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**Scandal or Silence: The Irish print media's role in investigating
and shaping historical Church and state abuse as national
'scandals', 1920–2003**

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Abstract

Contemporary narratives of the abuses suffered by generations of women and children in Irish institutions are often framed through a reductive language of media revelation and discovery. Politicians, academics and commentators often speak of these abuses as ‘secrets’ wrenched from a ‘dark’ and ‘hidden Ireland’ and revealed to an unknowing public by a dynamic Irish journalism in the 1990s. As a result, Ireland’s so-called ‘decade of scandal’ has been wrapped in a pervasive narrative mythology that simultaneously absolves Irish journalism for its failure to inquire—by describing these abuses and the institutions themselves as ‘hidden’—and Irish society, by claiming that ‘no one knew’.

Using the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system as cases studies, this analysis directly challenges this conceptualisation, arguing that the institutions and their abusive and carceral nature were never hidden. An analysis of thousands of pieces of reportage in the pages of Ireland’s three main national newspapers—the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*—between 1920 and 2003 reveals that these institutional systems were normalised and legitimised through consensus narrative frames that presented abuse as charity and incarceration as moral rescue and a valued social service. Examining how these newspapers shaped, contested, and sustained the consensus institutional narrative it helped to embed is the primary goal of this study.

This dissertation traces the evolution in reporting that shifted the above episodes of historical injustice from a legitimising consensus frame to one of controversy, ultimately facilitating their reporting as national ‘scandals’ in the 1990s. It examines this evolution and the journalistic practices that framed the public narrative around these issues across the twentieth century. Consequently, this is a study that integrates media history with media analysis.

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Introduction

One of the most persistent cultural myths of the 1990s is the claim that ‘no one knew’. No one knew what really went on behind the walls of Irish institutions. No one knew of the suffering endured by generations of largely poor women and children in these places. It was part of a secret past, a ‘hidden Ireland’. It was Irish journalism—invigorated by the decade’s climate of revelation—that unravelled the secrets and turned darkness into light. It exposed Ireland to itself.

This thesis seeks to interrogate that myth, arguing that the high-profile media investigations of historical Church and state abuse were the culmination of a longer process in which the media, societal norms and institutional power intersected. Using the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system as cases studies, it argues that their carceral and abusive nature were never hidden.

They were made invisible to the public, not through ignorance, but through journalistic and societal framing that legitimised these carceral systems as sites of charity, moral rescue and a valued social service for much of the twentieth century. Investigating how Ireland’s three main national newspapers—the *Irish Times*, the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*—contributed to, challenged or sustained the consensus institutional narratives it helped to construct in the decades prior to the 1990s is the principal goal and focus of this dissertation.

While much of the twentieth century was characterised by journalistic production and reproduction of institutional consensus, the 1990s marked a significant point of rupture. Media exposure of a number of clerical abuse scandals—beginning with the Bishop Casey Affair in 1992—signalled a critical moment when the Irish media shifted away from a longstanding traditional deference towards a more active and inquiring role.

The Bishop Casey Affair

A phone call to the news desk of the *Irish Times* in January 1992 arguably serves as the symbolic foundation for the Irish journalism’s decade of ‘revelation’, marking a decisive shift in the balance of power between the Irish media and the Catholic Church. The call revealed that the Bishop of Galway Eamonn Casey had fathered a child with an American woman named Annie Murphy in the 1970s. The caller to the

newspaper was Arthur Pennell, the partner of Annie Murphy. Casey was a flamboyant, charismatic, and much-loved character in the country, due to his work with Irish immigrants in Britain and his setting up of the charity Trócaire (Brady, 2005; O'Brien, 2008, 2017). Despite fears that the Church would 'destroy' the newspaper if it published something that proved untrue, on 7 May 1992, the *Irish Times* ran a story stating that it sought to interview Casey about money he had sent to a woman in the USA—the only facts it could verify (Brady, 2005; Pollak, 1992). An editorial that same day, however, pointed readers to the bigger story. It called on the bishop to give an account of the facts and comfort others 'who have found themselves caught between what the law of the Church requires and what real life may actually throw up' (*Irish Times*, 1992). Casey later admitted paternity which the newspaper subsequently ran as a story.

The fall of Bishop Casey was a culturally seismic moment in Ireland. It changed the public perception of the Catholic Church's authority on matters of sex and marriage. It also marked the beginning of a decade in which Irish journalism increasingly scrutinised Church and state institutions. Given what was to emerge throughout the remainder of the 1990s in terms of the abuses of the Catholic Church, it is easy to downplay how ground-breaking and significant the Bishop Casey story was. Despite the emergence of a more pluralistic and questioning media, Irish journalism in the late 1980s and early 1990s remained a space where pursuing a Catholic bishop was done at your peril. It was also a space which was, if no longer deferential, still sympathetic to the Catholic Church.

Conor Brady edited the *Irish Times* between 1986 and 2002 and was, remarkably, the first Catholic editor of the newspaper (O'Brien, 2008). As someone who was brought up in the Catholic faith and had friends in religious life, Brady has admitted that dealing with revelations around the Church in the 1990s was 'an area of my editorship I found difficult'. The *Irish Times* was also a place where 'Sons and daughters of the manse and rectory were always numbered among the editorial staff' (Brady, 2005: 143). Brady even acknowledged that some of the reporters working for him 'refused to have anything to do' with the Casey investigation (Brady, 2005: 145). For the editor, exposing the moral hypocrisy at the heart of the Bishop Casey scandal was a 'monumental event' in Irish social history.

The dramatic fall-off in religious practice, the steep decline in vocations to the religious life and the near total loss of authority by the institutional church that took place during the 1990s can be said to have begun with the fall of Bishop Casey (Brady, 2005: 148).

Brady's view here can be disputed, and some scholars claim that the waning authority of the Catholic Church was already well under way by the 1970s (Inglis, 1998; Ferriter, 2010). However, the impact it had on the development of Irish journalism cannot be overstated. Here, for the first time, was an Irish newspaper seeking to directly expose the private life of senior figure in the Catholic hierarchy. The story was about more than just a bishop engaging in a sexual liaison and fathering a child. It revealed an Irish media finally willing to challenge an institution that dictated how its flock should live a moral life but itself failed to live up to those teachings. The story undercut a vision of Irish Catholic identity that was founded on moral purity and rectitude. Quite apart from the obvious risk in running a story about a very prominent member of the Irish Catholic hierarchy, the story also presented some journalistic problems. The information the newspaper received was over two decades old and extremely difficult to corroborate. It was also wary of a blackmail attempt, of publishing a story that it could not prove to be true and the risk of being viewed as a traditionally Protestant newspaper attacking the Catholic Church (Brady, 2005; Brown, 2015; O'Brien, 2008). It is easy now to look back on the story and argue that the *Irish Times* was somewhat timid in its approach to publishing the story. However, this was 1992, and in a country which, on the verge of an economic and cultural transition, 'had little interest in digging up old ghosts' (Smith, 2007b: 432). By dint of its very publication, the Bishop Casey story ensured that the Catholic Church was now as much a target for Irish journalism as any other centre of power in the state.

The 1990s and the 'decade of scandal'

The story set a precedent. The remainder of the decade revealed a series of high-profile cases that exposed the collusion of Church and state in institutional abuse. The crimes of the child abuser Fr. Brendan Smyth led to the collapse of the Fianna Fáil/Labour coalition government in 1994 led by Albert Reynolds (Ferguson, 1995; McGettrick et al, 2021). Such was the impact of clerical sexual abuse that the *Irish Independent* labelled 1994 the 'year of the paedophile priest'

(Ferguson, 1995). Revelations about one of Ireland's most well-known priests Fr. Michael Cleary followed in 1995, while the systemic abuse documented in the Industrial and Reformatory School System drew widespread public attention and opprobrium. Television docu-dramas and investigative documentaries, such as Louis Lentin's *Dear Daughter* (1996) and Mary Raftery's *States of Fear* (1999), combined the use of first-hand testimony with rigorous investigative journalism. They revealed that abuse in the Industrial and Reformatory school system was not an isolated historical phenomenon, but a systemic issue sustained by the institutional structures of Church, state, and the judiciary. These broadcasts achieved real political action and marked a 'decisive break' between the state broadcaster RTÉ and the Catholic Church, which had exerted a large degree of control over programming for decades and highlighted the media's capacity to achieve governmental action and increase societal awareness of the issue (*Irish Times*, 1996; McDonagh, 1996; Siggins, 1996; Smith, 2007: 116).

While the 1990s are widely recognised for bringing these scandals to light, earlier evidence shows that the media had long been aware of institutional abuses, though coverage was inconsistent. Memoirs, testimonies and novels, from Peter Tyrell in the 1960s, Paddy Doyle and Mannix Flynn in the 1980s and Pat Tierney in the early 1990s, demonstrated that the neglect and maltreatment of children in institutional care were visible well before the 1990s. Investigative journalism by Mavis Arnold and Heather Laskey in the mid-1980s on the 1943 fire at St Joseph's Industrial School for Girls in Cavan further confirmed this. However, newspaper coverage prior to the 1990s often normalised institutional practices, framing them as charitable or uncontroversial rather than critically examining them. These early accounts highlighted a persistent tension. Journalism had the information to challenge these institutions, but it was either unable, due to unofficial self-censorship or 'censorship of anticipation', or unwilling to disrupt prevailing social narratives (Adams, 1968; Inglis, 1998; Rockett, 2004; Woodman, 1985: 202-203).

The media 'revelations' of the 1990s are indicative of a wider shift in Irish journalism in that decade. One where the press moved from deference to critical scrutiny, from creating and maintaining consensus to generating controversy through the scrutiny of powerful institutions and systems. But what of Irish journalism before the 1990s? How did newspapers report institutions like industrial

and reformatory schools and the Magdalene Laundries in the decades before they came to be viewed as a national ‘scandal.’ How did journalistic practices and framing shape public visibility of these institutions, or obscure it, over time? Understanding these dynamics is crucial in not only contextualising the media interventions of the 1990s, but also for understanding media power, historical accountability, and the production of social consensus in Ireland.

This study examines the widely accepted view that the Industrial and Reformatory School system, the Magdalene Laundry system, and the abuses experienced by the women and children within them were somehow ‘hidden in plain sight’ until a persistent media revealed them to an unknowing Irish public. It challenges this belief, arguing instead that the institutions themselves, and their abusive practices, were visible in newspaper reportage as far back as the foundation of the state in 1922. Irish journalism was complicit in constructing and sustaining a national consensus around the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system which legitimised them for much of the twentieth century. This complicity provided a set of moral and interpretive frames through which the public was invited to understand and conceptualise the institutions, thereby effectively insulating them from meaningful public or journalistic scrutiny (Entman, 1993; Gamson et al., 1992). An analysis of thousands of pieces of diverse reportage, including news stories, feature articles, court reports, letters, and advertisements, reveals that in the decades preceding the 1990s, media representations both reflected and amplified a consensus narrative by approaching these institutions and their abusive practices as charitable endeavours. Through repeated use of this frame, incarceration and institutionalisation were normalised as acts of benevolence and charity, while concerns about abuse were rarely investigated or foregrounded.

This study is a work of media analysis and media history. It demonstrates that, while Irish journalism played a significant and well-acknowledged role in exposing institutional abuse in the 1990s, it also played a central role in creating, reflecting, and sustaining the social and political consensus that enabled these institutions’ endurance throughout much of the twentieth century. By focusing not only on *what* the print media reported but also on *how* it reported and framed its coverage, this dissertation traces the evolution of Irish journalism as it shifted its treatment of the institutions from functional and uncontroversial reporting to

controversial news coverage characterised as a *scandal*. The 1990s, therefore, should not be seen as a period in which the media *uncovered* the realities of the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system. Rather, it should be viewed as the period in which these issues were *rediscovered*—this time as subjects of public controversy that warranted sustained journalistic scrutiny.

Methodology

This dissertation's principal aim is to document and analyse how Ireland's three main national newspapers reported two interlinked episodes of injustice: the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system, with a particular focus on the decades preceding the 1990s when these issues began to dominate public attention. It further examines the discursive strategies used in constructing and/or contesting specific media narratives of these institutional systems. It also explores the significance of media framing of these 'scandals' for how journalism engages with complex historical and institutionally produced injustices.

This research contributes to the scholarship of Irish Media History by documenting and examining contemporaneous journalistic interpretations of these institutional systems and their socio-political impact. Furthermore, the study aims to map and outline the evolution of the journalistic practices that produced the news narratives of these issues for the Irish public.

The central research questions that guide this study are: how did Irish national newspapers report on the Industrial and Reformatory School system, and the Magdalene Laundry system between 1920 and 2003, and when and how did this reporting produce and circulate consensus narratives for public consumption? Additionally, how did the Irish journalistic landscape evolve between 1920 and 1990 and what factors influenced this evolution?

The initial aim of this study was to trace newspaper coverage of the institutions as they began to be reported on as 'scandals' in the 1990s. As part of the initial research process, it was important to establish the pre-history of these issues in terms of the extent of media coverage in the preceding decades. The unexpected scale and richness of the resulting historical newspaper material ultimately shifted the entire

trajectory of the dissertation, revealing the central role of early reportage and frames in shaping later news coverage.

Relevant newspaper data was gathered using select search terms from the digitised archives of Ireland's three main national newspapers—the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*—covering the period 1920 to 1990.

This period was chosen to examine historical reporting prior to these issues becoming public scandal. For specific analysis of the Magdalene Laundries reportage from 1993 and 2003 was also examined. The relevant material was identified using the *Irish Times* Archive and the Irish Newspaper Archive.

The arguments presented in Section One of the dissertation are drawn from a comprehensive analysis of 5,796 individual pieces of reportage from the three main national newspapers of the period: the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*. The goal of the data collection was to critically assess the frequency, nature and focus of the reportage around the institutions and the children committed to them. Coverage was isolated using the search term 'industrial school' and resulted in a data set which contained a broad and diverse range of media content including news reports of court committals, general news stories, reports of Dáil debates, editorials, adverts, and letters. The *Irish Independent* generated the most results with 2,722 pieces of reportage followed by the *Irish Times* (1,805) and the *Irish Press* (1,269). In addition to the coverage identified through the search term, a small number of pieces outside the principal search criteria were considered if they were connected to the topic through the content of the initially identified reportage. Due to the volume of material and the complexity of the subject matter, a manual and qualitative approach was employed when analysing the reportage. Close attention was paid to the type of narrative and language presented in the reportage to ascertain how the institutions, those that operated them, and the children committed to them were framed. Close attention was also paid to journalistic and editorial techniques used to prioritise certain frames and information for the consumer to understand more fully the mechanisms through which media representations of the industrial school system were constructed and disseminated. In Chapter One, analysis of the material revealed certain thematic representations of industrial schools, which were isolated, manually coded and themed under the following main headings:

1. Charity
2. Class
3. Performative
4. Criminalisation of poverty

In Chapter Two, relevant reportage indicating evidence or signs of the abusive nature of the institutions was identified through a manual analysis of articles published between 1920 and 1990. This close reading allowed for nuanced engagement with the material, capturing subtleties and emergent patterns that automated methods might overlook. From this process, the following themes emerged:

1. Unease about Industrial Schools
2. Evidence of abuse (physical, sexual, or suicide)
3. Exploitation of labour
4. Time spent in an industrial school used as a defence in later criminal proceedings

Chapter Three relates to a small number of journalists who engaged in forms of investigative and campaigning journalism in relation to the Industrial and Reformatory School System. These journalists and the relevant articles cited in the chapter were isolated during the initial data gathering stage. This material was easily isolated as it was smaller in number and was explicitly critical of the system itself, a fact which set it apart from the bulk of the reportage from the period.

To isolate the historical coverage of the Magdalene Laundries used in Chapter Four of Section Two, three search terms were used: “Magdalene* Asylum”; “Magdalene* Home” and “Magdalene* Laundry/Laundries”. The last of these searches was excluded from the analysis as the results generated predominantly came from the 1990s and later. The first two searches generated a large amount of material for the period under discussion, with the search term “Magdalene* Asylum” found to be the most common reference for the institutions in the early decades of the Irish state. As a result, it was decided to use the material from this search as the primary basis for these chapters.

To compare the coverage across the three publications, the number of search results generated was recorded. The *Irish Independent* contained the most coverage of the three publications examined with 758 results for “Magdalene* Asylum”. This compared to 559 results for the *Irish Times* and 458 for the *Irish Press*. The results contained a diversity of reportage, namely classified adverts, news briefs, news reports, and the reporting of charitable bequests. In analysing this material, close attention was paid to the language used and the type of narrative presented in the reportage to ascertain, not only how the institutions themselves were framed, but also how the nuns that operated them and the women incarcerated in them were discussed.

Based on this reading, the following categories were created and used to code the articles:

- notification of upcoming events (i.e., charity sermon, gift day, fundraising)
- report of charitable event
- seeking money/funding/charity
- news reports (with laundries central)
- gives number of women in institution
- nuns (positive)
- women (negative)
- wills/bequests
- charity appeal
- letters
- advertising documentary/TV
- reviews

Each of the articles was assigned to one or more of the above categories based on the content and language contained therein. For example, if an article was a report of a charity sermon where people were encouraged to donate money to the institution and the work of the nuns was praised, it would be coded in three categories: “report of charitable event”; “seeking money/funding/charity” and “nuns (positive)”. The number of articles in each category was recorded for each newspaper to allow for a comparison of the nature of the coverage across all three publications. The articles

used in the chapter were selected on the basis that the most strongly represented the themes which emerged during the analysis.

As Chapter Five is focused on the specific issue of the High Park Magdalene Laundry exhumations in September 1993, with follow-up developments reported in 2003, material for this chapter was far smaller in number and much easier to isolate. This reportage was isolated using search terms “Magdalene Laundry” and “High Park”.

Each article used in the chapters was downloaded as a PDF and recorded in a spreadsheet for organisation and retrieval. Metadata including article title, article type, publication date, page number, and key words and phrases were recorded.

Because ‘no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher’, I recognise that my professional background as a journalist informs both the research questions and my interpretive lens (Sword, 1999: 277). I was also aware that my reporting on these and related issues influenced my coding and theme development. Reflexivity underpinned my approach and I was, at all times, aware of how my own experiences, assumptions and political viewpoint might shape how I selected and interpreted data (Berger, 2015; Denscombe, 2010; Finlay 2002).

However, it is important to stress that the goal of the study was never to gain an objective ‘truth’ about the newspaper coverage or measure the frequency of certain key words. Instead, it was to examine the salience of language and journalistic choices and how meaning and consensus are produced and re-produced through media representations. Newspaper reports are inherently complex, intertextual and open to a range of meanings. They are active sites where meaning is constructed through language, tone, rhetoric, framing and salience, often legitimising dominant ideologies and power structures while marginalising alternative voices (Hall, 1980; Berger and Luckmann, 1991; Entman, 1993; Fairclough 1995; Bourdieu, 1998; Richardson, 2007) As this study is attempting to say something about the nature of consensus, controversy and, ultimately, Irish social and journalistic culture, its value lies in this emphasis on *interpretation* rather than merely tracking linguistic frequency. It examines not just *what* but also *how* these issues were reported, and, as a result, utilised a manual thematic analysis that emphasised close and iterative textual engagement and interpretive depth. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun and Clarke, 2006, 2009, 2019) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA),

specifically the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009) place fundamental importance on the need for immersion in the data and a subjective, reflective analytical approach. Certain elements of these principles proved valuable during the data gathering phase and further legitimised the soundness of the methodological choice. As Hall (1980) and later scholars have argued, meaning is not fixed but negotiated, and an approach which required the researcher to actively engage with, and become immersed in the texts, in order to construct themes and meaning are therefore central pillars of this study (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594).

The data gathering process utilised Braun and Clarke's (2006) six iterative phases as a roadmap. These involved developing an in-depth familiarisation with the data, where articles were read and re-read multiple times to get an overarching view of the scale and textual richness of the material. This was followed by a detailed manual and reflexive notetaking process on relevant articles. These notes, which run to approximately 80,000 words, captured initial impressions, emergent ideas, and overarching themes drawn from the data. From these notes coding was conducted manually by working through the material giving full and equal attention to each piece of reportage, capturing recurring ideas and specific discursive and editorial features that were of interest and appeared meaningful in relation to the study's overarching aims, objectives and research questions. These codes were then refocused as themes representing recurring representations of the institutions under discussion.

For example, reporting coded as indicating highlighting athletic, musical, and theatrical displays by children the Industrial and Reformatory School System was collated under an overarching theme of 'Industrial Schools as performance'. Similarly, codes indicating reporting where children were working for little or no pay, or court cases where adults indicated they had been boarded out as children when in industrial schools to work as farm labour was gathered under the theme 'Exploitation of Labour'. In the case of the Magdalene Laundries, the coded material was organised into broader themes within a theoretical framework that interpreted reportage as an opportunity for the religious orders to engage with the public in what amounted to a public campaign or a call to action in support of the work of the institutions. An immersive and iterative 'refine and define' process ensured the identification of the essence of each theme and what aspect of the data each theme

captures (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 92). A detailed analysis was conducted and written, which gradually grew into a thematic roadmap for the overall dissertation. This dissertation is specifically focused on how Irish national newspapers reported the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system. The coverage, which spanned from the foundation of the state right into the 1990s, took place within an emerging and rapidly developing Irish media landscape which included a wide array of local newspapers, radio and, latterly, television. However, there are a number of reasons why this study focuses solely on the print media and, more specifically, national newspapers.

Firstly, newspapers were the most accessible, ubiquitous and dominant form of media during the period under discussion and served as a key source of news and information for a large portion of the population. As a result, they provided an accessible archive of periodised data which allowed for an analysis of how meaning and consensus narratives were both constructed and contested across decades. While the study initially included an examination of local newspapers, the sheer volume and scale of material necessitated a narrowing of focus to national newspapers in order to maintain a manageable dataset.

Secondly, my professional experience as a journalist in an Irish national newspaper was a key influence in this methodological choice. Having worked in print newsrooms, I possess an in-depth knowledge of how news is selected, constructed and presented to the public. This provided me with a familiarity with news language, tone, editorial structures and framing devices. All of this was central to the decision to place newspapers at the centre of the dissertation. It also provided a valuable analytical and reflexive avenue for the research. Through my experiences in print news, I am aware of how newspapers inherit language from the past and can serve to obscure injustice even as they work to reveal it. This dynamic is evident in the coverage discussed throughout the dissertation, in particular in the section examining reporting on the Magdalene Laundries in the 1990s. This familiarity with newspaper norms and processes allowed for a particular set of insights that would not have been as readily available if the study focused on radio or television coverage.

It is acknowledged that the exclusion of local newspapers and other forms of media from the study risks the introduction of some limitations. The Industrial and Reformatory School system and, to a lesser extent, the Magdalene Laundry system were the subject of numerous television documentaries and current affairs news

programmes across both television and radio. These representations also served to shape wider public and political awareness and understanding of the institutions and their nature. As a result, certain narratives and framings contained in these media representations may be underrepresented in this study. However, it is important to note that this coverage occurred in the mid-1990s, while the primary focus of this dissertation is on the period preceding Ireland's 'decade of scandal'.

The exclusion of local newspapers from the analysis was a decision principally made to achieve a periodised but manageable dataset. This brought the risk of potentially overlooking certain regional perspectives and responses, as well as locally specific instances of institutional abuse.

It should be noted that this study makes a conscious effort to address the fact that journalism was not working in a vacuum when providing Irish society with narratives of these carceral systems. In Chapter Four, the analysis briefly steps outside of the methodological focus on newspapers to signal that, before Irish journalism engaged with the issue of industrial and reformatory schools and Magdalene Laundries, their abusive and carceral nature was being addressed in the cultural and artistic space through memoirs, plays, art and song.

Ultimately, all of these decisions were made in order to strengthen the dissertation's analytical scope and feasibility. It is intended and should be read as a historically specific and contextualised analysis of national newspaper discourse rather than an examination of all media representations of the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system.

Structure of the Dissertation

Chapter One examines the role of Irish journalism in shaping positive public representations and perceptions of the Industrial and Reformatory School from the 1920s until the late 1960s. While Irish journalism is widely commended for 'revealing' systemic abuse in these institutions and framing it as a national 'scandal' in the 1990s, this chapter explores the industry's complicity in creating and sustaining a consensus view of the system that it would later work to expose.

Drawing on decades of reporting in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*, the chapter outlines how the reportage consistently framed the institutions as charitable and socially beneficial. Coverage both reflected and reinforced a broader

social and political consensus that framed poverty as a crime, problematising the children committed to the institutions through pejorative terms such as ‘truants’, ‘delinquents’ and ‘waifs’. Even when concerns emerged about the nature of the system, coverage remained deferential and privileged the narratives of those in authority over the lived experiences of the children committed to the institutions and their families. This framing served to legitimise the Industrial and Reformatory School system and embed it in the public consciousness as a charitable and benevolent endeavour for much of the twentieth century. It also establishes the narrative through-line for the dissertation’s broader argument; that Irish journalism played a dual role as both a participant in the creation of a national consensus which marginalised and silenced those suffering abuse, and a profession which acted as a tool for justice by framing those same abuses as controversial in the 1990s.

Chapter Two explores the perception that evidence of abuse in the Industrial and Reformatory School system was largely unknown until the 1990s. On the contrary, it demonstrates that abusive practices were repeatedly documented in newspaper reportage from the 1920s into the late 1980s. Using the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA, 2009) definitions of abuse (physical, sexual, emotional and neglect) as an analytical framework, the first section examines reportage indicating direct evidence of abuse. This includes physical, sexual and emotional abuse, as well as reports of neglect. It also considers cases involving suicide, the exploitation of children for labour, and situations where institutionalisation was cited as a mitigating factor in criminal court proceedings. The second section considers more oblique forms of political and social unease visible in reporting on the impact of institutionalisation on children and families.

The analysis shows that that the ‘revelations’ of the 1990s were, in fact, rediscoveries of a long-standing public knowledge. It was only in the late 1960s, as a small cohort of young and predominantly female journalists ed the reporting frame from consensus to controversy, that Irish journalism began a process that allowed for the systemic journalistic scrutiny of the 1990s.

Chapter Three traces the framing of the Industrial and Reformatory School system as a ‘national scandal’ in the 1990s to a broader transformation in Irish journalism that began in the 1960s and 1970s. Social, economic, and cultural shifts

saw the revival of the ‘new journalism’ of the nineteenth century, which had been abandoned after independence. This placed increasing value on investigative reporting and relaying lived experiences through interviewing. Influenced by the emerging ‘gonzo’ style from the United States during the 1960s, an emerging generation of young female reporters pioneered a new form of participatory campaigning Irish journalism which embraced subjectivity and a hybrid form of reporting which combined traditional reporting with the techniques of narrative fiction.

The chapter highlights the work of Michael Viney, Nell McCafferty, Eileen O’Brien, Mary Maher and Rosita Sweetman, among others, who were instrumental in shifting the traditional journalistic framing of the Industrial and Reformatory School system—from consensus to controversial. This journalism did not uncover or reveal anything about the institutions that was not already in the public domain; rather its form and emotionally engaging style allowed the public to rediscover the institutions as controversial and worthy of scrutiny. This transformation ultimately provided the critical scaffolding for journalism in the 1990s to again reframe the system as a national ‘scandal’ and a defining moment in Irish social and cultural history.

Having traced how journalism framed a consensus narrative for the public which legitimised the Industrial and Reformatory School system and its carceral and abusive nature, Section Two of the dissertation examines how similar dynamics operated in the coverage of Magdalene Laundry system.

Chapter Four explores the similar public perception that exists about the Magdalene Laundries and their abusive nature; namely that they were also somehow ‘hidden’ from Irish society prior to the 1990s. It challenges this view, arguing that the institutions themselves, their carceral nature and the fact that they profited from the unpaid labour of incarcerated women, was routinely mediated through newspaper reporting and often foregrounded and advertised by the religious orders themselves. Between 1920 and 1990, Ireland’s three main national newspapers functioned as a medium through which the religious orders which operated the Magdalene Laundries embedded a narrative that framed incarceration and exploitation of labour as charity, moral rescue and, ultimately, a social service. This narrative was repeatedly reinforced across decades of advertisements, charitable

appeals for donations, reports of sermons, and coverage of political support, in what amounted to a public campaign.

The effect of this coverage was to normalise the incarceration of women and the exploitation of their labour, while simultaneously conferring social, political, and moral authority upon the religious orders that operated the institutions, thereby shielding them from journalistic scrutiny. Media framing operated as a key mechanism which supported and sustained Ireland's carceral state. As with industrial and reformatory schools, the abuses in Magdalene Laundries were not 'exposed' to unknowing public in the 1990s; rather journalism rediscovered them and reframed them as controversial.

Chapter Five explores the eventual emergence of the Magdalene Laundries as the subject of media controversy, focusing initially on the 1993 exhumation of 133 remains from a graveyard on the grounds of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra, and latterly on renewed news coverage the issue received in 2003. The circumstances of the exhumation provided the catalyst for Irish journalism to shift away from its long-standing consensus frame of the Magdalene Laundries as charity towards a more critical interrogation. Yet, even as Irish journalism began to confront the official narrative, much of the reporting continued to employ the charitable phrasing and language of earlier decades. The institutions and the nuns that operated them continued to be portrayed as providing 'shelter', 'refuge' and a 'haven', while the women were depicted using the historical disparaging terminology such as 'abandoned', 'rejects' or 'unmarriageable'. The economic exploitation of the women's unpaid labour was euphemised as 'productive' both reproducing and reinforcing the consensus the media had itself helped to cultivate for decades.

The chapter also addresses the only effort by Irish journalism to investigate exhumations and the circumstances of the women's deaths. This would not happen until 2003 through the work of a single journalist—Mary Raftery—in the *Irish Times*. Her work stands as the first and only serious journalistic effort to investigate the Magdalene Laundries up to that point. Overall, the chapter illustrates how Irish journalism simultaneously reinforced and, occasionally, challenged the consensus narrative it had participated in constructing. It operated by moving between obscuring abuse

through a charitable framing while, at the same time, presenting the institutions as sites of controversy and ‘scandal’.

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Section One:
**Consensus, Visibility and Rediscovery: Irish journalism and
the Framing of the Industrial and Reformatory School
System**

Chapter One

Allowing ‘cowardice to rule’: Industrial Schools, Irish journalism and consensus, 1920–1970

Introduction

On 11 May 1999, then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern issued a formal apology on behalf of the state and its citizens to those who survived Ireland’s brutal institutional childcare system. In the letters pages of the *Irish Times* that same day, another apology was made—this time on behalf of journalism. Brian Quinn, the former editor of the *Evening Herald* (1969–1976) wrote of his ‘mounting shame’. Journalists, he wrote, had ‘their suspicions’ about reformatories and industrial schools as far back as the 1940s but, when faced with an ‘all-powerful’ Catholic Church, had ‘allowed cowardice to rule’ (Quinn, 1999). Quinn was even more blunt a few days later when he wrote that journalists had ‘failed in our basic duties in the 1940s and 1950s’ (Quinn, 1999). Both apologies came on the day the final episode of *States of Fear*, the seminal documentary by journalist Mary Raftery examining Ireland’s Industrial and Reformatory School system, was aired.

Quinn’s words can be viewed as a challenge to Irish journalism to examine its own complicity in the construction of a national consensus around this system for much of the twentieth century. Irish journalism has, in the main, constructed its own narrative around how a range of Church and state scandals came to public prominence in the 1990s. In the case of reformatories and industrial schools, it has been praised by itself, and by many in academia, for ‘revealing’ and ‘exposing’ this so-called ‘hidden Ireland’ to an appalled Irish society. To a lesser degree, it has faced some criticism for ignoring historical context and producing lurid and sensationalist accounts of abuse while silencing alternative experiences in the institutions.

Based on an in-depth examination of thousands of press reports in the pages of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*, this chapter argues that between 1920 and the mid 1960s, Irish journalism actively supported and embedded a consensus view of the Industrial and Reformatory School system as charitable enterprises caring for and educating children that had no one else to look after them. Coverage was frequent in the form of committals via the courts but rarely sought to examine

conditions in the institutions or give voice to those residing in them. Instead, the media reflected a broader social and political consensus that viewed poverty as a crime. Children, who committed no other crime other than being from impoverished families, were committed to institutions often for years at a time. Incarceration was presented as charity, as a kindness to poor children, who would be reformed through industrial ‘training’. Linguistic sleight of hand is used to both elicit and reinforce this consensus view. Industrial schools are routinely conflated with orphanages. Children removed from one or both parents are mislabelled ‘orphans’. Simultaneously, they are problematised or presented as a threat to existing social norms using terms like ‘delinquents’, ‘truant’ and ‘waifs’. Newspapers actively endorsed the Industrial and Reformatory School system as charity in editorials and in news reports. Coverage is deferential to the religious and wary of the supposed criminal tendencies of those being committed to their care. Evidence of the success of ‘training’ is highlighted through coverage of concerts, plays, massed drills and gymnastics displays performed by industrial school children. Even when concerns are raised about the nature of the system, there is little effort to investigate these concerns or to give voice to those residing in institutions. Industrial and reformatory schools were simply not deemed legitimate topics of controversy. Journalists, therefore, were not required to be objective or to remain disinterested observers. Industrial schools as sites of charity became embedded as the accepted social and political consensus. That consensus, upheld and amplified by an unquestioning media, served to justify the existence of the system for much of the twentieth century. If the 1990s represented a period where Irish journalism tackled the existing hegemony of Church and state, it must also examine its role in the creation and maintenance of the very consensus it later worked to tear down.

Theoretical Framework

Hallin (1986), in his influential study of how the American media covered the Vietnam War, has examined the relationship between journalism and consensus. He argues that journalism as a profession contains three different regions or spheres, each of which is governed by different journalistic standards and procedures. He imagined these spheres as three concentric circles which he labelled: (1) the Sphere of Legitimate Controversy; (2) the Sphere of Consensus and (3) the Sphere of Deviance. (Hallin, 1986: 116–117). Journalistic objectivity, often regarded as the

fundamental bedrock of ethical journalism, operates differently in each of the three spheres.

The ‘sphere of legitimate controversy’ is where most topics covered by the press reside today. For Hallin (1986), this sphere is the sole ‘province of objectivity’ and includes political and social issues which can be debated by a range of different actors who represent a range of diverse opinions on any given topic. Given these subjects are controversial in some way, journalists actively endeavour to remain objective and balanced.

However, there is also a ‘sphere of consensus’, where journalists are not required to present any opposing views. Nor are they expected to remain as disinterested observers. Here, the role of the journalist is to act as ‘an advocate or celebrant’ for the prevailing political consensus (Hallin, 1986: 116–117). In this sphere, journalists ‘feel free to invoke a generalized “we” and to take for granted shared values and shared assumptions’ (Schudson, 2011: 48). Journalistic neutrality and objectivity are simply not required as the consensus view is taken as an accepted fact and organised opposition to this view is either limited or non-existent.

Similarly, objectivity is not a journalistic requirement in the ‘sphere of deviance’. This is where views that are deemed to be so far outside the accepted political and social mainstream of society reside. Objectivity is not required as these views are simply ignored by journalists as ‘unworthy of being heard’ and are not mediated as they fall too far outside of what is deemed legitimate to cover. (Hallin, 1986: 117) For Hallin, each sphere has its own internal gradations and the boundaries between them are ‘fuzzy’ (Hallin, 1986: 117). Journalism can also move between spheres depending on the prevailing societal and political landscape. For example, one could argue, that for the much of the last 70 years, topics like white supremacy resided in the sphere of deviance but, in recent years, have been shifted back towards legitimate controversy as the political climate in the United States and parts of Europe has drifted to the right. These topics, once beyond the pale of mainstream media coverage, are now regularly featured. Similarly, Schudson (2011: 48) argues that in the weeks after the 9/11 attacks, American journalism was jolted back into the sphere of consensus in order to find the adequate language and tone to rationalise the events for a public that was in national mourning.

For the majority of the twentieth century, this chapter argues, Irish journalism, in its coverage of the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the religious orders

that operated it, firmly resided in the sphere of consensus. A cast-iron political and societal consensus existed that viewed the removal of economically disadvantaged children, or the children of single parents from the family setting and their placement in institutions run by religious orders, as an act of social kindness and charity. The popular press upheld and reinforced this consensus through not only *what* it reported but, also, *how* it reported. It explicitly supported the system and those that operated it in editorials. Its journalists, unburdened by the need for objectivity or detachment, frequently editorialised in news reports to reinforce a consensus opinion of industrial schools for its readers. It was a consensus constructed along rigid class lines, one where Catholic educational structures, the law and journalism itself viewed poverty, the poor and single-parent families as something to be feared and punished.

The views of those in the establishment or positions of power—politicians, judges, the religious, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) inspectors—are privileged, prioritised and editorially foregrounded in news coverage. By contrast, the children committed to industrial schools and their parents, are largely invisible, or are problematised using pejorative terms. The religious orders which operated industrial schools are presented as men and women dedicating their lives to charity in service of God. Given Ireland's emerging vision of nationhood was bound so closely to the Catholic faith, these people represented the best of the faith and, therefore, the best of the nation. The wider institutional childcare system could only, therefore, be something to promote and be proud of.

Chapter Structure

This chapter will be divided into four main sections, each of which explore specific themes visible in the reportage:

- (a) Industrial and Reformatory Schools as sites of charity
- (b) Industrial and Reformatory Schools as sites of performance and public display
- (c) Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the criminalisation of poverty
- (d) Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the reproduction of class hierarchy

(a) Industrial and Reformatory Schools as sites of charity

Raftery and O’Sullivan (1999:11) argue that the notion that children living in institutional care were receiving the charity of the religious orders is the ‘first and most persuasive myth’ of the Industrial and Reformatory School system. However, it was more than a myth. It was also the dominant political and social consensus for much of the twentieth century. Irish national newspapers, namely the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*, upheld and reinforced this consensus in the fifty years following the foundation of the state. The incarceration of thousands of children to industrial schools is routinely presented in charitable terms. Praise for the system and the NSPCC via the words of judges committing children to institutions is routinely foregrounded, while the voices of children and their parents are largely absent. Newspaper coverage between 1920 and the early 1960s is littered with examples where both the politicians who funded the system, and the judges who committed children to it, publicly praised industrial schools and the religious orders that ran them.

Judges:

As early as 1921, the Lord Chief Justice of Ireland Sir Thomas Francis Molony referenced ‘two special agencies’ that were worthy of special mention, the NSPCC and industrial schools and spoke of the ‘immense amount of good work’ they had accomplished (*Irish Times*, 1921). This view was reinforced repeatedly by a succession of district court judges committing children to years long sentences in industrial schools because their parents were unable to care for them, for non-attendance at school or for petty criminal offences.

In 1923, an *Irish Independent* court report of the committal of a child to an industrial school for three years for stealing eggs noted that the Judge, when ordering the father to pay 2s a week for the child’s maintenance, told him he was getting ‘the greatest bargain the father had ever made to have his boy fed, clothed, and educated for that amount’ (*Irish Independent*, 1923). In another case, where a Dundrum man was imprisoned ‘for neglecting his seven children’ who were subsequently committed to industrial schools, the magistrate was reported as having ‘praised the work of the society [NSPCC]’ (*Irish Times*, 1925). Where a woman was discharged with a caution for ‘aiding and abetting the removal of a boy’ from St. Joseph’s Industrial

School in Limerick in 1928, the *Irish Independent* reported that District Justice Flood ‘paid a high tribute to the careful upbringing the boys receive from the Christian Brothers’ (*Irish Independent*, 1928).

When reacting to the first applications for committal to industrial schools under the 1929 Children Act, which allowed for destitute children to be sent to industrial schools without having committed an offence, Judge George P. Cussen described it as ‘a red-letter day when the Saorstát Éireann decided to send poor children to an industrial school without having the children charged with committing a criminal offence’ (*Irish Independent*, 1929). Cussen would later go on to head up the first major state investigation of the Industrial and Reformatory School system—the Committee to Inquire into the Reformatory and Industrial School system (1934–1936). In a case from 1937, where two brothers aged just 10 and 14-years-old were charged with stealing 12 candles and attempting to steal a shrine box in a church, the judge is reported as having ‘sent the boys to an industrial school, where, he said, they would learn truth, sincerity and honesty’ (*Irish Times*, 1937). District Justice Sullivan committed another child to an industrial school where ‘the boy might be an expense to the ratepayers but in Greenmount he would be taught to grow up a decent citizen’ (*Irish Independent*, 1937). These examples, which span the early 1920s to the late 1930s, indicate a clear consensus view held by the courts, that the industrial schools were performing a valuable social service.

Prominent coverage was given by the *Irish Press* in 1937 to a specific day in the Dublin District Court when Judge Edward Little committed 12 children aged between 10 and 13-years-old to industrial schools for a range of offences under the Juvenile Offenders Act. The story, which the newspaper carried as the off-lead on the front page, details the ‘heart rending spectacle’ and ‘pathetic scenes’ where ‘mothers, sisters, brothers and near relatives assembled in the courtyard to bid farewell to the children, who were taken away from them and borne away in motorvans’. It outlined how a total of 70 children were charged with ‘wandering, some without having proper guardians, and others with committing minor offences’. A total of 40 were in court for non-attendance at school. Judge Little ordered ‘a dozen’ children in total be committed to industrial schools ordered until they were 16-years-old.

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Vol. VII., No. 163. De Cum Síleas De Agor Orlas sa B-éireann SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1937. The Truth in the News. PRICE ONE PENNY

CITY

SCALA

CHERRY

12 JUL 1937

PULL UP!

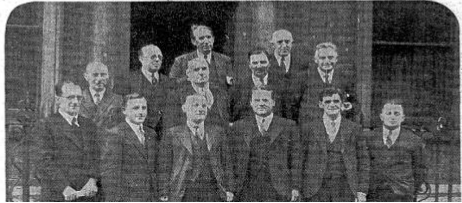
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NON-INTERVENTION DEADLOCK CONTINUES

BUT BRITAIN TO TRY TO FIND A SOLUTION

“Not Prepared To Accept Strictures” Warns Lord Plymouth



Distressing Scenes In Courtyard

Many Dublin Children Sent To Artane

TEARFUL PARTING

THERE were pathetic scenes in Dublin District Court yesterday when a number of children, aged 10 to 15, were sent to an industrial school, by order of District Justice Little, for offences under the Juvenile Offenders' Act.

(Distressing Scenes in Courtyard: Many Dublin Children Sent to Artane: Tearful Parting. *Irish Press*, 10 July 1937, 1)

The piece is a noteworthy example of Irish journalism's promotion of the consensus view on industrial schools. Even though family members were clearly distressed by having their children removed from them, the *Irish Press* reporter made no effort to speak to or quote any of them. Instead, Judge Little was the only person interviewed. His view that the committals were necessary to safeguard the children's futures was prioritised using an editorial device—a pull quote:

“SAFEGUARDING THEIR INTERESTS.”

Mr. Little, who sympathised with those who had pleaded for the children, said that his reason for sending them to a home was to safeguard their interests in the future.

In the school they would, he said, be properly looked after, cared for, educated and given a training which would bring them up as proper citizens of the State.

Addressing the parents of children who had absented themselves from school, Mr. Little said that it was their duty to see that the children attended school regularly.

(Distressing Scenes in Courtyard: Many Dublin Children Sent to Artane Tearful Parting. *Irish Press*, 10 July 1937, 1)

This device allowed the newspaper to signpost and frame what it deemed to be the key message for the reader. While the reader learned that parents pleaded for their

children to be spared incarceration, it was Judge Little's view that the children would be 'properly looked after' in order to be 'proper citizens' by committal to an industrial school that was foregrounded for the reader. It served as a cue for the reader to prioritise the narrative that the children were better cared for behind the walls of an institution than by their parents. Given that this was the cast-iron consensus view, neither the journalist, nor the newspaper, felt any requirement to present an opposing view or represent the views of the families in any depth. For his part, Little remained a strong defender of the Industrial and Reformatory School system, even as some in public life began to question the wisdom of committing children to institutions via the courts for non-attendance at school and minor offences. Three years later, in 1940, in a separate committal case, Judge Little again reminded those in attendance that 'those admirable institutions' were not really industrial schools but instead 'a God-send to this country, and are really the boarding schools of the poor' (*Irish Press*, 1940). This type of praise from the benches of the district court continued right into the 1960s. An *Irish Press* court report of the committal of two boys to an industrial school in 1962 led with a glowing tribute paid by District Justice Lannigan O'Keeffe to the system as he passed judgement on the children:

Work of industrial schools

IRISH PRESS Reporter
A TRIBUTE to our industrial schools was paid by District Justice Lannigan O'Keeffe, when he committed two boys in the Children's Court, Dublin.

He told the boy's parents their sons would receive a first-class education and would come out better citizens, well equipped for the future.

Justice O'Keeffe said that not only would the boys be well-fed and well looked after, with plenty of football, and holidays three times a year, but each one of them would learn a trade which would be invaluable in the years ahead.

(Work of industrial schools. *Irish Press*, 16 August 1962, 10)

Judge Lanigan's remarks, much like Judge Little's a quarter of a century earlier were emphasised by the newspaper and served to reinforce the prevailing consensus view of the system. A pull quote invited the reader to prioritise Judge Lanigan's view that the two children would become 'better citizens' as a result of their incarceration rather than remaining in the care of their parents. Indeed, later in the piece, Lanigan reminded the parents that it cost most people £200 a year to send their children to boarding school and that, as a result, they should 'be grateful that your sons will receive such an excellent education free' (*Irish Press*, 1962).

Politicians and High Society:

For much of the twentieth century, the political class was largely, though not exclusively, in lockstep with the legal profession on the moral and social value of the Industrial and Reformatory School system. This is reflected in much of the newspaper coverage between 1920 and the mid-1960s, where politicians—even if critical of the system—were deferential to the religious who operated it, their charitable nature and the sacrifices they had made for the children in their care. Amidst concerns in 1925 that there were not enough children being committed to industrial schools, Tom Johnson of the Labour Party warned that judges were becoming slow to commit children and that this had resulted in a lower capitation grant to industrial schools. He said such a decrease would be 'very pleasing if the fall in numbers represented a great change in the character of the boys, but he did not believe that' (*Irish Independent*, 1925). Cumann na nGaedhael's William Sears agreed that there was 'evidence of great dereliction of duty on the part of magistrates' and stressed that the number of children in these 'excellent schools' should be higher. When one of the few politicians to question the consensus view in this period, Alfie Byrne, took issue with Sears and Johnson, the *Irish Independent* reported that he was 'sharply rebuked' for his 'soft-heartedness' by the President of the Irish Free State W.T. Cosgrave. The leader of the new Irish state was in no doubt that industrial schools were 'an absolute credit to the State' and were 'absolutely necessary, just as necessary as the punishment code in the Army Act and the Criminal Court' (*Irish Independent*, 1925). These comments were singled out as pull quotes and placed in bold type by the *Irish Independent*, reinforcing this consensus view as the dominant opinion for the reader to value.

One of the more visible and public examples of the deference shown by the political class to the system and the religious that operated it can be seen in the coverage of the setting up of the Committee to Inquire into the Reformatory and Industrial School System (1934-1936). Initiated by Fianna Fáil Minister for Education Tomás Derrig, this first ever review into the system was the subject of substantial press coverage. What is most notable from the reportage, however, is the Minister's attempts to undermine the inquiry's independence right from the outset by heaping praise on the religious orders running the institutions. Speaking at the opening meeting of the inquiry, Derrig stated that the religious had taken on 'the almost superhuman task' of running industrial schools and who, 'out of their own resources, set up these schools and gave themselves this truly Christian work' (*Irish Press*, 1934).

In the second of two pieces on the inaugural meeting in the *Irish Press*, the Minister is reported as having emphasised that his decision to set up an inquiry into the system 'did not imply any want of appreciation or recognition of the work that was being done, and had been done, for many years by the Reformatory and Industrial Schools.' In fact, not only had the religious orders been 'very successful' in the operation of the institutions given the resources at their disposal, but the country itself 'owed a debt of gratitude to the various religious orders who established those schools out of their own resources, and maintained them for the benefit of that section of the community most deserving of sympathy and pity—the neglected children' (*Irish Press*, 1934). Utilising pull-quotes, the *Irish Independent* again made the editorial decision to foreground and emphasise the deference shown by Derrig to the religious. These were men and women who had been 'inspired by nobler motives than worldly credit or recognition' and the country should show 'appreciation of their work'.

were not able to solve that particular problem in a more sympathetic and modern spirit.

The value of religion in these establishments was enormous, and they had reason to congratulate themselves that they had orders of men and women to take responsibility for these children.

The Government was going to set up a Commission to deal with the question of Reformatories and Industrial Schools.

(Educational Problems. *Irish Independent*. 12 April 1934, 10)

He thought that, considering the resources at their disposal, the Industrial Schools had been very successful.

They had enabled a large number of boys and girls who would otherwise have no chance of doing so to grow up into useful citizens.

There were, however, many reasons why an inquiry, such as was being entrusted to them, should be undertaken without further delay. It was desirable to see if the system was

(Increase In Juvenile Crime: Poverty. *Irish Independent*, 8 May 1934, 6)

The editorial prominence afforded these views by emphasising them as pull-quotes again provided the reader with a cue as to the most important narrative to draw from the article: that the removal of these children from their families and their committal to institutions provided them the greatest opportunity to become ‘useful citizens’ and that Irish society as a whole should be grateful to the religious orders who provided this social service.

Three decades later, a different Minister for Education and another inquiry into the Industrial and Reformatory School system, resulted in almost identical language. At a speech given at the annual meeting of the Limerick branch of the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (ISPCC), the Fianna Fáil Minister for Education Donogh O’Malley is reported as having ‘thanked the Brothers and Sisters for their efforts over the years for those waifs and strays of society who had been committed to their care’.

“It is sometimes the fashion of society to decry the efforts of those good people, but I should say that for any defect that may be found in this regard, the fault is not theirs, but that of society itself,” he said (*Irish Independent*, 1966).

One year later, when speaking at the inaugural meeting of the Committee for Reformatory and Industrial Schools—which would later produce the Kennedy Report in 1970—O’Malley stressed the need for a greater standard of education in

the Industrial and Reformatory School system. However, he immediately caveated this view by pointedly stating that the inquiry ‘was no reflection on the work of the devoted religious communities who, over the last century and more, had taken care of the underprivileged and less fortunate people’ (*Irish Independent*, 1967).

News coverage of the St Joseph’s Industrial School fire, Cavan, February 1943:

This determination to view the institutions and the nuns and brothers that operated them in only the most charitable light persisted even in the face of one of the biggest tragedies to have occurred in a then fledgling republic.

On the night of 24 February 1943, the St. Joseph’s Industrial School for girls in Cavan burnt to the ground resulting in the deaths of 35 children and one elderly woman. The institution was operated by The Poor Clares, an enclosed order of nuns. The tragedy made front page news in all three main newspapers and an inquiry was launched into how the fire started and why the children had been unable to escape the burning building. The coverage is striking in that it outlines in harrowing detail how efforts by locals to save the girls failed and features interviews with both rescuers and survivors. Despite all of the children who died in the tragedy having one or both parents alive, the coverage repeatedly and incorrectly referred to the children as ‘orphans’—again reinforcing the consensus view of industrial schools as charity. However, particularly noteworthy is how the newspapers treat the traditional messages of sympathy which dominate all stories of this kind. Politicians and prominent clergy members all offered their condolences primarily to The Poor Clare nuns, with the families of the children either relegated to an afterthought or completely ignored.

In a lengthy piece carried on the front page of the *Irish Times*, the Bishop of Kilmore Dr. Patrick Lyons is reported as having ‘called on the Mother Abbess and conveyed his deep sympathy to her.’ Later in the piece, he ‘expressed his deep grief at the terrible blow the Poor Clares had sustained and spoke of the very fine work they had done in the town for many years.’ Education Minister Tomás Derrig also ‘conveyed his sympathy to the members of the Order and to the Bishop’. No sympathies were extended to the parents of the children. In fact, they were not mentioned in the report at all (*Irish Times*, 1943).

In the *Irish Press*, Taoiseach Éamon de Valera’s condolences to the families and relatives of the children come only after he had offered his ‘deepest sympathy’ to

Bishop Lyons. Derrig made no specific reference to the families but instead offered his ‘deepest sympathy to your Lordship and all who suffered.’ Fine Gael Leader W.T. Cosgrave also failed to acknowledge the grieving parents when he offered ‘respectful and heartfelt’ sympathy to the Bishop Lyons and ‘heartfelt sympathy to the nuns and the people of Cavan’. The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Ald. P.S. Doyle, speaking on behalf of the people of Dublin, offered ‘profound sympathy to your Lordship and the Superioress of the Community of the Poor Clares and to the people of Cavan’ (*Irish Press*, 1943).

The children who died and their parents and families are also sidelined in much of the coverage of the funeral. Both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Press* led with the fact that the children themselves were buried in a mass grave with no names inscribed on the coffins or cross over the grave. However, this callous indifference to the identities of the children is not investigated further by either newspaper. It is even more striking when one considers the fact that the names of the children were a matter of public record. They had been carried on the front page of the *Irish Times* on 25 February. However, the decision to bury the children, unnamed and *en masse* is euphemistically labelled a ‘simple ceremony’ (*Irish Press*, 1943). No effort is made to query this decision. It is not deemed controversial enough by contemporary Irish journalism to warrant abandoning its position of consensus. As a result, the excision of the identity of the children at their own funeral warrants just a single line of news copy.

The presence of the distraught families at the funeral ceremony is noted in both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* coverage. Despite this, Bishop Lyons, in his address at the gravesite, choose to criticise the grieving parents while praising the nuns—in whose care the children had died. The children ‘had not had the care of their parents, but who had had a beautiful substitute in the care of the Sisters’ (*Irish Press*, 1943). Bishop Lyons did offer sympathy to the families but prioritised the ‘sadly stricken’ nuns who he implored to ‘have the courage to go on courageously with the work of looking after the little ones entrusted to their care’ (*Irish Press*, 1943).

This reportage came as a government inquiry into the fire and its causes chaired by senior counsel Joseph McCarthy was established. In a modern journalistic setting, this would call for rigorous objectivity in any reporting of the tragedy. However, some contemporaneous newspaper coverage made no effort to conceal its support for the nuns’ narrative of events leading up to and during the fire. In one piece featuring an interview with Bridget O’Reilly, a lay teacher who was sleeping in a cubicle near

the dormitory which was engulfed by the fire, the *Irish Press* reporter abandoned any professional commitment to objectivity in order to editorialise and offer an unsupported opinion which entirely exonerated the nuns in advance of the inquiry publishing its findings.

Most Rev. Dr. Lyons, Bishop of Kilmore, and local clergy spent several hours to-day with the Poor Clare Sisters, discussing details of the tragedy. Statements were taken from several of the nuns by gardai.

I had the opportunity to-day of a few words with the kindly Mother Abbess, whom the disaster has affected terribly. She is greatly pained at the currency of inaccurate reports that the doors of the dormitory in which the little children slept were locked.

"We did not lock our dormitory doors," she said.

Technicians from Garda Headquarters continued investigations among the ruins, to-day, but there is no clue yet of the origin of the fire.

(Teacher's Effort To Reach Trapped Children. *Irish Press*, 27 February 1943, 1)

At the time that this article was published, the critical question as to whether the door to the dormitory was locked or not had yet to be determined by the McCarthy Inquiry, which had only just then begun. However, the *Irish Press* report used as a pull-quote the opinion of the Mother Abbess' concerning so-called 'inaccurate reports', presenting them for the reader as fact rather than speculation. This type of reporting is indicative of a consensus journalism where 'journalists tend to act as "responsible" members of the political establishment, upholding the dominant political perspective and passing on more or less at face value the views of authorities assumed to represent the nation as a whole' (Hallin, 1986: 10). For the purposes of this study, who or what was at fault for the 1943 Cavan Industrial School Fire is not at issue. The salient point is that the press coverage at the time indicated that the clergy, politicians, and, in many cases, the media were in full agreement that the religious order operating the institution was not to blame.

This consensus view of an Ireland where the religious could not be questioned—even in a case where 35 children died in their care—did not go unnoticed by some in Irish

public life. Brian Ó Nualláin, better known by the literary pseudonyms Flann O'Brien and Myles Na Gopaleen, served as secretary to the Cavan Fire Inquiry in his role as a civil servant in the Department of Local Government. His pithy limerick, which he composed while in a pub during the inquiry with one of the counsel involved, and future Chief Justice and Presidential candidate, T.F. O'Higgins, aptly described his discomfort with the contemporary political climate:

In Cavan there was a great fire;
Joe McCarthy came down to inquire
If the nuns were to blame
It would be a shame
So it had to be caused by a wire (Cronin, 1989: 138)

Charity through newspaper editorialising:

Newspapers not only reported the consensus view of industrial schools as charitable enterprises. They actively supported and endorsed it until the 1960s. This direct support is apparent not only in editorials, but also in the main news pages. Reporters often editorialised, preferring unsupported opinion to any sense of obligation to balance or journalistic objectivity. A practice frowned upon in modern journalism, it was routinely employed by Irish journalists in the fifty years following the foundation of the state to reinforce the narrative of industrial schools as charitable enterprises.

In a short report of the 'annual athletic sports day held at Artane Industrial School in Dublin in 1921, an *Irish Independent* reporter described the institution as a 'wonderful home of juvenile industry and secular and religious instruction' which was presided over by the 'revered manager' Brother Nolan. (*Irish Independent*, 1921). An ostensibly hard news story covering a report by the Inspector of Reformatory Schools Dr. McCormack in the *Irish Independent* in 1926 saw the reporter add a personal opinion that 'the greatest blessing enjoyed by the fortunate pupils in Industrial Schools is that they are mainly under the control of Religious who have consecrated their lives to education of the poor' (*Irish Independent*, 1926). The language chosen by the journalist is instructive. The story was not written in the traditional objective, matter of fact fashion. Instead, in the brand of consensus journalism indicative of the time, the inspector's findings were presented to the reader as 'a tribute' to the work of the religious:

A CHRISTIAN FAMILY.

This is a magnificent tribute. . Coming from Dr. MacCormack it is of irresistible cogency. Yet it is not surprising to any one at all conversant with the internal administration and tone of our industrial schools, and more especially if such a one can appreciate the spiritual as well as the intellectual and practical evidence which pours in upon him; and the spiritual is really the most striking of all.

