top of me. I was just nervous. I often had to walk out because I was afraid, but over the years it went away. I've never had a boyfriend. I could never meet anyone because I was always locked in. I was frightened of being shut away again ... I still have my good days and my bad days. I don't want to take my bitterness out on anyone, so I keep my sadness inside me (O'Riordan and Leonard 201-202),

... I can never make a proper conversation with anyone because I'm always kind of frightened they're going to ask...because it's always in my head about my childhood, why I'm living up here with my accent, why I've no relations coming to visit me, whereas you know, your mother, your sisters or brothers...I don't know...nobody around me...and that frightens me. (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Pippa Flanagan" 37)

The stigma attached to ex-penitents is an everlasting one as we can see in these quotations. In Dominique Moran's words, "In communities where incarceration does not form part of the majority experience, a personal history which includes incarceration is a source of stigma, with former prisoners facing significant obstacle to assuming mainstream social roles" (Moran et al. 96). As ex-prisoners, Magdalene women found it difficult to adapt to normal life after their release since they "were never prepared for the outer world" (Humphries 00:45:51-00:45:54). Some of them were able to rebuild their lives by getting married and having children but they opted for emigration as the best alternative. The other feasible alternative was to remain in the

Asylum for the rest of their lives (Finnegan, 41; Smith 66), as Nancy did (O’Riordan and Leonard 187). The truth is that very few women achieved social inclusion and employment after their reclusion. The fact that women were not successfully reinserted in society as dignified beings and that they did not obtain a job after their release questions the reformatory nature of the laundries (Finnegan 103; Smith 66).

Another possible explanation of their silence can be the trauma they suffered after their release. The emotional distress these women experience is caused by the psychological and physical damage they endured like sexual abuses, punishment, humiliation, hard work, loss of a child, constant surveillance, and so on. A common technique of survival of any traumatised victim is silence and forgetting as Laub (“Bearing Witness” 58) and Kaplan (74) claim. Especially because the act of telling and remembering may be more traumatising for the victim since it implies the reopening of his/her wound (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 67). Therefore, some people tend to repress and forget those records, silencing them. This is the case of survivors like Diane (O’Riordan and Leonard), Evelyn, Bernadette and Mary (O’Donnell et al. “Oral History of Evelyn”; “Oral History of Bernadette”), who have blocked and forgotten certain traumatic moments. Contrary to this practice, psychologists like Freud (Breuer and Freud) and Laub (“Truth and Testimony”) believe that trauma can only be overcome when the repressed is released by sharing it with others. It is by the exercise of memory and by telling their stories that these women’s suffering can be heard and healed. As LaCapra notices, the testimonies of those traumatised subjects open a dialogue between present and past triggered by the use of memory thanks to which they recreate their experience and reconstruct their identities; identities which have been erased (LaCapra, *Writing History* 86-87). Finally, the concealing attitude of the Church, the State and of the whole society amounted to the silencing of these women since they

were not provided with any support. Being offered no recognition or help, as we are about to see, these women were silenced and moved away from public life in order to preserve the reputation and prestige of those in power as well as the ideal image of the county fabricated in the Post-independence period.

The McAleese Report was expected to be met with great acclaim, but its publication caused a revolt due to its inconsistencies and biased character. Apart from trying to analyse the State's involvement with Magdalene Asylums during the twentieth century, the Report also attempted to contradict the negative vision of Magdalene Asylums and the nuns by exploring issues such as routes of entry and exit, life within the Asylum, illegal transference of women, financial profit of the Asylums, and the 1990s exhumations. First, the McAleese Report contradicts itself since in some parts it admits the State's involvement in sending women to Magdalene Asylums and in others it says the opposite:

... certain cases involving a woman being brought to a Magdalen Laundry by an NSPCC Inspector in fact arose following criminal cases. This occurred for instance, where an NSPCC Inspector accompanied a woman to a Magdalen Laundry following court proceedings against her in respect of neglect or abuse of her child or children. Again, these cases would constitute a State (Court or probation) referral (McAleese 154),<sup>16</sup>

No woman referred to a Magdalen Laundry on foot of a criminal conviction made contact with the Committee. Instead, the majority of the small number of women who engaged with the Committee had been admitted to the Laundries either by a non-state

route of referral or, most common of all, following time in an Industrial School.  
(McAleese VII)

The data offered by the McAleese Report proves that from 1922 to 1996 several governmental institutions sent women to Magdalene Laundries, namely the criminal justice system (684 women), Industrial and Reformatory Schools (622 women), County Homes (349 women), Mother and Baby Homes (313 women), Psychiatric Hospitals and other institutions (107 women), and Health and Social Services (87 women). The higher intervention of state referrals is recorded during the 1930s, 1940s and 1960s coinciding with The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935) and the Criminal Justice Act (1960). In the 1970s and 1980s, the State reduced the numbers of women sent to Laundries after the enactment of the Criminal Justice Act which put an end to the imprisonment of prostitutes. In chapter nine the McAleese Report details those cases in which the State was involved in sending women to Magdalene Laundries under the laws mentioned in chapter five. It tries to prove the State's legitimacy in placing women in Industrial Schools and Magdalene Laundries (McAleese 255). The Report recognises that under the Youth Offenders Act 1901, The Criminal Justice Act 1914 and the Probation of Offenders Act 1907, those offenders below the age of 21 could be placed in institutions such as Industrial or Reformatory Schools as remand and probation placements for which they were economically compensated (McAleese 80). Overall, the State made up 19% of routes of entries followed by other Laundries and congregations (18.6 %); these figures confirm the active participation of the State in sending women to Magdalene Laundries (McAleese 162-165).

Another proof of the State's involvement in the management of the Laundries was the direct funding these institutions received: "State subventions", "payments under the Health

Acts”, “payments for certain remand and probation cases”, “other miscellaneous payments”, and “grants during transitional phases” (McAleese 596). These religious institutions were not only sustained by State funds for the social work they were doing; they were also economically supported by several state and local contracts as we know from several survivors’ testimonies who claim that the laundry came from local Hospitals and colleges (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary” 40), the public (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Bernadette Murphy” 4), Hospitals and the railway (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Bernadette Murphy” 41), from hotels (O’Riordan and Leonard 168), and schools, churches, sports teams, police, prison, government, and mental houses (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 35). Moreover, Laundries were exempted from taxation given their charitable character in granting help and education to people (chapter fifteen of the McAleese Report). But the irony is that, as we have seen in the previous section, inmates did not receive education and they were obliged to work without remuneration. So, they were contravening the laws:

Following the National Insurance Act (1911), workers over sixteen years old should be paid and in 1947 the insurance covered all employees. But the Conditions of Employment Act 1936 accepted the employment of workers without salary in reformatory institutions:

62.—(1) The provisions of this Act, except in so far as they relate to the payment of workers, shall apply in relation to industrial work done in any institution as if the persons doing such industrial work were workers employed to do such industrial work by the persons having control of such institution unless such industrial work is done for the purpose only of supplying the needs and requirements of such institution.

(2) For the purpose of this section the word ‘institution’ means an institution carried on for charitable or reformatory purposes, other than a prison, a borstal institute, a mental home, or a county home. (Office of Attorney General, *Conditions of Employment*)

Concerning Magdalene Asylums’ financial profit, in chapter twenty the McAleese Report opposes this view (McAleese 994). The report analyses the financial data obtained from the Asylums and they show that they always had a deficit, so the idea that they derived no benefit from their work is justified. But a detailed list of expenses is not provided, hence those lists may have been manipulated. The Asylums received an average of fifteen to thirty pounds per week per person for the maintenance of the penitents and they were also paid for the laundry work they did, which varied depending on the Asylum (from one hundred to three hundred pounds). Apart from that, they received state grants and public donations, so they seem to have earned much more than what they could spend (McAleese 1002). So, what did they do with the money? The following testimonies from Magdalene survivors prove, contrary to the McAleese Report, that the nuns did obtain a huge profit from the inmates’ work: “When we had finished our tea, it was time to go into the recreation room and sit in our circle. Miriam had to make sure the rest of our circle did our work, making things for the nuns to sell in their shops” (O’Riordan and Leonard 169); “You made surpluses, handkerchiefs, but mainly for the American market...and for Rome I think” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary” 20); “I made holy pictures too, which the nuns would sell. There would be a big sale for the public every year, and everything was snapped up. But we were kept away from that. And we certainly didn’t see any of the money. Those nuns made money out of us every way they could, and they never gave us a penny. Not one” (O’Riordan and Leonard 103). These testimonies show the abuse of power on the part of the nuns who were more concerned with money than with the protection of the women under their

care. All of them claim they were enslaved for no money while the nuns enriched themselves from giving children in adoption, the contracts they had, selling scapulars and other objects made by the inmates, and from the State's financial support they received. In Luddy's words, "all the Asylums engaged in needle and laundry work. Although the main reason given for engaging in such work was the desire to discipline the penitents and to give them a trade, such work was also a vital source of financial support for the institutions" (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 115).

The McAleese Report confirms that Magdalene Laundries were subjected to state's inspection—under the Factory and Workshop Acts 1901-1920 and the Factories Act 1955—and that all reports kept were favourable concerning health, machinery and hours of work. But nothing is said about the hours that women were required to work or about the working conditions; indeed one testimony of an inspector mentions they did not "address contracts of employment or wages issues" (McAleese 573). The Report includes the testimony of some women about inspection showing that they were not examined while working, so inspections focused on machinery and sanitary measures only (McAleese 575). Contrary to the defence the Report makes concerning the state's inspection of Magdalene Asylums, McCarthy and Finnegan claim that Magdalene Asylums were not regulated and inspected in Ireland and England until 1907; the English and the Irish spoke in Parliament regarding Laundries' inspections and the Irish refused to inspect them linking religious morality to labour, reform and nationhood (Finnegan 223-224; McCarthy 188-189). Moreover, survivors' testimonies, like that of Marina Gambold, confirm it: "Many of them had been put in the laundry by the State. The State had responsibility for us, but never checked up on us ... " (O'Riordan and Leonard 117). In chapter eleven, the McAleese Report claims that Magdalene Asylums—even after the establishment of the Health Boards in 1970—were used by the Health Department as external institutions "for the

‘maintenance, education or treatment’ of women eligible for public assistance” under a series of Acts by which they were subsidised by the State (McAleese 448). But by the testimonies offered by doctors and inmates, the McAleese Report admits that no education or health was provided to the inmates before the 1970s (McAleese 251, 544-555)

Moreover, Magdalene survivors’ stories analysed in the previous section pinpoint the cruelty of the nuns who were supposed, as their social mission dictated, to offer care to the inmates. The lack of education and healthcare, apart from the constant physical and psychological abuses these women suffered, endangered their corporeal and mental integrity resulting, sometimes, in their death. The Report establishes certain causes of death such as cancer, respiratory illnesses, and heart diseases which may have been caused by the hard-working conditions women were subjected to and the fact that they did not receive sanitary attention, but nothing about it is said in the Report (McAleese 805). This concealing attitude, together with the cruel regime within the Laundries, amounted to the deprivation of these women’s rights. The social status of these women was denied not only during their stay, but also after their release when they were not granted support from the State or the Church.

The McAleese Report makes use of historical records offered by scholars like Francés Finnegan, Maria Luddy, Moiran Maguire, Cliona Rhattigan and James Smith, among others, to give an overview of the origins and evolution of Magdalene Asylums (McAleese 34-45). Yet, the Report only presents those comments which benefit the Report’s defence of the State and the Church in the establishment of these institutions to shelter and help “fallen women”. The Report disregards the evidence given by these scholars on the degeneration of these institutions during the twentieth century, as we have seen in the first section of this chapter. The McAleese Report

claims that a total of 10,012 women crowded Magdalene Laundries from 1922 to 1996 without considering 3,409 women who entered the Laundries more than once, or 1,186 women transferred from other laundries (McAleese 150-151). The Report shows that the most common routes of entry were transference from other Magdalene Asylums and other congregations (2,084) and voluntary (1,319). Despite the fact that the Report does not openly recognise the illegal transference of women Smith talked about, we are drawn to these conclusions from several pieces of information: 23,4% of women had been previously institutionalised, which shows the transference of women between State and religious institutions (McAleese 180); and in chapter ten the Report points out a small number of cases of women directly transferred from Industrial and Reformatory Schools to Magdalene Asylums under the Children Act 1908 amended by the 1941 Act. Concerning the period of confinement, the data facilitated by the McAleese report contradict the general belief that women spent no more than two years in Magdalene Asylums; 25.8% of women spent from two to ten years and 7.7% spent more than ten years, which demonstrates the illegal confinement of women. The nuns also defended the social labour by which they granted women education and a job, but the reality is that only 7% of women left the Asylum to work; on the contrary, most of them remained in Magdalene Asylums or went back home—the highest number of exits is entitled “Left” but it is not specified what this refers to (McAleese 168-170).

Finally, concerning the exhumation of bodies of the Sister of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge Asylum, the Report gives legal bases to justify this act. Following the Births and Deaths Registration (Ireland) Act (1863) and the Births and Deaths Registration Acts (1880-1996), deaths should be notified in seven days and in 1880, in five days subjected to penalty if it was not done; and death registration should be done 12 months after the death, and sometimes earlier

(McAleese 785-788). The McAleese Report compiled a list of 879 women, but it was difficult to know if these deaths were registered for several reasons: real names were normally not given, some of the entry registers of the Asylums were not updated concerning the deaths of women, and women were buried in different districts. So, 127 cases were not identified. The Public Health Act of 1878 stated that, “ 69. ... no general requirement applied for the Congregations which operated the Magdalen Laundries, or for the undertakers hired by them for funeral and burial arrangements, to notify the Local Authorities or any other agent of the State of individual burials intended to be made in their private (non-Local Authority operated) graveyards” (McAleese 800). Therefore, the exhumation of 133 women was granted by the government according to the death certificates of the Asylum but 22 more bodies were discovered, the Report says. Some grave diggers testified there were a higher number of corpses. In an internal memorandum in 1993, the government accepted the exhumation of these bodies without the death certificates since they could not be obtained. Public recognition through obituaries and tombs was negated to the Magdalenes showing how little their lives were worth. These women were not considered part of the nation as being outside of the norm, so they were dead already before they died, but also those who survived since no public recognition was granted to them. This silence and lack of recognition can be seen as a kind of violence against them, a deprivation of these women’s identities and histories; in Butler’s words, “... obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed. It is the means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy. As a result, we have to consider the obituary as an act of nation-building” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 34).

Overall, the first criticism the McAleese Report may receive is that it only covers the period from 1922 to 1996 and it only inquired into Magdalene Asylums established by four religious institutions despite the request, by several organisations, to broaden its scope of investigation (McAleese 20). Apart from that, the Report offers a biased and inconsistent perspective on Magdalene Asylums, being imprecise and contradictory throughout. Moreover, even though the Report claims a wide variety of sources used—religious congregations’ archives, files and reports from Government departments, academic research, newspapers, and the testimonies of Magdalene survivors and nuns (McAleese 55)—, the truth is that prominence is given only to religious and State archives and to nuns’ testimonies. Indeed, survivor’s testimonies are not taken much into account due to the “very small sample of women available and in a position to share their experiences with the Committee” (McAleese VII).

However, the Church was not the only one found guilty of this historical crime. As we have seen, the Irish government was in control of Magdalene Asylums so, contrary to its negation, it also participated in the stigmatisation of those women. What we can see in the background is that due to the visibility of prostitutes and unmarried mothers in society, the Irish identity as Catholic and respectable was being wavered. Hence, women’s reclusion in these institutions was taken by the State as an opportunity to conceal Irish social problems so that a fake national identity, based on purity and social inclusion, could be built; in Smith’s words, “women were promised secrecy and rehabilitation. In return, Church and State negated the compromising realities of embodied sexual practice. Containing sexual immorality, specifically, illegitimacy and prostitution, behind the walls of Ireland’s mother and baby homes and Magdalen asylums helped to constitute and to perpetuate the fiction of Irish cultural purity” (19).

Added to the Church and the State, the whole community, engaged in a conspiracy of silence as Finnegan (46) and Smith (90) claim, did acknowledge what was going on inside Magdalene Laundries. Historical records, along with survivor's testimonies, provide several proofs to support the idea that the State and the whole community did contribute to the functioning of these Laundries—the sending of women to these institutions by the court; public sermons, newspapers and advertisements promoting the confinement of women in Laundries; the funding of these institutions with government's money; the fact that the department of education allowed the transference of young girls from Industrial Schools to Magdalene Laundries; and the fact that young girls were threatened by their relatives to be sent to the Laundries if they misbehaved as some survivors claim: “And when we were children we were always threatened to be put in the Magdalene side if we were naughty, you see ... ” (O'Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Currington” 12); “I mean me mother often said, ‘I’ll give you away to the nuns if you don’t be good’ ... ” (O'Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 45). The proven involvement of the Church, the State and the whole society, even these women's families, in the stigmatisation, exclusion and marginalisation of those “deviant women” has given legitimacy to these survivors to recognise these groups as perpetrators of the violence they suffered.

After the McAleese Report was published in 2013, Magdalene survivors and women's organisations raised their voices against it to reveal the truth about Magdalene Asylums' functioning. These women suffered psychological and physical havoc as a result of their time in the Laundry and due to the social rejection that they suffered. Some of them have attempted suicide unable to stand the pain of the past, like Maureen Sullivan (O'Riordan), Marie (O'Riordan and Leonard), Lucy, and Pippa Flanagan (O'Donnell et al. “Oral History of Lucy”

37; “Oral History of Pippa Flanagan” 23, 33). And most of them experience what is called in psychoanalysis “Post-traumatic Stress Disorders”:

While the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth, “Introduction” 4)

One of the common things in all these testimonies we are analysing here is how vividly they remember specific moments within the Laundry. Some repressed memories come to the survivor’s mind triggered by personal and public reminders of trauma (Mohatt et al. 130) as we can see in the following quotations: “ ... when the doors are all closed at night time, I can still hear that big brown door slamming (pause) and that never leaves me” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Pippa Flanagan” 26); “ ... I’ll always remember it I can still hear the creak of the door ... ” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Lucy” 9); “ I could still hear Mother Scholastic saying, ‘The devil makes mischief for idle hands’. Her words rang in my ears. I could never forget them. Even now I keep active round the clock. I’m never idle for a minute ... I could never forget how unkind the nuns had been. I suffered bad bouts of depression, and I still do” (O’Riordan and Leonard 130-131). Freud and Josef Breuer consider the trauma as a body or agent which is still at work after the traumatic experience; it haunts the individual if the “cathartic effect” is not achieved. Displayed in the forms of hallucinations, dreams, and somatic reactions, distorted memories overwhelm these women in their daily life. As examples, they have nightmares and

daydreams about their time in Magdalene Laundries which cause in them great distress (Carew 06:15- 06:24; O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary" 4; O'Riordan and Leonard 14). Herman says that trauma affects the victim concerning their sense of safety and of themselves, and the meaning of life. The link with others is broken and they feel alienated and displaced in their communities; overall their identities are lost (56). These feelings of shame, helplessness, loneliness, and inability to socialise are what Magdalene survivors pinpoint in their testimonies. The damage caused to them changed their lives completely, but they attempted to restore them by bouncing back and claiming justice.

Psychoanalysis has identified different responses to trauma, namely taking revenge, forgetting, crying, or keeping silent. The response to trauma some survivors adopted is resignation but the most common one is action—looking for the perpetrators and demanding justice and compensation. They draw upon their vulnerability and their losses, caused by trauma, to blame the perpetrators (Erikson 192). As examples, Mary Smith and Mary openly blame the Church, the State and society for incarcerating them (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Mary Smith" 34; O'Riordan and Leonard 279). In these cases, the government, Church and society are recognised as the perpetrators and they are also made responsible for these women's restoration and healing.

Once the victims make their story public, the groups targeted as responsible, together with anyone who listens to them, become secondary witnesses—what Kaplan coins "vicarious trauma" (40-41). Then, an ethical demand on the witness is made by the Magdalene survivor to help her. But the survivor herself is also a witness of her own trauma—most of these women re-experienced trauma the day they gave their testimonies and the day they saw themselves in

documentaries or read in the press about themselves. We can appreciate in this process the three levels of witnessing Laub defines: “Being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself” (“Truth and Testimony” 61). In this process towards healing, society seems to have been involved in offering the traumatised recognition and restitution. Herman affirms that a precondition for the restitution of the victims is the help offered by the community (70). For its part, the State has turned its back on these women by negating their collaboration with the Church. As Kaplan claims, silencing is encouraged by political and social reasons since acknowledging the truth could damage whole nations as is the case of Ireland (74). Yet the country has finally offered an apology and a compensation scheme to victims. Mentioning the State’s apology, some survivors appreciate it and consider it an act of recognition like Bernadette Murphy and Martha. However, others, like Marry Currington, believe it changed nothing (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Currington” 114). Finally, the Church still seems to be reticent to recognise its fault and to offer these women help. As a result, some are not able to forgive the nuns for what they did to them. As examples, all of the survivors in Humphries’s documentary reject religion as a reaction against the abuse they suffered; Martha says: “ ... I will never forgive them for the physical abuse and I will never forgive them for telling me when they were sexually abusing me that I was the devil’s child ... ” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Martha” 48). Evelyn claims: “And I suppose in a way I feel guilty for not believing like I used to do but I know the reasons why. The church wasn’t there for me when I needed it so why would I be there for the Church?” (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Evelyn” 58).

Scholars like Avi Berman, Miriam Berger and Ivan Urlić (2010) propose a culture of forgiveness based on the recognition of the perpetrator as accountable for his crimes and the

recognition of the victim (Urlić et al. xv). Moreover, by forgiving, the victim may recuperate her agency and voice. Unable to forgive the Church and to forget, these women develop resilience patterns to carry on with their lives. Most of the literature on resilience tackles vulnerable sectors of society exposed to natural risks and socio-economic changes. In social resilience, the original focus had been on children who grow up in a conflictive setting. Later, a wider scope has been adopted including women and marginalised sectors of society on the grounds of race, class, gender, and ethnicity. Recently, resilience has been rethought in connection with vulnerability and resistance in our present society attacked by terrorism or war. Although resilience has always had positive connotations and vulnerability has implied negativity and powerlessness, scholars are claiming these concepts are complementary (Miller et al. and Bracke). My focus here is on all those vulnerable women called Magdalenes who grew resilient despite the few resources they were offered. Resilience is defined as the ability to adapt well in the face of adversity, trauma or threat using external and internal resources available (The American Psychological Association). Tuppett M. Yates, Fanita A. Tyrell, and Ann S. Masten (2015) and Katherine Pasteur (2011) highlight the importance of the context—family, community, government—in the process of reducing vulnerability and increasing resilience. Offering resilience resources is a way of empowering the victim but also that empowering is achieved sometimes by themselves being agentic and resisting to those who damaged them. Contrary to the view of some scholars like Sarah Bracke, for me, the concepts of “Resistance”, “Resilience” and “Healing” are linked in the sense that resistance can be seen as a form of resilience towards healing. Yet, in a country where the perpetrator still negates their accountability for their crimes, survivors are still in the middle of the path towards restoration and healing.

As the testimonies of these women have highlighted, the Church and the State became the target of social protests from 1996 onwards given their inaction in the representation and defence of these women. As Butler claims, we are social and political beings who are produced, recognised, and represented by power but those excluded from the social system fail to be represented and to be considered human (Butler, *Precarious Life* 147). Yet, the press echoed these voices and contributed to the public discussion of Magdalene Asylums' reality. Several snippets spread the History of Magdalene Asylums making the survivors' testimonies public and criticising the secretive attitude of the Church and the government. Some of the headlines read: "Survivors remember Ireland's Magdalen Laundries" (Costello N.), "Report: Irish state sent thousands of women to infamous workhouses" (Smith-Spark and Taggart), "A life un-lived: 35 years of slavery in a Magdalen Laundry" (Daly S.), "The Magdalene Laundries: Irish Report Exposes a National Shame" (Pollak), "Magdalene Laundries: Truth hidden behind a wall of silence" (McGettrick), "Demanding justice for women and children abused by Irish nuns" (Roberts), "Locked in a cell, tortured and abused: Magdalene Laundries survivor tells of her fight for justice" (Fearon), "Granddaughter of woman buried in Magdalene Laundry grave fears 'dozens more' bodies could be buried in Cork" (Fogarty), "I want an apology before I die': The 'wayward' women abused by nuns in Ireland's notorious Magdalene laundries who are still demanding justice more than two decades after the last one closed" (Lloyd), and "'It will be with me until the day I die': Woman, 79, who survived Irish Magdalene Laundry reveals how she's still haunted by the fear, back-breaking labour and loneliness she suffered in brutal workhouse 60 years ago" (Greenaway and Metcalfe). From these headlines above we can appreciate the pressure exerted on the Irish State and Church, considered the perpetrators of that historical trauma, to reveal the truth and to recognise their role in this historical event. Words such as

Abused Bodies: Irish Magdalene Asylums

“infamous workhouses”, “national shame”, “tortured and abused”, “slavery” and “broken lives” were recurrent in these newspapers which took sides with the victims claiming justice, recognition and compensation for them. They made emphasis on the fact that the truth behind Magdalene Asylums had been hidden, and on the necessity to disclose it. The *CNN* newspaper said:

There is a dearth of personal records of the women, and they continue to feel constrained and silenced by a deep sense of stigma and shame over their incarceration in the Magdalen laundries, because of the continued denial of justice, lack of inquiry, and lack of acknowledgement that they were not at fault for what they suffered but instead had a grave abuse perpetrated upon them. (Smith-Spark and Taggart)

And they were especially concerned about the State’s action and report. The same year the Report came to light, the press echoed the news with an optimistic attitude:

They were the forgotten women of Ireland, kept under lock and key, forced to clean and sew, and to wash away the sins of their previous life while never being paid a penny. Some stayed months, other years. Some never left. They were the inmates of Ireland’s notorious 20<sup>th</sup>-century workhouses, the Magdalene Laundries. And this week, with the publication of a government report into the dark history of the laundries, the women came that much closer to obtaining justice. (Pollak)

Yet, the response to the failures of the report was heard immediately. Exposing the testimonies of women, the press highlighted the failure of the State and the Church to compensate and recognise the victims. The Report’s findings of sexual abuses, the death of women there, and the

nuns' profit were contested by the press offering the testimonies of victims to discredit them (McGettrick 2015; Roberts 2014; Lloyd 2014).

After the publication of the Report, the continuous pressure exerted by Magdalene groups and by the press forced the government to offer an apology. In 2013, Edna Kenny said: “As a society, for many years we failed you. We forgot you or, if we thought of you at all, we did so in untrue and offensive stereotypes. This is a national shame, for which I again say, I am deeply sorry and offer my full and heartfelt apologies” (*Irish Examiner*). Yet, survivors and the press received it with disdain: “As survivors of Ireland's Magdalene laundries prepare for a national day of remembrance, many question the sincerity of the government's apology to women held against their will in the Catholic Church-run institutions” (Costello N.); “For women like Mary, the formal apology from the Irish government is an acknowledgement of what was stolen from them, but many feel that justice will never truly be done” (Greenaway and Metcalfe). The failures of this Report aroused social protests which forced the government to set a compensation scheme directed by John Quirke—The Magdalen Commission Report (2013). Yet, some women continued to fall out of the scope of the compensation scheme as Norma Costello (2016) claims: “A number of women have also been excluded from the scheme because of the path by which they entered the laundries.” To that, the Church denied contributing financially as Sue Roberts (2014) affirms: “Mary, like hundreds of other Magdalene Laundry survivors, has been compensated financially by the government for her time spent as an unpaid forced labourer. The sums are still being calculated and the final bill is expected to reach tens of millions of euros. But the nuns have refused to contribute” (Roberts). James Fogarty (2017) collects the Archbishop Michael Neary of the Tuam Diocese's testimony who claimed, “as we did not have any involvement in the running of the home, I have no specific information on the manner of

interments.” Claire McCormack (2013) made an appointment with some nuns who refused their involvement in this issue and even found it unnecessary to apologise for it:

Apologize for what? demanded Sister A, her voice choked with emotion. Apologize for providing a service? We provided a free service for the country ... All the orders involved saw a need in society and they tried to respond to it in the best way that they could and there was a terrible need for a lot of those women because they were on the street, with no social welfare and starving. We provided shelters for them. It was the ‘no welfare state’ [a term often used to describe the Ireland of that era] and we are looking with today eyes at a totally different era. (McCormack)

Among the dozens of snippets that cover the Magdalene Asylums issue, these few give us a clue of the media’s attitude towards it. The media’s involvement in this topic, which is still recurrent, has helped organisations like JFM in their claim for accountability to put the nuns and the State in the spotlight and to reveal a shameful hidden past. It was thanks to survivors’ testimonies, the press and the role of Justice for Magdalenes (JFM) and Magdalen Survivors Together (MST) that the silence that surrounded the Magdalenes has been broken and a process towards the healing of these women has been initiated. Reclamation of the term “magdanelism” has become important now. With this term, it is attempted to give back to Magdalenes the authority they had been deprived of (Wecker 273). By reclaiming that, a process of healing towards justice is intended and the possibility for Magdalenes to tell their own story and to reconstruct their past is given, fostering a sense of community among survivors (Wecker 276; Smith 118).

Butler claims that one of the ways of granting or negating public recognition to people is through the media allowing those who are not supposed to appear in the public discourse to be

seen and heard or not (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 14). Contrary to Meltem Ahiska’s idea that media representation of women’s vulnerability and violence against them produces anonymity, fixation of vulnerability, homogenisation and normalisation, I believe the media representation of Magdalene women and what they suffered contributed to the recognition of these women’s identities and stories (Ahiska 213). Being witnesses of these women’s testimonies, these groups supported them and spread the truth making the whole society responsible for the restoration of these women. Even though complete healing of these women’s wounds will never be achieved, as the victims themselves claim, a partial restoration has been granted thanks to the recognition of their identities. As I said before, Herman highlights the response of the community as powerful in the restitution of victims of trauma (Herman, 70); public recognition of Magdalene women and the action taken to help them have contributed to their healing. However, Everett Worthington and Jamie Aten (2010) consider forgetting and reconciliation as the main premises of healing, something which the survivors cannot achieve (57).

