



SECULARISATION IN IRELAND:

An analysis of the reaction of Irish newspapers to scandals surrounding mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries from 1990 until today.

Thesis for MA History in Political
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Dedicated to the memory of Mary Magdalen Derby and unmarried mothers who
fell victim to prejudice in Ireland's past.

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List of Mother and Baby homes that were previously active in the Republic of Ireland:

- Ard Mhuire, also known as The Good Shepherd Home, Dunboyne, County Meath.
- Belmont, Dublin 4.
- Bethany Home, Dublin 6.
- Saint Mary's Mother and Baby Home, also known as the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, County Galway.
- Denny House, Dublin 4, previously known as the Magdalen Home, which was located in Dublin 2.
- Kilrush Mother and Baby Home, County Clare.
- Manor House, Castlepollard, County Westmeath.
- Ms. Carr's, Dublin 6.
- Regina Coeli Hostel, Dublin 7.
- Sacred Heart Home, Bessborough, Blackrock, County Cork.
- Sean Ross Abbey, Roscrea, County Tipperary.
- Saint Gerard's, Dublin 1.
- Saint Patrick's Home, Dublin 7, previously known as Pelletstown, and later moved to Dublin 4.
- The Castle, County Donegal.

Locations of Magdalen laundries that were previously active in the Republic of Ireland:

- Donnybrook, Dublin 4.
- Dun Laoghaire, County Dublin.
- Galway City.
- Drumcondra, Dublin 9.
- New Ross, Wexford.
- Limerick.
- Cork.
- Sean McDermott Street, Dublin
- Sunday's Well, Cork.
- Waterford.

Please note:

The contemporary spelling of Magdalen ends with an 'e', i.e.; 'Magdalene'. This is the spelling used in *The Magdalene Sisters* and has henceforth, become the more popular spelling used in Irish newspapers. As the traditional spelling, and the typical historian's choice, is 'Magdalen', this spelling will be utilised throughout this paper, except in direct quotes or references to the film.

1. Introduction

“I end, dear brothers and sisters, beloved sons and daughters of Ireland, by recalling how divine providence has used this island on the edge of Europe for the conversion of the European continent, that continent which has been for two thousand years the continent of the first evangelisation.”

– Pope John Paul II. Saturday, 29 September 1979. Holy mass in Phoenix Park, Dublin.¹

The first papal visit to Ireland in 1979 attracted 2.5 million people in total to various papal events around the country; out of a population of only 3.4 million in the state. By contrast, the papal visit in 2018 drew in only a fraction of this number; in total, less than 200,000 people attended events, out of a population of 4.8 million. The infamous holy mass in Phoenix Park is an imperative aspect of papal visits to Ireland it seems, but attendance figures have greatly changed over the decades; almost 1 million flocked to the ceremony in 1979, while a mere 130,000 were present in Phoenix Park at the event in 2018. A national census in 2016 revealed that 78.3% of the population defined themselves as Catholic that year; a significant decrease compared to the 2011 percentage of 84.2%.² This decline is more evident if one considers the Central Statistics Office figure of 91.6% of the Irish population being Roman Catholic in 1991 and 93.9% further back in 1971.³ These years were chosen as points to assess the religiosity of the Republic of Ireland as they were provided by the Central Statistics office as 20 year points, in which the religious changes in Ireland could be presented. The 2016 records were included as they are from the most recent census conducted in the Republic of Ireland. While this could be due to many factors, a noteworthy cause of the decline is the increasing rates of secularism

¹ Copyright Liberia Editrice Vaticana. w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/homilies/1979/documents/hf_jp-ii_hom_19790929_irlanda-dublino.html

² Irish Census 2016

³ CSO Ireland. 2016 report. Percentage distribution of religious population, 1881-2016.

in Ireland, which could be accounted for by the recent reveals of numerous controversies surrounding the Irish Catholic Church and its abuse of vulnerable members of society, from the nineteenth century until the late twentieth century. Essentially, the most commonly referenced definition of secularisation is that of Bryan R. Wilson, which first appeared in his work *Religion in Secular Society* in 1966, as '[Secularisation] (...) is meant the process whereby religious thinking, practice and institutions lose social significance'.⁴ The secularisation of the Republic of Ireland will subsequently be discussed, in the context of Irish newspaper reactions to the scandals that arose surrounding mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries, in the period 1990 until today. Secularisation theory will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

There have been several movements which also suggest the secularisation of the Republic of Ireland, aside from the statistics referenced above. Within the research period, the introduction of widely available contraception in 1992 was the first major milestone that contradicted the teachings of the Catholic Church, closely followed by the legalisation of divorce in 1997. Both had significant effects on Irish family life, as marriage could be seen as impermanent and couples could control the number of children they wished to conceive. The number of long-lived Catholic marriages that bore large numbers of Catholic children were set to decrease, much to the disappointment of the Church. The 2010s have showcased major secularisation movements and the modernisation of Irish society. With the legalisation of same sex marriage in 2015, it could be considered that the Church further lost its grip on Irish society. Furthermore, the immense debate in the run up to the eventual legalisation of abortion in 2018 demonstrated how Ireland is no longer restricted by the ideals of the Catholic Church. Taking all of this into consideration, it appears that the secularisation of Ireland has occurred at an accelerated pace in recent decades compared to the mid twentieth century and it is palpable that

⁴ Brian Wilson. *Religion in Secular Society*. p. 11

the newspaper articles published in Irish newspapers about these issues could have contributed to the acceleration of the secularisation process.

The Republic of Ireland and its relationship with Catholicism and the Catholic church in Ireland, which henceforth may be referred to solely as ‘the church’, has been a prominent topic in Irish and International newspapers in recent years, primarily due to the scandals that have arisen relating to the abuse of women and children under the care of the State. Its ill-treatment of the vulnerable citizens who were in the care of religious institutions has been increasingly public since the early 1990s and includes women in Magdalen laundries and those in mother and baby homes amongst other victims. Aside from receiving negative attention surrounding its previous treatment of unmarried mothers, the church was also confronted with a broader variety of scandals that potentially contributed to the tarnishing of its reputation, with the clerical abuse scandals being the most prominent of these, alongside other matters relating to clergy.

The first wave of negative media attention began in 1992 with the news of Bishop Eamonn Casey confirming that he had fathered a child with an American woman and had subsequently supported the woman using church funds.⁵ It was dramatically announced on *Morning Ireland*, a daily show broadcast by Raidio Teilifis Eireann (the national television service), as was the woman’s name, Annie Murphy, alongside further details of the affair.⁶ If this was a lone case, it could have perhaps been overlooked by the Irish public. However, after the death of an Irish priest, Father Michael Cleary, it was revealed that Cleary had been in a relationship with his housekeeper and had fathered two children, one of whom had been adopted.⁷ Alongside a number of paedophilia accusations, the church was coming under

⁵ Brian Girvin, ‘Church, State and the Irish Constitution: The Secularisation of Irish Politics?’, p. 606

⁶ Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, 2009. Ch 5. p. 82

⁷ Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, Ch. 5, p. 84

increasing pressure; this was further driven by the 1996 documentary *Dear Daughter*, which detailed the life of Christine Buckley, a former industrial school resident. The documentary exposed the abuse of hundreds of children that had been in the industrial school system.⁸ Industrial schools were boarding schools that were established in the nineteenth century to care for ‘neglected, orphaned and abandoned children’. They are now notorious for the harsh discipline and brutal abuse implemented. The abuse by priests was one aspect of the scandals that attracted the most media attention, however, as David Ferriter outlines in *Occasions of Sin*, the church did not recognise the scandals in an effective manner, ‘(...) displaying hypocrisy, disingenuousness and insensitivity in how it talked about and responded to the revelations of the 1990s’.⁹ Brian Girvin, in ‘Church, State and the Irish Constitution: The Secularisation of Irish Politics?’, documented that a poll in the mid-1990s revealed that 57% believed that the Catholic Church in Ireland had been permanently damaged by the extent of sex abuse allegations.¹⁰

The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, chaired by Justice Sean Ryan, was established in 2000 in order to investigate institutional child abuse following the accusations made in the 1990s, and in 2009, the Ryan Report was released with the results of this investigation, which found that sexual abuse as endemic in boys’ institutions.¹¹ Over 1,700 men and women contributed to the evidence collected during the investigation, with over half reporting sexual abuse; although physical, emotional and psychological abuse was also reported.¹² The report included evidence from residential laundries, submitted by women who had been transferred from industrial or reformatory schools.¹³ It could be considered that the

⁸ James M. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment*, Ch. 4, p. 4

⁹ Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, Ch. 5, p. 64

¹⁰ Brian Girvin, ‘Church, State and the Irish Constitution: The Secularisation of Irish Politics?’, p. 607

¹¹ Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, Ch. 3, p. 71

¹² Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin*, Ch. 3, p. 72

¹³ Maeve O’Rourke, ‘Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the State’s Duty to Protect’, p 207

publicity of the Ryan Report and the revelation of the mass grave at the Tuam mother and baby home are the two largest of the scandals relating to the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Media Impact on Society.