(Reformatory School System: Tribute To The Schools: Character And Freedom. *Irish Independent*, 3 May 1926, 5)

This embedding of the narrative of charity and rescue across media reportage also crops up outside of the main news pages. In an article about historic Irish buildings, Artane Industrial School is featured and described as a ‘useful institution’ which was ‘the most remarkable of its kind in Europe’ (*Irish Independent*, 1928). In another piece, advertising the main attractions of Dublin city as tourist destination, the same institution was praised as ‘the second largest and the best conducted in the world’ (*Irish Independent*, 1931). Support for the system is also expressed in peculiar puff pieces that crop up in the 1940s. These articles have questionable news value and seemed to exist only to praise the ‘training’ provided to children in industrial schools. A particularly odd piece in the *Irish Press* in early 1940s focused on the abundance of food that the nearly 800 boys in the Artane Industrial School had to eat during Christmas 1940.

Breakfast : Six Cwts Of Sausages



THE boys are still talking about the Christmas dinner in Artane Industrial School. The 760 of them actually devoured threequarters of a ton of pudding. And none of them burst; But that's nothing to them. Every morning when the breakfast bell rings down they troop to the dining hall and in less than 15 minutes six cwt. of sausages have disappeared.

Theatre Royal, Dublin, on Sunday, 21st January, he consented at once. "As for the lads themselves," writes our reporter, "when I told them about the concert, they jumped up and cheered: 'WE'LL BE THERE!'"

(Breakfast: Six Cwts Of Sausages. *Irish Press*. 6 January 1940, 5)

The Rev. Bro. Columba was quoted as telling the *Irish Press* reporter that the quantity of food consumed by the boys was proof of ‘how healthy they are’ and that, of the 760 boys in the institution ‘not a single one of them is in hospital.’ This assertion was then followed by reporter editorialising to offer their own, and by extension, the newspaper’s validation work of the institution:

“It just goes to show how healthy they are,” Rev. Bro. Columba told an IRISH PRESS reporter. “There are 760 boys here and not a single one of them is in the hospital.” This is a record and the Christian Brothers have every reason to feel proud.

The boys act happy and look happy as they learn the various trades which will be their means of livelihood when they leave the school; about 160 of them leave every year.

(Breakfast: Six Cwts Of Sausages. *Irish Press*. 6 January 1940, 5)

Given that the Cussen Report in 1936 had directly criticised the standard of education and training in industrial schools, as well as the diet offered to the children, the article has the appearance of an effort to counter any negative perceptions of the school and its standard of care.

This advertorial flavour is repeated in a number of *Irish Independent* articles across the 1940s and early 1950s. Madeline Clarke, in a 1948 article in the ‘Women’s Parade’ section of the newspaper described the St Joseph’s Industrial School for girls in Kilkenny, as being run ‘on the freest and most up-to-date lines imaginable’.

Woman's PARADE

Work And Play In
A Girls' Industrial School

IT is the season of the year when, willy nilly, memories of our school days are thrust upon us. An invitation comes to the convent re-union, or we hear about it indirectly; a photograph of a prize distribution or sports contest in the Press reminds us of prowess that once was ours, or, since fragrance is noted for evoking memories, a simple thing like the smell of wallflowers after rain brings our mind back to night prayers in the Children of Mary's Oratory during Summer term.

Whether they were really the "best days of our lives" is a debatable point, depending on our particular personalities and on what Fate has meted out to us.



The Juniors' percussion band at practice.

(Clarke, M. (1948) Work and Play in a Girls Industrial School. *Irish Independent*, 5 June 1948, 5)

Clarke presented a consensus narrative to the reader of the Sisters of Charity as caring for children who 'have nobody else in the world willing to look after them', while also extolling the modernity of that charity. The institution has a 'beautifully situated playground...equipped with the very newest models in swings, see-saws and other outdoor toys' with the babies having 'a special sand-pit for themselves'. The piece is deferential to the point of being saccharine. This was not just a modern institution but an idyllic setting reforming girls and raising the 'roundiest, rosiest babies you ever saw'. Clarke called on the public to support the work of the nuns by taking the children out for holidays, stating that it is 'a crying necessity if the children are to get a glimpse of the normal life that God has seen fit to deny them' (*Irish Independent*, 1948). Clarke invoking the supernatural will of God as the reason the children were in the institution, allowed her to studiously avoid a more earthly fact—alluded to earlier in the piece—that children ended up in places like St. Joseph's Industrial School because the courts sent them there.

A similar tone was adopted by Patricia Boyne the following year in another piece in the 'Women's Parade' section of the *Irish Independent* titled 'Holidays for the Homeless'. In the article, she ruminated on how much of 'a trouble' it can be planning a family holiday before asking the reader to imagine having to plan a holiday for 'over a hundred homeless little girls!' (*Irish Independent*, 1949). To find the answer, Boyne called to her 'dear friend', the Sister in Charge of an unnamed convent. By labelling her principle source for the article a 'dear friend', Boyne immediately undermined her own journalistic objectivity in order to uphold a consensus narrative. She minimised the carceral nature of the institution by incorrectly labelling the girls as 'homeless'. This choice of language also reinforces the narrative of charity for the reader, who would likely have assumed that these

children had nowhere else to go. The Sister running the institution takes on an almost ethereal nature, with Boyne referring to her as ‘Serene, as always’ and ‘my little nun’. She listened ‘entranced, as Sister sketched her plans’ in providing holidays for the girls who are bluntly referred to as ‘inmates’. The most uncomfortable aspect of the piece lies in the questions left unasked, and the ease by which the carceral nature of the institution is simply accepted as kindness. Readers are told that the plan for providing holidays for the girls involves sending them to homes in the wider community. The suitability of the homes is never addressed. In fact, Boyne told the reader that when the nun did visit the homes it was only ‘to ensure that her little ones are behaving fitly’. The girls are the only potential problem in this system, not the fact that the community homes are uninspected. They are expected to be grateful for a chance to visit the ‘outside world’. Boyne measured this value in a peculiarly wistful way, rather than by any standard method of journalistic inquiry:

Almost all of them came back “with magic in their eyes,” their hearts crammed with rose-petal remembrances to be poured in the bowl of memory (*Irish Independent*, 1949)

None of the recipients of this charity, namely the girls’ resident in the institution, are quoted in the piece. They are instead problematised as ‘inmates’ who need to behave ‘fitly’ in order to be permitted to stay with families in the ‘outside world’. The dangers of such a system are never addressed or questioned.

Deasún Breathnach, writing as Rex McGall, offered a similarly sympathetic portrait of Artane Industrial School in a lengthy article in the *Irish Press* in 1950:

THEY MAKE NEARLY EVERYTHING AT ARTANE

BERNARD is a cheery-faced, auburn-haired Dublin lad who, thanks to a modern fairy tale coming true, is now beginning a glamorous adventure.

Until a few months ago he was one of the many orphans up at Artane. At twelve years of age he was still studying in the classroom. Two years later he would have gone on for a trade. In time he would have been thrown out into the world, healthy in mind and body, but without a mother, brothers or sisters, who make such a big difference to one when life begins in earnest.



Up to fourteen years of age these lads receive primary education through Irish. At 14 each boy decides what he wants to learn. He has a choice of eighteen trades or occupations, but for some strange reason most of the youngsters seem to prefer tailoring. At 16 they go out into the world.

If you talk to the boys you will find another strange thing: that most of them hate the thought of leaving. Perhaps memories of slum conditions still haunt their dreams. Maybe instinctively they guess at many things when their brothers or

(McGall, R. (1950) They Make Nearly Everything. *Irish Press*, 11 May 1950, 3)

Carried prominently on page three of the newspaper, the article immediately set out to dispel any negative impressions of the Industrial and Reformatory School system:

Artane is just a few miles outside Dublin. It is called an industrial school, but don't get the idea that this is a juvenile prison, for it isn't. No towering walls cut off these 300 acres from the outside world. And it's easy to escape, if you want to, because the gate is always open. Few of these 800 young citizens of to-morrow, who range in age from 8 to 16, ever give the subject more than a passing thought.

Out there they are happy at work and play. Within these grounds they find refuge from poverty and friendlessness. Here they can learn a trade or occupation to fit themselves for the struggles and responsibilities that come with manhood.

(McGall, R. (1950) They Make Nearly Everything. *Irish Press*, 11 May 1950, 3)

In language strikingly similar to that used by priests and clerics in sermons in aid of Magdalene Laundries, McGall described Artane as 'a refuge from poverty and friendlessness'. There was no requirement for a neutral and objective framing of the system, as the consensus view of the institutions as charitable existed as a social truth. He stressed how well educated and fed the boys in the institution were. Indeed, they were better educated and fed than the boys 'at the end of your street'. This perception of the boys in Artane Industrial School as being happy to be there is reinforced by McGall who points out that when 'you talk to the boys you will find another strange thing: that most of them hate the thought of leaving. Perhaps memories of slum conditions still haunt their dreams.' Despite this indication of having spoken to the children, none of them were quoted. By contrast, it is only the consensus narrative that is foregrounded, through the words of the only person quoted in the article—the principal. Perhaps betraying a wider societal unease at physically abusive nature of the institutions, McGall pointedly assured the reader that Artane was not an institution of violence. He saw no 'cracking of whips, growling

overseers, exasperated commands...Nothing out of Dickens' *Oliver Twist*...No atmosphere of the institution' (*Irish Press*, 1950).

The *Irish Times* also expressed support for the system in news reports that prioritised opinion over objective reporting. In a piece by a 'special correspondent' which sought to tell the 'story of the work of the probation officers, the story of advice and assistance freely given to people who come within the shadow of the courts', little effort was made by the journalist to remain neutral and objective when reporting about the probation system. The probation officers, much like the religious, are deified as people 'who give their lives' to earning the trust of the children who come before them (*Irish Times*, 1941). The journalist pointed to a shortage of probation officers but then offered an unsupported opinion that, despite this, 'the machinery is in perfect order' and that 'the efficiency of these, Dublin's probation officers, is remarkable; their kindliness and their industry.'

What is done—and it is an enormous amount—is impressive. It is exhausting, and often seemingly, thankless work, until some boys and girls, sent to an industrial school, perhaps, come back to adopt their probation officer as a guardian for the rest of their lives. That happens even now, and proves the probation officer's success, and is, perhaps, his best reward (*Irish Times*, 1941).

Here, once again, opinion is presented as fact. Editorialising is simply an accepted journalistic practice that trumps any requirement for objectivity. The piece has the appearance of an early example of investigative journalism. However, it is deferential to the very people and system it examines. The probation officers simply take the place of the religious, sacrificing themselves for the greater good. None of the children and parents before the courts were interviewed. Instead, readers were presented with what appeared to be a fictional case study of a boy named 'Tommy' who moved through an idealised children's court system. Such is the level of deference afforded to the legal system, the journalist noted at the end of the piece that permission to make the inquiry was 'kindly granted' by the District Justice.

(b) Industrial and Reformatory Schools as performance and public display

Prior to the 1960s, the children incarcerated in industrial schools were rarely represented or made visible through their own words in media coverage. As

individuals, they were problematised in decades of newspaper court reports as ‘delinquents’; ‘truants’; ‘criminals’; ‘strays’; ‘waifs’ and ‘friendless’. Upon committal to industrial schools, however, they became transformed into homogenous paragons of virtue and budding Irish nationhood through media representations that are performative in nature. Industrial school children were presented to the public in very specific and controlled settings, through public displays of athletic, musical and theatrical prowess. Newspaper coverage of these performances served not only to manage the public impression of the institutions, but also to highlight the success of the Industrial and Reformatory School system itself. The success of this ‘training’ went largely unchallenged by the Irish media, even when the adequacy of the educational training these children were receiving was being directly criticised by state inquiries and lay advocacy groups.

The importance placed on the athletic and physical ability in representations of industrial school boys is evident in much of the early coverage. The public visibility of these performances was also of central importance. For example, the boys of the Artane Industrial School played a central performative role in the first instalment of the revived Tailteann Games in 1924, giving ‘an exhibition of a massed drill’ at halftime during a Shinty versus Hurling match, and performed a similar role at the 1928 and 1932 games (*Irish Independent*, 1924; *Irish Times*, 1928, *Irish Press*, 1932). This sporting and cultural festival, which had ancient origins, was open to Irish athletes and athletes of Irish descent and was aimed at showcasing Ireland as a thriving industrial and independent state to an international audience (Cronin, 2003; Reynolds, 2007). The 1924 games took place at Croke Park with over 5,000 competitors taking part in some 25 Olympic-style events as well as motorcycle racing, speed boat racing, aeroplane racing, horseracing, billiards and chess (Hunt, 2019; Reynolds, 2007). The following month, at another event in Croke Park, the Artane Boys Band performed along with another group of boys who gave ‘an effective massed display of physical drill exercises with and without dumbbells, barbells and Indian clubs’ (*Irish Times*, 1924). It is noteworthy that the band and gymnastics instructors were individually named in newspaper coverage while the boys’ identities are diluted, subsumed into a single performative unit ‘notable for their precision’ (*Irish Times*, 1924). Crucially, however, the involvement of industrial school children in the Tailteann Games indicates that the system was held in sufficiently high regard to be included in the nascent state’s first central act in ‘state

projection and self-promotion' which was intended to portray Ireland as an 'affluent, cosmopolitan, and confident new nation' (Cronin, 2003: 396; Reynolds, 2007: 157). Efficiency and precision are often singled out as the ultimate indicator of the success of industrial school training. The public attended and, according to the newspaper reportage, marvelled at these feats of athletic ability. Readers were told of the 'big attendance of the general public' at events where boys 'gave an excellent display of gymnastics on the horizontal bar, parallel bars, and vaulting horse, as well as other items of physical culture' (*Irish Independent*, 1925). These attendances showcased not only the talent of the boys but, more importantly, provided evidence to the public of the success of the industrial school project itself. The coverage reinforces this point time and time again. The performances bear 'all the evidences of masterly training' (*Irish Independent*, 1929) while the '...the boys drill instructor, deserves credit for the state of efficiency which he has brought the boys' (*Irish Times*, 1930). A massed drill and gymnastics display at Artane Industrial School in 1933 was described by the *Irish Press* as the 'Event of the Season' and the newspaper carried dedicated photographs of the performance in its coverage (*Irish Press*, 1933). These events were often dramatised for the reader, who were told of gymnastics displays that were a 'thrilling exhibition' and where the 'feats performed by these...gymnasts are, in themselves, worth seeing' (*Irish Times*, 1930). Reports of one of Ireland's cultural and sporting highlights—the All-Ireland final—came with descriptions of the performances of industrial school children. For example, the *Irish Independent* report of the 1925 All-Ireland final dedicated a portion of its coverage to the 'Artane Boys Drill':

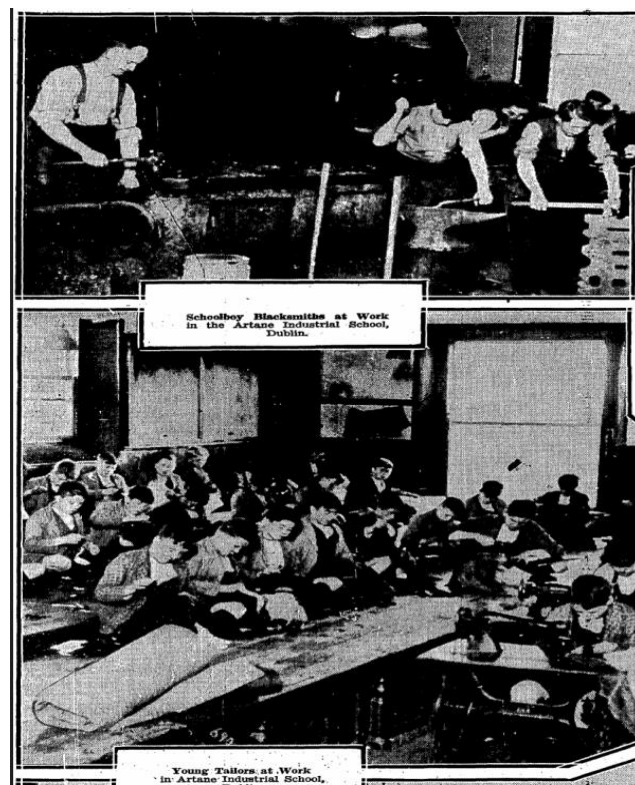
The band of the Artane Industrial School marched through the streets to the grounds shortly before 2 o'clock, and were greatly admired for their smart appearance and brilliant playing. They gave a finished display of physical drill on the grounds, and afterwards played some charming selections, being loudly cheered by the thousands present (*Irish Independent*, 1925).

This performative representation of industrial school children was not limited to feats of physical and sporting prowess. Musical and theatrical events were also used to foster a positive impression of the institutions and were frequently framed as symbolic of the success of the industrial school project. In some cases, industrial school bands were casually mentioned in coverage as performing at a range of high-

profile events and fundraisers, while the institutions themselves serve as locations where the public and high society could come to be entertained. In 1922, after a new theatre is opened in the Artane Industrial School, the *Irish Independent* told its readers that this new amenity would ‘afford an opportunity to the general public’ to witness productions on the grounds of the institution itself (*Irish Independent*, 1922). Another report of entertainment provided at Carriglea Industrial School in Dun Laoghaire highlighted the ‘excellent band selections’ as well as the performance of a ‘comic operetta’. The boys are reported as having given an ‘astonishing’ performance of a scene from Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* ‘considering the youth of the company’ (*Irish Independent*, 1925). At another entertainment evening, this time in Artane Industrial School, the school choir ‘contributed delightful choruses’ while ‘Splendid incidental and other music was rendered by the orchestra band’ (*Irish Independent*, 1925). The advent of recent technologies like radio brought the idealised and performative representations of life in industrial schools into Irish homes, with newspapers listing a range of performances which the public could tune in to.

This performative representation of industrial schools also extended to highlighting and exhibiting evidence of the industrial training children received in the institutions. Newspaper coverage showed children being inspected by politicians and visiting dignitaries while performing their trades or exhibiting their skills at shows and industrial pageants. This is often presented as not only a force for rehabilitation and education but also a source of national pride. As early as 1922, the *Irish Independent* carried a photograph of girls from St. Martha’s Industrial School in Monaghan dressed in costumes that were ‘designed and made by the pupils’. The caption described the school as ‘one of the most Gaelic Institutions in Ireland’ where the pupils had ‘a thorough knowledge of the Irish language, and are winners of numerous prizes in Irish step dancing’ (*Irish Independent*, 1922). One of the centrepieces of the 1928 Aonach Tailteann was an industrial pageant through the streets of Dublin aimed at showcasing Irish produce using modern industrial methods (Cronin, 2003). This event was particularly well-attended and newspaper reports paid specific tribute to the industrial training of boys from the Artane Industrial School. Not only is the work itself praised, but the compliant and performative nature of the boys ‘assiduously’ performing their tasks was also singled out in the coverage (*Irish Independent*, 1928). At another industrial pageant held by the Industrial Development Association, the

Artane boys were foregrounded in the coverage for a ‘very practical display’ which consisted of a ‘decorated motor-lorry, on which were a number of juvenile mechanics from the school engaged in the overhaul of a motor-car engine, at which they appeared to be quite as much at home as more seasoned hands’ (*Irish Independent*, 1929). This trend continued into the 1930s, with the *Irish Press* carrying picture packages of children in industrial schools with captions such as ‘Young Tailors at Work’ and ‘Schoolboy Blacksmiths at Work’.



(New Radio Station: Schoolboy Blacksmiths: Giants at Rest. *Irish Press*, 28 October 1932, 12)

Children that the state had incarcerated, largely due to poverty, were mediated for the public as rehabilitated and reformed as a result of having been ‘trained’ as effective units of production. Fit, efficient and compliant boys and girls were the goal of this system. A headline for an article on an inspection report from the state Inspector of Reformatory and Industrial Schools in the *Irish Independent* in 1926 would have left the reader in no doubt:

REFORMATORY SYSTEM

TRIBUTE TO THE SCHOOLS

CHARACTER & FREEDOM

presses it, moral training underlies everything in the children's lives, and is not confined to religious instruction.

He notes with apparent satisfaction that the reports of the Diocesan Inspectors show that the religious knowledge of the pupils was equal to severe tests that may be taken to indicate good all-round intelligence.

(Reformatory School System: Tribute To The Schools: Character And Freedom. *Irish*

Independent, 3 May 1926, 5)

The report, by a Dr. MacCormack, concluded that plays and concerts performed for 'outsiders' showcased 'the very best evidence of the refining influence of those institutions'. The journalist also editorialised to reinforce this conclusion stating that it 'would be difficult to find any school where there is a sturdier physique than may be found in our Industrial Schools (*Irish Independent*, 1926).

The power of this performative media frame and narrative is highlighted by the fact that it was being repeated some four decades later—even as criticisms of the system were resulting in the closure of schools. Writing in the *Irish Times* in 1969, a former teacher in Artane P.J. McNulty remembered how the boys there 'seemed to do everything mechanically, as if they were wound-up toys' (McNulty, 1969). In a piece marking the closure of the Artane Industrial School in 1968, Ann Murphy in the *Irish Independent* also falls back on the most ubiquitous media narratives of charity and performance when opining on its legacy:

Artane is famous for the great work done by the Christian Brothers in sending out into the world thousands of young lads, who were geared to face life and trained to take up many useful positions. But it is more famous because it houses within its walls "The Greatest Little Band in the World," which may after all be able to celebrate its centenary in 1970.

(Murphy, A. (1968) Finale for the Artane Band. *Irish Independent*, 19 December 1968, 10)

Six years later, when the site of the same industrial school was being converted to a secondary school, the *Irish Independent* education correspondent John Walshe, also relied on the performative frame when seeking to sum up the legacy of the Artane Industrial School in a concise topline, pointing out that the pupils of the school ‘became world famous for their boys band’ (*Irish Independent*, 1974).

Industrial schools were not places where children were hidden. On the contrary, they were put on show. In 1928, the visit of president and CEO of the United Steel Corporation James A. Farrell to Artane Industrial School was widely reported. Readers of the *Irish Times* were told that the ‘world’s biggest employer’ inspected the ‘various workshops and factories’ and was treated to ‘drill display’ as well as songs from the school choir. The Artane Boys Band also performed the US and Irish national anthems. Speaking to the *Irish Times* reporter, Farrell ‘spoke highly of the magnificent work being done by the institution’ and the ‘efficiency’ of the boys (*Irish Times*, 1928).

Both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* covered the visit of Australian Attorney General Francis Brennan and his wife to the Artane Industrial School, where they were ‘much impressed by evidences of the many-sided activities of the institution, and by the instrumental and choral items rendered by the boys...and the display of the gymnastics class’ (*Irish Independent*, 1930). Brennan, in two addresses, ‘expressed deep appreciation for the great work done by the institution, and spoke of the duty of gratitude on the part of the boys to the Brothers for their self-sacrifice on their behalf’ (*Irish Independent*, 1930).

Visits by senior Irish politicians to industrial schools were also extensively covered by Irish newspapers. A visit by President of the Irish Free State W.T. Cosgrave and the Minister for Defence Desmond Fitzgerald to Cork to visit the city’s factories also included a trip to Greenmount Industrial School. Both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* covered the visit, with the former highlighting how crowds lined the streets to wave and cheer the politicians who ‘were met on the Bandon road by the boys’ band of the school, who played them to the institution’ (*Irish Times*, 1931).

Four years later, the visit of Cosgrave’s successor, Éamon deValera to Artane Industrial School was also given extensive coverage. In the *Irish Independent*, the institution itself and the children are made visible through a performative frame. DeValera spent hours watching and inspecting the ‘various activities of the boys’. These included grinding flour, mat making, sewing, farm work, scutching and

weaving. Bootmaking and repairing was also listed as 'another attraction' (*Irish Independent*, 1935). The newspaper also carried a series of photographs over a full page, while the *Irish Press* carried a photograph of the visit on its front page:

Opticians
DIXON & HEMPENSTALL
SIGHT TESTING
12, SUFFOLK ST.

The Irish Press

Vol. V., No. 87. De Cum Eideag Tá Agor Oideag na h-Eipeann THURSDAY, APRIL 11, 1935. The Truth in the News. PRICE ONE PENNY

This Week's Aficogram
MUSKETEEER
PINK SALMON
No 1 Tall Tins 8^d per tin
FINDLATER'S
FINDLATER'S CUSHER, DUBLIN.

MR. de VALERA AND DECLARATION OF A REPUBLIC

PEOPLE MUST BE READY TO MAINTAIN IT

MINISTRY'S SERVICE TO INDEPENDENCE

FRIENDSHIP WITH FREEDOM

"WHILE I would like to see another 1919 in the morning, I would not like to see it followed by another 1921."



Mr. de Valera admiring some of the boys' work during his visit to the Artane Industrial Schools, Dublin, yesterday. (I.P. Photo.)

Priest Murdered

BIG LINER AGROUND

AQUITANIA BLOWN ON TO A MUDBANK

THE Cunard-White Star liner, "Aquitania," 10,647 tons, went aground yesterday at the entrance to Southampton water. The weather was very rough with a high wind blowing. In response to a wireless message eight of the most powerful tugs in Southampton were immediately despatched, but all efforts to refloat the giant liner failed. The vessel was returning to take her place in the North Atlantic passenger service after having made two Mediterranean cruises from New York.

FATHER STEPHEN FANG, a 38-year-old Chinese Catholic priest, has been murdered by bandits in Northern Shensi, according to a report received in Peking (Pekin), Reuter says. The bandits raided his house at Chueh-tai and dragged him off to the mountains with 20 other captives. They demanded a ransom from his superiors, but the money could not be paid. The bandits tortured Father Fang almost daily, hanging him by the arms from a tree and beating him with

(Mr deValera admiring some of the boys' work during his visit to the Artane Industrial Schools, Dublin, yesterday. *Irish Press*, 11 April 1935, 1)

PICTORIAL PAGE

THURSDAY, *Irish Independent* APRIL 11, 1935.

PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO CO. DUBLIN SCHOOL



Boy Gymnasts of Artane Industrial School acting as an escort for President de Valera when he visited the school. —Irish Independent Photo (McM.).

Out of the Past

RETRIEVED BY ESS

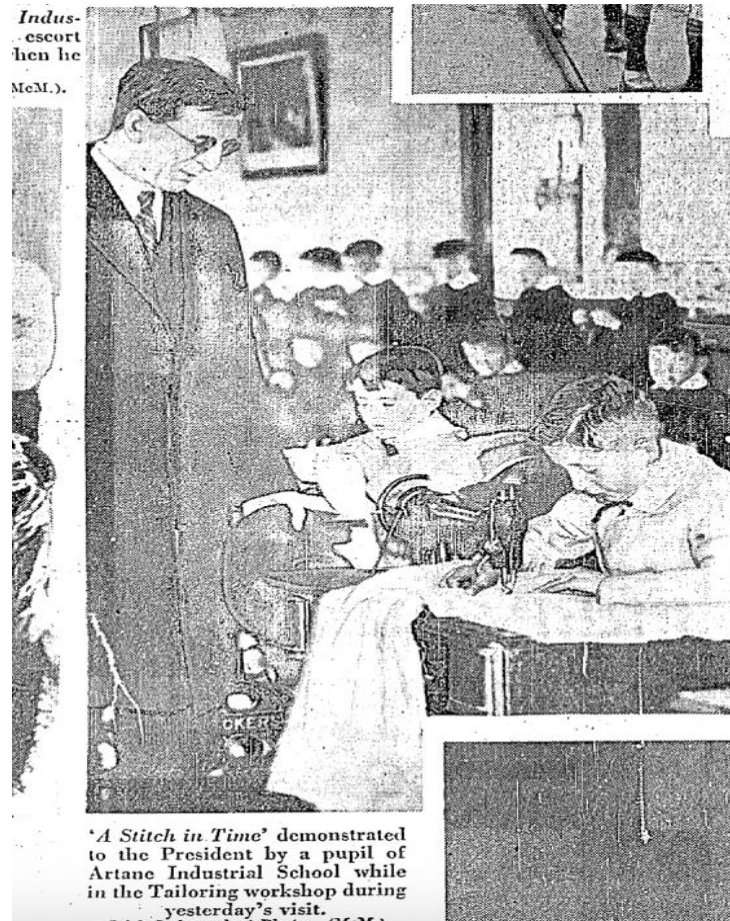


ISAAC BUTT.

The Leader of the First Organised Home Rule Movement.

A Fine Old Etching of the "Father of the Home Rule Movement," after whom Butt Bridge, Dublin, is named. His resting place is in the graveyard of Stranorlar, Co. Donegal, near the place of his birth in 1813. He was buried beneath a beech tree, from which he fell, when a boy. At the time he was a member of the Young Ireland movement and later broke of his desire to be interred under that tree.

(President's visit to Co. Dublin School. *Irish Independent*, 11 April 1935, 3)



(President's visit to Co. Dublin School. *Irish Independent*, 11 April 1935, 3)

(c) Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the criminalisation of poverty

One of the most debated aspects of Ireland's Industrial and Reformatory School system is whether poverty or familial neglect was the key driver of the huge number of admissions to the institutions. The report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA) was unambiguous in its findings that 'the main reason for children being committed to residential care was the poverty of their families' (CICA Report, 2009: Vol. V, 9) and concluded that in a 'very real sense, poverty was the reason for the Industrial schools' (CICA Report, 2009: Vol. IV, 3.01). That social need was the main reason for the institutionalisation of children in industrial schools broadly supports the conclusions of scholars like Buckley (2013); Raftery and O'Sullivan (1999); Earner-Byrne (2011), Holohan (2011), O'Sullivan and O'Donnell (2012) and Powell and Scanlon (2015). However, some criticise this view as overly simplistic. Ferguson (2007) has highlighted the role played by cruelty and neglect of parents,

while Maguire (2009) also points to ‘defaulting parents’ who abandoned their families as a significant contributor to child poverty and therefore institutionalisation. However, historian Sarah-Anne Buckley (2008, 2012) in her work on the NSPCC, has shown that the label ‘neglect’ in post-independence Ireland served as a vague and ever-expanding category that included poverty, desertion, alcoholism, illegitimacy, mental illness and domestic abuse. This recategorisation of neglect served ‘mainly to perpetuate class and gender inequality’ and was a manifestation of wider fears around the dangers posed by non-traditional family structures (Buckley, 2008: 68). Cullen (2012) expands on this by pointing to a concept of poverty in Ireland that differentiated between the ‘deserving poor’ and the ‘undeserving poor’. Most Irish people were poor in this period, but those who did not fit the conservative Catholic ideal through the breakdown of the nuclear family faced marginalisation (Cullen, 2012: 151). The children of these families faced institutionalisation in industrial schools in order to be ‘reformed’. In the public mind, and often aided by inaccurate media coverage, reformatories (which were for young offenders) became conflated with industrial schools. Poverty was not only problematised, it was criminalised—both literally and figuratively. For journalist Fintan O’Toole, industrial schools existed to ‘punish poverty’ as the ‘needy were dangerous’ (O’Toole, 2009). The CICA concluded that inevitable result was that those committed to industrial schools ‘were unfairly stigmatised as criminals whereas, in fact, their only ‘crime’ was poverty’ (CICA Report, 2009: Vol. I, 3.23).

An analysis of the news coverage between 1920 and 1960 supports this view. In much of the coverage, neglect is conflated with poverty and poverty itself is often linked to criminality. A statistic repeated by politicians and reported in newspaper, as though it were a mantra, throughout the 1930s and 1940s was that 90% of children who were in industrial schools were there due to poverty. Indeed, Minister for Education Tomás Derrig mirrored the words of CICA some 75 years later when, at the first sitting of the Cussen Committee in 1934, he said that 90% of children who passed through industrial schools ‘were guilty of no other offence than poverty’ (*Irish Independent*, 1934). That there was a stigma attached to being in an industrial school was also widely acknowledged. An editorial in the *Irish Times*, upon publication of the Cussen Report in 1936, defending the system seemed to undermine its own argument by acknowledging that it was the view of ‘the man in the street’ that the institutions means something very like “‘prison”, and the child who has been to an

industrial school starts life with a handicap which he may never be able to live down' (*Irish Times*, 1936).

A striking antipathy towards the plight of the poor is evident in newspaper coverage. It is most striking in court reports where children are removed from their parents because of 'neglect' which is not wilful but, rather, the result of poverty or because the family unit does not fit the social ideal. As early as 1920, newspapers were covering the committal of very young children through the courts system simply for the crime of being poor. In 1920, the *Irish Times* reported on a case in Kingstown (now Dun Laoghaire) where an NSPCC inspector sought the committal of a six-year-old boy who had been found 'wandering'. The report noted that the parents were 'separated' and it is evident that poverty was the root cause of the family's difficulties.

The mother had the care of three children, towards whose support the court had ordered the father to pay £2 a week. He was a carpenter earning £4 15s. a week, but through ill health and scarcity of work there was a sum of £34 due. Two of Byrne's children had already been committed to an industrial school (*Irish Times*, 1920).

It is clear that the father was attempting to support his children in incredibly difficult circumstances. However, rather than treating the case leniently, the judge instead highlighted the burden that children in industrial schools were on ratepayers and threatened to jail the man. The *Irish Times* was also less than subtle in expressing its view by headlining the report a case of 'child neglect' (*Irish Times*, 1920). This trend of parents being sent to prison or threatened with prison for 'neglecting' their children, when in fact they were simply struggling financially is repeated consistently in newspaper coverage of court committals. The solution to familial poverty, as evidenced by court reports, was to remove the children from their parents. In one case—referred to by the *Irish Independent* using a pull quote as a 'shocking story of child neglect'—an NSPCC inspector sought the committal to an industrial school of seven children from a family in Ahascragh in Galway:

SHOCKING STORY OF CHILD NEGLECT

FATHER SENT TO PRISON

A shocking story of child neglect was deposed to at Ballinasloe District Court by Miss Monnelly, N.S.P.C.C., in support of her application to have seven children of one family, named Tyrrell, committed to an industrial school.

The family live at Ahascragh, and consisted of father, mother, and ten children. Their "home" was a shed without windows, and the rain was coming through the roof.

When she visited the place at 1 o'clock in the 'day she found the father and mother in bed, and the children, half naked, sitting round a spark of fire.

All the children were poorly nourished, poorly clad, verminous, and under-sized. There was no food in the house.

There was one bed covered with hay and rags in which the whole family slept, and the hens laid their eggs in this bed.

(Shocking Story of Child Neglect: Father Sent To Prison. *Irish Independent*, 10 February 1925, 7)

Disparities in class and a disapproval of polite society of the lifestyle of the family, not to mention its plight are evident in the reportage. The NSPCC inspector 'remonstrated with the father, asking why he was in bed at that hour, he chased her into the street and threatened to kill her'. The report also noted that the man had 'nothing on but a shirt' (*Irish Independent*, 1925). The views of the family or their solicitor are not reported. They are invisible in the proceedings which end with the father being fined and sent to prison for two months and the judge ordering the removal of the children to an industrial school.

In a similar case in Ballintubber District Court in Mayo, a man was prosecuted 'for cruelly treating his three children'. The man's three girls, aged 11, eight and six are named in the piece and committed to an industrial school. However, the report does not record any evidence that the man was wilfully neglecting or inflicting cruelty on

his children. Instead, an NSPCC inspector, who visited the home with a Civic Guard, inspector simply describes a family living in abject poverty. The news report itself undermines the mitigation of poverty by stating that the man had 12 acres of land while ‘his children lived by begging from neighbours’. As with the case in Galway, the father objected to any efforts to remove the children from his care with the NSPCC inspector telling the court that he ‘would not allow the children to be taken to an industrial school until witness threatened to get a warrant for their removal’. Not only did the judge accede to committing the children to an industrial school, but he also accused father of having ‘behaved in a disgraceful way to the children, and he ought to be sent to jail’ (*Irish Times*, 1925). The view of the court was that a poor father trying to hold on to his children was something that was not only ‘disgraceful’ but worthy of a custodial sentence.

In other cases, parents were accused of cruelty and neglect even where evidence was provided that the children were well cared for and well fed. They were simply poor.

In one case before Kildare District Court in 1925, a man appealed against a conviction and sentence of six months in prison ‘for alleged persistent cruelty to several of his children’ (*Irish Times*, 1925). A solicitor for the NSPCC highlighted how the man had sold a large farm to purchase another one but that, despite this, the family of nine were living in ‘a terrible hovel’. The NSPCC inspector outlined to the court that some of the children had already been removed to industrial school but conceded that the children ‘were well fed and nourished, though pale and anaemic’.

The report is noteworthy for the fact that the father was represented in court and offered a defence—namely that the house was some 300 years old and had become unfit for habitation four or five years earlier and forced the family into the barn. The importance of families being able to secure legal representation is evidenced by the fact that the judge postponed the imprisonment of the father on condition he pay for the industrial school and pay £7 to cover costs and expenses (*Irish Times*, 1925).

Cases where parents were directly imprisoned or threatened with prison continue into the late 1940s using much of the same language and narrative frames. In 1932, a traveller couple, were given six months hard labour for ‘neglecting their children’ aged five and six years old. The father was described as an ‘itinerant violin player, and lived in a caravan with his wife and children’, and who had left his children ‘dirty, foodless and ill-clad’ (*Irish Press*, 1932). However, the parents disputed the claim stating that the children were left with a neighbour. Despite this, they were

jailed, and their children removed to an industrial school. In another case, in 1949, a father was arrested while working on a bog after the NSPCC sought committal of three of his children to an industrial school. What is clearly an impoverished family setting is conflated with the wilful neglect of children by parents. The evidence supplied by the NSPCC outlined an extremely poor family rather than children who were experiencing the cruelty of their parents. The children are described as sleeping 'in a bed supported underneath by branches of trees, and the bedclothes consisted of rags' and 'sitting down on an old sack and eating potatoes from a pot' (*Irish Times*, 1949). The NSPCC inspector alleged that the mother of the children informed him that her husband would not give her money to support the children. However, upon being brought to court by the Gardaí, the father stated that he was on the dole 'for a long time' and only had 18s 6d a week. He 'owed a number of bills, and was trying to pay them' (*Irish Times*, 1949). In the view of the court, the most adequate way to address the poverty of this family unit was to remove the children from it. To the judge, poverty was equated with child cruelty. He stated that if they parents had had been brought before the court on a charge of cruelty, he would have given them six months in prison with hard labour (*Irish Times*, 1949).

There are rare examples where reporting did attempt to represent the views of the families and allow them to vocalise their fears of losing their children to the Industrial and Reformatory School system. In 1927, an *Irish Times* report by a special correspondent about conditions in the west Cork village of Adrigole outlined a case of a recently widowed man living in abject poverty with eight children. Six had already been committed to industrial schools. The piece is noteworthy as an early instance of an Irish newspaper attempting to investigate the underlying causes of poverty rather than merely describe it. However, particularly instructive is the editorial decision to include the man's fears and anxiety, expressed in his own words, that he will lose his children to an industrial school:

Near to Glengarriff live in a mere "shack" a very poor man and two of his eight children. A year ago his wife died, and six of his children were sent to an industrial school. There were only a few potatoes in the house—no tea, bread or sugar. The children have scarcely a garment, and there was fear in this haggard and hungry man's eyes when he said to me: "I cannot send the children to school without clothes, sir, and may be they will take them away from me too." His was, perhaps, the worst of all the houses I saw in that district.

(Sore Plight of Adrigole: Poverty, Disease and Hunger, Some Painful Instances, Suggested Measures of Relief. *Irish Times*, 4 April 1927, 8)

The *Irish Times* reported on another case in Donegal where a woman was charged with 'the ill-treatment' of her nine-year-old daughter. The evidence provided outlines a widow living in extremely impoverished circumstances. The report indicated how, the woman, in desperation, 'asked the Justice not to send the child away to an industrial school, as she was delicate'. However, the judge told her he had no option and committed the child to an industrial school until she was 16-years-old (*Irish Times*, 1928).

Sensationalism was also often used as an editorial tool to arouse the requisite emotion or interest in the reader. In the case of industrial school committals, lurid descriptions of poverty are used to emotionally engage the reader but also to represent those experiencing the loss of their children as 'other' or in some way deviant from the social norm. They are, simultaneously, to be both pitied and vilified. Cases are often reported using extreme descriptors such as 'shocking'; 'worst'; and 'sad' to evoke sympathy but while, at the same time, terms such as 'miserable'; 'pathetic'; 'filthy' and 'dreadful' work to elicit more negative feelings of disgust and disdain. This language is visible from the 1920s right into the 1940s. Poverty is described in Dickensian terms using phrases like 'the worst case of misery and filth that he had ever seen' (*Irish Times*, 1925); 'a case of such utter neglect and destitution she never met before' (*Irish Independent*, 1925); the 'stench in the place was dreadful' (*Irish Independent*, 1925); and 'on the middle of the floor there was a cesspool, the stench of which might have caused fever' (*Irish Times*, 1925).

(d) Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the reproduction of class hierarchy

Scholars like Buckley (2013), Earner-Byrne (2011), Maguire (2009) and O’Sullivan (1997) have all stressed the importance of class bias in understanding Ireland’s Industrial and Reformatory School system. Buckley (2013), in her case study of NSPCC inspectors in Wexford, outlines how they often ‘projected their own middleclass views in making judgements of families’ and labelled fathers and mothers in pejorative terms which questioned their domestic or moral virtue (Buckley, 2013: 83–84). Journalist and commentator Fintan O’Toole has also identified class as a crucial element in understanding how pervasive the Irish Industrial and Reformatory School system was. Ireland was a society, he argues, where ‘the middle class expressed their insecurity about their own status in a hysterical contempt for the poor. The function of industrial schools was to punish poverty’ and persisted for three reasons ‘power, sex and class’ (O’Toole, 2009; O’Toole, 2009b). *Irish Times* political editor Dick Walsh also touched on class when pointing out that ‘because the poor, the excluded, the people who didn’t fit in were considered a threat to society they were best left alone (Walsh, 1999). Earner-Byrne (2011: 52) has argued that Irish society was always aware that the Industrial and Reformatory School system was ‘intrinsically class based’ and that its adequacy as a form of child care was regularly debated in public. These contemporaneous welfare debates, she points out, ‘reveal a deep-rooted distrust of the working class family’ (Earner-Byrne, 2011: 64). The newspaper coverage from the period certainly supports this thesis. It is clear from general reportage, court reports, letters and public comment that industrial schools were places used to control poor children who came from families deemed to have deviated from the accepted and idealised middle-class norms of polite Irish society.

One of the few politicians to consistently criticise the Industrial and Reformatory School system and its undue focus on poor children was James Dillon of Fine Gael. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, Dillon, who later became leader of the party and a government minister, vehemently criticised successive governments for the ‘public scandal’ of having children ‘railroaded to jail’ in industrial schools (*Irish Times*, 1934; *Irish Independent*, 1939). Despite admitting to detesting ‘anything that savours of class war’, Dillon felt compelled to point out in Dáil Éireann that ‘none of these

children are the children of rich people’ and that ‘if you go back on the cases you will find that no rich people’s children have gone to industrial schools’ (Dillon, 1939).

No rich person would ever be treated in this way. Can you imagine the son or the daughter of a resident of Fitzwilliam Square being brought down to Morgan Place and sent from there to an industrial school because he stole 5/- worth of grapes? (Dillon, 1939).

Dillon’s angry outbursts about the ‘scandal’ of industrial schools were regularly covered in the newspapers, albeit usually as part of wider Dáil roundup news reports. However, it is noteworthy that his class-based criticisms of the institutional child care system were not deemed worthy of quoting by journalists and do not appear anywhere in the reportage.

A public and particularly bitter spat between the Lord Mayor of Dublin Alfred Byrne and Judge Edward Little in 1937 over juvenile ‘garden robbers’ also unwittingly exposed the distinct class divergence between those committing children to industrial schools and those incarcerated in them. The row erupted after Byrne had criticised recent sentences of children aged between eight and 11-years-old to five years in industrial schools for stealing apples from orchards as ‘very savage indeed’ (*Irish Times*, 1937; *Irish Independent*, 1937). Byrne’s sympathy was clearly with the working-class families of the children and he is reported as stating that he had seen the ‘effects on mothers of the punishment of their children...for trifling offences.’ In response, Judge Little labelled Byrne’s remarks as a ‘grotesque misrepresentation’ of the functions of industrial and reformatory schools:

admission to these schools. The management of these schools is the lifework of men and women of gentle breeding, who have given up all to devote themselves to the care and education of these children of the poor. There is no sentence imposed by us, and no child that has been sentenced is admitted there. These schools are -for the children of the poor what boarding schools were for us, and still are for our children—schools to which we were sent and they are sent when parents are dead, or absent, or when experience teaches that more adventurous and daring temperaments must be guided by a firmer system of authority than most parents have time, opportunity, or devotion to give.

(Mansion House Mummery: Dublin Justice's Reply No Children Sent To Schools. *Irish Times*, 26 August 1937, 8)

Clear and demarcated class lines and power structures are evident in Little's defence. The religious are men and women of 'gentle breeding' who have sacrificed everything. By contrast, the poor children needed rehabilitation and reform by a 'firmer system of authority'. Industrial schools 'were for the children of the poor what boarding schools were children of the more prosperous classes' (*Irish Independent*, 1937). Not only does Little make this spurious comparison without any evidence, but it is instructive of the very different Ireland he inhabited compared to the children he was committing to institutions. Byrne again highlighted the issue of class later that year after he raised a case of a 13-year-old girl who had 'who had passed from the sixth to the seventh standard at school' but was sent to an industrial school for three years for failure to attend school. He noted that the mother of the girl was 'broken-hearted' while the father was 'bitter' because he felt that 'anybody could come along and send a workingman's child to a Borstal Institution for two or three years simply because it was the child of a workingman' (*Irish Independent*, 1937). A distinct class bias among certain elements within the legal class continues to be prevalent in newspaper coverage as late as the 1980s. The *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* both reported on an annual meeting of the Irish Save the Children Fund in 1972, where barrister Fergal Foley was quoted calling for pillory and stocks to be introduced to punish juveniles "who know no other language except that of violence and force". Despite most children being in industrial schools due to poverty, Foley labelled them "high schools and universities of crime" before saying that some children "will only respect the iron fist in the chain-mail glove" (*Irish Times*, 1972). Just over a decade later, the retirement of Justice Robert O'hUadhaigh was marked with a tribute piece by the *Irish Press*. O'hUadhaigh had worked for a time in the Children's Court in Dublin in the 1960s and his views on the committal of children to institutions are reminiscent of Justice Edward Little's remarks in the 1930s, when comparing the lives of children in institutions to his own experiences in a boarding school:

He doesn't deny it was tough sending a young fellow to Letterfrack but the experience benefited all but the ten per cent or so who "are just born that way." He compares it to a year he himself spent as a boarder at Mungret College.

(McClellan, D. (1984) Stepping down...Justice O'hUadhaigh: Criminal class's stern master hangs up gown. *Irish Press*, 19 April 1984, 4)

O'hUadhaigh described himself as a 'conservative' who believes in 'the establishment' and clearly took issue with any suggestion that the industrial schools were problematic institutions in terms of child welfare:

"I enjoyed it immensely until a Commission was set up to investigate the so-called children's problem. It was tough work and hard, the things we had to do." With a faint air of regret he comments: "They did away with the industrial schools. I gather now if somebody does anything, and they have to be incarcerated one way or the other, they nearly have to pass an exam to get into some of the institutions."

(McClellan, D. (1984) Stepping down...Justice O'hUadhaigh: Criminal class's stern master hangs up gown. *Irish Press*, 19 April 1984, 4)

Class and circumstances of birth crop up somewhat inadvertently but repeatedly in the piece. At one point, O'hUadhaigh reflected on how he sentenced 'an unmarried pregnant teenager' to six months in Mountjoy prison for a first offence, telling her solicitor that she would get all the medical attention she needed in prison. The circumstances that led to the young girl finding herself vulnerable, pregnant and forced to steal are never considered. Yet, elsewhere in the piece, the reader learns that O'hUadhaigh's own background and upbringing were centrally important to his obtaining of a position of power over young people in difficult situations. He outlined how his own success in life was down to the 'luck' that he came from "a family that was well known." He also admitted that 'his political connections helped him get prosecution work.' (*Irish Press*, 1984).

The letters pages of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* also reveal a public that was acutely aware of the existing social class distinctions in Ireland. In a letter to the *Irish Times* in 1925 praising the ‘training’ received by girls in industrial schools, an M. Roche noted that the girls ‘compare favourably with others of any class’ when it came to employability. However, for Roche, this comparison did not involve any possibility of social mobility. She noted that for both her and her friends, the industrial school girls had ‘served as nursery maids, cooks, parlour maids and dairy maids’ before adding that some had even managed to marry (*Irish Times*, 1925). In a letter to the *Irish Independent*, an unnamed ‘social worker of 40 years’ also noted that at a recent evening of entertainment at Artane Industrial School, she overheard a woman stating that the ‘boys might be from Eton’. Yet, despite this, it is clear that her vision of the future for these children bore no resemblance to that of a privileged Eton graduate. Success for the girls of industrial schools amounted to them becoming ‘clever needlewomen as well as good housekeepers’ and that whatever ‘natural good’ that was in these children had been ‘better developed than if brought up under less favourable conditions’ (*Irish Independent*, 1925). In short, for a social worker in 1925 Ireland, it was better for a child to grow up in a religious run institution than to grow up in a poor family.

Reacting to the ‘garden robbers’ spat in 1937, E. Hepworth wrote to the *Irish Times* to express her support for the committal of poor children to industrial schools. She remarked that:

...nowadays the rod is spared in the upper classes, and naughty children are “reasoned with (save the mark!), while the lower classes they are just allowed to run wild and do as they like, and, if their victims complain to their parents, they are met with either abuse or contempt, while, if the police are notified, reprisals of a drastic kind are resorted to (*Irish Times*, 1937).

For Ms. Hepworth, the upper classes were the ‘victims’ of the criminally minded ‘lower classes’. Some members of the public pushed back against this criminalisation of the poor simply for being poor, however, and noted the distinct class bias in terms of the socio-economic backgrounds of children being committed to industrial schools. Writing to the *Irish Press* in 1944, a J. Brown took issue with the reported comments of a District Judge who had accused former residents of Artane Industrial School of lying when before the courts:

**“ INDUSTRIAL
SCHOOLS ”**

To the Editor, THE IRISH PRESS.

Dear Sir,—In a Dublin evening paper of May 23rd, an incident was reported from the Dublin District Court, in which the Justice is stated to have said: “They have been in Artane for five-and-a-half years; you would think that would teach them something, but they come up here and lie to me consistently.” Perhaps the Justice would tell your readers where he was at school? Have any of his former classmates broken the law? If so, was their Alma Mater duly announced from the bench when they appeared in court? Would he say what purpose he served or hoped to serve by telling all and sundry that two poor delinquents in his court had been at school in Artane? Why is it that the only persons treated similarly in other instances are past pupils of industrial schools?

(Brown, J. (1944). Industrial Schools. *Irish Press*. 17 June 1944, 3)

Individual newspapers and journalists also revealed their own class bias when reporting or commenting on the Industrial and Reformatory School system. In a piece about the publication of two new road safety handbooks published by the Safety First Association of Ireland, the motoring correspondent with the *Irish Times* Harold Brown discussed the importance of parents educating their children about road safety, before embarking on a bizarre foray into editorialising on the merits of industrial schools. He took issue with ‘the almost criminal irresponsibility of some Dublin parents, particularly in working class districts’. These parents are accused of taking ‘so little interest in their children that they do not even know what standards they are in in school’ (*Irish Times*, 1940).

In 1943, an *Irish Times* series on crime in Dublin also exposed an ingrained class bias when making the claim industrial schools helped to prevent poor people from becoming criminals. In the familiar comparison used repeatedly in coverage, the reporter editorialises to tell the reader that there was ‘no reason to suppose that the average industrial school boy is not of as good a character as the average inmate of Clongowes or St. Columba’s’ (*Irish Times*, 1943). However, unlike the boys of fee-paying boarding schools, the employment options for industrial school boys are limited to post office messengers, farm and garden work, shoe making, house and hotel work and factory work. The long running *Irishman’s Diary* section of the *Irish*

Times repeated a well-worn statistic from the period that 90 per cent of children were in industrial schools because of poverty before making a distinctly class-laden judgement on the parents of children who had ended up in the Daingean reformatory:

figures I have seen showed that 90% were in for the sins of their parents, who did not want them, or would not or could not look after them, or had no control over them, or who were, through drunkenness or cruelty or vice, considered to be unfit to keep them. It is to Daingean that the bulk of the actual law-breakers go. ..

An Irishman's Diary: Daingean. *Irish Times*, 2 November 1949, 5)

The children themselves are considered 'all potential lawbreakers' who, if they are the 'lucky ones' are 'picked up and sent off to an industrial school before they commit a crime' (*Irish Times*, 1949).

At times, journalists also show a peculiar deference to the power structures they purport to be inquiring into. An April 1970 article by Leila Doolan in the 'Women's Press' section of the *Irish Press* is striking for the almost reverential tone adopted when interviewing the head of the Dublin Children's Court, Justice Eileen Kennedy, during a day spent in her court. The judge had been appointed by the government to investigate the Industrial and Reformatory School system in 1967 and published a report critical of the system in late 1970. Doolan seemed in awe of the judge who she interviewed in her chambers, and this is reflected in the tone she adopted throughout the piece:

I watched the small, star-shaped brooch rise and fall gently on the lapel of her well-cut brown suit. She was self-possessed, almost self-contained. I was conscious that my hair needed pressing, that my questions were general. Her answers were precise, particular and without priggishness (*Irish Press*, 1970).

Kennedy is later quoted as saying that she only committed children to industrial schools as "a last resort" and that she was "hard on the middle classes". This latter claim, which was counter to the widely publicised view that industrial schools were predominantly used for children of the poor, goes entirely unchallenged by Doolan.

Even in 1989, a time when abuse in industrial schools had been highlighted in numerous memoirs and just a few short years before the system would be acknowledged as a public scandal, some prominent journalists chose to fall back on class bias when discussing the Industrial and Reformatory School system. In a column on the role of religious orders in the Irish education system, *Irish Independent* journalist Mary Kenny euphemistically acknowledged that some people ‘had a hard time at the hands of the teaching orders’ but immediately qualified this with a claim that working class children may never have received an education without the religious orders:

But as you feel moved to shed a tear for kids who were too harshly treated, remember that many working-class lads would never have had any education to speak of, if it hadn’t been for the Brothers, who not only gave poor kids a schooling, but produced a remarkable number of high achievers – not least of them our beloved leader, Charles J (*Irish Independent*, 1989).

Conclusion

For all the plaudits received for its role in framing the Industrial and Reformatory School System as a national ‘scandal’ in the 1990s, Irish journalism must also wrestle with what it knew and what it reported about the system in earlier decades. This chapter has shown that, from the 1920s until the late 1960s, Ireland’s three main national newspaper consistently framed industrial schools and reformatories as charitable endeavours that were socially beneficial, while rarely seeking to examine conditions or give voice to the children committed to these institutions. Even when concerns did emerge, coverage remained, in the main, deferential to the religious. It reinforced a social perception of poverty as a crime and problematised the children incarcerated in the institutions as ‘truants’, ‘delinquents’ and ‘waifs’. Newspapers explicitly endorsed the Industrial and Reformatory School system in news reports and editorials. As a result, Irish journalism in this period was an active participant in legitimising the very system it would later seek to expose in the 1990s.

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Chapter Two

‘I was brought up in prison, in two industrial schools’: The visibility of abuse in industrial schools in Irish newspaper coverage, 1920–1990

Introduction

The nature and legacy of Ireland’s Industrial and Reformatory School system is often framed for the public using reductive tropes. Terms like darkness and light, secrecy and revelation, a ‘hidden Ireland’, ‘Ireland’s dark past’. These have been used by journalists, politicians and commentators for so long it has become an accepted truth. This narrative at once absolves society of any past knowledge while placing the media as the driver of revelation. It was Irish journalism that shone a light in the dark corners. It revealed the truth to a shocked public. It exposed the hidden Ireland. It is, and remains, one of the most pervasive narrative myths of the 1990s—Ireland’s decade of scandal. Its power lies in its utility both to Irish society and Irish journalism. It enables Irish society to say that nobody knew or, as Earner-Byrne (2011) has argued, ‘to construct distance through ignorance and compartmentalise guilt’ (57). However, the idea that industrial schools resided in an Ireland somehow ‘hidden’ from the public is demonstrably false. A cursory examination of the public debate around industrial schools reveals that right from the foundation of the state in 1922, there was a considerable societal awareness that the system was damaging to children and destructive to the family unit.

For Irish journalism, this narrative has allowed it to be the hero in its own story. The physical and sexual abuse of children in Ireland’s industrial schools was wrenched from a reluctant past that was unwilling to give up its secrets. Journalist Pasty McGarry, writing in 2017, said that if the journalism of Mary Raftery, and some isolated reports in the 1970s, was crucial in uncovering the abuses of the Industrial and Reformatory School system in the 1990s, ‘what of journalism in Ireland before then where this awful scandal was concerned?’ (McGarry, 2017: 31). This chapter will address that question and argue that, from the very beginnings of the Irish state, the fact that industrial schools were abusive institutions was being reported in

Ireland's three main national newspapers — the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*. These references range from the oblique which hinted at abuses, to concrete examples of the physical and sexual abuse of children, the exploitation of children for labour, the death of children in care and the suicides of young people after leaving industrial schools. In numerous court cases, adults charged with crimes pointed to abuse that they had suffered while in institutions as mitigation for their crimes. Journalists simply did not or could not — due the unofficial self-censorship which operated particularly in the 1940s and 1950s in relation to any topics which painted the Catholic Church in an unfavourable light — consistently foreground these abuses as anything worthy of investigation or deeper inquiry until the late 1960s. It would take another shift in journalism in the 1990s for them to be labelled as a 'scandal'.

Knowledge and understanding: A contested space

Societal knowledge of the abusive nature of the industrial schools remains a contested space. Following the publication of the final report of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA), more commonly known as the Ryan Report, in 2009, journalist and commentator Fintan O'Toole wrote of a propensity in Irish culture to have “‘unknown knowns’—things that are known to be true but are treated as if they are outlandish fictions.’

No honest person seriously doubted that the industrial schools were instruments of terror and torture—why, otherwise, were children threatened with Letterfrack and Daingean, words that induced a numbing chill of fear? (O'Toole, 2009)

When reflecting on the impact of the Ryan Report, the iconic Irish broadcaster Gay Byrne also noted a broad public awareness, if perhaps not an understanding, of what was going on in industrial and reformatory schools.

