

## Producing ‘decent girls’: governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922–1937)

Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin\*

*Department of Geography, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland*

In this article we examine the mode of governmentality constructed in Ireland with regard to the regulation and disciplining of sexuality in the post-independence era up to the writing of the Constitution (1922–1937). Drawing on the writings of Michel Foucault, we document how Ireland became an intense site of applied, national bio-politics with a panoply of government commissions and legislation, accompanied by new sites of reform (Magdalene Asylums and Mother and Baby Homes), which together were designed to mould and police the sexual practices of its citizens and create a sanitised moral landscape. Whilst a thoroughly gendered project, with nearly all legislation and sites of reform targeting women, we contend it was also a highly spatialised endeavour. The modes and practices of governmentality produced a dense spatialised grid of discipline, reform and self-regulation, seeking to produce ‘decent’ women inhabiting virtuous spaces by limiting access to work and public spaces, confining women to an unsullied (marital) home, and threatening new sites of reformation, emigration or ostracisation.

**Keywords:** governmentality; bio-politics; sexuality; places of formation

### Introduction

In this article we undertake a Foucaultian analysis of changing the sexual landscape of Ireland in the period between independence (1922) and the ratification of the Constitution (1937). This period was a time of formative nation building as the newly independent Ireland, free of British intervention, sought to define Irishness and the national moral character. Several commissions examined the moral conduct of the nation and reported on how Irish social behaviour should be disciplined and a number of new pieces of legislation were enacted, designed to give the state and its various bodies the power to intervene into the sexual lives of its citizens (see Table 1). Following Foucault, we would argue that during this period there was a ‘political, economic, and technical incitement to talk about sex’ – an explosion of discussion about sex (including both social and criminal acts) accompanied by tactics to regulate sexual conduct.

Whilst sexual conduct was the focus of regulation prior to independence, during this period we would contend there was an intensification and deepening of the disciplining regime as the state built for itself new institutionalised power, at the same time bolstering the power of the Catholic Church and heads of family to regulate subjects. The Catholic Church had increasingly sought to shape sexual morality from the mid-eighteenth century through the pulpit and schooling, ‘using discourses of sin, shame, guilt and familism as a means of disciplining, enacted through the confessional, penance, censorship and marriage’ (Kitchin and Lysaght 2004, 196). In the face of political disillusion after the civil war and perceived social and moral decay, it joined forces with the newly formed Cosgrave<sup>1</sup> government to produce ‘a mutually reinforcing

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\*Corresponding author. Email: rob.kitchin@nuim.ie

Table 1. Key reports and government acts concerning the regulation of sexuality.

1923	Local Government (Temporary Provisions) Act 1922	Provided a framework for dealing with unmarried mothers, proposing various methods for reforming 'first offenders' and punishing 'recidivists' and those who could not or would not be reformed.
1923	Censorship of Films Act	Established a film censor (moral editor) with power to cut or refuse a licence to films which in his opinion were subversive of public morality, indecent, obscene or blasphemous.
1925	Civil Service Amendment Act	Gave the government the power to bar women from certain civil service exams.
1925	Poor Law Reform Commission and the Workhouses	Proposed methods for reforming 'fallen women' and punishing those who could not or would not be reformed.
1926	Inter-Departmental Committee of Inquiry regarding Venereal Disease	Set up to 'make inquiries as to the steps, if any, which are desirable to secure that the extent of Venereal disease may be diminished'.
1926	Report of the Committee on Evil Literature	Apart from reporting on 'indecent literature', also reported on levels of illegitimacy and contraception.
1924, 1927	Intoxicating Liquor Act	1924 Act limited opening hours and an amendment in 1927 reduced the number of licensed premises – both were driven, in part, by concerns over the effects of alcohol on sexual conduct.
1924, 1927	Juries Bills	Denied women the right to sit on juries.
1927	Report of the Commission on the Sick and Destitute Poor	Focused on the issue of illegitimacy and unmarried mothers. The Report delineated two classes of mother – 'those who may be amenable to reform' and the 'less hopeful cases'. It advocated different treatment for each category. Commission proposed a period of detention or ranging from 'moral upbringing' to segregation to forced detention.
1929	Censorship of Publications Act	Section 16, 17 banned the advertising of contraception or abortion. Prohibited the sale and distribution of 'indecent or obscene' books.
1930	Illegitimate Children (Affiliation Orders) Act	Ordered fathers to pay maintenance.
1930–34	Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health	Emphasised the importance of specialised homes for 'fallen women'.
1931	Legitimacy Act	Provided for legitimation by subsequent marriage of parents.
1931	Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1880–1885) and Juvenile Prostitution	This report dealt with age of consent, contraception and prostitution. It found an 'alarming amount of sexual crime', illegitimacy, prostitution sexual immorality. Recommendations included raising the age of consent from 16 to 18, a ban on contraceptives 'except in exceptional circumstances', increased penalties for brothel owners and the establishment of a female police force. This report was never published.

Table 1 – (continued)

1934	Maternity Homes Act	Registration of private maternity homes – brought in after grave concerns about the high rate of infant mortality (particularly amongst illegitimate babies) and ‘baby farming’.
1935	The Conditions of Employment Act	Extended the marriage bar of the Civil Service Amendment Act to the entire civil service (except for workers in the lower grades such as cleaners) and gave the government power to limit the number of women employed in any given industry.
1935	Dance Halls Act	Clamped down on illicit behaviour – covering licensing, suitability of premises, parking of motorcars, age of admission, police supervision and hours of proposed dancing.
1935	Criminal Law Amendment Act	The Act raised the age of consent from 16 to 17 years and raised from 13 to 15 the age at which carnal knowledge would be classed a felony. Section 16, ‘suppression of prostitution’, increased the penalties for prostitution. Section 17 banned the sale and importation of contraception. Section 18 related to public indecency – inhibiting sexual behaviour in public.
1937	Bunreacht na hÉireann (Irish Constitution)	Articles defined the family as the basic social unit of society and the position of woman as ‘mother’, made contraception and divorce illegal and reconfirmed the illegality of abortion and homosexuality (as enshrined in the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885).

political and episcopal vision’ underpinned by a commitment to Catholic moral values (Howell 2003, 339; Fanning 1983), despite the 1922 Constitution defining the state as officially secular.<sup>2</sup> Nationalist and religious leaders could for the first time shape the moral landscape in their own vision through their new abilities to formulate, control and deliver legal reform and welfare, health and education. This was reinforced by a strong social homogeneity (in the 1926 census, 92.6% classified themselves as Catholic, 61% lived outside towns and villages). As a consequence, Inglis (1987, 165) argues that during this time ‘secular civility became synonymous with Catholic morality’.