Overall, a dialogue between present and past which has triggered a crisis of faith in the Irish population has been opened in the twenty-first century after the disclosure of new data about the management of the Magdalene Asylums, along with the life of the women living in them. For those women, it is indubitable that their identity has been erased being anonymity their hallmark during life and after death—it was the Irish State in coalition with the Catholic Church which stole their identities and denied their past, their memory and therefore their existence after a life of incarceration. As we have seen in this chapter, the assignment of vulnerability to this group only served to make them more vulnerable and powerless and to be singled out in society. During their confinement, these women experienced physical and psychological abuses which

resulted in the erosion of their identities and corporealities despite their resistant attitude. Thanks to the pressure executed by these women, the press and these organisations, the state has offered an apology and a compensation scheme to the victims. Yet, not everything is forgotten; after the McAleese Report concluded that there was no evidence to support that women were detained illegally and tortured, the investigation came to a dead-end leaving many women out of the restoration scheme. The apology was not enough since women are still not recognised, and many are buried in wrong places and unmarked graves. For their part, the nuns have not offered an apology yet and do not allow access to their records. Overall, the promises done by Quirke about health and money reparations are still not fulfilled (O'Rourke and Smith 152-157).

## PART II: CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

In the last decades of the twentieth century and throughout the twenty-first century, novelists, filmmakers, and dramatists have taken great interest in disclosing the reality behind Irish Magdalene Asylums. The outburst of new information about this topic since the last decades of the twentieth century, in the form of documentaries, reports and newspapers, has opened the wound of those survivors who have seen their stories made public after so many years of silence and repression. As we have seen in the previous part of this thesis, Magdalene survivors used to keep silent about that past in order to protect themselves; following Trauma Studies, silence is considered a logical response adopted by victims who tend to repress and forget a disturbing past. But they were also silenced by the Catholic Church and the State to conceal the questionable practices carried out in these religious institutions. According to María Beville and Sara McQuaid (2012), silence is “an instrument to establish dominant discourses, to trivialise dissent, to discriminate and to disenfranchise ... a means of exclusion and marginalisation from which emerges a hegemonic discourse” (7).

Those who did not ascribe to the Western normative mainstream society—those Foucault named “peripheral sexualities” (*Discipline and Punish* 42)—fell out of the public view. The dissenting voices of these women have been vanished from the public sphere, otherwise, they would have destabilised the nation and its foundation. Hence, their lives were worth less and their recognition in the public sphere was negated. Yet, social injustices and the reality behind the Magdalene Asylums have come to light thanks to the testimonies of several victims. Moreover, the media was, during the twentieth century, a source of challenge for the Catholic supremacy since it denounced the corruption of the Church to raise consciousness about the

reality hidden for so long. As Smith claims, the media has offered the possibility to break that imposed silence and to recognise those women:

Television documentaries allowed this to happen in a publicly accessible manner, and consequently, they helped to erode Ireland's architecture of containment by representing the survival of the very women it was erected to negate ... These visual representations ... provided a forum for survivors of Ireland's Magdalene Laundries to bring their traumatic experiences out from the shadows of historical silence and societal shame and into the screen of the nation's collective conscience. (Smith 117)

I believe that testimonies have been a valuable source since no official history exists about the twentieth-century Magdalene Asylums. Nevertheless, we should respect those victims who have decided to keep silent since the spread of this story may arouse certain uneasiness in them caused by the forced recalling of traumatic events.

These testimonies have inspired writers, filmmakers and dramatists who have offered their view on this issue. Based on these testimonies and critical imagination theory, artists may have filled the gaps that exist in history, but, overall, fiction coincides with reality in most cases as we will see in this part of the thesis. Since the appearance of the first cultural product on this topic back in the 1990s ("Sex in a Cold Climate" (1998)), a considerable number of films, plays, documentaries, and novels have been released. We could distinguish two stands within this genre, namely novels and autobiographies. The distinction is based on the different characteristics of these narratives such as the narrative person, the plot and the tenses. What these strands have in common is the period they cover—the 1940s and 1980s—, when coercive confinement in Irish Magdalene Laundries registered its highest numbers. All these works have

contributed to the acknowledgement of a past reality people may be aware of, but which was unknown and concealed by power institutions involved in the establishment and running of these institutions. These cultural products, despite encountering censorship in some cases, are means of remembering against the silence that has reigned for a long time in Ireland. Those who have fictionalised the life of the Magdalenes make a quest to remember—cultural memory—and to achieve justice and compensation for the victims. Thanks to these artists' commitment, a sense of community among survivors has been achieved (Wecker 273-276). The firm commitment of filmmakers, novelists, and dramatists to represent dissenting voices in the public sphere has enabled this marginal group to be recognised in society, contrary to the rejection they had suffered from the part of power institutions; in Smith's words,

The cultural significance of these stories and their various reproductions is twofold: they give force to a history that Irish society traditionally prefers not to acknowledge, and they break the culturally imposed closed ranks and silence typically accompanying such sensitive issues as rape, incest, illegitimacy, and domestic, physical and sexual abuse. These stories, together with others focusing on adoption and the Magdalen laundries, reimagine the nation's architecture of containment. (Smith 88)

The current contemporary engagement in recovering the past has been interpreted as the necessary act of revisiting it from a different perspective, to understand the present. Their main concern has been to revisit and make sense of that past but from the perspective of those who did not belong to mainstream society and who had been silenced and deprived of the opportunity to tell their stories. Constantly fighting to reconstruct their selves, writing became not only a therapy for those who aimed to overcome a traumatic past—through autobiographies or

testimonies—, but also a tool used by contemporary writers to give voice to those who had been silenced. Hence, it is thanks to these narratives that those victims have gained agency. Writing about themselves or those victims offered the writers the possibility of making others understand and feel what these women had experienced by making the reader a witness; a witness who following Jennifer Johnston's (1992) last words has a particular task: "... to listen and never to forget" (Foreword xi). As Marianne Hirsch (2016) claims, aesthetic works provide accountability, representation, and visibility to those who have been erased by violence (82).

The cultural representation of the Magdalenes shows their vulnerability and urges us to develop an ethics of response at the same time they trigger our vulnerability and responsibility for these events. Kaplan distinguishes between different types of trauma and various responses to it: "At one extreme there is the direct trauma victim while at the other we find a person geographically far away, having no personal connection to the victim" (2). Whereas the former would be the Magdalenes, we (readers/viewers) would be the latter. We encounter trauma through cultural products, what he calls "mediatised trauma", by which we are made witnesses to others' suffering (Kaplan 2). We should distinguish between two groups here, one formed by the Magdalene survivors and another consisting of the rest of the population who just witness the trauma. Moreover, we should also add another group which will be formed by those who have not experienced it directly and do not belong to this society. The response of these groups to the same traumatic event would vary significantly, especially that of those whose culture and values differ from the Irish ones. Concerning the response of secondary witnesses to trauma narratives, Kaplan defines certain "ethics of response for secondary witnesses—objectivity, empathy necessary for understanding, and no identification with the victims" (98). However, he warns against generalisations concerning historical trauma; we are not all victims and we are not all

wounded, he affirms (Kaplan 712). Hirsch's concept of postmemory is useful here; with that concept, she claims that postmemorial aesthetic strategies can enable us to see the vulnerability of others and respond to it but always marking the boundaries that distance us from them to resist homogenising suffering (Hirsch 82). Opposed to them, Shoshana Felman and Laub believe that "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening, he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (57). In the case of the Magdalenes, I believe that a generalisation is necessary since this historical trauma affected the whole Irish society. The inhabitants of this Catholic country's identities as a group were demolished and all Irish women became affected and identified with the victims despite not having gone through their traumatic experience. A process towards healing consisting of different stages has been open now eased by films, literature, and drama.<sup>17</sup> Through the fictionalisation of these survivors, the victims empathise with the characters re-experiencing their trauma. Their wounds are open again, but this time the healing is not individual but a collective process in which the whole society participates. This traumatic past is revived now as a process of working through towards reconciliation. The intended response to these trauma narratives is action—the recognition, from the part of the perpetrators, of the damage caused—and as for the rest of the witnesses it is not revenge as Freud states, but the acknowledgement of their past and the application of pressure upon the perpetrators—Church and State—to heal the wounds of the victims.

Overall, the disclosure of new data about the management of those Asylums, along with the life of those women living there, has opened in the twenty-first century a dialogue between present and past which has triggered a crisis of faith in the Irish population. In Titley's words, "the gradual erosion of clerical authority culminated in its virtual collapse during the 1990s when

a series of scandals rocked the Church. The mass media, no longer subservient, became filled with stories of paedophile priests, the abuse of children in Church-run orphanages, and the sexual misadventures of the Bishop of Galway” (12-13). Literature and popular culture have contributed to the opening of this dialogue by disclosing that reality during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Artists started to question the role of the Catholic Church and its practices in Irish society, especially after the scandals several priests were involved in. Accusing them of not offering an example to follow, but committing the same sins they condemned society for, Irish artists began to contest Catholic teachings and the moral rigidity so long imposed. Aesthetic productions have attempted to recuperate those faded identities and voices to demand justice and restoration for them, as well as to give them visibility, recognition and help to heal their wounds.

The literary and cultural panorama on the Magdalenes is extensive with works such as Marita Conlon-McKenna’s *The Magdalen* (1999), Goulding’s *The Light in the Window* (1998), O’Neill’s *Fallen Star* (2005), O’Beirne’s *Kathy’s Story: A Childhood Hell Inside the Magdalen Laundries* (2005), Odgaard’s *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017), or Alexander’s *The Magdalen Girls* (2017); films such as Walsh’s “Sinners” (2002), Mullan’s “The Magdalene Sisters” (2002), or Frears’s “Philomena” (2013); and plays such as Burke-Brogan’s *Eclipsed* (1963) or *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2004). My intention in the following chapters is to analyse these literary and cultural products from a social and cultural point of view as instruments of agency and healing for those women who have been deprived of the opportunity to tell their stories. Even though most of these products are fictitious narratives, they are based on the reality of thousands of Irish women who are given voice now in a process of reclamation of the Magdalenes’ identities. In that way, literature and popular culture have contributed to the spread of this historical fact and the process of reconciliation and healing. In the analysis of these cultural products, I will develop

four main axes—discipline and gender identity, violence/abused bodies, trauma and silence, and resilience and healing. I will follow a postmodern methodology together with Trauma Studies and Gender studies referring to authors such as Foucault (1975), LaCapra (1999; 2001), Butler (2006; 2011; 2016), Cavarero (2011), Herman (1992), and Ivan Urlić, Miriam Berger, and Avi Berman (2010). I intend to prove how these cultural products, considered fictional pieces, are, by far, realist depictions of Irish history by taking as a background the historical account I have provided in the previous part of the thesis. Moreover, I will demonstrate how these cultural products have eased the way towards individual and collective healing. In these last years, new novels have been published bringing up the issue of unmarried motherhood such as *White Linen* by Martin Howe (2018) or *The Baby Snatchers* by Mary Creighton (2017), which I have analysed in different articles that are waiting to be published. I have not incorporated these novels in this thesis due to space restrictions and since I considered these others more suitable for the analysis developed here.

Throughout this analysis, similar questions to those posed in the first part of the thesis may arise: these aesthetic productions have echoed these events and have raised awareness about the women involved, but what about action? Do they still stigmatise women as vulnerable and as Magdalenes? Do they question gender norms, or do they reinforce them? Do they offer alternative narratives? Do they represent reality? Do they account for personal experiences or do they generalise and therefore homogenise these women's stories and identities? Can they be considered tools to build resilience for these women to overcome their trauma? To what extent are artists commercialising this tragedy? When trying to answer these questions, we will see how these aesthetic products have represented reality faithfully, although with some exceptions; how some vulnerable sectors of society counted as less human have been more castigated by those

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who defended a social involvement and helped women in Ireland; how art has granted visibility and recognition to this marginalised group; how these products have contributed to the healing of these women's wounds and trauma; how they sometimes have been proved to be more accurate than historical records; and how these aesthetic productions have reconsidered the past and may be able to modify our future.

## Chapter Three. The Magdalenes and Narratives

### 3.1. Introductory remarks

All those political, social, and cultural changes Ireland experimented during and after the Independence were reflected in Irish literature; at the turn of the twentieth century, Irish writers revolted against Victorianism. This period was characterised by a Literary Revival aimed at recuperating the Irish language, literature, and national identity after so many years of English subjugation. The establishment of the Gaelic League allowed literature to be used as a tool in their national campaign in which Catholicism played an important part (1890-1920) (Vance 100-105). Once they achieved their independence, there was a general rejection of English literature motivated by the Catholic Church that considered it sinful and un-Irish (Frazier 129). Although the 1929 Censorship of Publication Act, encouraged by the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, was still in use in the 1960s, free and progressive ideas were successively entering the Irish literary panorama (Vance 199). The sexual revolution in the 1960s permeated the Irish novel, especially novels written by women (Riggs and Vance 262). Since then, as Pádraigin Riggs and Norman Vance (2005) claim, Irish literature was ideologically motivated. During the twentieth century, Irish authors turned their gaze to the social, cultural, and political context to raise consciousness about the problems taking place at the time. The hegemonic ideology beneath all those works is Catholicism, which has always played a pivotal role throughout history not only in social and political matters but also in the literary production of the country. As a distinctive sign of Irish identity, the Catholic doctrine has always occupied the mind of the writers who have criticised Christian practices and teachings in their works portraying the Catholic Church either as an oppressive force preventing intellectual and artistic freedom—James Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) or Kate O'Brien's *Pray for the Wanderer* (1938)—or as

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powerful institution opposed to sexual freedom and gender equality—Brian Moore’s *The Feast of Lupercal* (1958), Edna O’Brien’s Trilogy (*The Country Girls* (1960), *The Lonely Girl* (1962) and *Girls in their Married Bliss* (1964)).

With this new ideology, twentieth-century literature opened the way to new voices and topics which had been marginalised and silenced before (Peach 3-5). Both the novel and the autobiography became the selected genre of middle-class women writers fighting for their rights (Patten 269). The literature written in the last decades of the twentieth century challenged power narratives, the nation’s identity and normative concepts, but the contemporary novel continues to be especially critical with the Church (Peach 21). Both novels and autobiographies continue to be used by contemporary writers who explore the traumas and silences of the past (Peach 17-18). In this context, after the closure of the last Magdalene Asylum in 1996 and the broadcast of several documentaries dealing with this topic, female writers also contributed to the acknowledgement of this historical event. As an extended concept already, Magdalene literature has progressively become an established genre in Ireland and elsewhere since this historical event was discovered back in 1996 when the last Magdalene Laundry was closed. People may know of the existence of these Catholic institutions but the reality behind their walls came to light thanks to the voices of those who were confined there and to those fictional accounts of survivors’ testimonies. This topic is still current and there are more and more writers who are engaging in the exploration of Magdalene Laundries in Ireland.

Despite the criticism the narratives I am analysing here may have received concerning their veracity, their exhaustive analysis will prove their resemblance with real accounts of the Magdalene Asylums. Either in the form of novels or autobiographies, Irish literature has

challenged power discourses making public a reality hidden for so long; fictional or not, all these narratives served to challenge dominant discourses in their revision of the past as well as to give visibility, recognition and voice to those silenced before.

Goulding's *The Light in the Window* (1998) and O'Beirne's *Kathy's Story. A Childhood Hell inside the Magdalen Laundries* (1998) are autobiographies that should be considered valuable texts casting light on the reality of religious reformatory institutions. The first, *The Light in the Window*, was published by Goulding in 1998. This work is innovative in the history of the fictionalisation of Irish Mother and Baby Homes since it is an autobiography and because it is not the testimony of a sufferer but that of a direct witness. The second, *Kathy's Story. A Childhood Hell inside the Magdalen Laundries* was published the same year as Goulding's book. This autobiography is about Kathy's traumatic life of abuse and incarceration in several reformatory institutions. It is the adult's traumatised voice who comes to terms with her repressed past now to overcome the trauma and to seek justice. As autobiographies, the veracity of these accounts should be automatically confirmed. But for those who may doubt their authenticity, Katherine O'Donnell, Sinead Pembroke and Claire McGettrick (2013) have offered the testimony of Pat Logue, a woman whose grandmother was a matron in Bedford Row Maternity Hospital during the 1950s where many of her friends were born (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Pat Logue"), and of Marry Currington, the daughter of an unmarried mother who was sent to a hospital to work in the maternity section at the age of sixteen (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Marry Currington"). These testimonies prove the existence of the Maternal Hospitals and Mother and Baby Homes Goulding talks about, as well as the questionable practices carried out there. As Kathy, other survivors like Martha Cooney (O'Riordan), Evelyn (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Evelyn"), Martha (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of

Martha”), and Lucy (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Lucy”), among many others, suffered the abuse of some of their relatives, of the priests and of lay people being that the reason why they were sent to Industrial Schools and later illegally transferred to Magdalene Asylums. Their testimonies coincide with that of Kathy’s with regards to the dehumanising practices carried out inside these institutions which damaged these women physically and psychologically. The remaining books I will analyse are fictionalisations of the Magdalene Laundries’ stories. Published in 1999 by Marita Conlon-McKenna, *The Magdalen* has been extensively analysed by scholars like Pérez-Vides and Murphy, so I have decided not to incorporate it into this chapter. Yet, I consider it is worth mentioning here as the referent for many novels which have been written on this topic. Finally, O’Neill’s *The Fallen Star* (2005), Alexander’s *The Magdalen Girls* (2017) and Odgaard’s *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017) resemble the stories of all those women in Ireland who were sent to Magdalene Laundries for being on the verge of falling, or for having committed the sin of having sex outside marriage. Despite several inconsistencies with historical records and the victims’ testimonies, these novels are valuable contributions to the historical fictionalisation of the Magdalene Laundries.

One common aspect we can highlight in all these novels and autobiographies, despite their differences, is the fact that they focus on one particular sector of society that was marginalised and victimised by the strict Catholic doctrine that existed in Ireland during the twentieth century, that is, the unmarried mother, or women on the verge of falling. Set during the 1950s and 1960s—except for O’Beirne’s testimony which is set during the 1970s and 1980s—, these adolescents suffer the consequences of falling in love with the wrong person and of having consented sex outside marriage. During those decades, O’Donnell and O’Sullivan have acknowledged higher imprisonment rates in reformatory institutions (*Coercive Confinement* 7).

All these narratives, with their different perspectives, will help us to obtain a complete view of Magdalene Asylums in twentieth-century Ireland. All these novels and autobiographies are questionings of religion and of the main pillars upon which the Catholic Church rests making the reader doubt about their faith, and they are quests for remembering and for healing the wounds of traumatised victims.

This chapter will be divided into two sections: In the first part, I will analyse all these novels and autobiographies using postmodern theory to explore concepts such as vulnerability and precarity, and biopolitics. Later, I will focus on the autobiographies using Trauma studies to explore issues such as resilience, forgiveness, healing, and accountability. My intention in this chapter is to analyse these novels and autobiographies to prove the already presented hypothesis that Magdalene Asylums were instruments of power used by the Church and the State where women were placed in a precarious condition, damaging their corporeality and identity. The analysis of these novels and autobiographies will be illustrative in the sense that they offer unofficial versions of events and that we can listen to the victim's voice directly. Hence, they can be considered narratives challenging gender norms, offering personal experiences against the homogenised discourse adopted by the Church and the State and providing tools to build resilience for these women to overcome their trauma.

### 3.2. Restriction of Loose Morals; Disciplining Vulnerable Bodies in Joan O'Neill's *Fallen Star* (2005), V.S. Alexander's *The Magdalen Girls* (2016) and Lisa Michelle Odgaard's *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017)

The novels I am going to analyse in this chapter focus on one particular social problem that affected twentieth-century Ireland, that is, the incarceration and abuse of “fallen women” in

reformatory institutions. Given the silencing and censorious attitude of the Church and the State concerning this historical event, storytelling seems to have been a safe way to tell the truth, though most of the times vanished as false or fictional. Published in 2005, O'Neill's novel *The Fallen Star* tells the story of Stella Wood, who at the age of sixteen is betrayed, abandoned, and confined in the Convent of the Blessed Wounds in Dublin. Set in 1960, it is a first-person narration of how the protagonist's life (Stella Woods) is turned upside down a year before when she meets Charles Thornton and falls pregnant. O'Neill's use of this point of view enables the reader to know the main character through her actions and dialogues with others. Rejected by her mother and deserted by Charles, she is placed in a Mother and Baby Home and later in a Magdalene Laundry where she experiences a harsh regime of work and punishment from which she finally escapes. Overall, this novel has been considered by scholars like Pérez-Vides and Murphy a narrative of trauma challenging power discourses by revisiting the past and by giving voice to those silenced (Pérez-Vides, "Disciplined Bodies" 15-30; Murphy 139-153). Odgaard's *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017) tells the story of Maren Adair who in her adulthood (1994) confesses her secret past in a Magdalene Laundry to her daughter Brigid. Overall, this novel is one of resistance, of growing resilient in an adverse atmosphere and of breaking the silence of a traumatic past to heal the wounds caused on the mind and the body. Overall, it is about resilience, resistance and healing and offers a happy ending, contrary to the sad reality unmarried mothers suffered in the twentieth century, granting the protagonist the opportunity to keep her child and to start a new life in England. Finally, Alexander's *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017), set in 1962 in Dublin, tells the story of three adolescent girls—Teagan, Nora and Lea—who live in Dublin and end up in a Magdalene laundry sent by their relatives. It is sex that leads these characters to a life of confinement and torture. This historical novel is one of resistance, of

revealing the truth at all costs and of questioning the main values spread by the Catholic Church. These two last novels make use of the third-person narration to tell the stories of the protagonists. Contrary to O'Neill's chosen point of view which may emphasise the trauma the protagonist experiences as well as the identification with the narrative voice, Odgaard and Alexander seem to distance themselves from the connection between the reader and the protagonists. In these cases, the reader is a mere spectator of these characters' development who learns about them from the narrator's descriptions. All these novels present developing characters which are formed throughout the narration.

These three novels depict the consequences of challenging the Church's power in Ireland during the twentieth century. According to Foucault, the family is the main focus of sexuality where power relations are first established (*The History of Sexuality* 110-111). There, the mother is always the object subordinated to the father (subject) where the child relates to both as subject too. This gender duality limited the free will of individuals who should behave according to prescribed norms; in Arendt's words,

It is decisive that society, on all its levels, excludes the possibility of action, which formerly was excluded from the household. Instead, society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to "normalise" its members, to make them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement. ("On Human Condition" 40)

O'Neill's (2005), Alexander's (2017), and Odgaard's novels (2017) physical setting is rural Ireland at a time when the Catholic discipline encouraged women to behave according to the moral standards of passivity, purity, and chastity. These novels are representations of the

phallogocentric economy that existed in Ireland during the twentieth century when men were granted all privileges while women were relegated to the lowest place both in society and at home.

Educated according to patriarchal and Catholic values, the protagonists' families in Alexander and Odgaard's novels—Teagan, Nora and Maren—represent the heteronormative principles in which Irish people were instructed. Concerning fathers, they represent the authority within the home and outside it, while the mothers embody ideal womanhood, in charge of the home and the education of their daughters as Article 41 of the Constitution states. This patriarchal system, supported and encouraged by the Catholic Church which believed women to need male protection, caused the precarity of the female members who had to respond to a strict disciplinary system which rendered them vulnerable and subordinated to the male authoritarian figure. The notions of respectability, chastity, frailty, delicacy, self-sacrifice, and subordination fostered by the Victorians continued in twentieth-century Ireland to define the image of the “good wife” relegated to the private sphere of the home. Overstepping the limits imposed on women was translated into a defiance of the stipulated moral requirements.

This gender discourse adopted and spread by the Church was intended to control and regulate the population in an attempt to establish a coherent Irish identity. The moral teachings of the 1940s and 1950s spread by the Church indoctrinating women with purity, chastity and self-respect are visible throughout O'Neill's novel. As an example, Stella and her friend Maeve, in *The Fallen Star*, go out to a party when they are spotted by a neighbour—Mrs Cribbins—who becomes scandalised at seeing them wearing make-up, dresses and high-heels. The reaction of this character may be considered natural at a time when decency and purity were the main values

ascribed to young girls (O'Neill 15). It is not coincidental that Stella in *The Fallen Star* (2005) meets the man who ruins her life at a party. According to Catholic teachings, recreation has always been a dangerous and evil practice that perverts the most incorruptible soul. And that is what happened to Stella, however, the perspective given by the author is that of victimhood—girls who were deceived, betrayed, and abandoned by men. After falling in love with Charles, Stella has sex with him and falls pregnant. The realisation of her pregnancy and its announcement to her boyfriend cause his rejection and abandonment. This episode exemplifies the prominent role of the Catholic Church in controlling and guiding Irish people's lives, as well as the silencing attitude concerning the practice of sex. The internalisation of sex as evil and of the determined role of women as sexually passive hindered the free acts of young women in twentieth-century Ireland. The inculcation of Victorian prudery, as Inglis comments, was still present in the first half of twentieth-century Ireland ("Origins and Legacies" 15). The lack of formal education on sex, explained by the silencing attitude of the Church concerning sexual practices, contributed to the rise in unwanted pregnancies from 1923 to the 1970s. Moreover, the different moral standards that were applied to men and women caused a social gap being women the ones blamed for unmarried pregnancies and consequently punished (Luddy, *Women in Ireland* 32; Smith 61).

As Luddy claims, the modesty and reputation of girls in Ireland should be preserved in the community otherwise the whole family would reject them for the shame caused ("Unmarried Mothers" 109). This shame caused by Stella's pregnancy leads to her rejection in the community (O'Neill 77-78). As Magdalene survivors and scholars claim (Luddy, *Prostitution* 123; "Unmarried Mothers" 109-126), Smith (19), and Paul Garrett ("The Abnormal Flight" 332-333), thousands of women in Ireland, like Stella, were rejected by their families who tried to conceal

their pregnancies for fear of the neighbours' rumours which would turn them into the talk of the place. The overriding concern about the visibility of these "fallen women" and the damage this behaviour caused to the reputations of families and the whole nation led parents, the Church, and the State to set these women aside and enclose them in Magdalene Laundries (Finnegan 17-18; Luddy, *Prostitution* 95; O'Donnell and O'Sullivan, *Coercive Confinement* 27; Smith 31; Titley 10).

Apart from the father, patriarchal authority was extended outside the home in the person of the local priest. As we have seen in the previous part of this thesis, priests, perfectly aware of the functioning of these institutions, were the main referrals sending women to Magdalene Asylums. Yet, the confinement of these women in reformatory institutions was not only caused by committing sins, but preventive confinement of those on the verge of falling was also a common practice executed by the Church and the State to secure the country's morality. In Alexander's novel (2017), Nora suffers the consequences of not behaving according to moral standards after she attempts to convince her boyfriend not to abandon her through sex (Alexander V. 28). She was sent to a Magdalene Laundry together with Teagan, the other protagonist of the novel, whose sexual attraction to Father Mark leads her to be sent away (Alexander V. 37-42). In the case of Odgaard's novel (2017), the protagonist's confession to Father Seanán about her attraction to Faolán implies her preventive confinement in a reformatory institution (Odgaard 12-33). Aware of the sexual attraction between Maren and Faolán, her mother warns her about not falling in love with him and committing a mistake (Odgaard 24-25). Her mother's warning words concerning sin is a representation of how religion was used at that time to instil fear in young girls forcing them to behave according to moral standards (Odgaard 25). It was the fear instigated by the Catholic Church concerning loose morals that led her to

confess her attraction for Faolán to the priest. Farther Seanán, in charge of the education of children, becomes concerned with what Maren confessed and keeps an eye on her. It is after a communal dance when Father Seanán comes to the school with a nun and takes Maren in secret to the Convent of the Sisters of Sacred Mercy as a preventive measure:

Maren, it has come to our attention that you were perhaps getting a little too friendly with a certain young man your father has working on his farm ... at your age, we must be careful not to allow our young girls to get themselves into situations where they might-well, situations that might be dangerous to them ... these situations we have often found it necessary to remove the girls from the sources of temptation so that they do not end up as many of the other girls who reside here ... It was my decision ... to remove you from the enticement of Faolán O’Ciarmaic, in order to spare you the difficulties that many of these girls are now going through. (Odgaard 41-42)

Odgaard uses flashbacks in her narration to introduce Maren’s past. This breakage of linearity in the narration engages the reader who is taken to the past to reexperience what the protagonist did. However, by using direct speech, the reader does not totally disconnect from the present moment. As we can see in the above quotation, different mechanisms of control were employed in twentieth-century Ireland to regulate women’s sexual activity, among them, gossiping and confessions. The confinement of these women was a response to their confession to a priest, which makes us question the Catholic Church’s proclamation of tenderness and care towards the weak. The naturalisation of sex within the marriage bond left other forms of sexual encounters out of the normative conception of gender and sexuality for women. Therefore, those who challenged Catholic rules were deprived of their rights to be sexually free and punished to be

enclosed in Magdalene Laundries for their reformation. It is believed by some scholars like Butler that confessions liberate us, however, we can see here how confessions are, as Foucault claimed, means of control through which the abject being is purified of sin (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 165-167). When these women openly talked about sex or love they were immediately displaced and rejected by society. Adopting a discourse of vulnerability, power institutions deprived these women of their agency to decide about their future giving them no other alternative but a life of confinement.

To pay for their sins, these girls were confined in a Magdalene Laundry where they were introduced to a strict system of work and discipline. As I proved in the previous part of the thesis, these Asylums should be considered instruments of power that subdued young women through different disciplinary techniques similar to those described by Foucault such as hard work, isolation, surveillance, and silence (*Discipline and Punish* 121). To that, discipline of the body and the soul through modesty, fasting and prayers was added in the Laundries. Engaged in a monotonous routine of prayers and work, constantly monitored and in silence, Stella spends almost a year in what she referred to as a prison (O'Neill 116). Isolated from the outer world, the lack of privacy and the narrow space all inmates share turns these institutions into locked prisons where they must expiate their sins.

That isolation and painful routine increased the vulnerability of these women secluded in Magdalene Laundries. As Bordo (2003), Cavarero (2011) and Butler (2016) claim, vulnerability is the main characteristic granted to any human at birth. As we grow older, the power relations in which we, as political and social bodies, are embedded render us vulnerable to others (Butler et al. 4-5). The first coercion against the Magdalenes' bodies is exerted through the confinement of

these women in reformatory institutions. In all these cases, their unjust incarceration left them powerless and with no rights over their bodies. All these novels demonstrate that these women were victims of a coercive system that subjugated them for the mere reason of not behaving according to moral standards. Hence, the imprisonment of these women should be considered a form of violence against their corporeal integrity; depriving these women of their freedom indefinitely should be accounted as a dehumanising process that eroded their identities and bodies. However, deviancies from correct behaviour were not only punished by the State and the Church with the coercive confinement of “fallen women” in reformatory institutions, but the nuns also imposed that strict discipline I have already discussed before through strict Catholic teachings. The previous usage the protagonists of these novels have made of their bodies is corrected now following a Catholic indoctrination based on slave work, concealment of femininity and physical and psychological punishment—reformatory practices that endangered these women’s corporealities.