Synge Street, where I went to school was a tough house, but I never saw a semblance of sexual abuse. Blood and tears on the walls, yes. There was one lay teacher that I now realise was at it. But the threat that was held over us was Artane or Letterfrack, a place of no return—that was our Korea (Duggan, 2010).

In one of the many letters to the *Irish Times* in the days following the publication of the report, a Dr. Norman Stewart wrote that, to be a child in Ireland in 1950s and 1960s, meant an awareness of the industrial school as ‘a threat’: ‘Parents would say “if you’re bad, you’ll be taken away to Artane Boys Home”. Just the threat of being taken away was enough for us, and we knew the boys had a hard life, but we never dreamed that conditions were actually as appalling as the commission describes’ (Stewart, 2009). Another member of the public, Joseph Geoghegan, wrote that the abuse of children in industrial schools was ‘common knowledge’ when he was at school in the 1950s, adding: ‘We all knew which brothers to stay away from’ (Geoghegan, 2009).

Arnold (2009) has argued that the perception of the Industrial and Reformatory School system as charity was ‘widely accepted by the Irish people’ but that, simultaneously, it was equally well known that ‘something quite terrible was going on.’

Evidence emerged regularly; it surfaced in Dáil questions and debates, in media coverage, in local authority confrontations. These episodes were never fully investigated. They were almost always dismissed by successive Ministers for Education, often as ‘isolated incidents’ (which of course was no excuse for not investigating), or a Department of Education inquiry was claimed as having taken place, its result invariably being the exoneration of those in charge of the relevant institutions’ (Arnold, 2009: 6).

O’Toole has discussed the cognitive dissonance that emerges because of the tension between personal knowledge and being forced to confront that knowledge, as ‘there is often more power in being forced to confront what you already know than in being amazed by the unexpected’ (O’Toole, 2009). The Ryan Report played a crucial role in forcing the Irish public to confront what it already knew. The witnesses who spoke to the inquiry ‘believed that awareness of the abuse of children in schools and institutions existed within society at both official and unofficial levels’ and that ‘while many of those people were aware that life for children in the schools and institutions was difficult they failed to take action to protect them’ (CICA Executive Summary, 2009: 14).

Journalists also knew. In a letter to the *Irish Times* on the day the final episode of Mary Raftery’s seminal *States of Fear* documentary aired in 1999, former editor of

the *Evening Herald* between 1969 and 1976, Brian Quinn wrote of his ‘mounting shame’ for his profession as he watched the series.

Journalists of the 1940s and 1950s had their suspicions of the industrial schools. We knew, in particular, that a stay with the Christian Brothers was to be avoided, the main reason being the brothers’ reputation for excessive corporal punishment.

Even in a climate of acceptance that brothers and nuns were beyond repute, we should have tried harder to find the truth. In the defence of journalists of that time, we would not have been believed and managements and editors would never have held out against a massed attack by the all-powerful Irish Catholic Church (Quinn, 1999).

Quinn described how repeated requests from ‘one of the worst of the Christian brothers’ to newspaper management to spike a court case mentioning Artane Industrial School were acceded to. This type of editorial interference ‘should have alerted journalists to start inquiries into what was happening in Artane. That we did not is a heavy burden’ (Quinn, 1999). In a column in the *Irish Times*, Dick Walsh, the newspaper’s then political editor, was scathing about the media’s deference to both Church and state. He wrote that it was ‘hardly credible’ that the press was unaware of what was going on but that, between the 1940s and the 1960s, the ‘press wouldn’t say boo to a goose’.

The *Irish Independent*, a respected and authoritative newspaper, was too busy with Lenten pastorals.

The *Irish Press* sheltered a fine collection of sacked school teachers, spoiled priests and lapsed republicans but, with Fianna Fáil in power, steered clear of controversy.

So did Radio Éireann and the *Cork Examiner*, as they then were; and The *Irish Times*, selling fewer than 30,000 copies a day, hardly mattered.

Could it be that no one knew what was happening? It’s hardly credible; far more likely that because the poor, the excluded, the people who didn’t fit in, were considered a threat to society they were best left alone (Walsh, 1999).

Despite this, however, the ‘no one knew’ narrative has persisted. Industrial schools remain part of a ‘hidden’ Ireland revealed to an appalled public in the mid-1990s. It is a language that safely absolves the Irish state and wider society from blame through ignorance and time. It also facilitates Irish journalism in avoiding the difficult questions posed of it by Quinn and Walsh by presenting itself as the central actor in the revelation of these hidden abuses rather than a participant in the

maintenance of the consensus which presented the mass incarceration of children as an act of charity.

Taoiseach Bertie Ahern foregrounded this revelatory narrative in the state apology offered to survivors of the Industrial and Reformatory School system stating that the then government was acting because ‘a light has been shone into the dark corners of both our past and present’ (Ahern, 1999). The implication being that without this light, the state would not have known. Of course, the Irish state was acutely aware of the abuses in industrial and reformatory schools. The fact it had initiated two formal inquiries into the system in 1936 and 1970 is indicative of this. However, commentators continue to lean on this narrative of ignorance. Jesuit John Dardis, when searching for an answer as to how Ireland went so quickly from ‘scandal free’ to ‘scandal ridden’ so quickly in the 1990s, relied on societal ignorance for his answer.

We lived in a society which was, for many decades, relatively unchanging. The surface was calm. But below the surface, problems were bubbling away; the ingredients for intense public debate and for a rapid period of social change were being prepared. We did indeed have the ‘stuff’ of scandals in the Ireland of the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s...but nobody knew (Dardis, 2000: 310).

Powell and Scanlon (2015) in their analysis of the relationship between the media, child abuse and public scandals have argued that, despite the widespread abuse of children in church-run institutions in the 1950s and 1960s, ‘this issue was not reported in the media until the 1990s (Power and Scanlon, 2015: 49). However, as this chapter will argue, this claim is entirely without foundation.

What is child abuse?

Child abuse and child welfare as a conceptual construct has its roots in the mid-nineteenth century. As Buckley (2013) has noted, topics such as child cruelty and neglect, child sexual abuse, child labour, juvenile delinquency and single parenthood were the focus of numerous campaigns and debates as the state began to interact with the family unit. The newspaper coverage of industrial schools in the twentieth century reflects this and is littered with terms such as ‘neglect,’ ‘cruelty,’ ‘ill-

treatment' and 'abandonment.' In other cases, abuse can be inferred from the reportage.

The Ryan Report classified child abuse using four main categories:

1. Physical abuse:

The wilful, reckless or negligent infliction of physical injury on, or failure to prevent such injury to, the child.

2. Sexual abuse:

The use of the child by a person for sexual arousal or sexual gratification of that person or another person.

3. Neglect:

Failure to care for the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare.

4. Emotional abuse:

Any other act or omission towards the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare (CICA, Vol 3: 1.09).

From the 1920s into the 1980s, Irish newspapers contained evidence of abuse which conform to these definitions. It is now known that these institutions were abusive. However, this chapter will outline numerous examples of press coverage which highlight not only evidence of abuse but also reports that show that the institutions were recognised to be abusive and damaging to children *at the time*.

Chapter Structure

This chapter will be divided into two main sections. The first, and more substantial section, will examine reportage which indicates direct evidence of abuse. This section will be further subdivided under the headings: (a) physical abuse (including deaths in care), (b) sexual abuse, and (c) neglect and emotional abuse (including reports of suicide, the use of institutionalisation as a mitigating factor in criminal cases and the exploitation of children for labour).

The second section will examine reportage indicating a more abstract political and social unease about the impact of the Industrial and Reformatory School system on children and families. This section will also be subdivided under the headings: (a) Oblique and overt ‘unease’ about industrial schools (b) industrial school as sites of cruelty and (c) forced familial separation.

Section One: Evidence of Abuse

There is widespread historical newspaper reportage which hints at an existing knowledge of abuse, and which conveys a general sense of societal unease concerning industrial and reformatory schools. Judges sometimes used the threat of committal to an industrial school as a method of ensuring children stayed in school. In one case from 1928, a boy who was ‘afraid to go to school’ because he did not like studying Irish and was ‘slapped’ appeared in Athlone District Court with his mother for failing to attend school. The *Irish Times* reported that the judge told the boy that he would get ‘more than slaps’ if he stayed away from school and that ‘a good slapping would do you good...The Justice then asked the boy if he had ever heard of an industrial school, and he said that he did, and promised to go to school’ (*Irish Times*, 1928). Clearly, even in 1928, it was widely known to both children and adults that industrial schools were places to be feared.

A similar sense of societal knowledge hangs over a curious article in the *Irish Times* in 1929, which reported how the Longford Board of Health was notified that an ambulance, intended for bringing people to and from the county home and hospital, was instead used ‘to bring three female inmates to the Newtownforbes Industrial School to visit children’. The management of the industrial school itself lodged the complaint, as the visibility of the ambulance on the premises had drawn ‘inferences’ from the public:

terday. The industrial school authorities lodged a complaint about it, and said that while they did not object to visitors, they objected to its use on this occasion, as its presence for a considerable time outside the convent had drawn considerable public attention, and inferences had been suggested. The school authorities strongly objected to this, stating that the ambulance should not be used to convey inmates to the school as visitors. The Board deferred action pending further information.

(News from All Ireland: Use of an ambulance. *Irish Times*, 12 November 1929, 13)

The article does not outline exactly what inferences the public drew from the presence of the ambulance on the grounds of the industrial school. However, they were clearly negative and, given that the school authorities had objected to them, it points to a pre-existing wider public unease about industrial schools in the early years of the Irish state.

In a brief article in 1939, the *Irish Times* reported on the case of a 17-year-old boy before the courts on a house breaking charge. Other reports had indicated that he was homeless, starving and that both of his parents had died. The *Irish Times* report, which ran to a mere two paragraphs noted:

BRAY DISTRICT COURT
YOUTH BOUND TO
THE PEACE

(BEFORE MR. LIAM PRICE.)

Richard Doyle (17), both of whose parents were dead, and who was stated to be a native of Bray, was bound to the peace on charges of breaking into a house and petty larcenies. He was also ordered to remain under the control and direction of the manager of an industrial school until work was found for him.

Mr. Price said that it might appear from the statements that had appeared in the Press on the last day that the boy had been neglected. This was not correct. The manager of the industrial school had done everything possible for the boy.

(Youth Bound To The Peace: Before Mr. Liam Price. *Irish Times*, 25 November 1939, 3)

The article did not expand on how the boy 'had been neglected' but revealed allegations that he may have suffered some form of abuse while resident in an

industrial school. It is also unclear how Judge Price concluded that the manager of the institution had done all he could for the boy in question.

Allegations of neglect were not always so oblique. In 1954, the *Irish Press* carried a report on a case taken by Ambrose J. Leonard, a 39-year-old bus driver from Cabra in Dublin, who was seeking to have his children transferred from the St. Kieran's Industrial School in Wicklow. They had been committed there the previous year following the death of their mother. The report noted that the father had made the application 'on the grounds that the three boys were not being properly looked after'. The fact that the father of the boys was willing to go to court to have the children removed from the institution and had also made an official complaint to the Department of Education, is instructive as to the level of concern he had for their welfare. Despite this concern, the presiding judge, District Justice McCarthy ruled that he had no power to grant the application and had to send the children to the schools provided by the Department. The *Irish Times* report quoted the judge's opinion that 'so far as I know they have always been well run' (*Irish Times*, 1954). The fact that the judge felt the need to personally offer a defence of the institution points to a pre-existing negative impression at some levels of Irish society that the institutional childcare system was problematic.

(a) Physical abuse

The Ryan Report defined physical abuse as: 'The wilful, reckless or negligent infliction of physical injury on, or a failure to prevent such injury to, the child' (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.06). There were 474 reports of physical abuse involving 26 schools given by 403 male witnesses to the Confidential Committee of the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.08). There were similarly high levels of physical abuse in girls' institutions. The Confidential Committee received 383 reports of physical abuse from, 374 witnesses relating to 39 schools (CICA, 2009: 3: 9.06). In total, there were 857 reports of physical abuse made to CICA.

The types of physical abuse reported by male witnesses included 'hitting, punching, kicking, flogging, and bodily assault with implements' while the Confidential Committee also heard 'disturbing accounts of severe assaults causing injuries that required medical intervention'. Witnesses also reported being abused 'by being immersed in water, being burned, and subjected to what they believed to be

deliberate and persistent physical cruelty' (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.07). Female witnesses reported similar types of physical abuse that ranged from 'being smacked on the hand to being beaten naked in front of others.' Other types of reported abuse included being 'hit, slapped, beaten, kicked, pushed, pinched, burned, bitten, shaken violently, physically restrained, and force fed...having their heads knocked against walls, desks and window ledges, being beaten on the soles of their feet, the backs of their hands, around their heads and ears, having their hair pulled, being swung off the ground by their hair, and made to perform tasks that they stated put them at risk of harm and danger' (CICA: 3: 9.11).

An analysis of newspaper coverage in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent*, and *Irish Press* between 1920 and 1970 reveals multiple reports that conform to the definition of physical abuse set down by the Ryan Report. These range from oblique references to physical punishment to direct allegations of physical assault and flogging. They also include reports of legal action taken against those operating industrial schools for severe injuries suffered by children in their care, and coverage of inquests into the deaths of children in the institutions.

That physical abuse occurred in industrial and reformatory schools was being publicly admitted by those operating the institutions in the early years of the Irish state. These views were also carried in the national press. In 1925, the *Irish Independent* carried the views of an unnamed manager of a reformatory school who defended the use of the institutions as places which could 'most effectively reclaim and save to society those children whose parents cannot, or do not, or will not, exercise their proper control and who, in consequence, have begun to enter on the ways of crime'. The article articulated the manager's view that, while the methods of rehabilitating children in these schools was 'mainly religious and moral', the use of physical punishment, although 'rare' was 'not altogether excluded' (*Irish Independent*, 1925).

The physical punishment of children in industrial schools was also something successive Irish governments were aware of and actively facilitated. As Buckley (2013) has noted, Fianna Fáil Minister for Education Tomás Derrig recertified the 'draconian' nineteenth century rules for industrial schools in 1933 at a time when Britain was reforming its industrial school system by introducing shorter sentences, reduced corporal punishment and a stricter inspection regime (Buckley, 2013: 130). Ireland had, after all inherited the system from Britain, and Arnold (2009) argues that

Derrig could simply have imitated the British rules of 1923 or 1933 but instead ‘wilfully chose to introduce rules that allowed Irish child prisoners to be whipped without limit’ (Arnold, 2009: 15). This level of physical punishment did not occur in secrecy and raised public concern in Ireland long before the 1990s. These concerns were widely reported in newspapers as early as the 1930s.

At a meeting of Limerick Corporation in 1946, the *Irish Independent* reported on a motion which called on the Government to launch an inquiry into conditions in Irish prisons after the death of Seán MacCaughey, who had died after going on hunger strike in Portlaoise Prison. The case had generated a degree of publicity at the time. However, the *Irish Independent* coverage noted a brief contribution from Cllr. M.W. McGuire who called for a wider inquiry which included the treatment of children in industrial and reformatory schools. The councillor made the call after he had personally viewed the injuries suffered by a child who had been beaten in an institution:

Recently a boy was brought into his office who had been flogged before he had escaped from an industrial school. The boy's back which was very much discoloured, was covered with weals as the result of a flogging from a cat-o'-nine tails. He had the boy medically examined and the facts brought to the notice of the Minister for Justice with a view to an investigation being held, but nothing had been done.

(Call For Inquiry Into Prison Conditions. *Irish Independent*, 16 May 1946, 6)

Although comprising just one contribution in a report of a wider meeting, McGuire's comments pointed not only to potential evidence that children were being physically abused in industrial schools, but also to the fact that these allegations were causing enough concern politically to warrant calls for an investigation. In 2009, the Ryan Report revealed that, frustrated by the lack of investigation or interest, McGuire passed on details of the case to Fr Edward Flanagan, the founder of the famous Boys' Town reformatory in Nebraska in the United States (CICA, 2009: 1: 11.41-11.68). Flanagan was touring Ireland at the time and had publicly labelled the juvenile detention system ‘a disgrace’ during the visit (*Irish Times*, 1946). Upon his return to the United States, Flanagan also spoke out publicly about the level of physical punishment inflicted upon children in the Irish industrial and reformatory schools.

Declining to investigate the cleric's claims, Minister for Justice Gerald Boland instead attacked Flanagan in the Dáil and robustly defended the orders. No newspaper followed up on the allegations.

Artane Industrial School features prominently in reporting, from the 1930s into the late 1960s, which points to potential evidence of the physical abuse of children. In 1939, the *Irish Press* carried a report of a financial settlement made to a 16-year-old boy named Roger Adamson who sued, through his uncle James McSherry, the manager of Artane Industrial School, the Rev Bro. T.M Leenane and the Superior General of the Irish Christian Brothers, Joseph. P. Noonan. The claim was 'for damages for alleged negligence, which was denied, in the care of the boy's left arm, which, it was stated, had been injured in an accident.' Counsel for the boy was reported as alleging that, because of 'negligence in supervision or some fatality in the treatment of his arm, he did not make a good recovery' although the arm was 'fairly well now.' The defendants were recorded as having offered 'to make the payment without any admission of liability' and that 'liability would be very difficult to establish' (*Irish Press*, 1939).

In 1954, Artane Industrial School again made headlines following a case where a young boy had his arm broken as the result of being physically punished by a religious member of staff at the institution. The case received prominent coverage in a lengthy article on page seven of the *Irish Times* after independent TD Captain Peadar Cowan raised it in the Dáil.

ARTANE PUNISHMENT RAISED IN DÁIL

ON the motion for the adjournment of the Dáil yesterday, Captain Cowan (Ind.) raised the matter of the punishment of a 14½-year-old boy in Artane Industrial School on April 14th.

(Artane Punishment Raised in Dáil. *Irish Times*, 24 April 1954, 7)

The report outlined that Cowan had been informed on 14 April that the 14 and half year-old boy had been punished for engaging in an altercation with another boy and that, when this punishment was being meted out, 'the doors were locked, the windows closed and the punishment, which was normal, was inflicted in the presence of his classmates' (*Irish Times*, 1954). This involved a number of slaps on the hand from the 'punishment leather' but, on the completion of this, the boy was informed that he was going to get further punishment from 'the edge of the strap', something which the boy resisted:

to accept that punishment. The Brother in charge sent for another Brother and, apparently, the boy who was being punished felt that the Brother was being brought in for the purpose of compelling him to receive this additional punishment to which he objected. Whatever his boyish mind was, he ran from the place in which he was being punished and he lifted a sweeping brush, standing in the corner and held it up as a protection. Captain Cowan said that in this situation the second Brother arrived and, seeing the brush in the boy's hand, snatched it from him, struck him on the head, injuring him, struck him on the back, injuring him, and struck him on the arm and broke his arm.

(Artane Punishment Raised in Dáil. *Irish Times*, 24 April 1954, 7)

Such was the extent of his injuries, the boy had to be taken to hospital where his arm was set in plaster. Cowan further alleged that the mother of the boy had not been informed of her son's injuries at the time. When she learned of the incident that week and tried to see the superior of the institution, she was refused permission. When she was finally granted a meeting on Tuesday of that week, the superior 'admitted that the boy had received the injuries mentioned'. Cowan pointed out to the Dáil that the mother of the boy had approached him seeking assistance in securing permission to see her son in the hospital. The TD called the superior and, when the woman finally saw her son, she was 'shocked at the state in which she found him' (*Irish Times*, 1954).

Cowan, for his part, was at pains to be deferential to the religious. He lived near the school, had contributed to its funds and had seen the school band play in Croke Park. The article noted that he ‘regretted’ having to raise the matter which he was satisfied was ‘an isolated incident’. However, it is also clear from the reportage that Cowan was deeply disturbed by what had happened. He had been informed that the Brother ‘who had injured the boy was barely 21 years of age—not much older than the boy.’ The report noted that Cowan had written to the Minister for Education Seán Moylan and asked him to ‘answer to the House and to the country for the condition under which those boys were kept, the conditions under which they lived, the punishment, and matters of that kind’ (*Irish Times*, 1954). In his response, Moylan grabbed onto the narrative of the case being an ‘isolated incident’ and reassured the chamber that he ‘would not tolerate cruelty or misuse of any boy in any such institution.’ However, he immediately followed this by offering a robust defence of the religious that operated Artane Industrial School:

He would like to remind the House that the Community had provided the buildings and equipment from their own resources. They did that in a Christian endeavour to ameliorate certain conditions and he could not conceive any deliberate ill-treatment of boys by a community motivated by the ideals they had shown in the foundation of the school.

CONSTANT INSPECTION

Accidents would happen in the best regulated families and, in this family, there were 800 boys, many of them sent to Artane because of the difficulties of their character, and because of their conduct. The boys were very difficult to control at times, and it might be that it was essential now and again that some should be punished. He

(Artane Punishment Raised in Dáil. *Irish Times*, 24 April 1954, 7)

Moylan’s defence is worth dissecting as it offers an insight into how allegations of abuse could be dismissed just as quickly as they were brought forward. It also mirrors the deference shown to those that operated the Magdalene Laundries, which will be outlined in Section Two of this dissertation. Despite the allegation being that

a religious staff member had deliberately beaten a boy, Moylan reminded the chamber that those running the schools were engaged in ‘a Christian endeavour’ while the boys in their care were there because of the ‘difficulties of their character, and because of their conduct.’ In this conceptualisation, it is the boys, and not their abusers, that are the problem. They are ‘very difficult to control’ while the men that assaulted them are engaged in God’s work. In one short Dáil exchange and subsequent news report, an allegation of the physical assault of a boy is summarily dismissed and—based solely on the unsupported opinion of the Minister—determined be nothing more than an accidental isolated incident. It is also noteworthy that the case is never mentioned in the newspaper again. Despite the seriousness of the allegation, the Minister’s view that it was an accident signalled the end of the matter. No journalist or newspaper felt compelled investigate the concerns any further or to make additional inquiries of the Department of Education or Artane Industrial School.

In fact, it would take another half century for the matter to be examined again, this time by the Ryan Commission in 2009. In its chapter on the Artane Industrial School, the Ryan Report dedicates a section to the incident. It found that the Brother responsible for administering the beating to the boy was transferred from Artane following the assault—at his own request. The Christian Brothers order which operated the institution never informed the Department or the parents of the boy of the incident and no investigation was ever carried out. The Ryan Report noted that this failure suggested that ‘there was a policy of concealing damaging information’ (CICA: 1: 7.137).

Another case of a child suffering serious injury while in the care of the Artane Industrial School also made the newspapers but was not examined in the Ryan Report. In 1957, the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* all reported on the case of John Stone who was awarded £2,000 for losing an eye in the institution:

£2,000 for boy hurt at school

Mr. Justice Murnaghan was told in the High Court, yesterday, of the settlement of an action by John Stone, a pupil in Artane Industrial School, against the school for damages for injuries received during instruction in the use of a wood-cutting machine. The settlement was for £2,000 and costs without admission of liability.

(£2,000 for boy hurt at school. *Irish Press*, 16 November 1957, 7)

Boy to get £2,000 for loss of eye

Mr. Justice Murnaghan was told in the High Court, Dublin, yesterday, of the settlement of an action of John Stone, a pupil in Artane Industrial School, against the school for damages for injuries received in the course of instructions in the use of a wood-cutting machine on April 23rd last year. The settlement was for £2,000 and costs, without admission of liability.

(Boy to get £2,000 for loss of eye. *Irish Times*, 16 November 1957, 11)

INJURED PUPIL TO GET £2,000

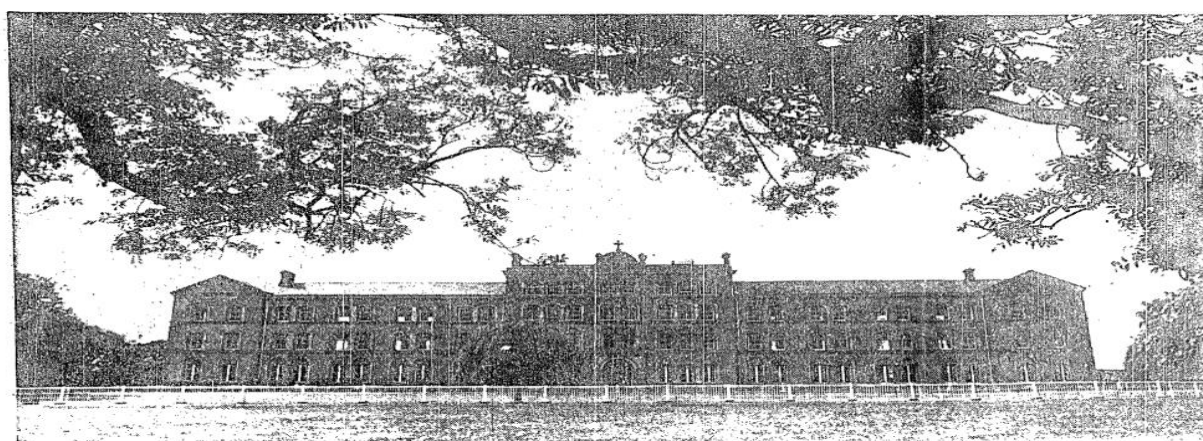
Settlements in injury actions announced before Mr. Justice Murnahan in the High Court included one providing for the payment to John Stone, a pupil in Artane Industrial School, of £2,000 and a sum for costs on behalf of the school authorities, without admission of liability.

(Injured Pupil to get £2,000. *Irish Independent*, 16 November 1957, 3)

The *Irish Times* carried a short report on the case pointing out that Stone had taken the action against Artane in the Dublin High Court for 'injuries received in the course of instructions for using a wood cutting machine' where he was struck in the eye by a piece of wood (*Irish Times*, 1957). In a brief in the *Irish Independent*, it is noted that the payment to the boy came 'without admission of liability' (*Irish*

Independent, 1957). The *Irish Press* was the only newspaper to note the severity of the injury when it reported that Stone's 'left eye had to be removed' after the incident (*Irish Press*, 1957). None of the reports mention the age of the boy. However, it is clear from the fact that he and his family brought the matter before the courts in the first place, that they felt that there was a degree of negligence on the part of Artane Industrial School which left him with life altering injuries. This type of reporting—which highlighted potential abuse and negligence to the public without ever attempting to investigate these issues further—is typical of the coverage of industrial schools in this period.

One series of articles in the *Irish Times* is particularly instructive in this regard. In June 1969, the *Irish Times* carried a lengthy two-day series on the Artane Industrial School under the headline: 'Memories of Artane:



Artane industrial school.

THE PALE BLOBS of light in the tall street lamps seemed strangely incongruous as I approached the open entrance-gates of the famous institution. It was a crisp September evening in 1937 and I was arriving to take my duty as assistant teacher in Artane Industrial School. The stark outlines of the grey stone building stood austere against the red-tinted western sky and, as I made my way up the long avenue, my thoughts dwell on the prospects that lay ahead. A round a week plus board and lodging—that was the offer. Rather small for a fully qualified man. Still, compared with the two rounds, twelve and six one started with in an ordinary national school at the time, it wasn't too bad, especially when there were no dubs to be paid.

MEMORIES OF ARTANE—1

The first of two articles by PATRICK J. McNULTY, who taught in the Industrial School in the 1930's

At about half-past four I walked out to the yard. The day was appalling. All those under the age of fourteen were scampering about, shouting, playing hide and seek, throw-the-ball and every conceivable kind of game. Brother Ullan and Ned Managan, a dapper lay teacher, who was fastidious about his appearance, walked among the boys, ensuring that the horse-play did not get out of hand. I took a saunter down the avenue, where it was quieter, wondering what lay in store for me at five o'clock.

ANOTHER CLASS

The post-Primary class was held in a comfortable room in the main part of the

(McNulty, P.J. (1969) Memories of Artane—1. *Irish Times*, 20 June 1969, 12)

Written by P.J. McNulty, who had taught in the institution in the 1930s, the articles are not intended to serve as hard news and are somewhat nostalgic in tone. McNulty wrote of how the boys were 'well cared for, physically, morally and mentally' (*Irish Times*, 1969). However, on closer reading, his memories and language reveal clear indications of physical abuse, psychological trauma, as well as oblique references to potential sexual abuse.

In terms of physical abuse, McNulty pointed out that ‘discipline and correction were ever-present problems, requiring vigilance and a certain amount of rigour.’ The severity of this discipline was made clear to him on his first day, where he was introduced to his new colleagues, of which he was the youngest and, bar one other man, the only trained teacher:

In the staff room Frank Rice introduced me to my new colleagues. They were all much older than I, and, with the exception of a stout middle-aged man and myself, none were trained teachers. I was offered all kinds of advice, most of it negative. “Don’t get friendly with them!” “Don’t encourage laughter.” “Don’t allow any boy to speak to you until you address him first!” “Keep aloof!” “Keep your distance, it is the only way.” “It’s a simple alignment of us versus them,” confided Frank, with a wry smile.

I asked about the man I had seen cuffing a boy on the ear during the morning line-out. “A sadistic, ill-disposed old bastard,” said Charlie Moran, the middle-aged trained teacher, whose opinion I naturally respected. “The boys call him Fish Face,” said Frank out of the side of his mouth. “He doesn’t live in at all, just comes in at marshalling times. Ex-British army and all that. The boys dread him, but without him we’d have a rough time.” An oldish man with a strong Dublin accent piped up: “Fish Face is the boy for them bloody yahoos, I tell you!”

McNulty, P.J. (1969) Memories of Artane—1. *Irish Times*, 20 June 1969, 12)

Although, the anecdote is recounted as something of a light-hearted memory, the fact that teachers referred to another colleague’s sadism as something of a necessary evil at the institution is jarring.

McNulty is disconcertingly vague, yet specific, on other memories which clearly pointed to physical abuse and psychological trauma. For example, he remembered all the boys as ‘inhibited’ with some having ‘physical defects’ and many ‘the blank stare of the mentally retarded or emotionally disturbed’. Some of the smaller boys ‘were inclined to fret’:

One boy out of my Class 1c, whose face bore the scars of extensive burns, was counting the panels in the wainscot. He counted them over and over again. Brother Ultan told me it was a compulsion the poor boy had and not to mind him.

(McNulty, P.J. (1969) Memories of Artane—1. *Irish Times*, 20 June 1969, 12)

McNulty was raising an example of a child that was physically injured and was clearly severely emotionally damaged. However, in the vague, yet specific manner of the entire article, the memory ends there. The reader is told nothing more about this boy. McNulty's article was not intended to be investigative in nature, but neither can it be dismissed as simple 'nostalgic gloss' (Keating, 2002). It tells the reader more than it intended in terms of the nature of the institution and the hostile and abusive atmosphere faced by the children incarcerated there.

Harsher memories rather than nostalgia are the heart of a 1983 three-part series on a family reunion by Helen Quinn of the *Irish Press*. In the articles, the reader is introduced to 44-year-old man called Victor. Now living in England, he recalled his 'vivid and bitter' memories of being physically abused while in an industrial school in Galway:

"I used to get beaten something terrible. It's a sin to do that to kids just for daydreaming. I can still remember the roll calls for mail and hoping week after week that there'd be a letter or a two-shilling postal order for me like some other kids got. There was always the same nobodies in the corner who got nothing."

(Quinn, Helen. (1983) Somebody's Child: how a family discovered its identity: Victor Nobody. *Irish Press*, 5 July 1983, 9)

Articles such as these—which stretch across decades of newspaper coverage—reveal that there was sufficient contemporary knowledge of abuse within these institutions to allow for deeper investigation by Irish journalism in the decades before the 1990s. However, given the brand of consensus journalism and the power of a deeply embedded charitable framing of the institutions, the industry did not or could not see

these incidents of potential physical, sexual and emotional abuse of vulnerable children as issues worthy of controversy.

Deaths in industrial schools:

The deaths of children in industrial schools also feature in news coverage from the 1930s into the 1950s, with newspapers carrying a range of news reports of the mandatory inquests carried out into these deaths.

One case, which also featured in the Ryan Report in 2009, is that of 14-year-old boy Patrick Flanagan who died following a fall from a staircase in Artane Industrial School in 1951. As a result of allegations from former residents that the boy fell because he was being chased and punished by a member of staff, the Investigation Committee of Ryan Commission ‘investigated the incident in full’. The report noted that the death was recalled as ‘a tragic and traumatic event that affected everyone in the School at the time and left a lasting impression for years after the event.’ (CICA, 2009: 1: 7.138). The case was also covered in multiple newspapers in 1951, albeit only briefly. The *Irish Times* report noted that the boy fell 14 feet while sliding down a banister at the school and that a verdict of ‘accidental death’ was recorded. It is noteworthy that both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Press* coverage noted a statement from the coroner, Dr. McErlean, that ‘he was satisfied from the evidence that the supervision in the school was adequate’ (*Irish Times*, 1951). For its part, the Ryan Report concluded that the evidence did not support a conclusion that the Christian Brothers which operated Artane Industrial School were at fault for the boy’s death. However, it noted that the ‘precise reason why the boy died remains somewhat unclear because of the multiplicity of medical complications cited by the pathologist’ (CICA, 2009: 1: 7.147).

Not every death that generated significant press coverage was covered by the Ryan Report. For example, on 27 April 1935, the death of a 15-year-old boy John Byrne in Artane Industrial School following a ‘scuffle’ with a teacher featured prominently in all three of the newspapers under discussion. In fact, the topline carried in the *Irish Press*, which featured the inquest prominently on page three of the newspaper, told the reader plainly that the inquest into the teenager’s death was examining ‘Allegations of ill-treatment’:

DEATH OF ARTANE BOY

INQUEST ALLEGATIONS
OF SCUFFLE WITH
TEACHER

FATHER'S STATEMENT

ALLEGATIONS of ill-treatment of a pupil at Artane Industrial School were investigated at an inquest held in the Mater Hospital, Dublin, yesterday, on John Byrne (15), 55 York Street. The inquest lasted over four hours.

(Death Of Artane Boy: Inquest Allegations Of Scuffle With Teacher: Father's Statement. *Irish Press*, 27 April 1935, 3)

It reported that Byrne, who had been in Artane for three years at the time of his death, had been playing football and kicked the ball at a teacher. The teacher, a Mr. Lynch, was alleged to have then kicked the boy in retaliation. The *Irish Press* noted that the boy's father told the inquest that when his daughter brought a parcel to the school the previous Sunday, she was told that her brother was in the Mater Hospital. He subsequently died there on 18 April. The medical officer at Artane Industrial School, Dr. Murphy, told the inquest that the boy complained of pain in his left hip and showed pain on pressure. However, he claimed there were no signs of bruises or other injuries. Unable to diagnose the teenager, he sent him to the Mater Hospital. The house surgeon at the hospital, a Dr. B. Malley told the inquest that Byrne presented with a temperature of 104.8C and 'was conscious most of the time at the hospital' having never mentioned a kick. A post-mortem by state pathologist Dr. J. McGrath showed 'no bruising or marks of violence on any part of the body' but that there was 'matter on the hip joint and around it.' He concluded that 'the boy died from natural causes but the origin could have been unnatural.' The newspaper chose to use the official recorded cause of death as a pull quote and noted: 'Death was due to numerous abscesses in the lungs, heart and hip, and to septicaemia' (*Irish Press*, 1935). In an article in the *Irish Times*, the assistant superior at Artane Industrial School, Brother Deelan is reported as having stated that 'no complaint was made to him that the boy was injured'. A question from the City Coroner also indicated to the reader that the discipline meted out to the boy was deemed excessive, even for the time:

**The City Coroner—Did you reprimand Mr. Lynch in any way?—I did not care to do that, as the thing was *sub judice*.
Is it customary for members of the staff to knock boys down?—No.**

(Schoolboy's Death: Evidence at Inquest: State Pathologist Examined. *Irish Times*. 27 April 1935, 5)

Although the death was ruled accidental, the newspaper coverage of the inquest could have left the reader in no doubt that children were being physically assaulted at the institution. Buckley (2013) has noted that the fact that Byrne died in what appeared to be 'suspicious circumstances' garnered a significant reaction in wider civil society. The month after the inquest, the Irish Labour Defence League petitioned for support for the family to make a claim for compensation via the courts. Its secretary, Lawrence Wright, wrote the following in a letter to Hanna Sheehy Skeffington on 16 May 1935:

A few weeks ago a boy named John Byrne lost his life in Artane Industrial School following a beating by a teacher named Lynch. This terrible tragedy calls for an investigation. There is every reason to believe that the authorities intend to let the matter pass and take no action. The boy's parents (he was their only son) are endeavouring to take the matter into the Courts and to make a claim for compensation for the death of their son. But this cannot be done without financial help. £5 is needed at once to enable the solicitor to proceed. All just minded people are asked to come to the assistance of the parents of the dead boy and enable them to make a fight for justice to ensure that such inhuman recurrences will no longer happen in these institutions (quoted in Buckley, 2013: 131).

It was not just industrial schools for boys where the deaths of children occurred. In 1938, an inquest into the death of a 14-year-old Mary Slattery, an 'inmate' of the Sligo Mercy Convent Industrial School, was briefly recorded in the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press*. Both reports used almost identical language to record a verdict of death as 'shock and toxæmia' as a result of 'burns accidentally received when her clothes caught fire, and that no blame was attaching to anybody' (*Irish Times*, 1938; *Irish Press*, 1938).

In 1951, both the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* carried more detailed news reports of an inquest into the death of a three-and-a-half-year-old girl named Mary Davey at the Goldenbridge Industrial School in Dublin. The name Goldenbridge would later

become synonymous with the abuse of children in industrial schools following the broadcast of the *Dear Daughter* (1996) and *States of Fear* (1999) documentaries. The death is not addressed in the Ryan Report.

The inquest heard that Davey had been found sleeping in a stone archway with her parents at St. Anne's Estate in Clontarf in Dublin by a civic guard and an NSPCC inspector. The family was removed to Raheny Garda Station and the child sent to the High Park convent in Drumcondra 'for protection.' The child was there from 16 December until 10 January, after which she was removed to St. Kevin's Hospital until 18 January 'for treatment' as she had 'skin trouble and was in a delicate condition' (*Irish Press*, 1951). She was then sent back to the convent before being committed to Goldenbridge Industrial School on 24 January. The inquest heard that, on 10 February, the child fell from a stool and the 'next day she had suddenly become ill and had been taken to the hospital, where she was found to be dead'. Her death was found to be from 'shock and heart failure following cerebral haemorrhage' (*Irish Times*, 1951). However, the *Irish Press* noted one specific aspect of the inquest that was absent from the coverage in the *Irish Times*—namely that the inquest had been initiated on foot of an allegation by the parents of the child that she had been mistreated while in Goldenbridge:

Dr. MacErlean told the jury that he considered the inquest necessary, because the parents of the child had alleged that the little girl was ill-treated in the institution.

In his opinion the child would have died much sooner had it not been for the action of the Gardai, the N.S.P.C.C. Inspector, and the care which she got in these institutions.

The jury added a rider exonerating the authorities in the institutions from all blame.

(Child died from fall off stool. *Irish Press*. 27 February 1951, 5)

The reporting reveals a noticeable degree of irritation on the part of the coroner at the parents' temerity to question the care their child received at the hands of the Sisters of Mercy nuns that operated Goldenbridge. The level of deference afforded to

the order is indicated by the fact that the Court added an addendum to the verdict which explicitly exonerated the nuns. However, McErlean's parting shot at the parents is perhaps the most startling. The coroner departs from any commitment to the medical facts of the case to offer an opinion that the child would have died sooner if it had not been for the Gardaí, the NSPCC inspector and the Sisters of Mercy. The child had lived, albeit in difficult circumstances, with her parents for over three years but had died just over two weeks after entering the care of Goldenbridge Industrial School. However, this fact is not addressed by the coroner. Nor is it ever addressed again by Irish journalism. The fact that Mary Davey died just a fortnight after entering an industrial school and that her parents had alleged publicly that she had been mistreated provided ample grounds for further journalistic inquiry into the wider system.

(b) Sexual abuse

The Ryan Report defined sexual abuse as 'the use of a child by a person for sexual arousal or sexual gratification of that person or another person.' The evidence the Ryan Commission heard included accounts of 'rape and associated physical violence to non-contact abuse such as enforced nakedness and voyeurism' (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.109). A total of 242 male witnesses (59%) made 253 reports of sexual abuse in relation to 20 schools, while 127 female witnesses made 128 reports of sexual abuse (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.110 and 9.70).

Unsurprisingly, given the restrictive and censorial journalistic climate surrounding any matters of a sexual nature in the decades preceding the 1990s, direct references in the press to the sexual abuse of children in industrial schools are extremely rare. Nonetheless, they are present and range from suggestions of sexual abuse right through to direct allegations. This analysis found only one case of a conviction for sexual abuse of children in an institution reported in an Irish national newspaper prior to 1990.

In 1951, the *Irish Times* carried an article reporting the conviction of an attendant at the Marlborough House Detention Home in Dublin for sexually assaulting three boys. The story, although very brief, recorded that Isaac O'Sullivan, a 52-year-old man, with an address at Parnell Street, was 'sent to prison for twelve months, with hard labour, by District Justice P.D. O'Grady, when convicted on four charges of indecently assaulting three boys in the Home between October and December last'

(*Irish Times*, 1951). The headline on the story read: ‘12 Months For Assaulting Boys’. For the reader, the story could have left no doubt that children had been sexually abused in the institution. It is noteworthy that the *Irish Times* is the only newspaper to record the conviction. The *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* decided not to report on the matter.

12 Months For Assaulting Boys

Isaac O’Sullivan (52), an attendant in Marlborough House Detention Home, Dublin, with an address at Parnell street, was, in the Dublin District Court, yesterday, sent to prison for twelve months, with hard labour, by District Justice P. D. O’Grady, when convicted on four charges of indecently assaulting three boys in the Home between October and December last.

(12 Months For Assaulting Boys. *Irish Times*. 1 February 1951, 3)

The conviction raised obvious questions, which inquiring journalists would typically endeavour to answer. What was the extent of the abuse by this man? How long had the abuse been going on? Did he return to employment in an institutional setting after his release from prison. Instead, the brief report of his conviction *Irish Times* is the only time Isaac O’Sullivan is ever mentioned in an Irish national newspaper. The background to the case is dealt with in detail by Keating (2004), who labelled it the ‘first-ever documented institutional case of sexual abuse’ (167) and the Ryan Report (2009) which incorrectly stated that ‘there were no newspaper reports’ of the conviction (CICA, 2009: 3: 3: 3.100).

The sexual abuse allegations emerged during a previous court case concerning the boys, who had appeared before Mr Justice H. A. MacCarthy in the Children’s Court on a separate matter. He seems to have passed the information on to the relevant authorities and a successful prosecution ensued, although the Ryan Commission found no record of this within the Department of Justice or the Department of Education (CICA, 2009: 1: 16.153). While the conviction warranted only a few lines in the *Irish Times*, it generated considerably more comment within the civil service and was raised at a meeting between the Department of Education and members of

the Industrial and Reformatory School Managers Association on 23 April 1951. The following day Minister for Education, Richard Mulcahy, wrote to his counterpart in the Department of Justice, Daniel Morrissey, suggesting an interdepartmental conference to investigate that the boys in Marlborough House were being ‘adequately looked after and all danger of scandal or criticism eliminated’ (CICA, 2009: 1: 16.66). It is notable that, for the minister of the day, the protection of state interests and the avoidance of public scandal was as important as the welfare of the children in this communication. An invitation to be a member of the conference was issued to Judge MacCarthy, who accepted. In a letter to the Department of Justice in May 1951, he pointed out that he had raised concerns about Marlborough House in the past and was now calling for an inquiry into the conditions in the institution:

For some considerable time past I have been very uneasy about conditions in this institution...the repeated escapes from the Institution, and repeated allegations by the boys of ill-treatment—culminating in the incidents which gave rise to the recent prosecution in the Criminal Courts—have convinced me that the conditions under which boys are detained at Marlborough House call for immediate inquiry and amelioration. (CICA, 2009: 1: 16.70).

While just one conviction for sexual assault in an industrial school was found in an Irish national newspaper prior to 1990, other articles strongly hinted that children were being sexual abused within the institutions. In his 1969 series in the *Irish Times* about his memories of working as a teacher in Artane Industrial School in the 1930s, P.J. McNulty wrote that the boys under his care in the institution had ‘rather a lopsided idea of life in the outside world’ and that ‘a few of them had adolescent sex problems.’

This was later confirmed to me by one of the brothers, who, much to my embarrassment, discoursed at length and in great detail on the homosexuality and such other sex deviations or perversions as had come to his knowledge in his role of disciplinarian (*Irish Times*, 1969).

McNulty did not expand any further on this disturbing conversation. However, the fact he was embarrassed by the level of detail provided by his colleague on the ‘sex deviations or perversions’ he had witnessed is open to interpretation and serves as a potential indicator of sexual abuse at the institution.

More than a decade before the *States of Fear* documentary detailed the horrific litany of sexual abuse that occurred in industrial schools, it was already being alleged in open court and subsequently reported in Irish newspapers. In 1988, the *Irish Independent* reported on the conviction of a 35-year-old Dublin man Thomas O'Shea 'who buggered and beat up' a 17-year-old university student. He had been convicted of buggery twice before, the first occasion when he was just 15 years old. However, the report, which was carried prominently on page five of the newspaper, stated that the court was told that O'Shea 'had been sexually disorientated as a child when he was raped, buggered and had sadistic practices carried out on him in Daingean industrial school' (*Irish Independent*, 1988). This allegation was made in open court, in the presence of the media. It was an invitation for journalists to investigate and inquire into what went on in the Industrial and Reformatory School system. However, it would take another decade for this invitation to be accepted.

A DUBLIN MAN who buggered and beat up a 17-year-old Trinity student was jailed for seven years by the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court yesterday.

Thomas O'Shea, (35), Sean MacDermott Tower, Ballymun, was twice before convicted of buggery, on the first occasion when he was only 15.

The court heard that he had been sexually disorientated as a child when he was raped, buggered and had sadistic practices carried out on him in Daingean industrial school.

(Man jailed for sex attack on student. *Irish Independent*, 11 June 1988, 5)

(c) Neglect and emotional abuse

The Ryan Report defined neglect as the 'Failure to care for the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare'. (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.156). It categorised the areas of neglect

under a range of headings including diet, healthcare, hygiene, education, lack of supervision and the lack of adequate preparation for discharge.

Emotional abuse was defined as ‘Any other act or omission towards the child which results, or could reasonably be expected to result, in serious impairment of the physical or mental health or development of the child or serious adverse effects on his or her behaviour or welfare (CICA, 2009: 3: 7.213 and 9.190). The investigation recorded witness evidence of a range of forms of emotional abuse from deprivation of family contact, personal identity, secure relationships, affection and approval, and a lack of safety and protection.

The impact of neglect and emotional abuse on the later lives of the children who passed through Ireland’s Industrial and Reformatory School system is difficult to discern from an analysis of newspaper coverage. However, it is noteworthy that previous committal to an industrial school is mentioned in newspaper reports of inquests into the suicides of two people. It is also commonly cited as a mitigating factor by those defending young people before the courts in criminal cases. The legacy of the failure to prepare children leaving industrial schools for joining society is also evident in reports highlighting the exploitation of labour.

Suicide:

In 1949, the *Irish Times* reported on the by suicide death of a 13-year-old boy in Crumlin in Dublin. The article, which runs to just a single sentence in the newspaper, stated that the boy who ‘was to have returned to an industrial school to-day, was found hanged in his home yesterday’ (*Irish Times*, 1949). While, no other details are given in the article, it is instructive that the report specifically noted the fact that the boy had died by suicide the day before he was due to be ‘returned’ to an industrial school.

In 1957, both the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Times* reported in far more depth on the inquest of a former resident of the Cappoquin Industrial School. The case was featured prominently on the front page of the *Irish Press* and was headlined:

Man found dead in car identified

EX-PUPIL OF CAPPOQUIN INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL

THE young man found dead in a car at Seart, Clogheen, Co. Tipperary, has been identified by Sisters of Mercy of the Cappoquin Industrial School, Co. Waterford, as a former pupil named Ignatius Geary, aged 27, who came to them in 1934 from an address in Fermoy.

(Man found dead in car identified: Ex-pupil of Cappoquin Industrial School. *Irish Press*, 17 July 1957, 1)

The man, named as Ignatius Geary, had been committed to the institution as a four-year-old and had spent six years there. He had been found dead in his car the previous Saturday and a 'nine-foot length of hose had been attached to the exhaust pipe with the other end pushed through the window of the car.' The cause of death was reported as 'carbon monoxide poisoning, self-administered' (*Irish Press*, 1957). By the time of the inquest, authorities were still trying to locate any relatives of the man. Both news reports focused on the evidence of two nuns from the Cappoquin Industrial School, who told the inquest that Geary had called to the institution with sweets for the children just two days before taking his own life.

The second nun said that on Thursday, Geary took her and another nun to visit Mount Melleray Abbey, in a car which he told them he got in a Cork garage the previous week.

Geary, she said, was "a lot quieter than other ex-pupils" when they called to the school, and did not remember his old teachers, as most ex-pupils did.

He did not say anything about taking his life.

(Man found dead in car identified: Ex-pupil of Cappoquin Industrial School. *Irish Press*, 17 July 1957, 1)

A Sister of Mercy at Cappoquin industrial school gave evidence that Geary called to the school on July 11th and brought sweets for the children. He said he had a good job in London in the market garden business.

(Motorist died by suicide. *Irish Times*, 17 July 1957, 7)

Although it is impossible to draw inferences as to the state of mind of the young man at the time, it is striking that, in the days before he would take his own life, the institution in which he was raised was at the forefront of his thoughts and actions. He had accessed a car in Cork with the express purpose of driving to Cappoquin Industrial School so he could carry out an act of kindness towards the children that were then incarcerated there—the gift of some sweets.

Industrial schools as a mitigating factor in criminal cases:

John Warren was 41 years old and homeless in 1937 when he faced a judge in a Dublin court charged with a series of housebreaking offences. He had already served several terms in prison and when the judge pleaded with him to try and stay out of jail, he responded: “I was brought up in prison, in two industrial schools” (*Irish Independent*, 1937). Warren’s response, which featured in two short briefs carried in the *Irish Times* and *Irish Independent*, was blunt, but no less informative for the reader. He equated prison with an industrial school. A plea from a judge for him to stay out of prison would fail. Prison was all he knew. Warren’s response points to the less overtly abusive legacy of the Industrial and Reformatory School system, namely the fact that thousands of young adults left institutional settings with little to no education and limited employment prospects. That they struggled, much like John Warren, to adapt to life outside the walls of industrial schools and reformatories can be gleaned from news reports from the 1920s right into the 1980s.

In a case covered by the *Irish Times* in 1958, James Murphy, a 26-year-old from Dalkey in Dublin, appeared before the Dublin Circuit Criminal Court to face charges of housebreaking and larceny of £260 10/ of property. Although he pleaded guilty to

the charge, Murphy took the opportunity to offer a key mitigating factor to the judge, namely that he had spent 15 years of his life in an industrial school.

When he came out of the school, his father disowned him and would have nothing to do with him. "I was a stranger to everybody, and I just took to crime" (*Irish Times*, 1958).

Murphy's comments, like those of John Warren two decades earlier, were brief but profoundly revealing. He was vocalising the trauma he had suffered in an open court. He left an institution with no family to return to, no social support system and no employment prospects. He was alone, 'a stranger to everybody'. With such limited options available to him, he took to crime.

Examples of teenagers and young adults drifting into petty crime after being in industrial schools are littered throughout the newspaper coverage, right from the foundation of the state. Having previously been in an industrial school is repeatedly cited as a mitigating factor when these young people appeared in court. For example, in 1920, A.J. Hayes, a 17-year-old boy was sentenced to three months in prison for having broken into a warehouse. The *Irish Independent* report of the conviction recorded that the court was told he had been 'brought up in an industrial school' (*Irish Independent*, 1920). Four years later, a 19-year-old man named Patrick Murray pleaded guilty to the theft of a wallet from the Clarence Hotel in Dublin. The newspaper report of the case noted that 'the boy seemed to have been in an industrial school since he was four years of age' (*Irish Times*, 1924). In 1932, a homeless 21-year-old man named Michael Buckley was sentenced to nine months in prison for stealing cigarettes. He told the court that 'he could not get work' and that he 'had been in Artane Industrial School and the National Army' (*Irish Independent*, 1932). When sentencing a 23-year-old Michael Duggan to 12 months in prison in Dublin Circuit Criminal Court for wounding a civic guard in 1949, the judge was reported in the *Irish Times* as having told the accused that he 'had started a life of crime when he was 14' (*Irish Times*, 1949). The court had already heard that this was the age that he had been first committed to an industrial school.

Previous residence in an industrial school was also cited as a mitigating factor in defence of young people charged with and convicted of more serious crimes. In 1950, the *Irish Times* reported on the conviction of 20-year-old Thomas Power from Tramore in Waterford for pushing a man off a cliff and causing serious bodily harm.

The court heard that, although Power had no previous convictions, he had been ‘reared in an orphanage, after the death of his father 18 years ago, and later in an industrial school.’ Upon leaving the institution, Power ended up working for a farmer who—in a particularly instructive comment about the mental health struggles he faced—recounted that he was ‘moody and inclined to go off his food’ (*Irish Times*, 1950). The court heard that, two years previously, Power had spent a month in the mental observation ward of Cork District Hospital and was currently serving a sentence of six months in prison for demanding money with menaces. Although not explicit, the article points to the legacy of confinement in an industrial school. At just 20-years-old, Power had secured menial labour as employment, had serious mental health struggles and was now facing significant prison time for causing grievous bodily harm. The fact he had been raised in an industrial school was deemed an important enough element in the development of his character and personality for it to have been specifically cited in court.

That same year, the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* prominently featured the case of 17-year-old Kathleen Harmon, a domestic servant, charged with the murder of a four-and-a-half-year-old girl in Dublin. She was eventually convicted of manslaughter. In the *Irish Times* coverage of the case, which was carried on the front page, the fact that the teenager had spent time in an industrial school is cited as a mitigating factor in her defence. Harmon’s legal representative pointed to the ‘sordid surroundings and the brutality from which this girl sprang’ and asked the jury to take into account that she had grown up in poverty before ending up ‘in an industrial school, from which she had escaped once and had tried on two other occasions to escape’ (*Irish Times*, 1950). The *Irish Independent* report noted how Harmon ‘showed no emotion’ when convicted, and that her legal counsel ‘traced the unhappy life of the accused at home and in an industrial school, and said that from her attitude in the witness box the jury might dismiss her as a hard, expressionless child who would kill another child with the same ease and lack of regret that she would kill a mouse’ (*Irish Independent*, 1950). These articles reference a clearly emotionally disturbed young person who had tried to escape from an industrial school on multiple occasions. The jury is also explicitly asked to take this fact into account when deciding her fate.

The following year, in 1951, another murder trial highlighted the same mitigating factors. Matthew Power, a 21-year-old man, had pleaded not guilty to the murder of

a 57-year-old woman. His mother gave evidence that he had been in Artane Industrial School for a period as a child, and ‘seemed very depressed’ before the woman’s death (*Irish Times*, 1951).

Six years later, another report of a murder trial also noted the fact that the accused had spent time in an industrial school and was suffering with severe mental health issues. Chief Medical Superintendent at Grangegorman Mental Hospital, Dr John Dunne was the only witness called for the defence in the trial of a 25-year-old farm labourer John J. O’Brien who was charged with the murder of an 18-year-old woman named Margaret Power. In the *Irish Independent*, Dr. Dunne is reported as having told the court that the accused was ‘suffering from an insane obsession and was insane at the time of the crime’. O’Brien, he said, had given him ‘an account of his history from the time of his childhood when he was sent to an industrial school’ (*Irish Independent*, 1957). Although, no further details are provided, the reporting again points to a link between having been resident in an industrial school and significant mental health problems later in life.

Even in 1988, on the cusp of the Industrial and Reformatory School system emerging as a public scandal, institutionalisation was still being cited in news reports of court cases of young people falling into crime. An *Irish Independent* report of the trial of two teenagers accused of mugging an American tourist in Dublin noted that the two ‘drug addicts...had served their time in their childhood in St. Joseph’s Industrial School, Clonmel’ (*Irish Independent*, 1988).

‘Homeless and friendless’—exploitation of children for labour:

An analysis of the newspaper coverage for the period under discussion also reveals numerous examples between the 1920s and 1950s of children and young people being exploited for their labour.

In 1929, the *Irish Independent* reported on the deaths of two ‘English industrial school boys’ at the District Hospital in Carrick-on-Shannon in Leitrim. Both boys had been working for farmers in the locality. The story is noteworthy in that, unlike many of the news reports from this period which are devoid of analysis or deeper inquiry, it attempted to investigate why the boys had died on the farms. The first boy, Patrick Maher, had become ill a few weeks previously. An ambulance was called but ‘before the boy reached hospital he had died on the way’. When the matron of the

hospital notified the farmer of the death of the boy, 'he replied declining to take responsibility for the burial, which had to be undertaken by the Board of Health' (*Irish Independent*, 1929). The boy was then buried in the grounds of the old workhouse in the area. The second boy, named as William Charles, was also employed by a farmer in the area. He had been admitted to the District Hospital 'greatly emaciated' and died a few days later. Once again, the farmer who employed the boy was notified but had also 'refused liability, the ratepayers also having to bear the cost of burial at the old Workhouse grounds.' In fact, the report noted that both boys had been before the courts previously on charges of larceny and that, when these cases were investigated, 'they disclosed the fact that the boys were receiving only a few shillings a week, denied clothing, and fed and kept in conditions which the justices described as nothing less than white slavery' (*Irish Independent*, 1929). This striking language, where the treatment of industrial schoolboys in the employ of farmers is equated with slavery, is repeated by the *Irish Independent* the following month. The newspaper, in what it labelled a 'Special to the "*Irish Independent*"', clearly made an editorial decision to investigate the issue further with a follow-up piece headlined:

BOY SLAVES ON WESTERN FARMS

A PERNICIOUS SYSTEM

THE NEED FOR A REFORM

(Special to the "*Irish Independent*.")

The question of the importation of boy labour into Co. Leitrim, in view of the recent deaths of two from the Carrigallen (Mohill) area, has aroused general condemnation.

On one occasion made strong pronouncements on the conditions in which these boys are employed, and the fact that they were only receiving from 3s. to 6s. a week called forth from him severe denunciation of the employment conditions which he described as nothing but pure white slavery.