Hug (2001, 25) thus argues that from ‘the beginning . . . the Catholic hierarchy, a number of lay groups, and the government together imposed a Catholic construction of sexuality and worked to regulate it. Anything that threatened the family was seen to threaten the stability of society, and of the nation as a whole’. Consequently, at this time ‘there was installed . . . an apparatus for producing an ever greater quantity of discourse about sex, capable of functioning and taking effect in its very economy’ (Foucault 1978, 23). And while the 1937 Constitution was certainly not the end point of the state’s attempts to actively shape the sexual conduct of its citizens, it brought this period to a close by pulling together many of the discourses and practices developed over the previous 15 years, making contraception and divorce illegal, reconfirming the illegality of abortion and homosexuality (as enshrined in the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and Criminal Law Amendment Act 1885 that were continued after independence), making the family the cornerstone of Irish society, and outlining a very circumscribed view of women’s role in society.

Several other studies have started the process of analysing the recently released reports that have been suppressed since the period and legislation enacted at the time. For example, Kennedy (2000, 2001), McAvoy (1999), Finnane (2001) and Smith (2004) have explored the 1931 *Report of the Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts (1880–1885)*<sup>3</sup> and Howell (2003) has examined the 1927 *Report of the Committee on Venereal Disease*. Gray and Ryan (1998), Gray (1999), Ryan (1999, 2002), Valiulis (1995a) and Daly (1995) have explored the connections between control of women's sexuality, gender, identity and nation building, and Luddy (2001) and Earner-Bryne (2004) have examined issues concerning illegitimacy, unmarried mothers and emigration. These studies, however, tend to focus on one particular report, piece of legislation or form of sexual practice (such as prostitution or illegitimate births), rather than construct a genealogy of how these various reports and Acts worked together to produce a particular moral terrain. Moreover, with the exception of Howell (2003), these studies frame their analysis within a feminist framework that casts the regulation of sexuality as a highly gendered project aimed predominately at regulating the lives of women. This is undoubtedly the case (indeed, almost without exception, discourses and legislation were targeted at women), but crucially we would argue that it was a gendered project that was thoroughly *spatial* in its conceptualisation, with the practices of regulation designed to produce particular moral geographies within the home, work and public spaces, and which led to a network of new interlinked institutional spaces designed to reform and discipline 'sexual deviants' and act as a deterrent to the 'weak-willed' (for example, Magdalene Asylums, County Homes, Mother and Baby Homes, reformatories and industrial schools, some of which persisted to near the end of the twentieth century<sup>4</sup>).

In contrast to these other studies, in this article we draw on Foucault's ideas to detail how the various reports and legislation worked together to spatially regulate sexual conduct in different spheres to create a new moral terrain post-independence. Our examination is based on primary archival research conducted between 2003 and 2005<sup>5</sup> that analysed all of the reports and legislation in Table 1, conducted a reading of all editions of the *Irish Times* from 1921 to 1945 and the *Irish Independent* 1924–1937<sup>6</sup> for stories concerning sexuality and its regulation, examined official and unofficial correspondence between government departments, officials, religious and lay organisations and members of the general public (stored at the National Archives, Dublin), and analysed contemporaneous literature and the Dáil (parliamentary) minutes for the period.

### **New moral geographies of sexuality in post-independence Ireland**

In Volume 1 of the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) produced an account of how power in its various guises is brought to bear on sexuality, setting out how relatively open attitudes towards sexuality in seventeenth-century Europe were reconfigured so that by the end of the nineteenth century sexuality was largely repressed. Sexuality became carefully regulated through moral and legal disciplining, confined to the realm of the legitimate and procreative couple. This regulation was enforced through interlocking mechanisms of state and institutional policing, accompanied by societal, familial and self-regulation.

While Foucault (1978) concentrates his analysis on the construction of discursive regimes concerning sexuality at different periods of history and how such regimes produced new modes of governance and shaped sexual identities, he did so in large part by charting the various spaces through which sexual disciplining was articulated (e.g., hospitals, schools, courts, churches, homes). As such, he recognised the inherent spatiality of sexual governance and subject formation; that there were a diverse collection of sites of power/knowledge wherein certain people (e.g., medical professionals, teachers, priests, parents) sought to use spatialised practices to encourage and enforce regulatory regimes designed to shape sexual behaviour. As Foucault

notes, these sites and practices do not simply work as locations of discipline but, in conjunction with the predominate discursive regime, instil modes of self-discipline wherein subjects monitor and adapt their sexual behaviour with regard to their own moral values and those of others. These sites and their spatialities then are key loci in the production of particular sexual subject positions; they are 'places of formation' (Markus 1993).

The various commission reports and legislation identified in Table 1 worked, as Foucault suggested, to create a series of places of formation in the newly independent Ireland – places that both reflected and sought to produce a new moral landscape as desired by the state and church. In the remainder of this section we highlight how Ireland's new legislative order worked to have a profound effect on the discursive and material practices of sexual regulation in post-independence Ireland, radically reshaping the production of various social spheres.

### *Home places*

The primacy of the family as the cornerstone of Irish society, and thus the home as the key social and political sexual site, was well established by the early twentieth century. This position was further strengthened post-independence through proscription (legislation) and prescription (church pastorals, Dáil Debates, elite discourse) so that the sexual conduct of individuals within the home was increasingly inundated by new rules and regulations that positioned it as a woman's place and the site of procreational sexual conduct, with no state or religiously sanctioned alternative. Women were pushed toward home life through a disciplinary grid that ensured that they became married before or once sexually active, maintained their procreative role throughout their twenties and thirties (through the denial of contraceptives) and their mothering and family duties throughout their lives, denied them the ability to divorce, limited their access to public and work space, and punished moral infractions.

Illegitimate births were demonised by the state and Catholic Church as gross moral infractions. Women who became pregnant prior to marriage sought wedlock to give the relationship and child a legitimate family status in order to avoid stigmatisation by family, community, and to avoid places of discipline and reformation such as Mother and Baby Homes, emigration abroad or giving the child up for adoption. The *Committee on the Criminal Law (Amendment) Acts 1880–1885* (Carrigan Report) noted with grave concern the perceived increase in sexual immorality, stating that the percentage of illegitimacy per total births for 1929 was the highest recorded and 'that since 1925 illegitimacy is increasing throughout the country at an unprecedented rate' (Carrigan 1931, 8). It was noted that 3.1 per cent of total births registered in 1929 were illegitimate – including births in county homes (Poor Law institutions) and public hospitals – and that the problem of illegitimacy and unmarried mothers 'has strained the accommodation of the County Homes beyond their capacity' (Carrigan 1931, 9). It also commented that 'the number of illegitimate births unregistered considerably exceeds the number of such births registered ... that the total number is much in excess of official figures we have no doubt' (Carrigan 1931, 9).