As something sinful and prone to damnation, the female body was punished by different practices inside these Laundries. These women’s corporealities were reduced to a meaningless existence by a dehumanising power that rendered them vulnerable and disposable. Cruel techniques were also utilised in these reformatory institutions. The nun’s inhumanity is highlighted throughout these novels where women are deprived of everything they had. Just at their entrance, these women lose their voice, being silenced (Alexander V. 47). Moreover, they also lose their families who have rejected them, their possessions and identity; targeted as “penitent” they were deprived of their belongings and their names were changed: Teagan’s name was changed to Teresa (Alexander V. 50-51); Monica for Nora (Alexander V. 67); and Stella for Star (O’Neill 108).<sup>18</sup>

Apart from prayers, fasting and surveillance—all of them punishing practices which contributed to the undermining of these women’s sense of self and to the forgetting of their past (Finnegan 28; Luddy, *Prostitution* 86)—, these women were educated through physical and psychological punishment which damaged their corporeality and identity. Physical punishment was justified by Sister Líadan in Odgaard’s novel just for not saying the prayers correctly, for not working properly or for rebelling (Odgaard 58). The nuns’ power could never be challenged otherwise the consequences would be terrible. This can be seen in one episode in which Amy is saying her prayers wrong and when Líadan tells her off she stumbles and stains the nun’s gown. Because of what the Sister considers a lack of respect, she is about to hit her when Ceara intervenes. She confronts the nun saying: ““You cannot treat us like we are pigs in a stable, mindless and stupid and only following your orders because you dump some slops in front of us once or twice a day. How can you live with yourself?”” (Odgaard 107). Líadan threatens Ceara and she attempts to hit the nun, but she is stopped and bitterly hit with a brush until she collapses:

With Ceara finally in one spot, the nun continued her assault, beating every inch of Ceara’s body that faced her. She stood with her feet planted squarely on either side of the unconscious girl, bringing her weapon down harder and harder on whatever was presented to her. Several small trickles of blood ran out from under Ceara’s hair, and a few spots of dark red began to grow on the grey dress she wore ... (Odgaard 111)

Like the nineteenth-century punishing practice of forcing individuals to behave showing them the consequences of challenging the norms, the nuns instilled fear in the inmates to prevent them from misbehaving (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9). The same ill-treatment of inmates can be

observed in Alexander's novel; the first episode of violence is experienced by Nora at her entrance when she is slapped for the fuss she has caused and locked in a room for hours—the Penitent's Room<sup>19</sup> (Alexander V. 70). During some nights, Teagan and Nora go out on the roof to smoke and speak for which they are punished when discovered by Sister Anne: "... 'You will lie here in the position of the Cross, until you learn your lesson. You will understand what Jesus suffered. You will not eat, nor drink, nor soil yourself.' She brushed the rod near Nora's face. 'When the evil has been removed from your spirit, you'll be able to join us. I do this out of love, so you will know Christ and His ways'" (Alexander V. 102). Nora spits on Sister Anne's feet and she is punished further—she is made the sign of the cross with a pin on her palm (Alexander V. 102). Once, Dolores tries to open a window and she is told off by Sister Michael. Dolores makes some mockery at her back and she is caught and punished brutally: "... She wacked her knuckles with the heavy rosary beads that hung from her waist and marched off, leaving Dolores snivelling" (O'Neill 112-113). As we can see in these episodes, physical punishment was a recurrent technique of subjugation used by the nuns to correct those who deviated from the norms imposed. Although a new punitive system was introduced with the birth of the prison (19<sup>th</sup> century) imposing new techniques of punishment such as coercion, confinement, work, silence, rules, habits, and authority (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 128-129), Magdalene Laundries still carried out the corporeal punishment and the spectacle of torture characteristic of previous centuries in a wide variety of forms (Finnegan 44-45; Smith 47).

A common practice carried out in the Laundries, as Finnegan (26) and McCarthy (82) comment, was hair cutting. Defended as a way to maintain hygiene and security, it was also used as a measure to inflict pain on the inmates for insubordination. After one of Ceara's beatings, Maren goes to the kitchen to give Ceara some soup. Unfortunately, she is caught by Sister

Líadan and punishes Maren by having her hair cut (Odgaard 121). The deprivation of a woman's hair should be considered a form of violence affecting the victim not only physically but also psychologically;<sup>20</sup> haircutting implied the deprivation of women's identity and the alteration of their femininity (Finnegan 26; Titley 5). In Maren's case, it is clearer that losing her hair led to the loss of the only aspect that linked her to her family—she was called Cassán by her father which meant “little curly-haired one” (Odgaard 14).

All these violent episodes described above demonstrate that the social vulnerability of our bodies is an essential characteristic of any human being, as Butler claims, but inequality and dependency are granted by the social relations of dominations which render us vulnerable and disposable (*Undoing Gender* 24; *Precarious Life* 27). Both young girls and unmarried mothers underwent a process of animalisation by being deprived of their human status through blows and humiliations. As a necessary requirement to reform these wayward women, physical punishment was justified against the inmates who were treated as wild animals in need of restraining and correction. We are who we are by the social relations we are engaged in; we depend on others as others depend on us. The social dimension of our bodies renders us vulnerable to others who impose certain demands on us. Yet, in that scale of human vulnerability, some people are more vulnerable than others. Those Irish women who did not follow the norms were dehumanised falling out of the category of the subject and therefore considered unreal, hence violence against them was justified in the sense that they did not really exist (Butler, *Precarious Life* 30-31).

But the body of the Magdalene was further punished by sexual abuse in some cases; although historians have not recognised this practice, several survivors' testimonies show sexual abuses were a reality. Novelists have also wanted to highlight this reality of the Laundries. At

one particular moment in Odgaard's novel, Sister Líadan enters Maren's room abruptly accusing her of lying. She is taken to a room with the other menstruating girls who are asked to put down their knickers to prove they are saying the truth. (Odgaard 89). During this humiliation, Deirdre refuses to show her intimate parts and is threatened to go to confession with Father Conall. She reacts furiously cursing Sister Líadan who catches her by the throat and strangles her until she loses her consciousness (Odgaard 90-92). Later in the novel, we realise Father Conall had abused many girls inside the convent together with Deirdre (Odgaard 101-103). This episode is a faithful representation of real survivors who have suffered the harassment and abuse of priests inside the Laundry for which they were punished while the priests eluded their responsibility (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Pippa Flanagan" 2-3; "Oral History of Martha" 18). As a response to all those sex scandals in which Irish priests were involved, these writers have raised awareness of this issue that was attempted to be silenced in society. The denied abuse of thousands of women within reformatory institutions is unveiled here as a form of support to all those victims who have seen their stories discredited.

As seen in this last episode, psychological abuse was also a common technique of power used by the nuns to subdue "deviant women". As experienced by many survivors who have offered their testimonies, apart from abusing their bodies, the Magdalenes' minds were also punished making them believe they were worth nothing (O'Donnell et al., "Oral History of Martha" 16; "Oral History of Pippa Flanagan" 14; "Oral History of Evelyn" 30-31; "Oral History of Mary Smith" 56). As a result, their self-esteem and identity were eroded. Arendt, Cavarero, and Mbembe talk about the sovereign power's use of terror to maintain order and security, by which the person embodies the conditions of vulnerability and helplessness (Arendt, "On violence" 242; Cavarero 113; Mbembe 20). And Herman talks about this same technique used in

penitentiaries to control and subdue prisoners (Herman 83). This terror these scholars talk about can be seen in reformatory institutions established by the Church in which women were exposed to constant fear. Far from teaching these “deviant women” manners, the nuns’ sadistic practices prove to have humiliated and animalised these vulnerable women reducing them to bare life. The inculcation of shame of their bodies and worthlessness of their lives made it easier to control and manipulate them.

Finally, the punishments these women received were aggravated by the poor working and health conditions that they found in the Laundry (Finnegan 57). According to Foucault, slavery work was used in the modern period to reform prisoners (*Discipline and Punish* 149-170). But this technique was also adopted by the nuns in reformatory institutions where women had to work to expiate their sins and to learn a trade. The exhaustive work these girls and older women were required to develop was intended for their reformation but making young girls or pregnant women work in such an exhausting and demanding job can only be considered a form of slavery and cruelty. Rather than the successful reformation of inmates, what we can see is the exploitation of young girls who were made to work in any condition. Defended as necessary for their salvation, slave work rendered these women in a vulnerable condition and with no future prospect rather than to remain in the Laundry. This sovereign power was used as an instrument of the State and the Church to monitor and control this specific group labelled as “dangerous” for the well-being of the country. Moreover, the lack of formal education and the failed reinsertion of these women in society prove that these women were illegally detained and used as labour force for the benefit of the State and the Church. All this punitive system caused damage to these women’s bodies and minds that were not medically attended in the Laundry. Instead of looking after these women, the nuns seem to be responsible for their illnesses and physical deterioration.

Unbearable working and living conditions contributed to their weakness and physical deterioration, as the following quotations show: “Soon it won’t come at all. Most of the girls here have already stopped flowing; it’s the scarcity of food and the hard work that stops it from coming. Most of the nuns are happy when they see that you’ve gotten it- it means that you haven’t snuck out and gotten yourself pregnant ...” (Odgaard 83); “The work exhausted her after a few hours. The smell of bleach and detergent turned her stomach. The work was dull, the daily routine duller; the sleep blocked out the pain somewhat, but like Nora, she could feel herself slipping away, another year and she would be gone—like Sarah, Betty, and many others. She knew it” (Alexander V. 271). As I stated in the previous part of this thesis, no health assistance was provided to the inmates before the 1970s, which contradicts the social labour nuns were supposed to do (McAleese 544-555). The rights of these individuals seem to have been ignored in these institutions where the well-being of their occupants was the least important thing. This neglect should be considered another form of violence against these vulnerable women; the lack of compromise towards those in need and the excruciating pain they were forced to undergo are some of the reasons that support this argument.

Overall, what these women experienced was an internal and an external erosion that was justified by the nuns as necessary for their reformation. Yet, it is proved once more that the cruel techniques used by these religious people caused the internal death of most of them; in certain cases, even their real death inside the Asylum, which was justified by the nuns by eluding their responsibility:

One of the youngest girls in the convent, barely fifteen and eight months pregnant, had collapsed at the workstation next to Maren’s, her eyes rolling back in her head. Maren

gasped as she saw a pool of blood beginning to form under the girl's smock, and she called out for the nun on duty to help. Sister Dáirine had rushed over, but it was too late. The girl had suffered a miscarriage haemorrhaged massively, and died a few minutes later as two of the nuns were carrying her out ... (Odgaard 63)

The poor healthcare inside the Laundries, as we can see in this quotation led to illnesses women could not overcome sometimes. The McAleese Report established certain causes of death such as cancer, respiratory illnesses, and heart diseases that may have been caused by the hard-working conditions women were subjected to and the fact that they did not receive sanitary attention, but nothing about it is recognised in the Report (McAleese 805).

All these inhuman practices young women were subjected to can only be interpreted as a display of power that was aimed at controlling and making these bodies docile for the nuns' benefit. Far from a social and reformatory labour, this disciplinary system was detrimental for all those women whose minds and bodies became altered. These women were neglected and excluded from the nation not only by being confined in reformatory institutions but also by being silenced and concealed. Since we are socially constructed, Butler claims, we exist as long as we are recognised in society. For that, we should follow certain norms of intelligibility to be socially included in a community. These "fallen women" in Ireland were excluded from the domain of the intelligible and secluded, in most cases, for their whole lives. That lack of representation should be considered a dehumanising act against these women. Yet, the fictionalisation of these women's stories is a way of giving them recognition, at the same time this crime against humanity is recovered from oblivion and made public. Hence, grieving these victims of an abusive system is possible now at the same time power institutions are being questioned.

The fact of incarcerating an individual against his/her will should be considered a mechanism of power used against those more vulnerable groups. Furthermore, the reformatory techniques employed by the nuns should be also seen as exemplifications of the Church's power over those "deviant women". The illusion of security these humanitarian practices spread is contested by the testimonies of real women through the fictional representation of these confessions. Overall, Irish culture has always been characterised by a strong Catholic identity; the moral discourse adopted by the Church has been gender-specific, being women the main target of constraints concerning their role and place in society. For those who did not follow the path of virtue, the alternative was their confinement in a Magdalene Laundry to be reformed. The disciplinary system imposed by the Church and supported by the State and the whole society caused the erosion of these women's identities. Abandoned by their counterparts and their families and deprived of everything they had, these women's lives were devastated and broken by a patriarchal society that established a dual reality in which normative constraints were only imposed on women. Nevertheless, I believe that to reduce the domination of women to patriarchal forms of power is a simplistic view that overlooks other existing potential forms of domination. As we have seen, women—nuns—exerted the same power over young women which leads us to affirm that power relations are not only established between women and men but at all levels, and that domination is not only directed by men but by anyone who owns the means to subjugate others.

3.3. Fostering Resilience and Healing to the Victims of Trauma in Kathy O'Beirne's *Kathy's Story: A Childhood Hell Inside the Magdalen Laundries* (2005) and June Goulding's *The Light in the Window* (2005)

At the end of the twentieth century, life writing started to bring issues related to the family and sex, which used to be considered private matters. Hence, the private-public dichotomy was blurred, granting women a space to talk (Grubgeld 233). Philippe Lejeune defined the autobiography as a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is on his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.” (58) According to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (1951), autobiographies are “narrative constructions of identity” (357). By reading them we become witnesses who are educated emotionally in the process of reading (365). Two of the four works I am going to analyse in this chapter are autobiographies: one written by a former midwife of a Mother and Baby Home and the other written by a former inmate of a Magdalene Laundry. The first, *The Light in the Window*, was published by Goulding in 1998. This book is innovative in the history of the fictionalisation of Irish Magdalene Asylums since it is an autobiography and because it is not the testimony of a sufferer but that of a direct witness. Set in the 1950s, it tells the story of Goulding who, as a professional midwife in her twenties, is offered a job at the Bessboro home for unmarried mothers run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. Goulding chooses a first-person narration telling the stories of the inmates and introducing their voices through dialogues and direct speech. She is a double narrator here since she tells her own story and that of the characters as an omniscient narrator. Kathy O'Beirne's' autobiography (*Kathy's Story. A Childhood Hell inside the Magdalen Laundries*) was published the same year as Goulding's book. This is an autobiography about a traumatic life of abuse and incarceration. Written in the

present—when she is in her forties—, she narrates how her childhood was truncated by constant abuses from her father and later by nuns in several reformatory institutions she was confined in throughout her life. It is the adult traumatised voice that comes to terms with her repressed past now in an attempt to overcome the trauma and to seek justice. This autobiography is a critique of the whole Irish system and of all those who turned their back on her—family, nuns, society, and State. A novel of trauma and resilience, this book is a confession, a call for action and justice, and a claim for the truth to be known. Although the structure of the book tries to follow a common stylistic pattern throughout all the chapters—they open with a title and a poem—, the lack of linearity in the narration present in this autobiography resembles that fragmented memory and identity of the protagonist who informs the reader through dialogues and flashbacks.

In her book *Horrorism* (2009), Cavarero analyses contemporary violence such as terrorism or war that cause the death of people and the erasure of their identities. It is specifically by the violence against bodies, dismembered in war or terrorist attacks, that the identity and singularity of the victims fade away while that of the perpetrators remains (113). This idea can be applied to the erased identity of the Magdalenes who suffered physical and psychological violence within the Asylums as we have seen. We should, however, establish some differences. I am obviously not talking about the same type of violence Cavarero is concerned with. Through incarceration against one's will and the consequent deprivation of individual freedom, the Magdalenes experienced a new form of contemporary violence. It would be excessive and imprecise to compare the Magdalenes to the victims of genocide. Yet, I can see a parallelism as far as a dehumanisation process resulting in the internal death of the helpless victim is concerned. The protagonists of these autobiographies, like thousands of Irish women, endured horrors within these Asylums that could be considered prisons that, like the concentration camps,

were causing terrible traumas on their psyches difficult to heal. During their confinement in the Laundries, these women endured, as we have seen, a harsh regime that affected their subjectivity and sense of self as well as their corporeality. Having gone through all these misfortunes, it is undeniable that these women suffered from severe trauma.

The aftermath of Magdalene Laundries was a difficult stage for all those victims who experienced it (Finnegan 10; Luddy, *Prostitution* 93; McCormick 9; Smith 33). As O'Beirne's *Kathy's Story: A Childhood Hell Inside the Magdalen Laundries* (2005) and Goulding's *The Light in the Window* (2005) exemplify, adapting to normal life again was almost impossible. In the beginning, she tried to repress and forget those records silencing them. Silence was the common attitude adopted after their release which is explained in psychoanalysis as a common technique of survival of any traumatised victim (Kaplan 74; Laub, "Bearing Witness" 58). After her release from the last institution where she was confined, Kathy keeps silent about her past trying to repress all those traumatic memories she had. Yet, these memories come back to haunt her (O'Beirne 160). One day shopping, she smells disinfectant, and it reminds her of an incident during her childhood. She falls out of place, full of fear and unable to breathe. She remembers the day the priest abused her and the shopping centre looks like the Home for her: "... The child in the sacristy was screaming inside me for help. But what could I do? I could not help myself, never mind her. But her pain and isolation cut through my heart. She cried out for me and I for her" (O'Beirne 162). In this quotation, we can see how Kathy's identity is split between the suffering child she was and the adult woman she is now—neither of them can help the other. This feeling of division is common to those traumatised subjects who have been robbed of their agency and identity and who are constantly trying to make sense of their suffering. Freud's theory of repression explains that neurotic patients show resistance which blocks traumatic

memories stored in the unconscious (Freud, *A General Introduction* 9). If those memories are repressed, they may harm the victim further. In B.A. Van Der Kolk, and Onno Van Der Hart's words, "traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into negative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatised person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it" (176).

But her memory is not the only thing which reminds her of her past, public reminders of trauma, as Nathaniel Vincent Mohatt, Azure B. Thompson, Nghi D. Thai, and Jacob Kraemer Tebes (2014) call them, also contribute to Kathy's reliving of her traumatic experience. When the documentary "States of Fear" was broadcasted she became a witness of her own trauma (Laub, "Truth and Testimony" 61). Obviously, she cannot face watching it since it would hurt her more; in her own words, "... I couldn't bring myself to watch them at the time, I was too afraid of the psychological effect they might have on me during a period when I was already finding it difficult to cope with the ghosts of my past. But I kept close track of the reaction to the series and wondered if something at last would be done to recognise our suffering" (O'Beirne 194); "These memories come to haunt you like a curse. There is no getting away from them. Objects and people all queue up as spectres from your past, uninvited guests in your present. Just think of a name and you are back there ... " (O'Beirne 168). These episodes this survivor recounts in her autobiography show how the past and the present can be blurred in the mind of a traumatised subject unable to distinguish between reality and fiction, here and there (LaCapra, "Trauma, Absence, Loss" 699).

The psychological havoc caused in all these women by the treatment they received in Magdalene Laundries and Mother and Baby Homes was aggravated by the fact that they were not able to tell their story either because they never left the Home or because they kept silent after their release. Moreover, society at that time contributed to the maintenance of this issue hidden by keeping silent and not listening to the victims as Pat, Goulding's boyfriend, and she discuss:

'I knew that it was considered a terrible disgrace for a girl to get into troubles, but I never knew that the punishment went on and on,' he said one day. 'It's just something that people won't talk about—it's so hush-hush'. 'And they can't tell their story—nobody wants to listen. The other day one of them asked me to write a book to tell the world what their lives were like'. (Goulding 77)

Keeping silence and trying to forget are common mechanisms of protection, as we have seen, but the most common response to trauma is action, that is, looking for the responsible individuals and demanding justice and compensation; once the first step of recognising the damage is done, the victims normally draw upon their vulnerability and their losses, caused by trauma, to blame the perpetrators (Erikson 192). Kathy's first feeling when confronting her past is of rage seeking revenge:

I rage inside at the injustice and evil hypocrisy, and I have at times fantasised about revenge and punishment for my torturers. In my dreams I have seen them burning in hell ... When I suddenly wake, all I can hear are my own screams of mercy. Mercy that never comes. In nightmares like these, I can feel temporary satisfaction from a sense of revenge

other than that, the reality is that it is me who is suffering the agony of the damned.  
(O'Beirne 166-167)

Then she responds by blaming herself, or her as a child, for allowing all those abuses to happen:

That is why, on that black day, I could not cope with the thoughts of the little girl who denied what was happening to her in the same way that in my mind I was now denying the advance of the lava. At times like that, I blame her for what happened. She was stupid and could have done something to stop the abuse. She wasn't always six and eight and nine, she was twelve and thirteen and she still let it happen. My adult anger turns on the child, wrongly and unfairly, for allowing herself to be sexually abused by people who had total power over her. There is nothing she could have done to stop it. But I can't stop blaming her. (O'Beirne 170-171)

Those reproaches she makes to herself lead her to adopt a self-destructive attitude. She thinks of suicide, but she forgets about it thinking that if she committed suicide the perpetrators would win (O'Beirne 171). Having gone through these stages, her grief becomes strength to fight for justice (O'Beirne 171). The first measure she took to liberate herself of her burden was to speak up. According to Laub, “... repossessing one's life story through giving testimony is itself a form of action, of change, which one has to actually pass through in order to continue and complete the process of survival after liberation” (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 70). When the Commission to Investigate Child Abuse<sup>21</sup> was settled, Kathy went through it telling her story: “... I wanted a chance to be heard and for my abusers to be named and shamed. This was a difficult choice to make and just to set the ball rolling I have to go back to a solicitor and tell her in detail about everything that had happened to me. This was incredibly hard to do ...” (O'Beirne 196). But as

some claim, remembering trauma and telling it could be painful for the victim since it implies the reopening of his/her wound (Laub, "Truth and Testimony" 67). As an example, Kathy cannot continue the sessions and leave them (O'Beirne 204-205). Alternatively, she decides to attend the Redress Board in 2002 where she does not have to testify orally.

The fact that an inmate requests Goulding to tell the world what was going on inside the Home, and the example of Kathy's willingness to speak, leaves clear some women did not want to remain silent but had to because of the censorious attitude adopted by the Church and State concerning this topic. Consequently, thousands of marginal voices and identities faded away in the Irish history of coercive confinement. But not all these women's identities and their stories have been eroded. Kathy is a representation of all those women who found the courage to speak up after a life of torture and abuse. Alternatively, for those who were not capable of making their story public, Goulding represents all those witnesses who have offered their help to these women. Kaplan says that a viewer who has experienced traumatic situations directly or indirectly can respond to the victim's testimony more powerfully than another witness who lacks such experience (Kaplan 90); and this is what Goulding claims: "... No other person had such an insight into the conditions in that institution and nobody else felt the overwhelming need to let some light into what really went on behind the high walls. I have kept my promise" (Goulding 204).

Although Goulding was not an unmarried mother herself, she became a victim of the system too. Kai Erikson (1995) claims that trauma has a social dimension due to its capacity to connect all those who have undergone a similar experience in a group (185). In the same line, Caruth affirms: "... history, like the trauma, is never simply one's own, that history is precisely

the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (Caruth, "Unclaimed Experience" 192). As an outsider working there, Goulding gets involved in these women's traumas experiencing what Kaplan coined as vicarious trauma; she sympathised with the victims and identified herself with them (Kaplan 122). Goulding experiences the trauma of these women through different perspectives—being institutionalised herself, listening to others' stories, and writing this book. What Goulding experienced there as a witness affected her psychologically; her attitude and humour changed, and it affected her in her relationship with Pat who told her once: "Will you stop trying to take all their sufferings and tribulations on board? You are getting too involved here, and it's making you depressed and you should know now that you won't change the system or the rules ... " (Goulding 186). This quotation reaffirms Laub's theory that "no observer could remain untainted, that is, maintain an integrity—a wholeness and a separateness—that could keep itself uncompromised, unharmed, by his or her very witnessing" (Laub, "Truth and Testimony" 66).

Goulding's role there is not limited to delivering babies as the nuns required, she also becomes a support for those women, listening to them and reassuring them. Yet, she is powerless in that dictatorship imposed by the nuns (Goulding 158). Unable to help these women more, the memories of those days come to her mind reopening the wounds once she leaves the Home:

My thoughts were many and varied, and my memories kept crowding in—the first enthusiastic days of "no night duty" and then the appalling reality that this was not a hospital or a home, but a place of detention for the poor creatures who found themselves bound to stay here for three long tragic years ... I could do nothing to alleviate any of the suffering of any of the girls. Molly was my only achievement ... These, and a few more

incidents, stood out in my memory of working as a midwife in such a joyless place where even the birth of the Infant Jesus at Christmas was not recognised. (Goulding 199)

Overall, talking about what she experienced in the Home helps her overcome her trauma as a witness. But also telling these unmarried mothers' story helps to the restoration of these victims' identities, to the recognition of their voices and to the healing of their wounds. If it had not been for Goulding these women would have been forgotten since none of them spoke up—some because they were illiterate and others because they were too frightened to talk. Hence, Goulding's task is not only to inform the public about Mother and Baby Homes and the practices carried out there, but her job is also a social one helping women claim justice and compensation.

In the complex process of working through trauma, reducing the vulnerability of these women, and increasing their resilience is of paramount importance. As complementary concepts, both resilience and healing imply recovery and restoration from an illness, a misfortune or acute stress. Applied to trauma, these terms refer to the individual's capacity of adapting and recovering from a traumatic experience and the resources the victims are offered to achieve their bouncing back. As it has been widely used since the 1980s onwards, resilience has always drawn on the vulnerability of the victims offering them resources to grant their rehabilitation. If resilience is developed in those who are vulnerable, then vulnerability is a precondition for it as scholars like Fiona Miller (2010) have defended. From the perspective of vulnerability, the victims have been robbed of their power whereas from the resilience point of view, their vulnerability is accepted but their agency is also praised. Resilience and healing are generally understood as developmental processes in which not only the individual strength is counted but also the social context and the resources offered to the victim. Yet, we should not forget that

those resilient resources are given by those in power, so certain groups are discriminated against and not offered help. According to Bracke, resilience is used by neoliberal governments to deny vulnerability and justify violence. She claims that those marginalised are named “resilient” not in relation to security, since they are not secure, but in relation to survival as their capacity to overcome threats and attacks from those in power. She proposes to call this group “a subject of subaltern resilience, or the resilience of the wretched of the earth, which is born out of the practice of getting up in the morning and making it through the day in conditions of often unbearable symbolic and material violence” (Bracke 60). Resilience, from her point of view, is a mode of subjectification used by biopower; she affirms that we are entertained with the idea of becoming resilient without exploring other possible ways, without challenging power which causes these situations and our vulnerability (Bracke 61-62).

Applying all this theory to our case of analysis we can see how these women have been left in a vulnerable condition, forcing them to grow resilient towards an adverse situation caused by those in power. In that process towards healing, the help received from others is of paramount importance. In the book *Social Ecology of Resilience* (2012), Michael Ungar and other contributors talk about the importance of the interaction between the individual and the environment (family, community, and government) and the resources the last offers to the victim’s personal growth. In the same line, Herman (1992) points out that the support of the community offered to the traumatised, based on his/her recognition and restitution, is essential in his/her restoration (70). Yet, this was not common among Magdalenes’ families. Moreover, they have not been offered help until the whole issue has been mediatised and brought to light. Despite suffering too much, Kathy and unmarried mothers in Goulding’s autobiography survived, though wounded forever. The only possibility left for them is to overcome the trauma

and to live with it. To do that, they have developed different resistant-resilient techniques throughout their lives that have helped them achieve, if not complete, partial healing.

Generally speaking, Goulding was the only one who, having witnessed and experienced herself the cruelty and abuse executed against these women, could speak about them. Writing an autobiography to tell those unmarried mothers' story was her response to trauma and her way to heal the wounds of the victims and herself too. Claude Hurlbert (2012) defends the idea that writing is a technique of healing and sharing knowledge. He refers to the USA nation in which nationalism has caused great damage to the country—racism, intolerance, violence, and hate—and in which education is influenced by political ideas; but we can apply Hurlbert's ideas also to Ireland which has experienced almost the same. According to him, writing is about putting forward our own thoughts, our own histories to be shared with others, and to challenge those normative powers that want to steal our voices (Hurlbert 24-25). When we write, he affirms, we incorporate ideological, social, political, and cultural ideas that tell things about ourselves and we provide the reader with meaning through our words and silences. From his point of view, writing can transform the world and us (Hurlbert 72-73). Finally, he defends transnational writing as a healing therapy that enables the silenced voices from all over the world to be listened to (Hurlbert 176). Apart from healing the wounds of the victims, Goulding's testimony, together with those of inmates, serves to challenge dominant narratives concerning unmarried mothers in Ireland. Yet, the novel seems to have certain flaws concerning the identification of voices. What is important to notice is that the name of the inmates is revealed by the author whereas the name of the nun in charge of the Home is omitted from the very beginning (Goulding 10). As a matter of fact, the names of the women are provided just to grant them recognition and voice, as well as to restore their identities against the homogenising discourse adopted by the nuns concerning

unmarried mothers. However, the omission of the nun's name implies the omission of the perpetrator's responsibility. By not providing the name of the guilty person his/her responsibility towards the victims vanishes. On the other hand, this omission can be interpreted as a generalisation of all those religious women who took advantage of their position to subdue young women in Ireland at that time. Butler says that we should pinpoint the responsible ones in any act of violence and claim accountability for their acts (Butler, *Precarious Life* 15-16). By making the identity of the perpetrator public Goulding might have been able to help those under her care further. In any case, this autobiography does contribute to the restitution and healing of the victims giving them visibility and voice. It casts light on a silenced past making the reader a co-owner of these women's trauma. Implicitly, Goulding is making an ethical request to listen to the victims, to restore their identities, and to urge the perpetrators to compensate for the damage caused to them. As Butler claims, as a community we are linked by social ties to others forming a dependency and ethical responsibility, so we are, to a certain extent, involved in this restorative project Goulding has begun with her novel (Butler, *Precarious Life* 22).