When these boys first came to the country, I learned from the Supt. Home Help Officer, a representative of the school would occasionally visit the district and see that the conditions were such as to ensure all the comforts necessary for these poor boys, but in recent years visits are not made. The ambulance driver told me that in cases where he had to go to

(Boy Slaves on Western Farms: A pernicious system: The need for a reform. *Irish Independent*, 1 March 1929, 4)

The article, which was investigative in style and tone, revealed that following 'exhaustive inquiries' with a Garda and other local representatives, the newspaper had learned that the boys did not come from state-aided industrial schools in England but rather 'from schools or institutions maintained through charity by Catholic nuns

and brothers.’ The boys are described as orphans ‘picked up in large cities and taken from the danger of falling into the hands of proselytisers’ with the newspaper concluding that there seemed to be a traffic of industrial school children from England being brought into the country by ‘a small class of impoverished farmer’ (*Irish Independent*, 1929).

Almost 20 years later, the use of industrial schools as a source of cheap farm labour again made headlines. In 1947, Labour TD William Norton raised in the Dáil the same issue of ‘slave labour’ on another farm in Leitrim. In a report carried by the *Irish Independent*, it was outlined that Norton highlighted the case of a 26-year-old man who had been employed by a farmer since the age of 19. The Labour politician asked Minister for Justice Gerald Boland if he was aware that the boy ‘was compelled to sleep on planks in a barn and under a manure cart in a shed’. As a result, he had spent three years in a tuberculosis hospital in Manorhamilton. Norton was quoted as saying that it was ‘quite undesirable that boys in industrial schools should be farmed out in this way at wretched pittances masquerading under the name of wages’ (*Irish Independent*, 1947). A decade earlier, another Labour TD, T.J. Murphy, in a strikingly similar contribution in the Dáil, claimed that the ‘whole industrial school system savoured of a traffic in human beings that was entirely deplorable’ (*Irish Independent*, 1936).

It was not just politicians who raised concerns about the exploitation of children and young adults from industrial schools as a source of cheap labour. In 1933, the *Irish Press* reported on a court case in Athlone where a boy was charged with stealing a bicycle. In an instructive editorial decision, the headline and topline for the piece foregrounded the judge’s criticism of employers exploiting former pupils of industrial schools:

TREATED LIKE SLAVES

D.J. Criticises The Conditions Of Farmers' Boys

Allowing out William Fahey on his own recognisances, Mr. J. P. Kenny, D.J., said at Moate that very often boys such as he were treated like abject slaves by their employers so that they were driven to do these things.

(Treated like Slaves: D.J. Criticises The Condition Of Farmers' Boys. *Irish Press*, 21 October 1933, 9)

The boy himself told the court that he was 'homeless and friendless' and had been committed to an industrial school four years earlier. Since his discharge, he had worked for farmers in Donegal and Longford who, he claimed, had usually paid him with little more than a 'bite to eat, an occasional cigarette and a few pence' (*Irish Independent*, 1933).

In some cases, the young people subjected to such exploitative practices attempted to secure justice through the courts. In 1935, the *Irish Independent* reported on the case of 17-year-old boy Patrick McMahon who took a case against Gertrude Clarke, a 'dairy proprietress' at Air Park in Rathfarnham Estate for assault and wages owed. The story, which was carried as a short brief in the newspaper, noted that the boy was employed 'to milk cows and do general work' and was to receive 5/- per week and his board. However, McMahon claimed that while in Clarke's employment for six weeks, he had only received 3/- and 'on one occasion she struck him twice on the ear with a whip' (*Irish Independent*, 1935).

Exploitation drove some former industrial school residents to even more extreme actions. In 1957, 28-year-old Joseph Patrick Dwyer was arrested for the murder of a woman in Clondalkin. In an *Irish Times* report of the trial, the garda who arrested Dwyer, quoted the accused as having said:

"I killed three women; I'll be hung, but I won't be hung for a month. I'll have time to get a priest, which they had not.

"Mick Whelan is the cause of it all. If he had paid me last Saturday I would have gone to England and this would not have happened...I asked him for money last Saturday. He said he had no money.

“All the farmers in the country should be burned. I was working with Whelan, looking after cows for the past fortnight. I was sleeping in Whelan’s shed on a bed of straw. I set fire to the straw and broke all the windows in the house” (*Irish Times*, 1957).

The Garda told the court that while in the car and later at the station after being arrested, Dwyer spoke of his early years in Cork and how he had been in the Greenmount Industrial School and in the Daingean Reformatory, before later working for a number of farmers in Cork.

Section Two: Industrial Schools and societal ‘unease’

Carol Stanton (2000) argues that Irish society was always aware that abuses had occurred in institutional settings. There were ‘veins of knowledge’ around every victim and perpetrator of abuse. Connected to every abuse victim was ‘a family, or in the case of orphanages and schools, confrères, who had to be seduced, intimidated, co-opted or lied to before abuse could take place’ while connected to every abuser was ‘any number of friends, confrères and family members who had to be seduced, co-opted, intimidated or lied to in order for abuse to occur and continue’ (Stanton, 2000: 356). Reflecting on these veins of knowledge, Earner-Byrne (2011) argues that the challenge lies in examining if people understood what they knew and what contemporary social meaning was given to the abuses suffered by children in institutions.

For Stanton (2000), people did not see abuse for several reasons. Some simply do not want to see and, as a result, construct a reality which allows them to accommodate obvious red flags. For others, they discount their uneasiness as paranoia, while lastly there are people who do not know what to do about what they see. This category contains many who say “I am not surprised” when such abuses are revealed as ‘scandals’ (326). Arnold (2009), has described how the scale of the system and the sheer number of children involved meant that enough knowledge existed to make people ‘uneasy’ at the sight of poorly fed and clothed children from institutions (Arnold, 2009: 2).

This underlying societal uneasiness about the damage industrial schools were doing to thousands of children and their families is evident throughout the newspaper coverage of the institutions from as early as the 1920s. It is also evident that, at least some people, articulated a clear understanding of the dangers of the system. The

reporting features numerous references to conditions in the institutions, the forced separation of children from their families and the potential long term psychological effects of incarcerating children. However, these issues were rarely foregrounded as topics worthy of journalistic investigation or criticism. The reporting is, in most cases, straight reportage devoid of analysis or any attempts at deeper investigation.

(a) Oblique and overt ‘unease’ about industrial schools

Examples of this uneasiness are evident as early as 1925, even in reportage which ostensibly served to support the consensus view of the institutions as charitable. After some criticisms of industrial schools in favour of a ‘boarding out’ system where children were fostered in the community, a former ‘industrial school girl’ called Brigid Crosbie wrote a letter to both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*. In the letter, Ms Crosbie said she had left the institution some six years ago but had returned there after falling ill the previous year.

A lot of girls left in my time, and I know they are doing well and look on the school as a good home still. We would not have been able to get on if we had not been well taught and got good care and been helped to face the things we can in the world. People should not make out that we do not get good care for it is not true. My mistress said that I should write to you and I hope you will print my letter (*Irish Times*, 1925).

While Ms Crosbie was defending the institution, her words also reveal an existing counter-view, namely that children ‘do not get good care’ in the institutions. Her autonomy in the matter is also open to question as it was her ‘mistress’ who instructed her to write the letter in the first place. It is also noteworthy that this instruction is not carried in the letter as it appears in the *Irish Independent*. Similarly, in 1952, the *Irish Independent* unwittingly revealed an existing public unease about the system by the stridency of its defence of the treatment of the children institutional care. In an article headlined: ‘Their School is their home’; journalist Julia Clements was at pains to describe St Joseph’s Industrial School for Girls in Kilkenny as anything but an industrial school:

Someone will have to coin a new name for these schools. It is true that most of the pupils are orphans, but the Sisters see to it that there is none of the orphanage atmosphere in the generally accepted sense about the lives of these youngsters, who, through no

fault of their own, are deprived of home and parents.

Neither can these schools be called institutions, for that suggests a regimentation which is wholly foreign. Even uniforms are barred except for drill and such occasions as would demand them in any ordinary school. As for the term "Industrial School," it suggests grim pictures of children in community workshops with the future an endless vista of bigger and better machines.

(Clements, J. (1952). Their School is their home. *Irish Independent*, 13 September 1952, 5)

A further editorial decision was then made at the newspaper to foreground the first paragraph of the above passage from the article for the reader by placing it in bold font. However, instead of disavowing the reader of a negative view of the institution, it serves to reinforce the existence of the societal counter-narrative. One where children were perceived to be living exactly the 'grim' regimented lives the article sought to reject.

However, more overt expressions of unease from people in significant positions of prominence were also featured in national newsprint. In its report of a debate on the estimates for the Department of Education in April 1933, the *Irish Independent* chose to emphasise—as a pull quote—the view of then independent TD James Dillon, that the detention of children in industrial schools for failing to attend school was 'unchristian and a scandalous procedure' (*Irish Independent*, 1933).

For the remainder of the decade, and well into the 1940s, Dillon, who was to become a future leader of Fine Gael and government minister, frequently criticised the use of Summerhill (later Marlborough House) in Rutland Street in Dublin as a detention centre for children who had been committed by the Dublin Children's Court to industrial schools located outside of the capital. Pre-empting later condemnations by the Cussen Commission in 1936, Dillon railed against the 'deplorable' condition of the building and the fact that children in detention received no education and limited exercise (*Irish Times*, 1935). Dillon's view of Summerhill as 'a grave public scandal'

was also highlighted in the *Irish Independent*. The newspaper chose to specifically highlight—again by way of a pull quote—the lack of religious instruction received by the children at the institution. It stressed that ‘it was only by flouting the law that the officials could bring certain of them to Mass’ (*Irish Independent*, 1935). From an editorial perspective, the *Irish Independent* perceived the threat to juvenile religious piety as more important than the children’s physical and educational wellbeing. Dillon, for his part, continued to raise public awareness about industrial schools into the 1940s. He called for committals to be ‘reviewed constantly by the Minister’ as the courts were ‘not dealing with criminals but trying to provide children with the best prospects for normal healthy development’. He labelled Summerhill an ‘abomination’ and an institution that ‘would not be tolerated in America or Great Britain’ (*Irish Independent*, 1940). That these expressions of unease by a prominent public representative were being reported by the press almost certainly raised some degree of contemporary public awareness and concern about the suitability of the Industrial and Reformatory School system for caring for children. Indeed, this awareness and unease remained rooted in areas around Rutland Street in Dublin decades after the system had been abolished. Terry Fagan, who was himself detained in Summerhill in the 1970s, and operates ‘Monto Walking Tours’ in Dublin has highlighted how some of the older women in the area still remembered Summerhill as a place to be feared when they were growing up.

I interviewed some women who recalled as young girls being taken out of Rutland Street School by schoolteachers made stand on the corner of lower Rutland Street & Summer Street facing the detention centre to watch young boys being taken out kicking & screaming & put into a Black Maria police van & transported to some of Ireland’s most notorious Industrial schools. One woman said, “I’m old now, but I always think of those poor boys screaming crying being put into the Black Maria van. I always wondered whatever happened to them, did they ever come home (Fagan, 2023).

(b) Industrial school conditions and as sites of cruelty

That industrial schools were seen as sites of cruelty which were damaging to children is also evident across the coverage. For example, at a meeting of Dublin corporation in 1939, Maud Walsh, the first woman elected to an urban district council in Ireland, described Summerhill as ‘nothing more or less than a miniature

prison'. She had come to this conclusion after personally visiting the institution. At the same meeting, TD Joseph Hannigan labelled its use as a detention centre 'a legalised form of cruelty to children' (*Irish Press*, 1939).

By 1950, the *Irish Times* had openly called for the abolition of the Industrial and Reformatory School system. In a series on child delinquency carried over two days, the newspaper criticised the failure of successive Irish governments to act on the recommendations of the Cussen Report in 1936. That inquiry had criticised the standard of education and training in industrial schools, as well as the inadequate diet of children in institutions. The *Irish Times* had praised the Cussen Report in a 1936 editorial as 'sensible and humane' and argued that the system 'itself is not too bad' and that the institutions were 'anything but "prisons"' (*Irish Times*, 1936). Yet, by 1950, the newspaper's synopsis of that same report is noticeably different in tone and emphasis:

grey. Too often, it complains, the schools were soulless. The buildings were gaunt and forbidding. The interiors were bleak and without colour. There were few facilities for outdoor, and fewer for indoor, recreation. Exercise sometimes was confined to making the pupils walk, as convicts do, round and round the school yard. One convent forbade its pupils to play on an adjoining beach. Fields belonging to the schools were out of bounds to the children. Contacts with the outside world were frowned upon. Meals were frugal and without variety; even butter and milk were rarely provided. Sometimes the meals had to be eaten in silence.

(Children Before The Law: Child Delinquency-III: Legacy of the Past. *Irish Times*, 4 Feb 1950, 4)

The series, written by a special correspondent, was sceptical of the inspection regime stating that industrial school inspectors were 'primarily concerned in seeing that nothing is done which ought not to be done. It then pointed out—in a very prescient remark for 1950—that the state had been able to avoid taking any concerted action on conditions in industrial schools 'partly because of the electorate's indifference to the subject and partly by putting the responsibility on to the religious orders' (*Irish*

Times, 1950). The *Irish Times* report ultimately concluded what was clearly obvious in 1950, that the Industrial and Reformatory School system was failing children and should be scrapped:

The temptation is to take the industrial school system for granted. It has been there for so long it has become an accepted part of Irish life. We might be inclined, if money were suddenly made available, to use it on improving, rather than altering, the system...That would be a mistake. Any money that is available should be spent on getting boys away from industrial schools—on abolishing institutions (*Irish Times*, 1950).

This conclusion came 20 years before the Kennedy Report recommended to the Irish government that the system be abolished, and some 40 years before it became a national scandal.

An examination of the letters pages of Ireland's national newspapers also reveals that this awareness of and unease about the damage being done to children in industrial schools had resonated with ordinary members of the public. In 1959, Donal McEvoy wrote to the *Irish Independent* echoing the call made in the *Irish Times*, almost a decade earlier, for the system to be abolished due to the harm it was inflicting on Ireland's 'forgotten' and 'abandoned' children:

of his or her childhood? The unfortunate debtors in the old London Marshalsea were not more forgotten or abandoned than these children. Imagine the utter dreariness and hopelessness of their lives—herded and regimented morning, noon and night, no privacy of any kind, dependent on a permission even to answer a call of nature, living in primitive conditions with no attempt made at any kind of gracious living or uplift, sleeping on hard beds, eating coarse food from chipped and cracked ware, wearing the roughest and coarsest clothes and boots. Added to all this is the fact that they are prisoners, watched, guarded and confined for every second of every minute of the day and night. Is it any wonder that they leave such schools with warped, sour and bitter minds? How long is this senseless souring of dragons' teeth to continue? When are we going to scrap this iniquitous system that has proved a failure from the beginning.

(McEvoy, D.P., Industrial Schools. *Irish Independent*, 26 June 1959, 8)

A similar sense of unease emerges from a letter to the *Irish Times* from 1968.

Michael Fanning wrote of his memories from when his family housed a boy from Artane Industrial School and described what the child had told him about life in the institution:

The Artane Band visited Waterford, and the young lads were housed by various people in our locality, ours being one of these houses. This young lad was my source of information, and while he was too young to have all the facts of the matter, what facts he did have were sufficient to disillusion me of any belief I may have had in Irish governmental humanism, or sense of fair play (Fanning, 1968).

Fanning did not elaborate any further on what the boy told him, but the fact that the experience was negative is clear.

(c) Forced familial separation

Vague expressions of unease aside, there are also numerous examples in the newspaper coverage of concrete concerns around what could now be argued to be

human rights abuses—namely the courts forcibly separating children from their families by committing children to industrial schools (Enright and O’Donoghue, 2025; O’Rourke, 2021; O’Rourke, 2022; O’Rourke et al., 2018).

In a 1928 *Irish Times* report of the second reading of what became the Children’s Act 1929, which amended the 1908 Act to allow the courts to have destitute children committed to an industrial school without having had to have committed an offence, independent Senator Jane Wyse Power explicitly raised the issue of forced separation of children from families. She pointed out that the legislation sought to unfairly criminalise poor children while simultaneously breaking up the family unit.

Mrs. Wyse Power said that she agreed with a great deal of what had been said. It was not fair that children should be made criminals because their parents were not able to support them, nor was it fair that, because the parent was unable to support the child for a time that it should be put into an industrial school, and the home broken up. She thought that where the breadwinner was out of work the State should come to the aid of the father or mother, and help by giving something towards the upkeep of the child in the home in which it was born.

(Children Act: Amending Bill In Free State Senate The Dentists Bill. *Irish Times*, 14 June 1928, 7)

Five years later, the sanctity of the family unit was also at the heart of James Dillon’s criticism of the School Attendance Act 1929. The *Irish Independent* report veered into editorialising stating that Dillon ‘gave us a pleasurable thrill right away’ by denouncing the legislation and called on the Minister for Education Tomás Derrig to ‘forthwith release little boys who had been relegated to industrial schools under the Act and restore them to their families’ (*Irish Independent*, 1933).

In 1939, Maud Walsh again called attention to the increasing number of children that were being committed to industrial schools under the legislation for failing to attend school. The *Irish Times* reported that she put down a motion at a meeting of Dublin Corporation directed ‘against a system that was responsible for breaking so many homes, removing children from where God and nature intended them to be.’

“It is better to contribute to the upkeep of a child in its own home where it has a natural life, the affection and influence of its parents, than to subsidise it in institutions from which it

emerges with the lockstep handicap to resume its place in society with which it has lost all touch,” said Mrs. Walsh (*Irish Times*, 1939).

This call on the state to intervene by providing financial assistance to underprivileged families was also made by prominent nationalist and political activist Maud Gonne MacBride. Appearing before the Cussen Commission in 1934, she said family life ‘should not be lightly destroyed’ and where parents could not feed and clothe their children, money should be provided to enable them to do so (*Irish Times*, 1934). She also hit out at the ‘overzealousness’ of ISPCC inspectors for visiting the homes of the poor and bringing children before the courts for committal to industrial schools (*Irish Press*, 1934). At a meeting in Cathal Brugha Street in the summer of 1934, the *Irish Independent* reported that Gonne MacBride told those in attendance that ‘the industrial school system permitted children to be taken from their homes because their parents were poor. It is a system that should be ended’ (*Irish Independent*, 1934). Twenty years later, those very same concerns were still being raised in newsprint. Activist and educator Rosaleen Mills opened a 1956 article in the *Irish Times* headlined ‘A new deal for children’ with the blunt statement: ‘For a country whose society is firmly based on the family unit, we have far too many children growing up in institutions’ (*Irish Times*, 1956).

Once again, the letters pages of newspapers also show that this unease about the forced separation of families had filtered down to at least some sections of the public. In a letter to the *Irish Times* in 1951, a member of the public highlighted a recent case reported in the newspaper where a mother lost custody of her two children—a boy aged six and a girl aged five—because she was unable to support them on a pension of 16s a week. The letter outlined how the woman ‘pleaded that she should not be deprived of them for ever’ before the court ordered one to a convent and another to an industrial school. The writer echoed the calls from Walsh and Gonne MacBride some two decades earlier and asked why the state could not intervene to assist poor families so that they could keep their families intact (*Irish Times*, 1951).

In response to an earlier published letter about the deficiencies of the childcare system in Ireland, T.K McKeogh wrote in 1965 of the ‘evils’ of a likely unconstitutional system which forcibly removed children from their families simply because they were poor:

CHILD CARE

SIR. — Mr. Simon Bush's admirable letter (March 1st) highlights some of the grave deficiencies in our system of child care, but he has not uncovered all the evils. That the system of child care in Ireland is grossly inadequate by British standards is bad enough, but worse still is the insensitivity, indeed the callousness, which permeates it. Children, simply because their parents are poor or neglectful or dead, are submitted to the ordeal of committal by a court to an industrial school, to which they are escorted by gardaí, and from which they have no hope of release before the age of 16. Brothers are separated from sisters by being committed to different industrial schools which are often miles apart, and also, very often, at a great distance from the childhood home and surviving relatives. Not only are these practices un-Christian and unworthy of a Catholic country, but they are illegal in the light of the Constitution's professed high regard for the family and its rights.—Yours, etc.,

T. K. McKEOGH.

(McKeogh, T.K. (1965) Letters to the Editor: Child Care. *Irish Times*, 4 March 1965, 9)

Conclusion

Irish journalism has placed itself as the principal driver of revelation in the 1990s around the widespread physical, sexual and emotional abuse suffered by generations of children in the Industrial and Reformatory School system. The resulting state inquiry and the publication of its findings in the Ryan Report is seen as a pivotal moment in Irish social and cultural history—a moment when 'a hidden Ireland' emerged into public consciousness through sustained media revelations, pressure and the resultant public outrage.

However, this chapter argues that, not only was there a pre-existing societal knowledge that industrial and reformatory schools were damaging to children and the family unit, but that evidence that children endured physical, sexual and emotional abuse in these institutions was evident in the pages of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* as far back as the foundation of the state. These

references—which range from the oblique to concrete evidence of abuse—highlight physical and sexual abuse, the death of children in institutions, the exploitation of children for labour and the suicide of young people after leaving the institutional care system. In numerous court cases involving both petty and serious crimes, those charged directly cited the abuse they suffered in institutions as mitigation, further highlighting how publicly accessible this knowledge was.

From the 1920s right into the late 1960s, Irish journalism was either unable, due to the unofficial self-censorship of the 1940s and 1950s, or unwilling to break with the long-established consensus framing of the institutions as charitable enterprises.

The abuses that occurred in the Industrial and Reformatory School system were not media revelations. Rather, they were a rediscovery and reframing of knowledge that was already in the public domain. It would take a small cohort of young, and predominantly female journalists in the late 1960s and early 1970s to force the first cracks in this consensus frame, eventually making it possible for Irish journalism in the 1990s to mediate the Industrial and Reformatory School system as the national ‘scandal’ it is seen as today.

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Chapter Three

Consensus to controversy: Campaigning Irish journalism and the ‘rediscovery’ of industrial schools as a subject of inquiry and controversy, 1966-1980

Introduction

Examining Irish life as it was, as opposed to reflecting how it was imagined to be, was the principal innovation in Irish journalism in the 1960s. O’Brien (2017) has argued that the first half of the twentieth century saw the construction of a ‘Catholic Ireland’, while the second half was the period of its deconstruction (227). Irish journalism underwent a similar transformation. To adapt to an increasingly contested national identity, it had to deconstruct a decades long consensus model of journalism—one characterised by an unquestioning and deferential attitude toward the narrative of a Catholic and morally pure Ireland. It had to be remade into a set of professional practices that allowed for the critical space necessary to foster a more active and inquiring role as the ‘custodians of public conscience’ (Ettema and Glasser, 1998: 3).

An emerging cohort of journalists resuscitated the ‘new journalism’ of the nineteenth century, abandoned after Irish independence, embracing techniques of investigative reporting and relaying lived experiences through interviews. Female writers, in particular, pioneered a new form of participatory and campaigning journalism. Mirroring the more subjective and participatory reporting of the ‘New Journalism’ of 1960s America, writers like Eileen O’Brien, Nell McCafferty, Mary Maher, and Rosita Sweetman among others often became protagonists in their own stories. Their columns were borne from deep personal conviction and featured vivid accounts from real people expressed using their own words. It was writing that was entirely new to Irish journalism, challenged accepted norms and power structures and was impossible to ignore.

Social, economic, and cultural shifts in the 1960s created the space for a small, but influential cohort of Irish journalists, not to *uncover*, but rather to *rediscover* the Industrial and Reformatory School system—reframing it from a topic of consensus

to one of controversy, and worthy of deeper journalistic inquiry. Working against the commonly held belief that abuses in industrial and reformatory schools were uncovered in the 1990s, this chapter will argue that this shifting of reporting frames—from consensus to controversy—was crucial to raising public awareness and anger about the system and was instrumental in it being rediscovered again in the 1990s, this time as a ‘national scandal’.

The 1960s and the journalistic revolution

These changing reporting practices and processes reflected seismic changes within Irish society in the latter half of the twentieth century. Ireland’s emergence as an independent nation was marked by the creation of a national identity and narrative rooted in the concept of Ireland as a morally pure Catholic idyll, which itself translated into the sexual purity of Irish women (Fischer 2016; Fischer 2017; Inglis, 1998; Whyte, 1980). The national project had a calcifying effect on Irish journalism, which saw it regress from pioneering the ‘new journalism’ investigative techniques of the 19th century to complicity with Church and state in the creation and maintenance of the ‘Catholic Ireland’ national narrative (Adams, 1968; Brown, 2004; Inglis, 1998; Inglis, 2007; Donnelly and Inglis, 2010; Larkin, 2014; O’Brien, 2017). It provided a vehicle by which this imagined Ireland could be mediated and embedded in the public consciousness. Film censorship had been introduced in 1923 with ‘barely a ripple of dissent’ (Horgan and Flynn, 2017: 28). Censoring of publications followed in 1929 and, while focused ostensibly on publications that were deemed ‘indecent or obscene’ or which promoted contraception, nonetheless had a chilling effect on journalism (Woodman, 1985). Crime, and in particular, sexual crime went largely unreported. As a result, the 1940s and 1950s saw newspapers operate a form of unofficial self-censorship whereby they studiously avoided ‘any topics deemed ‘indelicate’ or any events that could give rise to scandal or embarrassment for the Catholic Church’ (O’Brien, 2017: 98). Despite this, Irish newspapers largely supported censorship upon its introduction, with only the *Irish Times* offering any real voice of opposition in its pages (Horgan and Flynn, 2017). Writing in 1962, *Irish Times* journalist Brian Inglis highlighted how its reporters ‘had to avoid writing about any subject in which criticism, even if justified, could be construed as criticism of the Church’ (Inglis, 1962: 107). O’Brien (2017) has pointed

to ‘one of the one of the few self-critical reflections on journalism in early to mid-twentieth-century Ireland’, an observation from journalist Michael O’Toole who remarked that, until the 1960s, Irish reporters were generally ‘a docile lot, anxious to please the proprietor, the advertiser, the prelate, the statesman’. It was an era of consensus journalism, marked by ‘an unhealthy willingness to accept the prepared statement, the prepared speech, and the handout without demanding the opportunity of asking any searching questions by way of follow-up.’ For O’Toole, the principal flaw in Irish journalism during this time was ‘its failure to apply critical analysis to practically any aspect of Irish life’ (O’Brien, 2017: 91). Historian Terence Brown (2004) has offered a similarly withering assessment of Irish journalism in this period as an industry that had ‘contented itself with the reportage of events and the propagandist reiteration of the familiar terms of Irish political and cultural debate until these categories became mere counters and slogans often remote from any actualities.’ As a result, Irish journalism —rooted in the production and re-production of consensus narratives—failed to ‘challenge Irishmen and women to reflect seriously on their own reality’ (Brown, 2004: 192-193). This failing was keenly felt within journalism itself. A 1964 report compiled for the Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid concluded that many journalists felt the Church benefitted from ‘a special protection from criticism in the editorial and letter columns of newspapers’ and that it was ‘well known among journalists that certain newspapers have a policy of keeping off issues in which the Church may be involved’ (O’Brien, 2017: 1).

However, from the 1950s onwards, Ireland began to open itself more to the world. The 1960s saw Ireland move away from economic protectionism and towards a more outward looking, interventionist economic policy which embraced free trade (Ferriter, 2009; O’Brien, 2017). A radical overhaul of Ireland’s education system would also see educational opportunity open to children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Indeed, the fact that Fianna Fáil Minister for Education Donagh O’Malley announced the landmark decision to introduce free secondary school education without consulting the cabinet or the Catholic hierarchy was an indication of the waning grip of the Church on social and political life (Lee 1990; O’Brien 2017). Increasing equality of opportunity in education saw university graduates from broader social and economic backgrounds enter careers in journalism in the 1960s. For O’Brien (2017), the increasing emergence of an interventionist state was

mirrored by an interventionist media, one with more of a social affairs bent which focused its gaze on areas of Irish life which had yet to be framed as controversial (O'Brien, 2017: 227).

The *Irish Times*, particularly under the editorship of Douglas Gageby from 1963, was to the fore in moving to broaden its social agenda. It hired specialist writers, gave reporters bylines, and increasingly gave copy space to topics like education, women's issues, and religion. Notable among its fresh faces was the English journalist Michael Viney whose investigative features on issues like adoption, illegitimacy, and divorce, saw the newspaper re-embrace the 'new journalism' techniques of the nineteenth century which had been lost in the decades post-independence. However, driven by its dynamic and socially minded news editor Dónal Foley, it was the recruitment of a cohort of women, and his urging for them to write about issues that impacted them in a new and vibrant way, that would transform how Irish journalism addressed the lived realities of sections of society that had rarely been reflected in the pages of Irish newspapers (Brown, 2015; O'Brien, 2017).

Eileen O'Brien's 'A Social Sort Of Column' examined issues like homelessness, alcoholism, and the impact of poverty on working class areas of Dublin. It made uncomfortable reading for anyone clinging to the imagined Ireland of the first half of the twentieth century. In the mid 1960s, the newspaper introduced the 'Women First' section, edited by Mary Maher, which focused its attention on a range of social issues impacting women such as contraception, divorce, and equal pay. In the early 1970s, Nell McCafferty's 'In the Eyes of the Law' column was scathing of the social and class bias reflected in the Irish courts system. The *Irish Press* showed a similar evolution with the appointment of Tim Pat Coogan as editor in 1968. Under his stewardship, the newspaper made several key changes, such as the appointment of Mary Kenny as its women's editor in 1969, as well as the recruitment of young reporters like Anne Harris and Rosita Sweetman, both of whom focused their journalistic gaze on social conditions in Ireland (Horgan and Flynn, 2017: 107-108). Even in the ostensibly more conservative and Catholic leaning *Irish Independent*, Mary McCutchan was being granted copy space to focus on social affairs and issues that directly impacted women.

More important than the issues addressed, however, was the *style* of journalism which these newly recruited female journalists introduced to Irish newspapers.

Where traditional journalistic convention demanded an invisible reporter, detached, and removed from the story to objectively reports the facts, these columns worked to upend that convention. Writers like O'Brien, McCafferty, and Sweetman among others, wrote from conviction in a highly personal and participatory way. Critiques were often scathing. Subjectivity and fact-based opinion were valued over traditional journalistic objectivity. While those in positions of authority were quoted in columns, it was the words of those impacted by the decisions of those in power that were foregrounded. It was journalism from the bottom up. Old certainties, institutions and centres of power that had been beyond critical gaze were now being directly challenged and questioned.

This type of writing was transformative for Irish journalism and was heavily influenced by the burgeoning 'New Journalism' and 'Gonzo' journalism of 1960s and 1970s America. These were highly subjective and participatory forms of journalism, which included the reporter as part of the story, and combined traditional fact gathering with narrative techniques of fiction (Alexander, 2018). Journalist and academic Curtis Mac Dougall has outlined some of the definitions for the new brand of American journalism of that period: 'Activist, advocacy, participatory, tell-it-as-you-see-it, sensitivity, investigative, saturation, humanistic, reformist and a few more' (McDougall, 1972: 4). In a more modern sense, this brand of journalism could be labelled literary or campaigning journalism—a style of reporting borne from personal conviction.

The most notable difference in this brand of journalism lies in its technique and form. Instead of an invisible journalist objectively reporting facts, the 'New Journalism' of 1960s America was notable for its literary non-fiction style, where facts were interspersed with a more subjective interpretation. The journalist is immersed in the story and often plays an active role within it. Tom Wolfe, one of the writers most strongly associated with New Journalism of the 1960s, described how this new brand of reporting emerged as journalists began to discover the devices that had given the novel its unique power, namely realism. He identified four principal devices that these journalists co-opted from fiction writers:

1. A scene-by-scene construction, whereby the story is told by moving from scene to scene and resorting as little as possible to historical narrative
2. Using a full record of dialogue, in particular realistic and conversational dialogue

3. Using a third person point of view — presenting every scene to the reader through the eyes of a particular character, so the reader can engage with that character's reality.
4. Utilising incidental details to round out a character (gestures, habits, body language, style of clothing, friends and family, possessions etc) in order to reveal that person's 'status life...the entire pattern of behavior and possessions through which people express their position in the world or what they think it is or what they hope it to be' (Wolfe, 1972; MacDougal, 1972: 6).

The result was, for Wolfe, the emergence of a form of journalism that was not 'merely *like a novel*.'

It consumes devices that happen to have originated with the novel and mixes them with every other device known to prose. And all the while, quite beyond matters of technique, it enjoys an advantage so obvious, so built-in, one almost forgets what a power it has: the simple fact that the reader knows *all this actually happened* (Wolfe, 1972).

It was these processes, and the power inherent in them, that was adopted by a cohort of female journalists in Ireland in the 1960s. Elgy Gillespie, herself a member of this new breed of writer, aptly described their determination to grab this emerging form of journalism and pen 'the ripping reads of the day—first person entertainments exposing shame, scandal, fear, misery, and abuse. The New Journalism had arrived, and we put ourselves in every story' (Gillespie, 2003: 9).

The 'rediscovery' of industrial schools as a topic of controversy

O'Brien (2017) has argued that, until the arrival of 'outsider journalists' in the 1960s, vulnerable groups and minorities, such as children in institutions, 'did not exist in the media' and therefore 'did not exist in the public imagination' (O'Brien, 2017: 152). It is an appealing claim but one without foundation. Earner-Byrne (2011) has adroitly observed that an analysis of the public debate on the Industrial and Reformatory School system reveals that it was a contested method of welfare provision from the foundation of the state in 1922. This thesis has similarly demonstrated that the system, and the public debate around it, routinely featured in newspapers in the same period. Vulnerable groups, therefore, did exist in the media before the 1960s. However, Irish journalism during this period largely promoted a consensus view of industrial schools as charitable institutions that cared for and educated children who

had no one else to look after them. Reporting did reveal, but rarely foregrounded, pre-existing public awareness and unease and, to a lesser degree, evidence of the abuse of children. What changed in the 1960s was that a newly invigorated and dynamic brand of journalism—spearheaded by small minority of largely female journalists—began to openly challenge this consensus narrative and frame the Industrial and Reformatory School system as a subject of controversy worthy of deeper journalistic scrutiny. This ensured that the issue could be mediated in a manner that ensured the institutional care of children in Ireland could never again remain a consensus topic for the public. Of course, journalistic inquiry rarely happens in a social vacuum. Journalists did not ‘uncover’ the fact that industrial schools were abusive to children and damaging to families. Instead, this newer brand and breed of Irish journalism was provided with a critical space by a shifting social context which saw the foundations of the entire Industrial and Reformatory School system come under increasing strain from the late 1950s onwards. For the purposes of this chapter, the publication of two key reports, Tuairim’s *Some of Our Children* in 1966 and the Kennedy Report in 1970 were essential in ensuring that the issue was covered by the three main national newspapers.

‘Some of Our Children’, Tuairim, 1966:

Founded in 1954, Tuairim was a reformist intellectual movement with branches across Ireland and published pamphlets on a range of topical issues such as partition and unification, Irish education, the United Nations and, Ireland and Europe. Its membership included future Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald, future Supreme Court justices Dónal Barrington and Ronan Keane, and Miriam Hederman O’Brien among others (Whelan, 2006: xxxi; Finn, 2012). Its 1966 report on the residential care of children in Ireland was undertaken by its London branch and recommended that the 1908 Children Act be replaced with modern legislation, and that all childcare be coordinated by the Department of Health. Crucially, the report contained a section on physical punishment in industrial schools. However, despite speaking to both current and ex-pupils of the system, the Tuairim report was guarded in its criticism of the punitive nature of the institutions it examined. It acknowledged that it had received accounts of ‘excessive corporal punishment in the past’ (Raftery and O’Sullivan, 1999: 362). It also noted that it had heard ‘from a number of sources’ of punishment

which the group considered to be ‘unsuitable or excessive’ but that in the ‘absence of verification...they must be treated as hypothetical’ (*Irish Times*, 1966; Finn, 2012: 192). The report noted that, in most of the schools, there appeared to be ‘an easy and informal relationship between children and staff’ (*Irish Times*, 1966). One contributor to the report, Peter Tyrrell, who survived horrific abuse in the Letterfrack Industrial School, had relayed abuse he suffered in the institution to Tuairim, but his experiences were not included in the final report (Whelan, 2006). Finn (2012) has noted that this was likely due to a lack of proof and the fear of legal consequences but, that Tuairim ‘clearly believed that personal testimony was insufficient as proof’ (Finn, 2012: 192-193). One year after the report’s publication in 1967, Peter Tyrrell took his own life by setting himself on fire on London’s Hampstead Heath. Whatever its flaws, Tuairim’s intervention is significant in a number of ways. The report generated significant public debate and comment, which necessitated that its findings be covered in the pages of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*. The group also directly interviewed pupils in the Industrial and Reformatory School system and, at the very least, attempted to relay their experiences to the public. This arguably provided a cue and cognitive space for journalists to do the same. Newspapers had, in previous decades, largely failed to interview young people residing in the Industrial and Reformatory School system. However, they began to do so in the months and years that followed the publication of the Tuairim report. It also had an impact on government policy, with scholars like Finn (2012) and Buckley (2013) arguing that it played a key role in the decision to set up what became the second state inquiry into the Industrial and Reformatory School system headed up by Justice Eileen Kennedy the following year in 1967.

The Kennedy Report, 1970:

At first glance, the Committee on Reformatory and Industrial Schools (Kennedy Committee) did a thorough job. It met a total of 69 times and visited every industrial school and reformatory in the state at least once in the three years before it published its final report in 1970. It dealt with 56 oral and written submissions, sought information from 45 civil society organisations and cited some 113 publications (Kennedy, 1970). It made a total of 13 recommendations, most notably that the institutional care system ‘be abolished and replaced by group homes which would

approximate as closely as possible the normal family unit' and that the committal or admission of children to residential care be only considered 'when there is no satisfactory alternative'. The Committee found that the reformatory system was 'completely unsatisfactory' and that Marlborough House and An Daingean be closed immediately. Other recommendations included the need for fully trained staff, improved education and aftercare, and the ending of the capitation system which saw block grants being paid to institutions based on the number of children in the institution, and that responsibility for childcare services be transferred to the Department of Health (Kennedy, 1970: 7). More generally, the report concluded that the institutional approach to childcare adopted by the Irish state was 'harmful to children' who became 'depersonalised.' It also found that some of the religious orders running industrial schools were engaged in other work which was of more direct concern to them and was in the public eye, and that there was a tendency to staff schools 'in part at least, with those who are no longer required in other work rather than with those specially chosen for Child Care work (Kennedy, 1970: 15). Irish society, the report concluded, 'can no longer hide our social problems behind institutional walls' (Kennedy, 1970: 59).

That its findings were deemed explosive by Irish journalism, but not explosive enough for any newspaper to carry the report on its front page, is instructive. Page place and copy space are crucial indicators of what the media deem to be the most salient issues worthy of public attention. The Kennedy Report clearly indicated that the industrial school and reformatory school system was deeply flawed and abusive to children and families. However, despite this, the editors of Ireland's three main newspapers felt that while the report's findings were newsworthy enough to cover, they were not newsworthy enough to make the front page. It also serves to highlight a key point; the groundbreaking work of the small cohort of journalists examined in this chapter was the *exception* in Irish media in this period, not the norm.

For example, on 12 November 1970, the *Irish Independent* carried its news coverage of the Kennedy Report on page three of the newspaper—commonly regarded as the second most important news page. Although labelling it a 'shock report' which gave a 'devastating insight' into the lives of children in care, its findings received no copy space on the front page (Walshe, 1970). It did, however, dedicate an editorial to the report's publication, praising it as 'comprehensive and courageous' (*Irish Independent*, 1970). Yet, it was the selection of a quarry contractor as the Fianna Fáil

candidate in an upcoming Dublin by-election that was chosen as the newspaper's front page story that day.

It received even less prominence in the *Irish Times*. Its story, which labelled the Kennedy Report as 'hard-hitting' containing 'harrowing evidence' that was 'almost Dickensian in its intensity, was carried as an off-lead piece on page four as part of a wider 'education review special' (*Irish Times*, 1970). The newspaper's editorial said the report was 'an indictment that no one can ignore'. It laid the blame for the failure of the institutional childcare system at the door of the state but also singled out the congregations who it said, 'cannot be acquitted entirely' (*Irish Times*, 1970). Despite the strength of this language, the report's findings were absent entirely from the front page of the newspaper, which instead led with plans for a unified post-primary education system.

However, letters published in the national press in the months that followed its publication indicate that certain sections of the public were more interested in the glaring issue that the Kennedy Report failed to address and that newspapers failed to give prominence to—the physical abuse of children in the institutions. An S. Keogh wrote to the newspaper and claimed the report 'pussy-footed' on the issue before addressing the need 'for thorough ongoing research on the incidence of corporal punishment within these schools' (Keogh, 1970). It is this silence on the issue of the physical abuse of children that has ensured that the Kennedy Report has endured something of a contested legacy in the decades since its publication.

Rafty and O'Sullivan (1999) have argued that, at the time of its publication in 1970, the Kennedy Report 'was without doubt one of the most damning indictments of the operation of any State system ever produced in this country' and that its legacy lies in its sounding of 'the death knell for the institutional model of child care which had remained remarkably resilient in this country for almost exactly 100 years' (Rafty and O'Sullivan, 1999: 378- 379). Elsewhere, it is variously described as 'a watershed in terms of childcare policy,' while the Ryan Report said it is 'generally viewed as a pivotal moment in the history of residential childcare in Ireland' (Richardson, 1999: 147; CICA Report, 2009: 4: 4.148). However, the Ryan Report also pointed out that the key recommendations of the Kennedy Report 'were recognised and broadly accepted before the report was commissioned' (CICA Report, 2009: 4: 4.152). This is a key point. Despite much of the reportage after its publication describing its explosive and shocking nature, much of what was in the

Kennedy Report was already widely known. Its failure lay in its refusal to address what the Committee itself knew—and what Ms. Keogh was unafraid to address in her letter to the newspapers in 1970—namely that children were being subjected to physical abuse in institutions.

Journalist Bruce Arnold (2009) has been scathing in his critique of the Kennedy Report, which he labelled ‘a whitewash’ and ‘a deliberate and comprehensive fraud’ that has ‘acquired an undeserved legendary status’ as ‘a sacred text’. (Arnold, 2009: 69,70,76). Arnold based his claim on the Committee’s failure to address and report the physical abuse of children, its failure to examine the court committal procedures, and its failure to assess the character, training, and psychological capacity of those who operated the system. Keating (2014) has called Arnold’s condemnation as ‘overstated’ but said ‘it cannot be denied’ that Kennedy omitted to publish the ‘most damaging evidence’ it had in its possession (Keating, 2014: 314). Scanlon and Powell’s (2015) assessment is blunt, but perhaps the most accurate, when they point out that, in hindsight, the Kennedy report opted ‘for closure over disclosure’ and that while its recommendations were laudable, its failure to disclose the human rights abuses it was aware of was ‘reprehensible’ (Scanlon and Powell, 2015: 137). Indeed, in the report itself, Justice Eileen Kennedy felt obliged, or perhaps compelled, to clarify that the Committee’s intention was never to criticise the work of the religious orders who operated industrial and reformatory schools:

In listing the limitations of the present child care system insofar as it concerns Reformatory and Industrial Schools, it may seem that we are criticising those responsible for running those schools. This is not the intention of this Committee: indeed, we are very much aware that if it were not for the dedicated work of many of our religious bodies the position would be a great deal worse than it is now (Kennedy, 1970: 13).

Whatever the failings of both the Tuairim Report and the Kennedy Report, they nonetheless provided a critical space for a small, but progressive, cohort of emerging journalists to report on the Industrial and Reformatory School system in a dynamic way. While the bulk of Irish journalism in this period continued to write about the institutions using the charitable frame which had persisted for decades, this small band of writers managed to create the first cracks in this consensus. They forced the issue of industrial and reformatory schools into positions of prominence in their own

publications and, consequently, into the public spotlight, edging it towards the media frame of scandal which emerged some decades later.

Michael Viney and ‘The Young Offenders,’ 1966

One of this emerging cohort of reporters was Michael Viney, who had arrived at the *Irish Times* in 1961 with a distinct advantage. He was an immigrant. He had cut his journalistic teeth not on D’Olier Street in Dublin, but on Fleet Street in London. This allowed him, what Brown (2015) claimed, was ‘a dedicated objectivity and a lack of innate respect for inherited sacred cows’ (241). He examined issues which, while not taboo, were whispered rather than spoken about and his early years at the newspaper saw him examine topics such as mental illness, alcoholism, divorce, and unmarried mothers (Brown, 2015; Horgan and Flynn, 2017; O’Brien, 2008).

For O’Brien (2008), Viney’s position as an outsider granted him a ‘cultural distance and perspective’ to examine social issues in a way that was new to Irish journalism (O’Brien, 2008: 169). This view was echoed by Peter Lennon, director of the documentary *Rocky Road to Dublin*—another devastating critique of the imagined Catholic Ireland idyll—who, in 1965, observed that Viney’s training in British newsrooms granted him ‘a different set of nerves and conditional reflexes to Dublin taboos’ (quoted in O’Brien, 2017: 153). However, Viney brought more than just character and personal conviction. Reflecting on his arrival to the *Irish Times* as an ‘immigrant journalist,’ Viney recalled that he ‘found an Ireland that was virtually innocent of social inquiry or investigative journalism’ (Viney, 2009). Irish journalism had once pioneered some of the investigative journalism techniques that emerged during the so-called ‘New Journalism’ of the nineteenth century (Larkin, 2014). These, however, had been replaced by a brand of consensus journalism after the foundation of the state which prioritised a Church and state narrative of national identity. Viney, unburdened by any cultural and historical baggage, helped re-invigorate these processes which placed intrinsic value on journalism as a form of moral inquiry and investigation.

Viney’s most celebrated and groundbreaking journalism came with the publication of his lengthy eight-part series ‘The Young Offenders’ which ran between 27 April and 6 May 1966 and examined so-called juvenile delinquency in Ireland. It provided the public with a devastating critique of Ireland’s Industrial and Reformatory School

system. It did not emerge in isolation. Notably, he was granted both the professional space and social conditions to undertake such an in-depth project. Viney himself acknowledged that the modernising spirit fostered in the *Irish Times* at that time allowed him to thrive. Editor Douglas Gageby trusted his reporter's judgment on the issues he wrote about and, crucially, allowed him 'generous research time and space' to carry out the investigation (Viney, 2009). Here Viney is likely being both literal and figurative in the sense that he was granted not only creative space but, crucially, literal copy space in the newspaper. For Viney to be given permission for an eight-day series, with each part taking up considerable and precious copy space, was largely unprecedented for the time, and a courageous move by the *Irish Times*. For that amount of copy space to be devoted to an investigation of industrial and reformatory schools—an issue then rarely given significant or prominent coverage—was even more remarkable still. This dedication of space across multiple days of publication indicated to the reader that this was an issue of significant social importance. Here the Tuairim report, published just three months earlier, also likely created the necessary sense of topicality for the series to be commissioned. Crucially, however, unlike much of the reporting around the publication of the Tuairim report, Viney did not rely on it alone in his reporting. Whereas traditional reporting is reactive and reports in an objective fashion on material and facts provided by outside actors, the investigative process is more proactive (Spark, 2003; Hunter, 2011). Viney wanted to generate his own findings by securing his own source materials and speaking directly to those involved. He left the confines of the newsroom and personally visited three institutions, Daingean Reformatory and the Upton and Letterfrack industrial schools, to see for himself what conditions were like. He spoke to staff and the children to draw his own conclusions as a journalist. This may seem obvious to a modern media consumer but, at the time, it was a key departure for Irish journalism.

These findings were laid out for the reader on 23 April 1966 in a short article carried on page 11 of the newspaper highlighting, what the *Irish Times* labelled, an 'investigative series'. Viney highlighted poverty as being at the root of the so-called juvenile delinquency problem and was scathing of the failings of the Children's Court, the probation system, and the lack of any adequate training of those tasked with running the institutions and providing childcare:

THE YOUNG OFFENDERS

MORE than half the people found guilty of crime in the Republic are under 21. But are we doing enough to prevent our children becoming a part of the "delinquent machine"? And how progressive is our treatment of the young offenders themselves?

Michael Viney's latest social investigation — an eight-part series called "The Young Offenders" — attempts some tough and challenging answers to these questions.

"In these articles," says Viney, "I shall be offering evidence for the following charges:

A. That most juvenile offences in the Republic are rooted in social conditions: urban poverty and overcrowding, deprivation and inadequate family welfare;

B. That the children's courts have lost faith in an out-dated and money-starved system of institutional care;

C. That probation, as an alternative, has been emasculated

by lack of training, lack of staff and overwork;

D. That in the piecemeal partnership between two Government departments and a variety of religious orders and agencies, proper liaison and aftercare is virtually unknown;

E. That vital psychological and psychiatric aspects of the juvenile problem are getting only token attention.

"Judged on official figures alone, the Republic's juvenile delinquency problem is one of the most manageable in Europe. But this is to invent a pseudo-fact and dodge the truth behind it. When we go beyond the figures, to look at the environments producing delinquency and at the system of dealing with young offenders, complacency must evaporate. In many respects, we have more to trouble our social conscience than nations coping with a far higher rate of young offenders."

"The Young Offenders" begins in the *Irish Times* on Wednesday.

(The Young Offenders. *Irish Times*, 23 April 1966, 11)

That Viney's style and tone would be different from what went before is immediately evident from the first article in the series on 27 April 1966. The article, which takes up almost half of page 10 of the newspaper, is entirely dedicated to the experiences of one young homeless teenager called Larry living on the fringes of Irish society. The reader learns that Larry is 17-years-old and homeless. His parents were alcoholics, so he left home and drifted into petty crime. At the age of 15, he was sent to the Daingean reformatory in Offaly where he spent two years. Whereas traditional reporting would rely on academics and civil society groups to contextualise the teenager as an abstract example of a broader social issue, Viney choose to speak to just one person—Larry himself. The teenager recounts his own experiences in his own words. Its power lies in the invisibility of the reporter and external commentators and the visibility of Larry himself. His words alone serve as an indictment of the institutional care system. This was a major point of departure for

Irish journalism. Whereas young people, like Larry, were previously invisible or sidelined in news copy, Viney placed them at the heart of his series. They were both humanised and made visible, allowing them to inform the reader directly of their experiences in institutional care. Physical abuse, exploitation of labour, lack of food, clothing and minimal education are revealed to the reader through Larry's words alone.

He described how when he first arrived at Daingean at 15 years-old, he was initially 'greeted very nicely' but that he 'felt the fear inside me.' He outlined the carceral nature of the institution, where young people were poorly dressed, could only shower once a month and were given monthly haircuts of which 'you'd be ashamed for anyone to see you.' Larry described the poor standard of food and the physical dirt of the institution: '...I'd like a bit of cleanliness down there. The rust does sometimes be thick on the knives' (Viney, 1966).

The teenager also recalled the monotonous brutality of the work regime and the physical toll it took on some of the younger boys in the institution:

In the Fields

"The field batch is the worst of the lot. You go out there in all sorts of weather with so little clothes on you, just the little short coat, and your hands would be just coiled up and you could beat them against a wall and not feel it. You go out there to the fields and you start picking potatoes, turnips or beet. You have knee-wads on you and you can't move at all, just keep going up and down, taking them out with your hands and throwing them into the can.

(Viney, M. (1966) The Young Offenders 1: The Trouble with Larry. *Irish Times*, 27 April 1966, 10)

Larry told the reader of the physical brutality of Daingean, as well as the use of humiliation as a punishment. He outlined how he was beaten for getting into a fight with a farmer who had made derogatory remarks about his family and for trying to escape the institution when he had 'had enough...They gave me a 'baldy' haircut, as well as a flogging, but maybe they don't do that now' (Viney, 1966).

Viney dedicated the sixth article in the series to conditions in the Daingean reformatory where Larry had spent two years of his life. The piece, more traditionally journalistic in tone and style, is nonetheless significant in how it

departed from the traditional form of reporting that was dominant at the time. Unlike a traditional news report, where the reporter remains objective and detached from the story, Viney's piece was based on his own visit to the reformatory, with his opinions and judgment evident throughout. Just one person—the manager of the reformatory—is quoted in the piece and told Viney that ‘the only solution for Daingean is obliteration’ (Viney, 1966).



(Viney, M. (1966) The Young Offenders 6: The Dismal World Of Daingean. *Irish Times*, 4 May 1966, 12)

The article opened with a direct attack on the state's failure to adequately reform the institutional care system. The reader is reminded that it is 'exactly' 30 years since the Cussen Report in 1936 made a series of recommendations to reform the Industrial and Reformatory school system, only some of which had been adopted. Some of these reforms—many of which Viney concluded 'were essential to the welfare of children'—had been ignored by successive governments. He outlined how the 'painstaking and devastating' Tuairim report confirmed many of his own findings before describing the dull and dreary surroundings which children in 'greasy and unkempt or even straightforwardly tattered' clothes lived in every day. Theirs was 'a world of overriding shabbiness and decrepitude' where showers were granted about once every three weeks and food was 'high in starch and low in vitamins.'

Crucially, however, and in contrast to much of the reporting in previous decades, Viney as an emerging brand of investigative journalist sought not only facts but also accountability. He criticised the Department of Education and local authorities for a capitation grant system that was woefully inadequate to meet the needs of a childcare system the state had abandoned to religious orders. Viney eschewed the long-standing journalistic deference to the religious orders in favour of direct, evidence-based criticism of their ability to provide adequate care to the children and young people in their care. He avoided the typical, neutral language of a traditional news report. Instead, Viney described managers who had no idea of the cost of maintaining and staffing an institution, and how grants were ‘merely a reflection of what the orders have managed to screw out of the Department of Education and the local authorities (who still pay their share six months late).’ Viney used similarly loaded language when discussing the lack of training the religious had in childcare, and pointed out that ‘with a few recent exceptions, the religious staffs of these institutions have made little attempt to keep up with international writing, discussion and experiment in the care of deprived and delinquent children.’ He then followed this criticism with an unusually oblique allegation:

And until the past decade, certain of the institutions were regarded within their orders as places of banishment or refuge for inadequate or misfit religious. These were not the most suitable men to have the care of children (Viney, 1966).

Journalistically, Viney’s choice of language here is noteworthy. Throughout the series, he is direct in his opinions. However, this allegation is left hanging without explanation. The reader is left to wonder why institutions were places of ‘banishment or refuge for ‘inadequate or misfit’ religious who he deemed ‘not the most suitable men to have the care of children.’ And what these men had done to deserve the description of ‘misfit’ and ‘inadequate.’ Despite working in a forward-thinking newsroom under a leadership that allowed him to criticise the system directly, Viney later stated that if he had mentioned abuse ‘nobody at the time would have credited it. ‘Prove it’ would have been the response’ (Boland, 2010). Journalism demands accuracy in language for both legal and ethical reasons, and it is likely that Viney had to choose his words carefully when making this allegation. Given the social climate and journalistic culture of the time, which did not permit direct discussion of

physical and sexual abuse, it can be argued that Viney's language served as an invitation for an informed readership to read between the lines.

The examination of the Daingean reformatory was followed by an article investigating conditions at the Letterfrack and Upton industrial schools in Galway and Cork. Viney is far more positive about these institutions and described himself as 'pleasantly surprised by the open and spontaneous atmosphere of Letterfrack' and that, despite the 'crudities and imperfections' of the system, it 'is not the worst place a boy could find himself' (Viney, 1966). Much of the piece focused on how, due to the lack of after-care and follow-up, many of the young people leaving industrial schools lacked the appropriate skills to survive outside of an institutional setting and drifted into crime and sex work.

However, as with other pieces in the series, it is when Viney allowed others to speak that the reader learns most about the institutions and their impact on children. In one quote, a priest in Cork described how children 'jump to a whistle it's in their blood.' Viney then granted six lengthy, uninterrupted, paragraphs to a teenager who had spent 10 years, from the age of six until 16, in an industrial school. The boy's mother had died, and his father had simply vanished from his life. Described as 'a typical experience,' the paragraphs reveal a damaged young man unprepared for society and ashamed of his position in it:

"There's a lot of us in the Army. It's a pretty soft life, really—no responsibility, no worry. They're getting a few bob and they're fed. They're going to be privates for the rest of their lives and they don't want any more. But I couldn't take being sheltered by anyone. When I came up to Dublin first, I couldn't walk anywhere without feeling that people were watching me. I used to blush at the least thing. I couldn't walk down the centre of a cafe. This awful feeling of people looking at you . . . And if someone gave me something, I wondered why. I never felt it was because they were fond of me. I was too trusting and too suspicious, all at once. I suppose it was just getting used to people."

(Viney, M. (1966) The Young Offenders 7: Children At Risk. *Irish Times*, 5 May 1966, 12)

The teenager described his embarrassment over of his lack of knowledge about sex and having 'never had much confidence in myself as regards women.' He was never told of the facts of life and described coming out of an industrial school 'with the weirdest ideas, not really knowing a thing.' Viney's findings, on the lack of after-care

for the boys leaving industrial schools, are confirmed by the teenager who described homelessness as a common outcome for former industrial school inmates:

“There are some of our lads here in Dublin, walking the streets and, oh God, I pity them. Some of them don't want to work, admittedly, but a lot of them just don't know how to go about it. They get to depend on people, they sponge, they've no morals about asking anybody for anything. And after that stage you just don't care—you probably steal if you get the chance.

(Viney, M. (1966) The Young Offenders 7: Children At Risk. *Irish Times*, 5 May 1966, 12)

While Viney may have been forced to be oblique in relation to criticisms of religious orders in 1966, events in the following decade allowed him to be more forthright. Following the publication of the Kennedy Report in 1970, and allegations of physical and sexual abuse in religious run children's homes in Italy in 1971, he published a piece which indirectly raised this spectre in Irish industrial schools:

Religious and Child Care

The Italian children's homes scandal may raise new doubts on religious management of institutional child care. MICHAEL VINEY discusses the issue in the light of a new book about secular child care in Britain.

(Viney, M. (1971) Religious and Child Care. *Irish Times*. 10 March 1971, 11)

THE disturbing revelations of conditions in Italy's children's homes will have had a special impact in Ireland, coming so soon after the report to the Government on the state of our own industrial schools and reformatories. There are obvious differences in the scale and degree of scandal and at least there has been no question in Ireland of charging priests and nuns with abuse of office and ill-treatment of children. But the reports from Italy may well intensify some kinds of unease about our own child care institutions (Viney, 1971).