Fifty-four doctors working in public and private practice stated 'emphatically that in their experience official statistics of illegitimacy did not adequately represent that actual condition of the country regarding it' (Carrigan 1931, 6). The same opinion was expressed by British rescue organisations who sought to assist unmarried Irish mothers who had travelled to Britain 'in shame', for example, the Liverpool and Catholic Aid Society, Police Court Missionary in Manchester, Leeds Diocesan Rescue, and the Crusade of Rescue in London. The Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International Traffic in Women and Children reported a total of 1947 Irish cases for the period 1926–1930. In Ireland, charitable organisations such as the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society provided accommodation to unmarried mothers. For the three years, 1923–1925, it dealt with 1351 applications, between 1926 and 1928 2707

applications, in 1929 with 950 applications and in 1930 with 1026 applications. St Patrick's Guild dealt with 834 cases for the years 1923–1925, 1126 between 1926 and 1928, 495 cases in 1929, and 452 cases in 1930. Other illegitimate births were not registered due to concealment, emigration and forced marriage.

Once married, the state sought to maintain a woman's place in the marital home by removing the means of divorce. Before 1922 a divorce could be obtained by means of a Private Members' Bill in parliament and although there was no specific mention of divorce in the 1922 Constitution, the Attorney General favoured allowing divorce for those who wanted it. Three Private Members' Bills were presented in Ireland in 1924. However, in 1925 standing orders were suspended making it impossible for such Bills to be introduced in the future. Archbishop Gilmartin of Tuam warned that family ties were weakened in countries where facilities for divorce were available, arguing that in these places 'the family hardly existed' (Irish Catholic Directory 1927, 583, cited in Keogh 1995, 29). J.J. Byrne (TD<sup>7</sup>) contributed to the debate by stating: 'This country, I believe, stands for the sanctity of marriage . . . To the vast majority of people the limitation, the control of births, or the infliction of race suicide upon this nation is one which is bitterly resisted' (Dáil Debates, vol. 26, 18 October 1928, col. 686).

Despite some opposition (mainly from Anglo-Irish activists like William Butler Yeats), this remained the situation until divorce was made unconstitutional in 1937 (Keogh 1995; Kennedy 2001). The 1937 Constitution cemented the family as the key social unit in society, marriage as the key social act, and explicitly stated that a woman's place in society was as home-maker. Article 41.1.1 stated that, 'The State recognises the Family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law'. In Section 3.1 of the article: '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'. Section 3.2 declared: 'no law shall be enacted providing for providing for the grant of a dissolution of marriage'. In other words, divorce became illegal, only being repealed in 1995 through a constitutional referendum (and then only being passed by a narrow margin of 1%; Ferriter 2004, 718).

The illegality of divorce was not the only legal impediment to women leaving the family home if they so desired. Under the Women's Property Act, 1882–1893, women could keep property they owned prior to marriage (which would account for only a minority of women in Ireland) but had no legal right to the marital home or to any of the proceeds should it be sold. This Act was not repealed until 1957 under the Married Women's Status Act. A married woman could not claim a domicile independent of her husband until 1986<sup>8</sup> or be officially registered as unemployed<sup>9</sup> until the enactment of the Social Welfare Act 1986 and it was not until 1964, under the Guardianship of Infants Act, that mothers were given the same legal status as fathers in the care of their children.

Prior to and once confined in the marital home, the state and other organisations such as the Church sought to limit citizen's access to literature on birth control and access to contraceptives. The *Report of the Committee on Evil Literature* (1926) revealed that many Irish citizens were aware of the availability of commercial contraception and/or advice on how to procure contraception and 'abortifacients'. Commercial contraceptives (referred to as birth control propaganda and race suicide by the Report), including condoms, cervical caps, creams, and spermicides, were available to people in the Free State through mail order from Britain. Advice was also freely available on home-made methods of contraception for those unable to afford the commercial variety. Over 23 files (National Archives, Jus 7/2) of 'evidence' for the report, much of it from concerned citizens, contain documents, journals, and newspaper cuttings advertising contraception or offering advice on sexual matters. The Report concluded that easy access to birth control, or knowledge concerning birth control, would lead to sexual relations between unmarried citizens and offend the moral majority.

The evidence gathered by the Committee provided the foundation for the 1929 *Censorship of Publications Act* which banned all literature advocating or giving information on contraception and abortion. In order to shore up a series of loopholes in the 1889 Indecent Advertisements Act, which permitted the advertisement of medicines and appliances for procuring abortions, promoting miscarriage or preventing conception in newspapers, this Act banned the printing, publishing, distribution or sale of 'any book or periodical publication . . . which advocates the unnatural prevention of conception or the procurement of abortion or miscarriage or any method, treatment, or appliance to be used for the purpose of such prevention or such treatment', unless the reader had a permit in writing granted to him/her by the Minister for Justice (sections 16, 1 a, b, c). Advertisements which dealt with 'any disease affecting the generative organs of either sex, or to any complaint or infirmity arising from or relating to sexual intercourse, or to the prevention or removal of irregularities in menstruation' were liable to the board's control. Infractions carried the possible penalty of up to £100 in fines or imprisonment of up to three months (sections 17, 10, 2). In 1935, section 17 of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act imposed a complete ban on the importation and sale of artificial contraceptives.

Literature providing information on the dangers of contraception was, however, allowed to circulate freely. In his book on *Lawful Birth Control*, John A. O'Brien (1934, 81) quotes the following eminent gynaecologists, Dr Guchteneere:

... this noxious character (the frustration of an essential function of the organism) is inherent in every contraceptive method without exception, although certain of the methods are particularly dangerous – for example, *coitus interruptus*, the most widespread and most harmful of all.

O'Brien goes on to quote from the Opening Address to the Congress of German Gynecologists in 1929:

... almost all preventative methods present a danger – and frequently no negligible one – to the health of the woman especially. Nature cannot be hoodwinked. Continual and fruitless stimulation of the genital organs leads to more or less serious chronic pelvis disorders and very frequently sterility. (O'Brien 1934, 82–3)

In addition to the Censorship of Publications Act (1929), the December 1930 Papal Encyclical *Casti Connubi* cemented social policy on birth control and condemned the use of contraceptives, sterilisation, or abortion in any circumstances – even where the life of the woman was threatened through pregnancy (including tuberculosis, heart and kidney disease). Such policy worked to condemn women to the marital home.