Alternatively, Kathy was offered no help as we have already seen. In the complex process of overcoming trauma, different stages are pointed out by Urlić, namely “confrontation-mourning-forgiveness-reconciliation” (Urlić, “On the Culture” 196). Urlić claims that if the victim is not capable of talking about the trauma, he will develop a victimhood and vengeful attitude which will hinder forgetting and forgiveness. Instead, the healing process should consist in mourning towards reconciliation where empathy is necessary to achieve forgiveness (Urlić, “To Live with Enemies” 150-154). Instead of surrendering to this rejection and going away, Kathy decided to confront her abusers (O'Beirne 157). Yet, it took Kathy much time to take the first step of confrontation.

After many years of silence and suffering Kathy, a real survivor, finds the strength to raise her voice revealing her truth and claiming justice and compensation in her autobiography *Kathy's Story. A Childhood Hell inside the Magdalen Laundries*. Freud and Breuer, together with other experts in the field, believed that trauma can only be overcome when the repressed is released either by sharing it with others (confessions) or by taking action (revenge) (Breuer and Freud 9). In the same line, LaCapra claims that talking is a precondition for working through trauma (LaCapra, *Writing History* 90). As Goulding's book, Kathy's autobiography is a way of telling the truth and of seeking justice. In the prologue she provides the reasons why she wrote this book—to tell the truth and to act against those who damaged her:

... now the painful deep scars I had been made to keep secret for so many years are out. I am afraid no more, damaged yes, with scars so deep they will never heal, but now I can move on and know that I was innocent, helpless and afraid. The misuse of power causes evil. I feel my story had to be told ... So much evil was done and there was a voice inside me shouting 'Justice'. Not just for me but for so many, many more ... The truth about these evil people and the cruelty they imposed has to be told. They destroyed me and so many more. This is what happened in holy Catholic Ireland. Enough is enough. No more secrets, the secrets are out, free at last! (O'Beirne 219)

Free of the fear that coerced her, she starts tracking her past and the responsible who allowed this to happen. Engaged in a tedious process which damaged her psychologically even more, she asks for her records in the Industrial School and the Magdalene Laundry, but they say they had been damaged in a flood and a fire respectively (O'Beirne 190). In 1993, the exhumation of 133 bodies received media attention, so she decided to continue with her project. She writes to Mary

Robinson—President of Ireland from 1990 to 1997— to meet her, but she refuses. Since she, together with other Magdalenes, is helped neither by the State nor the Church, she launches a campaign to help those who were still institutionalised. Furthermore, she decides to do something for those women who have died—she is determined to give them dignity by improving the Glasnevin cemetery’s conditions, by removing the headstone in which the word sinner or penitent was written and, by building a proper memorial for them (O’Beirne 193). In 2004 she manages to meet Archbishop Diarmuid Martin and the newspapers cover the news. She is promised to be helped in her petition and is referred to Phil Garland, the head of the Child Protection Service of the Archdiocese of Dublin. Meanwhile, she receives anonymous calls that threaten her to be silent (O’Beirne 204-206). This last episode leaves clear the conspiracy of silence that existed in Ireland at a time when revealing the truth about reformatory institutions would damage the whole country. Seeing that she does not achieve anything, she decides to go on a hunger strike ignoring her friends, her family, and the Archbishop’s recommendations. It is only at that time that the media takes interest in her (O’Beirne 207). Butler claims that the media can function as an “infrastructural support” when it helps those more vulnerable who are not allowed to appear in the public sphere (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 14). However, we can see how the media is also a mechanism of power allowing those marginal voices to appear in public according to its interest.

Due to the pressure the media was exerting upon the government to compensate the victims, the State offered a public apology to Kathy and thousands of people witnessed it: “On behalf of the State and all citizens of the State, the Government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue” (O’Beirne 194). Moreover, they were economically

compensated. Yet, neither the apology nor the money was enough for a person who has been devastated in every single possible way; in Kathy's words, "... money will never heal the scars that I have inside or make me feel clean. I don't think it's possible to put a price on what was done to me during my childhood, and so receiving a pay-out will never be an answer, but at the time it felt like this was the only way forward" (O'Beirne 198-199). Eleven years later, when she still has not achieved her goal stated in the prologue, this book is a call for action to all those who may bear witness to her testimony:

So please, Lord. Help all those busy people who only think of themselves to stop, look, listen and think. Five minutes of kindness can mean one day of happiness for someone who is suffering great pain and sadness or even save a life. If someone had given me the time and attention I needed then I could have been saved from the abuse and torment I suffered for years. And so many others could have been saved as well. (O'Beirne 189-190)

And to the State: "Perhaps if any of those mentioned read this book, they will think again and answer my letters. Perhaps someone will take an interest and try to help me. Perhaps the Government will do something to honour that apology they made six years ago" (O'Beirne 217); "... I think we have been punished enough, so, Bertie, I would like to see some of that 'action' from you. I think you should be like me, afraid no more. Free at last. Or are you afraid too?" (O'Beirne 220). Speaking up about such a traumatic experience and challenging power institutions as Kathy does here is a courageous act not all victims have been capable of. In real testimonies we have seen how the community fostered among survivors encouraged them to speak; however, Kathy was alone along the way. As we can appreciate in this quotation, writing

this autobiography is a way of healing her wounds at the same time she unveils a reality hidden for so long. Overall, this autobiography is the testimony of a survivor who is claiming not only justice but also her own identity to be restored.

Žižek (2008) says that after a crime the common stages are punishment, forgiveness and forgetting. But we can only forgive and forget once the guilty has been punished; we normally forgive but do not forget since the damage is not undone. No reconciliation or revenge is possible for Kathy since the perpetrators still deny their responsibility and do not listen to her. Moreover, she still finds no answer that explains why she had suffered so much (Žižek 189-190). Finally, I would like to highlight here that only in the fictional representations of Magdalene Laundries were these women able to overcome the trauma and achieve the healing of their wounds. Contrary to the successful endings presented in fictional representations of Magdalene Laundries, these autobiographies analysed here faithfully depict the sad reality victims of this coercive system experienced after their release. These women, abandoned, denied, and silenced by power institutions and by the whole society, were offered no alternative but to come to terms with a traumatic past alone.

## Chapter Four. The Magdalenes and Theatre

### 4.1. Introductory Remarks

It is generally agreed that Ireland did not have a theatrical tradition until the eighteenth century (Kearney and Headrick 3). Even then, it was introduced and controlled by the English who stereotypically represented the Irish on stage (Shaun 11). It was not until the nineteenth century that theatre was born in Ireland with a propagandist nature (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 7). As the century progressed, dramatists such as Edmund Falconer, Hubert O'Grady, P.J Burke and W. Whitbread took a militant direction in their plays; they broke with the Irish idealism that was spread and they created an Irish theatre history. The Irish Literary Theatre was born in 1897 with plays by Lady Gregory, Edwards Martyn and W.B. Yeats in an attempt to revive the Irish language and tradition—period known as the Irish Literary Revival which lasted until 1926 (Kearney and Headrick 4). In 1903, when Yeats and the other founders moved away from nationalist ideas to more aesthetic, realistic, and philosophical ones, the Irish Literary Theatre became the Irish National Theatre Society (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 14, 24). Since the opening of the first theatre in Ireland, several theatres were founded such as the Irish National Dramatic Society (1902), Ulster Literary Theatre (1902), the Cork Dramatic Society (1908), the Irish Theatre (1914), The Pike Theatre (1953), and The Gate Theatre Dublin (1930s). All the plays produced during the first decades of the twentieth century attempted to challenge the stereotypical image of the Irish spread by English plays (Kearney and Headrick 6; Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 13).

During the nationalist campaign, drama played a key role since it was employed by nationalists to defend the Irish identity away from the English one. The nationalist character

adopted by the theatre of W.B. Yeats, D.W. Gregory, and Millington Sygne in their attempt to revive the Irish language helped politicians in their project of independence (Greene I). Yet, playwrights such as Sean O’Casey, Denis Johnston, Brendan Behan, W.B. Yeats, Samuel Beckett, and Brian Friel took a different direction as the twentieth century progressed. Post-revolutionary theatre aimed to demythologise Ireland and recover those voices which had been silenced. These playwrights employed the theatre to contest political and economic power during the twentieth century (Shaun 1).

However, plays were banned by the Church. After the first stage censorship imposed by Reverend Armstrong during the 1819s, rarely were plays in Ireland censored between 1897 and 1907 (Dean 34). After their independence, however, censorship contributed to the slow introduction of Modernism in Ireland (Singleton, “The Revival Revised” 258-259). In 1958, Archbishop of Dublin John Charles McQuaid imposed censorship in Ireland which was combated by The Irish Association for Civil Liberties, founded in 1948 (Dean 150, 160). The constant pressure received from the Catholic Church concerning decency and decorum, together with the arrival of the TV, supposed a decrease in theatre attendance during the twentieth century. Yet, the Irish theatre overcame these obstacles and by the 1960s the Censorship Board was relaxed, and taboo topics were performed (Morash 242). The revolution started in the 1960s continued during the following decades and issues of class, religion, sexuality, and women’s rights were debated on stage (Trotter, *Modern Irish Theatre* 154).

It was not only the novel which echoed the changes taking place in the new century, the theatre also covered the problematic issues being raised in Ireland during a period of extreme social and cultural remodelling. According To Mark Fortier, “theatre is more complexly and

intimately intertwined with the outside world than many literary and other artistic activities” (102). Like the novel, the theatre was preoccupied with history and revisited it from different perspectives focusing on those on the margins (Greene 245). The openness of the theatre reflected the social changes taking place at that time, the change in people’s mentality, and the secularising process Ireland started to get involved in. A new generation of playwrights with authors like John B. Keane, Tom Murphy, Brian Friel, and Hugh Leonard led this movement which challenged the official versions of nationalism, sexuality, education, and Catholicism. As examples, Tom Murphy’s *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975), Thomas Kilroy’s *Talbot’s Box & Brian* (1973), and Friel’s *Faith Healer* (1979) are some of the plays that represent this modernisation and the secularising process Ireland was involved in (Morash 249). The internationalisation of the Irish theatre came in the 1970s when Ireland joined the European Union (Jordan 4). Despite the advancement in the economy and social measures, the theatre focused its attention on the unresolved issues of the past and on those problems that were not discussed (Jordan 5). The clerical and political scandals brought to light in the 1990s were also performed and fiercely criticised by dramatists.

In all this process of the Irish theatre formation, the introduction of women in dramaturgy was slowed down by the patriarchal attitude adopted at the time; in Eileen Kearney and Charlotte Headrick’s words,

The opening decades of the twentieth century were full of movement and creativity in Ireland. Although they rarely received as much public recognition as their male counterparts, women did make a substantial contribution to the Irish Renaissance. It was an exciting time to be a woman, but a frustrating time to be an Irish woman seeking

artistic recognition ... it was difficult for women artists to gain admission to the inner circle of the Dublin theatre scene, and in particular that of the famed Abbey Theatre. (9)

Although women played a pivotal role in the achievement of independence and in the dramatist movement, as Mary Trotter (2009) comments, they found great difficulty in being employed in theatres (Trotter, "Translating Women" 600). Inghinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Ireland) established the performance as a site of political and ideological empowerment through tableaux vivants in 1900 (Leeney "Women and Irish Theatre" 21). Yet, the lack of women's education and participation in politics led to low participation in drama and other arts. Moreover, the repressive laws directed at women together with the fierce censorship in art contributed to the low participation of women in theatre (Leeney, "Women and Irish theatre" 279). Even though women playwrights' presence in theatres was common during the revival, it was not until the 1970s-1990s when they emerged to give voice to the silenced and to analyse women's situation in Ireland as well as the political, economic, and social situation of the time (Kearney and Headrick 13-14). The introduction of women in dramaturgy was taken as a challenge to the prescribed moral norms for them, but these female playwrights took it as an opportunity to put their demands forward (Kearney and Headrick 3). The popularity and scope of drama enabled them to fight for their rights in the public arena (Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights* 1).

In the mid-twentieth century women playwrights such as Emma Donahue, Burke-Brogan, Marina Carr, Christina Reid, Jennifer Johnston, Dolores Walsh, and Elizabeth Kuti brought up female issues affecting them, usually ignored, and they challenged stereotypical representations of women in the mainstream theatre too (Trotter, "Translating Women" 601, 603). The elimination of the marriage bar in 1977 after the Commission on the Status of Women, among

other measures adopted which improved women's conditions, granted not only women's involvement in politics but also in most forms of art. Finally, in the 1990s a theatre company for women was established granting them a space to talk and to deal with women's problems (Dean 187). Feminism had a great impact on Irish society in the last decades of the twentieth century; they did not only achieve improvements in women's lives, but they also opened previously shut paths to women in the public sphere. Charabanc Theatre Company is an example of this; set in 1983 in Northern Ireland, it shows the feminist spirit of the time (Sihra 550).

Among all the controversial topics that Irish playwrights dealt with in the twentieth century such as emigration (Brian Friel's *Philadelphia, Here I Come!* (1964) and Padraic Colum's *The Land* (1905)), Catholic power (Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1953)) economic crisis (Tom Murphy's *Crucial Week* (1997)), Northern Ireland conflicts (Brian Friel's *The Freedom of the City* (1973)), sexuality (Millington Synge's *Playboy* (1907)), and family (Séan O'Casey's *Cock-a-Doodle Dandy* (1949)), the focus of this thesis encourages us to concentrate on one of the most prominent female dramatists of Ireland who brought up the issue of Magdalene Laundries in their plays. Previously, the theme of institutional and child abuse, especially in Industrial schools, had been common in plays like Gerard Mannix Flynn's *James X* (2003) and Frank McGuinness's *Bag Lady* (1985). I have already introduced the concept of "Magdalene Literature", but I should say that Burke-Brogan is perhaps the inventor of this term. This painter, poet and playwright had a pivotal role in the spread of Magdalene Laundries' story since her plays were the first productions covering this historical event in Ireland. Inspired by her experience as a novice, she wrote *Eclipsed* and published it in 1992; the play has won many awards including a Fringe First at Edinburgh Theatre Festival 1992 and the USA Moss Hart Award 1994. Later in 2003, she revisited this story in *Stained Glass at Samhain*. Burke-Brogan's

first play served as an inspiration to many novelists who have fictionalised the lives of Magdalene survivors. Both productions are focused on unmarried mothers and the difficulties they encountered in a repressive Catholic society which condemned them as evil people. Moreover, a perspective that has generally been overlooked by novelists, that of the nuns, is present here to counteract the negative vision that had been spread concerning the clergy. In both plays, Burke-Brogan makes a defence of the women at the same time she blames the Church, the State, and the whole Irish society for what was allowed to happen.

Burke-Brogan's plays are critiques of the whole Irish system and of all those who turned their backs on these women—family, nuns, society, and State. These plays recover the past from the perspective of the “perpetrators”. These stories are of resistance, calls for action and justice, and claims for the truth to be known. Even though she is critical of the Church, the State and all those who were involved in this tragic event, Burke-Brogan does not look for culpable parties. Her narration accounts for the recognition of these women and a claim for reconciliation and overcoming the past. In Smith's words: “In the end, *Eclipsed* proclaims that there is a duty attached to remembering an eluded past, repossessing the archive of history, and ultimately taking action. In fulfilling this responsibility, Ireland's eclipsed women emerge from the shadows of official history and are commemorated in a public act of mourning” (Smith 104); then he adds:

*Stained Glass at Samhain* suggests how Ireland's Catholic religion could assist reconciliation for past injustice by participating in the project of narrative retrieval. Burke Brogan criticizes the religious congregations for remaining silent about the Magdalen Laundries, and implies that they remain in thrall to a patriarchal church hierarchy by not

releasing their records or offering a comprehensive apology for abuses in the past. (Smith 110-111)

The theatrical production about Magdalene Laundries has not been as extensive as the novelisation of it, but apart from Burke-Brogan, in 2011 an innovative theatre founded in 2009 by Louise Lowe and Owen Boss created a shocking performance raising awareness of the life of those women inside a Magdalene Laundry. The production called *The Monto Cycle* consists of four plays, namely *World's End Lane*, *Laundry*, *The Boys of Foley Street*, and *Vardo* which explore social problems affecting Ireland during the last decades of the twentieth century such as prostitution, violence, drugs, asylum-seeking, and the scandal of the Magdalene Laundries. Set in St Mary Magdalene Asylum in Dublin, *Laundry* takes individual spectators on a tour around the Magdalene Laundry where they can experiment what it was like to live there. Its attempt to create a collective memory so that these women could not be forgotten is the driving motive of this play in which the spectator is encouraged to participate actively interacting with the actresses (Magdalenes) who ask them to make moral decisions (Singleton, *ANU Productions* 48-52).

The theatre allows the representation of silent topics and the witnessing of certain issues people may avoid. An ethical response on the part of the audience is implied, which resembles what Magdalene survivors do when offering their testimonies (Duggan 86). If Patrick Duggan affirms that “by entering into the kinaesthetic space of the performance event, we facilitate a sense of being physically connected to the bodies on stage and to the images they present us with”, everyone who witnesses the testimonies of these women is bound to directly experience through all their senses the infortunes they endured (Duggan 113). The power of theatre in bringing back the past and claiming accountability for the wrongdoings is its main characteristic

from the 1960s to the 1980s when performances were engaged with memory retrieval (Jordan 221). Burke-Brogan's plays continue this tendency by uncovering a hidden past. According to Victor Merriman (2008), "theatre is part of a broader cultural conversation about who we are, how we are in the world and who and how we would like to be. Theatre is a powerful means of constituting and invigorating community" (597). In contrast to the novel, as a private act, Burke-Brogan's theatre facilitated that sense of community by creating a strong link between the actors and actresses and the audience. The fact of reliving a traumatic past on stage and making the audience participate in it boosts the effect of performativity. The representation of Magdalene Asylums on stage has not only brought to light this chapter of Irish history, but it has also enabled these women to be heard and seen.

My intention in this chapter is to analyse Burke-Brogan's plays in the light of the historical records I have already presented to see how this playwright has contributed to the spread of this historical event in Ireland and abroad, giving voice to those silenced. I will read these plays through the lenses of vulnerability, discipline and resilience to see how the discipline exerted in Magdalene Laundries was a coercive one which rendered these women vulnerable, but which they resisted in any possible way.

#### 4.2. Growing Resilient-Resistant against Vulnerability and Discipline in Patricia Burke-Brogan's *Eclipsed* (1994) and *Stained Glass at Samhain* (2003)

Burke-Brogan presents in these plays a strict disciplinary regime, based on work, isolation, silence and prayers, and poor healthcare which affects both nuns and inmates equally. Mother Victoire in *Stained Glass* (2003) and Mother Victoria in *Eclipsed* represent an extension of patriarchal authority subduing both young girls and nuns. On the contrary, Sister Luke in *Stained*

*Glass* and Sister Virginia in *Eclipsed* (2008) represent the opposite stand; they are sympathetic to the women and they challenge the system from within because of the ill-treatment they receive. In a world dominated by men—bishops and priests—the nuns were considered numbers, so no recognition was granted to them, not even after their death (Burke, *Stained Glass* 27). In Burke-Brogan’s world, it is not only the inmates who suffer the stigmatisation of being in a Magdalene Laundry, but the nuns also want to run away although they are dissuaded from it, as the following quotation shows:

She confessed to me that every morning when she opens those Big Outside Gated, she’s tempted. Wants to run and run far, far away from this Convent—Only it would hurt her parents. The stigma—their daughter a spoiled nun! A run-away nun! Neighbours gossiping! How many of them gave one day of their lives to work for Big Boss God Himself? (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 15)

The power attributed to non-judicial systems in the nineteenth century, as Foucault claims, enabled the Church in the twentieth century to decide about the future of thousands of women who did not comply with the religious norms. With this new legal system, the body became an object of abuse by depriving it of its liberty and by making of it a productive tool. Implicitly, the body of the “criminal” became a vulnerable one under the power of those who incarcerated it (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 22). The vulnerability we have mentioned in previous parts of this thesis related to young women is now shared in these plays by all women in a patriarchal world. During their stay there, nuns and inmates alike are incarcerated/isolated and encouraged to follow a disciplinary regime based on decency and redemption. As examples, Sister Virginia is visited by Father McCarthy, a friend of her brother Father John, and Sister Victoria allows her

ten minutes and warns her to be prudent—“custody of the eyes” (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 39); also, Sister Benedict wants to go home to say goodbye to her mother who had died of cancer, but Mother Victoire does not give her permission to do that (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 53).

The institutionalisation of both inmates and nuns, defended as a social mission, causes the erasure of these women’s identities and agency. According to Butler, the assignment of vulnerability to a certain group stigmatises it depriving it of all right to decide, speak or act (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 25). This imposed condition enabled those in power to act freely and decide for those women, most of the times against these women’s will. As a result of the damaging practices inside the convent, women and nuns grew resilient against vulnerability and discipline. Following Butler, Gambetti and Sabsay (2016), vulnerability is a condition of resistance; as subjects, our bodies are exposed to power and to vulnerability but that does not imply we cannot grow resistant. Against feminists who draw on paternalistic institutions to help vulnerable people and who think of women as vulnerable, these scholars raised awareness of the dangers of stigmatising gender division by considering women naturally vulnerable. On the contrary, vulnerability is a general condition of any human being, which can be resisted (Butler et al. 2). This resistance would cause the vulnerability of these women, though (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 12). However, they jeopardise the only thing they have—their bodies—to claim their identity and agency back.

It is generally agreed that power cannot be destroyed, social normativity cannot be overcome, but we can challenge the system through our acts to negotiate our place and role in society. Arendt says: “Society expects from each of its members a certain kind of behaviour, imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalise” its members, to make

them behave, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement” (Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 40). These women’s sin of behaving unexpectedly having a baby out of wedlock is punished with their confinement in a reformatory institution where they are rendered vulnerable. However, they renegotiate these rules by challenging the disciplinary techniques governing the Laundry. Several resisting techniques are adopted by the inmates such as escape, mental evasion, bad behaviour, humour, and direct confrontation. The first of these practices should be considered a proof of these women’s uneasiness. An example of this could be found in Cathy who tries to escape several times but is returned to the Laundry once and again (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 25). The indefinite detention of these women in the Magdalene Laundry and the fact that women put their lives at risk if they achieve freedom make us question the social mission of the Church. According to Gambetti (2016), when we act, we expose ourselves to risk in the public realm. Since we are always in relation to others, we are actors and sufferers at the same time engaged in antagonistic relations (33-34). Following this reasoning, the relationship established between nuns and inmates cannot be seen as one of solidarity and help, rather it proves to be one of subjugation and power. Despite the inability to escape from this institution, these women challenge this unfair system leaving clear the precarious condition in which they are detained.

Remembering home and keeping records of their families and beloved ones is another form of resistance. Mandy and Brigit keep photos of their children in order not to forget them (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 31-32). Against the imperative of silence governing the convents and the urgency to forget about their sinful past, these characters remember their home and talk about it openly. Confined and isolated from the outer world, these characters challenge the system by imagining reality otherwise. As examples, the women gave Cathy presents and they throw a

party imagining they are in Paris (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 28-29); Mandy lives on illusions to survive and the other women reassure her. On one occasion they all dress the manikin up as Elvis, Brigit impersonates a Bishop, and they sing Elvis's songs while Mandy and Elvis get married. At the same time, Sister Virginia is watching the emotive scene with tenderness (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 47-53). In this sixth scene of the first Act, we can see they are only young women who want to live like the rest but whose dreams are truncated by the fact they fell pregnant without acknowledging the consequences of that sinful act. They are just innocent girls who were deceived and betrayed by men. We can see the cruelty of incarcerating women with all their lives ahead for a mistake they made; a mistake the Church did not forgive. The characters take the good side of the situation, though. Mandy imagines the place as a dancehall and Brigit, the most realistic character, imagines the bin is the purgatory where she sends all those who punished her. The bin is an allegory of the Laundry; these women are in purgatory already suffering for what they had done (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 63-65).

Humour is used by the women both to bear their stay and to challenge the power of the nuns. However, humour is also a strategy of resistance used by the characters on stage. By using it, these women were challenging an authority which prohibited any recreation act. Even though humour is normally used in comedies, Burke-Brogan uses it here to empower these women and help them endure their stay. On one occasion, Brigit imitates Mother Victoria telling Nellie off and she also curses the Bishop and dresses up like him (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 21). This imitation of the Bishop allows us to see the corruption of the system and the imbalance that existed between penitents and clergymen (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 23-24). This is maybe more visible in the third scene of Act Two when the inmates are highlighting the hypocrisy of this religious group and of the whole society:

NELLIE-NORA. They were terrible at the back of the chapel and in the organ- gallery!

They were all the same!

BRIGIT. And they think we're the dirty ones! ... Our Canon stood at the back of the dance-hall and watched! ...

NELLIE-NORA. A curse will fall on you, Brigit! Talking like that about the Canon!

*(Mandy and Nellie-Nora bless themselves.)*

BRIGIT. A curse! Don't be daft! I'm here—isn't that enough? ... Listened to all the gossip and gave the orders, pointing at us with her scarlet fingernails! ...

NELLIE-NORA. I often think about Our Lady the time she got pregnant! Did the neighbours point at her too?

*(Women smile.)*

NELLIE-NORA. She must have had a terrible time, when she began to show! ... I wonder did the neighbours whisper and sneer?

BRIGIT. Gossiping neighbours going home from Mass like holy-water hens! Bloody hypocrites! But the missionaries were the worst! Hellfire and brimstone every morning and evening!" (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 68-69)

The language used by the characters and the non-verbal communication here are subversive acts in themselves given the religious atmosphere they are in. That freedom of speech granted by Burke-Brogan enables the audience to see how the characters really are in private, when no authority figure was overseeing them. Hence, a closer link between the actors and actresses and the audience is established here. This scene shows, on the one hand, the strength of these women who dare to question and challenge the system which condemns them for what the Virgin Mary did, that is, falling pregnant. A system controlling women's reproductive rights, which has

employed gossiping as its main force, has always been common in Ireland. This system of terror surrounding reformatory institutions prevented women from living a normal life (Inglis, “Religion, Identity” 10). Societal contribution to this disciplinary regime is highlighted here forcing each spectator to account for the crimes committed.

Despite the restrictions and their inability to dismantle the whole system, these characters contravene the norms using the few resources they have. Brigit in *Eclipsed* is maybe the most rebellious character of both plays. Her challenging attitude is clearly seen in several moments, but especially when Mother Victoria is singing with the inmates and Brigit sings a non-religious song (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 40), or when she laughs at Mother Victoria while talking to her (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 40-41). Brigit’s resilient attitude against adversity would lead her to confront Sister Virginia whom she blames for their confinement in the following scene:

BRIGIT. Chocolates! Hhh! Keep your bloody chocolates. The keys, Pasty Face! Give me the keys!

SISTER VIRGINIA. I—I can’t! You know I can’t give you the keys, Brigit! ...

BRIGIT. Pretending to help! You’re just like the rest o’ them! You think if you keep us locked up, that we’ll forget about living! About being alive! Don’t you? That our heads will go soft and mushy from hymns and prayers! You think that we won’t see what you crowd is up to! Well, Pasty Face! Brigit Murphy here sees through you! Sees through the whole lot o’ you! Mother Superiors, Bishops, Popes and all!

*(Sister Virginia fingers her Rosary Beads. Bridgit approaches her.)*

BRIDGIT. Look at yourself, Pasty Face! You’re a woman—Aren’t you? Did you ever have a lover? Tell us that now, Sister! Ha?—Would you like a bit o’ lipstick, Sister?

*(Bridgit holds lipstick menacingly. The women move away. Sister Virginia tries to escape, but Bridgit pins her against wall.)*

BRIDGIT. You don't know anything! Never had a lover! Never had a baby! So you're white and shining, Sister! Not the same as us. Are you? Whose side are you on anyways? Why aren't our lover- boys locked up too? One law for them and another for us! Scab! Spy! I'll daub it on the walls of Hell! ...

BRIGIT. All sweet smiles and 'Here's chocolates!' But you're as bad as the rest! ...

SISTER VIRGINIA. But I want to help Brigit! I am on your side!

BRIGIT. No! You're not! I'd kill you, but you're not worth it!

*(Bridgit throws lipstick at Sister Virginia, takes box of chocolates and throws contents on top of Sister Virginia. She moves towards basket. Sister Virginia gets up slowly, tries to smooth her habit, then, with dignity, walks through exit. Her white coif/veil is on floor downstage. Brigit stands at basket.)* (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 73-75).

Brigit's violent and recriminatory attitude, seen in her acts and in the director's annotations, is an echo of what all those women who were unjustly confined feel. This episode shows, on the one hand, the resilient attitude of Brigit who confronts the perpetrator and demands her rights, and on the other, the vulnerable nature of nuns who are demystified here. Despite being nice to the women, the reality is that Sister Virginia also contributes to the confinement and damage of these women. According to Sabsay, humanitarian practices do contribute to the stigmatisation and vulnerability of certain groups in society if they do not dare to question the system imposed (280). Brigit highlights precisely this same idea here; it is not enough to be nice to them, those who are supposed to protect these vulnerable women should do so by putting an end to this regime of terror and abuse.

The nuns also adopt a resilient attitude in these plays fighting for these women's rights. Sister Luke in *Stained Glass* also adopts a challenging attitude and criticises what she refers to as "Central Powers". We suppose this group is the one in charge of the Laundries made up of bishops. Unhappy with the system Sister Luke tries to escape, but she is not able to (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 18-19). As the only alternative, she helps those women:

When I was appointed Superior in Killmacha Magdalen Laundry, I changed the so-called penitents' diet. I insisted that they got plenty of milk and fresh vegetables ... I only had to remember my own time in the Novitiate, when the smell of rasher frying for His Lordship's breakfast made me cry with hunger, made me lonely for home. I spent the Laundry money on the women instead of sending it to Central Powers. I brought them tennis shoes, I took away their ugly boots, I gave them flowery aprons instead of clay-coloured overalls. (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 10)

But instead of being listened to and being taken into account, she is treated as mad:

... The money the women earned. — It was their money! The weeks and weeks without sleep trying to balance the books, staring at pages of figures in my head, scraping through my mind for answers that wouldn't be heard. — But I knew I was right! I knew that things must be changed, if God is going to be allowed to be God! Central Powers didn't approve of my financial management. — Demoted me! Without warning ... (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 16)

In these two quotations we can see a sympathetic nun who tries to challenge the whole system from within, but who is rejected and displaced by those holding power. The inability to challenge

the system does not exonerate her of her fault in all this. Sister Luke does not only criticise the Church which damages unmarried mothers and separated them from their children, but also society for their inaction with the following words: “Wouldn’t you think they’d take the mothers out of the Laundry and give them their babies from the orphanage, their páistí gréine, instead of popping pennies into black-baby-boxes—for all to see. What does Christ himself think of it? Who had bolted doors and windows on these women? Answer me that!” (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 9). Moreover, her story as an illegitimate child and the fact that her mother had been institutionalised give Sister Luke all the right to question the system (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 59). However, she does not question her own role in the Laundry; working there she contributes to the subjugation of these women. To a certain extent, her return to reveal the truth about this institution can be accounted for as an amendment of her sins. She can be seen as a tormented soul by the mistakes of the past that is willing to grant recognition to these women by telling their stories now.