The treatment of unmarried mothers and their children in the twentieth century is a subject that has attracted significant media attention, which has been a force in revealing some of the abuses of the past. In the early 2000s, the Magdalen Laundries were the subject of academic critique, but public criticism soon became very evident.¹⁴ The history of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, Galway, has sparked massive media attention worldwide as a list containing the names, ages and causes of death of 796 children were released in 2017, whose remains were confirmed to have been buried in a mass grave on the grounds of the institution.

The question remains here as to can newspapers effectively influence public opinion? Donald McLachlan argues that it is impossible to give a concrete answer to this question; he argues that in the long term it can guide readers ‘(...) by a multitude of stories, ideas, recommendations and services’.¹⁵ On the contrary, George Lundberg has argued that ‘It probably seeks to discover and reflect that opinion rather than make it’.¹⁶ In either case according to these authors, it is highly likely that the articles scandalising the history of mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries in Ireland did have an effect on public opinion to some extent, so can therefore be seen as somewhat representative of the perception of the church. As Mutz and Soss outline in their article ‘Reading Public Opinion: The Influence of News Coverage on Perceptions of Public Sentiment’, while newspapers are limited on the effects they

¹⁴ Simpson et. Al, ‘Doing compassion or doing discipline? Power relations and the Magdalen Laundries’, p. 254

¹⁵ Donald McLachlan, ‘The Press and Public Opinion’. p. 163

¹⁶ George Lundberg, ‘The Newspaper and Public Opinion’. p. 714

can have on personal opinion, they highlight the perceived importance of an issue on a community level.¹⁷

The revelations of abuse that had occurred regarding various institutions and the widescale use of cover-ups angered the Irish public and had a negative impact on the legitimacy and authority of the church in the public perspective, which in turn, altered inter-generational change as newer generations became less likely to adhere to institutional Catholicism.¹⁸ In earlier decades, the church was essentially absolved from public scrutiny due to its authoritative position in the State, however the heavy criticism it received from the media had an influence on the public trust in the institution.¹⁹ On the contrary, in return the church has little impact on the Irish State, public perspective or media in the twenty-first century.²⁰

According to Catherine Cox in 'Institutional Space and the Geography of Containment in Ireland, 1750-2000', the majority of studies pinpoint the beginning of church-related controversies to the 1990s, when RTE broadcast 'States of Fear' in 1999 detailing abuse in industrial schools and Magdalen laundries, which made the information more accessible to the public.²¹ Since then, a national debate on the abuse committed within Catholic institutions has born and thrived, with positive and open results for many survivors.²² As a result of this, numerous reports have been published about the institutions run by religious orders in the past; the Ferns Report (2005), the Ryan Report (2009), the Murphy report (2009), the Cloyne Report (2011) and the McAleese Report in 2012, which will be the only one discussed within the scope of this paper. Daithi Corrain effectively summarises a key truth that the reports divulged:

¹⁷ Diana C. Mutz & Joe Soss, 'Reading Public Opinion: The Influence of News Coverage on Perceptions of Public Sentiment'. p. 432

¹⁸ Brian Girvin, 'Ireland transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', p. 431

¹⁹ Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 761

²⁰ Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 761

²¹ Catherine Cox, 'Institutional Space and the Geography of Containment in Ireland 1750-2000', p. 703

²² Catherine Cox, 'Institutional Space and the Geography of Containment in Ireland 1750-2000', p. 676

‘They revealed a failure of leadership, hypocrisy and a dysfunctional authoritarian institutional culture more concerned with avoiding scandal and secrecy than protecting the vulnerable’.

This has contributed to the public questioning the moral authority of the church, as it had once confidently preached about moral purity, but behind closed doors, clergy and religious orders proved to be less inclined to follow the moral stringency it had set down for the rest of the nation.

The newspaper discussions surrounding mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries contributed to the revelations of abuse and highlighted the experiences of children and women that were in the system. With the consternation revolving around the fact that so many infants, children and women could be buried in a disrespectful manner and the tone and language used as the stories were relayed to the Irish public through the medium of newspapers, it is highly likely that the public perception of these institutions and the Catholic Church would be negatively altered. . Through an analysis of the response of the main Irish newspapers to the scandals, a new perspective on the image of the Catholic system which was projected on to Irish society by the media can be assessed. It could indicate the perceived social power of the church through the primary Irish newspapers. Through information and opinions outlined in articles, the public opinion can be somewhat impacted, which may contribute to the overall decline of the church in Ireland. It could be considered that the confidence of journalists to speak out against the Catholic Church contributes towards national opinion, as harsh opinions may likely be retained if the greater population supports the Church. It is likely that the gradual turn away from Catholicism in Ireland was assisted by the media reaction to the Magdalen laundries scandals and the mother and baby home scandals.

The treatment of unmarried mothers in the earlier decades of the twentieth century was wholly immoral, as the prejudice they encountered drove them to reside in these institutions, as in many cases they did not have the means to be financially independent. While all of those who were abused in institutions deserve to be recognised, this thesis will exclusively deal with the newspaper articles published between 1990 and the present, surrounding the situation of Ireland's unmarried mothers who spent periods of time in Magdalen laundries or mother and baby homes. This period was chosen because it is the period in which secularisation intensified. Unmarried mothers and institutions linked to them were decided upon because this has not been previously researched with regards to the secularisation process.

As secularisation in the Republic of Ireland and the impact of the discourse about Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes is at the core of this thesis, the primary question this paper aims to answer is:

‘How did Irish newspapers react to scandals in the period 1990 until today, with regards to unmarried mothers and the Catholic institutions in which they resided, primarily mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries?’.

Background

To understand the importance of scandals relating to these institutions, it is first necessary to understand the prominence of coercive carceral institutions in Ireland during most of the twentieth century. As Paul Michael Garrett emphasises in his article ‘Excavating the past: Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland’, the usage of these institutions were substantial; in 1951, for example, there were 5,844 residents in industrial schools, 1,983 in homes for unmarried mothers and other Magdalen homes and 18,343 in district and auxiliary

mental hospitals, which starkly contrasts with the 443 people that were confined in prison.²³ This is an example for the mid-twentieth century but confirms the epidemic use of these institutions at that point. The use of institutions declined as the century progressed.

As mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries are the primary institutions discussed in this thesis, background material will be evidently concentrated on these two institutions. They are linked by their intrinsic significance in the journey of many Irish unmarried mothers who were pressured by family, clergy or society to reside therein. In 2012, The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries (The McAleese Report) revealed that only 3.9% of admissions to laundries came from mother and baby homes, which could suggest that lower numbers of unmarried mothers resided in Magdalen laundries than expected. However, the report will be discussed later in this paper. Both institutions were managed by religious orders and provided a solution to the apparent threat to the sexual purity of the national identity, which was represented by Ireland's women. It could be considered that both institutions served male interests and strengthened the social power of men, as it was usually males who admitted the women to the mother and baby home or the laundry, in the form of local clergy or the father of the family.²⁴ Meanwhile, men who impregnated unmarried women, nor men who committed sexual assault or rape towards unmarried women did not experience repercussions. As Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin iterate it in 'Producing 'decent girls': governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922-1937)', these institutions '(...) were designed to mould and police the sexual practices of its citizens and create a sanitised moral landscape'.²⁵

The Local Government Temporary Provisions Act in 1923 confirmed that after independence,

²³ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Excavating the past: Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland, p. 363

²⁴ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Excavating the past: Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland, p. 362