There is no doubt that Viney was being deliberate in his choice of language. While careful not to directly allege that child abuse was occurring in Irish institutions, he was providing the reader with a journalistic cue to infer while, at the same time, amplifying existing societal knowledge and 'unease' about what was happening in

these institutions. The Italian scandal, he wrote, would only ‘sharpen the misgivings of those who doubt that religious are the best people to run our child care institutions’. Viney then directly criticised the Kennedy Committee for failing to tackle this question, pointing out that at least half of the Committee itself ‘could be said to have had a vested interest in continuing the traditional relationship between the State and the religious orders’ and that child care was ‘one sphere in which the Church in Ireland cannot plausibly claim to know best’ (Viney, 1971).

O’Brien (2017) has argued that Viney’s ‘Young Offenders’ series was the ‘first to indicate that not all was well in the industrial schools run by religious orders’ (153). However, as this dissertation has demonstrated, indications that the Industrial and Reformatory School system was harmful to children can be gleaned from Irish newspaper reportage going back decades. The *Irish Times* itself had prominently featured a four-day series on child delinquency written by a ‘special correspondent’ in February 1950 which was scathing of the system and called for its abolition. Court reports, news reports and even letters to newspapers all pointed to an institutional care system that was not fit for purpose. The significance of Viney’s journalism lies in the fact that, unlike previous reportage which rarely foregrounded the Industrial and Reformatory School system and relied on a consensus narrative that invited no deeper analysis, he made it the central focus of the coverage. He framed it as a topic of controversy which demanded debate and investigation. He also made the people living in the system visible to the public by relaying their lived experiences in their own words. Viney understood that his brand of socially inquiring investigative journalism was unusual for the Ireland of the time. Writing in 2009, he recalled that, when researching the series, he was ‘aware of treading on strange cultural and historical ground, and of the absence of professional secular expertise and self-scrutiny familiar from Britain’ (Viney, 2009). However, he was not revealing a vast hidden system to the public. After all, the industrial schools he visited had facilitated his visits and had allowed him to speak to both staff and children. Other journalists could have done the same but, given a prevailing journalistic culture that prioritised consensus over inquiry, were either unable, unwilling, or uninterested. It simply did not warrant coverage. Viney, as an outsider borne from a different journalistic culture and unburdened by its Irish journalism’s tradition of deference, saw an issue worth reporting and pursued it.

Despite its groundbreaking nature, in later years, particularly as the full scale of the horrors suffered by children in industrial schools began to emerge in the 1990s, Viney reproached himself for ‘not digging deeper, and for remaining too content with describing systems rather than seeking out their victims’ (Viney, 2009). He expressed ‘terrible guilt for not having gone after the child-abuse side of things’ despite acknowledging that it would likely not have been believed at the time (Boland, 2010). Viney also lamented the contemporary impact of the series on the public recalling that there was only ‘one letter to the letters pages’ following its publication (Viney, 2009). This absence of response was also noted by the Ryan Report which also claimed that the series attracted just one published letter in the *Irish Times* (CICA, 2009: 4: 3.107). However, both Viney and the Ryan Report do the series a disservice in terms of its public impact. An analysis of the newspaper coverage reveals that there were, in fact, eight letters published in response to the series in the *Irish Times* between 10 May and 28 May—a not insignificant number. The first of these letters, published four days after the series ended, came from Captain Edgar White of a Dublin branch of The Boys Brigade, a Christian youth organisation. The letter indicated that Viney’s forthright and less traditionally objective journalistic style had resonated, with Captain White praising the ‘excellent articles and outspoken comment’ which had spotlighted the ‘indifference of the community and Government’ and the ‘inhumanity of our systems’ (White, 1966). It also motivated two clerics to write to the newspaper. An anonymous cleric praised Viney’s series questioning if it was the ‘first serious effort to gather together all the facts of this very urgent problem’ which had ‘exposed one of our most urgent and pitiable social problems’ to an ‘unaware’ public (Cleric, 1966). Similarly, Archdeacon John Tobias of Dún Laoghaire in Dublin wrote that he was ‘more than a little shocked at the revelations he has given us of the conditions prevailing in Daingean’ (Tobias, 1966). The only letter defending the religious orders acknowledged that physical abuse occurred in industrial schools Bryan W. Roche wrote that ‘the public have crazy ideas about industrial schools’ and ‘imagine beatings dished out as part of the day’s routine’, despite Viney having not made that allegation at any point in the series (Roche, 1966). Of course, the ‘Young Offenders’ series was not the first time these issues had been aired in an Irish newspaper. However, the fact that members of the public clearly interpreted this journalism as revelatory and confronting, outlines the power and

impact of Viney's decision to frame the issue as a controversial topic. His journalism forced the public to confront what it knew but did not speak about, what Fintan O'Toole (2009) has called the 'unknown knowns'. A sense aptly summarised by Mrs. B., a cleaning lady who spoke to the *Irish Times*' Eileen O'Brien in December 1966, seven months after Viney's series was published. Surviving on the margins of society by cleaning houses of the wealthy in the leafier suburbs of Dublin, she found that Michael Viney's journalism punctured a societal consensus that had never rung true:

She has no television. "But if I see on the paper that Michael Viney is on the TV, I go to the woman next door and ask her to turn it on for me. Michael Viney is a shining star. He comes out with things and always goes to the point. Then they write nonsense to the paper about him not being Irish—the Irish are afraid of their lives to probe into anything or to let things be known.

(O'Brien, E. (1966) A Social Sort of Column. *Irish Times*, 26 December 1966, 12)

Nell McCafferty, 'Notes on Reality' and 'In the Eyes of the Law,' 1970-1974

Where Michael Viney felt his series on the industrial schools was ignored, just a few years later, a cohort of female journalists began producing journalism so provocative in style and tone that it was impossible to ignore. No journalist epitomised this more than Nell McCafferty.

Like Viney, she was an 'outsider' to traditional Irish journalism having been raised in Derry's Bogside in Northern Ireland. As a young feminist and socialist, McCafferty spent her early twenties writing pieces for the local labour magazine 'Ramparts.' By her own admission, she had never considered a career in journalism until a chance meeting with the storied US journalist Jimmy Breslin in a hotel in Derry in 1969. Breslin, at that time, was a prominent exponent of the burgeoning American 'New Journalism' movement embracing techniques of narrative fiction such as scene-by-scene construction, imagery, conversational dialogue, and the use of a third person point of view to engage readers with a reality that spoke to ordinary people and their experiences. Barry (2024) has pointed out that Breslin's stated journalistic motivation was 'rage' and that 'he felt strongly the challenges of the disenfranchised

and he distrusted the powerful' (Barry, 2024). This personal conviction and desire to reveal meaning through the ordinary and everyday was something that deeply influenced McCafferty. In her 2004 memoir, she outlined how Breslin had told her to stop pontificating to people through her writing. If the story and writing were compelling enough, the readers could see and feel the message without having to be told (McCafferty, 2004: 184). McCafferty clearly took this advice to heart. A year later, in 1970, Fergus Pyle, the Belfast editor of the Northern edition of the *Irish Times* commissioned her to write a piece about the firebrand unionist preacher Ian Paisley, who was then running in a Westminster by-election. McCafferty made it clear that Breslin's advice was something that directly influenced her emerging journalistic process and how she approached the piece. She chose to ignore the humdrum vagaries of a by-election and 'did not bother with any of that.' Instead, she 'wrote what I saw—that Paisley was adored, that he cut a fearless swathe through the Protestant highways and byways, that people literally looked up to him and tried to take courage from him, that they believed that he would rescue them from the Fenian civil rights onslaught, that he made them laugh when he mocked the captains' (McCafferty, 2004: 186). McCafferty's ability did not go unnoticed and earned her a full-time job with the *Irish Times* based in Dublin in May 1970. News editor Dónal Foley had found a space for her brand of journalism 'as a chronicler of the human condition' and sent her to cover the Children's Court (McCafferty, 2004: 206). McCafferty was tasked with covering Justice Eileen Kennedy's deliberations and contrasting them with her recommendations in her much-lauded report on industrial and reformatory schools which had been published that year. The resulting 'Children in Court: Notes on Reality' and 'Eyes of the Law' series are a devastating social critique of the power and class imbalance that was present in the courts system. McCafferty made no secret of being uninterested in traditional journalistic objectivity. She outlined how, unlike traditional court reporting, she never used the names and addresses of the people before the courts but instead 'named the Justices who decided their fate' in the hope that the articles 'will put them in the dock for a change' (McCafferty, 1981: 2). Like Michael Viney, she sought a form of accountability through her journalism. However, unlike Viney, McCafferty's journalism was not investigative, but nor was it straight court reporting. It was less concerned with reporting the facts of the case and more interested in the experiences and circumstances of the families she witnessed coming before the courts. It was a

form of campaigning journalism, motivated by McCafferty's personal conviction and anger. The offences committed were secondary to the economic circumstances of the people before the court and the unfairness of the system they faced, and class was always at the heart of the analysis. This determination to highlight the class and power imbalances ingrained in a justice system which committed young people to industrial schools leaps out from her 1970 three-day series: 'Children in Court: Notes on Reality'. Appearing in December, just one month after the Kennedy Report was published, McCafferty's aim was to 'see how present court practice accords with the recommendations and opinions expressed in the report'. To gain this insight, she attended every session of the Children's Court in Dublin for two weeks. Where Michael Viney had seen the Children's Court as warm and friendly, 'a disarming chamber of justice, functional and mellow as an old village schoolroom, with a turf fire burning in the grate,' McCafferty saw a cold place of fear where children 'cowered' in a dock which was 'the mouth of a huge, empty fireplace' (Viney, 1966; McCafferty, 2004: 207).

The contrast between the findings of the Kennedy Report and the reality faced by families and children before the court is repeatedly stressed in the series. McCafferty was appalled that Justice Kennedy continued to commit children to an Industrial and Reformatory School system that she herself had just recommended be abolished as it was detrimental to the welfare of children. Using bullet points and, in sections, a staccato effect for emphasis and contrast, the first article in the series is a devastating and surgical dissection of how the poetry of Kennedy's report contrasted with the brutal prose of her judgments on the young people before her court:

* * *

THE REPORT: "All children need love, care and security if they are to develop into full and mature persons The recommendations made by the Committee in this report are based on the assumption that all those engaged in the field of child and family care agree that this must be their fundamental approach to the work they are undertaking."

REALITY: In one case, when reproving two children, Justice Kennedy said: "I'll have no mercy on you. I'll send you to industrial school. Do you know what I'm talking about?"

* * *

THE REPORT: "It is evident that there is a compelling need for greater facilities for examination and observation of young offenders if the Courts are to discharge their functions fully."

REALITY: A mother said her son was attending a psychiatrist.

Justice Kennedy: "A lot of good it's doing him."

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 1: Notes on Reality. *Irish Times*, 9 December, 12)

In another case, when an eight-year-old boy denied telling his teacher that he took days off because he had to go out to buy whiskey for his father, McCafferty reported Justice Kennedy as having said: "Are you a liar as well as everything else?" The boy's father then objected to this language being used to address his son:

Justice Kennedy: "I'm not asking you, I'm asking him."

The father: "So that doesn't give me any say at all?"

Justice Kennedy: "That doesn't give you any say at all."

* * *

Mother of convicted 12-year-old boy:
"What's he done that he gets two years in Daingean?"

Justice Kennedy: "I could send him until he's sixteen."

* * *

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 1: Notes on Reality. *Irish Times*, 9 December, 12)

Here Breslin's exhortations to McCafferty are plain to see. She never tells the reader what to think but instead allows Kennedy's own words to inform the reader's opinion. As Enright (2020) has argued, Kennedy's responses suggested 'that parents' rights to lay claim to their children, and to advocate for them were, in many respects, already extinguished before they appeared in court' (Enright, 2020: 124). This sense of parental powerlessness in the face of the courts would not have been lost on any informed reader.

McCafferty's second article in the series focused on the Letterfrack Industrial School. Here, again, she differed from Viney's journalism in terms of both style and tone. Viney was more traditionally investigative in process and tone. He examined systemic issues such as how the lack of aftercare resulted in those leaving the institution drifting into crime and homelessness (Viney, 1966). McCafferty, by contrast, was less interested in objective investigative journalistic processes, something she acknowledged in the piece itself. Whereas in 1966, Viney felt he could only obliquely raise the spectre of abuse, by 1970, McCafferty opted to be more explicit. The entire article, which is given a half page in the *Irish Times*, is based on the memories of two former residents of the Letterfrack industrial school — Gordon, aged 12 years-old, and Mick who is 19 years-old. Whereas Viney felt he could not mention abuse in his 1966 series because he would have been told to 'prove it', by 1970, enough of a shift had occurred in Irish journalism to allow McCafferty to be more direct. She opened the piece by telling her readers why she was utilising direct testimony as the basis of the article and, crucially, why the experiences and recollections of the young people who had been through the system mattered:

IT WOULD BE FUTILE to suppose that a child's memories can be trusted as "accurate" in the adult sense. A child records events and surroundings differently and brings different emotions to them. He will believe literally what he would test from longer experience. Fact and fantasy become intermingled. What follows, therefore, may not in every detail be "true" as factual evidence. But it is certainly real—emotionally real—for the child. This is how at least some children remember the institutions to which we send them for "love, affection and security."

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 2: Memories of Letterfrack. *Irish Times*, 10 December, 14)

This shift in process was a crucial moment that opened the discursive space to allow Irish journalism to frame the issue as a national 'scandal' some two decades later. The two boys' experiences—told in their own words—recount physical abuse, humiliation, hunger, a perverse attitude to normal sexual habits and urges and even death. In just two paragraphs, Gordon informed the reader about physical abuse, humiliation, hunger, and the exploitation of children for labour:

CHILDREN IN COURT - 2

By Nell McCafferty

MEMORIES OF LETTERFRACK

DA WOULD KILL anyone that starts with him. Well, me and my brother were sent to Leatherfrack for eleven months for stealing bicycles. You only get chips and hamburgers, no vegetables. There was turnips and carrots growing thare, but the Brothers would eat them. There was cake for the brothers and the lovely smell of it in the monastery would drive you mad. You got killed in Leatherfrack and got it across the back, and if you're caught smoking you run around the yard till you dropped and Willy M. burst his appendix and he went to hospital till his time was up. If you could still stand up you hopped on one leg until you fell down.

When we worked in the bog in summer, we was starvin' and parchin', and we took water from the drains. In the winter it was very cold on the bog and sometimes it was dark. All the young fellas do be cryin', if they're not near you you can't see them, but voud' hear them cryin'. You have to get a

sack and fill it with the turf and put it on your back and carry it on your back for about three miles.

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 2: Memories of Letterfrack. *Irish Times*, 10 December, 14)

That children had died in industrial schools had been reported in Irish newspapers as far back as the 1930s. However, McCafferty's decision to allow a twelve-year boy to recall this reality for the reader in such nonchalant and matter-of-fact language is far more revelatory for that simple fact.

BOYS DIE OF the flu and are taken to the graveyard. Everyone goes to the funeral. The fellas in there a long time do be tiny, one older than me was smaller than me. Boys die. When they're working the bogs there's traps like teeth for foxes and one fella caught his legs and he was a mile away, and there was a fella heard him say "help" and he ran up, but your man died when he was half-way up.

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 2: Memories of Letterfrack. *Irish Times*, 10 December, 14)

Similarly, 19 year-old Mick calmly recounted the severe physical punishment inflicted on children and how staff would watch the boys at night to ensure that they did not masturbate:

In Letterfrack they ask you personal questions. Have you any bad habits? I acted thick and said what do you mean? He said, well, do you bite your nails? Yes,

my toe-nails, said I. He said, no no, I mean bodily habits. I pick my nose, said I. Finally he said, you know what I mean, so I said I didn't have bad bodily habits. They watched us at night to make sure we didn't.

What was bad was I seen things that should not have happened. You'd try to pick up a rock in the bog and you couldn't and he'd lash you round the legs with a bush, d you'd feel it, looking into his face. You

shouldn't get bashed, you should be taught why things are not right. I seen boys get lashed with a bamboo stick, bare-arsed across a chair. That's very bad.

(McCafferty, N. (1970) Children in Court - 2: Memories of Letterfrack. *Irish Times*, 10 December, 14)

Justice Eileen Kennedy continued to be a focus of McCafferty's ire throughout the first half of the 1970s. An article on 10 March 1973 highlighted her treatment of a young, impoverished family. The parents, who had seven children, were squatting in a one-bedroom flat where they all shared a double bed. Despite the court hearing of the "terrific bond" between the children and their parents, Justice Kennedy committed two of their daughters to Goldenbridge, one for eight years and another for six years, something to which their mother, through tears, agreed to:

State does its duty and sends sisters from one-room home to industrial school

"I propose to commit Caroline till she's 15," Justice Kennedy told the mother. "You know she can get out on holidays. Will they go to Goldenbridge together now, in the van?" They would, said the mother with a smile. Ten-year-old Mary, committed till she's 16, jumped up with a smile. "I'm Mary." Seven-year-old Caroline, committed till she's 15, jumped up with another smile. "I'm Caroline." "I'm Thomas," laughed the little boy.

They filed outside again with their mother, and went downstairs to wait on the big black Maria. They sat on a wooden bench before a wooden table, in a dark, cold narrow room. They cuddled their mother and each other, laughing and happy because they were committed together. She smiled and caressed them.

(McCafferty, N. (1973) In the Eyes of the Law: State does its duty and sends sisters from one-room home to industrial school. *Irish Times*, 10 March 1973, 5)

Scenes like these were common in the Children's Court but were rarely mediated in such a visceral way. Traditional court reporting necessitated a cold and balanced report of the facts of the case and its result. However, McCafferty focused on the courtroom experience from the point of view of the family and utilised imagery and language more akin to narrative fiction than objective journalism. Instead of a dispassionate objective court report which reported the facts of a case using neutral language, she chose to upend traditional journalistic convention and allow the reader to experience the justice system through the eyes of a family with limited financial means and ever fewer options. McCafferty never strove for objectivity in reporting courtroom procedures and offered a scathing assessment of a state welfare system that failed poor families and a courts system—embodied by Justice Eileen Kennedy—that incarcerated children for the crime of being poor. It was a journalism

which appealed to the reader's sense of empathy and injustice in exposing the class bias at the heart of the Children's Court system.

McCafferty never remained detached from what she was writing about and was unafraid to insert herself into the story. She dispensed with detached objectivity and wrote from conviction offering her own typically blunt assessment of the system: 'What in the name of God does the Children's court exist for? To put children into jail and take pound notes off them?' (McCafferty, 1975). She spoke to a hypocrisy of a state which accepted the need for the abolition of the Industrial and Reformatory School system, but which still threatened children with institutionalisation via the courts: 'What's wrong with Industrial Schools? If they're so frightening, should we be sending children there?' (McCafferty, 1973). McCafferty was frequently a participant in the events she reported on and described her own interactions with those before the courts. These were often powerfully revelatory of the systemic failings of the justice system and how it perceived children as, what Enright (2020) has termed, 'non-persons' before the law:

At 20 past 12 I saw the mother downstairs, standing in the hallway, up against the wall. "I'm waiting for them to take him away," she said. "But it was too cold for me to wait with him in the hole."

"The hole?", I asked.

"Back there", she said, indicating the detention room at the end of the corridor. I went back to have another look at the hole. I placed my eye against the small grilled opening. When I had accustomed myself to the chilly draught and the gloom I could perceive some boys pacing up and down the bare dark brown, cold, miserable holding place, popularly and accurately known as "The Hole".

They swished back and forth, like animals at the zoo. Only, the animals have sunlight, and warmth in winter, and food, and people to visit them, and they can see the sky.

Outside the black maria was waiting.

(McCafferty, N. (1974) In the Eyes of the Law: Solicitors urgent plea for detention does not go unanswered. *Irish Times*, 12 October 1974, 15)

It is instructive to note the differing views Viney and McCafferty held regarding the impact of their reporting on the Industrial and Reformatory School system. Whereas Viney viewed the impact of his 1966 series as limited, McCafferty felt that, despite later ‘revelations’ of widespread sexual and physical abuse, the fact she had written about ‘the mere fact of the imprisonment of these children in remote rural areas, caused a sensation’ in 1970 (McCafferty, 2004: 207). Writing in 1984, Maeve Binchy, who had been editor of the ‘Women’s First’ section of the *Irish Times* between 1968 and 1975 credited McCafferty’s ‘In the Eyes of the Law’ column as having ‘changed the thinking and attitudes of so many people towards the courts of our land’ (Binchy, 1984). Similarly, McNally (2009) has stated that the column put the courts and criminal justice system ‘to the forefront of the agenda of social reform activists then playing an increasing role in prompting social policy development in Ireland (McNally, 2009: 210). This is certainly reflected in the response to McCafferty’s work. Both the Joint Committee of Women’s Societies and Social Workers and the Free Legal Aid Centre wrote letters in support of her reporting (Huet, 1970; McAuley, 1973).

McCafferty’s reporting did not reveal or uncover anything that was not already public knowledge about the Industrial and Reformatory School system. Her journalism was not investigative, nor was it intended to be. Yet, crucially, its impact on the public was revelatory in nature. Her campaigning style of a new journalism, which foregrounded and framed the lives and experiences of those people engaging with the system in a visceral and emotionally engaging way allowed the reader to rediscover industrial schools and reformatories as controversial topics worthy of debate. This emotional connection encouraged readers to question consensus narratives, existing power structures and social norms. Numerous letters from members of the public to the *Irish Times* testify to this revelatory nature of her reporting. Readers wrote of their shock at what they deemed to be revelations in McCafferty’s series, even though concerns about the system had been in the newspapers for decades. In one letter, a—Mrs. F. O’Brien said McCafferty ‘deserves the highest praise for revealing the facts’ in relation to the Children’s court which she ‘found most distressing’ (O’Brien, 1970). Cyril Daly, who had begun a letter writing campaign against corporal punishment in the late 1960s, noticed how McCafferty’s reporting highlighted class and power imbalances in Irish society (Daly, 1974). McCafferty herself collated the ‘surprising amount of mail’ she received in response

to a television appearance where she cited poverty as being a root cause of crime in the country and made it the focus of a column in 1978. While she acknowledged that some of the letters came from ‘the liberal, educated class,’ the majority had come from ‘persons of no property, little prospect, and much experience.’ These were the voices, ‘seldom heard in public’ that she wished to give voice to in her writing (McCafferty, 1978).

Other female voices: Eileen O’Brien, Mary Maher, and Rosita Sweetman, 1965-1972

Nell McCafferty was not the only female journalist in this period embracing campaigning and participatory forms of reporting. For Binchy (1984), the reform agenda of 1970s Ireland began ‘not with a campaign, but with a slow burn’ in Eileen O’Brien’s “A Social Sort of Column” which began in the *Irish Times* in 1966. Another recruit of Dónal Foley, O’Brien had joined at the newspaper the previous year and her columns were a radical departure from previous social columns which focused on ‘the nauseating whiff of ‘Elegant Hostesses, Lovely Homes, and what the Ambassador’s wife said to the Consul’s mother.’ Instead, she wrote about ‘another side of society, one which couldn’t make ends meet, where the system didn’t spread far or wide enough to avoid poverty, tragedy and misunderstanding’ (Binchy, 1984). O’Brien focused on societal issues like poverty through the lens of those it directly impacted. In 1967, she reported the hardship faced by residents of corporation flats in a courtyard off Foley Street in Dublin known as ‘the cage’. Residents described a place which was ‘a breeding ground for corruption and crime...kids have nowhere to go, no recreation to take them off the streets, no playground, and a lot of young fellows get into trouble.’ She inserted herself into the story, and utilised incidental details, imagery and language more akin narrative fiction, in order to emotionally engage her readers in the lived reality of those on the margins of Irish society: ‘I came away [from ‘the cage’] into the biting rain. Someone had vomited in the hall’ (O’Brien, 1967).

The column underwent an evolution in terms of how it addressed the Industrial and Reformatory School system. For example, in a 1968, column about the St Kyran’s Industrial School in Rathdrum in Wicklow, O’Brien engaged in a ‘top down’ brand of journalism. The manager of the institution, Sr Xavieria—later the subject of

numerous allegations of physical abuse in the Ryan Report—is quoted at length in the piece. The children, while visible, are described rather than quoted. O’Brien conveyed, in one sentence, their reality as one of happiness rather than imprisonment: ‘All the children were attractively dressed in bright colours, but were not too rigidly tidy. Their lives are not too regimented’ (O’Brien, 1968). Meanwhile, Sr Xavieria’s utilised a range of stereotypes to describe the children in her care:

A home from home for the homeless

A SOCIAL SORT OF COLUMN

by EILEEN O'BRIEN

families. "Think of the frustration and unhappiness an unmarried girl goes through while she is expecting her baby — it is bound to affect the child", said Sr. Xavieria. "Then think of the home life many of them have had -- parents deserting, drinking, fighting over money, appalling irresponsibility -- that is bound to affect a child".

"Many of these children grow into beautiful citizens", said Sr. Xavieria. "and many do far better than anyone could expect, but some are inevitably irresponsible like their parents".

(O'Brien, E. (1968) A Social Sort of Column: A home from home for the homeless. *Irish Times*, 3 June 1968, 10)

At no point does O’Brien request evidence for these claims or challenge the class bias inherent in them. Nor are any of the young people permitted copy space to describe their own lived reality in the institution.

However, in later columns, O'Brien reported more from the 'bottom up' when addressing the system. In a confronting case study on contemporary poverty in Dublin, O'Brien wrote of the struggles faced by Kathleen O'Brien from Fatima Mansions in Dolphin's Barn in trying to raise 10 children with a husband in prison. Two of her children had been committed to the Letterfrack Industrial School for non-attendance at school. In this case, O'Brien did not quote management at the institution but instead allowed Kathleen to speak in her own words about the loss she had suffered. It amounts to a brutal indictment of the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the justice system supporting it:

the children. "He got up in court and pleaded that they be remanded for a fortnight to see how they got on, but the justice said no, they would have to be sent to Letterfrack and that was that," Mrs. O'Brien said.

"I did not even see them before they went. They were sent to Marlborough House. I do not think children so young should be sent to a place like that for only school attendance. It hardens them.

"When they were told they were to go to Letterfrack they went hysterical. They were crying to me "don't leave us". To try to keep them quiet I said I would try to get them out next morning. If I had gone the next morning to see them it would have made them worse. The little fellow was still waiting after a week. He wrote to me: "Why did you send us away? You said it was for one day. You did not keep your promise."

"It is the children who suffer. They can be frowned upon when their father is in prison. I am only 30 now. I feel 60. Last night I dreamt that the Circuit Judge said 'I am giving your children back to you.' Then I woke up and it was only a dream."

(O'Brien, E. (1971) A Social Sort of Column: A Promise That Could Not Be Kept. *Irish Times*, 2 July 1971, 14)

O'Brien continued writing in this vein throughout the 1970s, with later columns directly quoting young people who had been through the industrial and reformatory school experience. In one column from 1972, she quoted a boy who described physical abuse in Marlborough House, a place where "the screws come in drunk and bash you. There would be someone whistling and they would hit you a belt" (O'Brien, 1972). Later that year, in a column about a young homeless couple, a man described being physically abused as a child in an industrial school in Galway: "It was horrible. The least thing you would do wrong you would get a belt of a leather six inches thick. If you did not know the catechism they beat it into you" (O'Brien, 1972).

The 'Women First' section of the *Irish Times* also examined Ireland's social problems and attacked its patriarchal structure. Launched in May 1968 by Dónal Foley, it was first edited by Mary Maher, another 'outsider' originally from Chicago who came to the newspaper with the 'great advantage of not knowing which were the sacred cows, and by the time she did know, she had enough courage not to care about them' (Binchy, 1984). Maher railed against the traditionally male-dominated newsroom and its equally traditional methods. She recalled that, when women's pages came of age, 'they did it with a vengeance; and I think with satisfaction of how shaken up all those real reporters must have been' (Maher, 1974: 12). Maher, like McCafferty and O'Brien, had little interest in remaining detached and objective. Artane Industrial School was described in 1965 as appearing on the Malahide Road 'like a cold geometrical incision' and while she shied away from describing it in carceral terms, she nonetheless told the reader exactly what she thought of the institutional care model:

340 ARTANE BOYS AWAIT THE FUTURE

By Mary Maher

A RTANE Industrial School lies along Malahide road like a cold geometrical incision. It is padded on all sides by thick green fields, 147 acres of perfectly groomed lawns; the main building, a stone rectangle, is centred precisely on a circular driveway.

But if it is not a penal institution or a work-house, neither is it a home, nor, in any true sense, a training school designed to prepare children for the future. It is a place to keep alive in, from the age of eight to 14 or 16. Luckily, at eight or even 14 or 16, injustice is still an abstract concept, and futility is a word on a spelling list.

(Maher, M. (1965) 340 Artane Boys Await Future. *Irish Times*, 31 December 1965, 8)

While more favourable and deferential when writing about the Kilmacud Industrial School the following year, by 1970 and the publication of the Kennedy Report, Maher was unequivocal about the nature of the system, describing it as ‘one of those national sores with us so long its bandage seemed, indeed, part of the body politic. Somebody had removed the coverings, and everyone was forced to look, however quickly, at all that horror’ (Maher, 1970).

Similarly, in 1972, after the publication of a memorandum deeply critical of the institutional childcare system by the civil society group the Campaign for the Care of Deprived Children (CARE), Elgy Gillespie at the *Irish Times* abandoned traditional journalistic objectivity to describe its findings as ‘further detailing the gross evils’ of the Industrial and Reformatory School system. She also expressed her personal outrage at the ‘great shortage of concern’ in both government and among the wider public about the issue. She concluded the article by confronting her readers with a question which was, in effect, a demand for more public scrutiny: ‘How many more times must the public be battered by facts before something is done?’ (Gillespie, 1972). While the *Irish Times* led the way with this form of campaigning reporting, it was not alone. At the *Irish Independent*, Mary McCutchan addressed the issue of the Industrial and Reformatory School system in a three-day series in 1969, while the *Irish Press*, through the work of Helen Quinn, Linda Kavanagh, Mary Punch and, most notably Rosita Sweetman, also produced critical news copy on the issue. Following a tip off from a warden at the Marlborough House reformatory in Dublin, Sweetman produced a devastating three-day investigative series on conditions in the institution. In the first article, the story is told through ‘Jim,’ a whistleblower warden who described an institution run through fear, where children were routinely physically abused and often hungry.

Edited by
MARY KENNY

WOMAN'S PRESS



Rosita Sweetman, in the first article of a series,
visits a remand home and wonders...

How corrective are our houses of correction?

(Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: How corrective are our houses of correction? *Irish Press*, 5 January 1971, 6)

The wardens were 'mainly retired army men, or retired guards' with no qualifications and little interest in the children entrusted to them. Through 'Jim,' the reader learned that the food in the institution 'is designed to just barely keep body and soul together,' the boys are 'half starved' and that when boys spend nine months or more in the institution, 'you can see their health go down visibly.' One warden, the whistleblower revealed, had told him over lunch that he had 'beaten the lard' out of an 'itinerant kid.' When 'Jim' protested, he was told that the boys were 'criminals' who were 'here to be corrected and we'll correct them.'

"In any civilised society Marlborough House would not exist," said "Jim", "but while ghettos exist for the working class, and continue to be built, they'll go on". He thought maybe

"Most of the kids here are regular customers. They're hard — but then they have to be to survive. Some have been in 5 or 6 times, that would make a saint hard. Nobody gives a damn about them. Even the clergy take no interest in them. No Social Worker seems to visit—ever."

(Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: How corrective are our houses of correction? *Irish Press*, 5 January 1971, 6)

Like the previous work of McCafferty and Viney at the *Irish Times*, none of what Sweetman reported was new. Marlborough House had been the subject of

controversy for decades. However, allowing ‘Jim’ to outline the conditions and treatment of children in real and unvarnished language was, once again, revelatory for the public, who responded, just like they had done in 1966 with Michael Viney and in the 1970s with Nell McCafferty, with a flurry of letters to the *Irish Press* expressing shock and outrage.

From a journalistic perspective, however, it is the second article in the series that is most instructive. This is because Sweetman made a decision to bring the readers inside her journalistic process. She outlined how, since the publication of the Kennedy Report in 1970, other print outlets and the state broadcaster RTÉ had been refused access to the premises. She stated: ‘If the authorities in charge will not allow bone fide press to enter their remand homes then I consider it legitimate to get in illegitimately’ (Sweetman, 1971). Here, in one sentence, Sweetman separated herself from decades of traditional modes of ‘ethical’ journalistic fact-gathering by admitting she was willing to gain access to the institution through ‘illegitimate’ means. Crucially, however, she was engaging in a form of true ‘Gonzo’ journalism, and the resulting piece is a highly subjective piece of participatory reporting. Its effectiveness stems from the fact that Sweetman does not remain detached or invisible. Instead, she is a participant in her own story, guiding the reader through her highly personal emotional responses to what she saw and felt walking the corridors of the institution.

8
THE IRISH PRESS, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 1971

Edited by
MARY KENNY

WOMAN'S PRESS



“The remand home should be designed to provide a disciplined environment which will begin the process of rehabilitation of the child at a time when he is experiencing an abrupt break with his familiar surroundings and to enable information to be gathered for the assistance of the courts about his history, background, and personality”

— Extract from Report on Reformatory and Industrial Schools Systems, 1970.

Midnight in Marlborough House

(Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: Midnight in Marlborough House. *Irish Press*, 6 January 1971, 8)



Sweetman gained access to Marlborough House at 1am through a ‘guide’ who took her room by room through the institution. The oppressive nature of the building, its sounds and smells are brought to the reader as individual scenes in a highly

descriptive fashion. She described how upon entry, ‘stone walls and a whistling draught welcome the visitor’ in a scene, which she herself stated, could have been the setting of an ‘Oliver Twist’ film:

Inside, stone floors and a whistling draught welcome the visitor. The first door revealed a long room with dirty, yellowish walls, red lino floors and one battered, inked, scuffed

wooden table in the middle with two wooden benches on either side. An enormous Victorian pot-bellied stove which ‘heated’ the room completed the archaic atmosphere. (Perhaps the next MGM version of ‘Oliver Twist’ could be shot here). There were no pictures on the walls, no books, tall filthy windows covered with wire grills and a partition separating the next room.

“I’ll show you the toilets,” my ‘guide’ said, walking ahead. Down another corridor, this time the freezing cold was accompanied by a pungent stinging stink — urine. Through a draughty stone-floored area, the walls covered in filth, tiny high windows unopenable because of wire grills, no lights, and around the corner a row of urinals from where the stench was emanating. “If a boy wishes to go to the toilets at night he has to be accompanied by a warden,” my guide

(Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: Midnight in Marlborough House. *Irish Press*, 6 January 1971, 8)

Sweetman then described having ‘a piece of paper pressed into my hand’—a letter from the Superintendent Timothy O’Leary to the Inspector in the Department of Education. She offered an abridged version of its contents which were a request for alterations to make the institution even more oppressive and carceral than it already was:

Downstairs, a piece of paper was pressed into my hand. I read it going home. It was from the Superintendent, Timothy O'Leary, to the Inspector in the Department of Education . . . an abbreviated version below . . .

"Security in Marlborough House"

1. "Boundary fencing of playing ground is still not adequate to prevent escape if attempted by some unruly boys." (A somewhat bizzare comment if the boys seldom get out to play.)

2. "The wall around the grounds should be raised about 4 feet higher. All pipes down to be coiled with barbed wire half way from the ground.

"It is also suggested that the room at present available on the top floor be converted into a 'Strong Room', this would provide some form of punishment where a boy misconducts himself.

(Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: Midnight in Marlborough House. *Irish Press*, 6 January 1971, 8)

Typical of 'Gonzo' journalism, Sweetman made no attempt to be objective in her reporting. She directly addressed how class and poverty sustained the institution, pointing out that 'Middle class kids don't end up in Remand Homes like Marlborough House' because they could afford representation in court, so instead, 'the less well off must suffer.' Her conclusion is confronting for its lack of detachment. It is borne from the same emotion that motivated Jimmy Breslin and Nell McCafferty—rage:

Marlborough House made me sick physically. The atmosphere of decaying structures, total neglect and filth was unbelievable. I've smelt urine before in the Zoo, in the elephants' enclosure, I've seen poverty and neglect before. I've known and seen plenty of young lads in and out of trouble. I've never before seen such a repressive prison-like building. It contains kids and teenagers — that's all.

Middle-class kids don't end up in Remand Homes like Marlborough House. They come to court with parents and solicitors and usually get off with fines. So the less well-off must suffer. Who cares if a bunch of lads from the 'working class ghettos' Jim knows so well spend a few months in hell? It certainly won't do them any good. It just trains them and hardens them and makes a lot of them Young Criminals.

Take any child from its home and give it a few months in a prison, with totally inadequate food, untrained and disinterested wardens, grim prison surroundings, the company of severely delinquent children — he's not going to end up loving the society that sent him there. He'll end up hating it. I certainly would.

Sweetman, R. (1971) Inside a Reform School: Midnight in Marlborough House. *Irish Press*, 6 January 1971, 8)

In the final article in the series, Sweetman pivots and steps outside of the story to allow it to be told through the words of 14 year-old 'Brian'. The teenager had recently been released from a second stint in Marlborough House, for stealing a bicycle. His words leave the reader in no doubt as to the scale of physical and emotional abuse suffered by the children committed to the institution:

"One time me Ma brought me up these slippers. I didn't want to wear them as they were woman's slippers, and the warden came up and started jeering. Said me shoes were always in tatters. I told him I'd tell me Da. He brought me down to the hall door in the night and made me kneel on me knees there.

"All the kids do be scared of wardens. He plays cards with them, and if you beat him at cards he gets it back on you. He came to me in the dormo once when I was half asleep and said 'Why d'ya have to get smart with me?', then suddenly he'd make you get out,



and say 'go in and take a cold shower'. You'd have to. He'd be shouting at you 'this little cur, this little pig', and say 'would ya be like that at home?'.

"Some of the kids sleep on the floor without a mattress. The wardens lock the door on the dormo (dormitory) when we go in. Sometimes a warden with a few drinks on him comes in and says he hears us whistling and starts getting us all out. We'd all have been asleep.

"There were two travellers there (itinerants), the wardens would be hard on them. He called them 'Judases' one day. He took this fella Cawley out and brought him into the toilet and locked the door and gave him a busted nose.

(Sweetman, R. (1971) A child from a remand home. *Irish Press*, 7 January 1971, 6)

Conclusion

The fact that children were suffering and being abused in Ireland's industrial schools and reformatories was not something that was 'uncovered' and revealed by Irish journalism to an unknowing public in the 1990s. There was considerable societal unease about the adequacy of the institutional childcare system as a method of welfare provision right from the foundation of the state. Both oblique and overt references to abuse featured in the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* in the first half of the twentieth century. However, given a journalism deeply rooted in the production and promotion of a consensus narrative of charity, the abusive nature of the system was rarely consistently foregrounded or framed as a topic worthy of investigation or inquiry.

Social, economic, and cultural shifts in 1960s created space for a newer brand of campaigning journalism in Ireland pioneered, in the main, by women. Influenced by the 'New Journalism' and 'gonzo' reporting of the United States in the 1960s and 1970s, this intrinsically subjective and participatory journalism combined traditional news gathering methods with the narrative techniques of fiction. It allowed a small section of Irish journalism the necessary space not to *uncover* but, instead, to *rediscover* the abusive nature of the Industrial and Reformatory School system as a topic of controversy rather than consensus

This chapter has argued that the framing of the system as a 'national scandal' in the 1990s was a process that can be traced back to the journalism of the 1960s and 1970s. The work of Michael Viney, Nell McCafferty, Eileen O'Brien, Mary Maher, and Rosita Sweetman, among others, shifted reporting frames—from consensus to controversy—and both reflected and amplified public awareness and anger about the abusive nature of Industrial and Reformatory School system. It provided the critical scaffolding for journalism in the 1990s to again rediscover the issue—this time as a national 'scandal'.

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Section Two:
**Charity to Controversy: Irish journalism and the Framing
of the Magdalene Laundry System**

Chapter Four

Saviours and Sinners: How Irish newspapers normalised the Magdalene Laundries as charity, 1920-1990

Introduction

Magdalene Laundries were never hidden from Irish society. Nor were the women confined in them. Indeed, for much of the twentieth century, the religious orders themselves inserted the laundries into the lives of ordinary citizens—on an almost daily basis. This was done by a continuous campaign of appeal for public donations and financial support in the pages of national newspapers—namely the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and, from 1931, the *Irish Press*. These appeals, which ran uninterrupted from the 1920s until the mid-1960s, took a number of forms. Many were what would be today called classified adverts. These included public notifications of upcoming charity sermons given by priests in aid of the institutions that were preached in Churches across Dublin or broadcast into people's homes on the radio. There were also adverts highlighting 'gift days' where the public could view and buy items made by the 'inmates' of the institutions. There were also annual Christmas appeals, as well as simple public appeals for financial support through donations or via bequests in wills. However, as well as running as adverts, many of these events—particularly the charity sermons—were also reported in the pages of the newspapers as traditional news events. Indeed, the visibility of the Magdalene Laundries in Irish newspaper coverage in the 50 years following the foundation of the state is noteworthy, not for its absence, but for its regularity.

✠
ST. PATRICK'S REFUGE,
(MAGDALEN ASYLUM),
CROFTON ROAD,
DUN LAOGHAIRE.

The Sisters of Mercy earnestly solicit
your Kind Patronage and Aid on behalf
of the poor Magdalens under their care.
Smallest donation will be gratefully
received.

PRAYERS ARE DAILY OFFERED FOR
DECEASED AND LIVING BENEFACTORS.

(St. Patrick's Refuge, (Magdalen Asylum), Crofton Road, Dun Laoghaire. *Irish Independent*, 7
December 1929, 6)

**MONASTERY OF OUR
LADY OF CHARITY
OF REFUGE.
ST. MARY'S ASYLUM,
HIGH PARK,
DRUMCONDRA, DUBLIN.**
On TO-MORROW, 11th JAN.,
Immediately after the First Gospel of
the Last Mass.
**THE ANNUAL CHARITY
SERMON**
In aid of the above Institution
will be preached in the
**CHURCH OF ST. FRANCIS XAVIER,
UPPER GARDINER STREET,**
By the
REV. TIMOTHY J. HALPIN, S.J.
CAN YOU AND WILL YOU HELP?
**214 MAGDALENS RELY ON YOUR
GENEROSITY.**
The Daily Prayers of the Com-
munity and poor Magdalens are
offered for the Benefactors, both
living and dead.
Donations from those who cannot
attend the Sermon will be gratefully
received by the Mother Superior of
the Monastery.

(Classified Ad 69 – No Title. *Irish Times*, 10 January 1942, 4)



(The Magdalen Asylum, High Park, Drumcondra, Dublin. *Irish Press*, 11 January 1958, 3)

This coverage—whether it be advert or reportage—set a very specific narrative and set of frames by which the public would be invited to understand Magdalene Laundries for the grineater part of a century. It provided a vehicle by which the religious orders could frame its own narrative for public consumption as well as appeal for financial support. Much like the institutional childcare system discussed in Section One, the Magdalene Laundries became imbedded in the public discourse as charitable enterprises, places of refuge where women who had strayed from God and good Catholic lives could be rescued and reformed. The women are routinely identified in carceral terms (‘inmates’; ‘penitents’), infantilised, and presented as worthy of pity (‘sinners’; ‘poor creatures’; ‘victims’; ‘weak’; ‘sick’) or disdain (‘delinquents’; ‘miserable dupes’). By contrast, the nuns are portrayed as ‘Christ-like’ in living lives of sacrifice and are possessed of almost supernatural qualities of rescue and reform. The power of this narrative and the accompanying media frames can be seen in the fact that they were being repeated in newspaper coverage as late as the 1990s—even as journalism was evolving to report on the treatment of women in Magdalene Laundries through a controversial frame.

This chapter argues that the result of decades of such press coverage and reportage was the normalisation of the confinement and abuse of women in Magdalene Laundries in wider society by presenting it to the public as charity and moral rescue. The carceral nature of the institutions is never hidden; instead, it is foregrounded as an act of kindness. Between 1920 and 1990, the religious orders which ran the Magdalene Laundries courted a level of publicity in the pages of the national newspapers that amounted to a public campaign. The public could, and did, play a role in this normalisation process by helping to fund the institutions by answering appeals in the press for financial donations and charitable bequests to the institutions. This media framing across decades of reportage also earned the religious a form of social and cultural capital within Irish life which ensured it would not be the focus of any real journalistic inquiry for almost the entirety of the twentieth century. This analysis also echoes the broader argument about Irish journalism developed throughout this dissertation—that it served a dual purpose. First, as an active participant in the creation and maintenance of a national consensus which obscured the abusive nature of the Magdalene Laundry system even as it made it visible; and later, as an industry that evolved to puncture that consensus by framing the institutions as abusive in the 1990s.

Theoretical Framework: ‘Collective action’ framing

In their analysis of the annual reports of the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum (EMA) between 1801 and 1914, Evans and Pierpoint (2015) discuss how the narratives utilised in the reports were used to manage public impressions of the institution:

Narratives can be employed by organisations in fundraising, discharging accountability, promoting corporate objectives, or defending actions and outcomes. The choice of particular narratives, plots and styles permits the organisation to frame its mission statements and to manage impressions. (Evans & Pierpoint, 2015: 661)

Drawing on the work of Erving Goffman on asylums, stigma, impression management and framing, they outline how the institution was framed as a place of refuge and a home and how this was used to ameliorate any potentially negative events or perceptions. The study found that the institution’s annual reports drew on existing societal cultural norms and expectations by utilising religious themes and

master narratives from popular culture. They employed what Snow and Benford (1988) and Benford and Snow (2000) termed diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational framing in order to mobilise support for the institutions and manage expectations (Evans & Pierpoint, 2015: 673). Sentimental narratives ‘of fall and redemption’ were also used as a way of mobilising public support for the EMA itself and its ‘output’—the reformed Magdalene—who, ‘if she did not find redemption in death, could be reintegrated into society as a docile domestic servant, a dutiful daughter, or a wife and mother’ (685). They found that these narratives remained consistent throughout the annual reports for the institution, whereby a dichotomy was created between the ‘irredeemable wicked sinner and the remorseful Magdalen.’

While both were stigmatised, the latter in particular would be presented as an individual, with a life-story, a biography that would evoke empathy and pity. The narrative could also be employed to relate the individual’s moral career before, during and after incarceration in the asylum’s total institution. On the other hand, by framing, *inter alia*, early leavers as irredeemable sinners, the EMA could attribute blame for failures elsewhere and manage expectations (Evans & Pierpoint, 2015: 686).

This chapter argues that, for the majority of the twentieth century, the daily newspaper was a simple, cost effective and ubiquitous medium by which the religious orders that operated Magdalene Laundries in Ireland also engaged in this process of impression management. Its pages offered a conduit to the wider public whereby it could promote a specific narrative and language in order to imbed a positive public impression of the institutions. Operating in what Hallin (1986) termed the ‘sphere of consensus’, where journalists promote a prevailing political or social consensus as accepted fact and opposition to this consensus is limited, Irish journalism was a willing participant in the creation and mediation of this narrative. A binary was created between the saviours and the sinners. The language evident in the adverts and reporting leave the reader in no doubt as to who were the saviours and who were the sinners in this narrative. The nuns are routinely referred to as ‘good’, ‘great’, ‘Christ-like’, ‘heroic’, ‘noble’. They take the place of spiritual mothers guiding their ‘children’ back to salvation. The women, by contrast, are labelled—often in the very same newspaper reports—as ‘poor’, ‘sinning’, ‘sin-stained’, ‘despised’, ‘weak’, ‘fallen’, ‘unfortunates’, ‘friendless’ ‘giddy’, ‘miserable dupes’, ‘irresponsible’. A somewhat different, but equally jarring, binary exists in the

framing of the institutions themselves. They are at once a ‘second home’ but also ‘asylums’ and a ‘penitentiary. They are both ‘homey’, but their residents are ‘inmates’. This merging of the language of the carceral with the language of charity and kindness often occurs in the same press reports and sometimes in the same sentences.

The coverage presents the institutions as being in a state of almost constant financial crisis. The public, in both the advertisements of charity sermons and fundraising events, and the news coverage of these occasions, is repeatedly reminded that this work of rescue was under almost daily threat from the financial pressures faced by the nuns. Debt, which is routinely described using terms like ‘heavy’, ‘large’ and ‘crushing’, is presented as the invisible and ever-present worldly threat to the ‘Christ-like’ work being undertaken on behalf of the women incarcerated behind Magdalene Laundry walls. The newspaper coverage repeatedly called on the public to donate money in return for prayers from the ‘inmates’. This narrative created a powerful and morally driven moral cocktail for a deeply Catholic populace. As Frehill (2020) and Enright (2023) have argued, a faithful Irish public would have understood this call for financial support as an investment in their own salvation. The result is that the very act of incarcerating women, sometimes for the remainder of their lives, to engage in unpaid labour is presented to the public as an act of charity. The distinction between confinement and kindness dissolves. Incarceration becomes charity. The language and tone of the adverts, as well as the faithful reporting of succession of charity sermons in aid of the institutions, serves to normalise their carceral nature as charity, while at the same time mobilising public support for these practices.

However, the newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries was more than simply an exercise in managing public impressions of the institutions. The pages of the national newspapers offered the religious orders a vehicle for more direct engagement with the public in the form of a public campaign or a call to collective action in support of the work of the institutions. Snow and Benford (1988) argue that the successful mobilisation of support for any campaign requires the employment of three core framing tasks: (1) the diagnosis of some aspect of social life as problematic (2) a proposed solution to that problem and (3) a call to arms or a rationale for engaging in the suggested corrective action. These ‘collective action frames’ they labelled—diagnostic, prognostic and motivational. They are ‘action

oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate social movement activities and campaigns' (Benford & Snow, 2000: 614). Gamson (1995) suggests there are three further components to these collective action frames: injustice, agency and identity. The injustice element relates to the presence of some form of emotion laden moral indignation. The agency component refers to the awareness that it is possible to change things through collective action. Finally, the identity element relates to the process of defining an adversarial component—a problematic 'they' with different values or behaviours who stand in opposition to the morally correct 'we'. Collective action itself requires 'a consciousness of human agents whose policies or practices must be changed and a "we" who will help to bring about change' (Gamson, 1995: 90).

This chapter argues that these collective action frames, visible in Evans and Pierpoint's (2015) analysis of the annual reports of the Edinburgh Magdalene Asylum between 1801 and 1914, are also evident in the newspaper coverage of Irish Magdalene institutions between 1920 and the 1970s.

Diagnostic framing: The 'problem' of 'sinning' women

Diagnostic framing, involving the identification of a problem and attributing blame and causality, is particularly visible in the coverage of the regular charity sermons in aid of the institutions between the 1920s and the late 1950s. These sermons were commonplace events in this period and were advertised widely in the national press. They were also deemed newsworthy events by editors. The sermons themselves were not reproduced verbatim but, instead, were covered as traditional news stories with news reporters deciding on the principal news line and the most newsworthy elements. The sermons, which were also later broadcast on Radio Éireann from the mid-1930s, saw a succession of clerics highlight how Irish society, and particularly the virtue of women and children, was at risk from the threats posed by certain 'evil habits' (*Irish Independent*, 1938). These included things as varied and diverse as cinema, dance halls, alcohol, particularly types of fashion and literature, 'indulgence in vice' (*Irish Times*, 1937), sex outside of marriage, promiscuity, temptation, inadequate parenting, and even simple poverty.

This identification of the problem posed by sinning women is evident right from the foundation of the state. In one charity sermon, on behalf of the Gloucester Street

Magdalene Laundry in Dublin, the Rev Andreas Macardle SJ speaking at the Church of St Francis Xavier on Lower Gardiner Street is reported as warning those in attendance against the dangers posed by cinema and of ‘modern dress’—particularly for women (*Irish Times*, 1922):

PRESENT-DAY MORALS.

THE SAFEGUARDING OF THE YOUNG.

References to present-day morals were made by the Rev. Andreas Macardle, S.J., at the Church of St. Francis Xavier, Lower Gardiner street, Dublin, yesterday, in making an appeal for support on behalf of the Magdalen Asylum, Gloucester street.

He paid a tribute to the excellent work carried on by the nuns for the salvation of the penitent Magdalens who came to them. The

(Present-Day Morals: The Safeguarding of the Young. *Irish Times*, 31 October 1922, 8)

JESUIT AND MODERN FASHIONS

Rev. A. Macardle, S.J., preaching in St. Francis Xavier's Church yesterday in aid of the Magdalen Asylum, Gloucester St., commented on the reckless independence and luxurious selfishness of the young people of to-day, and urged the need for increased vigilance on the part of parents, and condemned the slavish imitation of modern imported fashions, the reading of immoral literature and the frequenting of picture houses and night dances.

(Selfishness of To-day: Jesuit and Modern Fashions. *Irish Independent*, 30 October 1922, 5)

Fr. Macardle, the reader is told, ‘condemned the slavish imitation of modern imported fashions, the reading of immoral literature and the frequenting of picture houses and night dances’. The priest called for ‘increased vigilance’ on the part of parents to counter the ‘reckless independence and luxurious selfishness’ of young people (*Irish Independent*, 1922). Previously ‘modest girls’ had now allowed themselves to become ‘slaves of fashion’, appearing in clothes that ‘tended to degrade them’ (*Irish Times*, 1922). Fr Macardle also listed the ‘haunts of vice’ which were endangering young people. These included picture houses which ‘pandered to the lowest passions of the human mind’. Unlike immoral books, which could only be

read by one person at a time, ‘one bad film became a serious source of temptation to a multitude’ (*Irish Independent*, 1922). Fr Macardle also stressed the importance of the nuclear family: ‘The happiness of every State depended on the happiness of the home, and it was a happy land that could boast of many of them.’ (*Irish Times*, 1922). Here, in coverage across two national newspapers, Irish society is presented in the most singular fashion—one where there was no place for women and children who existed outside the confines of a Catholic family.

This type of diagnostic framing is still evident in the coverage a decade later. Interests deemed as too ‘modern’ such as cinemas, dance halls and literature remained a critical threat to women. As Clair Wills has observed, in a post-independent Ireland still grappling with developing a sense of national identity distinct from British influence, ‘becoming modern appeared dangerously close to becoming foreign’ (Wills, 2007: 30). Modernity itself was tied up in morality; in an innate fear that socialising and the ‘awkward vigour of youth’ would undermine the idealised chaste image of Irish womanhood’ (Wills, 2007, 32).

For example, at a charity sermon in aid of the High Park Magdalen Laundry in Drumcondra, a Fr Aloysius is reported by the *Irish Press* as having ‘condemned the evil influence of the cinema and foreign Press’ (*Irish Press*, 1932). On the other side of Dublin city, the *Irish Times* covered the sermon of the Rev P. Gannon who addressed ‘the lure of sinful amusements and dangerous pleasures, and the consequence of immoral living’ (*Irish Times*, 1933). While these threats were somewhat vague, the *Irish Independent* report of the sermon was more direct, telling its readers that in making his appeal on behalf of the Magdalene Laundry, Fr. Gannon ‘deprecat[ed] the tendency frequently evidenced in current literature to excuse the aberrations of such women’. These women ‘had been giddy, irresponsible and undisciplined at the start, too eager for attention, flattery, and fine dress, too addicted to cinemas, music halls, and the like’. Fr Gannon warned that what was required was ‘...higher standards all round, more reserve in intercourse between the sexes, more modesty in dress and conduct on the part of women, less perpetual thrusting forward of sex appeal, more chivalrous regard for women on the part of men’ (*Irish Independent*, 1933). In other cases, the women were ‘victims of the lust of men’ (*Irish Press*, 1931) or needed to be rescued from ‘from the streets, from the jail, from despair and from suicide’ (*Irish Press*, 1941). Sometimes, the dangers went unspecified and were not always preached by members of the clergy. In an *Irish*

Times report of the ‘annual meeting and gift day’ of Dublin’s only Church of Ireland Magdalene Laundry on Leeson Street in Dublin, M A. Reeves, the matron of Dr. Steeven’s Hospital, pointed out that the ‘temptations to which girls were exposed at present were appalling’ (*Irish Times*, 1943). Just what these temptations were is not mentioned. Other vague references were made to women engaging in ‘evil habits’, falling foul of ‘the world’s wickedness’, or simply ‘poverty and lack of home life’ (*Irish Times*, 1920); *Irish Press* 1951; *Irish Press*, 1957). In another case, the public was simply told that ‘the problem which the Magdalen Asylum had been erected to solve on Christian lines was more pressing to-day than ever before’ (*Irish Press*, 1945).

The arrival of post-war peace was also weaponised as something that posed a societal problem and was a danger to the moral purity of Irish women and girls. Again, the sermons in aid of the Magdalene Laundries provided the public space for this diagnostic frame, while the newspaper supplied the medium for the wider public to consume it. In a sermon in the Pro-Cathedral for the Sean McDermott Street Magdalene Laundry, the Rev C. O’Driscoll said the Emergency restrictions had led to a ‘violent reaction to self-restraint’ with the coming of peace time. The ever-looming spectre of non-marital sexual encounters loomed large in O’Driscoll’s comments. He is reported as having seen women, the majority in their teens, ‘helplessly drunk’ being helped along by ‘male escorts’ (*Irish Times*, 1946). At another charity sermon in Dublin’s Pro-Cathedral in aid of the same institution, Fr M. Heffernan told those in attendance that the ‘growing prevalence of vice’ in Ireland ‘could be partly explained by our being affected by the importation of mistaken maxims of morality’ (*Irish Independent*, 1948). The failure of parents to raise their children in the appropriate moral fashion was highlighted by the Rev R. Maguire in the annual charity sermon for the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra in 1949. He stressed the ‘dangers in allowing young girls of twelve to fourteen years of age to be out late on the streets at night’ who risked becoming the ‘victims of depraved human beings’. There were other girls who simply ‘sinned knowingly’ (*Irish Independent*, 1949).