As Sister Luke, Sister Virginia defends and supports the inmates sometimes breaking the rules. But unlike Sister Luke, Sister Virginia does not keep silent about the conditions there and breaks the rule of obedience spreading the truth for what she is punished. Mother Victoria makes Sister Virginia kneel and tells her off:

MOTHER VICTORIA. You are lucky you are not scared for life!

SISTER VIRGINIA. We are all scared! We their jailers!

MOTHER VICTORIA. Scared! You disobeyed me again, Sister!

*(Takes open letter from office-book and pushes it towards Sister Virginia.)*

MOTHER VICTORIA. This letter! Sealed without my permission!

(Pause.)

SISTER VIRGINIA. Yes, Mother Victoria! His Lordship should come to this Laundry! He should see things as they really are!

MOTHER VICTORIA. His Lordship, the Bishop, in that laundry talking to – those – those – sinful women! ...

MOTHER VICTORIA (reads letter). ‘My Lord Bishop, as you are patron of this laundry, I invite you to visit us at our workplace. You should see and speak to the mothers, who are locked in here. Out of the goodness of your heart, you will, I am sure, allow them weekly visits to the orphanage. Their conditions of work and diet need to be improved immediately. Because of the deterioration in the health of a woman called Cathy McNamara, I beg you to come before you leave for Rome. I am, my Lord, your obedient and humble servant Sister Virginia O’Brien.’

(Pause.)

MOTHER VICTORIA. ... During my thirty years in this community, I’ve never come across such – such imprudence! A white novice takes it on herself to invite that holy man to visit those – those-! ...

SISTER VIRGINIA. I must write to His Holiness! It takes a long time for news of change to reach this island, this laundry! (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 79-81)

This fourth scene in Act two, full of dramatic pauses which intensify the scene, demonstrates the nuns are also object of punishment when challenging the system. Sister Virginia’s brave act of spreading the truth about the injustices these women suffer is contrasted with the secrecy and concealment adopted by the rest of the clergy. In *Stained Glass* Sister Luke also breaks her silence and tells the audience the truth about what happened to these women. Yet, maybe

because the former does it at a smaller scale and the latter does it after all those women's deaths, both fail to help them.

Although they failed in altering the course of history, the Sisters' resistant attitude helps inmates grow resilient in a hostile environment. According to psychologists, resilience can be defined as

... a set of behaviours over time that reflect the interactions between individuals and their environments, in particular the opportunities for personal growth that are available and accessible. The likelihood that these interactions will promote well-being under adversity depends on the meaningfulness of these opportunities and the quality of the resources provided (Ungar 14).

In adverse situations, both the person's agency and the resources offered to help him/her are of paramount importance for the restoration of that person (Mohatt, et al). In these plays I am analysing in this chapter, Sister Virginia in *Eclipsed* and Sister Luke in *Stained Glass* grant reassurance and empowerment to the victims. Yet, they are unable to change the course of history since they are just as vulnerable and powerless as the inmates.

In *Eclipsed* we can see a sharp contrast between Sister Virginia and Mother Victoria. While the former questions their labour there and how those women are treated, Mother Victoria defends what they do as social work. Sister Virginia questions the interpretation of the Bible now which has concealed women's labour in Christ's life claiming women should be given importance (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 44). We can see Sister Virginia in the convent chapel praying the Credo while she listens to the inmates' voice and Mother Victoria's voice in her

head, she has a crisis of faith doubting about the work she was doing and the fact that God allowed this to happen:

SISTER VIRGINIA. ... I believe in God – God? – I believe in God – I try ... It is just a story from the East – from St Paul? A story? – The women need help from you, the Risen! But, did you rise from the dead? – You're supposed to be a Loving Father! Are you a God of Love? – A God of Justice? – I thought I'd be working for the poor! Am I being brainwashed? Will I become dehumanised too, if I stay here long enough? Locked in by Obedience? The Rule? Why are there changes in Our Holy Founder's Book? Was early Christian History rewritten too? Woman's witness submerged? – Christ Crucified! Help them! For a woman bore you, carried you for nine months! Mother of Jesus, do something about Cathy, Mandy, Nellie-Nora, and the others! When you arose from that tomb, women were your first witnesses! Your first miracle was performed at your Mother's request! – Help us! – Help me! (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 42-44)

Sister Virginia's crisis of faith is a reasonable response to those women who were incarcerated against their will and treated contrary to the Scriptures. The testimonies I have analysed in the previous part of this thesis confirm that women have lost their faith after what they endured during their lives. But Burke-Brogan presents here a nun who puts herself in the shoes of the inmates and condemns the whole system. The discourse adopted by Mother Victoria to justify the incarceration of these women on the grounds of their vulnerability and undesirability in society contrasts with the reality of these women who are dying and suffering for their lost babies. Seeing this reality, Sister Virginia could only doubt about everything she used to believe in. What Sister Virginia highlights in this internal monologue is the foundation on which

Catholicism rests: the denied role of women in Christianity. Despite being a woman the one who gave birth to Christ and the one who witnessed his resurrection, they have always been the sufferers. The phrase “women were your first witnesses” refers to Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary, the two images the Church adopted as examples for women’s lives. From the point of view of the Church, these inmates went on the wrong path and chose that of Mary Magdalene, so they needed to amend their sins. Yet, Sister Virginia offers an alternative interpretation of this woman granting her a main role in the life of Christ.

Sister Benedict in *Stained Glass* has also a crisis of faith and wants to leave, but Mother Victoria does not allow her to go home (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 30-31). Contrary to Sister Benedict who surrenders to the power of her superior, Sister Virginia does not give up and tries to convince the Mother uselessly:

SISTER VIRGINIA. Yes, Mother! The women need their children! – Is it really necessary to keep them locked away?

MOTHER VICTORIA. Those women can’t be trusted! They’re weak, Sister! No control! They’ve broken the Sixth and Ninth Commandments!

SISTER VIRGINIA. But isn’t God a Loving Father, a Forgiving Father? The men, who made them pregnant, broke the same Commandments!

MOTHER VICTORIA. Men? You don’t understand, Sister! No one wants those women! We protect them from their passions! We give them food, shelter and clothing! We look after their spiritual needs! ... Paul says, ‘People who do wrong will not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. – People of immoral lives – fornicators, adulterers.’

SISTER VIRGINIA. But St. Paul hated women! Christ had many women friends!

MOTHER VICTORIA. St. Paul, Sister! St. Paul may have been afraid of women. Women tempt men! Remember the Garden! Eve started it all! ... Those women can be treacherous! I warn you to be careful in the laundry! ... Doubts, Sister! We all go through those dark nights – Dark Nights! Try to remember that We Are Eclipsed! But that deep inside there is a shining that is Immortal – a part of us, which is outside Time ... You want to change the Rule, the Church, the World! You must start with yourself! Change yourself first! Get rid of Pride! Obey the Rule, Sister! Remember – We are eclipsed. But Blind Obedience will carry you through! (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 58-61)

In this scene (Act two, scene one) two stands towards religion are presented. Sister Virginia defends the women and asks the Mother to help them whereas the Mother defends their social work condemning women as sinful and deceiving; they are weak and in need of protection and the methods they used are defended as the appropriate ones. Sister Virginia questions religion and the Mother tells her to have blind obedience. To that, she answers highlighting the gender inequality, the poor health conditions, and the punishment executed there. She questions the original sin and the belief that all women are sinful. On the contrary, Mother Victoria's discourse on vulnerability serves to justify the confinement and ill-treatment of these women. As Butler claims, vulnerability is not only attributed to marginal sectors of society, but it is also a condition reclaimed by those in power to achieve their goals and justify their acts ("Rethinking Vulnerability" 23). But, as Sister Virginia highlights here, this discourse only masks a dictatorship imposed by the nuns which allowed them to act with impunity. In the end, after the death of Cathy and Sister Virginia's confrontation with the Mother blaming her for her death, Brigit escapes when Sister Virginia gives Brigit the keys (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 87). This subversive act should be read as a challenge to the whole reformatory system in Ireland which

unjustly confined women to be reformed. Sister Virginia recuperates her agency at the end at the same time she grants Brigit a new beginning.

But maybe the most remarkable act of resistance is that of speaking up against an imposed silence. Concealed and silenced for many years, the story of a Magdalene Laundry in Killmacha and its inmates is rescued by Burke-Brogan and told from different perspectives. In *Eclipsed* it is Nellie-Nora, a former inmate, who tells the story (1963) to Brigit's illegitimate daughter—Rosa—in the present (1992) while in *Stained Glass* it is a former nun who does so to the audience. As we can see here, writing and telling the truth about the past, what Sister Luke is doing, is what Burke-Brogan is really doing in these plays: talking about something that everyone knows, but nobody talks about (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 8). In the first play we are introduced to the characters when Nellie-Nora takes out the nun's habits from a basket and they unfold the past. After that, Rosa finds an old apron, a sheet, a manikin's head and some photos. In the photos, she reads her name, a dedicatory from her mother and in another a dedicatory to her mother from John-Joe, who we suppose was her beloved (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 17). It is after taking out a ledger—a book of records the nuns had—that Rosa realises her mother had been a penitent in a Magdalene Laundry and we are able to listen to the real victims (Burke-Brogan, *Eclipsed* 17). In the second play, the past is unravelled on Halloween when Sister Benedict appears on stage and removes the black cross from the head of the mommy-figure of Sister Luke. At that moment the dead come back to life in order to tell the truth about those who did not have the opportunity to do so: “ ... Stones and bricks twitch, try to release their trapped horrors. The pain held in the earth. Sister Luke's my name. I had to come back to tell my story.— It's Halloween! ... ” (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 7). As we can see here, writing and telling the truth about the past, what Sister Luke is doing, is what Burke-

Brogan is really doing in these plays: talking about something that everyone knows, but nobody talks about:

... Words — on my heart-shaped guimpes, words already written in the earth, on the surface of the Bog of Allen, in the drykes of the Burren, in the flight of birds over Black Head, on drumlins near Monaghan. I catch them, make them visible, write them all down with stout from that Laundry chimney. (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 8)

Like in *Eclipsed*, Burke-Brogan introduces here some objects representing women that act as reminders of trauma too. As Nathaniel Vincent Mohatt, Azure B. Thompson, Nghi D. Thai, and Jacob Kraemer Tebes claim, some repressed memories come to the survivor's mind triggered by personal and public reminders of trauma (130). The mere presence of these objects makes the victim remember and relive the trauma through intrusive recollections, nightmares, flashbacks and psychophysiological reactivity to reminders—what is known as post-traumatic stress disorder (McNally 105; Caruth 1995, 6; Herman, 35; Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart 172). In these plays, the victims are not present, so they do not undergo this process. Instead, it is the audience who does so as witnesses. It is by looking at these objects that the memory of those women is revived and thus their story is not forgotten: “Come over and look into the crater under that red-toothed bull-dozer. Hundreds and hundreds of worn-out boots, torn aprons, all holding their own pain! —” (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 10).

We can see how Burke-Brogan, in a subtle way, is claiming that the disclosure of past information from the part of the nuns and the exhibition of these objects could benefit all those Magdalenes whose past is unknown to them, as well as to the whole country; acknowledging the past may prevent us from committing the same mistakes again. Moreover, these objects are full

of symbolism; not only do they represent these women, they symbolise all the damage done to them and the individual experiences they had. Although they are just boots, aprons, habits and sheets that may have belonged to anyone, each object has a particular story of a real woman who had been confined in the Laundry. Against the homogenising discourse adopted by the state and the Church, Burke-Brogan gives names to those inmates who had once worn these garments. This playwright recovers here these women's forgotten stories and identities that have been reduced to dust and rags waiting to be buried. As Bernadette Sweeney (2008) claims, "the placement of the body on stage relative to other 'objects', both animate and inanimate, emphasizes the body as object" (Sweeney 15). This statement is useful in my conception of the Magdalene's body as an object of abuse treated as a mere object too.

While the Laundry where *Eclipsed* is set is closed, the one in *Stained Glass* is being demolished. Burke-Brogan recovers here a sad chapter of Irish history when in 1996, after the closure of the last Magdalene Asylum—the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge Asylum—, the discovery of Irish women's bodies that were buried illegally there triggered uneasiness among the Irish population. The inaction of the State and the cremation of those anonymous bodies were fiercely criticised by the United Nations Committee against Torture. Yet, the torture committed against former inmates was justified by the McAleese Report (2013) which gave legal bases to the cremation of women's bodies following the Births and Deaths Registration (Ireland) Act (1863) and the Births and Deaths Registration Acts (1880-1996) as we saw in the previous part of the thesis. What we can see here, as it is happening in the play, is that women were not offered public recognition and their lives were negated. The denial of a proper burial and the violence executed against them during life and after death is highlighted in this play where Sister Luke tries to stop the workers unsuccessfully; the dead do not count since they cannot be heard

anymore (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 69). Throughout the play, the audience participates in the demolition of the building without realising it. By their inaction, they take part in the erasure of the past at the same time they contribute to the damage done to these women. Sister Luke tries to reconstruct the stained window the bulldozer has demolished, but it is in vain (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 70). The past cannot be changed, and the only alternative left is to face the consequences of all the damage caused.

Unable to change the course of history, Sister Luke and Maura Ber in *Stained Glass*, and Nellie-Nora and Rosa in *Eclipsed* try to compensate the victims by telling their stories. Despite the attempts made by these characters for the contrary, these women's voices, together with their identities and bodies, are finally erased by the closure of the Laundry in *Eclipsed* and by its demolition in *Stained Glass*. In the latter, the convent has become a museum where Magdalene's photos are displayed (Burke-Brogan, *Stained Glass* 70). Even though records of these women are kept and made public, the commercialisation with these women's stories is raised and criticised here by Sister Luke. What is being criticised here in an ironic way is not only the fact that the victims were not asked to give their consent—basically because they were all dead or they have emigrated—, but also the way they have done it. They have exhumed and cremated the remaining bodies to make the life of others public without considering if the survivors would like to be known. Neither these women's privacy nor their will is taken into account, so they are not really helped but rather humiliated even more.

On a general level, what Burke-Brogan is doing in these plays is to grant recognition and voice to all those women who have been abandoned, concealed, and deprived of their agency. It is by making this story public and making others participate in it that a challenging attitude is

adopted towards those who pretended to silence a questionable past. As these plays demonstrate, the erasure of thousands of women's identities, voices, and bodies along the course of Irish history is an undeniable reality which has been possible thanks to the concealing attitude of the perpetrators of this crime as well as to the inaction of society. Yet, the theatre has contributed to the spread of this hidden reality and the restitution and healing of these victims. Despite the impossibility to help them, Burke-Brogan's aim has been to complicate the oversight of this historical event. Moreover, this Irish playwright has also aimed to present the whole picture of this event by introducing the perspective of the nuns too. Against the general view of nuns as perpetrators, Burke-Brogan offers a balanced perspective where not all the clergy do harm to the inmates. Moreover, she shows that all women were vulnerable to this patriarchal system.

## Chapter Five. Magdalenes and Films

### 5.1. Introductory remarks

According to Russell L. Sharman, cinema is a powerful medium of communication which allows us to make sense of our world where light, costumes, composition, frames and characters give sense to it (2020). The visual representation of the Irish Magdalene Laundries, documentaries, and films is almost as extensive as the novelisation of this historical event. The two films I am going to analyse in this chapter (Stephen Frears's "Philomena" (2013) and Aisling Walsh's "Sinners" (2002)) are faithful depictions, with some exceptions, of the history of Magdalene Asylums in twentieth-century Ireland. Overall, the fictionalisation of the Irish reality of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries enabled filmmakers to give voice to those marginal groups who were not allowed to tell their stories. The twentieth century was a turning point in Ireland not only concerning social and political issues but also cultural ones. The Celtic Revival was pursued by those who attempted to restore Irish identity away from the English presence leaving way to a wide variety of cultural movements like the Irish Literary Theatre or the Gaelic League, which tried to establish a national identity lost by the influence of English values (Nolan 157). There has always been a preference for American cinema over British or Irish ones. Yet, these two industries finally achieved their inclusion in the cultural panorama, not without difficulties (Caughie and Rockett 1-4).

Born in 1909, the cinema was a relatively new genre in Ireland which was dependant on the British industry first and the American one later (Caughie and Rockett 11). In 1927 the Cinematograph Films Act was established in Britain to increase the production of domestic films against the American dominance. But once they obtained their independence, the Irish film

industry had to fight against other forces like nationalist policies and Catholic ideas; in John Caughie's and Kevin Rockett's (2011) words:

... nationalist policies towards the cinema and popular culture in general were propelled by xenophobia and a conservative Catholic morality that was already clearly evident before independence. The new State expended its energies on a cultural protectionist policy that sought to exclude from Ireland any influences which might challenge the pre-modern official Gaelic and Catholic cultures ... The Official Film Censor operates under the Censorship of Films Acts, 1923, which restricts any film from public exhibition if it is deemed indecent, obscene or blasphemous, or is "contrary to public morality". Subjective assessment by conservative censors led to a policy of restricting anything which infringed Catholic morality. As a result, films which dealt with contraception and abortion, or represented in any sympathetic way extramarital affairs or divorce ... or depicted rape or homosexuality, were either banned or cut. (Caughie and Rockett 11)

This ban was eliminated in 1965 and since then, filmmakers started to look critically at Irish culture and power institutions. Yet, the huge control the Church and the State exerted upon the film industry slowed down the development of this genre. The image of the Irish presented to the world was the main concern for politicians and members of the Church at the establishment of the Free State. Hence, cinema suffered constraints concerning the visual representation of Irish life.

Modernisation brought several problems to the hegemony of the Church in Ireland as we have seen, and the cinema specifically posed a great challenge to this institution since the 1950s (Gibbons 211; Gillespie 20). During the twentieth century, Irish films questioned the national

identity exploring institutions and social practices that made up that identity (Gillespie 17). Cinema has targeted, and continues to do so, social, political, and cultural problems not only of the present but also those unresolved issues of the past silenced under censorship; broadly speaking, it has given prominence to that part of society “whose story has not yet been told” (Gibbons 215). During the 1980s, as Michael Gillespie (2008) claims, filmmakers represented a fragmented society focusing on the marginalised groups (22). During the 1990s, when The Film Board was established, foreign productions of Irish-themed films abounded as well as local ones, all of them echoing the erosion of the Irish identity and mores that was taking place at that time (Barton and O’Brien 1).

The State, the Church, and the family were recurrent themes in Irish films represented as part of Irish identity (Gibbons 114). Yet, it was at the turn of the twenty-first century when these institutions were fiercely and openly criticised, especially Catholicism and its teachings in Ireland. In Gillespie’s words, “Some of the most prominent contemporary films dealing with the church in Ireland focus on what has sadly become a timely topic: abuse in religious-run institutions” (170). Although Gillespie offers a negative vision of this approach, I believe the film industry has contributed to the spread of those questionable practices and the recognition of those victims. Concerning what we can label as “Magdalene films”—those films based on the story of Magdalene Asylums and their inmates—, there has been an outburst of filmmakers willing to bring this event to the silver screen. It is worth mentioning that none of the films produced about the Magdalene Laundries is Irish and that they were broadcasted in several countries outside Ireland first. This may be explained by the reticence from the part of the Church and the State to bring past ghosts back and by the censorship that existed during great part of the twentieth century in Ireland (Gibbons 210). The cruel practices carried out by the

Catholic Church were concealed throughout the twentieth century despite several attempts to disclose them. Yet, at the turn of the next century, the cinematographic industry broke the burden of silence spreading the truth about these institutions and questioning the Catholic teachings of the past (Gibbons 215). Due to the popularity of the film industry during these decades, it offered filmmakers the opportunity to draw attention to certain social problems that had been concealed. The wider scope of the cinema, not only limited to a country or time, favoured the spread of this reality in Ireland and abroad.

Mullan's film "The Magdalene Sisters" has been extensively analysed by scholars like Smith, Rosende-Pérez, Pérez-Vides, McCormick and Luddy, so I have decided not to incorporate it in this chapter. Yet, I consider it is worth mentioning it as the referent for many other films which have been produced on this topic. Inspired by the documentary "Sex in a Cold Climate" (1998), the film tells the story of three young rural middle-class girls—Bernadette, Rose and Margaret—who, during the 1960s, end up in a Magdalene Asylum for diverse reasons, namely rape, pregnancy, and vanity respectively. Mullan seems to give prominence to the perspective of the victims representing the nuns as perpetrators. Mullan's film was met with great acclaim from the public, but it was not exempted from criticism. A general criticism Mullan's film received was concerning its biased and simplistic depiction of the Magdalenes' story (Gillespie; Smith; Luddy *Prostitution* 10; McCormick 50). Despite these negative criticisms, some reviewers consider Mullan's film a fictional account of real events and a contribution to the acknowledgement of the Irish past being considered a "narrative of resistance", a questioning of the past and a social claim for State's intervention (Pérez-Vides, "Gender, Deviance" 9; Rosende-Pérez 126).

My focus on this chapter, though, is on Walsh's film "Sinners" (2002) and Frears's film "Philomena" (2013). Regarding the first film, "Sinners" tells the story of an orphan Irish girl—Anne-Marie—who falls pregnant out of wedlock in 1963. Here, I will explore the violence executed against the unmarried mother's body in Mother and Baby Homes and the precarious condition they were relegated to. Walsh depicts abusive religious people who took advantage of these women's vulnerability and abused them physically and sexually. But Walsh also makes the State and society responsible for the damage caused to these girls. Pérez-Vides has analysed this film focusing on unmarried motherhood and the violence executed against their bodies ("Gender, Deviance"; "Disciplined Bodies"). She has praised this film as a narrative of resistance, of recovery, of questioning the past and as a social claim for State's intervention. I totally agree with her and my intention here is to widen the scope of analysis and to offer a more complete view of this film which has contributed, although to a less extent than other films, to the disclosure of the cruel truth about being an unmarried mother in twentieth-century Ireland.

Concerning the second film, "Philomena" is based on Martin Sixsmith's book *The Lost Child of Philomena Lee: A Mother, Her Son, and a Fifty-Year Search* (2010). It also focuses on an unmarried mother—Philomena—who is sent to a Mother and Baby Home in Roscrea run by The Sisters of the Sacred Heart where she is deprived of her son. The film fictionalises the sad reality of all those Irish unmarried mothers who lost their children, along with the arduous task of finding them after their release from a Magdalene Asylum—the silencing attitude of the nuns when asked about Philomena's son hinders the acknowledgement of the truth. This film has been analysed by Pérez-Vides in her article "Magdalene Otherness and Ethical Turns in Stephen Frears's 'Philomena'" (2016) where she explores the concepts of "Otherness" and segregation in the film following Butler's and Agamben's theories. Following Trauma studies, we will see here

how the protagonist tries to overcome the trauma of losing a child and the difficulties she encounters when facing her traumatic past. This film is mainly about justice, forgiveness and healing, mixing drama and comedy to catch the viewer and to make him/her sympathise with the protagonist.

In this chapter, my intention is to analyse these two films from a postmodernist and psychoanalytical perspective to see how the film industry has contributed to the spread of this sad reality hidden in Ireland. The exploration of issues such as discipline, vulnerability, trauma, and healing in these films will provide us with a more complete view of the damage caused to thousands of unmarried mothers in Ireland, as well as with the perspective adopted by outsiders.

## 5.2. Uses and Abuses of the Unmarried Mother's Body; Vulnerable Identities in Aisling

### Walsh's "Sinners" (2002)

Women in twentieth-century Ireland were subjected to strict gender norms which sustained sexual differentiation. A patriarchal system existed, reinforced by the Catholic Church, which controlled and restricted female sexuality. Basically, sexual freedom applied to men who were allowed to occupy the public sphere whereas women were sexually repressed and confined to the private sphere. Hence, gender was, as Butler claims, socially constructed, determining the role and place of men and women in society and building a power relation between both groups. In rural Ireland, women were subjected to this patriarchal system in which they occupied the lowest position. In that relationship with others that define us, our gender and sexuality are dispossessed and governed by cultural norms (Nynäs and Yip 16).

Whereas the female body was commonly considered a private matter during the twentieth century, the Irish State, especially the Church, made it a public concern alluding to the vulnerability of women's bodies exposed to rape, incest, prostitution, and sexual illnesses. Given these dangers, the woman's body became the target of restrictions and repressions following the Catholic moral rules of self-denial and purity I have discussed in the previous part of this thesis. Moreover, the female body was also a family concern; the morality of the girl endangered or preserved the reputation of the whole family and even of the whole community. Not only did this discourse of vulnerability render these women powerless, but it also justified their indefinite detention in reformatory institutions on the grounds of national security.

Unmarried motherhood became a great social and political problem during the twentieth century. The Catholic Church and the State attempted to eradicate this problem by institutionalising mothers in Magdalene Asylums, after giving birth in a Mother and Baby Home, and either confining illegitimate children in Industrial Schools, or giving them in adoption (Finnegan 27; Luddy, *Prostitution* 237; O'Connor and Shepard 130; Smith 53). The conspiracy of silence Finnegan talks about is highlighted by Walsh on several occasions (46). Firstly, silence about the sins committed by women is encouraged by the family who removes the “deviant” from the public gaze secretly in order to maintain the family's respectability in the community (Milotte 19). In this scene, Anne-Marie is seen in a wide shot approaching the convent while her brother remains in the house. The spectator sees her distancing from him in the car and he/she instantly get the same feeling of abandonment Anne-Marie has. Walsh criticises these women's families who avoid responsibility towards them—this can be seen when Eammon turns his back on his sister—and, the collaborative attitude of members of society who acknowledged the reality of the Laundries and collaborated with the Church anyway—this is seen when Anne-

Marie escapes and Frank delivers her to the police. The presence of policemen controlling the inmates and the persecution of Anne-Marie when she escapes leaves clear the State's involvement in the management of the Laundries (Walsh 01:05:16-01:08:54). Finally, men's circumvention of responsibility is perfectly stated in Walsh's film at the end when Ann-Marie reproaches it to her brother Eammon:

I am only young and I have varicose veins. Six days a week I've been washing other people's filthy laundry. I've had not a soft pillow or a nice sheet. I've been beaten, I've been shouted at, and I've been told that I'm filth. They stole my beautiful baby and I'm supposed to be grateful? They took my life away Eammon. What they did was wrong, accept that; I do, but it was both of us. Tell me, why was your life well protected more than mine? You've had left me here. (Walsh 01:26:52-01:27:42)

Walsh uses here a medium shot with Ann-Marie in the background and her brother in the foreground while she gives her speech. This election may be interpreted as another sign of women's inability to break with that authority which subjugates them. Although the camera focuses on her most of the time, the opposite perspective is also present when he answers her. Ann-Marie's speech highlights that this unjust disciplinary system rendered women vulnerable and wounded while men had special privileges. Her attitude here is one of empowerment against the social conventions. His answer—"I was scared. I'm sorry"—shows men's inaction, as well as the terror imposed by the Church limiting people's challenging attitudes as we can see in Anne-Marie's response: "You know what my friend Kitty told me? The only power they have over you is keeping you afraid" (Walsh 01:27:51-01:28:05). Finally, silence about the functioning of the Magdalene Asylums is maintained by the State which exempts the Laundries from inspections

and collaborates with the Church. Yet, a clearer moment in the film showing the cooperative attitude of the government is when the Minister pays a visit to the nuns to express his thanks for the work they are doing (Walsh 01:01:14-01:05:14).

Considered “outcasts”, the protagonists of these films are excluded and marginalised suffering different types of violence. Once inside the Asylum, this patriarchal system is maintained since the nuns, as the maximum authority, control and discipline the women (Murphy 148). This disciplinary system and the authority of the nuns are perfectly depicted by Walsh in Rev. Mother Paul’s speech by which she leaves clear these women, as sinners, are equated to Mary Magdalene and their confinement justified under the premise of moral reform: “You may be a sinner, you may have contravened the laws of God and society, but here you can do penance for your sins. You can earn, as Mary Magdalene did, the forgiveness of our blessed God. So remember my dear that our heaven’s sent mission is to return you to the loving arms of our loved Jesus Christ” (Walsh 00:03:41-00:04:03). During this speech, we can see Ann-Marie going through the Laundry corridors behind a nun who, later, cuts her hair. The music here reinforces the dramatic situation of having been abandoned by her family. As this speech demonstrates, the nuns find penance necessary for the inmates’ achievement of spiritual salvation from eternal damnation. This penance, based on starvation, poor sleep, and hard work, can only be interpreted as disciplinary techniques which aim at reducing these women to bare life leaving them in a vulnerable state. Also, this discourse of necessary moral reform justified the exploitation of women used as labour force receiving no education or payment (McCarthy 156-157).

The mere deprivation of one’s freedom and of private space through indefinite detention in a prison-like institution can be seen as a form of violence executed against these women by

the sovereign power of the Church alleging the danger they pose for other women. In Butler's words, "indefinite detention is an illegitimate exercise of power, but it is, significantly, part of a broader tactic of law in the name of security" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 67). One day, Theresa tells the nuns she wants to leave but they discourage her from communicating with her relatives that put her there. She suggests getting a job in a house, but Rev. Mother Paul says: "You're a Magdalene. Do you really think any outstanding family would want you in their homes to dwell on your penance? Have you any money?" Theresa says no, and the nun continues: "So you'll end up on the street selling your body to feed your mouth. How could I, in all conscious stand before God if I let that happen? ... Try escaping and the girls will haunt you down and bring you back" (Walsh 00:29:44-00:30:32). This discourse was a repeated one by the nuns in an attempt to justify the indefinite detention of "deviant women". The statement "you're a Magdalene" pinpoints the stigma attached to these women once they have fallen which will remain with them for their whole lives (Luddy, "Sex and the Single Girl" 85).

But the confinement of these "outcasts" seems to be not enough for their reformation. As Foucault claims, "a punishment like forced labour or even imprisonment—mere loss of liberty—has never functioned without a certain additional element of punishment that certainly concerns the body itself: rationing of food, sexual deprivation, corporal punishment, solitary confinement" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 16). These penitents experienced hard working conditions and corporeal constraints such as silence, surveillance, prayer, isolation, and poor dieting. In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Foucault claims that the body is always invested by power relations by which it is subjected and used as labour force (25-26). Given the vulnerability of this group, the body of the Magdalene was subjugated and controlled until made docile. Women's bodies in these films are "transformed" and "improved" according to a strict Catholic doctrine

that represses femininity and sexual desire. Used as labour force, the protagonists suffer what Žižek calls “objective violence” being educated through corporeal coercion and work (12).