²⁵ Crowley and Kitchin, 'Producing 'decent girls': governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922-1937), p. 355

one workhouse would be retained in each county for uses as a county home where unmarried mothers and their children could reside, however, with *the Report of the Commission on the Relief of the Sick and Destitute Poor, including the Insane Poor* in 1927, a shift towards criminalisation was suggested as women were divided into categories of 'first offenders' and those who were less hopeful.²⁶

Mother and baby homes were established after 1927 in order to combat what the government viewed as rising levels of illegitimacy in the post-1922 Free State; in these institutions, pregnant women could await the birth of their children, undergo the childbirth process and reside for a period afterwards.²⁷ Mothers were discouraged from forming a bond with their child, before they were given up for adoption, which very often occurred without the permission or knowledge of the mother and was usually facilitated by the mother and baby home or associated adoption agencies. Women were sent to the homes to avoid the shame of living in a Catholic society whilst being pregnant out of wedlock, but the number of women who resided in them cannot yet be effectively estimated due to the destruction of records. However, results may be estimated effectively in the future as research continues. Social class also determined where women resided, as mother and baby homes were an expensive option for the families of pregnant women, but often, the women worked off their debts to the mother and baby home with an extended stay of approximately two years spent working for the religious order.²⁸ Women who fell pregnant for the first time could exclusively experience a mother and baby home, however, women who experienced multiple pregnancies would likely be consigned to a Magdalen laundry or a county home due to the likelihood of 'reoffending'.²⁹

²⁶ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Unmarried Mothers' in the Republic of Ireland', p. 713

²⁷ Kate Gleeson, 'A Woman's Work is...Unfinished Business: Justice for the Disappeared Magdalen Women of Modern Ireland', p. 295

²⁸ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Unmarried Mothers' in the Republic of Ireland', p. 715

²⁹ Clara Fischer, 'Gender, Nation, and the Politics of Shame: Magdalen Laundries and the Institutionalization of Feminine Transgression in Modern Ireland', p. 831

Mother and baby homes or Magdalen laundries were often located in close proximity to industrial schools, children's homes or other institutions. This made the separation of mothers and their children even more barbarous, as they could often be merely a few hundred metres away from each other but not know one another due to a lack of contact; this certainly did not abide to the maternal role that the 1937 Constitution so fervently declared.³⁰

Magdalen laundries or asylums were institutions managed by Catholic nuns, set up in order to reform 'Fallen women' who did not adhere to traditional Catholic morals in Ireland. The institutes took their name from Mary Magdalen; one of the most distinguished saints in Christianity who repented her sins and former life as a prostitute, so the Magdalen laundries came to be used to reform women that Irish society thought deviated from sexual norms.³¹ It is estimated in *The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* that there were approximately 30,000 women incarcerated in Magdalen laundries since their creation in the 19th century; 10,000 of which resided there since 1922. Although Magdalen laundries were not established solely to help solve the issue of illegitimacy, they were influential in developing institutionalisation for some women in Ireland, as Paul Michael Garrett sets out; '(...) their ethos and modalities of operation were to have a major impact on the character of institutional provision for 'unmarried mothers' for over 200 years'.³² In 'Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the State's Duty to Protect', Maeve O'Rourke outlines the types of women who entered the laundries;

'(...) those who had given birth outside of marriage, who had been sexually abused, were considered to be "promiscuous" or "at risk" of becoming so, were a burden on the

³⁰ James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, Ch. 4, p. 25

³¹ Crowley and Kitchin, 'Producing 'decent girls': governmentality and the moral geographies of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922-1937)', p. 366

³² Paul Michael Garrett, 'Unmarried Mothers (...)', p. 710

State or their families, or were already in the care of the State and the Catholic Church as children'.³³

Those whom O'Rourke has listed were forced to perform unpaid labour for six days per week under gruelling conditions; they were subjected to continuous surveillance by the religious order, multiple forms of abuse, enforced penance and prayer and deprivation of identity, rest, education, privacy and free communication with the outside world.³⁴ The women in the laundries were forced to provide a laundry service for local businesses, religious and State organisations, hospitals, schools and other institutions, which involved long workdays and an array of physical conditions which resulted from the heavy work.³⁵ Communal graves located on former Magdalen laundry sites or at local graveyards attest to the amount of women who passed away as residents of the laundries.³⁶ Up until recent decades, the Magdalen laundries were an overlooked aspect of Irish life, with most Magdalen women prevailing as virtually forgotten citizens.³⁷

The public perception and stigma associated with mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries contributed to why these institutions were not openly discussed for many decades. However, as Ireland became more tolerant and liberal towards the end of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first century, the public perception of the institutions was altered as the public had the opportunity to see the victimhood of the women and the harsh experiences they endured for crisis pregnancies, which have been normalised in today's Ireland.

Research process.

³³ Maeve O'Rourke, 'Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the State's Duty to Protect', p. 201

³⁴ Maeve O'Rourke, 'Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the State's Duty to Protect', p. 201

³⁵ Maeve O'Rourke, 'Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the State's Duty to Protect', p. 201

³⁶ Maeve O'Rourke, 'Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the State's Duty to Protect', p. 212

³⁷ Simpson et. Al, 'Doing compassion or doing discipline? Power relations and the Magdalen Laundries', p. 258

I have decided to approach the topic of how these scandals were addressed by Irish newspapers following the pivotal points from 1990 to the present day and the impact of this on the secularisation of Ireland, as through intensive research, I have found that this is a perspective which has not been previously analysed. The pivotal points which were researched include the adoption scandal and discussions surrounding unmarried mothers in the 1990s, the release of and discourse about *The Magdalene Sisters* in 2002 and 2003, *The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries* and formal state apology to the Magdalen victims in 2013 and the scandal of the Bon Secours mother and baby home in Galway from 2014 onwards. The scandals that arose following revelations in the newspapers encouraged negative public opinion surrounding Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes in Ireland.

This discussion will also contribute to formulating an answer to the question; to what extent was the Catholic Church held responsible in the newspapers, during the scandals that surrounded the Magdalen laundries and the mother and baby homes? The image of the Catholic Church that is portrayed in Irish newspapers and therefore projected onto the public, may be derived from the articles assessed. In that case, the blame placed on the church could potentially affect its image and in turn, encourage the secularisation process in Ireland.

The newspaper material will be divided into two periods to demonstrate the difference in Irish newspaper discussion of these Catholic institutions. The earlier period will constitute an analysis of the scandals in the 1990's surrounding mother and baby homes and the release and criticism of Peter Mullan's infamous film *The Magdalene Sisters*, in 2002. The latter period includes the current debate surrounding the mother and baby home in Tuam, County Galway, which began in 2014 and is still an ongoing topic in Irish newspapers today. The McAleese Report and the formal apology to the Magdalen victims delivered by former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Enda Kenny in 2012 will also be included in this period.

The four cases to be analysed were chosen because they proved to be critical points in the last three decades in relation to Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes. The first case to be addressed is the scandals in the 1990s that were related to mother and baby homes, as they offer a glimpse of how journalists treated the topic in this period. The second case refers to the Magdalen laundries and is the release of the film *The Magdalene Sisters*, directed by Peter Mullan. The newspaper material discussing the film could prove useful in analysing the journalistic discussion of the laundries at that time. The third case comes from the latter period of the Magdalen laundries; *The Report of the Inter-Departmental Committee to establish the facts of State involvement with the Magdalen Laundries*, which was the first major formal insight into Magdalen laundries in Ireland, and the formal state apology to the Magdalen victims, which appeared to be a point of closure for some Magdalen victims. The fourth case to be addressed is an example of the discourse during the later period of mother and baby home scandals, which is the case of the Tuam Mother and Baby Home. The home became notorious after a mass grave containing the bodies of almost 800 babies and young children was discovered and continues to be investigated as of the beginning of 2019. It is the only ongoing scandal of the four cases which are investigated in this paper, as it caused a heavy reaction in the international media in the first quarter of 2017. Although often addressed as a single case, it is seen to be representative of the general mother and baby home system in the twentieth century in Ireland. These four case studies and the surrounding media coverage have been pivotal points in the debate surrounding the treatment of unmarried mothers in Catholic Ireland in the twentieth century.