### **Workplaces**

In a Christian State women should be excluded even by law from occupations unbecoming or dangerous to female modesty. The employment of wives or mothers in factories or outside their own household should be strictly limited by legislation. (Cahill 1924, cited in Valiulis 1995b, 171)

Women's confinement within the home was aided by a series of legislative reforms that severely curtailed their ability to undertake paid employment or civic duties. The Civil Service Amendment Act (1925) gave government the power to bar women from certain civil service exams (based purely on sex) and in 1933 female teachers were required to resign upon marriage. The Conditions of Employment Act (1935) extended the marriage bar to the entire civil service (except for workers in the lower grades such as cleaners) and gave the government power to limit the number of women employed in any given industry (apart from this clause it was a progressive piece of legislation guaranteeing holidays with pay, regulating work hours, overtime, and so on; the marriage bar was finally repealed in 1973). Companies who hired men rather than women were given additional tariff protection.

Legal and official discourse was reinforced with repeated references in the media and from the pulpit to women's 'former dignity' (Ferriter 2004). It was claimed women had forgotten their true identity, the true meaning of their lives, and had strayed from the home to the detriment of themselves, the family, and the nation. Women who worked outside the home discredited the institution of marriage. Women had but one vocation:

... the one for which nature had admirably suited her ... that of wife and mother. The woman's duties in this regard especially that of bringing up children, are of such far-reaching importance for the nation and the race, that the need of safeguarding them must outweigh almost every other consideration. (*Irish Monthly*, vol. 53, 1925, 28–9 cited in Valiulis 1995a, 127)

One priest in Kerry opined that 'it was a sure sign of the break-up of the planet when women took to leaving their homes and talking in public' (cited in Kiberd 1995, 397). Even the supposedly liberal and Protestant *Irish Times* (22 February 1937) expressed criticism of married women working: 'Some day, please Heaven! The nation will be so organised that work will be available for every man, so that he may marry and assume the burdens of a home and for every woman until she embarks upon her proper profession – which is marriage'. Further, in 1924 and 1927 the Cosgrave government enacted the Juries Bills which virtually ensured that there would be no women jurors (for half a century after independence only three women served on a jury; Kiberd 1995). Church leaders argued that women carrying out jury duties 'is manifestly inconsistent with their home duties; and that any women be eligible to act as jurors in certain types of criminal cases is contrary to the Christian ideal of female modesty. Hence it is desirable that women be exempted from duty' (Cahill 1925, cited in Valiulis 1995b, 171).

This process of excluding women from workplaces ran in stark contrast to the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act (1919) which ruled that neither sex nor marriage should disqualify a person from 'exercising any public function or for any civil office or post' (cited in Fitzpatrick 1998, 235). Moreover, somewhat paradoxically, in the first decades of the twentieth century only three countries in Europe – England, Wales, and Norway – had a higher percentage of girls in secondary school education, and only two countries – Finland and the Netherlands – had a higher percentage of women in primary teacher training colleges. Finland was the only country that had a higher percentage of women in university; a state of affairs that was maintained right through to the 1930s (Daly 1995, 107). And yet, within a few short years, the fate of women within society was sealed with the enactment of the new Irish Constitution in 1937 which ensured that 'mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home' (article 41.2.2). Inevitably, many women were squeezed out of the workplace and into the marital home, denied a means of independent income, becoming reliant on the husband to provide for her and her family.

### **Public space**

The cult of sex is everywhere. Sex is blazoned on our fashion places, palpitates in our novels, revels in our ballrooms ... (*Irish Monthly*, March 1926, cited in Valiulis 1995b: 172)

In the early 1920s new ideas on sexual liberation, drawn largely from overseas, began to articulate themselves through cinema, art, literature, fashion and pastimes in Ireland. In response, the Catholic Church argued there was a national crisis with regard to sexual immorality, condemning what it saw as a growing obsession with pleasure, a slackening of parental control, and a decline in sexual morality. New legislation quickly followed. *The Censorship of Films Act* (1923) established the creation of a film censor (moral editor) with power to cut or refuse a licence to films which in his opinion were 'subversive of public morality' (sections 7(2)). His duties were to ban any film that he felt:



Unfit for general exhibition in public by reason of its being indecent, obscene or blasphemous; or because the exhibition thereof in public would tend to inculcate principles contrary to public morality or would be otherwise subversive of public morals.

This was shortly followed by the *Intoxicating Liquor Act* (1924) that limited opening hours, and an amendment in 1927 that attempted to reduce the number of licensed premises, both driven by concerns over the effects of alcohol on sexual conduct. However, it was the craze for jazz and dancing that upset the clergy the most. According to Lee (1989, 158), 'A morbid preoccupation with occasions of sin in dance halls would dominate pastoral pronouncements throughout the twenties and thirties'. Of course it was not only the dance halls themselves that concerned the Bishops but what went on during breaks from the hall and on the way home. Far from DeValera's much quoted St Patrick Day (1943) broadcast<sup>10</sup> about 'happy maidens' and dancing at the crossroads, Bryan MacMahon recalls a campaign led by priests in the 1930s against crossroads dancing. 'Wooden roadside platforms were set on fire by curates ... priests drove their motorcars backward and forward over the timber platforms ... and those who played music at dances were branded as outcasts' (cited in Whyte 1971, 28). The church was in favour, however, of modest céilí dances<sup>11</sup> as 'Irish dances do not make degenerates' (Cardinal Logue 1925 cited in Breathnach 1983, 44). These concerns of the clergy were echoed in the *Report of the Committee on the Criminal Law Amendment Acts* (1880–1885) that concluded: 'The 'commercialised' Dance Halls, Picture Houses of sorts, and the opportunities afforded by the misuse of motor cars for luring girls, are the chief causes alleged for the present looseness of morals' (Carrigan 1931, 12).