During the nun’s first speech Theresa is moved into a room and her hair is cut while Sister Bernadette says: “There is no place for vanity in God’s house.” Theresa is forced to take off her clothes in front of the nuns when a nurse comes and checks her. When she is totally naked, a bandage is placed around her breasts to conceal them (Walsh 00:04:10-00:06:20). Walsh uses here a medium shot displaying Ann-Marie’s body while the nun is always seen in the background. Yet, her naked body is never on screen. The music during this scene reinforces the drama of the situation forcing the spectator to sympathise with the protagonist. This scene resembles Phyllis Valentine’s testimony when she narrates how the nuns considered the body and the look of it a sin, and how they had to hide their female attributes (Humphries). Then, Theresa is given a uniform and moved to the Laundry where Sister Cecilia shows Theresa her position in the laundry (Walsh 00:06:49-00:07:45). Most of the time we see them working and praying even in advanced pregnancy which is the only way to achieve salvation from the nuns’ perspective.

This carceral system, which makes these women a slave force, seems to be softened by Walsh here allowing women to receive letters and to have visits although supervised. Yet, this is not a defence of the system, but the only way Walsh has of telling the story to the audience. This hard work is interrupted by the recreation time when women listen to the radio, read, or knit. All these were common practices in Mother and Baby Homes, as Bernadette comments in her testimony, which inmates were allowed to perform once a week, although being supervised all the time and the leisure activities being carried out in silence (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of

Bernadette”). Yet, Walsh eliminates the presence of the nun in these moments so that the inmates can be free for a short time. These instances contrast sharply with the rest of the inmates’ day reinforcing the punitive and coercive character of the system.

Walsh does not remain indifferent to the story he is telling and criticises the hypocritical attitude of the Church and the contradictory discourse they use to subjugate and control women. Fassin affirms that the politics of compassion encouraged by humanitarian governments is a politics of inequality and solidarity towards those more vulnerable (*Humanitarian Reason* 3). Walsh criticises here this religious discourse and the fact that those religious people do not teach by offering an example. In a mass, the priest gives a speech about temptation:

Today I want to discuss how we avoid the temptations of the flesh, as the Lord himself said, the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak. You sit here before God and me as penitents. Sometimes the road ahead must be seen very long but you must never give up hope, as our Lord said. Joy should be in Heaven of a one sinner that repents more than over ninety and nine ... (Walsh 00:21:36-00:22:14)

While he is giving his speech, he scratches his intimate parts, and some inmates laugh at seeing this. During this speech, Walsh uses a medium shot displaying the inmates and the priest. Once the priest gets on the ladder to remove the dove from the statute, we see him from below. This shot can be interpreted as him being above the inmates as powerful and it anticipates the next scene. The sexual abuse of Angela in the next scene contrasts with the sermon the priest had given to the inmates.

These women's bodies, engaged in power relations, were vulnerable to sexual abuse. Concerning the relationship between bodies—sexual relations—it may be seen as a power relation through which the male dominates and uses the female body for his benefit. In the Irish context, in which women were sexually illiterate, they were victims of what Žižek refers to as “subjective violence” by which they were objectified and subordinated (2). One form of women's objectification and subordination present in the film is through rape. The objectification of women as sexual objects can be seen in Walsh's film where Angela is sexually abused by the priest. The priest calls Angela to his office and asks her to lock the door and to kneel. He says he saw her looking under her soutane with devious eyes, but she denies it. He unbuttons his pants, and the camera moves away but we can hear how the priest masturbates himself in front of her; what we see while this is happening is the Laundry where all women are working and praying. Then we see the priest and Angela again; he is cleaning himself whilst Angela is crying. He calls her “slut” and gives her the handkerchief. Afterwards, Angela returns to work and Theresa asks her what the priest wanted. She lied but then she says: “I didn't ask to be pretty and I hate being pretty. I would end up like my mum ... It's my fault. I'm filthy little slut” (Walsh 00:23:13-00:25:33). She repeats the priest's words having internalised this discourse. This episode encourages the recognition of Irish women as vulnerable and helpless, using Cavarero's and Butler's terms, in a patriarchal system where men's responsibility is eluded whereas women are punished with social rejection and silenced. Walsh shows the silencing attitude adopted by nuns and inmates about sexual abuses. In the next scene, Theresa brings Angela to the nuns and tells them what the priest did. Theresa returns to work while Angela is taken to a mental institution. In the next scene, Theresa realises Angela was not the only one abused by the priest, but everyone keeps silent so as not to get into trouble. After this, Sister

Bernadette announces Father Flannery has gone on a mission and a new priest is introduced to them. Here priests seem to be punished by the nuns; an inversion of power depicting nuns as the maximum authority within the Laundry (Walsh 00:25:36-00:31:15). Yet, sexual abuses are not openly discussed here either. Irish dual morality allowed these cases of abuse to happen and these responsible men to go away unpunished. As this film shows with the nuns' inaction, "fallen women" were not worth credibility or justice but punishment and reformation.

Gender violence is normally understood as that performed on women by men, but in the Laundries, they are not only men who abused these women, but also women who execute violence against other women. Physical and psychological violence within the institution has been proved to be a common mechanism of power used by the nuns to subjugate and control inmates, as many survivors have testified. Walsh emphasises this sad part of the Magdalenes' story but without distancing from reality. Several are the instances in which the woman's body, always seen as "the Other", becomes the object of violence. Following Foucault's theory on discipline and sexuality, the body becomes the target of modern forms of power. Concerning psychological violence, it is not only exercised through insults and humiliations in Walsh's film, but also by the deprivation of these women's children. Except for Brida, who accepts the adoption saying her child will be better with a family who will give him everything, the rest of the inmates resist the loss of their offspring who are given in adoption to American couples. After being punished for escaping some nuns take Theresa's baby, but she resists, claiming her right over the child. Sister Bernadette reminds her that the child has never been hers and Theresa says: "He is. He trusts me. When he sees me coming he lifts his light arms. What he's going to think when he sees those stranger faces appearing down and...he will think I don't want him, that's what he'll think; he'll think I don't love him." Rev. Mother Paul affirms he will be alright

with the new family who has love, money, and everything she may want for her baby. Sister Bernadette takes the baby from her arms and leaves. Theresa pushes a nun aside and shouts: “Robbing babies out of their mothers’ arms. Where’s God’s holy will in this?” (01:09:47-01:11:11). The music in this scene, and the full shot chosen displaying Ann-Marie holding her baby surrounded by nuns, reinforce this dramatic moment. At the end, Walsh focuses on the protagonist just to finish with a full shot again depicting empty beds. This scene shows the drama thousands of unmarried women endured in Ireland justified by the nuns alleging these women had nothing to offer to their babies. The deprivation of these women’s rights to be mothers by distancing them from their offspring contributed to the erosion of these women’s identities; a violent act which demolished the natural and biological bond between mother and child, and which damaged these women psychologically. However, Walsh seems to give less prominence to psychological punishments than to physical punishments which are common in the films for disobedience.<sup>22</sup> One reason for punishment was breaking the imposed silence: as an example, Kitty is caught talking by the Sister and punished (Walsh 00:08:56-00:10:42). Another reason for punishment was bad behaviour. Walsh omits this spectacle of torture most of the time in scene as Pérez-Vides notices (“Disciplined Bodies” 8-9). The only physical punishments we see are those of Kitty and Theresa. Kitty is slapped one day for talking; Sister Bernadette urges her to pull her hand out and she slashes it several times with a belt (Walsh 00:09:30-00:10:43). After the death of Kitty, Theresa is punished for fighting with another inmate. She rebels against the nun saying: “Maybe if you hadn’t stolen her baby. Sold to the highest bidder ... You and your God murdered my best friend”. After saying this she grabs Theresa by the hair and makes her kneel down and repeat: “I renounce the devil and all his works. I’ll cleanse my soul of blasphemous thoughts. Spare my unborn child from the corruption of my spirit”. She keeps silent, so Sister Bernadette

punches her and says: “You’re an instrument of the devil ...”. By the punches, she provokes Theresa’s labour (Walsh 00:56:23-00:57:23). This scene proves the nuns’ inhumanity towards inmates endangering their well-being and that of their babies. Instead of being offered help and reassurance, these women suffered constant abuses to be morally reformed. Vulnerability, therefore, was not only natural in these cases, but also imposed by those in power. These scenes encapsulate the violence near sadism which, although exaggerated sometimes, these authoritarian figures executed against those who did not exist. These women’s confinement and identity denial justified their abuse being the property of the Church. Being their rights suspended and their body exposed to the use and abuse of those in power, these women “in need of protection” became more vulnerable and docile within a disciplinary system from which they could not escape.

Yet, they tried to escape, which was the most common cause of punishment. In Walsh’s film, Theresa is harshly beaten by Sister Bernadette after being brought back to the convent. We do not see the process but the result; her hair has been cut and her face is covered in blood. Sister Bernadette, looking at her, says: “You dared to imagine you’re something special. Shall I tell you what I see? I see ugliness, wantonness, corrupt under the failed flesh. An abomination of God’s Holy will” (Walsh 01:08:54-01:31:44). As I said before, haircutting was a type of punishment for bad behaviour and a kind of warning for the rest of the women—teaching through examples to avoid bad behaviour. This association between crime and punishment in the mind of the inmate prevents them to challenge the Church’s discipline (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* 9). Yet, it should also be considered a form of violence against women’s bodies whose femininity is taken away. This practice deprived these women of their identity and they went through a process of standardisation (Finnegan 26; Titley 5).

Not only were these women made to suffer during their pregnancy, but they were also forced to have a painful labour as a punishment for their sin. Like other inmates in Walsh's film, Kitty gives birth in the Mother and Baby Home and this is depicted as a violent act for several reasons. She is assisted by a nurse and consoled by Theresa while Sister Bernadette directs cruel words to her; she says: "We can do without the noise, thank you ... There will be no screaming. If you die it will be no more than you deserve. ... What your reckoning pupils would make of all this Kitty?" (Walsh 00:31:33-00:32:43). During this scene, Walsh uses a full shot when Ann-Marie appears on scene while a close-up shot when the nun does. This difference, together with the poor lighting of the scene, highlights the secrecy with which labours were assisted in Laundries. The next scene showing the umbilical cord and some blood in a bucket may refer to the carelessness with which pregnant women were treated inside the Laundries. For those "deviant women", childbirth is interpreted by the nuns as a necessary painful process (Pérez-Vides, "Disciplined Bodies" 6-9). Hence, they were denied painkillers or healthcare. Instead, they were severely punished being insulted and neglected. Astonishingly, these women did not lose their babies given the cruel regime of abuse they were subjected to. Yet, what is more alarming is the inhuman conditions in which they gave birth to their babies, together with the lack of healthcare in the postpartum. The strength and willingness of these women to be mothers are worthy of praise here since it reveals the power of those vulnerable women surrounded by a hostile environment.

Overall, Walsh's film faithfully represents the life of thousands of Irish women who were incarcerated against their will for breaking the moral discourse of the time. These women not only suffered violence and corporeal constraints, but also psychological damage caused by the deprivation of their voice and identity. Yet, by fictionalising the life of survivors, Walsh has

attempted to restore these women's legitimacy, to offer them recognition, and to grant them a place and an active role in society away from the stigma attached to them. Moreover, this filmmaker has disclosed a reality to raise awareness about these women involved and to claim accountability for the crimes committed.

### 5.3. Trauma and Healing after the Loss of a Child in Stephen Frear's "Philomena" (2013)

The Catholic morality has always associated sex with sin and imposed a clear-cut distinction between sexuality and motherhood: "In western logic woman is the seat of such oppositional categorisation, for patriarchal logic defines an exclusive border between motherhood and sexuality. The Virgin or the whore, the pure or the impure, the nature or the seducer is either asexual mother or sexualised beauty, but one precludes the other" (Marion 130). As a cultural construction, gender secures reproductive sexual ties and excludes sexual relations for other aims. Following Butler, normativity gives us guidelines to live but it also normalises life establishing what is human, real, liveable, and intelligible. Norms concerning sexuality were very restrictive in Ireland, as we have already seen, excluding, and punishing "deviant women" for contravening the ideal image of the good wife and mother.

Frears, unlike Walsh, does not encapsulate the life of "fallen women" within a reformatory institution; he focuses on the afterwards, on the life of an old ex-penitent who still bears the psychological scars caused by strict discipline and by the loss of her loved son. However, at the beginning he alternates images of Philomena in the present with flashbacks of her past the day she committed the sin that led her to be confined. This blurs the difference between present and past. Frears delves into the disciplinary system implanted by the Church which, supposedly granting compassion and help to those in need, punished unmarried mothers,

deprived Irish women of the right to be mothers and made a profit from the selling of babies. At her entrance two nuns interrogate Philomena:

—Sister Hildergate: ‘Did you let him put his hands on you?’

—Reverend Mother: ‘Did you enjoy your sin?’

—Sister Hildergate: ‘Did you take your knickers down?’ ...

—Philomena: ‘Yes. Oh, Reverend Mother at school the sisters never taught us about babies.’

—Reverend Mother: ‘Don’t dare blame the sisters for this. You are the cause of this shame. You and your indecency.’ (Frears 00:05:40-00:06:21)

This scene intertwines with images of Philomena in the present going home. The use of a medium shot and the music here by Frears reinforces the drama of the scene at the same time the distinction between freedom and coercion is highlighted. This dialogue lets us know sex education was not granted to Philomena as a young girl and this ignorance caused her to fall. Even though sex education was introduced in Ireland in the last decades of the nineteenth century, as Bartley (170) and Luddy (*Prostitution* 214) affirm, the Victorian mentality adopted by the Church, in control of the educative system from 1838 to the 1940s, managed to silence the discourse of sex in the twentieth century (Mort 128-150). Reverend Mother’s words “shame” and “indecency” refer to Philomena’s pregnancy out of wedlock; a sin she could hide within the convent (Luddy, *Prostitution* 123; Luddy, “Unmarried Mothers” 109-126; Smith 48-52).

Frears highlights the secretive and silencing attitude the Church adopted and the elusiveness of its responsibility towards all those victims. As Kaplan claims, silencing is encouraged by political and social reasons since acknowledging the truth could damage whole

nations as it is the case of Ireland (Kaplan 74). We can appreciate in the film how the State and Church, as powerful institutions, adopt a silencing attitude about the past and impose silence on Philomena as a mechanism to avoid reprisals. Any time Philomena goes to Roscrea to enquire into her adopted son, Sister Claire conceals the truth saying that the old nuns have died, or the records have been burnt in a fire. Later, Martin—the journalist who helps her— discovers that neither the head nun was dead, nor the documents had been accidentally burnt. He sees Sister Hildergate with his own eyes the first time he goes to Roscrea, and the truth behind the fire and the adoption is revealed to Martin at a tavern one day after visiting the Sisters of Mercy; the barman confesses to Martin that the nuns had burnt the records embarrassed of having sold babies to America for 1,000 pounds and to avoid people knowing about it, although all society was aware of it. This situation is an analogy of all those Irish survivors who are trying to make their voices heard against an imperative of silence imposed by those in power. During the Second World War, a black market of adoption was set up in America and they found Ireland a potential country to obtain babies. While the rest of Europe was protecting their children after the war, Ireland was getting rid of illegitimate children. De Valera opened the adoption flow and Archbishop McQuaid, with the help of the Department of External Affairs, granted the dispatch of thousands of illegitimate children (Milotte 22-25). Sean Ross Abbey was one of those adoption societies as Sister Hildergate confessed before her death in 1995; within her confession, she also admitted having destroyed documents from adoptees and their mothers (Milotte 114). It was not until the 1970s that the adoption business was stopped when single mothers were paid state benefits (Milotte 185).

Butler's *Precarious Life* (2006) is based on the foundation that power determines whose voices are given prominence and whose are silenced. In her latest work, she claims that the

media can be an “infrastructural support” if it helps the victims giving them recognition in the public sphere (Butler, “Rethinking Vulnerability” 14). It is not coincidental that Frears introduces here the figure of a journalist as the one who helps Philomena tell her story. The media, controlled by the State most of the time, has the power to decide how, when and from what perspective a story is told. Furthermore, the media, through the spreading of information, has the power to destabilise individuals and whole institutions; for that reason, when Sister Claire feels her integrity and that of the Church challenged by Martin’s persecution, she warns Philomena against trusting this journalist arguing he only wants her money (Frears 00:31:37-00:31:45). The relationship between Martin and Philomena could be seen as one of power. Martin, as a journalist, can decide and manipulate Philomena’s story for his benefit. However, he encourages her to carry on with the enquiry about her lost child, he accompanies her in her search for truth, and he helps her voice to be heard. The figure of Martin resembles that of O’Riordan who, as we have seen, is an Irish social activist and director who has helped Irish women survivors; thanks to the documentary “The Forgotten Maggies” (2009) and the book *Whispering Hope* (2016), O’Riordan has achieved the goal of making these victims’ stories known and of granting them compensation for the damage the Church and the State caused to them.

Butler claims that violent events should be openly discussed to find the roots of the problem, to learn from them and to avoid future violent acts; we must challenge power and tell our stories (*Precarious Life*). In the same line, Laub encourages the traumatised to speak up as a way of surviving:

None finds peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed “external evil”, which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion ... The “not telling” of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor’s daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor’s conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events. (“Truth and Testimony” 64)

In the process of acknowledging the truth about her son, Philomena works through trauma facing the past. The loss of a child is a traumatic event which leaves the mother broken, but even more painful is the fact of being deprived of her child when given in adoption. In Young Marion’s words, “the experience of going through a full-pregnancy, bearing a child and giving it up for adoption is punitive and traumatic for a woman because the relationship by then is real; it exists” (265). Following Freud, Butler claims that when we lose someone, we do not know exactly what we have lost in that person. The act of mourning is maintained by this enigma until it is discovered. When one loses a person one also loses part of oneself, of who one is without that tie to the other. In that loss, grieving is necessary to overcome it (*Precarious Life* 19-37). Yet, silence and repression of emotions is the most common response to trauma as Laub (“Bearing Witness” 58) and Kaplan (74) claim. On their way to see Mary—Anthony’s sister—, Martin asks Philomena: “Why did you keep this a secret for 50 years?” (Fears 01:01:25-01:01:27) to which she answers: “What I’d done was a sin and I kept it all hidden away. And then I thought to myself that keeping it all hidden away was also a sin because I was lying to everybody. And as it went on I tied myself up in knots, worrying which was the worse sin of the two, having the baby

or the lying. Well, in the end, I couldn't make up my mind Martin" (Fears 01:01:28-01:01:53). Fears uses here a close-up shot of Philomena during her speech while Martin remains silent. In this case, Martin's non-verbal communication is captured on camera showing his disapproval of what the nuns did to her. Apart from using silence as a mechanism of protection, the shame the Church inculcated on Philomena for the sin she had committed remained encouraging her to keep silent about her past. This association between sex and sin is also internalised and accepted by Philomena at her entrance into the Home but also throughout her whole life. In a conversation Philomena has with Martin, she leaves clear she accepted and even felt she deserved the punishment she had received, and she explains to him why she signed the adoption contract: "I signed it because I believed I'd committed a terrible sin and had to be punished. But what made it so much worse was that I enjoyed it ... and after the sex was over, I thought anything that feels so lovely must be wrong" (Fears 00:32:50-00:33:25). The reality was that she was forced to sign an adoption contract in 1955; the nuns denied responsibility for what happened to Philomena, but it was them who forced her to abandon Anthony and relinquish any right over him (Fears 00:32:02-00:32:15). The use of a close-up shot here intensifies the emotions of Philomena and enables the spectator to empathise with her.

In *Studies on Hysteria* (1891) Freud and Breuer establish that there are different responses to trauma, namely taking revenge, forgetting, crying, or keeping silent. In these cases, the trauma is repressed, and rehabilitation is hindered. The alternative is to speak up, to go through the traumatic experience with the help of a listener. The victim should go back to the very moment in which the injury is caused and give it verbal utterance. Otherwise, if repressed, these memories are associated with other effects and they come to the surface whenever a person endures a difficult situation that reminds them of their trauma. Those repressed memories are

stored in the unconscious granted by the person's dissociation between conscious and unconscious. Some ideas are not intense enough to pass the conscious and cause distress in the person. The way to overcome trauma is to associate these two and to bring the unconscious to the conscious (Breuer and Freud 9-12). The day of her son's birthday Philomena decides to break her silence and a difficult process of re-experiencing her trauma starts. Even though Philomena decides to act, that is, to make her story public, she encounters difficulties in coming to terms with the past. Laub recalls the distress the victim may suffer in narrating his/her traumatic experience: "There are never enough words or the right words, there is never enough time or the right time, and never enough listening or the right listening to articulate the story that cannot be fully captured in thought, memory, and speech" ("Truth and Testimony" 63). And she warns: "The act of telling might itself become severely traumatising, if the price of speaking is re-living not relief, but further retraumatisation ... Moreover, if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma—a re-experiencing of the event itself" (Laub, "Truth and Testimony" 67).

There are some instances when Philomena is so overwhelmed by the memories of the past that she doubts about making her story public: When they arrive in America they go to a museum where Martin suggests taking a picture of Philomena for the article. At that moment, she says: "Only, I'm a little bit worried, you see, because if we find him, he might be very disapproving of talking to the papers. Families are very private things" (Frears 00:45:13-00:45:19). Frears uses a wide shot here displaying Philomena surrounded by enormous pillars. This scene takes place at the same time she is regretting making her story public and can be interpreted as the feeling of inferiority she feels confronting the power of the Church. At the hotel, she tells Martin she wants to abandon the search since she is afraid of being accused of

having abandoned her son. However, Martin discovers a photo of Anthony wearing an Irish harp in her jacket; this suggests Anthony did know about his roots and encourages Philomena to continue with the search. On her way to see Pete, Martin and Philomena stop in a church. A few minutes later Philomena abandons the church and tells Martin not to publish the story (Frears 01:09:24-01:09:26). Martin tries to discourage her (Frears 01:09:29-01:09:31). And her response shows that she feels regret for what happened to her son and that she blames herself for losing him: “Well, you heard what Mary said. She said he never gave me a second thought. He wasn’t my Anthony; he was somebody else’s Michel. He probably hated the thought of me ... I should never have let him out of my sight ...” (Frears 01:09:32-01:09:43). Later, she refuses to visit Pete (Frears 01:14:05-01:14:12). She cares about what others would think of her and tries to silence Martin for shame but also as a way of protecting herself—this idea is seen when she asks Martin not to use her real name in the story. This indecision is logical in a person who has suffered too much and who is still frightened of the power of the Church. The internalisation of the Church’s discourse concerning sin and unmarried motherhood leads her to believe she is guilty of everything that has happened to her. Hence, she accepts and assumes the loss of her child and the treatment she received.

Contrary to Philomena, Martin’s response is to take revenge on the nuns. Martin is experiencing trauma from the outside—what Kaplan calls “vicarious trauma”, that is, the empathy the witness experiences and the effects produced in him/her (40-41). In the beginning, Martin feels empathy towards Philomena, but he cannot experience what Philomena does. This can be seen when Martin calls Sally—the newspaper’s editor—to publish the story: “The years melted away as a 50-year silence was broken by two simple words, “Hello, mum. I could write it now” (Frears 00:37:05-00:37:13). His cold attitude after he was told Philomena’s story shows the

distant perspective Martin adopts towards the story. Žižek claims that we are constantly exposed to violence either as victims or witnesses of it through the media. We do not feel empathy towards enemies—people we do not know and that are distant from ourselves—but we do towards those near us. I believe this identification and empathy towards the victim Žižek talks about is determined by those in power who decide who should be considered a victim and who a criminal. In the case of the Magdalenes, the Church and the State promulgated the view that “deviant women” were a danger for society, therefore, violence and discrimination were accepted things they deserved. Hence, society tended to hold the same opinion. Yet, as the film progresses, we can see an evolution in Martin who grows sympathetic towards Philomena. He is motivated by personal ideas and economic interests at first, but then he firmly believes in the cause and wants everyone to know what happened to Philomena. Later in the film, he tells Sally: “But people need to know what happened to him. There’s a real injustice here” (Frears 1:07:23-1:07:26). The shot here with Martin in the foreground and a Church in the background is of relevance since he is accusing that same institution of the injustices committed against Philomena. Martin seems to be more involved in the story when he and Philomena discover that Anthony had met Martin ten years ago at the White House. The problem Martin encounters is that he gets too much involved in the story, making it personal. LaCapra warns against the dangers of identification of secondary witnesses with trauma victims, what he calls “vicarious victimhood” (LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss” 699). In the same line, Laub claims: “The relation of the victim to the event of the trauma, therefore, impacts on the relation of the listener to it, and the latter comes to feel the bewilderment, injury, confusion, dread and conflicts that the trauma victim feels” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 57-58). Laub considers the telling of trauma as a therapeutic process which enables the victim to alleviate the pain and to historicise a past event;

a process by which the victim externalises the event and transfers it to a listener (Laub, “Truth and Testimony” 68). But the listener should protect himself from victimisation; Herman argues: “Trauma is contagious. In the role of witness to disaster or atrocity, the therapist at times is emotionally overwhelmed. She experiences to a lesser degree, the same terror, rage, and despair as the patient. This phenomenon is known as ‘traumatic countertransference’ or ‘vicarious traumatisation’” (140).

At the end of the film, Martin and Philomena meet Pete who shows them a film of Anthony’s life which Philomena watches while crying (Frears 01:19:12-01:01:22:42). In this medium shot we can see Philomena closer to the TV sitting near her son’s husband and Martin is farther away. This positioning reflects the strong connection with her lost son. While watching the film the camera moves closer to focus on Philomena’s face. This movement, together with the moving music reinforces the feelings in the scene. This moment is the climax in Philomena’s working through trauma. In that film she discovers her son had been to Ireland; Anthony had been looking for Philomena, so he did know about his roots, but the nuns told him they did not know where his mother was. After this meeting, Philomena and Pete return to Roscrea to meet Sister Claire again. Before entering the convent Philomena tells Martin not to make a fuss defending the nuns: “Now, remember Martin. It’s not their fault. They didn’t know Anthony had a different name” (Frears 01:23:44-01:24:38). But Martin chases Sister Hildergate until he finds her. Full of anger he accuses Sister Hildergate of what she had done to Philomena. Philomena and Martin have an argument caused by Martin’s far involvement:

—Martin: ‘Why are you apologising? Anthony was dying of AIDS and she still wouldn’t tell him about you.’

—Philomena: ‘But it happened to me. Not you. It’s up to me what I do about it. It’s my choice.’

—Martin: ‘So, what? You’re just going to do nothing?’

—Philomena: ‘No’ (Frears 01:27:17-01:27:33)

Before answering Philomena keeps silent. This dramatic pause introduced by Frears here increases the spectator’s anxiety who is looking forward her response. This confrontation between these two characters displays the different responses to trauma that a person can adopt, as Freud and Breuer comment. Contrary to Martin, Philomena does not take revenge against the nuns since she just wanted to find her son. But Martin feels it is not enough. In the end Philomena is left alone in front of her son’s grave; he had been buried in Roscrea according to his last will. Back to the origins, the circle is completed, and she finds peace after knowing the whole truth about her son. In this scene in which we see images of Philomena’s life, the viewer re-experiences with her everything that she has gone through which shows she will never forget it. Telling her story has alleviated her pain but the trauma seems to remain with her. She has recuperated her voice and identity, but her wounds seem to remain unhealed.

Healing physical wounds may be easy although sometimes slow, but healing the psychological wounds left after a traumatic experience is an arduous task and with no guarantee of complete restoration (Kaplan 19). The first step towards Philomena’s healing in the film is breaking her silence and telling the truth about what she had suffered. Offering her testimony to Jane and Martin can be interpreted as a liberating act but also as a cry for help. Philomena needs to be listened to, to be recognised, to share her burden with someone who would help her (Bussey and Wise 8). In Frears’s film, Jane and Martin act as therapists offering support to

Philomena and becoming witnesses of her trauma. In telling her traumatic story, Philomena asks her listeners for action—justice. Since the perpetrators have denied accountability for their crimes, it is the external listener who may help the victim’s healing; in Herman’s words, “by making a public complaint or accusation, the survivor defies the perpetrator’s attempt to silence and isolate her, and she opens the possibility of finding new allies. When others bear witness to the testimony of a crime, others share the responsibility for restoring justice” (210).

In her quest for justice, Philomena is helped neither by the State, nor the nuns who deny their responsibility and hinder her healing. Through the meetings with Sister Claire, we can appreciate the nuns’ secretive attitude about Anthony, which contrasts with the image they promulgate of assistance:

— Philomena: ‘I still go to Mass... I don’t want to cause any fuss or point the finger at anybody or blame the Church in any way. I only want to know if he’s all right. I don’t even need to see him.’