Since this research project is a study of the reaction of Irish newspapers to the four aforementioned case studies, the method of research will involve searches of three newspapers as a representative selection. The Irish Newspaper Archive will be the primary database used in order to access *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Examiner*, with *The Irish Times* Online

Archive providing access to *The Irish Times*. The primary national newspapers provide all of the primary material and give a clearer vision of the nationwide impact of a scandal. Newspapers were chosen as the primary research material, as opposed to other media sources, because they have been a strong source of Irish news throughout all three decades and are still very popular today.

The Irish Independent is Ireland's largest-selling daily newspaper. It is currently printed a populist conservative political perspective. This was selected due to its popularity in the Republic of Ireland. *The Irish Times* is Ireland's second largest selling daily and holds a liberal and progressive perspective. *The Irish Examiner* is a daily newspaper and holds a liberal perspective. The newspapers assessed in this study provide a broad view of the material printed surrounding relevant controversies and offer a variety of political perspectives. Through searching terms in these newspapers, articles were found, which will be used to discuss and analyse the four case studies. While newspapers can represent the general tone of the national attitude towards a topic, they do not constitute public opinion, therefore, in this case, the secularisation of Ireland can only be suggested from material. They provide valuable insight into the reaction to certain revelations regarding sensitive topics in the media such as the Magdalen laundries and the mother and baby homes. The review period will begin in the 1990's; the decade in which the first of the scandals arose, while the most recent date from which newspaper articles will be utilised is 31 February 2018, which is the last relevant date as it is the last date of the moth of the original intended date of the final report on the site at the Tuam Mother and Baby home. Search terms and figures will be dealt with in each individual case study.

Several other primary sources will be referenced to compliment the newspaper material provided in this study. Text obtained from the formal apology delivered by Enda Kenny in 2012 will be used alongside material from the McAleese Report. Secondary literature will be used in

order to provide alternative perspectives and information on the general historiography of the Magdalen laundries and the mother and baby homes.

Although the Magdalen laundries and the mother and baby homes have been widely discussed in the national newspaper and on scholarly platforms and literature, there seems to be little research undertaken on the written media reactions to the controversies that have arisen in recent decades. Searching through The Bibliography of British and Irish History Database, as well as other broader searches across academic debates yielded no relevant results. Most published works revolve around the institution themselves, the experience of the victims or the role of the church and State in the system of incarcerating ‘fallen women’. While none were relevant to this study, some provided factual information which contributed to research regarding both types of institutions in general.

Secularisation.

This paper contributes to the secularisation debate, which has been addressed by scholars for approximately 150 years. The secularisation debate is a very complex one indeed, with many minor strands emerging from two major strands. The two primary strands to this debate are most effectively outlined by Carmen Kuhling’s article ‘The New Age Movement in the Post-Celtic Tiger Context: Secularisation, Enchantment and Crisis’; on one side, there is the group whose argument suggests that secularisation and modernisation work as a unit and that gradual secularisation is inevitable.³⁸ This argument has been long-lasting in sociological thinking since

³⁸ Carmen Kuhling, ‘The New Age Movement in the Post-Celtic Tiger Context: Secularisation, Enchantment and Crisis’, 2014. p. 103.

the beginning of the secularisation debate. This perspective of progress, views aspects such as ‘(...) democracy, capitalism and science as accompanied by a series of mutually reinforcing social processes, such as secularisation, rationalisation and disenchantment’.³⁹ The other side of the secularisation debate generally affirms that modernisation and secularisation do not work in tandem and that there has been a growth of traditional religions at a global level. This tends to be more relevant to the situation in the Southern hemisphere, as in the Northern hemisphere, particularly in Europe, there has been a decline in popularity of traditional religions as more people stray from religious thinking, practice and institutions, particularly in recent decades.

Corrain offers an alternative discussion of secularisation theory, which relates more to how secularisation can be determined. He notes that some researchers focus on the withdrawing of church membership, such as citizens refusing to declare themselves as Catholic in national census records; others focus on church attendance in terms of weekly numbers and crowds at religious events; and a new approach argues that religion is being privatised, as it becomes much less of a State affair and could be regarded as a private institution.⁴⁰ As Daphne Halikipoulou asks in ‘Patterns of Secularization: Church, State and Nation in Greece and the Republic of Ireland, ‘How is secularization to be measured? How do we know that the social power of religion has indeed declined?’.⁴¹ While polls and a census give figures stating the number of members of a religion, they give little input into the general attitudes towards the church and how members devotion to the religion alters over time on a personal level or over generations. This is one of the aspects which makes measuring secularisation a difficult task.

³⁹Carmen Kuhling, ‘The New Age Movement in the Post-Celtic Tiger Context: Secularisation, Enchantment and Crisis’, 2014. p. 101.

⁴⁰ Daithi Corrain, ‘Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat’, p. 755

⁴¹ Daphne Halikipoulou, ‘Patterns of Secularization: Church, State and Nation in Greece And the Republic of Ireland’, 2001. p. 390.

In terms of secularisation in the Republic of Ireland, it is considered that the early stages of the process began in the 1960s but it accelerated from the 1990s onwards.⁴² If all religious vocations are measured from 1966 to 2006, in terms of annual intake, the decrease is dramatic; the intake in 1966 was 1,409 but that number fell to just 53 in 2006, which constitutes a decline of 96 per cent.⁴³ During the 1960s, increases in the number of young people deciding to pursue further education resulted in a small decline in church membership, as they were less likely to accept the religious lifestyle led by older generations and strived for modern answers to modern problems.⁴⁴ However, if a decline in church attendance is a suggestion of secularisation and the lessening influence of the church in the 1960s, then the evidence for Ireland is not strong as church attendance figures only slightly declined.⁴⁵ While it can be difficult to prove secularisation, since the 1990s, Irish religiosity has drastically changed, in comparison to previous decades.⁴⁶ According to Brian Girvin in 'Ireland Transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', 82 per cent of Catholics attended church weekly or more frequently in 1981, but by 1990, this had declined to less than 60 per cent for the first time in modern Irish history.⁴⁷ By the turn of the twenty-first century, that figure had fallen to only 42 per cent attending church on a weekly basis or more often, most of whom belong to older generations.⁴⁸ In a 1996 academic article titled 'Church, State and the Irish Constitution: The Secularisation of Irish Politics?', Girvin summarises the context of the 1990s adequately: 'Is it possible, then, to call Ireland a secular society? Ireland is not secular if this entails the marginalisation of religion in the public mind. (...) If secularism is understood as a process by which the state and non-denominational agencies replace the Church as the main provider of

⁴² Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 727

⁴³ Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 748

⁴⁴ Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 750

⁴⁵ Brian Girvin, 'Ireland Transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', p. 418

⁴⁶ Daithi Corrain, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880-2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', p. 754

⁴⁷ Brian Girvin, 'Ireland Transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', p. 431

⁴⁸ Brian Girvin, 'Ireland Transformed? Modernisation, Secularisation and Conservatism since 1973', p. 431

welfare, educational and health services, then Ireland has become somewhat more secular and is becoming progressively more so'.⁴⁹

Structure

The first case, which will immediately follow this chapter, will entail the scandals that surrounded the mother and baby homes in the 1990s. The media attention surrounding the release and discussion of *The Magdalene Sisters* will ensue in the subsequent chapter, followed by a short comparison of both cases. The third case, involving the media discussions around the *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to establish the facts of the state involvement with the Magdalen laundries* and the state apology to the Magdalen women, will be the first case of the later time period. In the conclusion of the case, it will be compared to the two earlier cases. The fourth case, which analyses the newspaper reaction surrounding the Bon Secours mother and baby home in Tuam, Galway, will be the final case to be discussed and will be compared to the previous three cases thereafter. Finally, this thesis will end with a concluding chapter which will reiterate the important elements addressed in the preceding chapters and provide a final impression of the research undertaken.

⁴⁹ Brian Girvin, 'Church, State and the Irish Constitution: The Secularisation of Irish Politics?', p. 614

2. Mother and Baby Homes: the scandals of the 1990's.

The first case to be addressed in this paper is the mother and baby home scandals and discussions in the 1990's, which primarily focused on the adoption scandal which came to light during the period. A notable feature of this decade is that the predicament of unmarried motherhood started to be more widely discussed in newspaper articles, in comparison to the earlier decades, which were researched for the purpose, but will not be discussed within the scope of this paper. The topic of mother and baby homes were discussed to some extent in regards to the predicament of unplanned pregnancy and how they were one of the options a woman could take upon discovering her pregnancy outside of wedlock in a very Catholic Ireland. The last mother and baby home closed in 1996, therefore the beginning of the decade was still part of the mother and baby home era, with the Sacred Heart Home in Bessborough and the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam still operating. The seedlings of an empathetic frame of mind towards the predicament of the unmarried Irish mother first significantly emerged in Irish newspapers during the 1990's, according to the discussions of articles in the decade.