Prognostic framing: The Magdalene Laundry as charity

The newspaper coverage also reveals obvious prognostic framing—the offering of a proposed solution and strategies to deal with the problems outlined in these charity sermons. This element of the coverage, unsurprisingly, lists the Magdalene Laundries themselves, the charitable rescue work being done by the nuns and the ‘training’ they provided for the women residing in them as the solution to the myriad of dangers facing Irish women. Behind their walls, not only could these wayward women find a ‘home’ and ‘refuge’, but they could also be rehabilitated and ‘trained’ for suitable roles upon their return to society. They could become, as Evans and Pierrepont (2015) noted, the ‘reformed Magdalene’ who could be returned to society to take up a suitable role as ‘a docile domestic servant, a dutiful daughter, or a wife and mother’ (685). This rehabilitation and reform would be achieved through their incarceration and the exploitation of their labour for what were ostensibly commercial enterprises. The carceral nature of this supposed charity is to the forefront of the coverage. It is never hidden. The language contained in the adverts and resultant news coverage was clear that these institutions were places of confinement, where some women worked for the remainder of their lives. The result is that this solution to the problem of so-called deviant women—incarceration—is normalised as an act of charity and rescue.

This prognostic frame, where the carceral nature of the institutions is presented as charity, is seen not just in the news coverage but also in the advertisements for various fundraising efforts for the institutions, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s. In these adverts, references like ‘great work of mercy’; ‘one of the most deserving institutions in Ireland’; ‘this truly Charitable Institution’; ‘care and shelter’ are commonplace (*Irish Independent*, 1922; *Irish Independent*, 1921; *Irish Times*, 1928; *Irish Times*, 1930). However, no effort was made to conceal the fact that the Magdalene Laundries were, in fact, places where women were confined in order to work for no payment. For example, in a range of Christmas appeals it published in December editions of the *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* between 1922 and 1941, the Religious Sisters of Charity which ran the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry openly labelled itself as ‘the oldest penitentiary in Dublin’:



(Christmas Appeals: Kind Friends! Please Don't Forget in Distributing Your Christmas Alms. *Irish Independent*, 15 December 1933, 1)

The tone and large lettering used in the advert suggest this was not a mere statement of fact but also something of a source of pride. A separate advert described the work of the 'penitentiary' as 'reclaiming souls to grace, peace and happiness' (*Irish Independent*, 1935). In *Irish Times* coverage of a charity sermon in 1920, the Rev B. Costelloe described the origins of the institution as a 'charitable undertaking of two humble persons—a working man and a woman—who moved at the sight of the misery of the poor outcasts in the streets, provided a refuge for a few of them'. The laundry at this point, the reader is told, had over 100 'poor penitents' living behind its walls (*Irish Times*, 1920). Similarly, in an annual sermon preached at the Church of the Sacred Heart in Donnybrook in 1922, Fr Malachy Oranfield is reported as describing the Sisters running the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry as 'providing not only shelter but a comfortable home to the penitent Magdalen' (*Irish Independent*, 1922). This work, readers were told, should 'obtain the sympathy of every Christian heart'. Another newspaper report recorded the cleric as stating that that the institution provided 'not only shelter but a comfortable home' (*Irish Times*, 1922). This normalisation of incarceration as an act of charity and kindness is repeated in the coverage of multiple Magdalene institutions across decades. Terms such as 'that spiritual hospital' (*Irish Times*, 1938), 'soul hospital' (*Irish Press*, 1956); 'a haven of safety' (*Irish Press*, 1951) and 'a happy home' (*Irish Press* 1954) are just some examples of the language used to describe the carceral nature of the institutions. In one report of an annual appeal in aid of the High Park Magdalene Laundry, a Fr Angelus is directly quoted describing High Park as being both simultaneously a 'Magdalen Asylum' and 'a home for weak and fallen girls', 'a haven of safety', 'a

sanctuary of prayer and penance, and reparation' and 'a charity for souls' (*Irish Independent*, 1933). Speaking at a 'gift day' for the Church of Ireland Magdalene Laundry on Leeson Street in Dublin in June 1928, Bishop Plunkett described the 'homey' feeling he experienced when he visited 'that most useful if, unfortunately, necessary institution'. The report stated that what most struck the prelate was the fact that the 'inmates were not treated as members of an institute, but they found there a second home with all the understanding and sympathy they needed in their trouble' (*Irish Times*, 1928). The fact that the women residing in this 'second home' were described as 'inmates' does not seem to have registered with either Bishop Plunkett or the *Irish Times* reporter. Given the dominant consensus media frame of the Magdalene Laundries, incarceration was simply coterminous with charity. This portrayal of the Magdalene Laundries as being almost like a second home continued in the reportage as late as the 1950s. In an *Irish Independent* report of an annual appeal on behalf of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra, the Rev J.C. Smyth describes the institution as 'a home-from home for more than 160 women of all ages'. Women were 'not only given a home and occupation, but they were also trained in domestic economy' (*Irish Independent*, 1957). In another report, readers are told that institution was a 'magnificent charity' where around '200 girls found shelter and a home' (*Irish Independent*, 1956). The Rev G. McDonnell is reported describing the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry in similarly homely terms. It was a place where some 150 women were given 'every comfort, and where the women in the care of the nuns had every amusement' (*Irish Independent*, 1955). In other coverage, the public is told that the women in the institution—referred to by the nuns as 'children'—were 'happy in their new found home' where they were now making reparations for their past lives by 'living in prayer and penance' (*Irish Press*, 1937; *Irish Press*, 1939). Indeed, in some cases, the public was told that the Magdalene institutions offered something better than the homes they grew up in. They were brought closer to God. In a sermon broadcast on Radio Éireann, Fr Aloysius is reported as having told listeners:

“Many of those for whom I plead never knew what home meant until, in the Home at Gloucester St., they learned to feel the nearness of a kind God and the influence of a merciful religion,” said Very Rev. Father Aloysius, O.M.Cap., in an appeal from Radio Eireann last night on behalf of the Magdalen Asylum, Gloucester St., Dublin.

(Capuchin Appeals for Aid: Deserving Institution. *Irish Independent*, 2 January 1939, 4)

Adversarial framing: Saints and Sinners

The prognostic framing of the Magdalene institutions also extended to the nuns who operated them. Indeed, such was the perceived importance of the work carried out by the religious orders, it was often portrayed in the newspaper coverage as being imbued with an almost supernatural quality. The nuns are routinely described in laudatory and reverential terms such as ‘Christ-like’; ‘heroic’; ‘excellent’; ‘splendid’; ‘good’; ‘valiant’ and ‘patient’. This stands in stark contrast to the women under their care who are infantilised as either weak or passive victims to be pitied, or active and knowing sinners to be despised. Terms and phrases like ‘miserable dupes’; ‘poor sinners’; ‘poor victims’; ‘unfortunates’; ‘weak’; ‘fallen’; ‘giddy’; ‘irresponsible’; ‘undisciplined’; ‘sinning’; ‘despised’; ‘wanderers’; ‘castaways’; ‘downtrodden’; ‘friendless’; ‘outcasts’; and ‘sin-stained’ occur throughout the reportage with some repeated across decades of coverage. This creation of a binary between the ‘saviours’ and ‘sinners’ is what Gamson (1995) identified as ‘adversarial framing’. This type of frame clearly delineates the good ‘we’ from an elusive ‘they’ who operate to different norms and values. Frehill (2021) has pointed out that institutional narratives also tend to privilege one set of historical actors over another; something clearly evident in the newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries in the period under discussion (Frehill, 2021: 72).

This binary of saviours and sinners can be seen and is repeatedly reinforced in advertisements and newspaper coverage of sermons from the 1920s until the early 1960s. It is almost always presented in adversarial terms where the goodness of the nuns is contrasted with the failings of the women under their care. One of the earliest examples can be seen in a report of a sermon on behalf of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry by the Rev. Andreas Macardle at the Church of Sr Francis

Xavier on Lower Gardiner Street in 1922. In the article, the reader is told that the cleric praised the ‘excellent’ work of the nuns ‘for the salvation of the penitent Magdalens who came to them’:

financial stress. The nuns did splendid things for these poor sinners, saving them from a moral and physical ruin, and opening up a new period of life, in which to forget and overcome the weaknesses of the dark days. What should they say about the scoundrels who led these miserable dupes into an existence of utter degradation, who, with a brazen face, could look at his fellow-men? He had a craven heart, and sooner or later the vengeance of an angry God would overtake him.

(Present-Day Morals: The Safeguarding of the Young. *Irish Times*, 31 October 1922, 8)

The ‘splendid’ nuns stand in stark contrast to the women under their care who were referred to as ‘miserable dupes’ led into an ‘existence of utter degradation’ (*Irish Times*, 1922). The nuns are the gatekeepers of refuge, repentance and, ultimately, salvation. It is noteworthy, and somewhat ironic, that the laundry is described as a place where the women would ‘forget’ their past. These institutions, so visible in towns and cities and in the newspapers the public read, would become structures that allowed society to forget these women in the decades that followed Ireland’s independence.

This tendency to laud the nuns and their work while simultaneously seeking to diminish the women under their care occurs throughout the newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries. The public was told there is ‘no more noble work’ that that being done by the nuns for the salvation of the ‘poor victims of the lust of men’ (*Irish Press*, 1931). The ‘good nuns’ were housing, clothing, and feeding ‘these poor unfortunates’ who were being ‘raised from a state of degradation and sin to the state of grace’ (*Irish Independent*, 1931). Elsewhere, the nuns are reported as exercising ‘Christ-like sweetness and unbounded charity’ in order to help ‘those poor souls in their struggles against violent temptation and to persuade them to remain in the institution.’ (*Irish Times*, 1937). A Fr. Laurence described the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry as somewhere where over 100 ‘wayward women...accustomed in the past to follow their own whims, could sometimes only with the greatest difficulty be trained in the practice of self-discipline’ (*Irish Times*, 1937). Both the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press* carried a report of a sermon given by Fr J.J.

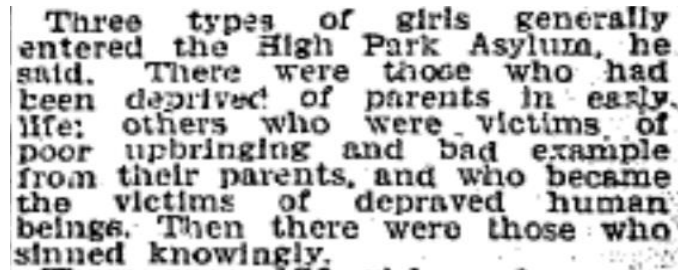
Powell in aid of Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry, where he contrasted the kindness of the nuns with the ‘despised’ women under their care:

In the home in Gloucester St. there was kindness, sympathy, consideration, and encouragement. All this helped the penitents to see God's mercy, helped them to grieve for their past, encouraged them in the path of virtue, uplifted and strengthened them for the future. They were no longer castaways, down-trodden and despised.

(Sermon in Aid of a Notable Charity: Magdalen Asylum. *Irish Independent*, 27 September 1937, 6)

A report of a sermon given by the Rev M.P. Cleary on the Beatitude ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit’, quoted him as describing the nuns ‘behind the grim walls of Refuge homes and Magdalen Asylums’ as ‘ladies’ but the women under their care as ‘the least and last of society’. (*Irish Press*, 1937). In another charity sermon, Rev Charles Molony described the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra in Dublin as a place where ‘you will find Christ’s view of great Christians who came to seek and save that which was lost’ (*Irish Press*, 1941). In other reports, the nuns were described as providing a ‘home’ for ‘weak and fallen girls’ and ‘poor creatures’ (*Irish Press*, 1950). The institutions were portrayed as ‘a haven of safety’ where ‘girl victims of the world’s wickedness were made happy and brought back into the grace of God’ (*Irish Press*, 1951). In some cases, identical phrases and descriptions of the nuns and women are used repeatedly across decades of news coverage. Readers were told persistently about the ‘good nuns’ (*Irish Independent*, 1923; *Irish Independent*, 1931; *Irish Press*, 1956) and that the women under their care were ‘more sinned against than sinning’ (*Irish Times*, 1922, *Irish Times*, 1937; *Irish Independent*, 1937). In a charity sermon in aid of the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry, the Rev Simon Hayes described the women in the institution as being reared in ‘poverty, unhealthy surroundings, with profligacy frequently before their eyes, it was little to wonder that many fell’. Hayes went on to say that when confronted ‘with hunger, torn by remorse and deprived of self-respect, they sunk deeper in the paths of shame’ (*Irish Times*, 1938). In another sermon, later that year at the Pro-Cathedral in aid of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry, the Rev J. Reilly described the 130 women as ‘sin-

stained souls' residing in 'that spiritual hospital' (*Irish Times*, 1938). In his description of the women entering the High Park Magdalene Laundry, Rev R. Maguire listed three 'types of women' who ended up in the institution:



Three types of girls generally entered the High Park Asylum, he said. There were those who had been deprived of parents in early life; others who were victims of poor upbringing and bad example from their parents, and who became the victims of depraved human beings. Then there were those who sinned knowingly.

(Preachers Appeal to Parents. *Irish Independent*, 10 January 1949, 5)

By contrast, the nuns were represented as having sacrificed their own happiness in order to carry out work of charity and kindness that was sometimes framed as supernatural and miraculous. As early as 1922, newspaper coverage described how the Sisters had 'sacrificed their own home comforts and family associations in order to provide for the shelter and spiritual wants of these poor Magdalens' (*Irish Independent*, 1922). The public is told of how these women had 'given their lives to God'; of 'the heroic self-sacrifice and self-abnegation the Sisters were called upon to exercise' and of how they had 'devoted their lives to the service of those girls' (*Irish Independent*, 1924; *Irish Independent*, 1938; *Irish Independent*, 1944). As Irish society approached the 1960s, these same themes of sacrifice were still being reinforced in newspapers. The nuns were reported as having 'worked day and night on behalf of those girls' and that they had 'devoted their lives to that work of reclaiming the fallen' (*Irish Independent*, 1954; *Irish Press*, 1956). They had 'given up everything, home and family and friends and the normal joys of life to look after a despised fraction of womankind' (*Irish Independent*, 1958).

The scale of this sacrifice had bestowed upon the nuns running the institutions a form of sanctity that allowed them to perform acts of God. The newspaper coverage reveals clerics directly stating that the work taking place behind the walls of Magdalene Laundries was more than mere charity. It was miraculous. Indeed, some clerics were so taken by the supernatural nature of the work of the nuns that identical wording was used to describe it in fundraising sermons given for two separate institutions in 1928 and, five years later, in 1933:

All Magdalen Asylums witnessed miracles of conversion and moral transformation so wonderful, so supernatural, that the Godless world, which disbelieved in the supernatural, refused to credit them. If the

(Debasing Modern Influences: Dangers To Society in Bad Literature and Immodest Dress. *Irish Independent*, 9 January, 1928, 5)

entrusted to their care. All the Magdalen Asylums witnessed miracles of conversion and moral transformation so wonderful, so supernatural, that a godless world, which disbelieved in the supernatural, refused to credit them,

(Great Charity that needs help: The Magdalen Asylum. *Irish Independent*, 28 February 1933, 5)

These supernatural acts of charity were also reported as having been witnessed. Coverage pointed out those ‘who had the good fortune to be brought into close contact with the work’ could see ‘the heights of sanctity to which many of them attained’ (*Irish Press*, 1939). In 1947, a Fr Angelus was reported as having ‘seen poor penitents in their degradation, and he had seen them transformed into new beings and die the death of saints’ (*Irish Independent*, 1947).

Motivational framing: Crisis and salvation

This type of language where the saviours and sinners are clearly defined and where confinement of women is presented as the work of God must have been an extremely intoxicating narrative to a predominantly and devoutly Catholic populace. It also provided the bridge to what Benford and Snow (1992) identified as the final core frame task—motivational. This frame serves as a sort of ‘call to arms’, a plea to the wider public to engage in collective action in to address the problems already identified (Benford and Snow, 2000: 617). According to Gamson (1995), a key component in motivational frames is the development of ‘agency’—the awareness that it is possible to create the desired change through collective action. They empower people by ‘defining them as potential agents of their own history’ and that, not only can something be done, ‘but that “we” can do something’ (Gamson, 1995:

90). This is achieved by the creation of ‘socially constructed vocabularies’ which provide people with compelling accounts for engaging and sustaining them in collective action (Benford and Snow, 2000: 617). In the case of the coverage of the Magdalene Laundries, the motivational frames centred on vocabularies of crisis and salvation.

One of the basic tenets of all news coverage is that it should be compelling. As a form of narrative storytelling, news reporting requires the creation of drama, winners and losers and moments of peril and crisis. The newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries between 1920 and 1960 reflects this need by presenting the institutions as being in an almost permanent state of financial crisis. The readers—in both the adverts for Magdalene Laundries and resultant news coverage—are constantly warned that the work of rescue that the nuns were engaging in was in jeopardy due to extreme financial pressures. A sense of urgency pervades the public appeals for financial assistance. Debt is referred to in stark terms like ‘heavy debt’ (*Irish Independent*, 1921; *Irish Times*, 1931; *Irish Times*, 1932; *Irish Times*, 1936; *Irish Times*, 1938; *Irish Independent*, 1942; *Irish Press*, 1951; *Irish Independent*, 1966), ‘huge debt’ (*Irish Independent*, 1920), ‘large debt’ (*Irish Independent*, 1938; *Irish Independent*, 1940) ‘crushing debt’ (*Irish Independent*, 1939). It is the public alone who can stave off this debt by donating to the institutions, thereby allowing them to remain open and continue their work on behalf of Christ. As a result, the coverage, is littered with appeals to the public to donate money either directly or through charitable bequest upon death. The reward for this is also publicised, namely receiving the prayers of ‘the Magdalens’ and the nuns, and the knowledge that they would be placed in God’s grace by investing financially—quite literally—in the salvation of souls.

This public campaign for financial donations is consistent across all the coverage of the Magdalene Laundries from the early 1920s right into the 1950s. As early as 1923, newspaper reports recorded the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry as being in dire straits financially and that ‘Funds are badly needed’ in order that its ‘great religious and philanthropic work’ can continue (*Irish Independent*, 1923). At a charity sermon that same year, a Fr Bury is reported as telling those in attendance that the institution faced a ‘heavy debt’ of ‘£3,000 upon which interest had to be paid, rent of £270, taxes of £80’ (*Irish Independent*, 1923). These debts never seem to be settled or paid. By 1931, Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry is again reported

as struggling under a ‘heavy debt of £7,000’ (*Irish Independent*, 1931). This was, ‘a debt these Sisters took on themselves to make more accommodation’ for the women under their care (*Irish Independent*, 1933). Once again, the nuns are presented as making a sacrifice—this time financial—so that sinning women could be saved from themselves. In 1936, the Rev R.J Murphy reminded the public that the laundry attached to the institution ‘does not produce sufficient revenue’ to ensure that the ‘very heavy debt’ still faced by the institution was cleared (*Irish Times*, 1936). An advert for a radio appeal published later that decade informed the public that this ‘large debt’ had yet to be serviced. In the ensuing news report, a Fr Aloysius is reported to have reminded the public that the ‘extension of the premises left a crushing debt of £5,000’ (*Irish Independent*, 1939). The language used was often stark when describing the impending sense of peril facing the institution. By 1941, the reader is told that ‘the outlook is black’ (*Irish Independent*, 1941). By 1950, the financial crisis facing Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry had still not abated. The reporting of charity sermons revealed a public continually being reminded of debts accrued as a result of ‘a large scheme of building and reconstruction’ that left the institution ‘in debt to the extent of thousands of pounds’ and that funds were still ‘urgently needed’ (*Irish Independent*, 1950).

This sense of financial crisis was not confined to the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry. Other institutions also fostered this narrative in their advertising of upcoming events like annual and charity sermons. This was then reproduced and reinforced through the ensuing news coverage across multiple publications. An *Irish Press* headline for a report for a sermon in aid of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in 1937 is typical of how direct these appeals often were: ‘Financial Help Needed: Carmelite’s Appeal for Magdalen Asylum’ (*Irish Press*, 1937). More than 20 years later, the very same institution was still presenting itself as being in desperate need of public donations. For example, a news report of a radio appeal for the laundry in 1958 was headlined: ‘Magdalen Asylum Needs More Funds’ (*Irish Independent*, 1958). A letter to the editor in the *Irish Independent* in 1938 revealed that a committee had recently been set up to help fundraise to reduce a debt of over £900 at the Dún Laoghaire Magdalen Laundry. The Honorary Secretary of the Collection Committee Alfred Byrne, who listed his medical qualifications after his name, wrote that, despite the fact that the nuns were providing a free service, ‘the Sisters find the cost of keeping the Refuge open a very heavy burden financially’ (Byrne, 1938). Just

a few years later, a report of a radio appeal broadcast on Radio Éireann quoted a Fr Sebastian Lee is reported as having told listeners that the situation in the institution was now ‘critical’ and that it was ‘in danger of having to close its doors and send back to the world those it now shelters’ (*Irish Independent*, 1944). On the other side of the city, the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry also mediated its own financial woes to the public through the press. A report of a sermon by Fr Simon Hayes in aid of the institution cited the cleric telling those in attendance that nuns faced a ‘grinding anxiety to make ends meet’ as they struggled to cope with ‘longstanding debts and increasing liabilities’ (*Irish Independent*, 1938). By 1947, not much has changed. The *Irish Independent* report of yet another charity sermon stated that, for the entirety of its 60 years of operation, the institution had had ‘no financial stability’ and was now in desperate need of public donations (*Irish Independent*, 1947).

In all of these descriptions of crisis, the public is presented as the only option for salvation of the institution. The appeals for donations through adverts and news coverage often sought to invoke a sense of moral duty in the public and serve as the ‘call to arms’ evident in the final core frame task identified by Benford and Snow (2006)—motivational. The public was told that the nuns had ‘a claim on the generosity of all the faithful’ because the work of rescue they were engaging in was ‘a continuation of the work of Christ’ (*Irish Press*, 1931). The coverage repeatedly stressed that, as the Magdalene Laundries receive no financial assistance from the state, they could only survive through the financial support of the Irish public.

Across consecutive decades, the coverage of appeals for the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry reminded the reader that the institution was totally reliant on donations from the public. In the early 1920s, it was ‘deeply in debt’ and had ‘no revenue but the charity of the people of Dublin’ and that ‘the generosity of the people was the only hope that they might keep the doors open to all poor wanderers’ (*Irish Independent*, 1924; *Irish Independent*, 1923). By the 1930s, this narrative remained unchanged. In a report of a radio appeal for the same institution, the reader was told that ‘as no Government grant or State aid is received the Sisters must rely on the kindness of benefactors’ (*Irish Independent*, 1938). A report of a charity sermon carried in the *Irish Independent* pointed out that the 36 Sisters caring for the women received ‘no Government grant to carry on their work of mercy and they must, therefore, rely on the charitable public’ (*Irish Independent*, 1937). As always, the threat to the work of rescue loomed large, with the public being told that it would

not be possible to care for the ‘inmates even in the most modest fashion unless the public came to the aid of the institution more generously than before.’ (*Irish Independent*, 1941). Fr D.N. Lamont reminded those in attendance at a charity sermon in aid of the institution at the Pro-Cathedral in Dublin in 1943 that it received ‘no financial aid from any source: they were completely dependent on the charity of the public’ and ‘did not get anything, even, in respect of the girls sent to the institution by the courts’ (*Irish Independent*, 1943). In a report of the same sermon in the *Irish Press*, the cleric was directly quoted imploring the public to prevent the closure of the institution:

Rev. Fr. Angelus said that poverty and slum life were responsible for the fall of many of the Magdalens of to-day. Young, innocent, unsuspecting girls from the country were lured from happy homes, unaware of the dangers and temptations of city life. “I want you to make it possible for the good Nuns to keep their door wide open for those who come to them for shelter and salvation,” he said.

(Magdalen Asylum: Two Dublin Appeals. *Irish Press*, 18 October 1943, 3)

In a report of another charity sermon later that decade, a Fr. Cotter reiterated that the institution received ‘No Government or local grant was given, and the Sisters depended entirely on the charity of the public’ (*Irish Independent*, 1947). The adverts for the institution also made this clear, with a number of appeals in 1948 and again in 1951—some of which were on the front page—reminding the public that ‘140 Magdalens are relying on your generosity’ (*Irish Independent*, 1948; *Irish Independent*, 1951).



(Next Sunday - 6.45p.m: Radio Appeal on behalf of the Magdalene Asylum, Lower Gloucester St., Dublin. *Irish Independent*, 30 September 1948, 1)

At a sermon at the Pro-Cathedral in 1950, Fr Ernest Cronin was still reminding people that the institution ‘had no public moneys or Government grants to aid it, and relied solely on the charity and generosity of the people’ (*Irish Independent*, 1950). In another sermon, the Rev Fr G. McDonnell made the case for direct state intervention pointing out that if the institution was funded through the public purse it could carry on, but ‘they do not get one penny from the Government, nor do they ask for it’ (*Irish Independent*, 1955).

This narrative of institutional survival being dependant on the financial generosity of the Irish public was echoed by other Magdalene institutions across Dublin. In a letter to the *Irish Independent*, the Honorary Secretary of the Collection Committee for the Dun Laoghaire Magdalene Laundry, Alfred Byrne wrote:

‘The Refuge which is under the care of the Sisters of Mercy, though by no means a local charity, is not in receipt of any State aid whatever, and is solely dependent on the generosity of the public’ (Byrne, 1938).

In a report of a radio appeal for the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry, Fr Benedict Langdon told listeners that that institution received no state aid ‘but was entirely supported by voluntary contributions’ (*Irish Independent*, 1951).

As well soliciting donations, the adverts and news reports also encouraged the public to bequest money to the institutions upon the instance of their death. This was done both directly through adverts and indirectly through motivational anecdotes contained in charity sermons. The language in the adverts requesting money from wills was at times explicit. For example, an advert taken by the Sisters of Our Lady

of Charity which ran the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry told the public that the 125 ‘penitents’ prayed for all those who donated financially to the institution—both ‘living and dead’: ‘Persons making their WILLS, are earnestly requested to remember this truly Charitable Institution which is still heavily in debt’ (*Irish Times*, 1928). This appeal was also echoed in appeals made by members of the clergy. In a report of a radio appeal in aid of the same institution, Fr John Gaffney is reported as having particularly ‘appealed to those making their wills to remember the Magdalen Asylum’ (*Irish Press*, 1937). In other cases, those giving charity sermons cited anecdotal case studies in order to motivate people to leave money to the Magdalene institutions in their wills. Under the internal headline: ‘Pensioners Example’, the *Irish Independent* outlines how one preacher used such a case study to encourage donations:

PENSIONER'S EXAMPLE.

The rev. preacher cited as a worthy example of the appreciation of the great work carried on by the nuns, the case of an old-age pensioner, now deceased, who had left all the money he possessed, a considerable amount, to be devoted to the upkeep of one of these institutions and said the Sisters were endeavouring to keep an open door for the return of the poor penitents, so that in their despair they might not go back to the haunts of vice.

(Selfishness of To-day: Jesuit and Modern Fashions. *Irish Independent*, 30 October 1922, 5)

More than a quarter of a century later, the Rev R. Maguire utilised the same anecdotal form of appeal when speaking in aid of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra. A report in the *Irish Press* cited the priest highlighting the example of a named civil servant ‘earning a thousand pounds a year who, he said, died penniless because he gave all his money to the poor’ (*Irish Press*, 1949).

The success of this campaign is evident in the fact that hundreds of people responded to these calls for charitable bequests. Between 1920 and 1973, when the requirement to publish notifications of charitable bequests was amended under the Charities Act, 1973, hundreds of these notifications highlighting charitable bequests left to the Magdalene Laundries can be seen in the pages of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press*. According to Enright (2023), who has examined charitable bequests

to the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry between 1922 and 1972, the impact of this form of public charity was that it helped to both normalise and fund the confinement and abuse of women in Magdalene Laundries (Enright, 2023). The type of people leaving money to the laundries is also noteworthy. While some of the amounts were small, many coming from the wealthier sections of polite Dublin society left significant donations:

Some were priests. Most were lay people. They were generally men of the merchant, professional and landlord classes, their widows and their surviving daughters, who prospered as Ireland settled into independence. Some were strong farmers. Many lived in wealthier Dublin suburbs such as Rathgar, Dún Laoghaire, Terenure, Ballsbridge and Donnybrook itself (Enright, 2023: 151).

These types of bequests conferred a sense of social status and acceptability on the laundries and the so-called ‘rescue’ work being undertaken behind their walls. Enright (2023b) argues that such bequests helped to ‘reinforce hierarchies that were rooted in deeply gendered conceptions of sin and poverty, morality and desert, hierarchies that normalised and legitimised the Magdalene institutions and their activities’. This funding formed part of ‘a network of benefit and legitimation’ that allowed Magdalene institutions to operate and, further, that those who left money to laundries in their wills were ‘structurally complicit’ in the abuses that occurred (Enright, 2023b: 84). It was also ‘an exercise of power; it affirms one’s status as one of those able to give; a member of a charitable elite’ (Enright, 2023: 152). Donating money also offered a very specific spiritual motivation—the promise of religious and supernatural reward. The adverts frequently informed those who donated money that they were not only investing in the work of God but that they would also receive the prayers of the both the nuns but, also, crucially the ‘penitents’ themselves. These prayers were considered extremely valuable as ‘penitents’ were considered closer to God (Frehill, 2021: 87; Enright, 2023: 154). The rewards that could accrue to the benefactor was frequently foregrounded in adverts, in some cases with the force of block capital letters:

APPEALS.
CHRISTMAS APPEAL,
1924.
 In distributing your Christmas Alms
 please do not forget the
POOR PENITENTS
 in the
MAGDALEN ASYLUM,
DONNYBROOK.
 Those Souls so dear to Christ, pray
DAILY for their **BENEFACTORS**
AND FRIENDS.

(Classified Ad 67 - No Title. *Irish Times*, 16 December 1924, 6)

Those who did contribute financially would 'secure for themselves abundant graces and blessings through the daily prayers offered up by the grateful and repentant Magdalens for their kind Friends and Benefactors'.

The Asylum would be self-supporting were it
 not hampered by a very heavy debt.
 It is to lessen this burden that the Community
 appeal to the GENEROUS and CHARITABLE
 Public. GREAT, INDEED, WILL BE THE
 REWARD for ALL who shall respond to the above
 URGENT APPEAL.

(Classified Ad 29 - No Title. *Irish Times*, 9 October 1936, 6)

Other adverts reminded those who donated money towards this 'noble work for the Salvation of Souls' would 'purchase happiness for themselves in life and the speedy release of the souls in Purgatory, as the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and a General Communion will be offered up every month, and the daily prayers of the Community and the poor Penitents shall be said for the deceased relatives and friends of all who shall respond to this urgent appeal' (*Irish Times*, 1935). These supernatural promises were also reinforced in the news coverage of the advertised annual sermons. For example, the Rev Fr R.A Harnett reminded those who attended a sermon he gave in aid of the Magdalene Laundries that they were 'making a safe investment, the interest on which would be paid by God himself' (*Irish Press*, 1939). As has been noted earlier in this chapter, such a promise of eternal spiritual reward would not have been lost on a devoutly Catholic population.

The visibility of Magdalene Laundries as carceral institutions

However, the reportage does, on occasion, betray a potential creeping wider societal uneasiness in some quarters about the nature of the institutions and their supposed charitable nature. A small number of the reports of sermons reveal clerics defending the laundries against sometimes vague and other times specific charges of potentially abusive behaviour. For example, in 1948, the Rev C. Molony was reported as having told those in attendance for one of his charity sermons that the ‘work done at High Park...might be misunderstood and remain unappreciated by some as it would surely be adversely criticised by others’ (*Irish Independent*, 1948). In a radio appeal on behalf of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry two years later, the Rev Paul O’Brien told listeners that ‘such institutions often were thought of as houses of detention. They had nothing in common with such places; they were houses in which Christian charity was seen at its best’ (*Irish Independent*, 1950). Other reports highlighted a succession of clerics at pains to stress that the women in Magdalene Laundries had entered the institutions voluntarily. One of the earliest examples of this is a report in the *Irish Independent* in 1923 of a sermon given by Rev J. Bury in aid of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry. The news report is, in the main, a standard one—an appeal for financial assistance for the work of the nuns in supporting some ‘120 penitents’. However, Fr. Bury is seen to stress the voluntary nature of the institution. The women had come to be in the laundry ‘voluntarily, they were under no compulsion or restraint’ (*Irish Independent*, 1923). This emphasis on the voluntary nature of the Magdalene Laundry system was still in evidence in reportage as late as the 1950s. In a sermon in aid of the High Park Magdalene Laundry, Rev J. McAuliffe is reported by the *Irish Press* telling the congregation that the 190 women confined in the institution ‘were there of their own free will to live a life of prayer, penance and work.’ (*Irish Press*, 1952). This positioning of the Magdalene Laundries as being places of voluntary confinement in the reportage was done even when that same reporting revealed that women remained in the institutions for decades or, in some cases, the rest of their lives. The reader is told that while, the Magdalene Laundry is an institution where women could leave if they so wished, many of the ‘inmates’ chose to stay there for decades of their lives:

‘The Gloucester St. Asylum had nothing of an institutional rigour or a gaol-like atmosphere about it. The inmates were free to come and go. Some of them had spent more than three score years within its sheltering walls (sic)’ (*Irish Independent*, 1939)

On a broadcast on Radio Éireann, the Rev R. Maguire, preaching in aid of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra, explicitly told listeners that some women spent their entire lives in the institution. It was a place where ‘the girls and women of all ages who had given up the world, some temporarily, the majority for the rest of their lives, to work and pray for the one thing really necessary, the salvation of their immortal souls’ (*Irish Independent*, 1952). In another radio appeal on behalf of the same institution some five years later, Rev R.J. Tyndall used his own personal experience on visiting the institution to assure the public that the ‘160 penitents’ in the institution were happy to be there:

Fr. Tyndall said that on his visit to the asylum he always found the people there happy, and the Sister in Charge assured him the past inmates of the institution in their communications expressed gratitude for what had been done for them by the Community.

(Radio Appeal. *Irish Press*, 19 August 1957, 7)

The public was not only told that women were incarcerated for long periods in the institutions, but news coverage also celebrated that fact. In a radio appeal broadcast on behalf of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra, the Rev O’Keeffe was reported as telling listeners that:

Asylum appeal

Last week three aged women celebrated the golden jubilee of their admission to the care of the nuns who run the Magdalen Asylum, High Park, Drumcandra. Rev. W. O'Keeffe, C.M., said this yesterday when he broadcast an appeal for the asylum. The nuns, he said, had given up everything in order that they devote their attention to almost 290 inmates.

(Asylum Appeal. *Irish Press*, 29 September 1958, 2)

Clearly, the fact that women were spending half a century in Magdalene Laundries was not something that was ever hidden from the Irish public. On the contrary, this type of reportage indicated to the public that large-scale incarceration of this kind was something to be celebrated.

It is difficult to reconcile the claim that these women entered Magdalene Laundries voluntarily with frequent descriptions of them as 'inmates' who often never left.

However, sermons such as these, which were reported in the national press and broadcast on the airwaves, were definitive on these points. That women were confined in Magdalene Laundries for decades and exploited for their labour would eventually come to shock and appal all of Irish society towards the end of the twentieth century. However, the newspaper coverage of these institutions in the decades following Irish independence shows that this was a fact that was never hidden from either the press or wider Irish society. Even on the rare occasions where the reporting betrayed some societal anxiety at the nature of the institutions, it was always portrayed and, normalised, as care, charity and a form of moral rescue.

Earner-Byrne (2003) has argued that, in the first half of the twentieth century, the prevailing view of unmarried motherhood was that it was 'morally untenable and socially undesirable' (Earner-Byrne, 2003: 53). Similarly, Luddy (2007) outlines that, in the newly independent Ireland, both the state and Church saw unmarried mothers 'as a particular danger to the moral condition of the nation' (Luddy, 2007: 200). The language, tone and tenor of the newspaper coverage discussed in this chapter to date only adds credence to this view. In such a stifling and conservative

climate, it is no surprise that in the decades following independence, hundreds of women appeared before the courts facing charges in relation to the deaths of a newborn child. Women were charged with infanticide or the concealment of the birth of an illegitimate child. In a censored departmental report from 1948, Dr. Alice Litster, a Department of Health Inspector for boarded-out children, referred to the victims of infanticide as ‘infants of convenience, respectability and fear. The Church is perhaps waiting for the State to do something. The State is perhaps hoping the Church will do so.’ (Earner-Byrne, 2003: 67). Litster’s words are both revealing and prescient. It is instructive that prior to independence, just one woman convicted of the murder of her illegitimate child served her sentence in a religious institution. Post 1922, 49% of women convicted of concealing a birth or the manslaughter of their child served their sentence in such an institution (Rattigan, 2012: 209). The Criminal Law Amendment Act (1935) and latterly The Infanticide Act (1949) provided the legislative basis for the state’s role in the supposed ‘voluntary’ confinement of women in Magdalene institutions. Smith (2007) argues that this legislation, which inferred that women killed their newborn infants because of a temporary mental incapacity, was a ‘discursive sleight of hand’ that enabled a ‘strategic response on the part of the state; because these mentally deranged women are not criminals per se, they are in need of protection, specifically, protection from themselves’ (Smith, 2007: 62). As these women were suffering from a mental impairment, prisons were deemed unsuitable places of detention. Instead, the state had a ready-made and socially convenient solution in the Magdalene Laundry system. Of the 211 cases examined between 1926 and 1964 by Smith (2007), 54 women found guilty of concealing a birth and receiving a suspended sentence entered a Magdalen Laundry—more than any other institution (Smith, 2007: 63). He further notes that none of these women were directly sentenced to serve a sentence in the institution, as the courts could not remand a woman to a Magdalen laundry until 1960. Instead, the women entered into an agreement with the court to enter the institution ‘voluntarily’ for a period of time. However, once these women entered the Magdalene Laundry system, they were surrendered to the care of the nuns. Smith points out that there is no evidence that probation officers who took the women to the institution ever initiated any follow up checks, nor is there any way to know if any of the women left the Magdalene system once their sentence had been completed (Smith, 2007: 65).

These cases and modes of sentencing were covered in the national press from time to time and again reveal the stark and limited options facing young women who found themselves in a crisis pregnancy. In one case from 1933, the *Irish Times* reported on a 19-year-old woman who had been charged with the murder of her baby daughter. The report notes that the prosecuting barrister, on instruction of the Chief State Solicitor, and having regard to the evidence, would accept a verdict of concealment of birth. The teenager then pleaded guilty to this charge.

Lord Hemphill (instructed by Messrs. Hogan and Shields), for the prisoner, made a plea for leniency on her behalf, and said that she lived in a wild, lonely district. Her mother was dead, and she had no one to advise her or look after her. She was willing to go into the Magdalen Asylum in Galway (*Irish Times*, 1933)

The Judge is reported as having expressed ‘a deep sympathy with the prisoner’ and that there was no evidence to support the charge of murder:

Judge Johnston said he had deep sympathy with the prisoner. There was no evidence to support the charge of murder. The most that could be said was that she left the child exposed in a field. He would let her out on her own recognisance of £100 to be of good behaviour for three years, on her going into the Magdalen Asylum, Galway, and remaining there for one year.

(Murder Charge Not Supported: Justice’s Sympathy with a Prisoner. *Irish Times*, 15 March 1933, 9)

This type of sentencing arrangement reflected the view of the Magdalene institutions as portrayed in the adverts and charitable sermons in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, now the state was bound up with the Church in utilising the Magdalene system as a solution to a social problem. Once again, the confinement of women is not presented in carceral terms but rather as an alternative to incarceration. Women were not being punished by the state. Instead, they were being offered a chance at reform and redemption by voluntarily agreeing to enter a Magdalene Laundry. The judge’s decision to send the teenager to the laundry is seen as a charitable act.

‘Magnificent charity’ vs Commercial enterprise

The newspaper coverage not only reinforced a consensus narrative that the incarceration of women was an act of kindness and charity. It also conferred a form of social and political capital on the religious orders that ran the institutions. As a result, the laundries could be presented, on the one hand, as charitable enterprises which operated laundries as a ‘little industry’ to occupy the women they housed and, on the other hand, fully fledged commercial operations with significant contractual arrangements with a range of private businesses (*Irish Independent*, 1943). In such institutions women could simultaneously be taught ‘the value of a pure and holy life’ while also learning ‘the importance of industry’ (*Irish Independent*, 1927).

Newspaper coverage sometimes switched effortlessly between lauding the ‘Christ-like work’ of the nuns in caring for the ‘inmates’ to advertising the fact that the institutions were profiting off the labour of these very women. For example, in 1967, the Galway Magdalene Laundry took out an advert in the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent* congratulating the Connemara Gateway Motor Inn for a recent award, before adding its delight ‘to be providing a complete laundering and dry cleaning service to this Motel.’



(Classified Ad 22 – No Title. *Irish Times*, 7 June 1967, 6)

In 1975, the same institution took out a similar ad congratulating the luxury Ashford Castle Hotel for its winning of the Egon Ronay Hotel of the Year. The adverts express the institution’s pride of its ‘40 year association’ with the hotel (*Irish Independent*, 1975; *Irish Times*, 1975). This advert was also carried in the *Irish Press*. The language contained in these adverts clearly denotes Magdalene

institutions as commercial entities and stands in stark contrast to the reportage foregrounding them as strictly charitable enterprises and sites of refuge and rescue. The fact that the Magdalene Laundries operated as commercial, for-profit enterprises also becomes apparent on the rare occasions prior to the 1990s where incidents at the institutions placed them at the centre of news reports. In November 1939, both the *Irish Press* and the *Irish Independent* reported on the outbreak of a fire at the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry.

The *Irish Independent's* account of the incident stated that the fire caused 'considerable damage to work on hands as well as to the premises, but nobody was injured' before advising customers that the 'despatch of laundry this week will be disorganised' (*Irish Independent*, 1939). The *Irish Press* coverage is notable for the fact that it focused, not on the fact that the women who worked in the laundry may have faced danger or injury, but rather on providing assurance to its commercial customers that work was continuing as normal. For example, the follow-up in the *Irish Press* the day after the initial report of the fire reported the Rev. Mother as stating that the fire had 'caused some disorganisation' and that she regretted 'the inconvenience to customers, who will be advised of shortages as soon as they are ascertained' (*Irish Press*, 1939). Another notice stated: 'Customers are assured that laundry work is proceeding, and collections will be made as usual' (*Irish Press*, 1939). The language here leaves the reader in no doubt that these were commercial entities and were viewed as such at the time.

However, this positioning of the Magdalene institutions as being simultaneously both a charity and a for-profit commercial enterprise did face challenge from the state when it came to the payment of commercial rates. In one case, which received significant newspaper coverage, the Good Shepherd Sisters running the Waterford Magdalene Laundry went to the Dublin District Court to appeal a decision by the Commissioner of Valuation to impose rates on its laundry. The order claimed an exemption from rates imposed on the Magdalene Laundry and the industrial school it operated, as well as other properties, on the basis that it was a charity. The laundry was operated by some '190 women under the direction of 30 nuns'. The other nuns worked in the industrial school, in which there were children over six years, 'in respect of whom a State grant was paid', and children under six years, 'in which no grant was paid'. According to the reporting, the Good Shepherd Sisters argued that the 'whole institution was conducted as a charity' and any money received by the

laundry or work done for the outside public went ‘to the common fund and was devoted to the charitable purposes of the institution’. The Commissioner, in response, pointed out that it was his duty to administer the law as he found it but, in a striking note of deference, he ‘also wished to testify to the good work done by the sister institutions at High Park and Gloucester Street, Dublin’ (*Irish Times*, 1928). In a decision the following October, the court ruled against the order and stressed that the institution was a commercial entity turning a considerable profit:

Mr. Justice Sullivan said that a laundry was run and made a net profit of £1,300 a year. The laundry was not exempt, and he could not see how the Court could hold that the convent was used exclusively for charitable purposes when it afforded accommodation not only for the congregation running the industrial school and the asylum, but also for the nuns engaged in supervising the work and management of the laundry.

(Sinn Féin Bank: Finance Minister a Creditor Before Mr Justice Sullivan and Mr. Justice O’Byrne.
Irish Times, 25 March 1930, 3)

This amounts to a roughly €100,000 yearly profit in today’s terms. The findings of the case also stand in stark contrast to a principal finding of the McAleese inquiry in 2013 that the Magdalene Laundries ‘were operated on a subsistence or close to break-even basis rather than on a commercial or highly profitable basis’ (McAleese, 2013: 993). Enright (2023) has noted that while the High Court in this case confirmed the state’s authority to charge rates on the property used for the Magdalene Laundry’s commercial and for-profit activities, it did not see fit to examine how this profit derived from the unpaid labour of the women in the institution (Enright, 2023: 156). Neither, it would appear, did any of the newspapers or journalists who reported on the case.

Cases like the above, which afforded journalists enough evidence to begin to interrogate the operation of the Magdalene Laundries in this period are rare but they do exist. As early as the late 1920s it is evident that, although the lived experience of women is not yet the focus of coverage, it can be found hidden in the paragraphs of other news stories.

For example, in the newspaper coverage of a contested will from 1928, we inadvertently learn of the desperation of some women to escape the Magdalene institutions. The case, from April 1928, was extensively covered in both the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*. It involved the will of Annie Josephine Cummins, a woman of considerable means who owned some 17 properties in Dublin city. An allegation was made that a number of the tenants of those properties had an ‘undue influence’ on Mrs Cummins in the period prior to her death. One of those named in this regard was Anne Marie Ryan, the god daughter of Mrs Cummins’ husband. She had lived with her and received six houses in the will as her ‘companion, and trusted servant’. The coverage of the case outlines that in 1921, Mrs Cummins had received a letter from Miss Ryan ‘from the Magdalene Asylum, Donnybrook, asking her to go and see her’. Miss Cummins initially declined to visit but, on receipt of another letter, eventually did. The evidence reported in the newspaper points directly to the involuntary detention of Ms Ryan and her absolute desperation to escape from the institution:

Referring to Miss Ryan's relations with Mrs. Cummins, the witness said that in 1921 Mrs. Cummins had a letter from Miss Ryan from the Magdalene Asylum, Donnybrook, asking her to go and see her. Mrs. Cummins did not go. Mrs. Cummins subsequently got another letter from Miss Ryan while the witness was in America, and went to see her. Miss Ryan begged Mrs. Cummins to take her away from the asylum, that she was very unhappy, and would work in any capacity for her. Mrs. Cummins refused to take her away. In 1924 Miss Ryan called at the house,

(Law Reports: Dublin Woman's Wills. Jury's Effort To Shorten Case. *Irish Times*, 23 April 1928, 11)

The *Irish Times* report outlines that, by 1924, Miss Ryan had managed to leave the Magdalene Laundry and called to Mrs Cummins’ door and ‘begged earnestly to be allowed to remain’ (*Irish Times*, 1928). Here, hidden in a news report of a contested will, we learn of the carceral nature of the Magdalene Laundry system as experienced by one of the women themselves. The experience of Anne Marie Ryan, even though only a few sentences, is one entirely at odds with the consensus media framing of the institutions as places of refuge and rescue. Ms Ryan’s experience, which is only referenced in the *Irish Times* coverage of the case, is just one small

example but it clearly points to a woman that was desperate to escape the Magdalene Laundry at High Park in 1921 and desperate to remain free from the institution in 1924.

The social status and visibility of the Magdalene Laundries

Far from being hidden in plain sight, the newspaper coverage reveals that the Magdalene Laundries were always visible to Irish society. Their carceral nature was also never hidden. In fact, it was foregrounded and sometimes advertised by the religious orders themselves. The function of the appeals for public support in the pages of national newspapers was to present the confinement of women as an act of charity worthy of financial support from the Irish public. The power of this narrative was not only that it embedded the incarceration of women to work unpaid in laundries as form of social service. It also bestowed on the institutions and the religious orders a form of social and cultural capital within so-called polite Irish society, a status which ensured it would remain free from any journalistic inquiry for much of the twentieth century.

An indication of this status is evident in some of the reporting, which shows not only the visibility of the institutions but also their political reach. For example, a 1950 a sale of work event at the Catholic Club at O'Connell Street in Dublin in aid of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry was opened Phyllis Ryan—the wife of the then President of Ireland, Seán T. O'Kelly. Also in attendance were The Earl of Wicklow and the Aide de Camp to the President. Under the headline: 'Plea for Dublin Institution', Mrs O'Kelly is directly quoted in the opening sentence of a report in the *Irish Independent*:

"Some day we will all be dependent on charity and refuge in a spiritual sense, and we will realise the meaning of those words," said her Excellency, Mrs. O'Kelly, speaking in Irish and English, when she opened a sale of work at the Catholic Club, O'Connell St., in aid of the Magdalen Asylum, Gloucester St.

(Plea for Dublin Institution. *Irish Independent*, 10 November 1950, 8)

The Earl of Wicklow is reported as having said that Mrs O’Kelly ‘had shown how close the connection was between Áras an Uachtaráin and the lives and charity of the people of the city and the country’ (*Irish Independent*, 1950). The newspaper then outlined that the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, which ran the institution, were dependent on the public ‘apart from what their laundry brought in’ to run the institution.

For the consuming public, reports such as these could surely have conferred no greater imprimatur on the work and the respectability of the Magdalene Laundry system. Here, in a single event, the institution is at once bestowed with the approval of the head of state and the respectability of polite society offered by the presence of The Earl of Wicklow at the event. Indeed, we know that, not only was Áras an Uachtaráin publicly supportive of the work of the Magdalene Laundries in this period, but it was also a paying customer (*Irish Times*, 2011; Coen et al, 2023: 78). The status this type of patronage offered the Religious Orders operating the Magdalene institutions was more than symbolic. It translated into real and tangible political power and influence over the provision of social services. On May 24, 1952, the *Irish Times* advertised the annual meeting and gift day for the Church of Ireland Magdalene Laundry on Lower Leeson Street in Dublin pointing out that the Minister for Health James Ryan would not only attend the event but also ‘speak on behalf of the Home’ (*Irish Times*, 1952). In a report of the event carried four days later, Mr Ryan—the brother of the Phyllis Ryan, the wife of the President of Ireland—is directly quoted as saying that: ‘Independent voluntary bodies such as the Magdalen Asylum are a necessary part of our social system’ (*Irish Independent*, 1952). The report not only reveals a government minister publicly stressing the importance of the Magdalene Laundry system to the state’s provision of social services but also calling on the public to financially support it through donations.

The power wielded by the religious and the deference shown them by the political establishment is also reflected in the media coverage of the 1960 Criminal Justice Bill. The purpose of the legislation was to grant the courts authority to remand young offenders, with their consent, otherwise than to a prison. Introduced in the Dáil on 28 June 1960, the parliamentary debate on the legislation was primarily concerned with the use of the St. Patrick’s Institution, located beside Mountjoy Prison, as a remand home for young men. This was because of the dangers of those on remand potentially mixing with convicted criminals (Smith, 2007: 67). In terms of what to

do with young women, the newspaper coverage of the debates reveal a political establishment deferring to the religious establishment and remanding female offenders to the Magdalene Laundry system rather than to a prison. In fact, the only voice raised in opposition came from independent senator Nora Connolly O'Brien—daughter of the famed Irish Republican and socialist James Connolly. Newspaper reports reveal that she argued against sending young women to the Magdalene Laundries, instead advocating for the setting up of a sister-institution to St Patrick's Institution. The *Irish Press* reported that Mrs Connolly O'Brien said that the 'one section which raised her indignation was that unconvicted girls would either have to go to a prison or to another institution which would leave a stigma on them all their lives' (*Irish Press*, 1960). The response of the Minister for Justice Oscar Traynor to these concerns, as reported in the *Irish Independent*, revealed a government, not just deferential to the Catholic Church, but one actively led by it in terms of policy:

The Minister. Mr. Traynor, replying, said in regard to criticism of the remanding of young girls to the Magdalen Home, he was very much in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities.

It was thought desirable that young girls should be remanded to a convent rather than a prison, and the Archbishop of Dublin had suggested utilising the Magdalene Asylum.

(Use for Cinema Tax Relief Suggested – Minister. *Irish Independent*, 14 July 1960, 2)

This admission that the Minister for Justice was 'very much in the hands' of the Catholic hierarchy on this matter is repeated in the *Irish Times* and *Irish Press* coverage which stated that Mr Traynor thought it 'desirable that young girls should be remanded to a convent rather than a prison, and the services of the Sisters at the Magdalen Asylum had been offered' (*Irish Press*, 1960). The *Irish Times* also noted this view from the Minister who it stated, 'could not see that the indignity of being remanded to the Magdalen Asylum was as great as the indignity of being remanded to Mountjoy Prison' (*Irish Times*, 1960). That newspaper's coverage also focused on the fact that the planned legislation required the young offenders to consent to be

remanded to an institution other than a prison. The Minister addressed concerns raised around this provision by stating it was ‘mainly intended for girls who might be remanded in custody, so that they could be sent either to a prison or a convent. If the girl objected to being sent to a convent she could elect to be sent to prison’ (*Irish Times*, 1960). The Dáil debate itself reflects the fact that the drive to use Magdalene Laundries as places of remand was led by the powerful Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. Traynor himself thanked the Archbishop for having ‘made arrangements that St. Mary Magdalen’s Asylum, Sean McDermott Street, Dublin, will accept Catholic girls who may be remanded in custody (Dáil Éireann 183, Cols 562, 28 June 1960). In fact, the issue of remand homes for girls was something of a hobby horse for McQuaid. Smith (2007) outlines that within two years of becoming archbishop, he had raised concerns about the issue of juvenile delinquency and the need for remand institutions for girls. In 1957, he personally advocated to Taoiseach Éamon De Valera for the use of the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry in this regard (Smith, 2007: 69). Indeed, when the Criminal Justice Act became law in 1960, McQuaid thanked the Minister for Justice Oscar Traynor for the ‘courtesy in allowing [him] to see the text’ and assured him that the new legislation would be ‘very helpful in dealing with young offenders’ (Smith, 2007: 71). For her part, Nora Connolly O’Brien never forgave the Archbishop for his role in the legislation. An interview with *The Irish Times*, recorded her anger some 16 years later: ‘She would never forgive Archbishop McQuaid, she said, for that idea which would have put on a young girls record for the rest of her life that she had been in a Magdalen asylum’ (*Irish Times*, 1976).

The most telling evidence of the success of this narrative is, not just the visibility and status of the Magdalene Laundries, but their reproduction in the media as uncontroversial pillars in society. Their very ordinariness in media representation allowed them to exist as mundane and uncontroversial aspects of Irish life. They are embedded in public discourse as part of what Hall (1973) referred to as the ‘dominant or hegemonic code’. This represents a social and cultural viewpoint that carries with it ‘the stamp of legitimacy—it appears conterminous with what is ‘natural’, ‘inevitable’, ‘taken for granted’ about the social order’ (Hall 1973: 17–18). The institutions themselves and the fact that women were incarcerated in them to work for no pay was normalised through decades of coverage so as to appear mundane. Examples of this crop up in the newspaper coverage from the period in

both oblique and explicit ways. It was not uncommon to see appeals for Magdalene Laundries to be shoehorned into radio schedules before news and sports bulletins and regular entertainment slots. Radio Éireann listings in the *Irish Independent* in 1941 show an appeal on behalf of the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra sandwiched between a musical broadcast ‘Ireland is Singing–Parnell and Land League Ballads’, News and Sports coverage and a broadcast of a Ceilidh Band (*Irish Independent*, 1941). Radio Éireann coverage of the historic 1947 All-Ireland Football Final from the Polo Grounds in New York was immediately followed by ‘News and Appeal on behalf of Magdalen Asylum, Drumcondra by Rev. R.J Tyndall S.J’ (*Irish Independent*, 1947). Indeed, not only did the national broadcaster air these appeals, it also, in some cases, offered to collect any money donated on behalf of the institutions. An *Irish Independent* report of a 1947 appeal made on behalf of the Donnybrook Magdalene Laundry noted that money could be sent to the superioress or to the priest giving the sermon ‘c/o Radio Éireann’ (*Irish Independent*, 1947). For many years, in his ‘Roddy the Rover’ column in the *Irish Press*, journalist and prominent Catholic Irish nationalist Aodh de Blácam noted instances where he forwarded donations to the Magdalene Laundries which had been sent in on foot of appeals (*Irish Press*, 1938; *Irish Press*, 1939; *Irish Press*, 1945). The ‘Day to Day’ column in the newspaper also highlighted reader donations to the laundry appeals. Support for the Magdalene Laundry system could be seen through the number of people who attended a wide range of fundraising events in support of the institutions. Annual reports of public pilgrimages to the tomb of the foundress of the Sisters of Charity Mary Aikenhead show that ‘thousands of people’ gathered at the events which took place in the grounds of the Magdalene Asylum in Donnybrook (*Irish Independent*, 1935). A whist drive on New Year’s Eve in 1938 at the Mansion House in Dublin in aid of the Dun Laoghaire Magdalene Laundry was reported to have drawn ‘close on 1,000 people’ (*Irish Independent*, 1938). Gloucester St ‘community and residents’ were treated to a performance of ‘Red Riding Hood’ by the Morning Star Players that same year. After the event, the report notes that ‘the cast were entertained to tea and a smoking concert’ (*Irish Press*, 1938).

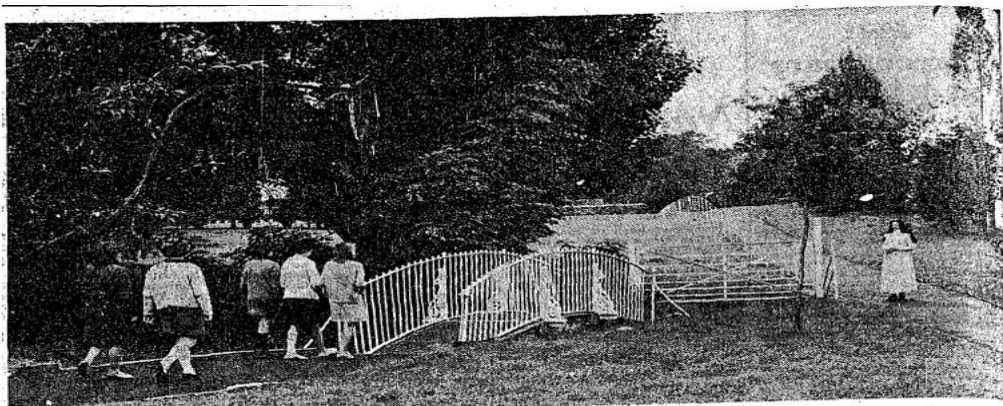
The visibility of the institutions, as well as their presence as commercial pillars of the community is evidenced in the fact that they sometimes crop up in routine articles unrelated to fundraising drives. In an article titled ‘Galway for the Tourist’ in the *Irish Press* in 1934, the reader was taken on a tour of Galway city and the

offerings it held for potential tourists visiting the West. The Magdalene Laundry was specifically mentioned in terms of its geographical proximity to the Fahy Bros Building Company and before a section on the city's Irish language theatre The Taibhdhearc:

Quite convenient to this is the Magdalen Asylum laundry in charge of the Sisters of Mercy. This is a most deserving and praiseworthy institution and many poor unfortunate girls will find a home and a refuge here. No fee is charged for their keep and the institution is maintained on the work done in the laundry. Apart from the charitable objects for which the institution was founded the work done is of the highest standard and is deserving of support.