— Sister Claire: ‘Philomena, we can’t take away your pain, but we can walk through it with you, hand in hand.’ (Frears 00:28:40-00:29:15)

Scholars such as Harper and Pargament (2015), and Aldridge (2000) have turned to spirituality as a healing technique. But Philomena finds no help in the Catholic Church which has caused damage to her; even though she remains Catholic, religion is not a source to overcome adversity for her. On the contrary, the nuns turn their back on Philomena and try to silence her erasing her identity and voice. Berger (2010) claims that,

Lack of recognition may constitute the ultimate injury; it is felt as a negation of one's unique subjectivity and a right to a life of one's own; it generates shame, humiliation and fear, which in turn give rise to vengeful wishes, and at times, violent actions against self and others. As I see it, to be recognised means to be granted a legitimate existence in the mind of an "other"; it validates one's right to have a history and a name of one's own, to be included, to count as a member in one's community. (Berger, "Vengefulness" 73-74)

Philomena's quest for recognition is a claim to be counted in her community and to recuperate her identity which has been taken away from her. In this process, remembering and telling the truth are central aspects for the maintenance of a community's history and for mutual recognition (Berger, "Vengeful Wishes" 104). On the contrary, the fact of not being offered recognition endangers the victims' survival and it hinders the healing of the victim; in Berger's words, "acts of 'non-re-cognition' like forgetting, ignoring, denying, not knowing, distorting or evading truth may weaken one's hold on reality in many ways and strengthen the ability to continue violations of human rights and dignity in reality" ("Vengeful Wishes" 108). Those who died within the Asylum were not recognised and their identities were negated. Martin goes to the backyard of the convent and sees, among the weeds, a grave in which the sentence "mother and child died in childbirth" was written. All those women suffered a dehumanisation process enduring violence and omission—their lives were not accounted as loss, hence they faded away silenced and not publicly recognised (Butler, *Prearious Life* 34). In the case of Philomena, no public recognition is granted to her. According to Butler, by those relations and cultural norms that define us, humanity and grievability are determined (Butler, *Prearious Life* 141). So, part of Philomena's healing is hindered by this omission of recognition. These unmarried mothers are forgotten but Philomena still has an opportunity not to be forgotten. Philomena represents all those survivors

who are fighting against the Church and the State claiming recognition and compensation. Martin, for his part, represents all those who are helping Magdalene survivors in their fight. As supporting evidence of the veracity of this film, the scandal surrounding Mother and Baby Homes has been also echoed by the British and Irish press recently. Hundreds of Irish mothers and babies were buried in unmarked graves in different convents throughout Ireland and the graves and bodies are now being discovered. Some of the snippets read: “Names of dead infants at Bessborough and Roscrea were given to the HSE in 2011” (Ó Fátharta), “Tánaiste warns criminal probe into Tuam baby scandal is ‘inevitable’” (Fogarty); “No child in care of State should be without an advocate—ever” (Finlay); “Survivors demand meeting with Taoiseach over deaths in Mother and Baby Homes” (*Irish Examiner*); “Survivors of Ireland’s mother and baby scandal deserve justice” (Gold); “Order of nuns that dumped up to 800 babies into a septic tank must be disbanded, says TD” (Flanagan). What this information proves is the necessity of survivors like Philomena to disclose the truth and of perpetrators to recognise and compensate these victims helping them in their healing.

In trauma studies, Urlicé targets a common process the victim is engaged in towards healing which consists of four stages, namely “confrontation-mourning-forgiveness-reconciliation” (Urlicé, “On the Culture” 196). After going through trauma and mourning for the loss of her child, Philomena goes to the next stage in the healing process when she forgives Sister Hildergate for what she had done to her. The protagonist adopts what Worthington and Aten named “emotional forgiveness”—emotional replacement of negative emotions with positive ones (55-71). In their last visit to Roscrea, Martin and Philomena meet Sister Hildergate. Martin has an argument with the nun reproaching her for what she had done. He asks her to say sorry, but she refuses alluding to the fact that she did nothing wrong. She says: “What’s done is

done. What do you expect us to do about it now?”. Philomena appears and says: “Nothing. There’s nothing to be done or said”. Martin claims: “I’ll tell you what you can do. Say sorry. How about that? Apologise. Stop trying to cover things up. Get out there and clear all the weeds and crap off the graves of the mothers and babies that died in childbirth.” Sister Hildergate answers: “The Lord Jesus Christ will be my judge, not the likes of you.” Martin responds with anger, but Philomena forgives the nun: “I want you to know that I forgive you.” Martin leaves the room saying, “I couldn’t forgive you” (Frears 01:26:31- 01:28:43). Walsh uses here a medium shot gathering all the characters in scene. While Philomena forgives the nun, she looks down at Sister Hildergate who is on a wheelchair; this difference in height is highlighted by Frears’s shot which can be interpreted as a subversion of power. This conversation shows the different responses to trauma adopted by these characters; whereas Philomena forgives and reconciles herself with her past, Martin maintains his critical stance asking the nuns to offer forgiveness and recognition to Philomena. He decides to take revenge on the nuns by making Philomena’s story public, but he understands Philomena’s pain and tells her he will not do it: “It’s between you and him” (Frears 01:30:16-01:30:22). Unexpectedly, given the several moments when Philomena goes back and forth about publishing her testimony, she says to Martin: “You know, I just decided... I did want you to tell my story after all. People should know what happened here” (Frears 01:30:56-01:31:04). Despite having forgiven Sister Hildergate she wants everyone to know the truth as part of her healing. The last scene presents Martin and Philomena leaving Roscrea and talking about a book. Philomena’s positive attitude suggests she has overcome her trauma, but we do not really know if she has or if she has just learnt to cope with it as many survivors have confessed.

Overall, “Philomena” is a quest for remembering, for revealing and acknowledging the truth, for the perpetrators to recognise their fault and amend it, for restoring victims’ identities and voice, and for preserving a dark chapter in Irish history in order not to commit the same mistakes again. Frears’s film is neither an autobiography nor a first-hand testimony of a traumatic experience; Frears is just a recipient of this traumatic life Magdalene survivors have transmitted through their testimonies, which he analyses from his point of view. We should consider the fact that political, economic, and ideological interests play an important role in the creation of cultural products. For that, a subjective viewpoint is adopted presenting the story from a particular perspective—that of the victim. Yet, Frears’s film is a faithful depiction of the trauma suffered by thousands of women who still bear the physical and psychological wounds of their traumatic incarceration in a reformatory institution and the deprivation of their children. Moreover, this film is an opportunity to reveal the truth about the Irish recent past. In this, individual and collective trauma intermingle trying to show a reality concealed by the Irish State, society, and the Catholic Church.

## CONCLUSIONS

The political and social demonstrations initiated in 1993 to help the victims of Magdalene Laundries contributed to the spread of a hidden reality and to the recognition of thousands of women who had been left in oblivion. However, apart from achieving a public apology and a compensation scheme for the victims, these organisations have boosted the public's interest in this issue. The press has mediated in the matter, putting pressure on the government to recognise the victims and to account for the damage caused to them. Furthermore, historians and scholars have extensively analysed reformatory institutions in Ireland from different perspectives, offering new information about these places. Moreover, novelists, filmmakers and playwrights have also offered their views on this topic fictionalising the lives of survivors, although some of them have also offered the real testimonies of some women. Literature and popular culture have contributed to the widespread of this issue all over the world. Every time a book, a film or a play is released, a new understanding of the Irish past is offered. As I stated in the introduction to this thesis, these cultural products I have analysed here should be considered instruments of agency and healing for those women who have been deprived of the opportunity to tell their stories. Thanks to literature and popular culture, a process of remembering, reclamation and healing has been initiated.

The first chapter of this thesis, despite being descriptive sometimes, has proved to be useful as background to understand the existence of Magdalene Asylums and other reformatory institutions in Ireland. Three main ideas have been developed in this chapter, namely Catholicism, women's role and place in Irish society, and moral deviance during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which I have analysed following feminist theories of the body. Throughout this part, I have demonstrated that Catholic Ireland was characterised during the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries by a repressive system which imposed restrictions on women's sexuality. Considered a matter of intervention by the State and the Church, women's sexuality, and role in nineteenth and twentieth-century Irish society was restricted to that of the good wife secluded to the domain of the home. This power was translated into a repressive attitude concerning women's education, role and place in society supported by the Irish government with the 1937 Constitution. As a result of the Catholic control of people's lives, moral restrictions were rooted in Irish identity.

Challenging normative conceptions of gender by the prostitute and the unmarried mother was read as a danger to the well-being of the nation and its inhabitants. Women's bodies and their sexuality have always been disciplined by power, using Foucault's terms, homogenising, normalising, and excluding them from the public domain. As Butler claims, we are produced and represented as subjects by power and to be politically and linguistically represented we should be considered subjects first following certain norms of intelligibility (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 3). In my case of analysis, those women in Ireland who challenged or attempted to challenge the stipulated moral requirements for women were labelled "outcasts" and, therefore, rejected and excluded from the domain of the intelligible. The discourse of vulnerability adopted and spread by the government and the Church rallied support to condemn moral deviance. Moreover, this same discourse was adopted by humanitarian enterprises, alleging the necessity of reforming these vulnerable women. As a result, thousands of women were confined in these institutions for their reformation.

From a feminist perspective, the political assignment of vulnerability to this group—unmarried mothers and prostitutes—rendered them powerless and this display of power can only be interpreted as a camouflaged subjugation of women depriving them of their legal status.

Instead of offering them solutions to their problems and of questioning the political order of the moment, these women's vulnerability was taken as an essentialist characteristic they combatted removing them from the public sphere. Overall, thousands of "immoral" women were hidden behind the walls of Catholic institutions to be morally reformed. This concealing attitude did not solve the problem of prostitution and of illegitimate births which, on the contrary, continued during the twentieth century even in higher numbers. Despite the social achievements and changes to the Constitution granted by the first and second wave feminisms, and the progressive secularisation of society, the Catholic Church has always maintained its hegemony, supported by the State, in the creation of a coherent national identity excluding all those who did not fit in this project. The Magdalene, as a linguistic category created by power referring to those women who were sent to Magdalene Laundries after committing sins, failed to be recognised as subjects according to the judicial system.

In the second chapter my focus has been on the historical analysis of Magdalene Laundries in the twentieth century following Foucault's theory of power, when a turning point concerning the functioning of these institutions took place. Punishment and correction are not unique techniques of Ireland or of the twentieth century; as we have seen, people's behaviour has always been regulated by power institutions in order to establish a coherent national identity and to maintain public order. These homogenising and naturalising techniques have created a social division between those who follow the rules and those who challenge them, being the last group coerced and punished. In the case of Ireland, "fallen women" belonged to the second group; women's sexuality and role in society have been social, political, and religious concerns since the Middle Ages when the first reformatory institution appeared to punish those who deviated from the norms. As explained in the first part of the thesis, when the Church took control of these

institutions by the mid-nineteenth century, a more punitive and coercive attitude was adopted. In the twentieth century, the former aims of the Rescue movement faded away and the degeneration of Magdalene Asylums became more visible.

During their confinement, these women suffered physical and psychological abuses and endured other disciplinary techniques which amounted to the erosion of their identity and corporeality. As we have seen from historical records and the testimonies offered by survivors, oppression, hard work, illegal transference and detention, lack of education, and physical and psychological punishment were common practices inside the Asylums, which hindered the supposed rehabilitation of the inmates—a rehabilitation these women did not need or ask for. From these primary sources we have obtained an insight of the routes of entry/exit, the power relations established between penitents and nuns and the techniques of power used to subjugate women—silence, hard work, surveillance, physical and psychological abuse, prayers, rationed meals, and isolation. Yet, we have also seen how inmates resisted this oppressive power during their confinement, which proves they were enclosed against their will. These women fought for their rights using the only thing they had—their bodies—rebellious against this coercive disciplinary system by adopting a rebellious attitude, by going on strikes or by escaping. As Butler claims, vulnerability is part of resistance and it is through speech and bodily acts that we can resist social norms and precarity (“Rethinking Vulnerability” 15). However, Magdalene women suffered the consequences of challenging the nuns’ power: they were punished for their misbehaviour. This proves, on the one hand that they could not escape that power, and on the other, that they were not sheltered to be offered help but punishment for their sins.

It is from all these testimonies we have analysed here that we conclude that Magdalene Asylums were tools of oppression and instruments of power used by the Church to subjugate and

abuse thousands of women, rendering them in a precarious condition. Yet, the Church was not the only responsible party here; as we have seen, the State contributed to the establishment and maintenance of these institutions through funds. Moreover, they also took an active part in sending women there during the twentieth century, when reformatory institutions worked as alternatives to the prison. It was their active participation in these institutions, and later their inaction concerning survivors' reinsertion in society, that the State should also be pinpointed as perpetrator of this crime against humanity as The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT) defines it. The hegemony and power of the Church of Ireland was not questioned until the last decades of the twentieth century—especially from the 1990s onwards—when the exhumation of Irish women's bodies that crowded Our Lady of Charity of Refuge Asylum triggered an atmosphere of suspicion surrounding the Church. Since then, people started to enquire into the functioning of these religious institutions. The truth was finally revealed in the twenty-first century through different reports, survivors' testimonies, and historical records. All these available sources spread the sad reality behind Magdalene Asylums concealed for many decades. They all have pointed at the Church, society, and the State as perpetrators of a crime against humanity. If there was any doubt about this latter statement, I have demonstrated, through the analysis of the McAleese Report, that the State, the Church, and the whole community were implicated in this historical event.

Once the last Magdalene Laundry was closed, "Ireland's containment culture" came to an end and citizens started to mobilise for justice and compensation. JMF and MST are some examples of the organisations created to support victims and to put pressure on the government to amend its mismanagement. Newspapers and popular culture also joined this battle to achieve implementation plans for these women, to break the silence, to restore these women's identities

and voice, and to help those women in their healing. Going back to the questions I have posed in the section entitled Part I, we have seen how, contrary to government's reports, the press and survivors' testimonies have offered alternative narratives aimed at challenging the stigmatisation of Magdalene survivors. I have also provided the reader with enough information to prove that these sources have questioned gender norms offering individual voices the opportunity to tell their own stories. These sources have granted Magdalenes an individual sense of self against the homogenising discourse that governed State's documents. Moreover, the press has also contributed to the spread of these women's stories. Being rejected and denied during and after their confinement, several organisations, such as Justice for Magdalenes or Magdalene Survivors Together, offered these women help to grow resilient and to claim back their identity and ownership over their bodies. In order to overcome their trauma, they faced the perpetrators and retold their stories making a public accusation and request. Thanks to the pressure exerted by these women, the press and these organisations, the State offered an apology and a compensation scheme to the victims. Yet, not everything is forgotten; these women are still recovering from all the damage caused to them, as they claim in their testimonies.

The second part of the thesis answers the question of what role literature and popular culture have played in the unveiling of this historical event and in the help offered to the victims. My interest in this thesis has not only been historical, but also cultural. One of my aims was to see how popular culture responded to this event. Analysing cultural products on Magdalene Laundries in chronological order, we can see an evolution of the story. As time goes by and more information is obtained, more biased and more complete the works are favouring the victim's perspective but incorporating fictional elements too. We could pinpoint two stances within Magdalene literature, namely that one which remains neutral to the events presenting a balanced

view of victims and perpetrators, and that which takes sides and defends the victim. Some of them are faithful to reality judging by the testimonies and historical records we have analysed, whereas some others distance themselves from that reality incorporating fictional elements. Yet, constant themes can be found in all these cultural products such as strict discipline, religious indoctrination, the use of physical and psychological violence, the deprivation of illegitimate offspring, poor healthcare system, and sexual abuse.

Literature has enabled these writers to revisit the past and bring up new identities which have been silenced before. Either through novels or through autobiographies, Irish literature and popular culture have served to challenge power discourses and to make public a reality hidden for so long. As I said at the beginning, the silencing and censorious attitude of the Church and the State concerning this historical event has left writers and victims no other alternative but to resort to storytelling as a safe way to tell the truth. Despite the criticism these novels may have received concerning their veracity, the exhaustive analysis of them has proved their resemblance with real accounts of the Magdalene Asylums. Although fictional, these novels have served to give visibility, recognition, and voice to those maintained in the shadows.

The analysis of Goulding's and O'Beirne's autobiographies has been illustrative in the sense that they have offered unofficial versions of events and that we could listen to the victim's voice directly. In the case of O'Neill's, Alexander's, and Odgaard's novels, their resemblance to real survivors' testimonies, despite some inconsistencies, grants them veracity in their depiction of unmarried mothers in Ireland. My focus in this chapter has been on the analysis of vulnerability, discipline and power, violence, trauma, and healing. From these theoretical perspectives I have used here we have seen how the hegemonic power of the Church was imposed on this marginal and vulnerable group who suffered the consequences of contravening

the Catholic code. We could label these books as Magdalene literature and literature of coercion and trauma.

Within literature, theatre had also its say in this event. After the analysis of Burke-Brogan's plays in chapter four, we can appreciate a desire to restore collective memory and to heal the wounds of all those who have been silenced in the past. The imperative of silence governing Ireland during the twentieth century, concerning anything that could destabilise the image of the Irish nation, was firstly broken by Burke Brogan's plays which brought Irish citizens closer to the reality of thousands of women. The ethical and moral implications of going to the theatre to see these plays go hand in hand with those of witnessing atrocities. Being always relegated to the place of the sufferer, young women are given agency, voice and a space here to explore the past and to tell their truth. Even though the restoration and healing of these women are not possible at the end of the plays, the mere representation of these women's stories serves to agitate the conscience of anyone who willingly witnesses it. Having analysed these plays through the lenses of trauma, vulnerability, and resilience we have been able to see how the discipline exerted in Magdalene Laundries was a coercive one which rendered these women vulnerable, but which they resisted in any possible way; the impossibility to challenge the Church's system, though, left them powerless. Instead, they were bound to suffer a life of misfortunes, silence, and forgetfulness. Both plays' titles, *Eclipsed* and *Stained Glass*, refer to these women's condition of invisibility which has been granted by the inaction of the State, the Church, and the Irish society. Burke-Brogan's work contributes to the visibility of these women and to the revision of the past towards a culture of forgiveness and reconciliation. Overall, Burke Brogan's plays concentrate on a universal topic: the abuse and repression exerted against women in a patriarchal society where they were subjugated according to a Catholic doctrine which

condemned sexual freedom. On a specific level, these plays raise awareness of the Magdalene Laundries' functioning and of the wrongdoing of the past. This playwright revisits the past, but the main objective is not to highlight anyone in particular as responsible for this drama, instead, the aim is to acknowledge the past in order to overcome it and move on.

Finally, taking some of the articles already existent to analyse Frears's and Walsh's films as a point of departure, my intention in chapter five has been to widen the scope and to offer a more complete analysis of these cultural products. The focus has been unmarried mothers and those "deviant" from the norm as examples of those survivors who endured the same misfortunes during their lives. The theoretical premises have been vulnerability, trauma, and healing. These theoretical stances I have used here have enabled me to see how this marginal and vulnerable group suffered violence by those in power unjustly. The stigma attached to their condition as sinners, as well as the traumatic experience within reformatory institutions, caused the erasure of their identity and voice and their rejection in society. Moreover, the silencing attitude of the Church, the State and society contributed to the impossibility to overcome their trauma and to heal their wounds. As we have seen through the analysis of these films, they present a high number of similarities not only between themselves but also with real testimonies offered by Magdalene survivors. Despite certain flaws I have commented, these filmmakers have represented the life of thousands of Irish women who were incarcerated against their will for breaking the morality discourse of the time. These women did not only suffer violence and corporeal constraints, but also psychological damage caused by the deprivation of their voice and identity. Yet, Walsh and Frears, by fictionalising the life of survivors, have attempted to restore these women's legitimacy, to offer them recognition, and to grant them a place and an active role in society away from the stigma attached to them. Moreover, these filmmakers have disclosed a

reality, although fictitious sometimes, to raise awareness about these women and to claim accountability for the crimes committed. Presenting strong-willed women, these directors have challenged gender norms offering alternative narratives.

Concerning the questions posed in the section entitled Part II, we have seen how these aesthetic products have faithfully represented reality, with some exceptions; how art has granted visibility and recognition to this marginalised group; how these products have contributed to the healing of these women's wounds and trauma; how they sometimes have been proved to be more accurate than historical records; and how these aesthetic productions have reconsidered the past and may be able to modify our future. However, a striking flaw common in all these products is the fact that no real names are provided, neither the nuns', nor of some of the inmates or institutions; only Frears's film offers the real name of the convent, the nuns, and the inmates. In my opinion, the use of pseudonyms and the invention of these institutions' names could be interpreted as a desire to generalise about this story, or for privacy reasons as it is the case of O'Beirne. However, I believe that justice is not totally possible due to the inability to recognise those who have committed this crime. Moreover, the rejection from the part of the nuns to open their archives also contributes to the silencing of the past and the impossibility to turn the page.

Our history is our identity, but thousands of women in Ireland were deprived of both during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Once they entered a reformatory institution these women lost their identities, voices, and ownership over their bodies. Their new identities as Magdalenes have also been silenced throughout decades, however, they have been able to make their stories public and claim justice and compensation. My overall conclusions thus are: rather than means of rehabilitation, Magdalene Laundries served as means of repression; despite the lack of support received from the part of the perpetrators, popular culture and literature have

contributed to the understanding and reconstruction of the Irish past helping those women in the aftermath of a traumatic youth; finally, vulnerability is not a natural condition of women but an imposed one by power institutions which subjugates them. The resilient-resistant attitude of women adopted during and after their confinement has proved their willingness to overcome those gender restrictions and to make their stories public. There is still too much to be known and many victims to be heard, so Ireland should join forces to restore these victims, to never forget and to learn from the mistakes of the past. Magdalene survivors are biopolitical victims, they are still vulnerable women who have not overcome trauma yet. Hence, they need agency, restitution and healing.

## RESUMEN

A lo largo de la historia la Iglesia Católica ha jugado un papel importante en el desarrollo de Irlanda convirtiéndose en el signo de identidad de gran parte del país. En general, la Iglesia Católica ha disfrutado de un gran poder al participar en asuntos del estado y en la vida de las personas. La Iglesia tomó el control del sistema educativo en Irlanda durante el siglo XIX y gran parte del siglo XX imponiendo restricciones sobre la moralidad y la sexualidad. En Irlanda, como en muchos otros países católicos, este discurso religioso se orientó al género femenino, siendo las mujeres el principal objetivo. Siguiendo los conceptos de las "esferas dobles" y del "ángel de la casa", las mujeres debían ser madres y esposas dóciles, pasivas, asexuales y ejemplares cuidando de la familia en el hogar.

Sin embargo, esta hegemonía religiosa ha sido cuestionada tras los recientes descubrimientos de corrupción e inmoralidad en los que se vieron envueltas varias instituciones religiosas. Me refiero a los Asilos de Magdalenas. Creados en toda Europa durante los siglos XVIII y XIX, estas instituciones privadas estaban destinadas a mujeres que al encontrarse en una situación desfavorable —aquellas que habían sido víctimas de abuso por un familiar, prostitutas, personas sin hogar, huérfanas, madres solteras, o discapacitadas—no se adaptaban al código moral que la Iglesia y el Estado imponían para las mujeres. La figura pecaminosa de María Magdalena fue utilizada como ejemplo de arrepentimiento y virtud para todas aquellas mujeres que se desviaron de la doctrina católica. Estas instituciones, tomadas por la Iglesia Católica desde la década de 1820, ofrecieron cobijo y protección a aquellas mujeres “desviadas” a cambio de labores de lavandería, entre otras tareas, hasta que en 1996 cerró el último asilo de Magdalenas, el Convento de las Hermanas de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad en Sean McDermott Street en Dublín. Su permanencia allí era considerada necesaria para su reforma como mujeres

que habían cometido pecados y tenían que expiarlos y purificar sus almas. Entonces, de manera simbólica, lavar la ropa significaba deshacerse de las manchas del alma en favor de una vida piadosa y sin pecado.

Mientras que la represión sexual fue una práctica común durante los siglos XVII y XVIII, como afirma Foucault, Irlanda siempre ha experimentado limitaciones con respecto a las prácticas sexuales. Como país conservador y católico, la sexualidad sólo se aceptaba para la reproducción y se prohibía cualquier desviación de la norma. De ahí que la Iglesia y el Estado se unieran para condenar las anomalías sexuales y la desviación de la regla. Dadas las altas tasas de prostitución, la figura de la prostituta se convirtió en el principal objetivo de vigilancia y control. En un intento por regular la situación y prevenir el contagio de enfermedades venéreas, el Estado aprobó una Ley para la Prevención de Enfermedades Contagiosas en ciertas Estaciones Navales y Militares en 1864. Esta Ley fue endurecida en 1866 hasta la publicación de la Ley de Enfermedades Contagiosas de 1869 por la cual las prostitutas eran examinadas mensualmente y enviadas a los tribunales por sus pecados si se negaban a estos análisis. Se abrió un debate público una vez que las organizaciones de mujeres alzaron sus voces en contra de la ley. Con el apoyo de la Asociación Nacional de Mujeres para la Derogación de las Leyes de Enfermedades Contagiosas (LNA), lograron la suspensión de las leyes en 1883. Sin embargo, la prostitución continuó incluso en mayor medida. El movimiento de Rescate se involucró enviando mujeres a Hospitales y Hogares de Rescate, donde fueron entrenadas moral y religiosamente. El establecimiento de los Asilos de Magdalenas, ubicados en Dublín, Cork, Limerick, New Rose, Waterford y Galway, tenía como objetivo original regular la situación de estas mujeres y protegerlas del mal. Una vez que las prostitutas dejaron de ingresar en estos Asilos, su objetivo

de intervención moral fue las mujeres solteras. Estas mujeres fueron recluidas allí y privadas de sus hijos que fueron entregados en adopción o enviados a Escuelas Industriales.

El trabajo filantrópico fue realmente importante en la Irlanda del siglo XIX para el establecimiento de estas instituciones para las “mujeres caídas”. Originalmente fueron fundadas por mujeres de clase media que eran vistas como moralmente superiores a la clase trabajadora. Esta tarea de caridad fue motivada por la preocupación espiritual y la responsabilidad hacia los necesitados. Sin embargo, la progresiva ocupación de la esfera pública por parte de esas mujeres fue tomada por la Iglesia Católica como un peligro. De ahí que pronto la Iglesia se hiciera con el control de esos refugios, asilos y hospitales. A principios del siglo XX, el movimiento de Rescate perdió su objetivo original y se adoptó una actitud más intolerante hacia las penitentes. La intención original de los Fundadores de los Asilos de Magdalenas de rehabilitar y lograr la reinserción de la mujer en la sociedad pareció olvidarse una vez que la institución religiosa tomó el control de los Hogares. De hecho, muy pocas mujeres lograron la inclusión social y empleo después de su reclusión. Parece que lo que comenzó como una alternativa para las mujeres que habían caído en la prostitución se convirtió en una herramienta para que las monjas promulgaran la doctrina católica al mismo tiempo que obtuvieron trabajo manual gratis. Algunas mujeres ingresaban voluntariamente en los Asilos de Magdalenas para ser salvadas espiritualmente, buscar refugio y trabajar, pero también se vieron obligadas a ingresar a fines del siglo XIX debido a la disminución del número de mujeres que cayeron en la prostitución.

Las últimas décadas del siglo XX vieron una disminución de la religiosidad y un avance del lugar de la mujer en la sociedad. La presencia de la Iglesia católica en la política, la sociedad y la educación irlandesas disminuyó progresivamente durante el siglo XX. En primer lugar, la sociedad se urbanizó y se abrió mentalmente en busca de la autorrealización y la libertad. En

segundo lugar, los movimientos migratorios del siglo anterior provocados por la hambruna redujeron el número de católicos en la isla. Y en tercer lugar, los numerosos escándalos sexuales en los que se vieron envueltos los clérigos en ese momento hicieron que la gente cuestionara su identidad religiosa. Algunas de las razones que explican este proceso de secularización son la industrialización, el avance tecnológico, la llegada del psicoanálisis y las guerras mundiales. Las revoluciones culturales y sexuales que tuvieron lugar a partir de la década de 1960 en Irlanda fueron impulsadas por un malestar general debido al conservadurismo católico. Como resultado, el Concilio Vaticano II (1962) se celebró para frenar el libertinaje que gobernaba Europa y restablecer la posición y el poder de la Iglesia en la sociedad. Fue principalmente una respuesta a los cambios sociales, políticos y económicos contemporáneos. La principal preocupación de la Iglesia entonces era el problema del libertinaje sexual; Los avances sociales logrados durante la primera parte del siglo XX, como el divorcio, el aborto, la anticoncepción y la homosexualidad, fueron vistos como desafíos morales al poder católico. La disminución de la asistencia masiva a la Iglesia, los sacerdotes ordenados y los matrimonios junto con un aumento en las cremaciones, divorcios, abortos y encuentros sexuales antes del matrimonio fueron solo algunos de los indicadores de ese proceso de secularización en el que se involucró Irlanda.

Aparte de todos esos cambios, durante las últimas décadas del siglo XX, la identidad católica irlandesa se tambaleó gracias al arduo trabajo de los movimientos feministas que se atrevieron a desafiar la visión conservadora de la mujer en la sociedad. Considerado como un sistema represivo, lucharon por los derechos de las mujeres, especialmente después de la revelación de la triste realidad detrás de los asilos de Magdalenas. Hay voces opuestas sobre el papel de los sacerdotes y monjas que dirigían estas lavanderías. Mientras que existe un pequeño grupo que defiende el trabajo de las instituciones religiosas como una labor social para

rehabilitar a las mujeres, existe una gran mayoría que, a la luz de recientes investigaciones, denuncia el comportamiento abusivo y represivo que las mujeres tuvieron que soportar durante su estancia allí. Durante su encierro estuvieron sometidas a largas jornadas de trabajo y oración, silencio y vigilancia constante, medidas que las monjas consideraban necesarias para la rehabilitación de mujeres cuyo destino era morir en estado de gracia dentro de los Asilos. Lo que podemos observar es que la identidad irlandesa como católica y respetable se estaba debilitando debido a la visibilidad de las prostitutas y las madres solteras en la sociedad. Por tanto, esta labor social que el gobierno impulsó podría ser sólo un mecanismo para restaurar la imagen nacional irlandesa, como afirma Maria Luddy. Lo que preocupaba al Estado irlandés y a la Iglesia católica no era realmente la prostitución en sí, ya que no contribuyeron a mejorar la situación de la mujer en Irlanda ni tampoco castigaron a quienes contribuyeron al mantenimiento de la prostitución. Más bien, el Estado y la Iglesia estaban más preocupados por la visibilidad de las prostitutas en la sociedad y las posibles consecuencias negativas que esta práctica inmoral podría traer a la identidad nacional irlandesa como pura y católica.

La divulgación de nuevos datos sobre la gestión de esos Asilos, junto con los testimonios de las mujeres que habían vivido en ellos, ha abierto un diálogo entre el presente y el pasado. Los escándalos sexuales en los que resultaron implicados sacerdotes, como fue el caso del obispo Edmond Casey (1992) o el sacerdote Michael Cleary (1992), desencadenaron un clima de sospecha y una crisis de fe en la población irlandesa. La revelación de hechos históricos moralmente dudosos sobre la Iglesia católica irlandesa puso en peligro la hegemonía de este grupo, especialmente después de la publicación de los informes Ryan y Murphy, que investigaron casos de niños víctimas de abuso por sacerdotes y ofrecieron planes de implementación para las víctimas. Estos documentos confirmaron los rumores sobre la actitud

inmoral de los miembros de la Iglesiaesquema que hicieron uso de su poder para someter a niños y mujeres. A pesar de críticas en sentido contrario, como el informe McAleese (2013)—defendía los asilos de las Magdalenas como instituciones voluntarias donde se ayudaba a las mujeres asegurando que no se ejecutaron actos de violencia o abuso dentro de los asilos—, las duras condiciones de trabajo y vida de esos niños y mujeres dentro de esos centros, junto con la represión y castigo que vivieron allí, han dejado en ellos una herida profunda de difícil curación.