While men were to be foiled in their attempts to lure women, it was women who were most often the targets of reproach and discipline from the church. For example, the Catholic Truth Society, employing nationalistic tones, stated:

The women of Ireland, heretofore, renowned for their virtue and honour, go about furnished with the paint-pot, the lip-stick ... and many of them have acquired the habit of intemperance, perhaps one of the sequels to their lately adopted vogue of smoking. A so-called dress performance or dance today showed some of our Irish girls in such scanty drapery as could only be exceeded in the slave market of pagan countries. (*Irish Independent*, 13 October 1926)

Bishop O'Doherty of Galway, who forbade his flock from attending dances on Saturday nights, advised fathers: 'If your girls do not obey you, if they are not in at the hours appointed, lay the lash upon their backs. That was the good old system, and that should be the system to-day' (*Irish Catholic Directory* 1925, 568; see also *Irish Independent*, 9 April 1924). The outcome of these protests was the *Dance Halls Act* (1935) that was passed without debate in the Dáil. Owners of dance halls and organisers of public dances were obliged to obtain licences (which restricted times and dates) before dances could be held.

In tandem there were attempts to limit women's participation in athletic pursuits (married women were 'discouraged' by priests) and a teacher training college for women in Limerick (Mary Immaculate College) started the 'Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade in 1927', in response to Catholic Bishops' appeal for women to dress modestly. Women were instructed not to wear dresses less than four inches below the knee. Instruction also covered behaviour and disapproved of smoking, alcohol, immodest dancing, and so on (Ferriter 2004, 329).

While the moral panic concerning sexual liaisons arising from encounters in public space was largely driven by concerns over improper relations and illegitimate births, the spectre of venereal disease also played a part. In 1925, the Committee on Venereal Disease was established to investigate the prevalence of venereal disease in the Free State and to suggest solutions to the problem. Reporting in 1927 the Committee stated that the disease was widespread and that there was 'no considerable area entirely free from the disease' (p. 5). The Commission felt that it was so prevalent (in both rural and urban areas, and affecting men, women and children) that it constituted

'a menace to the maintenance and advancement of the physical and intellectual standards of the race'; it was 'a serious menace to the health of the nation' (p. 13). Controversially the Committee concluded that both syphilis and gonorrhoea 'appears to be conveyed by apparently decent girls throughout the country' (p. 18) with even women of the rural West of Ireland, a source of purity in the national narrative, not free from moral and physical contagion (Howell 2003). In a statement that went against the grain of established discourses on the 'social disease', the Report concluded it was 'disseminated largely by a class of girl who could not be regarded as a prostitute' (p. 3).

Indeed, the Report noted that the problem of the open brothel no longer existed in Dublin (p. 10). Up until the 1920s, brothels in Dublin's red light district, Monto,<sup>12</sup> had operated openly and 'without much let or hindrance on the part of the police authorities' (Suppression of Prostitution 1947, sections 4, 5). However, in 1924 the newly formed Catholic fundamentalist Legion of Mary joined forces with Jesuit Richard Devane (Pro-Cathedral in Malborough St) and Dublin Metropolitan Police and began patrolling the area, picketing brothels and placing prostitutes in rescue homes. Within six months the majority of brothels were closed down.

The problem was, then, not one of prostitution but of girls not acting as decently as they sought to portray themselves, with the Committee concluding that if it 'was possible to get rid of the prostitute the eradication of Venereal Disease would not be effected' (p. 5). The solution was to limit women's public role and access to public space and therefore the opportunities to act as indecent women.

### *Places of discipline and reformation*

Accompanying the movement to regulate women's participation in paid employment, public service and public life, and to effectively constrain their lives to the marital home, was the creation of a set of sites designed to discipline and reform 'fallen' women, act as a deterrent to others, and to address a number of related issues, such as the strain on accommodation and finances of the County Homes (in the 1920s these former workhouses dealt with the majority of unmarried mothers); the perceived failure of County Homes to instil a sense of respectability and responsibility amongst its citizens; 'souperism' or girls fleeing to Protestant refuges; unsafe and unregulated maternity homes where infant mortality was extremely high; pregnant single girls emigrating to England in large numbers; and the threat to the 'much cherished ideal of the traditional family by bypassing convention and creating unorthodox units' (Earner-Byrne 2004, 172). 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. As a result, unmarried mothers and their children were sent to these sites to be remade as women society deemed appropriate. The legitimacy for their containment and surveillance was dependent, to a large degree, on a rationale of defending the wider social body from dangerous or potentially dangerous moral forces.

As Smith (2004, 227) notes, the move towards the creation of such sites 'coincided, almost precisely, with the foundation of the Irish Free State'. Indeed, within the first five years of independence a nationally organised and politically directed programme to protect the social body was already in place. The *Local Government Temporary Provisions Act* (1923) and the Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor (1927) advocated a series of recommendations that effectively conferred criminal status on single women with children born out of wedlock (Powell 1992; Smith 2004). The 1927 Report of the Commission stated:

in dealing with the problem of accommodation for unmarried mothers it must be recognised that there are two classes to be provided for, namely:

- (1) those who may be amenable to reform and
- (2) those who for one reason or another are regarded as less hopeful cases. (1927, para. 228)

The latter class were deemed to be lacking any possibility for self-improvement and thus liable to a range of sovereign and disciplinary interventions. Included in this class were deserted wives, 'who subsequent to desertion had children not the offspring of their husbands' (Powell 1992). Similar divisions were presented in the Dáil:

You might divide the mothers into two classes. You have the middle-class mothers with whom the social workers and nuns in cities come into contact. In the other case, you have the mothers who go to county homes and who comprise the vast majority of mothers of illegitimate children in the Free State. Amongst the latter type you have a small percentage of mothers who themselves are illegitimate, who come of illegitimate stock, and who observe no moral code whatever. (M. J. Kennedy, Dáil Debates, vol. 33, 13 February 1930)

The Report of the Commission proposed two modes of treatment, which was intended to differentiate and segregate the two classes of offenders. First offenders were to be sent to Mother and Baby Homes and repeat offenders to County Homes and Magdalene Asylums.

First offenders, it was felt, required moral 'upbuilding', 'firmness' and 'discipline' but also, depending on the character of the offender, 'charity' and 'sympathy'. These women were to be dealt with in the same institution as children. In parallel, such institutions were created to fulfil these needs modelled on a prototype institution run by the Sacred Heart Nuns in Bessborough, County Cork, set up 'primarily for young mothers who have fallen for the first time and who are likely to be influenced towards useful and respectable life' (Annual Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1928, 113). Unmarried, pregnant women sent to these homes generally came from families who could afford to pay a fee to the home (Rafferty and O'Sullivan 1999, 74). The Order set up another Mother and Baby home in Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea in 1930, and the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary set up another in Castlepollard in 1935.<sup>13</sup> The state itself ran similar institutions, operated by the Poor Law Authorities (but staffed by nuns), at Pelletstown, County Dublin, Tuam, County Galway, and Kilrush, County Clare (Powell 1992; Garrett 2000).