(Galway for the Tourist. *Irish Press*, 14 July 1934, 7)

This is not an institution that is hidden. It is foregrounded in a piece as, not just an institution to be admired and supported, but also as something of a tourist attraction. Some three decades later, this centrality of the Magdalene Laundries to the social and commercial fabric of the local community is demonstrated by the fact that the institutions were the subject of lengthy feature pieces in the pages of the *Irish Times*. An article by Renagh Holohan headlined: 'High Park: Laundry with a Difference' opened with a telling line, indicating just how visible the institution was to the ordinary public:



HIGH PARK is a laundry that gives off emotional rather than any other kind of steam. It doesn't look like a laundry and its setting isn't a conventional industrial one. But it is for its highly efficient service that it has become known to north city Dubliners. Run by the nuns and girls of St. Mary's Home, it is part of a large group of buildings on a 15-acre site.

HIGH PARK : LAUNDRY WITH A DIFFERENCE

By RENAGH HOLOHAN

HIGH PARK is a laundry that gives off emotional rather than any other kind of steam. It doesn't look like a laundry and its setting isn't a conventional industrial one. But it is for its highly efficient service that it has become known to north city Dubliners.

(Holohan, R. (1968) High Park: Laundry with a Difference. *Irish Times*, 1 October 1968, 6)

The article directly stated that this 'efficient service' was being operated on 'a wholly commercial basis' by women who worked for no pay and often remained in the institution for the entirety of their lives:

THE GIRLS in St. Mary's don't pay anything for their keep but the nuns, apart from giving them pocket money and cigarettes, don't pay for the girls the work they do in the laundry.

The laundry is run on a wholly commercial basis. A manager and several men are employed. The girls who do most work are those who have been there for a considerable length of time; these are unlikely to be rehabilitated sufficiently to leave the home.

(Holohan, R. (1968) High Park: Laundry with a Difference. *Irish Times*, 1 October 1968, 6)

Many of these women, the reader is told, had been in the institution 'for years' and that the number 'who can really be rehabilitated is small'. Despite this, the reader is told of the voluntary nature of the institution and that women were free to come and go. A Sr Theresa is quoted in the piece and tells the *Irish Times* that women, are 'referred' to High Park via a number of routes, including the Gardaí:

"THERE ARE very serious problems in Dublin if we could only get our hands on them. Girls arriving up here from the country with no money and nowhere to go. They're found rambling around and then they're referred to us. Sensible and nice girls go to the Gardai and they send them here; others come through the Legion of Mary or social workers." Sister Theresa

"Many are barely literate when they arrive and we just do what we can with them. The results are good but it's not easy. They need an awful lot of help; they're so insecure. Some have no family and many have no family ties of any sort. A few come from very good homes but they have, perhaps, got into trouble and are sent here by their parents for safety. If they have a family we try to sort things out and send them back; but as a rule they haven't got one."

(Holohan, R. (1968) High Park: Laundry with a Difference. *Irish Times*, 1 October 1968, 6)

The feature article, which served to highlight another fundraising drive by the nuns for construction of 'a new hostel and a new training centre' is an instructive example of how easily media coverage could normalise incarceration and exploitation of labour as charity and kindness—even in a period where Irish journalism was finally beginning to critically interrogate the wider institutional care system. The article, which details women being incarcerated for life and engaging in unpaid labour has, at all times, a positive and breezy tone. The status of the nuns as pillars of the community is paramount. The abusive practices outlined are never questioned as they are not seen as abusive in the first place.

This visibility and status of the Magdalene Laundry in Irish life is also highlighted in one letter to the *Irish Times* in 1966. A GC Duggan writes reminiscing about life in Donnybrook in 1939:

Field, the butcher was there, too, and in a side-street, Darcy the dairyman. A post-office at the Donnybrook fair end, the Magdalen Asylum, and Cornelius Kennedy's public house round off my memories...(Duggan, 1966).

The letter is striking for a number of reasons. For the author, an institution that incarcerated women in order that they carry out unpaid labour to repent for their sins was as visible and central to the Donnybrook community as the pub, the butcher, and the post office. It is also instructive that the Magdalene Laundry is remembered as one in a list of commercial entities. Writing during the Dublin Honours Magdalenes gathering in 2018, columnist and commentator Fintan O'Toole also noted this decision to list the Magdalene institution alongside the ordinary commercial elements of local life:

Mr or Ms Duggan's letter is telling in so many ways. The male shop owners have names: Field, Darcy, Kennedy. The female inhabitants of the asylum do not.

The men's commercial businesses are remembered—butcher, dairyman, publican. The fact that the “asylum” was actually the biggest local business, a thriving commercial laundry, is brushed over (O'Toole, 2018)

For O'Toole, the casual reference to the laundry in the letter is ‘emblematic of the strangeness of Irish public memory itself—the difficulty of remembering what was hidden in plain sight, of acknowledging our great unknown known: the hulking, visually domineering institutions—laundries, mental hospitals, mother-and-baby homes and industrial schools...’ (O'Toole, 2018).

Decades of coverage that amounted to a campaign of appeal granted the institutions, and the religious orders that operated them, a status visibility that went unquestioned into the 1990s. The binary between the saviours (nuns) and the sinners (women) is solidified and normalised. Indeed, so great was the status conferred on the Magdalene system, it was granted the greatest veneer of respectability—that of the ordinary. It was sheltered from journalistic inquisition by dint of the fact that the incarceration of women behind its walls was normalised as charity and kindness. It became uncontroversial and mundane—the very things that journalism seeks to avoid. In a column the *Irish Press* in 1987, author and historian Eamonn Mac Thomais wrote about a walk he took through the ‘27 Steps’ area of Dublin which connects Summerhill to the Gloucester Diamond. In his column he recalled stopping into the Church of Our Lady of Lourdes to pray at the shrine of Matt Talbot:

While I was there I said a special prayer for the nuns opposite. The nuns we all know are the great Sisters of Mercy who run the Magdalen Asylum which was first started in in 1822 in Mecklenburgh Street as the Female Penitent Retreat.

(Mac Thomais, E. (1987) Down Dublin Streets: 27 Steps. *Irish Press*, 25 February 1987, 16)

On the cusp of the 1990s, the power of the Magdalene campaign remained as potent as it did in 1922. MacThomais said a ‘special prayer’ for the nuns who ran the Gloucester Street Magdalene Laundry. They were as ‘we all know’ the ‘great’ Sisters of Mercy. He offered no words, let alone his prayers, for the Magdalene women behind its walls.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to challenge the idea of the Magdalene Laundry system—and the women incarcerated within it—belonging to a so-called ‘hidden Ireland’ prior to the 1990s. Far from being hidden from Irish society, an analysis of the *Irish Times*, *Irish Independent* and *Irish Press* reveals that the institutions and, crucially, their carceral nature were an almost daily feature of reportage between 1920 and 1960. Through advertisements, charitable appeals for donations, news reports of sermons, and other miscellaneous forms of coverage, the main national newspapers served as a vehicle for the religious orders operating the institutions to disseminate a narrative which normalised incarceration and unpaid labour as charity, care, and moral rescue. Not only did this coverage help legitimise the institutions, it also directly enlisted the public in sustaining the Magdalene Laundry system itself, through appeals for donations, bequests and news reports of annual appeals, gift days and charity sermons. The endurance of this narrative is evidenced by the fact that many of the charitable frames of ‘refuge’ and ‘reform’ were still being repeated in Irish news coverage well into the 1990s—even as the system came under increasing journalistic scrutiny.

Ultimately, this chapter concludes that decades of this type of news coverage and reportage served two purposes. It helped to normalise the confinement of women in

Magdalene Laundries within wider society by mediating their incarceration through a consensus narrative that foregrounded the institutions as sites of charity, care and, ultimately, a social service. It also granted the institutions—and the religious orders that operated them—a form of moral, political and cultural capital that insulated them from journalistic scrutiny for almost the entirety of the twentieth century. Some of the language and phrasing of charity would persist in reporting into the 1990s, even as Irish journalism evolved towards framing the Magdalene Laundries as sites of controversy. This chapter therefore demonstrates that while journalism confronted the abuses of the Magdalene Laundry system in the 1990s and beyond, it had long functioned as a vehicle that helped to sustain and normalise what Smith (2007) called Ireland's 'architecture of containment'.

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Chapter Five

Charity, Consensus and Controversy: The Magdalene Laundries and the emergence of a ‘scandal’, 1993-2003

Introduction

Academics (Donnelly, 2016; Donnelly and Inglis, 2010; Fuller, 2004) and many in the wider media industry point to the mid-1990s as the moment when Irish journalism moved away from traditional deference to the Catholic Church and began to investigate and report its abuses. It would not be until 1993 that Irish print journalism identified the Magdalene Laundries as a subject worthy of journalistic inquiry, after the remains of 133 women were exhumed from a Magdalene grave in High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra. However, even as these women’s remains were being exhumed and reburied in controversial circumstances that caused considerable public outcry and anger, much of the reporting reverted to the pejorative language and narrative framework of charity so deeply embedded the consensus reporting of previous decades. The women who were incarcerated in the institutions—even as late as 1993—are problematised as having been ‘abandoned’ by their ‘embarrassed’ families or described as ‘unwanted’, ‘prostitutes’ and ‘rejects’. The institutions, and the nuns that operated them are, by contrast, referred to as having provided a valuable charitable social service offering ‘shelter’, ‘refuge’ and a ‘haven’ for these women who had nowhere else to go. This binary of problematic women being rescued by the religious sits alongside reporting which both acknowledged and normalised the fact that women worked for no pay as ‘productive’.

Not a single journalist endeavoured to investigate or further question the propriety of the licensing of these exhumations or the circumstances of the women’s deaths. It would take a full decade for that to happen through the work of Mary Raftery in the *Irish Times* in 2003. Hers was the first, and only, effort by Irish journalism to investigate the Magdalene Laundries at that point. Raftery, therefore, was an outlier rather than an indicator of an increasingly investigative Irish media. The Magdalene Laundries, therefore were not ‘exposed’ or ‘revealed’ by Irish journalism. They were never hidden. Irish journalism, until Raftery, simply saw little need to question the

accepted consensus narrative of the Magdalene Laundries which it had worked to embed since the foundation of the state. This chapter argues that, even as it began to interrogate the perception of the Magdalene Laundries as a social good and valued public service, Irish journalism simultaneously worked to reinforce this consensus by reverting to decades old reporting frames which obscured the institutions rather than reflected their true nature. It points to an Irish media landscape struggling to free itself from the consensus and deferential frameworks it had long helped to construct.

Emerging Awareness: Survivor Testimony and Cultural Exposure

Dublin Honours Magdalenes (DHM), 2018:

In June of 2018, over 230 women who had been incarcerated in and survived Ireland's Magdalene Laundry system began arriving in Dublin from across the world. They were there to take part in Dublin Honours Magdalenes (DHM). The two-day event was the result of a two-year campaign by the Justice For Magdalenes Research (JFMR) group. The event fulfilled two aspects of the Irish state's Magdalen Restorative Justice Ex-Gratia Scheme published in 2013: to bring together those women seeking to meet others who also spent time in the Magdalene Laundry system, and to provide an opportunity for a listening exercise to gather views from survivors on how the Magdalene Laundries should be remembered by future generations (O'Donnell, McGettrick et al, 2018). On 5 June, survivors were hosted at Áras an Uachtaráin where President Michael D. Higgins apologised to the women on behalf of the state. In the speech, he spoke not only of the 'stigma, shame and an unreceptive society' that condemned women to concealing their experiences but also of the failure of the Catholic Church and the Irish state:

All of you and of all the other women who cannot be with us today were failed by these institutions, the experience of which you share, and the religious orders that ran them. You were profoundly failed by the State which, in its relationship to these institutions, should have had your welfare at its core. You were failed by Governments that knowingly relied on the existence and practices of these institutions rather than addressing your particular needs in other, more sympathetic ways (Higgins, 2018).

That evening the survivors attended a gala dinner hosted by The Lord Mayor of Dublin at the Mansion House. As they arrived by coach, they were greeted by an

incredibly moving and spontaneous outpouring of support from ordinary members of the public—men, women and children—who lined the streets to clap, cheer and express thanks to the women. Some members of the public carried signs reading *‘Welcome Home’*; *‘We honour you today & always’*; *‘Welcome Home Ladies. Each one of you inspire us! Much love & Thank you’*; *‘The Women of Ireland Salute You’*; *‘Mná Mná!’*; *‘Welcome Home, Sisters’* (JFM, 2021). Others visibly wept as the women arrived. Of all the formal events organised as part of the DHM event, this was perhaps the most revealing. It offered a simple, instructive and cathartic moment for an Irish society that had long grappled with these issues. Ordinary members of the public, unprompted, felt the need to be there, to express thanks and gratitude for the sacrifice that these women had made in their lives.

The impact of this moment was not lost on the women in attendance that day. The transcripts of the Listening Exercise carried out as part of the event the profound impact the welcome had on them. Many spoke to the power of simply being seen as part of society:

And all the people last night [on Dawson Street] moved me so much...And I said to them...to think that someone recognised us...I never saw anything like it. It was like we were being welcomed back into society, or whatever. It's like we were being forgiven. Accepted again, that we're humans, yeah. They were sobbing. ‘Welcome home,’ you know...a girl called me over and shook me hand...actually cried because...it's after taking a little bit of a burden off me. (O'Donnell, McGettrick et al, 2018).

Others spoke of the importance of public knowledge, of ensuring that Irish society are educated to understand the truth of what happened in the Magdalene Laundry system:

You know the people that were outside here yesterday...The crowds that were out there? They, to me, understood more about us than we do about ourselves...From what they're reading and they were well-informed. (O'Donnell, McGettrick et al, 2018).

That the public, now honouring these women, were ‘well-informed’ and ‘understood’ what happened in these places was a process that was decades in the making. The catharsis resided in the fact that after decades of silence, they were now being seen and heard. Their ‘stories’ were being told.

The media played a pivotal role in facilitating this process, beginning in the 1990s. As a result, the Magdalene Laundries exist ‘in the public mind at the level of story rather than history’ (Smith, 2007: xvi/xvii). Providing a platform to allow people to speak about their experiences, the very act of narration, according to Pine (2011b) ‘is cathartic because it performs the desire to uncover a traumatic past and to share it’ (Pine, 2011b: 24).

However, as outlined in Chapter Four, it would be entirely incorrect to suggest accounts of life in the Magdalene Laundries, and public knowledge of how they operated, did not exist prior to the 1990s. The public visibility of the Magdalene Laundries was intentional but benign. It was constructed through self-promotion by the religious orders themselves and aided by a media industry invested in reproducing and sustaining a consensus narrative of the institutions as charitable. Neither the existence of the institutions, nor their carceral nature, was ever hidden from Irish society. The fact that women were not paid for their labour and that many remained there for the remainder of their lives is all there in the pages of the popular press. However, rather than being framed as abhorrent or socially unacceptable, it was instead mediated for the public as a form of charity and kindness.

Historical visibility and censorship: Halliday Sutherland’s ‘Irish Journey’, 1955

As early as the 1950s, detailed contemporaneous accounts of life behind the walls of Magdalene Laundries were also accessible to the public through channels outside of the mainstream national press. In 1955, the Scottish physician and writer Halliday Sutherland published an interview with the Sisters of Mercy who ran the Magdalene Laundry in Galway. The interview, published in his 1956 book *Irish Journey*, reveals many of the types of details about laundry life which would horrify the Irish public some four decades later:

At five o’clock I was at the Magdalen Home and was introduced by the Mother Superior of the Convent of Mercy to the Sister-in-charge and six nuns who managed the laundry. We were all seated in the Sisters’ parlour where I put my questions. Most were answered by the Sister-in-charge.

“How many girls have you”?

“Seventy-three.”

“How many are unmarried mothers”?

“About seventy per cent.”

“And the others”?

“Some are sent here when they leave the Industrial School because they need special care.”

“Are they mental defectives”?

“No.”

“Backward”?

“Yes.”

“Are the girls paid”?

“No they earn their keep.”

. . .

“Are the girls free”?

“Yes.”

“Can a girl leave whenever she chooses”?

MOTHER SUPERIOR: No, we’re not as lenient as all that. The girl must have a suitable place to go. . . “How long do they stay”?

“Some stay for life” (Sutherland, 1958: 82–83).

The interview, in Sutherland’s typically terse style, shows that women were not paid for their labour. While the ‘Sister in Charge’ assured Sutherland that women were free to leave when they wished, the Mother Superior interjected to stress that this was only if approved by the nuns. Some of the women remained in the institutions for the remainder of their lives. Those who were ‘Consecrated Penitents’ were buried with the nuns when they died, while the women who were simply penitents were buried, according to the Sister In Charge, ‘in the common burial ground’ (Sutherland, 1956: 83).

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the above encounter is that it was published at all. Sutherland, himself a devout Catholic, had to secure the permission of the Bishop of Galway, Dr Michael Browne to visit the Magdalene Laundry in Galway and the Tuam Mother and Baby Home. This permission was only granted on the proviso that everything he wrote was submitted ‘for approval by the Mother Superior of the Sisters of Mercy’ (Sutherland, 1956: 81). In short, *Irish Journey* contained an approved and sanitised description of the encounter. An unedited transcript of the book was not discovered until 2013 and revealed an Irish clergy deeply suspicious of anyone asking questions about how the laundry and Mother and Baby Home operated. In a blog post ‘The Suitcase in the Cellar’ published in 2014, Dr Sutherland’s grandson Mark Sutherland outlined how the unedited transcript showed

an Irish clergy acutely aware of how the treatment of women in the care of religious orders may be viewed as unsatisfactory—even in 1955 (Ó Fátharta, 2014). Included in the correspondence found in the suitcase, was a letter from the Mother Superior of the Galway Magdalene Laundry, Sr Fidelma, requesting that specific sections of the manuscript be removed from the manuscript before publication. One noteworthy excision was the fact that women were sent to the laundry via the Courts system. This is particularly instructive given that the Irish state did not formally acknowledge its involvement with the religious orders running Magdalene Laundries until the publication of the McAleese Report and the subsequent state apology in 2013. Until that point, successive Irish governments had claimed that the Magdalene Laundries operated as privately run autonomous institutions, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

In another section, the Sisters of Mercy requested that the following account of an escape attempt by one of the women be excised:

Dr Sutherland: “Do they try to escape?”

Mother Superior: “Last year a girl climbed a twenty foot drain pipe. At the top she lost her nerve and fell. She was fortunate. She only broke her pelvis. She won’t try it again”

(Sutherland, 2014).

This section seems to confirm that the Magdalene Laundries were not institutions where women were free to leave of their own volition. The Mother Superior also asked that the following section concerning the physical abuse of women also be removed from the final draft:

“For that kind of thing the girl gets six strokes of the cane, three on each hand.

A nun: “Sometimes on the legs.”

Dr Sutherland: “I suppose only the sister-in-charge may inflict corporal punishment.”

Nun: “Yes, and the only time I gave it I felt positively ill” (Sutherland, 2014).

This entry points to physical abuse in the institution as the norm rather than the exception and suggests that the order did not want such evidence of physical abuse to become public knowledge. It also contradicts a key finding of the McAleese Report in 2013 that ‘the ill treatment, physical punishment, and abuse that was prevalent in the industrial school system was not something they experienced in the Magdalene

Laundries' (McAleese, 2013: VII). In a further section, that remained in the final in the chapter on the Galway Magdalene Laundry, the interviewed nun acknowledged that for 'more serious offences' in terms of discipline, food was withdrawn from women (Sutherland, 1956: 83). The text also highlights a revealing conversation Dr Sutherland had with Bishop of Galway, Dr Michael John Browne, when seeking permission to visit the Galway Magdalene Laundry. The prelate took something of an exception to the request and issued a veiled threat that anything negative that appeared in print would be met with a swift response:

Bishop: So you're writing a book about Ireland?

Myself: I hope so.

Bishop: Well, if you write anything wrong it will come back on you. Remember that (Sutherland, 1956: 78).

Later, in what appears to have become an increasingly strained conversation, Bishop Browne denied there was anything to 'hide' in the laundry but stressed it was his 'duty to defend these nuns. I have done so in the past and shall do again' (Sutherland, 1956: 79). The influence of the religious in relation to cultural, social and political norms in the Ireland of the 1950s was not lost on Dr. Sutherland. In the 1958 American edition of *Irish Journey*, he added a preface in which he stated that '...all the critics have ignored my main criticism, which concerns the Irish secular clergy. In my opinion they have too much political power. They hold themselves aloof from their people, and are too fond of money' (Sutherland, 2014).

The censorship of Sutherland's manuscript had a somewhat contradictory effect, in that it drew public attention to the Magdalene Laundries while simultaneously obscuring their true nature—something also acutely evident in newspaper reportage. This dual effect is something that was mirrored in some early academic studies also. Sr Stanislaus Kennedy, or 'Sr Stan' as she popularly known, is a hugely revered figure in Ireland. A member of the congregation of the Religious Sisters of Charity (RSC), she founded Focus Point (now Focus Ireland) in 1985. Sr Stan set up the organisation—now the largest housing organisation in Ireland—after publishing research into the needs of women experiencing homelessness in Dublin in the 1980s (Focus Ireland, 2022). This research resulted in the publication of her 1985 book *But Where Can I Go? Homeless Women in Dublin*. The RSC operated two Magdalene

Laundries in Ireland—one in Dublin (Donnybrook) and one in Cork (Peacock Lane). As McGettrick et al (2021) point out in their analysis of the book, given that the religious orders continue to refuse access to Magdalene records, the book provides a rare insight into life in a Magdalene Laundry at the end of the twentieth century. However, they also emphasise that this insight is inherently opaque as Sr Stan recounts these lived experiences while also concealing the true nature of the institutions she describes. For example, nowhere in the book's 218 pages is the word 'Magdalene' used. Instead, Sr Stan uses the words 'hostels' and 'home' when describing what were Magdalene Laundries (McGettrick et al, 2021: 25). By couching the experiences of the women incarcerated in the laundries in euphemistic terms, the book obscures the reality of their lives and the institutions in which they worked.

Cultural Representations prior to journalistic intervention

While the Irish media is commonly cited as the critical catalyst in 'exposing' the reality of the Magdalene Laundries in the mid 1990s, the first substantial efforts to look behind the walls of the Magdalene Laundries and bring them to the forefront of public consciousness in contemporary Ireland were undertaken in the cultural space. Before journalists and documentary makers, writers (James Joyce, Austin Clarke, Mairéad Ní Ghráda, John Broderick, Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin) and novelists (Mary Leland, Patrick McCabe, Marita Conlon McKenna, Emma Donoghue, Ken Bruen) focused attention on the confinement of marginalised women in Catholic convents, including asylums and Mother and Baby homes. The impact of this work in the cultural space 'rendered the nation's Magdalen asylums visible and accessible' to the public before mainstream journalism took up that challenge (Smith, 2007: 91). Arguably, the most impactful of these cultural representations in terms of 'rupturing the secrecy which shrouded this aspect of Ireland's past' was Patricia Burke Brogan's play *Eclipsed* in 1992 (91). Despite receiving its first rehearsed reading in 1988, Burke Brogan struggled to find a theatre company to stage it in Ireland (McGettrick et al, 2021). It would take until 1992 for it to be fully produced by Galway-based theatre company Punchbag Theatre (Fernandes, 2021). It then went to the Edinburgh Theatre Festival where it won a Fringe First Prize (Smith, 2007).

The play was inspired by Burke Brogan's own experience as a novice and teacher working as 'holiday relief' with the Sisters of Mercy in the 1960s. She herself had worked with women in the Galway Magdalene Laundry and was shocked by the conditions facing the women who were incarcerated there:

I saw that the women were dressed in overalls that weren't too new. I was their white veiled gaoler. When they looked at me they saw their gaoler. I felt I was in Dante's inferno. I could hardly breathe with the stench of the bleach and the noise. And these poor women — some young, some middle aged and some older — walking around and they almost became part of the machines (Brogan, 2014).

The play represented the lives of the 'penitent' women as the public now understands them, foregrounding the carceral nature of the institution, the regime of work and prayer and the punishment and abuse women faced for breaching the disciplinary order imposed on them. The fact that she had worked in a position of power within a Magdalene Laundry makes her, as Smith (2007) points out, both 'a participant in and a survivor of the story she tells' (93). The unique space Burke Brogan occupied, allowed her, and indeed compelled her, to write about what she saw and experienced. This duality also allowed her to see that both the nuns and women were confined in a system of social control.

I wrote the play to give these women a voice. I was one of the few who entered the laundry, who came out again and could speak up. Why did we do it? I don't know. It's a question I've been asking myself for a long time, and I'm still in dialogue... "the nuns were also imprisoned, and did not see clearly either" (Dempsey, 1993).

Given these were issues not widely discussed in Irish society at the time, and that it would be another two decades before a state apology was offered to the women incarcerated in Magdalene Laundries, the play is a testament to Burke Brogan's social conscience and bravery. The impact of the play on the development of journalistic inquiry into the Magdalene Laundries also cannot be understated. A total of four television documentaries directly examining the Magdalene Laundries were produced in the 1990s, one of which—*Washing Away the Stain* by BBC Scotland in 1993—was directly inspired by Burke Brogan's play (Pine, 2011, Smith, 1997). The other documentaries were the seminal *Sex in a Cold Climate* (1998) by Channel 4 in

the UK, a French language documentary *Les Blanchisseuses de Magdalen* (1998) and *The Magdalen Laundries* (1999) by CBS 60 Minutes. None of these were aired on the Irish television. Even though *Sex in a Cold Climate* had provoked a large public response and was extensively covered in the print media, the national broadcaster RTÉ declined offers from the British producers to air the documentary at the time. This reticence is all the more striking as the 1990s was an era when the national broadcaster aired a number of documentaries on issues relating to the Church and state's treatment children; most notably *Dear Daughter* in 1996 and *States of Fear* in 1999 which examined the widespread abuse of children in the Industrial and Reformatory School system (Smith, 2007: 125). Smith argues that these documentaries not only challenged the official narrative of Ireland's past on this issue and established a societal awareness of the Magdalene Laundries, but also compelled Irish journalism to confront its historical and ongoing role in 'perpetuating the historical silence' surrounding the institutions through 'negligence and irresponsibility' (Smith, 2007: 117, 135; O'Brien, 2004: 234). This study offers a complementary, if somewhat different, perspective.

Indeed, it was through art and artistic representations that the Magdalene Laundries first began to be depicted negatively in Irish newspapers in the 1990s—hinting at the suffering endured in the institutions. In an interview in 1992, singer Mary Coughlan reflected on the Johnny Mulhern song *Magdalen Laundry*, which she had included on a recent album, and how its meaning and context was directly relevant to an Irish society still reeling from revelations from the Bishop Casey Affair:

I told Johnny Mulhern all about the Magdalen Laundry in Galway, where young girls were sent to work while they had unwanted babies and he wrote the song...And although, again, it may seem 'dirty' to some people, when we say 'We know where they've been/when they're not saving souls/What the red wine spilled/And the smooth hand poured', that is a reference to priests wanking. And the point is that these girls, locked away for the 'sin' of having sex are, at the same time, washing those stains out of the priests clothes. But sex is also a part of priests lives; as we all realised with the Bishop Casey affair.

And comments that were made in certain quarters about Annie Murphy, talking about the women as though *she* was dirty really did remind me of the nun in 'Magdalene Laundry'. So don't tell me I'm not singing about what's happening in this country right now (Jackson, 1992).

Artistic and cultural interventions, therefore, played a pivotal role in rupturing a societal silence, creating a discursive space which mainstream journalism could then occupy and begin to interrogate the Magdalene Laundries, though often constrained by the consensus narrative of charity it had helped to construct. The 1993 exhumation of 133 women who had died in the High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra in Dublin would bring the institutions into the glare of public scrutiny and reveal tensions between an existing media consensus, an emerging public activism on the issue and institutional accountability.

The High Park Magdalene Laundry exhumations, 1993: Consensus amidst Controversy

Continuities in Media Narratives: Charity and Debt

On 23 August 1993, the *Irish Independent* first reported that the remains of 133 women were to be exhumed from a Magdalene grave in High Park Magdalene Laundry in Drumcondra. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity (OLC) had exhumed the remains, which was reported as ‘the largest single exhumation in the history of the State’, in order to sell the land to a property developer (O’Keeffe, 1993).



(O’Keeffe, A. (1993) Abandoned women exhumed in convent land sale. *Irish Independent*, 23 August 1993, 6)

Set against the backdrop of increasing public awareness of the Magdalene Laundries, and the value that Irish culture traditionally places on respect for the dead and burial rituals, the story eventually garnered media attention and a degree of public anger. Despite being a news story about large-scale exhumation of the bodies of Magdalene women from a graveyard, it is instructive that they were not, initially, front-page news. The early coverage made little attempt to inquire into the lived experience of the women in the institution and, at times, was disconcertingly vague. Indeed, much

of the coverage is notable for the fact that it utilises much of the same frames, narratives and, in some cases, the identical phrasing from the historical newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries discussed in Chapter Four. The public is informed of the carceral nature of the institutions but, just as previous decades, it is presented as a form of kindness and charity. The adversarial framing which places the nuns in the role of ‘saviours’ of the women ‘sinners’ in their care is also evident in much of the reportage.

For example, in the very first newspaper report of the exhumations, the *Irish Independent* described the women as ‘abandoned’ in the headline of the story, which was carried on page six of the newspaper. In the very first sentence of the article—which carries the most weight and news value in any piece of reporting—the reader is told that many of the women were ‘unwanted’ by their families and society:

THE remains of 133 women, many who were once ‘unwanted’ by their families and society, will be dug up from a convent graveyard as part of a land sale deal.

(O’Keeffe, A. (1993) Abandoned women exhumed in convent land sale. *Irish Independent*, 23 August 1993, 6)

Although the word ‘unwanted’ is placed inverted commas, it is taken from by the only person quoted in the article, Sr Superior Anne Marie Ryan of the OLC:

Sister Superior Ann Marie Ryan said last night: “Many of these women had been unwanted, shunned, or marginalised. Some were an embarrassment to their families. “Society back in that time did not make space for such women. They came here from all over Ireland. They were respected here.”

(O’Keeffe, A. (1993) Abandoned women exhumed in convent land sale. *Irish Independent*, 23 August 1993, 6)

The quote undoubtedly serves to foreground the perception of the High Park Magdalene Laundry as a charitable enterprise. The entire historical narrative

presented in the article is produced by the OLC and is mediated for the public as the prevailing consensus view. High Park was a place where ‘unwanted, shunned, or marginalised’ women who were ‘an embarrassment’ to their families came to ‘from all over Ireland’ so they could be ‘respected’. The persistence of this brand of consensus journalism, even in the 1990s, is demonstrated by the journalist’s readiness to editorialise in order to solidify this unsupported opinion as a fact. The reader is told, outside of Sr Ryan’s quotes and in the main body of report, that women ended up in High Park because ‘they had nowhere else to go’. This was because: ‘Some were destitute, some had children out of wedlock, some could have been former prostitutes’ (O’Keeffe, 1993).

This binary between the saviours and the sinners—so evident in the historical newspaper coverage examined in Chapter Four—is also repeated in the *Irish Press* coverage of the 1993 exhumations. In its first article on the issue from 24 August, the women are also described as ‘abandoned’. The word is, however, used in inverted commas. The report stated that the remains were of women who were ‘taken in by the convent after being shunned by their family and society for a variety of reasons’ (O’Connor, 1993). Here, once again, the journalist editorialised to present the consensus view of the institution as charitable as an incontrovertible fact. There is no effort by the newspaper to ascertain the veracity of the statement that women were ‘taken in’ after being shunned by family and society. Nor is there any effort to explore any of the ‘reasons’ why these women ended up in a Magdalene Laundry. Instead, much like the narrative presented by newspapers in earlier decades, the carceral nature of the institution is obscured by a consensus-driven framing of charity. The women were ‘taken in’ and remained there until death. The circumstances surrounding their lives, deaths and burial are never explored, questioned or mediated for the public as controversial.

The exhumations also failed to make it onto the front page of the *Irish Times*. Its first report, on 25 August, largely utilised the same narrative frame as that of the *Irish Independent* and the *Irish Press*. Despite also describing it as ‘the biggest mass exhumation in Irish history’, the story contained no byline and is granted just five paragraphs (*Irish Times*, 1993):

133 bodies to be exhumed

THE remains of 133 Irish women are to be exhumed and cremated at Glasnevin cemetery in what is believed to be the biggest mass exhumation in Irish history.

The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity are selling off the private cemetery at their High Park convent in Drumcondra on Dublin's northside to cover debts incurred after they set up a centre for women in need, according to the Catholic press office.

The bodies are to be taken from

the private cemetery which was set up in the 1880s as a burial ground for women who were taken in by the convent after being abandoned by their families. A number of the women worked in the laundry when it was operated as a business by the convent. It has been closed for some years.

The order applied for permission to sell the graveyard because of the large debt accrued by the building of the new centre. The

Catholic Church granted permission for the exhumations and the sale of the land, as did Dublin Corporation and the Department of the Environment.

Sisters at the High Park Convent declined last night to comment on the exhumation and the sale of the land. "This undertaking is a very private one," a member of the order said. She added that the nuns had been misquoted by the news media.

(133 bodies to be exhumed. *Irish Times*, 25 August 1993, 5)

Just as in the coverage of the other two daily national newspapers, the *Irish Times* used the same language and phrasing to foreground the Magdalene institution as place of refuge for women with nowhere else to go. The reader is told that the women whose remains were being exhumed 'had been taken in by the convent after being abandoned by their families' (*Irish Times*, 1993). The phrase 'taken in' and the word 'abandoned' are again repeated, reinforcing the consensus narrative—embedded across many decades of reportage—of the Magdalene Laundry as a place of refuge. It existed in the public consciousness and is presented to the public via the pages of Ireland's foremost national broadsheet newspaper as an entirely charitable endeavour. The claim that the women had been 'abandoned by their families' is presented as an uncontested fact.

A fortnight later, even as the exhumations began to generate significant public controversy, the tone and language used in the reporting is reminiscent of the coverage of the institutions between the 1920s and 1960s. An *Irish Times* news article by Edward O'Loughlin in September framed the women as objects of pity or disdain who had been rescued by the nuns. In another striking piece of editorialising, O'Loughlin reported—as fact—that the women who resided in the High Park Laundry between the 1860s and the 1960s were 'Single mothers, prostitutes, abandoned, orphaned, unwanted or unmarriageable sisters and daughters' who had been 'taken in' by the nuns. They had lived 'hidden lives, virtually as lay nuns' with many working in the convent's 'laundry business' (O'Loughlin, 1993). No definition for what is meant by 'unmarriageable' is offered by the journalist.

Another theme highlighted in the coverage, which mirrors much of the historical newspaper reportage around Magdalene Laundries, is that the religious order running

the institution was facing severe financial difficulties. Indeed, in the initial media coverage, this was the reasoning given by both the OLC itself and a representative of the Catholic Church's hierarchy for the exhumations. In the first news article to address the issue in the *Irish Independent* on 23 August, a representative of the OLC, Sr Ann Marie, told the newspaper that the decision to sell off 12 acres of the grounds was dictated by the 'huge debts currently burdening the convent' and that the price obtained by the sale 'will not clear all the debt' (O'Keeffe, 1993). This explanation was repeated by journalist Paulette O'Connor the following day in the *Irish Press*, where a spokesperson for the Catholic Church is quoted as saying that the exhumations were being undertaken so that the order could sell the land 'in a bid to raise funds to cover convent debts'.

The sisters recently accumulated heavy debt after building a new centre for women in need, according to a spokesman for the Catholic Church (O'Connor, 1993).

The *Irish Times* coverage also stated that the exhumation to facilitate the sale of land was needed by the OLC 'in order to cover debts they incurred after they set up a centre for women in need' (*Irish Times*, 1993). It is noteworthy that this exact phrase 'heavy debt' had been used repeatedly in historical adverts and news coverage appealing for financial assistance from the public for the Magdalene Laundries from the 1920s to the 1960s. The reference to the building having been built for 'women in need' also served to reinforce the consensus narrative which the media had helped construct since the 1920s: that the Magdalene Laundry was, at its core, a charitable undertaking.

As public anger grew over the optics of a religious order exhuming women who had died in their care to sell land to a property developer, the OLC reframed its justification, recasting its rationale back to the discourse of charity. Instead, of emphasising the repayment of debts, it now began to claim that the sale was needed to 'raise funds' for a new centre for women in need, rather than to pay off debts accrued during its construction. In a letter to the *Irish Independent* on 6 September, the Provincial Superior of the OLC, Sr Angela Fahy wrote:

The exhumation work took place in a small cemetery plot which was part of an 11½ acre site which we had to dispose of in order to raise funds to pay the costs of a new and modern housing complex for the women who live in our care today (Fahy, 1993).

She later repeated this justification on RTÉ Radio's This Week programme, where she rejected claims that the sale had anything to do with needing 'to pay off bills' pointing out that the graveyard site was valued at £9,000, while the total cost of exhuming the remains of all the women came to £45,000. Therefore, she said, the order "did not sell that piece of land off to make money and that is the reality" (O'Connor, 1993; *Irish Independent*, 1993).

Persistent Media Deference in the Framing of Controversy

Editorial and Newspaper Framing:

In fact, even when questioning the official narrative of the Magdalene Laundries as charitable enterprises, and raising issues of concern around the nature of the exhumations, much of the newspaper coverage in 1993 was nonetheless careful not to be overly critical of the nuns. For example, an editorial in the *Evening Herald*—the newspaper containing the most critical reporting of the exhumations—reverted to much of the same language and frames of earlier decades. The binary between the nuns as the saviours of outcast, pitied and sinning women is reinforced. The women are described as victims of 'poverty and bad luck', a phrase reminiscent of the historical news reportage. Because society had rejected the women, and their families had abandoned them, 'only the nuns would take them in'. The editorial also sought to rationalise the exhumation, stating that the Sisters of Charity 'had a desperate decision to make to alleviate debts' (Evening Herald, 1993). This portrayal of the religious order as performing charitable rescue work despite mounting debt mirrors the narrative that newspaper coverage had repeatedly reinforced for decades, dating back to the foundation of the state.

Even Patricia Redlich, who granted significant copy space to views which challenged the consensus narrative of the Magdalene Laundries, reverted to narrative frames of charity and the rescuing of fallen women.

Last respects paid to society's lost souls

A PUBLIC memorial service, organised by the Magdalen Memorial Committee, was held in Saint Stephen's Green, Dublin yesterday afternoon. As part of the services. Thomas MacGiolla.

Patricia Redlich marks the end of a harsh age when hard labour was the only option society gave to women who fell by the wayside.

Mary, headstrong and 16, didn't always do what she was told by her brothers, the parish priest argued she was in grave moral danger, and found her a job in Dublin. After 20 years of silence, and five years of hassle with nuns who said

(Redlich, P. (1993) Last respects paid to society's lost souls. *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1993,

4)

In her *Sunday Independent* opinion piece marking the public memorial organised by the activist group the Magdalen Memorial Committee (MMC) on St Stephens's Green in late September 1993, Redlich stated that:

In an age before social welfare, those laundries were also the best shot an ignorant society seemed able to make at providing humane care for its physical and mental rejects, productive, albeit unpaid work, perceived as progress over an earlier age of infanticide and secret lock-ups.

(Redlich, P. (1993) Last respects paid to society's lost souls. *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1993,

4)

The reader was told that incarcerating women in Magdalene Laundries constituted a form of 'humane care' and that their unpaid labour was somehow 'productive'. The women were again framed—just as they had been in earlier decades of news coverage—as lesser, through the use of the phrase 'physical and mental rejects'. In what was billed as an 'exclusive' and snapped on its front page, the *Evening Herald* featured an interview the Provincial of the OLC Sr Angela Fahy.

by **MICHAEL LAVERY**

THE Sister of Charity convent, in High Park, Drumcondra, rests in a serene setting.

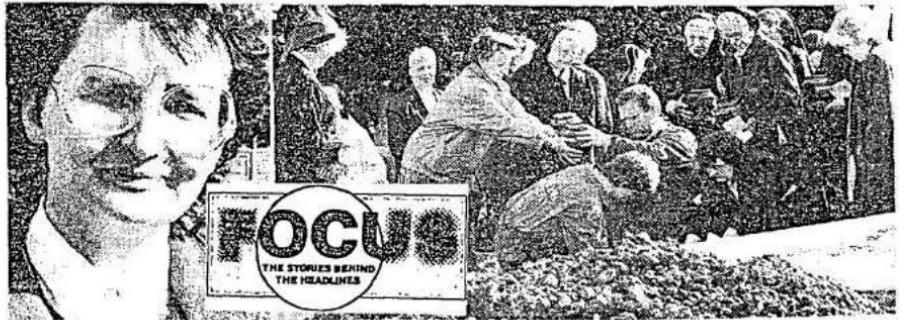
But the storm of controversy that erupted over the so called Magdalen women, has shaken it to its foundations.

Today the order's Provincial, Sister Angela Fahy, spoke exclusively to the *Evening Herald* about the pain of making tough decisions in the face of hard economic realities.

Sr Angela does not mince her words. The way society treated women like the Magdalens — a term not used since the 1960s — was "criminal."

But the nun who took the

A nun's story



Sr Angela: Hard decision

Sisters of Charity at the reburial of the Magdalens.

MAGDALENS: THE NUN'S STORY

THE head of the order of nuns who exhumed and cremated the remains of 155 "Magdalen" women spoke today of the painful decision she had to make. Sister Angela Fahy (right) told of her torment over the re-burial.

● See News Focus: Page 6.



(Lavery, M. (1993) A nun's story. *Evening Herald*, 15 September 1993, 6)

Reacting to the controversy surrounding the exhumation and reinternment of the remains, Sr Fahy described the way society treated the Magdalene women as 'criminal'. However, her comments focused on the impact of the controversy on 'the older sisters' of the congregation, and downplayed calls for redress for those who had been in the Magdalene Laundry system:

"The other reality is that I would be concerned if people got stuck on saying this should never have happened or that we want a redress, because in life you can't just undo something like this."

"I would be much more interested in examining the injustices that women continue to suffer in Irish life," she says.

(Lavery, M. (1993) A nun's story. *Evening Herald*, 15 September 1993, 6)

Even though High Park Magdalene Laundries had housed women until 1991, and other institutions remained in operation at the time of the interview in 1993, the article nonetheless situated the laundry system within a historical context. It was

framed as a phenomenon of its time and—using a term recurrent in decades of historical reportage—a ‘haven’ for women.

In the ‘A Social Sort of Column’ in the *Irish Times*, health and social affairs correspondent Padraig O’Morain reported on a public meeting that addressed the exhumations. In the piece, Josie Gilbert, who had been born in High Park is quoted eloquently vocalising the anger of attendees at media coverage utilising the phrase ‘fallen women’. She pointed out that many women had ended up in Magdalene Laundries ‘for reasons that had nothing to do with what is implied by the term’. Yet despite this, in a line that perhaps betrayed something of a disconnect between the public and the media on the issue, O’Morain relegated the anger of the women in the room to the past, describing the atmosphere at the meeting as one where, ‘the audience seemed to be as angry at things which happened 30 years ago as if they had happened 30 days ago’ (O’Morain, 1993).

As matters stand, the order seems unable to accept that this controversy is about how society in the present feels affronted by the behaviour of society in the past, and that it cannot simply be regarded as a private affair.

The order’s opponents in this matter seem unwilling to acknowledge that the nuns worked within a society which was, itself, cruel to many women, and that they themselves were products as well as agents of that society.

Next Saturday, we would do well to commemorate all the women and children who suffered at the hands of that arrogant, stupid society of which we are well rid (O’Morain, 1993).

This determination to create a sense of equivalence in suffering between the nuns and the women in their charge, while simultaneously portraying the Magdalene Laundries as relics of a bygone era, is all the more remarkable when in the paragraph directly preceding the above passage, O’Morain acknowledged that some ‘40 women still work in a laundry run by the order in the city centre and live in a premises run by the order’. The column also stated that an *Irish Times* request to visit the institution was refused (O’Morain, 1993). Similarly, in her column in the *Sunday Independent* marking the MMC public memorial for the exhumed women, Patricia Redlich described mourners as marking ‘the passing of a harsh age’. Her readers are told that ‘Dickensian laundries’ run by nuns ‘were the only substitute for the streets’ and that ‘hard labour the only honourable alternative to prostitution for women who fell by the wayside’. Once again, the dominant narrative of charity and refuge is

presented as fact. Redlich also made a conscious effort to equate the experience of the nuns with the abuses suffered by the Magdalene women. Both were victims in this narrative:

They were not nice times. Not for many of the nuns either. They were the days when women without dowries became "lay" nuns, the rigid class structures making virtual slaves of poor women called by God, but accepted with bad grace.

(Redlich, P. (1993) Last respects paid to society's lost souls. *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1993,

4)

Indeed, some of the coverage implored journalism to avert its gaze entirely and let the issue rest. In a strongly worded opinion column in the *Sunday Independent* following the reinternment of the remains, Eilis O'Hanlon rather glibly opined that 'it is about time that a line was drawn underneath the whole controversy'.

While it was 'a sorry episode in Ireland's past, and a dreadful tragedy for all the families involved, it is nonetheless hard to see why the original sale of the graveyard should have prompted such a pathetic orgy of moral outrage (O'Hanlon, 1993).

Humbug and a flurry of unfocused moral outrage

NOW that the remains of the unfortunate women popularly known as the Magdalenes

Let's lay the issue of the Magdalen women to rest, says **Eilis O'Hanlon**

bound to ask why it took the sale of a graveyard to bring it about. Why could it not have been done sooner? The suffering of the women was already known and

(O'Hanlon, E. (1993) Humbug and a flurry of unfocused moral outrage. *Sunday Independent*, 19

September 1993, 15)

Despite the absence of an in-depth investigation by any Irish journalist into the sale of the land or the propriety of the granting of the exhumation licence by the Department of the Environment in the first place, O'Hanlon nonetheless states with certainty that there is 'nothing controversial about it.' Instead, she retreats to the

historical consensus media frame of the Magdalene Laundries as charitable, and the women as ‘abandoned’, eliminating the need for any further journalistic inquiry.

What is ironic, of course, is that the debts incurred by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity originated in their earlier decision to build a hostel for marginalised women. That in itself should be taken as a sign of their charity. For all the earlier mistakes of the order, it could at least be recognised that they are now trying to do something positive to look after women with nowhere else to go — women who have been abandoned and mistreated by their own families and communities — whilst liberal society itself is doing nothing.

(O’Hanlon, E. (1993) Humbug and a flurry of unfocused moral outrage. *Sunday Independent*, 19 September 1993, 15)

For O’Hanlon, this consensus view was ironclad, sufficient for her to conclude that the ‘whole controversy has the unmistakeable whiff of humbug about it. It is moral outrage purely for its own sake, for the sheer pleasure of it’ (O’Hanlon, 1993).

Indeed, the regularity with which both journalists and the nuns themselves refer to the Magdalene Laundries—some of which were still in operation in 1993—and the women incarcerated within them as relics of a bygone era is instructive. The ongoing exhumations are glossed over by rhetorically relegating the institutions to the past.

Those affected by the exhumations are, in turn, framed as being overly consumed by the past, a characterisation that serves to delegitimise their anger in the present.

McGettrick et al (2021) point out that in ‘relegating abuse to the ‘historical’ there is an inference that survivors’ and/or family members’ ongoing trauma is also a thing of the past, with the resulting logic that these individuals and their advocates are somehow (and merely) anachronistic’ (McGettrick et al, 2021: 39).

These examples illustrate that even as the exhumations became a subject of controversy, mainstream media coverage continued to reinforce the longstanding consensus narrative of Magdalene Laundries as charitable institutions, prioritising the perspectives of the religious orders while marginalising the experiences of the women in the institutions.

Letters to the Editor: Public Memory and the Consensus Narrative of Charity

Letters to the editor reveal a contemporary tension in 1993 between the consensus narrative that lauded the benevolence of the nuns and framed the women as abandoned, and the early emergence of dissenting voices. Most notably, in these letters, some members of the public were already articulating the very questions and moral concerns that, a decade later, would become central to journalistic investigations into the exhumations.

For example, in a letter in the *Irish Independent* on 30 August 1993, a P. O'Daly astutely queried why the remains of the women were being cremated rather than being buried, correctly pointing out that cremation 'only in recent times had the approval of the Catholic Church'. He also noted that the area where the nuns were buried 'will not be disturbed' while the land holding the Magdalene women would be sold for housing. As a result, these women 'are no longer allowed Rest In Peace' (O'Daly, 1993). In fact, cremation was forbidden by the Catholic Church until 1983. Currently, Canon Law 1176 'earnestly recommends' burial of remains and points out that cremation is not forbidden 'unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to Christian teaching' (McGettrick et al, 2021: 169). The question of why the remains were being cremated instead of buried in accordance with Catholic tradition, first raised by a member of the public in a letter to a newspaper, was not addressed by any journalist until 2003—a full decade after the remains had been exhumed. Some members of the public did write to defend the nuns and the exhumation process. In a letter to the *Irish Press*, an A. O'Neill, wrote that he had been 'connected with those "maggies" for the past 40 years' and wanted to 'clear up some statements' made by Nell McCafferty in her column earlier that September. Again, O'Neill reiterated the consensus narrative of charity in the face of mounting debt in defence of the religious. He concluded the letter by stating that he 'cannot praise enough the work done by those nuns' (O'Neill, 1993).

First, it is necessary for those sisters to sell the burial ground to pay off a huge debt incurred in building new homes for those so-called fallen women.

Never have those women had to work in their bare feet in "the swinging sixties." On the contrary, they got a new pair of shoes every year, about what I buy myself.

It is incorrect also to say they worked without pay, as apart from board and lodgings however simple that was, they also received pocket money every week.

They also got a holiday every year and many that I knew got the chance of outside employment. But in most cases they were only too glad to come back to the institute known to them as home.

(O'Neill, A. (1993) Nell and the Magdalens. *Irish Press*, 16 September 1993, 34)

Similarly, in a letter to the *Irish Times* a Mrs M. Gill took issue with Fintan O'Toole's view of the Magdalene Laundries, pointing out that it was one of her 'treats' as a child to visit her aunt in High Park, who was a nun at the convent. She undermined the carceral nature of the Magdalene Laundries, emphasising its charitable purpose as a 'women's refuge' and that all the women resident in the institution were there by choice:

My memory is of a group of tough, middle-aged Dublin women having lots of fun at the expense of my aunt; who also enjoyed the "crack". These women were there from choice — they asked to be admitted, it was a "women's refuge" and protecting them was part of the nuns work.

Sure, laundry work was hard and still is, but the women were well cared for — nursed when they got ill, and allowed to die with dignity (Gill, 1993).

Also writing in the *Irish Times*, a priest, C.T. Greenan O.P., further responded to mounting criticism of the nuns for exhuming the remains buried in High Park. He said the impression given in 'some letters and articles' on the issue was 'that the nuns there have been guilty of some sort of crime'. The priest then reverted to the

dominant narrative of charity, asserting that, not only had the nuns cared for the women in life, but were now continuing to do so in death:

Maybe it is because these particular bodies are being exhumed that some people feel so strongly about the whole idea of exhumation. Were the nuns in question disposing of the bodies in one of our city dumps I could understand the outcry. On the contrary, it is to save from oblivion the names of these women (whom they befriended in life and in death when no one else would) that they are having their remains reverently reburied in their order's plot in Ireland's premier cemetery, with a monument to their memory within a stone's throw of Daniel O'Connell's and Cardinal Cullen's.

(Greenan, C.T. (1993) The Magdalens, *Irish Times*, 16 September 1993, 11)

In Greenan's view, the very act of exhuming the remains was itself a kindness, a final act of charity towards the women. Their identities were being saved from 'oblivion' so they could be buried in the shadow of two of Ireland's foremost defenders of the Catholic faith. The fact that newspaper coverage had already pointed to the fact that the OLC did not know even the names of some of the women exhumed was not addressed by the prelate.

The Provincial of the OLC Sr Angela Fahy also wrote to the newspapers to highlight the 'pain and anguish' it had caused the order to read media descriptions of the women in their care as 'abandoned or unwanted'. She also defended the decision to exhume the remains taking issue with a 'suggestion' in the *Irish Independent* that the plot of land containing the remains of the religious sisters on the property was excluded from the sale.

The small convent graveyard is located at a considerable distance from the site in question. The suggestion in your report that it was excluded from this sale is therefore irrelevant. All of us here in High Park joined in a special liturgy celebrated for our departed friends on the occasion of their exhumation (Fahy, 1993).

Other members of the public recounted personal memories of the institution now making national headlines. In the *Irish Times*, Aidan Arnold described the ‘sad fate’ of the women who died in the laundries because of the ‘warped concept of morality as preached by the Catholic Church’.

It makes it easier to understand the German people when they say that they did not know what was happening behind closed doors in the 1930s and 1940s in their country.

I remember bringing linen to the convent in Gloucester Street on a regular basis for cleaning, but although it struck me as a strange and depressing place, I had no inkling of what was happening inside those four walls to these unfortunate women (Arnold, 1993)

This pervasive societal ignorance regarding the lived realities of the Magdalene Laundries belied the fact that the institutions—and their fundamentally carceral nature—were never hidden from the Irish public. As has been already been detailed in this dissertation, their existence and nature were routinely foregrounded in much of the media coverage and framed as charitable endeavours for much of the twentieth century.

Memories of High Park were also at the forefront Tadhg O’Scaill’s mind, who wrote to the *Irish Times* of his ‘personal experience’ as a veterinarian to the animals on the convent farm. His letter is particularly instructive in that, although ‘well acquainted’ with ‘the farm hands, the sisters and helpers’, he makes almost no reference to the women incarcerated and working within the institution. Themes so evident in early newspaper coverage of the Magdalene Laundries—most notably the erasure of the women and the framing of the nuns as benevolent caregivers—are clearly visible in his recollections. Despite acknowledging that the women ‘did not wish to be kept there and resented being kept against their will’, O’Scaill nevertheless framed the nuns as having ‘accepted the difficult task of looking after them and providing them with food, clothing and a safe roof over their heads’. Here, as in earlier media representations, the carceral nature of the Magdalene Laundry is recast as an act of kindness and charity. The nuns were ‘kind, friendly and very hard-working’ and had ‘a well nigh on impossible task to perform’ in the absence of ‘modern detention facilities’. It is striking evidence of the power of this consensus narrative that, in a letter addressing the exhumation of hundreds of women who had lived and died in a Magdalene Laundry—an institution he acknowledged was

carceral—O’Scaill’s predominant emotion was sympathy, not for the women, but for ‘one bright, gentle and very active’ nun who told him she had not been home on holiday in nearly three decades:

Her reply shocked me. She said that she had not been home on holiday for 28 years and she reckoned she would not go on holiday now as she felt she could not face back to the very difficult task of looking after the women entrusted to them and that she would wait until she went to her everlasting holiday in heaven.

I sincerely hope she has received a better reward in heaven for her dedicated unselfish labours than we would now accord her on earth. – Yours, etc.,

(O’Scaill, T. (1993) Magdalen graveyard. *Irish Times*, 28 August 1993, 15)

However, other members of the public were not so sanguine about the issue. Aodhán Madden wrote to the *Irish Press* stating that a funeral and monument to the women was ‘the least the Catholic church can do to give back to these people what was criminally stolen from them—their names and dignity’. He outlined how the ‘appalling scandal of the Magdalen laundries (sic) and other such institutions for the so-called “morally insane” is only now being revealed’ and praised the media ‘for opening up this poisonous well in our very recent past’ (Madden, 1993). This latter praise is perhaps a little overstated. While the media duly reported on the issue, it would take until 2003 for journalists to inquire as to the appropriateness and legality of the exhumations and the wider operation of the Magdalene Laundries as a whole. In fact, some of the more inquiring questions being posed in 1993 can be found in the letters pages rather than the news pages of Ireland’s national newspapers. In response to a letter by A. O’Neill in the *Irish Press* shortly after news of the exhumations broke in 1993, Maura Harrington posed ‘a few questions’ for O’Neill, who had written that he had been ‘connected with those “maggies” for the past 40 years’ (O’Neill, 1993). Her questions directly challenged the prevailing consensus narrative—precisely the kinds of questions reporters at the time were failing to ask:

- (b) Is not part of the reason for selling the burial ground to recoup losses incurred by speculation in GPA shares?
- (c) Is it not a little unhealthy to wear just one pair of shoes continuously — particularly when working in a steam-filled environment?
- (d) How much pocket money (sic) did these grown-up women receive?
- (e) Where did these women 'get' their holiday each year — at what locations and under what conditions?
- (f) "... in most cases they were only too glad to come back to the institute known to them as home" — does that translate as glad to be institutionalised?

(Harrington, M. (1993) Magdalen questions. *Irish Press*, 22 August 1993, 33)

Although Harrington adopted something of a sarcastic tone, her questions drew attention to issues the media in 1993 largely ignored. She interrogated the official explanation for the selling of the land while also querying the treatment of the women and the nature of their incarceration. It would be another decade before another reporter looked at the exhumations in more depth and elevated the Magdalene Laundries to that of a national 'scandal'.

Activism and the Media shift to Controversy

Despite the somewhat anodyne nature of much of the coverage of the exhumations, the issue was nonetheless gaining traction with a cohort of society appalled at the decision to grant the exhumations. A fortnight after the story broke, the *Irish Times* reported that a group calling itself the Magdalen Memorial Committee (MMC) had written to the Archbishop of Dublin calling on him to organise a 'public funeral' for the exhumed women and to make a 'substantial donation' towards a memorial in a prominent place in Dublin 'as a permanent reminder of past injustices' (O'Loughlin, 1993). The report acknowledged that the decision to exhume the remains to sell the land had caused 'some controversy' and concluded by quoting MMC founder Patricia McDonnell:

“These women were treated as worthless in life and now they are worthless in death,” she said.