The number of women admitted to Mother and Baby homes declined so steeply in the last decades of the century that the need for the homes was not as great as it once had been previously. In 1987, the term 'illegitimate' was abolished through the creation of the *Status of Children act*, allowing more unmarried mothers to feel comfortable keeping their babies.

In terms of scandals in 1990's articles that prove relative to this paper, the decade did not yield heavy results, as the initial research had suggested it could. Due to the homes closing, rumours of mass graves and changes in the social status of unmarried mothers, it could be assumed that there would have been more discussions regarding mother and baby homes. In retrospect, scandalising the mother and baby homes and groups that managed them appeared to

be a taboo it appears. Although human remains had been previously discovered, such as the mass grave at the Tuam Mother and Baby home, which will be discussed later in this paper, these discoveries did not grab the attention of Irish journalists or were perhaps swept under the rug for fear of displeasing the audience.

In 1993, the sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge were forced to sell the former convent and Magdalen laundry site in Drumcondra that was previously known as Saint Mary's refuge and requested permission to exhume the graves of 133 women who had resided at the facility. It was revealed that death certificates could only be obtained for 75 of the women and some of those were listed under their religious name or a false name. The women's bodies were exhumed, cremated and their ashes were buried in Glasnevin cemetery without notification given to surviving family members. Unfortunately, the occurrence did not generate much public interest so it was not revealed in any of the three newspapers included in this project and there was no political response at the time.⁵⁰

The adoption scandal during the 1990's was unequivocally the most discussed topic in relation to Mother and Baby homes. This involved revelations in Irish newspapers that thousands of babies born to unmarried mothers had been illegally adopted and trafficked to parents from the United States in the decades previously.⁵¹ Adoption was not legalized in Ireland until 1952, so while all adoptions up to this point were illegal, it is suspected that the majority of those conducted through mother and baby homes after 1952 were also legal to some extent.⁵² From this, stemmed a dialogue surrounding the plight and treatment of unmarried pregnant girls in Ireland up until that point and the investigation efforts of mothers and children desperate to be reunited. Another point of discussion was the rise in single mothers who were

⁵⁰ Kate Gleeson, 'A Woman's Work is.. Unfinished Business: Justice for the Disappeared Magdalen Women of Modern Ireland', p. 300

⁵¹ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Unmarried Mothers' in the Republic of Ireland', p. 715

⁵² Paul Michael Garrett, 'Unmarried Mothers' in the Republic of Ireland', p. 715

choosing to keep their children or unmarried couples who were choosing to raise their children together.

Media reaction to the 1990s scandals.

Critique of the mother and baby home system itself or of the religious groups that managed the homes was not plentiful in the newspapers of the period. The experience of the unmarried mother and grief at losing a child to the complicated, controlling and often illegal Irish adoption system was highlighted in the 1990s, as was the strict secrecy that was encouraged by the Church and wider Catholic society. Another prominent mention included articles on the popularity of unmarried motherhood and young mothers and couples who chose to keep their children as opposed to giving them up for adoption. In this chapter, the adoption question will be discussed firstly, followed by the predicament that was pregnancy and motherhood outside of marriage as it was delivered in the articles; the circumstances in mother and baby homes, and the change in trends and the stigma surrounding unmarried mothers in the 1990s.

Many articles that appeared in searches proved to be irrelevant to the topic. After numerous initial failures at finding relevant articles, search terms that produced a restricted number of articles were;

'Sex in a Cold Climate'⁵³.

The Irish Independent: 7

The Irish Examiner: 14

The Irish Times: 12

⁵³ *Sex in a Cold Climate* was utilised as it was one of the first documentaries recording the experiences of 'fallen women' in institutions in Ireland.

'unmarried mother baby home'.

The Irish Independent: 88

The Irish Examiner: 73

The Irish Times: 125

'adoption unmarried'.

The Irish Independent: 112

The Irish Examiner: 95

The Irish Times: 229

'bessborough/bessboro home'

The Irish Independent: 0

The Irish Examiner: 1

The Irish Times: 0

The search period for all terms was from 01 January 1990 until 31 December 1999 as this was the entire period in which scandals for mother and baby homes were researched. The only exception is for 'Sex in a Cold Climate', which was 01 January 1998 until 31 December 1999, as the documentary was broadcast on 16 March 1998 for the first time. The documentary covered the mistreatment of 'fallen' women in Magdalen laundries and although it did not cover

mother and baby homes, it contributed to an open discussion of the case of the unmarried mothers who started their journeys of institutionalisation in mother and baby homes and ended them in Magdalen laundries.

The necessary articles were used to effectively capture the essence of the newspaper response to scandals relating to the mother and baby home question in the 1990's.

The adoption scandal: coerced, forced and/or illegal adoptions coming to light in 1990s Ireland.

On 05 March 1996, the front page of *The Irish Times* announced that children adopted in the United States had discovered that their birth certificates were falsified. Leading journalist on the subject in the paper, Pdraig O'Morain claimed that;

Hundreds, perhaps thousands of children born to unmarried mothers in homes run by nuns or in homes run by the State were flown to the US in batches during the 1950s and 1960s where they were handed over to their adoptive parents. Frequently, the parental names of their birth certificates were false.⁵⁴

This outlines the essence of the beginning of the adoption scandal. In 1996, he noted that Barnardos had 200 enquiries from adoptees who wished to find their birth mothers, following the publicity of the revelations.

The Irish Times, *The Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Independent* subsequently began to shed light on the fact that 1,000's of babies born to unmarried Irish mothers were transferred to the United States to wealthy Catholic families, who provided hefty "donations" to the homes or organizations that supplied a cherished infant.

⁵⁴ O'Morain, Pdraig. 'Children sent to the US for adoption have found their birth certificates are false'. *The Irish Times*. 05 March 1996. p. 1

In June 1997, O'Morain discussed Mike Milottes's book 'Banished babies' in *The Irish Times* and recounted the 'ruthless determination of the Catholic Church'.⁵⁵ He highlights that infants under the age of one year could not be exported, therefore, the religious organizations who ran the homes required the mothers to care for the children until adoption was possible.⁵⁶ The consequence for the mothers was heart wrenching; 'They bonded with their babies in this time. Then the day would come when their mothers would be given a few hours' notice of the removal of her baby to the United States'.⁵⁷ In most cases, this probably would have made the difficult process of losing a child even more traumatic.

The Irish Independent also covered the revelation of the false birth certificates and the beginning of the adoption scandal. Kieran McGrath opened eyes with his article 'Records deliberately destroyed in name of adoption secrecy', in which he asserted that the false certificates should not be a surprise to those familiar with the history of adoption in Ireland.⁵⁸ McGrath referenced the charitable donations received after the adoption of a child and claims that 'there is little evidence of systematic baby-for-sale practice in Ireland in the past' due to the secrecy surrounding the operations and the lack of formalities in some cases.⁵⁹ This highlights the illegality of the system.

McGrath emphasized Barnardos claim that in a large number of cases, birth mothers would only become aware that their children had been adopted when they arranged to visit them in homes and found that they no longer resided there; adoption was assured in most cases,

⁵⁵ O'Morain, Padraig. 'Exports of the innocents'. *The Irish Times*. 07 June 1997. p 45

⁵⁶ O'Morain, Padraig. 'Exports of the innocents'. *The Irish Times*. 07 June 1997. p 45

⁵⁷ O'Morain, Padraig. 'Exports of the innocents'. *The Irish Times*. 07 June 1997. p 45

⁵⁸ McGrath, Kieran. 'Records deliberately destroyed in name of adoption secrecy'. *The Irish Independent*. 06 March 1996. p

⁵⁹ McGrath, Kieran. 'Records deliberately destroyed in name of adoption secrecy'. *The Irish Independent*. 06 March 1996. p

however warning was rarely given to mothers, whether they were present in the home at the time or where possible, had moved out of the home to attempt to lead a normal life.⁶⁰

The same journalist also spoke in April 1997 about misinformation regarding adoption when he highlighted that the Saint Patrick's Guild Adoption society gave misleading information to adoptees tracing their origins, which McGrath claimed to be the latest open wound in the case at the time.⁶¹ He recounted that he was aware of the destruction of adopted children's background records, which had been revealed to him by a nun whose predecessor committed the crime, believing that she had good intentions if the reason for secrecy was that the mother's identity could remain secret and she could live a normal life after the pregnancy and birth.⁶² It appears that there had been no definite period for which documents had to be kept, which of course ensured little regard for those who wished to find their children or mother years later.