Unmarried mothers were generally (and illegally) held in these homes for up to two years as it was felt 'a number of the girls [were] very weak-willed and [had] to be maintained in the Home for a long period to safeguard them against a second lapse' (Department of Local Government and Public Health 1930–31, 130). During their stay women were trained in domestic duties like cooking, sewing, knitting and religious instruction (Department of Local Government and Public Health 1928–29, 114, cited in Powell 1992, 191). Children of first offenders were very often quickly separated from their mothers – checked for any problems (mental or physical) and usually informally adopted if found to be healthy and 'normal' (Rafferty and O'Sullivan 1999). Although, in theory, women and their children were free to leave at any time, many stayed because they were unaware of their civil and legal rights or because in many cases poor law authorities refused to allow them to take their children with them. Not only was this illegal, it was also understood in official circles. In her Annual Report for 1931–1932, the Inspector of Boarded-Out Children, Alice Lister wrote: 'A grave wrong is done to their children by retaining them in the Co. Homes, but retention of the children is the only means of securing the mothers from the danger which freedom spells for them' (cited in *Irish Times*, 1 May 1999).

For repeat offenders or 'less hopeful cases . . . residue composed probably of those who are the least open to good influences', the Report proposed a period of detention (Department of Local Government and Public Health Annual Report 1927, 69), not only to protect the social

order but because their children ‘could be infected with the deviant genes and perpetuate the threat’ (Rafferty and O’Sullivan 1999, 74). These sentiments were backed up by politicians. For example, in the Dáil, Dr Ward spoke of ‘the difficulty of the unmarried mother’ and of ‘setting up separate institutions for that particular class . . . with compulsory powers to keep the mother there for a year or so’ (Dáil Debates, vol. 23, 23 May 1928). The Commission’s proposals regarding single women with more than one child were quickly put into effect, with mother and children separated and confined to different institutions. Mothers were generally incarcerated in County Homes and for the most part children remained under poor law regulation and were either sent to industrial schools or were fostered.<sup>14</sup> County Homes were supplemented by an arrangement between local authorities and the Sisters-in-Charge of Magdalene Asylums in 1932 for the containment of unmarried mothers (Annual Report of the Department of Local Government and Public Health 1931–32, 129 cited in Powell 1992, 181).

Magdalene Asylums (named after the prostitute Mary Magdalene) provided ‘special provision’ for repeat offenders. These institutions were originally created by social purity movements in the nineteenth century to rehabilitate and provide refuge to prostitutes and destitute women. They were quickly appropriated by the Catholic Church and by the 1920s were almost exclusively used to reform unmarried mothers, female sexual deviants, and those who transgressed sexual social norms. The Good Shepherd Sisters ran asylums in Limerick, Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Belfast. The Sisters of Mercy ran asylums in Limerick and Galway, and the Sisters of our Lady of Charity ran asylums in Limerick and two in Dublin. Once temporary places of refuge and asylum providing respite from abuse, disease, and so on, they became increasingly distanced from the original ideals of the social purity movement and instead turned into long-term, punitive institutions, driven by a quest for retribution and repentance. ‘Inmates’ and ‘penitents’ were obliged to surrender their infants and work primarily in laundries attached to the asylums. Unlike other businesses, these profit making laundries were not subject to the Factory Act (1895) that protected workers’ rights.

Penitents were referred to as ‘children’ and subject to enforced silences for long periods of the day. Under constant surveillance, close friendships were discouraged (Rafferty 1999; Finnegan 2004) and individual identity was suppressed and rebuilt (ostensibly carried out to protect anonymity). Women were often given new names and prohibited from talking of their past. Beds in the dormitories were open to the gaze (even trips to the toilet were carefully monitored and surveyed). Finnegan (2004, 29–30) quotes from ‘Rules for the Direction of the Classes’ (1898, 138); rules that were observed in the Good Shepherd Asylums until at least the 1960s:

We should not, at recreation nor elsewhere, allow two children to be alone . . . there should be no corners in which some could hide from the eyes of the Mistress. It is in such places the demon lies in wait for the children, to tempt them to do wrong . . . Then redouble your vigilance . . . Watch them in the chapel; watch them at work; watch them particularly during the hours of recreation. Let your surveillance extend to everything.

Shunned by their families, these women and girls largely ceased to exist in the outside world. ‘Escapees’ were often returned by their families or members of the Garda. Denied civil and constitutional rights, many stayed for life. No one knows how many women and girls were sent to the laundries. The religious orders continue to refuse to make these records available, but estimates range into tens of thousands (Finnegan 2004; Ferriter 2004).

### **Producing ‘decent girls’**

The real power – the real success of this whole new apparatus of sexuality – was that men, women, girls and boys inculcated sexuality in themselves. The key to the deployment of this sexuality was a

continuous, rigorous examination of the self using the rules, regulations, principles and practices of the Catholic Church. (Inglis 1997, 13)

Protection of Ireland's distinctiveness (and fictive ethnicity) and recently won independence was the primary concern for many post-independence political activists, and Ireland's appointed (and self-appointed) moral crusaders were determined to control dissident elements and cultural values in order to build a 'pure and unsullied society' (Kenny 2000, 117). As we have illustrated, the new Irish state very quickly became a site of applied bio-politics, and governmental practices began to focus explicitly on (visible) sexual morality as a key target of social intervention and organisation. Following reports on the morality of the population there was a proliferation of policy documents and legislation concerned with the administration of life (issues relating to, for example, contraception, abortion, divorce, venereal disease, health, hygiene) as policy makers and other state actors set about the task of reforming, regulating, dominating and controlling the politics and practices of the Irish population. As such, various official and unofficial government agents (through proscription and prescription) sought to shape the conduct, aspirations, needs, desires and capacities of individuals within difference spheres.

The disciplinary regime that was constructed was highly gendered, focusing almost exclusively on the regulation and self-regulation of women. They worked to form a dense *spatialised* grid of discipline, reform and self-regulation, seeking to produce 'decent' women inhabiting virtuous spaces by limiting access to work and public spaces, confining women to an unsullied (marital) home, with the ever-present threat of new sites of reformation, and convincing citizens that such material and discursive practices were in their own and the nation's best interests (and thus to self-discipline their own sexual behaviour). With regard to the latter, governmental strategies not only aimed to constrain, coerce, discipline and normalise but also to produce a certain kind of regulated, civilised subject (Foucault 1978) – decent men, but more particularly, women. The dividing practices employed not only helped to define who was in and out of the social body, but thus what constituted a desirable social body. The result was that by the early 1930s a systematic framework for the regulation and surveillance of sexual practices and segregating problem elements of the population was in place.