Para ayudar a estas víctimas, se han realizado varias manifestaciones políticas y sociales en toda Irlanda. La primera organización en crear conciencia sobre los Asilos de Magdalenas fue el Comité Magdalen Memorial, que presionó al gobierno de 1993 a 1996 para que construyera un monumento para las mujeres exhumadas y cremadas. En 2009, la organización Justice for Magdalenes inició su campaña para demostrar la participación del Estado en Magdalene Laundries y garantizar la responsabilidad de la Iglesia. En 2013 lograron una disculpa estatal y un plan de compensación para las supervivientes de los Asilos. Después de lograr sus objetivos, el grupo detuvo su campaña política, aunque su plataforma aún está funcionando para cualquier superviviente que pueda necesitar ayuda. Al mismo tiempo, algunas supervivientes ofrecieron sus testimonios sobre su confinamiento en 1998 y 1999 en los documentales “Sex in a Cold Climate” y “The Magdalen Laundries”. Sin embargo, a estos testimonios no se les dio demasiada relevancia hasta el siglo XXI cuando el documental “The Forgotten Maggies” (2009) y un libro titulado *Whispering Hope* (2015) pusieron a las supervivientes de los Asilos de Magdalenas en el centro de atención. Steven O’Riordan inició su campaña en 2009 realizando este documental con el que trató de unir las piezas del pasado irlandés. Tras el éxito de este documental publicó, junto a Susan Leonard, el libro *Whispering Hope* que recoge los testimonios de cinco supervivientes. Tanto el documental como el libro no sólo le sirvieron a O’Riordan para dar a conocer los

crímenes cometidos contra estas mujeres, sino que también pretendieron dar voz y reconocimiento a las víctimas.

Puede parecer que todo ha terminado con la disculpa del Estado y el plan de compensación. Sin embargo, la realidad es que todavía son muchas las mujeres que se han quedado atrás y que luchan por su derecho a ser conocidas y escuchadas. Esa es una de las razones por las que estoy escribiendo esta tesis. Como tema político y social relacionado con el género y los derechos humanos, su relevancia hoy en día aún se nota ya que muchos académicos están involucrados en su discusión. Muchos temas siguen sin resolverse y se desconocen, y esta tesis contribuye a escuchar las voces de esas mujeres. Aunque conocer el pasado puede haber tenido implicaciones negativas para quienes han sufrido, la revelación de esta parte de la historia de Irlanda ha ayudado a miles de víctimas que habían sido silenciadas y olvidadas.

El estallido de nueva información sobre este tema en forma de reportajes, investigaciones y artículos de prensa ha abierto la herida de aquellos supervivientes que han ofrecido sus testimonios después de tantos años de silencio y represión. Todos coinciden en la idea de que la Iglesia católica y el estado irlandés han causado un gran dolor a miles de mujeres. La prensa se hizo eco de los escándalos, especialmente en 2013 después de que se publicara el informe McAleese y de que algunas víctimas comenzaran a hablar sobre sus experiencias. Algunos de los titulares decían: "Informe: el estado irlandés envió a miles de mujeres a infames asilos de trabajo" (CNN), "Los Asilos de Magdalenas: Informe irlandés expone una vergüenza nacional" (Time), " Los Asilos de Magdalenas: Verdad escondida detrás de un muro de silencio "(Irish Examiner), " Exigir justicia para las mujeres y los niños objetos de abuso por monjas irlandesas "(BBC), " Encerrada en una celda, torturada y víctima de abuso: la superviviente de los Asilos de Magdalenas habla de su lucha por la justicia "(Irish Mirror). A pesar de lograr una

disculpa del Estado y de la Iglesia y una compensación económica sólo por parte del gobierno, esas mujeres aún sufren el estigma de un pasado traumático.

A pesar del intento de la Iglesia Católica de mantener en silencio las prácticas cuestionables que se llevaron a cabo en estas instituciones religiosas, las injusticias sociales y la realidad detrás de los asilos de Magdalenas han salido a la luz gracias a los testimonios de varias víctimas de los abusos y desgracias que sufrieron durante su estancia allí. Sin embargo, algunas víctimas de este "sistema carcelario"—usando el término de Foucault—aún permanecen en silencio como resultado de esta traumática experiencia. El trauma de estas mujeres fue causado por el daño psicológico y físico que sufrieron como abuso sexual, castigo, humillación, pérdida de un hijo, vigilancia constante, etc. Consideradas “marginadas” y rechazadas por su familia y la sociedad, estas mujeres soportan las heridas físicas y psicológicas de una experiencia traumática dentro de las Lavanderías de MagdalenaS como resultado de una “vida pecaminosa”. Como consecuencia, han tendido a reprimir este pasado y a guardar silencio. Por lo tanto, ahora es necesario un proceso de recuperación y curación haciendo público este hecho histórico para que podamos devolverles su identidad y lugar en la sociedad.

Para esas mujeres, es indudable que su identidad se ha borrado siendo el anonimato su seña de identidad durante la vida y después de la muerte. Fue el Estado irlandés en coalición con la Iglesia Católica, el que les robó su identidad y negó su pasado, su memoria y por tanto su existencia. Sin embargo, Irlanda todavía tiene las huellas del pasado; durante la década de 1990, la exhumación de cuerpos de mujeres irlandesas que abarrotaron el asilo de las Hermanas de Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Refugio dio pruebas claras de las ilegalidades relativas a los certificados de defunción. Las monjas vendieron la tierra y se exhumaron un centenar de cuerpos; mujeres que habían fallecido en el interior del asilo y cuyos nombres se desconocían.

Ante eso, el Estado irlandés miró para otro lado alentando la incineración de esos cuerpos anónimos. Como resultado, la ONU prestó especial atención a este hecho y el Comité de las Naciones Unidas contra la Tortura atacó al gobierno irlandés por no reconocer el dolor de esas mujeres. Como explica James Smith, esta actitud cómplice se adoptó en un momento en el que Irlanda disfrutaba de un gran desarrollo económico y social para que la reinención de Irlanda, como nación católica e independiente, no se viese comprometida por el descubrimiento de esta triste realidad. Posteriormente, se creó una organización sin ánimo de lucro llamada “Justice for Magdalenes” que pedía una disculpa y un esquema de compensación para las víctimas, pero el silencio se mantuvo hasta que Enda Kenny pidió disculpas públicas a los supervivientes en 2013 tras la publicación del informe McAleese: “Como sociedad, durante muchos años les hemos fallado. Os olvidamos o, si pensamos en vosotras, lo hicimos con estereotipos falsos y ofensivos. Es una vergüenza nacional, por lo que vuelvo a decir, lo siento profundamente y ofrezco mis más sinceras disculpas”. Actualmente, JFM continúa su investigación sobre el pasado de las Magdalenas otorgando apoyo a las víctimas y sus familias.

Tradicionalmente basada en la fe católica como símbolo individual y nacional, la identidad irlandesa en el siglo XXI se ha derrumbado y el camino hacia la secularización ha provocado la necesidad de reconsiderar y redefinir lo que significa ser irlandés hoy en día. El estallido de nueva información sobre la realidad detrás de las lavanderías y los muros de las escuelas industriales, de la que la cultura popular se hizo eco, ha desencadenado la necesidad de reconsiderar la posición de la Iglesia católica en la sociedad irlandesa, así como la redefinición de la identidad irlandesa. Una vez más, son la literatura y la cultura popular las que ficcionalizan la realidad abriendo un diálogo con el pasado por el que se cuestiona el discurso de la nación, incluso su identidad y fundamento. Dada la importancia de este hecho histórico y el impacto

social que ha causado, la literatura se ha interesado en ficcionalizar el drama de estas mujeres y sus hijos. Mi intención aquí no ha sido la de proporcionar al lector sólo un relato histórico de las lavanderías de las Magdalenas, sino también un análisis de aquellos productos culturales — novelas, películas, documentales y monumentos— que nacieron, durante las últimas décadas del siglo XX y principios del XXI, de la necesidad de concienciar al público de la realidad irlandesa; una realidad que ha sido silenciada y ocultada al negar la identidad de las víctimas. A través de ellos, ese proceso de recuperación y curación que ya mencioné podría ser posible.

Cuando comencé a escribir mi tesis, decidí embarcarme en el estudio de un hecho histórico actual que ha amenazado la identidad nacional irlandesa. Como estudiante de la cultura y la literatura británicas, encontré este tema realmente interesante dado su reciente descubrimiento. Descubrí que James Smith, junto con Frances Finnegan y Maria Luddy, fueron los primeros eruditos del siglo XXI en plantear este controvertido tema, revelando la triste realidad de los siglos pasados durante tanto tiempo oculta por el Estado irlandés y la Iglesia católica. Con el estallido de nueva información sobre las lavanderías de Magdalenas, muchos críticos e historiadores como Brian Titley, M<sup>a</sup> Auxiliadora Pérez-Vides, Rebecca Lea McCarthy, Eoin O'Sullivan e Ian O'Donnell, o Erin Costello Wecker entre otros se están involucrando en el análisis de este asombroso tema en Irlanda. El problema es que el acceso a los archivos es una tarea difícil dada la oposición de la Iglesia Católica a hacer pública esta información. Por lo tanto, no se ha escrito mucho sobre este tema, aparte de los académicos mencionados anteriormente, y un libro reciente que recopila los testimonios de las supervivientes (Nancy Costello's *Whispering Hope: The Heart Breaking True Story Of The Magdalene Women* (2016)), y una Tesis doctoral escrita en 2009 por Evelyn Glynn centrada en el acto de recordar y olvidar

ligado al trauma. Por el contrario, existen varios estudios sobre asilos estadounidenses y australianos y de muchos otros países europeos como Escocia o Gran Bretaña.

Con algunas excepciones, no se ha prestado mucha atención a los testimonios orales de esos supervivientes. La mayoría de los académicos mencionados anteriormente han tendido a analizar los asilos de Magdalenas desde una perspectiva histórica. Mi intención aquí ha sido añadir un punto de vista sociocultural; centrándome en los testimonios de las supervivientes, mi objetivo ha sido ver cómo la literatura y la cultura popular se han hecho eco de este hecho social e histórico y cómo han contribuido a la reconstrucción del pasado irlandés. El panorama literario y cultural de las Magdalenas es extenso con novelas como *The Magdalen* (1999) de Marita Conlon, *The Light in the Window* de June Goulding, *The Fallen Star* (2005) de Joan O'Neill, *Kathy's Story: A Childhood Hell Inside the Magdalen Laundries* (2005) de Kathy O'Beirne, *The Magdalen Girls* (2017) de VS Alexander, o *The Magdalen Laundries* (2017) de Lisa Michelle Odgaard; películas como “The Magdalene Sisters” de Peter Mullan (2002), “Philomena” de Stephen Frears (2013) o “Sinners” (2002) de Aisling Walsh; y documentales como “The Forgotten Maggies” (2009) de Steven O'Riordan, o “Sex in a Cold Climate” (1998) de Steve Humphries. Mi propósito ha sido analizar estos productos literarios y culturales desde un punto de vista social y cultural como instrumentos de agencialidad y sanación para aquellas mujeres que se han visto privadas de la oportunidad de contar sus historias. Aunque son narraciones ficticias, se basan en la realidad de miles de mujeres irlandesas a las que ahora se les da voz en un proceso de recuperación de las identidades de las Magdalenas. De esa forma, la literatura y la cultura popular han contribuido a la difusión de este hecho histórico y a un proceso de reconciliación y sanación. Por lo tanto, a través de esta tesis he intentado dar visibilidad, dignidad, reconocimiento y voz a estas víctimas del sistema católico irlandés.

En general, mi intención en esta tesis ha sido triple: en primer lugar, cuestionar el trabajo social que se creía que las monjas y las mujeres filántropas desarrollaban con el establecimiento de Hogares de Rescate y Asilos de Magdalenas en Irlanda; creo que estas instituciones sirvieron como medio de represión en lugar de rehabilitación para mujeres; En segundo lugar, ver cómo la cultura popular y la literatura han contribuido a la comprensión y reconstrucción del pasado irlandés siendo fiel a la realidad, en contra de lo que generalmente se piensa—aplicando estudios posmodernos, de género y trauma, analizo obras literarias y productos culturales como ejemplos de lo que han dicho historiadores y críticos como Finnegan o Smith sobre las Magdalenas—; y en tercer lugar, volver a definir la identidad irlandesa y el lugar que ocupan las mujeres en Irlanda dando voz a este grupo minoritario, siempre subyugado por la doctrina católica. Usando teoría de la resiliencia, exploro cómo las mujeres resistieron las restricciones impuestas. A lo largo de esta tesis he intentado mostrar que la disciplina cristiana ha impuesto restricciones al cuerpo de las mujeres utilizándolos como lugares de violencia y abuso, provocando en ellas una erosión de su identidad y un estigma. Usando el confinamiento forzado, todas aquellas mujeres que se desviaron de las normas sociales vivieron una experiencia traumática que determinó su identidad y lugar en la sociedad. Creo que es a través de la literatura y la cultura popular que se puede lograr un proceso de curación dando voz a los silenciados durante tanto tiempo. Entonces, mi análisis de estas novelas, documentales y películas se ha basado en el abuso del cuerpo de las mujeres, la actitud resiliente adoptada por estas mujeres vulnerables y el trauma que les ha quedado. Dicho esto, creo que esta tesis es innovadora en el sentido de que ofrece un nuevo punto de vista de la historia de las Magdalenas en el momento en que contribuye al reconocimiento público de esas mujeres.

La tesis se divide en dos partes: la primera parte se titula Panorama histórico de Irlanda (siglos XIX y XX); Desviación moral y Asilos de Magdalenas y la segunda parte se llama Representaciones culturales de los Asilos de Magdalenas. Antes de estas dos partes hay una introducción, en la que presento la metodología y los estudios realizados hasta ahora sobre el tema. Dentro de la primera parte podemos encontrar una breve introducción sobre los capítulos incluidos en esta sección seguida de los capítulos uno y dos. El primer capítulo, titulado Catolicismo y desviación moral, está dedicado al estudio del catolicismo irlandés como signo de identidad irlandesa y a ver cómo la doctrina religiosa ha restringido el papel y el lugar de la mujer en la sociedad irlandesa. Luego analizo esas desviaciones morales que cuestionan la moral católica: la prostitución y los casos de “mujeres caídas”, refiriéndome a las que no se ajustaban a la doctrina moral católica. Aquí, estudio el caso de la prostitución y de las madres solteras en dos países principales, a saber, Irlanda e Inglaterra, haciendo una comparación entre ambas durante los siglos XIX y XX. El segundo capítulo, titulado Lo Carcelario y los Asilos de Magdalenas, es una revisión histórica de estas instituciones en Irlanda. Aquí exploro los orígenes y la evolución de estos asilos siguiendo a ciertos críticos e historiadores. Además, estudio la vida dentro de los asilos centrandome mi atención en los testimonios de las supervivientes. Finalmente, siguiendo el método carcelario de Foucault, doy argumentos razonables para considerar los asilos de Magdalenas como una especie de cárceles para mujeres desviadas durante los siglos XIX y XX en los que se impuso una estricta disciplina religiosa. Dentro de la segunda parte, podemos encontrar una breve introducción a los capítulos incluidos en esta sección seguida del capítulo tres —Las magdalenas y novelas—, cuatro —Las magdalenas y el teatro— y cinco— Las magdalenas y el cine. Estos tres capítulos están dedicados al análisis exhaustivo de novelas, películas y obras de teatro basadas en los Asilos de Magdalenas. Utilizo a los críticos de estudios

posmodernistas junto con el trauma y los estudios de género para respaldar mi punto de vista sobre la historia de las Magdalenas como una marcada por la violencia, el abuso y el trauma. Este marco teórico me ha servido para explorar una amplia gama de productos culturales que han representado este hecho histórico desde diferentes perspectivas. Finalmente, el último capítulo está dedicado al establecimiento de conclusiones generales y al refuerzo de aquellas ideas principales que he explicado a lo largo de la tesis.

Para el desarrollo de la primera parte de esta tesis he hecho uso de una amplia variedad de fuentes como artículos, libros y artículos de prensa. Todos estos elementos me han proporcionado los antecedentes necesarios sobre el tema para los tres primeros capítulos. Luego, me he apoyado en estudios posmodernos junto con estudios de Trauma / Sanación y de Género refiriéndome a autores como Mary Luddy, Michel Foucault, James Smith, Frances Finnegan, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Butler, Adriana Cavarero, Judith Herman, David Aldridge, Anna R. Harper y Kenneth Pargament. Finalmente, he aplicado sus ideas al estudio de las Magdalenas a través del análisis de novelas, películas y obras de teatro sobre este tema.

Tras llevar a cabo los objetivos marcados anteriormente, puedo concluir que nuestra historia es nuestra identidad, pero miles de mujeres en Irlanda se vieron privadas de ambos durante el siglo XIX y el XX. Una vez que ingresaron a una institución reformativa, estas mujeres perdieron sus identidades, voces y propiedad sobre sus cuerpos. Sus nuevas identidades como Magdalenas también han sido silenciadas a lo largo de décadas, sin embargo, han podido hacer públicas sus historias y reclamar justicia y compensación. La literatura ha permitido a estos escritores volver a visitar el pasado y plantear nuevas identidades que antes habían sido silenciadas. Ya sea a través de novelas o autobiografías, la literatura y la cultura popular irlandesas han servido para desafiar los discursos de poder y hacer pública una realidad oculta

durante tanto tiempo. Como decía al principio, la actitud de silencio y censura de la Iglesia y el Estado frente a este hecho histórico no ha dejado a los escritores y víctimas otra alternativa que recurrir a la narración como una forma segura de decir la verdad. A pesar de las críticas que pueden haber recibido estas novelas sobre su veracidad, el análisis exhaustivo de las mismas ha demostrado su parecido con relatos reales de los Asilos de Magdalena. Aunque ficticias, estas novelas han servido para dar visibilidad, reconocimiento y voz a quienes se mantienen en la sombra.

Las manifestaciones políticas y sociales iniciadas en 1993 para ayudar a las víctimas de los Asilos de Magdalenas contribuyeron a difundir una realidad oculta y al reconocimiento de miles de mujeres que habían quedado en el olvido. Sin embargo, además de lograr una disculpa pública y un plan de compensación para las víctimas, estas organizaciones han impulsado el interés de la ciudadanía en este tema. La prensa ha mediado en el asunto presionando al gobierno para que reconozca a las víctimas y rinda cuentas por el daño causado. Además, los historiadores y académicos han analizado ampliamente las instituciones reformativas en Irlanda desde diferentes perspectivas, ofreciendo nueva información sobre estos lugares. Además, novelistas, cineastas y dramaturgas también han ofrecido sus puntos de vista sobre este tema ficcionalizando la vida de los supervivientes, aunque algunos de ellos también han ofrecido los testimonios reales de algunas mujeres. La literatura y la cultura popular han contribuido a la difusión de este problema en todo el mundo. Cada vez que se publica un libro, o se estrena una película o una obra de teatro, se ofrece una nueva comprensión del pasado irlandés. Como dije en la introducción a esta tesis, estos productos culturales que he analizado aquí deben ser considerados instrumentos de agencialidad y curación para aquellas mujeres que se han visto privadas de la

oportunidad de contar sus historias. Gracias a la literatura y la cultura popular se ha iniciado un proceso de recuerdo, recuperación y curación.

Mis conclusiones generales son: más que un medio de rehabilitación, los Asilos de Magdalenas sirvieron como medio de represión; a pesar de la falta de apoyo recibido por parte de los perpetradores, la cultura popular y la literatura han contribuido a la comprensión y reconstrucción del pasado irlandés ayudando a esas mujeres en las secuelas de una juventud traumática; finalmente, la vulnerabilidad no es una condición natural de las mujeres sino una impuesta por las instituciones de poder que las subyugan. La actitud de resiliencia y resistencia adoptada por las mujeres durante y después de su confinamiento ha demostrado su voluntad de superar esas restricciones de género y hacer públicas sus historias. Todavía hay mucho por saber y muchas víctimas por escuchar, por lo que Irlanda debería unir fuerzas para compensar a estas víctimas, para no olvidar nunca y aprender de los errores del pasado. Las supervivientes de los Asilos de Magdalenas son víctimas biopolíticas, siguen siendo mujeres vulnerables que aún no han superado el trauma. Por lo tanto, necesitan reconocimiento, restitución y curación.

**APPENDIXES**  
Appendix A  
Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook Cemetery, Dublin



Picture 1. Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook Cemetery by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018

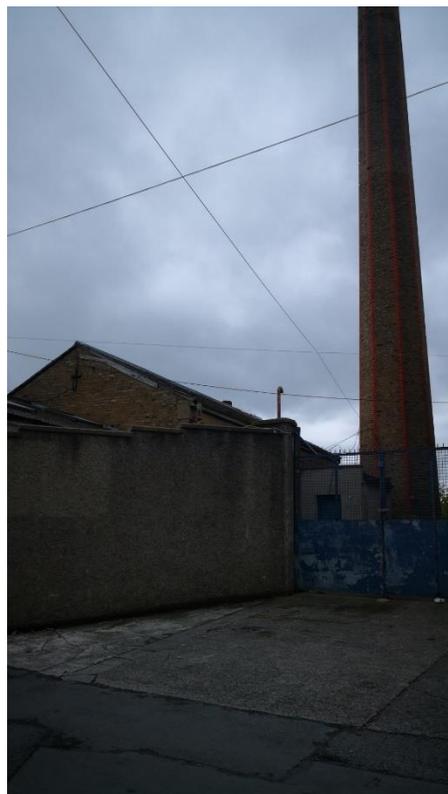


Picture 2. Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook Cemetery by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018

Appendix B  
Sisters of Charity Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook, Dublin



Picture 3. Sisters of Charity Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.



Picture 4. Sisters of Charity Magdalene Laundry, Donnybrook by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.

## Appendix C Religious Sisters of Charity, Dublin

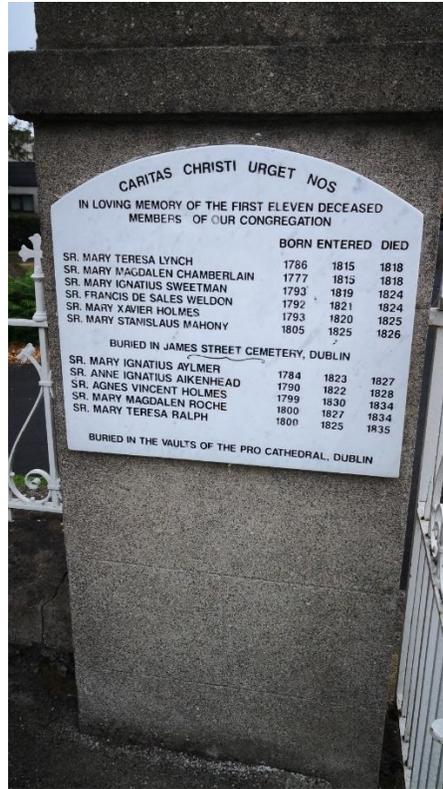


Picture 5. Religious Sisters of Charity entrance by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.



Picture 6. Religious Sisters of Charity's graveyard entrance by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.

## Abused Bodies: Irish Magdalene Asylums



Picture 7. Religious Sisters of Charity's graveyard. Memorial of the sisters buried there by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.



Picture 8. Religious Sisters of Charity's graveyard. Grave's cross of a Sister by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018



Picture 9. Religious Sisters of Charity's graveyard. Separate graveyard where some Sisters are buried by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.



Picture 10. Religious Sisters of Charity's graveyard. Separate graveyard where the women are buried by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.

Appendix D  
Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Sean McDermott St. Dublin



Picture 13. Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Sean McDermott St. entrance by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.



Picture 14. Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, Sean McDermott St. façade by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 12 Aug. 2018.

Appendix E  
Sisters of Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Dun Laoghaire, Dublin



Picture 15. Sisters of Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Dun Laoghaire by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 09 Sep. 2018.



Picture 16. Sisters of Mercy Magdalene Laundry, Dun Laoghaire by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 09 Sep. 2018

Abused Bodies: Irish Magdalene Asylums



Picture 17. St Michael's Hospital; adjacent to the Magdalene Laundry founded in 1876 by the Sisters of Mercy. Dun Laoghaire by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 09 Sep. 2018.



Picture 18. Magdalene Laundries' memorial. Glasnevin Cemetery by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 10 Sep. 2018.



Picture 19. St. Mary's Beechlawn House' memorial. Glasnevin Cemetery by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 10 Sep. 2018.



Picture 20. St. Mary's Beechlawn House' memorial detail. Glasnevin Cemetery by Elena Cantueso Urbano. Dublin, 10 Sep. 2018.

## Notes

1. The theories of the double spheres and the double standard of morality ruled the Victorian era distancing men and women in society, especially concerning sexuality. Whereas women were taught in passivity, self-respect, purity and monogamy, men enjoyed much more sexual permissiveness (Romero-Ruiz, “Shaping Female” 127).
2. The term “fallen woman” has been widely used by scholars like Braun Gretchen (344), Romero-Ruiz (“Women’s Identity” 28-31; *The London Lock* 25-28), Finnegan (4) and James Smith (xiv) referring to the label these women of dubious morality received in Ireland.
3. “Outcast” was the name women who did not conform to the established morality received. They were mainly prostitutes, unmarried mothers and feeble-minded women who violated all the moral prescriptions of the family and the woman’s place in society together with the main values of reputation and purity (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 1).
4. The term “deviant woman” is a synonym with “fallen woman” referring to those whose behaviour deviates from the moral code (Luddy, *Women and Philanthropy* 1).
5. During the last decades of the twentieth century several public debates were open concerning the detrimental Catholic influence on women’s lives. Lovett’s pregnancy and death triggered a public debate concerning incest and teenage sexuality and Joanne Hayes was sentenced for the killing of her baby which opened a debate about abortion (Maguire 335-358; O’Connor 21-22; Ferriter 9). The X-cases refer to different girls and women in Ireland who got pregnant and were denied the possibility to access abortion. As a result, they attempted suicide and lost their babies. These cases opened a public debate during the 1990s on the grounds of human rights’ negation (García-del Moral and Korteweg 413-427).

And the case of the Kerry Babies refers to the twins of Joanne Hayes who gave birth and killed them in her farm. The babies were of different blood groups which indicate she had had sex with two different men. The scandal was covered by the media although the court did not charge her (Inglis, “Sexual Transgression” 8).

6. Romero-Ruiz’s book *The London Lock Hospital in the Nineteenth Century* (2014) provides an itemised historical account of those institutions set during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in England. Focused on the problem of venereal diseases and the medical advancements, she analyses the Lock Hospital as a philanthropic institution devoted to women’s reform and rehabilitation. However, she also studies Magdalene Asylums as institutions where women were sent to be religiously trained and instructed in hard work after their stay in a Lock Hospital. In her book *Prostitution* (2000) Bartley also points out several institutions created in England to reform prostitutes such as Magdalene institutions, Lock Hospitals and Private Homes.
7. The link between national identity and women’s sexual morality was strengthened during the twentieth century when Ireland was fighting for its independence. The image of the virtuous Catholic woman was used by the Irish as a representation of their identity to distance them from the English (McCormick 79).
8. For a detailed analysis of Irish Magdalene Asylums see chapter two.
9. After the Poor Relief Act 1838, County Homes were institutions run by the State which gave refuge to children, the aged, unmarried mothers and those mentally handicapped. Later, after the Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act 1923, these workhouses became county homes where unmarried mothers were lodged. Finally, after the Inter-Departmental Committee on the Care of the Aged Report (1968), County Homes only

hosted the aged (O'Sullivan and O'Donnell, *Coercive Confinement* 15-18; Garrett "Unmarried Mothers" 713).

10. There were two classes of unmarried mothers, namely "first offenders" and "hopeless cases". Whereas the former were women who got pregnant for the first time, the latest were recidivist offenders. First offenders were normally sent to Mother and Baby Homes first, where they gave birth to their babies, and later to Magdalene Asylums. But hopeless cases were preferably admitted in Magdalene Asylums. The illegitimate children of the former group were adopted whereas those of the latter were enclosed in Industrial Schools (Smith 48-52; Luddy, *Prostitution* 123; Luddy, "Unmarried Mothers" 109-126; Garrett, "The Abnormal Flight" 332-333; Garrett "Unmarried Mothers" 714; Earner-Byrne 187).
11. Article 40, 3 acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and the equal right of the mother, but reality and the rest of text in the Constitution distanced from this law (The Stationery Office).
12. McCarthy's term "magdalenism" here refers to the process through which Magdalene repentant convents evolved into labour prisons for marginalised women at the time capitalist societies emerged (9).
13. These scholars are ascribed to the paradigm of trauma studies, a discipline which uses testimonies as main tools for the reconstruction of the past and for the healing of the traumatised victim.
14. For a complete view of the legal process the JFM organisation was involved in from 2003 to 2013 to achieve a State apology and an inquiry report see O'Rourke (2015) and O'Rourke and Smith (2016).

15. For more information about the Ryan Report and the Murphy Report see <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/MagdalenRpt2013>
16. NSPCC acronym refers to National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.
17. Urlicé, Berger and Berman identified different stages a traumatised victim goes through, namely confrontation, mourning, forgiveness and reconciliation (Urlicé et al.).
18. The practice of assigning new names is discussed by scholars like Wecker (265), Titley (5), Smith (37) and Finnegan (47) and also experienced by survivors like Nancy Costello and Marina Gambold (O’Riordan and Leonard).
19. This Penitent Room is a mechanism of power the nuns in Alexander’s novel use to punish the inmates psychologically. Yet, we consider that the confinement of these women in this inhabitable room is another form of physical violence executed against the inmates’ bodies.
20. Disciplinary practices such as hair-cutting and the use of uniforms have been discussed by scholars like Titley (5) and Finnegan (26) as well as by survivors like Phyllis Valentine and Brigid Young (Humphries), Mary Smith (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Mary Smith” 11-12) and Bernadette Murphy (O’Donnell et al., “Oral History of Bernadette Murphy” 60).
21. The Commission to Investigate Child Abuse, called the Ryan Report, was established to investigate the abuse of children who were admitted to Industrial Schools from 1936 onwards. Chaired by Mr Justice Seán Ryan the Report was released in 2009 and confirmed the abuse thousands of children suffered under the custody of several religious orders.
22. Perez-Vides analyses in her article family abuse and institutional cruelty present in Mullan’s and Walsh’s films (“Gender, Deviance” 77-92).

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