“The idea that they should be disturbed from their resting place is obnoxious” (O’Loughlin, 1993).

The group was more prominently featured in an article in the *Sunday Tribune* on 29 August. The criticisms made by the MMC were foregrounded and formed the principal focus of the report. Patricia McDonnell was quoted extensively and directly countered the narrative that the Magdalene Laundries were charitable enterprises:

“These women were treated with disrespect when they were alive, and now they are seen as unworthy in death,” said Patricia McDonnell.

“If you are to justify digging up graves by saying it is to pay for new buildings, then why don’t we solve Dublin’s housing problem by digging up Glasnevin cemetery and building houses on it. This isn’t just land.” (McKay, 1993).

In contrast to some of the other contemporary reportage, the statement that the women residing in the institution were abandoned by their families and society is placed in inverted commas in the piece, identifying it as a claim rather than a fact. Similarly, the reasoning by the Catholic Press Office that the exhumations were required to sell land to cover outstanding debts when the OLC built a centre for marginalised women is also subtly questioned by placing the phrase ‘marginalised women’ in inverted commas.

Public outrage at the decision quickly became the main thrust of some reporting. The *Evening Herald*, which devoted more coverage to the story than any other newspaper, was notable for the fact that it consistently framed its reporting through a lens of controversy. For example, it carried the story on its front page on 9 September 1993 under the headline: ‘Graves Outrage’ and pointed out that members of the MMC had threatened to picket the site if a public funeral was not granted to the women whose remains had been exhumed (Murphy, McEaney and Farrelly, 1993).

Evening Herald
 Thu, Sept. 9, 1993
 Vol. 182 No. 214
 Price 25p



GRAVES OUTRAGE

© My sad search for a forgotten Magdalen: See Page 3.

Tom's in The Firm
 • Read Weekend Planner on Tom Cruise's smash new movie

PLUS:
 • Turn to centre for fashion special on a different kind of wedding



Michelle to wed LA Law star

Protest as nuns dig up and cremate 133 women

A DUBLIN property site was threatened with pickets today in protest over the exhumation and planned reburial of the remains of 133 women in a convent graveyard plot.

A group of relatives of the 'Magdalen' women vowed to picket the former cemetery at High Park Convent, Drumcondra if the remains are not given a public funeral.

Last week the remains were exhumed from their resting place in the convent owned by the Sisters of Charity and cremated at Glasnevin cemetery.

The ashes of the women were being held in urns at the Glasnevin cemetery church today while a decision is awaited on the final burial arrangements.

Today the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity say they were forced to sell the

the graveyard as part of 12 new private developments site.

And the Catholic Press Office said today that the women, most of whom worked in the convent, were buried in the convent cemetery.

The newly formed Magdalen Memorial Committee has written to the Archbishop of Dublin requesting a public funeral for the women.

But relatives were today

angry that the women, some of whom were downcast, unmarried nuns or former prostitutes, are to be reburied at Glasnevin Cemetery without a public ceremony.

© TO PAGE THREE

SULTRY Hollywood actress Michelle (Catherine Furler) is said to be 'reuniting' today. She plans to marry 25-year-old LA Law star David Kelly 25. • Full story: Page 11

(Murphy, C., McEneaney A. and Farrelly, B. (1993) Graves Outrage: Nuns dig up and cremate 133 women. *Evening Herald*, 9 September 1993, 1)

The newspaper also attempted to explore the lived experiences of the women, running a case study inside the main jacket. It also subtly questioned the morality of exhuming the women in order to sell the land which held their remains:

Walking through the grounds of the Sisters of Charity convent on Grace Park road in Drumcondra, it is impossible to find any sign that a graveyard ever existed.

In fact the only means of seeing what was once a graveyard is through an adjoining field, which already as a "sold" sign proudly showing...Gone are the few remaining headstones that read "Magdalen of the Sorrows" and "Magdalen of the Sacred Heart".

Gone is the resting place for 133 Irish women. Their ashes are now stored in urns in a vault within Glasnevin Cemetery (Evening Herald, 1993).

The reburial ceremony took place on 11 September 1993 and was attended by around 25 nuns, their chaplain and a small number of lay people. No relatives of the women were in attendance, which became a key point of contention between the OLC and the relatives of the exhumed women (O'Kane, 1993). A report of the burial service was carried on the front page of the *Evening Herald*—again using a controversial frame—stressing public 'anger' over the 'secret reburial' where the urns carrying the remains of the women were transported to their final resting place in the back of a

jeep, rather than a hearse (Moloney and Power, 1993). A picture of the urns was also published, with a later edition publishing a photograph of the burial ceremony itself:

Evening Herald

Sat, Sept. 11, 1993
Vol. 102 No. 216
Price 55p

EROTIC?

Meet the man who's bringing the sex toy trade to Dublin. See page Seven

CITY

THE FINAL JOURNEY

THE remains of 155 women, dug up amid controversy from a former convent cemetery, were reburied today.

A group of 25 nuns and a priest gathered for the reburial service at Glasnevin Cemetery. The remains of what have

By EUGENE MOLONEY

... become known as the Magdalens — mostly destitute women, single mothers and prostitutes — were entombed in brown plastic urns. They had been exhumed and reinterred in order to make way for the convent cemetery and which, until ear-

lier this month, had been their resting place.

They were reinterred in a common grave at Glasnevin Cemetery in a plot owned by the nuns of the Sisters of Charity.

Other nuns, also with white stick-on labels, carried such inscriptions as "Magdalene of St. John's", "Magdalene of St. John's", and "Magdalene of St. John's".

Earlier today, the brown urns had been taken from a store room at Glasnevin Cemetery and loaded into the back of a jeep.

● TO PAGE THREE

WIN

See Man Utd in action!

Win two return flights plus match tickets to see Manchester United play Arsenal next Sunday. See Sports Section.

WIN

Be the new Naomi . . .

We are offering a guy and a girl the chance to win hundreds of pounds worth of clothes and modelling contracts in Dublin, Paris and Madrid. See page 12

Big bucks for Bruce

Wills set to collect \$1 Bn for three months' work. See Page 17

NEXT WEEK

HOSTAGES TO HORROR:

In-depth reports on the drug scene in Dublin today start on Tuesday.

SHOCK AS LAWYER QUILTS IN JACKSON CASE: SEE PAGE 4

(Moloney, E. (1993) The Final Journey. *Evening Herald*, 11 September 1993, 1)

Evening Herald, Saturday, September 11, 1993 3

ANGER AT SECRECY SURROUNDING CEREMONY

Magdalens are reburied

● FROM PAGE ONE

When the mass of the remains of the 155 women, who in 1991, had been dug up from a site near the High Park convent, Droicheada, was taken to the convent of the Sisters of Charity, after being found in a plot where an open common grave lay ready to receive them.

Their remains were taken from a store room, loaded into a jeep and driven to the grave at the edge of the opening cemetery.

After the service, the Sister of Charity Reverend Mother, Sr Anne Marie, said she did not know of any relatives who had been in touch with the Order about the ceremony.

Sr Anne Marie would not say why the land at High Park had been sold or who had bought it.

"That's not my affair to tell you," she said.

Today, relatives of the deceased expressed their disappointment at not having been informed of the reburial.

Members of the Magdalens Memorial committee gathered at Glasnevin Cemetery this afternoon and placed what they described as "white urns". They said they were planning a more formal service at a later date.

Jeep in place of a hearse

By EUGENE MOLONEY

THREE nuns lay on the grave at Glasnevin Cemetery today, the final resting place of the 155 Magdalens women.

The women, who in 1991, had been dug up from a site near the High Park convent, Droicheada, were taken to the convent of the Sisters of Charity, after being found in a plot where an open common grave lay ready to receive them.

There was no hearse and no church service.

As the sun shone on a crisp September morning, 10 cars followed the grey jeep to the grave at the edge of the opening cemetery.

**There was no hearse and
no church service.**

**Their remains were taken
from a store room, loaded
into a jeep and driven to the
plot where an open commu-
nal grave lay ready to
receive them.**

(Moloney, E. (1993) Jeep in Place of a Hearse. *Evening Herald*, 11 September 1993, 3)

The language used in the reporting of the *Evening Herald* coverage points to a journalism that was at least attempting to highlight the callous nature of the burial. Although it noted that the reburial involved a ‘simple moving service’, it also observed that the remains were carried in ‘brown plastic urns’ some bearing the inscription ‘unknown’, with the entire service lasting ‘a little under half an hour’. Relatives of the deceased women told the newspaper they were ‘appalled’ at the ‘secret burial’ and pointed out that, despite the claims of the nuns, they had not been informed of the event (Moloney and Power, 1993).

Some of the reporting also began to openly challenge the version of events that had been supplied to the media by the OLC; namely that when someone died in its care, it informed the relatives. Coverage of a meeting held in the Ormond Hotel the night after the reburial service received a large amount of media attention, in particular in the *Evening Herald*. In a full page dedicated to the experiences of women who had resided at High Park, the newspaper revealed that only one of the 133 women exhumed was not cremated and reinterred by the nuns. One of these women, Jane ‘Bessie’ Henderson is reported to have been sent to the laundry after she became pregnant as a young woman and lived there until her death, in her 70s, in 1983. When her grandchildren read about the exhumations, they ‘intervened and stopped the cremation with just 10 minutes to spare’. She was later buried in the family’s own plot at Glasnevin Cemetery. Bessie’s granddaughter told the newspaper that when she had died 10 years earlier, the family were denied access to her remains:

We wanted to bury her ourselves but we were told she was a ward of court... We used to visit her there. We used to bring up little parcels and toothbrushes and sometimes clothes. It was terrible when they said we couldn’t bury our own relative (Allen, 1993).

Some of the reporting also began to push back against the dominant narrative that the Magdalene Laundries were charitable endeavours engaged in the work of rescue and refuge for forgotten and abandoned women. In a *Sunday Independent* piece marking the public memorial service organised by the MMC on St Stephen's Green in late September 1993, Patricia Redlich dedicated a lengthy portion of the article to MMC founder Patricia McDonnell's personal experience of her family removing a relative from a Dublin Magdalene Laundry after the woman spent 20 years behind its walls:

Mary, headstrong and 16, didn't always do what she was told by her brothers, the parish priest argued she was in grave moral danger, and found her a job in Dublin. After 20 years of silence, and five years of hassle with nuns who said they didn't know her, relatives finally got her home in 1962, toothless, full of tapeworms, malnourished and totally institutionalised, standing to attention even when the family's two-year-old toddled into the room.

(Redlich, P. (1993) Last respects paid to society's lost souls. *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1993,

4)

McDonnell's reflections ran contrary to the consensus narrative of charity prevalent in both the historical and contemporary reportage, including in Redlich's own piece. She recalled a woman who had been abused and neglected, not a woman who had found refuge with the nuns. She also hit out at some commonly held perceptions which had been repeated in the pages of Irish newspapers—namely that the women in Magdalene Laundries were predominantly pregnant, unwanted or in some way mentally impaired:

"What devastated the family most, was that when they turned up at the appointed hour to collect her, they found her in uniform and on her knees, head bent over her bucket, scrubbing the convent hall floor. The nuns hadn't even bothered to tell her she was about to leave for ever." She wasn't poor, wasn't mentally or physically handicapped, and wasn't pregnant.

(Redlich, P. (1993) Last respects paid to society's lost souls. *Sunday Independent*, 26 September 1993,

4)

In a somewhat more oblique way, McDonnell also took issue with how the exhumations had been reported by the press. The anger felt by relatives and those beginning to campaign around the issue, for McDonnell, was not adequately reflected in reportage:

"What outraged us was the fact that the nuns conveniently forgot that relatives existed. It seems that the Magdalen women, unworthy in life, were also found unworthy in death. That hurts. Two lines in a newspaper to the effect that 133 bodies would be exhumed on the morrow from their burial plot in the convent grounds of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in High Park, Dublin, was not enough. Families who had already suffered loss, been racked with guilt, haunted by not knowing the fate of their womenfolk, deserved better" (Redlich, 1993)

Twenty-years on from her campaigning journalism in relation to Ireland's Industrial and Reformatory School system, Nell McCafferty's rage had not abated when describing yet another institutional system. This time, she used her column in the *Irish Press* to describe a visit she made in the early 1970s to 'a basement laundry in a convent in the inner city of Dublin'.

They were inarticulate, monosyllabic, distant, wary, resentful at being shown to an outsider. What we must now face is the truth of what made them so. They had been, most of them, pushed out of the house often as not, and locked away for life. They were given to understand that they were not henceforth free and in truth, they were not. They were not even paid for their labour. They lived like any other slaves (McCafferty, 1993).

McCafferty's reference to slavery was particularly prescient. However, such language was very much the exception rather than the rule in the coverage of the High Park exhumations in 1993. It would take another two decades for the Special Rapporteur on Child Protection Dr Geoffrey Shannon to confirm the accuracy of McCafferty's view, in his conclusion that from the treatment of women in Ireland's Magdalene Laundry system 'constituted slavery' (Shannon, 2012: 78).

The only substantial journalistic efforts querying the official narrative around the need for the exhumations prior to 2003 came, not from a traditional news reporter, but from a columnist. In the *Irish Times*, Fintan O'Toole pointed out that the order had bought some \$110,000 of shares in Guinness Peat Aviation (GPA), which was now in financial crisis. Since those shares were now effectively worthless, he directly questioned if the official reason given for the exhumation and sale of the land—that the order needed to clear debts incurred constructing a new premises for the women in its care—was the sole motive:

According to the Catholic Press and Information Office, the convent is short of money and needs to raise cash for further development at the convent.

I'm not suggesting that the only reason the convent needs money is because it lost out on stock-market speculation. I'm sure it does need cash and that it will put the money to good use in its work for homeless women. But at least part of its need for cash must have something to do with losses on GPA shares.

The shares it held were purchased in 1991, when the price was very high. They cost about \$110,000 and are now all but worthless. That is a very substantial loss for a charitable institution to take. While it would be fanciful to suggest that the collapse of GPA caused the exhumation of the Magdalens, there is at least a very thin thread linking these two events (O'Toole, 1993).

Despite O'Toole's speculation around this connection between the exhumations and the order's substantial losses because of poor investments, this avenue of journalistic investigation is never further explored by the *Irish Times* or, indeed, any other newspaper.

Media Coverage of the Magdalene Laundries, 1993–1999

As the issue of the exhumation and the eventual reburial of the women receded from the press, the Magdalene Laundries were to only intermittently crop up in news coverage for the remainder of the 1990s. None of this reporting attempted to examine the propriety of the 1993 exhumations or the operation of the institutions themselves. Instead, the media repeatedly relied on the longstanding consensus narrative of the Magdalene Laundries that it had helped to construct, framing them as largely charitable endeavours from a bygone era.

One of the most significant articles carried after the 1993 exhumations appeared in the *Irish Times* to mark the closure of the last Magdalene Laundry in Ireland—Sean McDermott Street (formerly Gloucester Street) Magdalene Laundry in Dublin—in 1996. The article is noteworthy in that, while it reports on the imminent closure of an institution still operating in contemporary Ireland, it nevertheless framed the wider Magdalene Laundry system as a historical artefact from a distant and concluded past. The main interviewee was the Reverend Mother Sr Lucy Bruton and, as a result, the piece is skewed towards the inherited media narrative of the laundries as places of refuge where women were free to come and go. The voices and views of those women then still resident in the institution, or who had previously passed through it, are entirely absent and go unheard. Instead, as early as the opening two paragraphs, they are presented as statistics and units of production:

A controversial chapter of Dublin life will end next month with the closure of what's believed to be the last of the capital's convent laundries, that belonging to the Convent of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity in Sean Mac Dermott Street. At the height of its productivity 150 women worked in this laundry. Today 40 women are in residence at the convent, the eldest of them 79. They will all remain living there after the laundry closes on October 25th.

Approximately 40 per cent of the women who came here in the past were single women who became pregnant and were rejected by their families, says the Reverend Mother, Sister Lucy Bruton.

(Culliton, G. (1996) Last Days of a Laundry. *Irish Times*, 25 September 1996)

LAST DAYS OF A LAUNDRY

The women's babies were orphaned, adopted, though the men were not involved with the adoptions, according to Sister Lucy. Sister Lucy has had to go back to the babies. They were adopted or fostered and often didn't know where they were.

Sister Lucy, who has been in religious life for 40 years, says she went to the book bank and talk about enlightenment. "Hospitality were grim places in those days too. Patients got a raw deal and nurses were treated like slaves. I don't think people in 1920s knew what people assume that things in 1920s could be the same as in 1990s."

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Eastern Health Board. This would at least imply that the Irish state was tacitly subsidising the OLC for the work women carried out. The piece also pointed out that, in their older years, the women received the state pension, half of which was taken by the nuns for food and board.

The perception of the women as shamed and sinful is both disavowed and simultaneously reinforced. On the one hand, Sr Bruton states that attaching the label ‘sinner’ to the women made her ‘gorge rise’; while also describing the institutions as existing in a time before families understood that ‘even if a daughter had let them down’ they didn’t have to hide her away. This contradiction works to reaffirm the very moral framework that the article seeks to reject—an stark illustration of this dissertation’s broader claim as to the dual role of Irish journalism in sustaining a consensus that obscured the abusive nature of the institutions, while simultaneously positioning them as sites of controversy.

Articles that focused on the viewpoint of the women residing in Magdalene Laundries, or where they were the focus of the narrative, are rare in the period between 1993 and 2003. For example, a report on President Mary Robinson unveiling a plaque in St Stephen’s Green in honour of the women who died in the Magdalene institutions, published in the months preceding the closure of Sean McDermott Street was granted just three paragraphs in the *Irish Times* (*Irish Times*, 1996). A 1998 *Irish Times* opinion piece from Bernadette Fahy, a former resident of the St Vincent’s Industrial school (known as Goldenbridge), was a notable exception. The piece stands out from much of the reportage from this period in that it directly challenged the accepted narrative of the Magdalene Laundries as places of refuge and charity. Even more noteworthy is the fact that it pointed to the state’s involvement with the institutions—an issue that would generate much media scrutiny in subsequent decades. Fahy described the Magdalene Laundries ‘moral prisons’ which, although founded by religious orders, were ‘sustained by the State to the extent that some women who had “fallen” were given a choice between a State or a religious penitentiary’ (Fahy, 1998). She further observed that women who attempted to escape the Magdalene Laundries were sometimes returned to the institutions ‘by the Garda, acting on behalf of the State’. This collaboration between an arm of the state and the Magdalene Laundries failed to garner any significant media attention until it was raised by the Justice for Magdalenes campaign in the mid-2000s. Notably, the state did not formally acknowledge that the Garda returned

women to Magdalene Laundries until 2009 (Justice For Magdalenes, 2009; McGettrick et al, 2021: 53). Fahy also took aim at the narrative ‘myth’ of Magdalene women as having been abandoned:

Church and State played a significant role in fostering the myth that these women and children had no families who could or would care for them.

This is far from the whole truth. Many “orphans” had parents and all “Magdalen women” had families. Some families made desperate efforts to hold on to their children, but commonly Church and State intervened and removed them from the relative safety of their home environment.

(Fahy, B. (1998) Where were the men when the women were being incarcerated? *Irish Times*, 30 March 1998, 3)

While efforts such as these by survivors and activists, alongside rare critical interventions by journalists like O’Toole, McCafferty and Redlich, began to disrupt the persistent and entrenched narrative of charity, it would be another decade before Irish journalism fully interrogated the circumstances of the High Park exhumations—revealing discrepancies in the registration of the deaths, additional unrecorded remains and the state’s complicity in allowing these events to occur.

Mary Raftery (2003) and the first journalistic investigation into the 1993 High Park Magdalene Laundry Exhumations

In 2003, journalist Mary Raftery revealed that, during the 1993 exhumation and reinterment process, undertakers discovered the remains of an additional 22 women who had died at the High Park Magdalene Laundry (Humphreys, 2003). The *Irish Times* ran the story on the front page, with Raftery providing a lengthier, more detailed analysis in the main jacket of the newspaper.

Magdalen plot had remains of 155 women

JOE HUMPHREYS

The remains of an additional 22 women were discovered when 133 bodies were being removed from a Magdalen Laundry graveyard in north Dublin in 1993 to allow its development for housing. All but one of the 155 bodies were then cremated at Glasnevin Cemetery.

Death certificates existed for only 75 of the initial 133 bodies, even though it is a criminal offence in this State to fail to register a death which occurs on one's premises.

The 155 bodies were removed from the graveyard because the land at High Park,

Drumcondra, was being sold by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity to a property developer. They had been buried over the previous 100 years.

According to the Department of the Environment, an initial exhumation licence was granted to the Sisters on May 25th, 1993, in respect of 133 named women, one of whom, "Bridget O'Neill", was said to have died as recently as April 1987.

But the firm of undertakers carrying out the exhumations had to stop work when the remains of an additional 22 women were found. A further exhumation licence was issued on August 31st, 1993, to take out "all human remains".

The Department of the Environment has said that death certificates were provided in only 75 of the cases covered by the initial exhumation licence. The General Register Office issued "no-trace" forms for 34 other cases, and said it could not conduct a search of the remaining 24 as "insufficient details" were provided.

The Department added that in the case of the 34 "no-trace" women, "it appears that the statutory registration procedures were not complied with at the time of their deaths".

As for the remaining 24 women, only one was referred to by her first name. The rest were identified only by a religious name

such as "Magdalen of Lourdes" or "Magdalen of St Teresa".

In relation to the additional bodies, the Department said it only had a record of 14 additional remains.

In its statement, the Department added that it had sought "no additional information" for the extra licence. Nor did the Department make any recommendation or direction as to whether the bodies should be cremated or reburied.

The discovery of the additional bodies, and the lack of death certificates for so many of the women, is highlighted by the investigative journalist, Mary Raftery, in her column in *The Irish Times* today.

In a statement replying to Ms Raftery's inquiries, Sister Ann Marie Ryan, of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity, said the exhumation and re-intering of the bodies of the 155 women "was approved by all relevant authorities, and we have had no queries from families about our decision in the intervening time. One family took the remains of a deceased relative to a family plot at this time. The remaining 154 were respectfully cremated and laid to rest in Glasnevin Cemetery at a public ceremony."

Attempts by *The Irish Times* to contact Sister Ryan for further comment yesterday proved unsuccessful.
Mary Raftery: page 14

(Humphreys, J. (2003) Magdalen plot had remains of 155 women. *Irish Times*, 21 August 2003, 1)

The reporting revealed that, because the initial exhumation licence issued in 1933 covered only the 133 remains, the OLC sought and obtained a second exhumation licence for the additional remains discovered. This second licence was granted by the Department of the Environment, which did not request the identities of the 22 additional women. The report also outlined that the Department granted the original exhumation order—covering 133 remains—in the knowledge that the OLC could not produce death certificates for 58 of these women. Raftery also obtained the list of names provided by the OLC to the Department when it sought the original exhumation. The list, which she stated made for 'interesting reading', showed that the order was unaware of the identity of 24 of the women it was seeking to exhume:

Twenty-three of the women are listed under the heading "quasi-religious name" – the nuns admitted that they did not know their real names. They called them "Magdalen of St Cecilia, Magdalen of Lourdes, Magdalen of St Teresa", and so on. Another woman had only a first name.

The nuns told the Department that as they had no names, death certificates for these 24 women could not be produced. The Department raised no objection, despite the fact that some of the women had died as recently as the late 1960s. The nuns also said that there were no death certs for a further 34 women. These women at least had names. But the cause and date of death for most of them are listed as "not known". Some of these women died as recently as the mid-1970s.

(Raftery, M. (2003) Restoring dignity to Magdalens. *Irish Times*, 21 August 2003, 14)

Raftery further revealed that the names engraved on the headstone at Glasnevin Cemetery, where the exhumed and cremated remains were interred, did not correspond to the list of names submitted by the OLC to the Department when seeking the exhumation order (Raftery, 2003). Her investigation marked the first

instance in which Irish journalism had actively and directly examined the High Park exhumations. Furthermore, Raftery's reporting also raised the possibility of criminal impropriety in the operation of a Magdalene Laundry. In her column, she questioned how and why the initial exhumation licence had been granted by the Department of the Environment in 1993 in the absence of death certificates for 58 of the 133 women:

It is a criminal offence in this State to fail to register a death which occurs on your premises. This is normally done by a relative. In the case of the Magdalen women, it was the legal duty of the nuns to register their deaths. It would appear that for at least 58 of these women, the nuns failed to do so.

(Raftery, M. (2003) Restoring dignity to Magdalens. *Irish Times*, 21 August 2003, 14)

However, it was when the additional 22 remains were discovered during the exhumation that 'alarm bells started ringing' (Raftery, 2003). As these new remains were not covered by the initial exhumation licence, work had to cease while a second licence was sought from the Department by the OLC. Raftery pointed out that, rather than halting the exhumations so an investigation could commence, the Department simply granted the licence without asking for the identities of the women, a decision she claimed, 'beggars belief'. As well as the legality of the exhumations, Raftery also queried the moral probity of a religious order that chose to cremate the remains of women who died in its care, in opposition to its own teaching:

Until 20 years ago, cremation was forbidden by Catholic Church canon law. Even today it is frowned on as undesirable. Canon 1176 now "earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained (Raftery, 2003).

This point on surrounding the decision to cremate the remains had been raised in 1993 letter to the *Irish Independent*, though notably not by any journalist reporting on the story at the time (O'Daly, 1993). Raftery also directly questioned the role of the Department in its decision to grant the exhumation licences in the first place, highlighting what she described as a casual collusion between Church and state in the operation of the Magdalene Laundries.

The following day, *The Irish Times* ran a follow up article reporting calls for state inquiry into the matter (Newman, 2003). Notably, this story ran on page six and not on the front page. In response, the OLC contested the accuracy of the reporting and, in a statement issued to the newspaper, claimed that the death of every woman who died in their care was registered with the appropriate authorities:

In living memory, all women who died in our care were registered at Department of Health offices, Griffith Avenue, Dublin. We believe that this practice always pertained — although we do not have the full records available at this time to indicate this. Many of our records were destroyed by fire over the years (Kelly, 2003).

Nun claims many of the records relating to women who worked in laundries were destroyed by fire Order says Magdalen deaths were registered

OLIVIA KELLY

Every woman who died in the Magdalen laundries within living memory was registered with the Department of Health, according to the order who ran the laundries. In a statement responding to a report in *The Irish Times* that women had been buried in the graveyard at a Magdalen laundry in High Park, Drumcondra, Dublin, without their deaths being registered, Sr Anne Marie Ryan of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity said yesterday: "In living memory, all women who died in our care were registered at Department of Health offices, Griffith Avenue, Dublin. We

believe that this practice always pertained — although we do not have the records available at this time to indicate this. Many of our records were destroyed by fire over the years. "We are in contact with the Eastern Region Health Authority in an attempt to trace the Griffith Avenue records," she added in a statement emailed to RTE's *Five Seven Live*. Sr Ryan said that women in the laundry had been attended to by two GPs prior to their deaths and the doctors had been involved in the certification process. "Where possible, families were contacted at the time of serious illness and death.

"We in fact did not always have the full home address of women in our care. This was not a practice we would have initiated or wanted. "To suggest that there was anything irregular about the death of any of these women is preposterous and untrue," her statement concluded. A spokesman for the Department of Health told *The Irish Times* last night that it "could not substantiate" the order's claims that it registered all the deaths. "If we knew the names of the people who died, we could check the register, but without the names it would be very difficult. "We would have to check who was

resident in the Magdalen laundries, and check how many deaths were registered with the Department. Even then it would be very difficult to know for sure it would have to involve an extensive investigation." The *Irish Times* reported on Thursday that the remains of an additional 22 women were discovered from the graveyard at the High Park laundry in 1993 to allow its development for housing. All but one of the 155 bodies were then cremated at Glasnevin Cemetery. Death certificates existed for only 75 of the initial 155 bodies which had been buried over the previous 100 years. It

is a criminal offence in this State to fail to register a death which occurs on one's premises. According to the Department of the Environment, an initial exhumation licence was granted to the Sisters on May 26th, 1995, in respect of 155 named women. But the firm of undertakers carrying out the exhumations had to stop work when the remains of an additional 22 women were found. A further exhumation licence was issued on August 31st, 1995, to take out "all human remains". The Department said death certificates were provided in only 75 of the cases covered by the initial exhumation licence.

The General Register Office issued "no-trace" forms for 34 other cases, and said it could not conduct a search of the remaining 24 as "insufficient details" were provided. The Department added that in the case of the 34 "no-trace" women, "it appears that the statutory registration procedures were not complied with at the time of their deaths". Only one of the remaining 24 women was referred to by her first name. The rest were identified only by a religious name such as "Magdalen of Lourdes" or "Magdalen of St Teresa". The Department said it only had a

record of 14 additional remains. It added it had sought "no additional information" for the extra licence. In an earlier statement replying to inquiries from investigative journalist, Ms Mary Raftery, Sr Ryan said the exhumation and re-interment of the bodies of the 155 women "was approved by all relevant authorities, and we have had no queries from families about our decision in the intervening time. "One family took the remains of a deceased relative to a family plot at this time. The remaining 154 were respectfully cremated and laid to rest in Glasnevin Cemetery at a public ceremony."

Kelly, O. (2003) 'Order says Magdalen deaths were registered', *Irish Times*, 23 August 2003)

The statement from Sr Ann Marie Ryan asserted that the claim that the additional 22 women discovered in 1993 were buried unnamed and unregistered was 'preposterous and untrue'. The OLC Sister stated that, 'in living memory', all women who had died in the order's care had been registered correctly. However, as many of its records had been destroyed by fire, it was now working with the Eastern Regional Health Authority to trace the records (Sheehy, 2003). Sr Ryan then utilised the media opportunity to try and re-assert and reproduce the consensus narrative of the Magdalene Laundries as charitable institutions designed to assist women in need. She claimed that 'women came to them seeking refuge' and emphasised that the nuns 'did not seek them out but we were there to provide shelter when no-one else in society was willing to be of assistance (Sheehy, 2003). One would think that the discovery of such an anomaly in the registration of the deaths of hundreds of women would have resulted in some form of an investigation. At least one organisation, the National Women's Council of Ireland, called on the Department of Justice to launch an investigation into the circumstances granting of the exhumation licence (*Irish Independent*, 2003). However, none was forthcoming. Bar a small number of stories

in the *Irish Times* and the *Irish Independent*, the story fell off the news agenda almost as quickly as it appeared. The apparent lack of media attention to the issue appears to have been a source of frustration for Raftery herself. In a follow up piece in the *Irish Times* one year after the story broke, she lamented how it ‘became a news story for a few days and then simply vanished’ (Raftery, 2004). She again she questioned the legality of the exhumations, pointing out that it was a criminal offence to fail to register a death which occurs on your premises. Notably, Raftery also apportioned significant blame to both Church and state, neither of which, she claimed, had ‘shown the slightest concern that the laws of the land were flagrantly broken in the process’ (Raftery, 2004). The Department, the reader is told, ‘felt no inquiry was required’ while the Garda ‘looked into the matter last autumn and had concluded that no criminal investigation was warranted. No politician has questioned how laws in this regard were so blatantly ignored by Church and State’ (Raftery, 2004).

As Smith (2007b) points out, Ireland in the 1990s was basking in an economic and cultural transformation called the ‘Celtic Tiger’ and ‘had little interest digging up old ghosts’ (432). Despite receiving praise and admiration from fellow journalists, Raftery appears to have been alone in investigating the exhumations. In a column for the *Irish Independent*, Emer O’Kelly credited the discovery of the additional 22 remains in High Park to her ‘tenacious and indefatigable work. (O’Kelly, 2003). For Raftery herself, the story emerged simply because she ‘started asking questions about the High Park burials’ (Raftery, 2004). These questions could have been asked as a decade earlier in 1993; yet, Irish journalism at that time was either unable or unwilling to pursue them.

Indeed, the very fact that an additional 22 remains had been discovered during the initial exhumation process should have been evident to journalists in 1993. All of the main newspapers that reported on the exhumations initially recorded a total of 133 remains. However, after their reinterment on 11 September 1993, multiple articles in the *Irish Independent*, *Irish Press* and *Evening Herald* began to cite a total of 155—accounting for the additional 22 exhumed remains that would not be explicitly acknowledged for another decade. For example, on 9 September, the headline on the *Evening Herald* front page read:



Thurs. Sept. 9, 1993
Vol. 182 No. 214
Price 50p



GRAVES OUTRAGE

● My sad
search for a
forgotten
Magdalen:
See Page 3.

Tom's in
The Firm

● Read Weekend
Planner on Tom
Cruise's smash
new movie

PLUS

● Turn to centre
for fashion special
on a different kind
of wedding



Michelle to wed
LA Law star



SULTRY Hollywood actress Michelle (Carnegie) Pfeiffer is said to be "ecstatically happy" over plans to marry 35-year-old LA Law star David Kelly 35. ● Full story: Page 11.

Protest as nuns dig up
and cremate 133 women

A DUBLIN property site was threatened with pickets today in protest over the exhumation and planned reburial of the remains of 133 women in a convent graveyard plot.

A group of relatives of the 'Magdalen' women vowed to picket the former cemetery at High Park Convent, Drumcondra if the remains are not given a public funeral.

Last week the remains were exhumed from their resting place in the convent owned by the Sisters of Charity and cremated at Glasnevin cemetery.

The ashes of the women were being held in urns at the Glasnevin cemetery today while a decision is awaited on the final burial arrangements.

Today The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity say they were forced to sell the

by CATHERINE MURPHY, ANNEMARIE McNEANEY
and BRENDAN FARRELLY

the graveyard as part of 12 new prime development sites to meet growing Dublin.

And the Catholic Press Office said today that the women, most of whom

worked in the former convent laundry, would have received the full and dignified rights of the Church at the time of their deaths.

The final re-interment would be done with dignity, a spokesman said.

But relatives were today

angry that the women, some of whom were destitute, unmarried mothers or former prostitutes, are to be reburied at Glasnevin Cemetery without a public ceremony.

The newly formed Magdalen Memorial Committee has written to the Archbishop of Dublin requesting a public funeral for the women.

OTO PAGE THREE

HUGE ALERT OVER LOYALIST BOMB THREAT: PAGE 2

(Murphy, C., McEneaney A. and Farrelly, B. (1993) Graves Outrage: Nuns dig up and cremate 133 women. *Evening Herald*, 9 September 1993, 1)

However, two days later, on the day the remains were reburied, the *Evening Herald's* front page lead story included the additional 22 remains that had been found in its opening sentence:

by EUGENE MOLONEY
and BAIRBRE POWER

THE remains of the
155 Magdalen women,
removed from a Dublin
convent cemetery,
were being reburied
today in Glasnevin
cemetery.

(Moloney, E and Power, B. (1993) Anger at secrecy of reburial: The Final Journey. *Evening Herald*, 11 September 1993, 1)

On 13 September, the anomaly in the figures was even more starkly highlighted when, in two separate articles carried on the same page of the newspaper, the

Evening Herald reported that the remains of both 133 and 155 women had been exhumed at High Park:

JANE (Bessie) Henderson is the only one of 133 Magdalen women whose remains were not cremated and reburied at the weekend.

She was given a private reinterment by her family after spending the best part of her life in the Sisters of Charity convent at High Park in Drumcondra, Dublin.

(Allen, L. (1993) Tears for the Tragic Magdalens: Family's fight to give their grandmother a 'proper' burial. *Evening Herald*, 13 September 1993, 3)

Women's reburial defended by nun

THE cost of exhuming the remains of 155 Magdalen women was five times more than the sale of the original graveyard site.

by BAIRBRE POWER

become virtually inaccessible

(Power, B. (1993) Women's reburial defended by nuns. *Evening Herald*, 13 September 1993, 3)

The anomaly also appears in the coverage of other newspapers reporting the story. In its first article on the exhumations, published on 23 August, the *Irish Independent* reported that 133 remains were exhumed (O'Keeffe, 1993). On 11 September, the day of the reinternment, it repeated this figure (*Irish Independent*, 1993). However, the following day its sister newspaper, the *Sunday Independent* recorded a total of 155 exhumed remains, a figure that was again repeated in an *Irish Independent* article published on 13 September (*Sunday Independent*, 1993; *Irish Independent*, 1993). While the *Irish Press* consistently recorded a total of 133 exhumed remains across its 1993 coverage, a short article published the following year gave the higher figure of 155 (*Irish Press*, 1994). This suggests that the fact that an additional 22 remains had been discovered during the exhumation process was already in the public domain in 1993. The fact that multiple newspapers repeatedly reported two different figures—sometimes on the same page—was an inconsistency that could, and should, have been questioned by reporters at the time. However, it was not until 2003 that Mary Raftery brought any journalistic attention to the anomaly.

Another key aspect of the controversy, highlighted by Raftery in 2003 but overlooked in 1993, was how the OLC was granted a licence by the Department of the Environment to exhume the remains even though the identities of all the deceased women were not known. She correctly noted that it is a criminal offence to fail to register a death that occurs on one's premises. Although media reports in 1993 acknowledged that the identities of some of the remains were unidentified, not one newspaper sought to question why these deaths had not been officially registered. For example, in its first story on the exhumations, the *Irish Press* glossed over the fact that the identities of some of the women was unknown in a single sentence: 'More than 20 were called Magdalen and many were laundry workers at the convent' (O'Connor, 1993). Whether or not these unidentified women's deaths had been formally registered—a legal requirement—is neither explored nor questioned. An *Irish Times* report on 8 September outlined that the identities of these 'forgotten women' was not known and that many of the gravestones contained pseudonyms such as 'Magdalene of the Sorrows', 'Magdalene of the Sacred Heart' and 'Magdalen of St Anthony'.

Because many of the graves were used more than once, it was often impossible to distinguish which remains belonged to which name on the headstone (O'Loughlin, 1993)

Two days after the remains were reinterred, the *Irish Times* again pointedly referenced the fact that some of the exhumed remains were unidentified. In a colour piece describing the reburial ceremony, the reporter noted that: 'On many of the urns it simply read "Unknown"'.

They were commonly known as Magdalens, as the urns holding their remains testified. One nameplate read: "Magdalen of St John", another, "Magdalen of St Alphonsus" (O'Kane, 1993).

The *Evening Herald* also repeatedly addressed the fact that the identities of all the women being exhumed was not known. The reader was told that the headstones holding the remains of the women to be exhumed read 'Magdalen of the Sorrows' and 'Magdalen of the Sacred Heart' (Evening Herald, 1993). It also noted, in the same fashion as the *Irish Times*, that when the remains were being reinterred, they were carried in 'brown plastic urns' some bearing the inscription 'unknown'

(Moloney & Power, 1993). Despite extensive reporting on the exhumation of the remains and their subsequent reinterment, no journalist appears to have questioned the OLC regarding its failure to discharge its statutory obligation to register the deaths of all women that died in its care.

The defence offered by the Catholic Press Office for the exhumation of the women is also somewhat perverse—namely that the exhumation and cremation of the women would help the women living with the nuns in the present day:

“It was a case that the exhumation of the remains of those past would be helping the women there today. The Dublin diocese deemed it fitting and gave permission,” said Jim Cantwell of the Catholic Press Office (O’Connor, 1993).

No effort is made in any of the reporting to inquire into the validity of this unconvincing explanation. Nor is much journalistic endeavour expended in examining the OLC and Catholic Press Office claim that any relatives of the women would have been informed of their passing and invited to the liturgy which took place when the women were reinterred (O’Connor, 1993; Murphy, McEneaney & Farrelly, 1993; O’Kane, 1993). This last point would quickly become a major point of dispute between the nuns and the MMC, when relatives and campaigners claimed that, on the contrary, no relatives were invited to the reburial ceremony (Allen, 1993). Amid a media narrative which continued to prioritise the charitable nature of the institutions, a growing number of dissenting voices began to contest this framing, with activists and relatives challenging the propriety of the exhumations and the narrative that these were women had been abandoned only to be cared for by the nuns.

The coverage reflected a striking contradiction whereby the OLC characterised the women as having been ‘abandoned’ by their families, while simultaneously asserting that relatives had been informed of their exhumation (O’Connor, 1993). In fact, just shortly after the exhumations, Sr Angela Fahy appeared on RTÉ’s *Kenny Live* television programme and appeared to contradict even this claim:

We needed to pay...we were in a lot of debt...That graveyard, the impression would be given...that people were visiting...Nobody, apart from the Sisters and the ladies, would have visited that graveyard in years...when you say why not inform people, there was nobody to inform...That’s the truth (McGettrick et al, 2021: 173).

However, other reporting in the *Evening Herald* indicates that relatives did exist and were available to be informed. It highlighted the case of Jane ‘Bessie’ Henderson who died in High Park in 1983. When news of the exhumations emerged, her family alleged they had to intervene to stop her remains from being cremated. They also claimed they were denied access to her remains when she had died a decade earlier (Allen, 1993). While the dispute between relatives and the OLC was highlighted in the coverage, none of the reporting endeavoured to ascertain if the claim by the Catholic Press Office that relatives of the women were informed of the exhumations was, in fact, true. Instead, the Catholic Press Office, through the press, moved to assure the public that the exhumation was done with the ‘greatest sensitivity’, that all of the women received the full rights of the church at the time of their deaths and that they had been remembered at masses. Before the exhumation, a ‘special liturgy’ for the women was held at High Park.

Ultimately, the calls of the MMC for a public funeral and a memorial for the women went unheeded. A church spokesperson told the *Irish Press* that it was ‘unlikely’ that the Archbishop of Dublin Desmond Connell would agree to a public funeral for the women and that any planting of a flower garden at the site of the Magdalene women’s cemetery ‘was now a matter for the developer’ who bought the land. He added that he could see ‘no reason for the memorial’ (McEoin, 1993).

Conclusion

This chapter charts the evolution of Irish journalism’s engagement with the Magdalene Laundry system, tracing how its emergence through survivor testimony, memoir and cultural depictions in the latter half of the twentieth century came up against a media environment still largely rooted in consensus and reproducing a charitable framing of the institutions as sites of charity and moral rescue. The 1993 exhumations on the site of the High Park Magdalene Laundry were the catalyst that finally punctured this consensus. Yet, much of the reportage continued to prioritise this framing, illustrating how deeply ingrained decades of consensus reporting remained. It would take another decade, through the work of Mary Raftery in the *Irish Times*, for journalism to work to reposition itself—moving away from the reproduction of consensus towards a more inquiring role which questioned Church-

state complicity and reframed the Magdalene Laundries as sites of controversy and injustice.

Taken together, this chapter's analysis of the 1993 and 2003 coverage of the High Park exhumations illustrates the dual role Irish journalism played throughout the twentieth century: constructing and sustaining a consensus that obscured abuse, while intermittently and, at times simultaneously reinterpreting that same history as scandal. The Magdalene Laundries were never 'hidden'. Nor were the abuses that occurred in them 'revealed' by the media in the 1990s. Instead, contemporary journalistic and editorial decisions determined what was seen, how it was framed, and when it would finally be confronted, interrogated, and labelled the national 'scandal' it would later become.

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Conclusion

The genesis for this dissertation came about in 2018 when my professional life as a reporter collided with an issue that was, and remains, deeply personal to me. At a highly publicised press conference in May of that year, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs Dr. Katherine Zappone told the assembled media that that 126 cases where births were illegally registered between 1946 and 1969 had been discovered in the records of former religious-run adoption agency St Patrick's Guild, the records of which Tusla (Child and Family Agency) now held. The Minister said that while suspicions about such practices had existed for many years, here, for the first time, was categorical proof. Proof that the state itself uncovered and revealed. Large sections of the media took hold of the proffered narrative and declared these so-called 'revelations' as Ireland's adoption 'scandal'. The state had uncovered the crucial evidence and was acting. In the ensuing coverage, the state was presented as a proactive force uncovering wrongdoing and instigating action rather than as a reactive actor that had been forced into taking these actions. This frame continues to dominate much of the contemporary media coverage of the issue of illegal adoptions. Yet, there has always been another narrative — one in which the state was aware of and sought to obscure the reality of illegal adoptions and illegal birth registrations. In this narrative, documented evidence of such practices existed long before 2018. Relevant ministers, government departments, and state agencies were repeatedly informed of specific cases involving St. Patrick's Guild and other adoption agencies for decades but chose inaction over intervention. Having broken and reported these cases since 2009, this was the narrative I had attempted to mediate for almost a decade.

The 2018 announcement was a moment of personal and professional revelation. In real time, it exposed how the media could operate as a contested space in which various social and political actors could compete to sponsor specific frames and narrative for public consumption. I began to examine more critically how the media selects, frames, and legitimises specific social narratives and how it can decide when certain issues become framed as controversy while others remain within consensus. This is precisely what happened at that press conference in May 2018. It was not just

an attempt to direct the news agenda but also an attempt to present a ready-made narrative and interpretive frame through which the public could understand the issue. This prompted a broader question: if media framing could have a powerful narrative impact on a contemporary issue of controversy, how had Irish journalism framed the scandals that erupted in the 1990s in the preceding decades? This dissertation, therefore, began by questioning one of Ireland's most pervasive cultural and journalistic myths: namely, that the two most carceral and abusive systems of modern Irish history—Industrial and Reformatory Schools and the Magdalene Laundries—were ‘hidden in plain sight’ until revealed by Irish journalism in the 1990s. If the journalism of Ireland's ‘decade of scandal’ is cast as the hero in this narrative, then how should we assess the reporting of previous decades? Challenging the prevailing public narrative that Irish journalism *revealed* the abusive nature of these institutions in the 1990s, this dissertation instead argues that the media had long been an active participant in creating, reinforcing and eventually disrupting an entrenched societal consensus that viewed these carceral systems as charitable, benevolent and a form of moral rescue. Across five research chapters and the analysis of more than 70 years of newspaper reportage, it demonstrates that what was mediated to the public as revelation in the 1990s was, in fact, a *rediscovery*. Long-visible institutions and abusive practices were simply reframed as controversial.

Although both industrial and reformatory schools and Magdalene Laundries operated as separate institutions, with different functions and population cohorts, certain commonalities are visible in how they were represented in historical media coverage. Both systems were consistently portrayed as charitable enterprises providing a much needed social service for women and children. A further commonality exists in the construction of a moral and class binary between the religious who operated the institutions and the women and children incarcerated in them. In the case of the Magdalene Laundries, the nuns were portrayed as possessing almost supernatural qualities of kindness and benevolence. Similarly, the orders operating the industrial schools were represented as men and women of ‘gentle breeding’ whose life's work was dedicated to reforming and educating poor children towards an idealised conception of an Irish citizen. By contrast, the women and children in their care were infantilised and problematised as objects of pity and disdain. Incarceration—in the

reporting of both the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system—was framed not as a problem but, rather, as a kindness and a valued social service.

However, there are also notable differences. The media representation of the Industrial and Reformatory School system was more journalistically traditional in that it was reactive in nature. The consensus frame of charity emerged in editorials and news reports which were written on foot of the committal of children to industrial schools through the courts. The success of the system was highlighted in the coverage of concerts, plays, massed drills and gymnastic displays performed by children residing in the institutions. Individual newspapers and journalists generated this coverage and, therefore, it arguably allowed for the earlier emergence of reporting that utilised a controversial frame.

Conversely, it was the religious orders, rather than individual news outlets and journalists, that drove media coverage of the Magdalene Laundries. Through the targeted placement of classified adverts, public notifications of charity sermons and appeals for financial donations, the media served as a vehicle by which the religious could frame its own narrative of the system in what amounted to a public campaign. This coverage granted the religious orders a degree of moral, political and cultural respectability that insured that the Magdalene Laundry system would avoid any real journalistic scrutiny for almost the entirety of the 20th century.

Taken together, Chapters One, Two and Three demonstrate the central insight of the dissertation's first section, namely that journalistic framing, processes and conventions—not journalistic knowledge—determined whether the Industrial and Reformatory School System was mediated for the public as benign or abusive. The institutional childcare system in Ireland became a scandal, not because abusive practices were 'uncovered' or 'revealed', but because shifts in Irish society and journalistic practices allowed for the gradual rediscovery and reframing of already visible institutions and practices.

Chapter One outlined that from the 1920s to the 1960s, Ireland's main national newspapers consistently reported the Industrial and Reformatory School system using a consensus narrative frame of charity, moral reform and social service. The carceral nature of the institutions and the religious orders that operated them were normalised and legitimised while the children were problematised using pejorative

terms such as ‘waifs’, ‘delinquents’, and ‘truants’. When criticisms of the system did arise, these remained couched within the consensus framework that privileged the voices of the religious and political authorities. Journalism provided not only visibility to the institutions, but a benign visibility, which legitimised the system in wider Irish society as a solution to a social problem, rather than the problem itself. Chapter Two demonstrated that the most problematic aspects of the Industrial and Reformatory School system—that they were deeply abusive to children—was present in Irish newspapers going back to the foundation of the state. Utilising the Ryan Report’s definitions of abuse as a framework, the chapter illustrated how the public was exposed—through the popular press—to direct evidence of the physical, sexual and emotional abuse of children, as well as their neglect and exploitation across the twentieth century. These included accounts of suicide, physical cruelty, psychological harm, labour exploitation and the lifelong consequences of institutionalisation. The abuse was neither hidden nor unknown. However, Irish journalism was unable, or unwilling, to foreground these events as examples of systemic abuse.

Chapter Three addressed the revival of investigative forms of journalism lost after independence and, most notably, the emergence of a US-influenced participatory and subjective form of campaigning journalism across the 1960s and 1970s. Journalists like Michael Viney and, in particular, female writers like Nell McCafferty, Eileen O’Brien, Mary Maher, Rosita Sweetman among others were instrumental in shifting the traditional framing of the Industrial and Reformatory School system from one of consensus to controversy. It prioritised the lived experiences of those who had been through the institutions or were still living in them and critiqued a justice system that was still incarcerating children. Crucially, this journalism did not uncover new information. It simply reframed abuses that had long been visible. It allowed for a public ‘rediscovery’ of the system and laid the intellectual and cultural groundwork for journalism to again rediscover and reframe the issue as a national ‘scandal’ in the 1990s.

Chapters Four and Five reveal similar journalistic processes and framing at work in the coverage of the Magdalene Laundry system. Central to both chapters is the finding that Magdalene Laundries and their abusive nature were never hidden from Irish society. Rather, journalism actively made them visible and shaped their meaning across the twentieth century, firstly through the creation of a narrative

framing the institutions as charitable, and later through a slow and uneven shift to framing them as sites of controversy.

Chapter Four outlined how Magdalene Laundries were consistently visible in Irish newspapers from the 1920s to the 1990s. The institutions, and their carceral nature, were framed for the public as charitable enterprises that provided a valuable and necessary social service. The religious orders themselves used the newspapers as a platform where it could embed its own narrative for the public while also appeal for financial support. This was done through advertisements, public appeals for financial support through donations or via bequests in wills and newspaper reports of charity sermons and annual gift days. The repetition of this consensus reporting frame across decades of newspaper reportage amounted to a public campaign which granted the orders that ran the institutions a form of legitimacy and respectability that insulated them from journalistic scrutiny. It served to normalise incarceration as charity and protection, and the exploitation of labour as moral rescue. Irish journalism in this period did not question this consensus, it reinforced it.

Chapter Five focused on the 1993 High Park Magdalene Laundry exhumations and the renewed attention they received in 2003 as critical moments when the consensus frame embedded over the preceding decades was punctured. The discovery that the remains of women who died in the institution were to be exhumed so that the land in which they were interred could be sold to a property developer saw Irish journalism begin to challenge the consensus narrative of the institutions as sites of charity. However, even as it moved towards a controversial media framing, the reporting remained wedded to some of the charitable language of the past. The institutions continued to be referred to as havens and refuges; women continued to be described using pejorative terms and their exploitation as unpaid labour euphemised as 'productive'. The chapter, therefore, highlights the dual role journalism played in this period reinforcing a consensus narrative while simultaneously seeking to disrupt it.

The five research chapters reveal a number of journalistic patterns and processes across both the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system. The institutions themselves were never hidden; rather their visibility was made benign through journalistic representations that presented them as charitable. The carceral nature of the institutions, and the fact that they were sites of abuse, was also known. However, this was not foregrounded in the reportage as it

was articulated through and subsumed within a consensus frame. The narrative shift which occurred to allow both systems to be reported as controversial was not a process of journalistic revelation or an uncovering of unknown facts by an inquiring press. Rather, it was a reframing of existing facts made possible through shifting journalistic processes. Changing social conditions allowed for the re-invigoration of the investigative practices of the nineteenth century and the emergence of a participatory, campaigning and strongly feminist journalism. It was the coalescence of these things that created the conditions for controversy to emerge.

It was long recognised that Industrial and Reformatory Schools and Magdalene Laundries were sites of abuse. Yet, the visibility and public narrative of these institutions was shaped and constrained by journalistic framing. The 1990s was less a decade of journalistic revelation. Instead, it represented a reframing of established knowledge. It was, therefore, a period not of *revelation* but of *rediscovery*. The phone call to the *Irish Times* in 1992 that sparked the Casey Affair marks less the beginning of a decade of revelation and more the symbolic moment when the old deferential and consensus brand of Irish journalism finally began to fall away.

This study also makes a number of contributions to the Media Studies and Media History as well as to Irish Studies and Irish social memory. By examining how the Irish print media reported, framed, and at times normalised the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system, this study recasts Irish journalism as a producer of the social and political consensus that it later worked to upend. In doing so, it reconsiders the relationship between journalism, Church and state power, and the mediation of public knowledge in twentieth-century Ireland, questioning the assumption that media exposure in the 1990s marked a moment of revelation rather than rediscovery.

This study offers the first long-range comparative analysis of journalistic representations of both the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system, revealing shared linguistic, narrative, and framing processes across coverage of both systems. It provides evidence that physical, sexual, and emotional abuse was consistently visible in media reportage, challenging the perception that this was unknown or unknowable prior to the 1990s.

This study also puts forward an alternative view on how journalism engages with scandal. This dissertation has shown that media framed scandals do not always arise

from new, hidden or ‘uncovered’ information. They can also emerge through the rediscovery and reframing of long-standing knowledge made possible by shifting journalistic norms and processes.

This study reframes the traditional understanding of Irish journalism with respect to Ireland’s carceral past. As a result, the issue is not why did journalism not reveal the truth of these institutions before the 1990s but, rather, how it colluded in the construction of a consensus that legitimised them, granted them respectability and insulated them from any meaningful public scrutiny for the almost the entirety of the twentieth century.

This study also emphasises the importance for scholars in examining not just *what* journalism reports but *how* it reports; how it interprets, legitimises, and frames social institutions and power structures. Irish journalism is revealed as both a producer and a disrupter consensus. It mediated the abuse of power Church and state over the lives and autonomy of generations of women and children as a socially accepted consensus. It highlights how older news reporting frames and linguistic choices can persist in contemporary reportage. These frames often sustain and reinforce consensus narratives, even as these narratives themselves become the subject of controversy. More fundamentally, it highlights journalism’s capacity to normalise and obscure institutional injustices and abuses through framing and the repetition of consensus narratives over long periods of time.

Future Research

Several avenues for further study have emerged from this thesis, particularly regarding how processes of societal memory and forgetting shape what society, culture and, ultimately, journalism deems as acceptable and legitimate topics of inquiry. This research has taught me that Ireland often conceptualises the uncomfortable moments of its past as ‘secret’ or ‘hidden’ even when these abuses were not only visible, but mediated through the popular press. It allows society and, indeed, journalism, to forget what it already knows or, as Clair Wills frames it, to ‘learn to not see what we see, or not know what we know’ (Enright, 2023). Historical silences can be loud. Areas of life that are part of a ‘hidden’ past are often the most visible.

Wills (2025) has herself applied this lens, through her own family history, to Ireland’s reckoning with its past of forced and illegal adoption. This issue has been

the driving force of my personal and professional life since my mid-twenties as an early career investigative reporter. Initially, this study had intended to examine newspaper coverage of adoption as a third case study, with a specific focus on the Irish-American adoption scheme (1940s-1960s)—which also emerged as a public controversy in the mid 1990s. Again, this issue has been framed as another part of Ireland’s ‘secret history’ despite being widely acknowledged in official circles and extensively covered by the US newspapers in the 1950s.

After undertaking initial research and given the volume, scale, and richness of the data uncovered in researching the Industrial and Reformatory School system and the Magdalene Laundry system, it was decided that this warranted a larger-scale study in isolation. The number of Irish children who were removed from the Irish state to be adopted is unknown, but it is estimated to be in the region of 4,000. The scale of adoptions and their legality have never been formally investigated by the Irish state. To date, there has been no in-depth examination of the extensive US and international media coverage of Ireland’s adoption policies throughout this critical period. US media attention, particularly in the early 1950s, played a pivotal role in forcing the Department of External Affairs to address the issue in a meaningful way. Similarly, much of the limited scholarship on this issue has looked exclusively at Irish source material, notably the Department of Foreign Affairs Adoption Policy Files and the Dublin Diocesan Archives, American Adoption Policy Files, 1950-52. This decision to treat this as a standalone study was further solidified while researching the topic as a visiting Fulbright Scholar at New York University between February and June 2025. In that limited window, well over 100 separate pieces of reportage were found in a diverse range of publications encompassing a wide geographical area. The earliest reference found was from 1943, but a large amount of the material dates from the late 1940s right up to 1958. It indicates that, far from operating in secret, the traffic in children had been more widespread than previously thought and that it was common knowledge in the US that Ireland was seen as a location to adopt children without encountering too much “red tape” (a fact noted in some reports). Adoption, and the trafficking of thousands of children to the US across multiple decades in the mid-twentieth century, remains one of Ireland’s uncomfortable silences, something we see but have learned not to see, that we know but have learned not to know.

This dissertation began with an acknowledgment of the role of the Press in the 1990s in addressing the abuses and legacy of Ireland's carceral past. It concludes by arguing that Irish journalism must also reckon with its complicity in the creation and maintenance of a social and political consensus which normalised and legitimised incarceration and institutional violence as a moral kindness and a necessary social service. Industrial and reformatory schools and Magdalene Laundries were never hidden. They were narratively normalised, and their visibility mediated as benign. This enabled the institutions to endure and thrive throughout much of the twentieth century, thereby shielding them from public scrutiny. Irish journalism, therefore, played a dual role in the history of what Smith (2007) labelled Ireland's 'architecture of containment'. It was as an active participant in the manufacture and reproduction of a national consensus that marginalised victims and enabled societal silence and, later, a disrupter of that very consensus by reframing it as controversial and a national 'scandal' in the 1990s.

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