As we have noted, however, what occurred in this period (1922–1937) was not a replacement of earlier discourses on sexual purity and morality. For example, discourses on the immorality of prostitution, contraception, sexual perniciousness, obscene literature, and so on, had been laid down in the previous decades by social purity movements, the legal and medical professions, and religious institutions. As such, there was nothing new about attempts to regulate and reform morality through place (institutions for the punishment, reform and regulation of 'sexual deviants' were already well established and there had been sporadic attempts to regulate red light districts throughout the nineteenth century). There was, however, a transformation in the scale and continuity of the exercise of power, a shift in emphasis and objective, an increasing obsession amongst political and religious elites with the *visibility* of sex, and the development of a much more systematic and connected disciplinary regime. Concurrent with this, there was a diffusion of what might be termed 'containment culture' (Smith 2004) – where Irish citizens are implicitly held to be without maturity and the attributes of responsibility and autonomy, and where unwanted discourses and threats to the national narrative were suppressed and statistics concealed under the pretext that revelations of high levels of immorality and sexual crime would 'offend the sensibilities of the Irish people' and 'rejoice its enemies' (for example, official reports were not openly published). In both cases, women were the central foci.

The pressure to produce 'decent girls' – honest, chaste, virtuous, homely – meant that women became particular targets and a calculated administration of feelings of shame and guilt about the body and sexuality, designed to link the ethical capacities of women to the ends of government, were set in train (Inglis 1997; Rose 1993). In tandem with nationalist and Catholic discourse, legislative

measures were implemented that sought not only to constrain women, but to work positively (and oppressively) to create a particular subjectivity so that women would be seen to 'conform to the prescribed national paradigm' (Smith 2004, 210–11; Valiulis 1995b; McAvoy 1999).

It is perhaps no surprise then to note that it was women, having been persuaded to the logic of the governmentality advocated, who were the strongest supporters and effective objects and vehicles of new regimes regulating sexual conduct; the most ardent creators of new moral geographies. For example, in 1925 it was for the most part women who were involved in the closing of the Dublin's red light district, Monto (although directed by Frank Duff, founder of the Legion of Mary). Women also formed voluntary groups to monitor cinemas, theatres and women's dress code (Kenny 2000). In 1929, a report from the Galway Board of Health 'indicated that some women refused to use the facilities of Galway Maternity Hospital because they would be forced to associate with unmarried mothers' (cited in Carrigan 1931, 9–10). 'Concerned citizens' and lay organisations like the Irish Vigilance Association and Legion of Mary alerted the censors to 'immoral' literature and sought increased penalties. It was, for the most part, families, relatives and the local clergy who sent 'promiscuous' or potentially promiscuous girls and deviant women to Magdalene Asylums, and public representatives (e.g. elected councillors) openly recommended incarceration, categorisation and segregation of 'fallen women' (see for example Shaw 1926 and Ward 1928). And it was nuns who scrutinised, supervised and enforced the strict disciplinary regimes within these institutions.

In turn, the suspension of the law when it came to the treatment of unmarried mothers and their children served to heighten the discretionary powers of those (for example, nuns, local authorities, families) 'who are asked to rely on their own judgement to decide fundamental matters of justice, life and freedom' (Butler 2004: 55). By constructing any form of sexuality outside that of marriage as a moral problem and an issue of social responsibility it legitimated what was essentially a police action – the spatial confinement of the 'deviant'. Confinement in these circumstances was not seen to infringe on the women's rights as citizens and as such was viewed as a legitimate form of government.

These pressures clearly had a profound effect on the moral landscape of Ireland shaping sexual conduct and the lives of women in numerous ways. This said, it is clear from the record that Irish adults were far from 'innocents', unaware of their sexuality, sexual conduct, or the punishments meted out to transgressors in their name. After all, the disciplining regime was seen to be addressing a set of real concerns. During the first decades of the foundation of the new state, many women and men *were* exploring their sexuality and having sex prior to marriage. The use of contraception and birth control was relatively common in both rural and urban areas as was the availability of information. It is also clear that many men and women were having sexual relations outside marriage. Venereal disease was widespread, levels of illegitimacy were rising steadily, and there is strong evidence of pregnant women emigrating to Britain in large numbers to have their babies in a less puritanical and more anonymous environment (Earner-Byrne 2004). As such, it is a mistake to assume that all subjects bowed to the disciplining regime. Instead, there were ways of resistance (having relationships, affairs, attending dances, and so on), and challenges to the changes taking place. For example, Ryan (2002, 61) quotes a piece from the *Irish Independent* (15 December 1936: 7) where a social worker describes the situation of unmarried mothers: 'These girls are the scapegoats of a tradition of Puritanism that will not admit that things are as they are'.

At the same time, the obsession with immoral foreign literature, contraception, working women, divorce, and dance halls deflected attention away from the reality of high levels of sexual crime and abuse and 'the social scars which disfigured Ireland' (Lee 1989) and which recent public inquiries are only now starting to address such as sexual abuse by clergy and others in positions of power. The reluctance of successive governments to prepare a regular report on sexual crime

speaks volumes. In 1937, the Department of Justice prepared a minute for the Executive Council arguing for the need of a regular report: 'The present practice is so very unusual in a modern state and would be so difficult to explain or justify, if and when public attention is drawn to it, that it is proper to have a government decision on the matter' (June 1937, cited in Finnane 2001, 531). The minute was later withdrawn from the cabinet agenda. There was no public evaluation of the scale of sexual crime and no discussion on the impact on individuals (as in pre-Free State *Irish Citizen* articles) (Smith 2004). This denial was evident even amongst the judiciary. Sentencing a soldier for an assault on a young girl a district court judge stated he 'was glad to say that cases of indecent assault were uncommon in this country, and this was attributable to the manhood of the country. It had rightly been said that Irishmen had greater respect for women than the men in any other country in Europe' (*Irish Times*, 6 August 1928). Ironically, in 1927 and 1928 the rate of sexual assault on women were the highest recorded since 1909 according to the evidence presented by the Garda Commissioner, Eoin O'Duffy, to the Carrigan Committee in 1931 (cited in Finnane 2001, 535). Moreover, the 'culture of containment' worked to free Irish society from polluting elements while simultaneously rendering the 'contaminated' less visible (in a psychological, social and material sense). Incarcerating sexualised women and children in religious institutions rendered the compromising reality of their existence invisible while paradoxically confirming society's high standards. It sustained the new 'imagined community' concealing any visible signs of sexual crime, incidence of rape, incest, paedophilia and ignorance, and in 'return the nation secured its identity as a Catholic and morally pure society' (Smith 2004, 233).