The articles outlining the forced illegal adoptions in previous decades plausibly damaged the image of the Catholic orders and related institutions that managed these adoptions. Although readers did not encounter many articles with this negative attitude towards the institutions, journalistic pieces like those of O'Morain and McGrath would certainly have left an impact on their readers, especially in a decade where newspapers were the most prominent method of obtaining news.

Don Lavery and Lorna Reid, of *The Irish Independent*, reported on 06 March 1996, that a national register of adoptees and their birth mothers had been demanded by the those affected by the adoption scandals and the public supporting them, after it was revealed that in the 1950's

⁶⁰ McGrath, Kieran. 'Babies sent to US in cover-up'. *The Irish Independent*. 05 March 1996. p. 8

⁶¹ McGrath, Kieran. 'Time to open hearts and files'. *The Irish Independent*. 08 April 1997. p. 10

⁶² McGrath, Kieran. 'Time to open hearts and files'. *The Irish Independent*. 08 April 1997. p. 10

alone, over 1,000 children were sent to the United States.⁶³ They noted that Tom Woulfe, registrar of the adoption board that had been involved in the call for a registry of adoptions, believed that approximately 150 children per year were transferred to America for adoption, which results in approximately 1,500 illegal adoptions per decade.⁶⁴ This information would have caught the attention of Irish public and made them aware of the scale of the operations.

Articles regarding the adoption scandals continued to appear in the three newspapers assessed in this case. On 07 March 1996, Marese McDonagh wrote ““Private eyes” used by adoptees’, as she revealed that some American adoptees resorted to hiring private investigators in order to track down their birth mothers, as the ‘private arrangements’ involved in their adoptions proved very difficult to uncover.⁶⁵ Furthermore, she said that Helen Scott, of the Adoptive Parents Association, disclosed that children were still being illegally adopted to parents residing in the United States up to 15 years before the adoption scandal broke in March 1996.⁶⁶ The revelation of the somewhat recent nature of illegal and coerced adoptions in Ireland may have made the news more relevant to the readership in 1996 and would have highlighted the very recent nature of the scandals and the involvement of the Catholic institutions in the process. This would have further scandalized the Catholic Church in Ireland.

On 09 March 1996, Kathryn Holmquist, of *The Irish Times* highlighted the reaction of the state to the beginning of the adoption scandals; ‘(...) the Tanaiste (deputy head of the government of Ireland), Mr Spring, confirmed what many in the adoption area have long suspected: that our society’s obsession with sexual morality led babies to be taken from their

⁶³ Lavery, Don, and Reid, Lorna. ‘Register demand for ‘lost’ adoptees’. *The Irish Independent*. 06 March 1996. p. 4

⁶⁴ Lavery, Don, and Reid, Lorna. ‘Register demand for ‘lost’ adoptees’. *The Irish Independent*. 06 March 1996. p. 4

⁶⁵ McDonagh, Marese. ““Private eyes” used by adoptees’. *The Irish Independent*. 07 Mar 1996. p. 4

⁶⁶ McDonagh, Marese. ““Private eyes” used by adoptees’. *The Irish Independent*. 07 Mar 1996. p. 4

mothers and “exported” to the US for adoption’.⁶⁷ Spring’s accusation hints at the powerful grasp of the Catholic Church on Irish society and its detrimental result on unmarried mothers and their rejected children. An important political figure such as the Tanaiste, openly chastising the fascination with sexual morality in the past and it henceforth being reported in a national broadsheet would almost certainly affect the public’s view on the topic and perhaps influence their trust in the Irish Catholic Church.

This was not Holmquist’s first time writing about the issue of forced adoption in Ireland. In 1992, she wrote an informative article in *The Irish Times*; ‘Secret shame, silent scream’, in which she addressed the topic;

‘In retrospect, it [adoption] appears to have been a cruel form of moral cleansing and policing, a systematic termination of the bond between mother and children, (...) affecting several generations of mothers’, which was ‘a decision which created such emotional turmoil that it affected all their [the mothers] relationships later in life’.⁶⁸

Holmquist’s article is one of the earliest which deals with the plight of the unmarried mother, as well as the pressure placed on them to give up their babies for adoption, in any of the three newspapers assessed, and does so before the scandal of the falsified birth certificates.

The issue of adoption was also raised in the same broadsheet in 1993, by an unknown author analyzing a series called ‘Shadows from the past’, which highlights the fact that forced adoption was a heavily flawed solution to pregnancy outside of marriage.⁶⁹ The journalist makes a harrowing statement; ‘Anyone who doubts that the social coercion of thousands of women, pregnant outside of marriage, to give up their babies for adoption, was anything less

⁶⁷ Holmquist, Kathryn. ‘Obsession with sexual morality led to rejection of children’. *The Irish Times*. 09 March 1997. p. 7

⁶⁸ Holmquist, Kathryn. ‘Secret shame, silent scream’. *The Irish Times*. 01 Oct 1992. p. 9

⁶⁹ Unknown author. ‘Shadows from the past’. *The Irish Times*. 05 June 1993. p. 31

than an Auschwitz of the soul, will surely be convinced (...).⁷⁰ There seems to be little follow up to this article and further articles did not ensue until 1996.

The plight of pregnancy outside of wedlock prior to the 1990's; the predicament and the conditions endured.

Many articles outlined the catastrophe that pregnancy entailed for unmarried women in the decades prior to the 1990's. The lack of options was a prominent topic, as was the disclosure of how girls were treated in mother and baby homes. In the mid twentieth century, falling pregnant out of wedlock was one of the greatest sins a woman could commit in the eyes of the Catholic Church and a very much Catholic society. Although adoption was coerced in most cases, the social pressure to put a so-called 'illegitimate' child up for adoption was also strong, as girls faced abandonment by their families and were often shunned by society and the church for merely being pregnant. Hiding the 'terrible secret' - both the pregnancy and the baby itself - appeared to be the one option as unmarried mothers were not financially supported by the government.

As early as 1991, Nuala O'Faolain penned 'Condoms a necessary fact of life' in *The Irish Times* and spoke of her youth spent in University; 'We didn't know anything about contraception in those days. We did know what happened to girls who got pregnant. Disgrace and ruin awaited them'.⁷¹ Considering the strict restrictions on the sale of contraception in Ireland up until 1985, the only encouraged method of preventing pregnancy was abstinence. Without contraception, it was inevitable that many more young women fell pregnant and that

⁷⁰ Unknown author. 'Shadows from the past'. *The Irish Times*. 05 June 1993. p. 31

⁷¹ O'Faolain, Nuala. 'Condoms a necessary fact of life'. *The Irish Times*. 07 Oct 1991. p. 10

Mother and Baby homes were one of the most prominent options; despite the cruel conditions they harbored and the inevitable loss of a child to adoption.

Padraig O'Morain demonstrated the predicament that the women who were unlucky enough to fall pregnant faced; the frightened young women 'had no real option but to yield to society's insistence that the very existence of the children be kept secret'.⁷² Many opted for a Mother and Baby home which usually resulted in a coerced adoption; '(...) denied uncensored contact with the outside world, they meekly signed the papers which were put in front of them'.⁷³ While this route may have not been an attractive choice, unfortunately the options that unmarried mothers faced were rarely promising. Cases in which unmarried mothers happily brought home an 'illegitimate' child and was accepted back into the family were very rare it appears, as very few women have opened up about choosing this route. Tension between the woman and her own family would often be long-lasting. Alternatively, communication could be permanently severed.