The disciplining regime and the ideologies of respectability and superior sexual morality thus worked to produce a refuge in which to evade analysis and allow people to 'practise innocence'. It would appear that a significant proportion of the population assumed this role, creating an intimate symbiosis between government and civil society, through the adoption of new modes of self-regulation. As a consequence ideas on sexual conduct, and the role and place of women in society more generally, and how these should be maintained through new legislation, censorship, retribution and incarceration, were taken for granted, and came to be seen as desirable and commonsense, even though they had negative consequences for many in society, thus producing new moral geographies. Most Irish people seemingly accepted a role (if at the unconscious level) as accomplices in the new vision of Irishness and Ireland and its governmentality. As Lee (1989, 652) states: 'The ultimate perfection of the design had been achieved when it could be conceived not only by its architects but also by its victims, for all their inner sense of deprivation, as a divine dispensation'. The consequence of the new doxa was that within one generation women's political, economic and reproductive rights had been so severely curtailed that they were 'explicitly barred from claiming for themselves a public identity' (Valiulis 1995a, 120). The discursive formation was so deep-seated that it was not until the 1970s through to the 1990s that legislation and the constitution were subject to sustained critique and campaign, and a reconfiguring of the immediate post-independence, moral landscape was undertaken.<sup>15</sup>

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### Notes

1. William T. Cosgrave became the first leader of Cumann na nGaedheal, the first party to hold power in the Irish Free State after the granting of independence. The party was officially constituted in March 1923 and remained in power until 1932.

2. The only reference to religion in the 1922 Constitution was one that guaranteed religious freedom and equality to all the citizens of the Free State.
3. This Report is often referred to as the Carrigan Report after James Carrigan its chairman.
4. These institutions helped maintain and sustain each other. For example, many of the children born in County Homes (the old workhouses and subject to Poor Law regulation) and Magdalene Asylums were generally fostered out, adopted abroad or eventually sent to an Industrial School. Girls brought up in Industrial Schools frequently ended up working in the laundries attached to the Magdalene Asylums. Those admitted to the religious run, state-funded, Mother and Baby Homes were for the most part 'first offenders' from families who could afford to pay a fee and in a position to keep the 'secret' intact. Their children, however, often suffered the same fate as those born in the County Homes and Magdalene Asylums. The last Magdalene Asylum closed in 1996 (Culliton 1996).
5. The project is funded by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) through their postdoctoral fellowship scheme (Project title: A Genealogy of Sexual Standards and Practices in Ireland: 1880–2003).
6. During this period, the *Irish Independent* was viewed as a nationalist and Catholic national newspaper which gave its allegiance to Cumann na nGaedheal. The *Irish Times* was viewed as a liberal, Protestant national newspaper.
7. TD stands for Teachta Dála, meaning Member of Parliament.
8. A woman could only claim independent domicile after 1986. Before 1986, a married woman had the domicile of her husband and could not acquire a domicile independently of him so long as the marriage subsisted. The effect of the Domicile Act was to give married women the same capacity as anyone else of having an independent domicile.
9. Prior to the enactment of the Social Welfare (No. 2) Act 1985, married women were not allowed to claim unemployment assistance unless their husbands were incapable of self-support.
10. Available on [http://www.rte.ie/laweb/11/11\\_t09b.html/](http://www.rte.ie/laweb/11/11_t09b.html/).
11. The Irish céilí is a form of group dancing to traditional Irish music.
12. Michael McCarthy, author of *Priests and People in Ireland* (1908: 282–3) designated Monto 'the greatest blot upon the social life of Dublin and Ireland' where 'the trade in immorality is carried out as openly as any branch of legitimate business' and 'the principal houses are as attractively painted and fitted up on the outside as private hotels which are legitimately licensed for the sale of drink in the principle streets of the city'.
13. In 1930, 60 of the 120 children born in Sean Ross Abbey died (Department of Local Government and Public Health, 1938).
14. In orphanages catering for illegitimate children, the infant mortality rate in the mid-1920s ranged between 29% and 34% at a time when infant mortality rate in the rest of society was 5% or 6% (Annual Reports of the Registrar General of Births, Marriages and Deaths, 1923–1928).
15. The marriage bar was removed in 1973. Divorce became legal again in 1996. Contraception could be imported for personal use from 1973, from 1979 they could be sold in Ireland to married couples upon receipt of a medical prescription, from 1985, they could be bought by anyone over 18, from 1993, they could be sold via a vending machine, and from 1995 sterilisation became a legal means of contraception and contraception became free to the economically disadvantaged (Hug 2001). Homosexuality was decriminalised in 1993. Abortion remains illegal in all but exceptional circumstances (e.g., threat to the life of the mother, rape).

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#### ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

#### **Produciendo 'niñas decentes': goberamentalidad y las geografías morales de la conducta sexual en Irlanda (1922–1937)**

En este artículo examinamos el modo de goberamentalidad construida en Irlanda respecto a la regulación y el disciplinamiento de la sexualidad en la era de la post independencia hasta la redacción de la Constitución (1922–1937). Basándonos en los trabajos de Michel Foucault, documentamos cómo Irlanda se tornó un lugar donde se llevó a cabo una intensa biopolítica nacional aplicada con una multitud de comisiones y legislación gubernamentales, acompañada por nuevos lugares de reforma (los Asilos de Magdalena y los Hogares de la Madre y el Bebé), que juntos fueron diseñados para moldear y vigilar las prácticas sexuales de sus ciudadanos y crear un paisaje moral aséptico. Mientras que fue un proyecto profundamente marcado por género, con casi toda legislación y sitios de reforma dedicados a las mujeres, sostenemos que fue también, importantemente, un esfuerzo altamente especializado. Las formas y prácticas de la goberamentalidad produjeron, por un lado, un denso patrón especializado de disciplina, reforma y autoregulación, con el objetivo de producir mujeres 'decentes' que habiten espacios virtuosos con limitado acceso al trabajo y a los espacios públicos, restringidas a un hogar immaculado (marital), y, por otro lado, amenazantes nuevos sitios de reforma, emigración y ostracismo.

**Palabras claves:** goberamentalidad; biopolítica; sexualidad; lugares de formación