Many unmarried mothers who endured the Mother and Baby home and adoption route spoke up in the 1990's in order to raise awareness for the causes, as mother and baby homes had almost been abolished and support for unmarried mothers began to emerge in some newspapers. One of these women was Fionnuala Batts, who was interviewed by Liz Keating of *The Irish Examiner* in 1994. Keating illustrates that Fionnuala had the 'misfortune' of falling pregnant in the 1960s and had no alternative choices than to choose the route she did.⁷⁴ Batts claimed that being pregnant out of wedlock was "(...) the most horrible experience imaginable", with "no humanity" in the procedure in the home where she birthed her daughter and "insensitive and clinical" treatment from the staff at the adoption agency.⁷⁵ Another shocking

⁷² O'Morain, Padraig. 'When your flesh and blood is torn away'. *The Irish Times*. 11 May 1996. p. 6

⁷³ O'Morain, Padraig. 'When your flesh and blood is torn away'. *The Irish Times*. 11 May 1996. p. 6

⁷⁴ Keating, Liz. 'All for the love of Claire'. *The Irish Examiner*. 18 May 1994. p. 10

⁷⁵ Keating, Liz. 'All for the love of Claire'. *The Irish Examiner*. 18 May 1994. p. 10

revelation was made: Fionnuala Batts never met her daughter, as she was anaesthetised just before the moment of birth, which Keating claims was a popular practice in some institutions at the time.⁷⁶ Fionnuala also stated that she was led to believe that her 'unmarried-and-pregnant' predicament was not very common at the time and was later shocked by the estimated figures.⁷⁷ The stigma of unmarried motherhood at the time was so cumbersome that mothers would not be at liberty or have had the confidence to speak about it.

There was another appalling route that unmarried mothers could choose if they decided not to enter a mother and baby home and give up their child for adoption; Infanticide. Alexis Guilbride determined in 1995 that infanticide as a form of birth control had been practiced for centuries in Ireland.⁷⁸ She claimed that numbers peaked in the 1940s when women were no longer allowed to leave Ireland as a solution to pregnancy and highlighted the reasons why women were forced to commit infanticide in order to hide their 'crime' of pregnancy;

'The unwed pregnant woman in post-independence Ireland could, accordingly, expect, if her "crime" was discovered, to be disowned by her family and thrown out of her home; to be expelled from her community; to lose any position of employment that she might have held and, no social welfare system to fall back on, to be reduced to prostitution or begging on the streets. Alternatively, she might spend the rest of her days, malnourished and ill-treated, working in a Magdalen laundry'.⁷⁹

Guilbride's summary of the plight of the unmarried pregnant woman in Ireland is the most harrowing truth presented in the articles that were analysed during the research process for the 1990s Mother and Baby home period. The fact that murdering one's own child appeared

⁷⁶ Keating, Liz. 'All for the love of Claire'. *The Irish Examiner*. 18 May 1994. p. 10

⁷⁷ Keating, Liz. 'All for the love of Claire'. *The Irish Examiner*. 18 May 1994. p. 10

⁷⁸ Guilbride, Alexis. 'A Woman's Crime'. *The Irish Times*. 30 Oct 1995. p. 10

⁷⁹ Guilbride, Alexis. 'A Woman's Crime'. *The Irish Times*. 30 Oct 1995. p. 10

to be a more favorable option than continuing with pregnancy and motherhood in a very Catholic Ireland effectively showcases the difficult decisions that young women faced.

Alison O'Connor accessed the medical side of women being faced with these options in the 1990s. In her article 'Births to unmarrieds double in decade' in 1995, she claimed that many young girls gave birth alone and unaided, after blocking out reality for the entire duration of the pregnancy, due to utter fear.⁸⁰ They face the choice of reaching out for medical assistance at the last moment or else birthing alone; and if she choose to birth alone, it is often the case that she also choose to abandon the baby and possibly face medical complications along the way.⁸¹ Although abandonment was a very tough choice, it appeared to be ever so slightly easier for some young girls than choosing infanticide in the case that she choose to continue the pregnancy.

The Mother and Baby Homes.

In the 1990s, articles that discussed the atmosphere and treatment of unmarried expectant mothers in Mother and Baby homes began to emerge. Many were of an informative nature, while other documented the experiences of victims of these homes.

In her discourse on adoption in 1992, Kathryn Holmquist spoke of Joan, a woman who gave birth outside of marriage at age 21. Holmquist quotes Joan remembering the home as "bleak and terrible, like a prison", and full of Mothers and their babies.⁸² In Holmquist's piece, Joan recalls that the youngest pregnant girl was only 11 years old, who was impregnated by "a man who came through the window", a case which the Ireland of today would clearly view as rape, but unfortunately for the victim, societal views alongside the predicament she was in at

⁸⁰ O'Connor, Alison. 'Births to unmarrieds double in decade'. *The Irish Times*. 17 June 1995. p. 7

⁸¹ O'Connor, Alison. 'Births to unmarrieds double in decade'. *The Irish Times*. 17 June 1995. p. 7

⁸² Holmquist, Kathryn. 'Secret shame, silent scream'. *The Irish Times*. 01 Oct 1992. p. 9

the time led to her residency in a Mother and Baby home, with presumably no consequences for the perpetrator involved.⁸³ While the article does not mention any Mother and Baby home in particular, the atmosphere depicted resembles other depictions of home life in 1990s newspaper articles.

Anne Dempsey, of *The Irish Times*, spoke to Norah Gibbons from Barnardos in 1993, about the atmosphere in particular Mother and Baby homes. Norah spoke of the case of a woman residing in Sean Ross Abbey, a Mother and Baby home in Roscrea, in the 1960s. Norah conveyed that; ‘(...) the whole atmosphere was punitive. She was told that her child was conceived as a result of sin and her task was to atone for that sin’.⁸⁴ This attitude towards the pregnant women appears to be common, given the evidence from articles of the time, and the expectant mothers were consistently guilted for their ‘sin’ of being pregnant out of wedlock.

An insight into daily life in Mother and Baby homes was provided by June Goulding, who wrote a book titled ‘The Light in the Window’. Goulding worked in the Bessborough Mother and Baby home in Cork in 1951 and the bleak memories remained with her for the subsequent decades. Mary Leland penned an article about the book in *The Irish Times* in 1999 in which she disclosed some harsh realities about the home in the 1950’s. The unmarried mothers, who could spend up to three years at the home, dressed in smocks on a daily basis and were refused underwear, while they worked from 6am onwards to benefit the home.⁸⁵ She outlined the lack of care towards mothers during labour and delivery in the adjoining hospital; generally there were ‘no pain relief, no episiotomies, no sutures, no healing baths, a doctor who

⁸³ Holmquist, Kathryn. ‘Secret shame, silent scream’. *The Irish Times*. 01 Oct 1992. p. 9

⁸⁴ Dempsey, Anne. ‘The laundry girls’. *The Irish Times*. 04 Sept 1993. p. 27

⁸⁵ Leland, Mary. ‘A midwife remembers the banished lives behind ‘The Light in the Window’’. *The Irish Times*. 06 Apr 1999. p. 5

only came to take Wasserman tests or, once, to provide anesthesia'.^{86,87} This shows the mistreatment unmarried mothers endured under institutionalisation.

It was not just the mothers who were subjected to this type of treatment in Bessborough Mother and Baby home. In 1997, *The Irish Times* reported that the children of the home had been used as test subjects for the three-in-one and the four-in-one vaccines by Wellcome drug company, in 1960 and 1961.⁸⁸ Although the children did not have any adverse reactions to the drug, the permission of the mothers was not obtained in the process.

In 1998, prior to the informative piece on June Goulding's book, Mary Leland had still written a positive article about the Bessborough complex when the house was for sale. Leland wrote; '(...) the Sacred heart home (...) was the centrepiece of a service for unmarried mothers and their children, with a maternity unit and adoption service mirroring the needs of the community through the last eighty years. There is still a caring and nurturing service provided here (...)'.⁸⁹ Leland's piece in *The Irish Examiner* certainly differs from her depiction of the Bessborough home when she evaluated Goulding's book in 1999. Perhaps the revelation of the brutality of the mother and baby home system was only realized by Leland in the last year of the decade, as one may assume from the disparity between her two articles analyzed here.

Changing times; unmarried motherhood in the 1990s.

At the beginning of the 1990s, an article in *The Irish Examiner* accurately summed up the accelerating change in Irish society; 'For the first time in Irish history the majority of children born to unmarried parents are being kept within their families of origin'.⁹⁰ This statement

⁸⁶ Leland, Mary. 'A midwife remembers the banished lives behind 'The Light in the Window'. *The Irish Times*. 06 Apr 1999. p. 5

⁸⁷ A Wasserman test was an antibody test for syphilis.

⁸⁸ Unknown author. 'SBH confirms vaccine test in Cork babies home'. *The Irish Times*. 15 July 1997. p. 3

⁸⁹ Leland, Mary. 'Big house with a history of caring'. *The Irish Examiner*. 14 Nov 1998. p. 100

⁹⁰ Unknown author. 'Fewer Irish babies given up'. *The Irish Examiner*. 20 Dec 1990. p. 9

conveyed the media discussion that was ignited about unmarried mothers in the 1990s. Many articles in the three newspapers spoke about the changes that were occurring in Irish motherhood. In previous decades, unmarried mothers retaining their child was very rare but the beginning of the 1990s finally tipped the scales in favour of children remaining with their birth parents.

Maureen Fox presented the statistics in *The Irish Examiner* in 1991; in 1967, 97% of children born to unmarried mothers were adopted.⁹¹ By 1977, the number had dropped to 74.6%, but by 1989, only 9.4% of children born out of wedlock were put up for adoption.⁹² Irish single mothers were gaining freedom of choice and adoption certainly was not an option they were veering towards. This led to a higher demand for children available for adoption and many couples seeking children were forced to go abroad in their quest for an adopted child.

In the first quarter of 1993, 20% of babies were born to unmarried mothers in Ireland.⁹³ By 1998, that figure had risen to almost 28% of the births of the first three quarters of the year.⁹⁴ Births outside of the traditional married couple's family structure were becoming less stigmatised as the decade went on. In earlier decades, it is difficult to estimate how many women had babies outside of marriage, considering that some left Ireland, some went into homes and other choose various other bleak routes. The secrecy surrounding pregnancy out of wedlock suppresses accurate estimations, so true statistics cannot be defined.

It is evident that not only the media, but also academic researchers were aware of these changes in Irish society. According to *The Irish Times* in 1995, the National Maternity Hospital and the sociology department at University College Dublin came together to undertake a study

⁹¹ Fox, Maureen. 'The trauma of mothers who give up their babies'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 Apr 1991. p. 13

⁹² Fox, Maureen. 'The trauma of mothers who give up their babies'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 Apr 1991. p. 13

⁹³ Cruise O'Brian, Kate. 'Unmarried motherhood is not so tragic'. *The Irish Independent*. 24 Aug 1993. p. 6

⁹⁴ O'Regan, Michael, and O'Halloran, Marie. 'Single parent numbers grow'. *The Irish Times*. 18 Feb 1999. p. 10

on unmarried motherhood and teenagers, which resulted in the following conclusion; ‘(...) the trend towards supporting pregnant teenagers in the family home plays a crucial role in assuring the ultimate well-being of the young mother and her child’.⁹⁵ This could encourage families and society to be more supportive of unmarried mothers.

Irish family life was changing, partially due to the acceptance of unmarried parents in society, and therefore the creation of single parent families that had not occurred due to parental death or marital separation. Marianne Heron, as early as 1993, had written that almost 1 in 5 families in Ireland were not marriage based, which she defines as ‘(...) one of the most startling [statistics] to emerge in the rapidly changing patterns of family life over the last two decades’.⁹⁶ It was clear that unmarried motherhood was certainly not the catastrophe that it appeared to be in the past.

Conclusion.

The selection of articles chosen for *The Irish Times*, *The Irish Independent* and *The Irish Examiner* from the 1990s convey a balanced representation of the discourse about mother and baby homes in newspapers in the decade. The revelation of the issues with illegal adoption and the system itself showcase that the media may have been willing to criticise the system but less inclined to deliver criticism about the Catholic Church and the institutions that perpetrated the abuse against unmarried mothers and other women. There was a strong focus on the history of mother and baby homes in Ireland and the experiences of victims of the system. The adoption scandals and the plight of unmarried mothers prior to the 1990s and in the 1990s itself was highlighted as a significant aspect, not the abuse committed against the women or those who committed the abuse. This could suggest that the attention placed on educating the public about

⁹⁵ Bourke, Jackie. ‘When a child has a baby’. *The Irish Times*. 28 Mar 1995. p. 32

⁹⁶ Heron, Marianne. ‘When mum isn’t married...’. *The Irish Independent*. 09 sept 1993. p. 11

the corruption surrounding adoption and the abuse of unmarried mothers took attention away from placing the blame on the church and its institutions, as it appears that the fault of the Church did not come into question at the time.

The newspaper articles of this period cannot reflect secularisation until they are compared with those of the later period. However, there seems to be little outcry against the Catholic Church currently.

3. *The Magdalene Sisters*; the beginning of the debate surrounding the Magdalen laundries?

The scandals surrounding the Magdalen laundries can be divided into two representative periods; the earlier period can be defined by the articles surrounding the release of Peter Mullan's infamous movie *The Magdalene Sisters* in 2002 and its reception by the Irish media. The latter period is primarily marked by the media attention surrounding the McAleese report and the deliverance of the State apology issued by Taoiseach Enda Kenny in the Dail (the Irish Assembly) on 19 February 2013. This chapter will deal with the earlier period and newspaper articles that are significant to the case of the Magdalen laundries.

The Magdalene Sisters was first shown to a public audience on 30 August 2002 at the Venice Film Festival, where it won the prestigious Golden Lion Award. The plot of the film focused on the lives of four women, incarcerated in a Magdalen Laundry in Dublin in the mid 1960's; these included two unmarried mothers, one rape victim and one woman who was regarded as excessively beautiful and flirtatious, named Rose, Bernadette, Margaret and Crispina. The film was heavily criticised by *L'Osservatore Romano*, a daily newspaper of the Vatican City. The newspaper claimed that the film was staunchly anti-Catholic and unsurprisingly, the Vatican's criticism of the movie attracted widespread attention for the film.

The film was subsequently released on 06 October 2002 in Ireland, at the Cork International Film festival. James Smith, in *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, notes that *The Magdalene Sisters* broke the silence that the public upheld regarding Magdalen laundries, and subsequently helped provide a forum in which Magdalen victims could share their experiences and bring them into Ireland's known history.⁹⁷ Both the criticism and the announcement that the film had received the Golden Lion award, the

⁹⁷ James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, Ch. 4, p. 7

highest prize given at the Venice film festival, were often mentioned in Irish newspaper articles about the film's release, as was Mullan as the director of the film. Short descriptions about the film were often included, as was background information about the Magdalen laundry system in Ireland in the past.

The introductions to the Magdalen laundries in articles found suggest that Irish newspapers assumed that the public knew little about the topic. The institution was addressed as a unit, with no focus on individual religious personnel. The harsh language was usually reserved for opinionated pieces and was usually directed at the system in general. The material of this chapter will be presented in the following order, with division into six categories; the institution of the Catholic Church, Irish society, Peter Mullan, the treatment of the Magdalen victims, the quality of the film itself and articles that were compassionate towards the church. The analysis of these six categories will be preceded by a section especially for very substantial articles, in which the material greatly overlaps into more than one of these categories. The quality of the film is included in this discussion as while the film appears to be informative and historically relevant, the cinematic quality of the film was frequently criticised.

The search term utilised was 'Magdalene Sisters'. Due to the primary focus of this chapter being a film, many search terms were not necessarily required. The search produced the following number of search results:

'Magdalene Sisters'.

The Irish Independent: 165

The Irish Times: 231

The Irish Examiner: 138

These were the results from the release of the film at the Venice Film Festival on 30 August 2002, until the chosen research cut-off date of 31 December 2003, as the number of articles referencing the film greatly reduced in quantity after this date.

A significant issue that was encountered during the research of newspaper articles about *The Magdalene Sisters* was the large amount of advertisements for the screening of the film in cinemas throughout the country. These added little value to the research and much time was spent covering all results that addressed the movie. *The Irish Examiner* appeared to be the newspaper with the largest number of advertisement material.

It is notable that newspapers with daily editions produced quite many articles given the short time frame of research regarding this film, however, this is inevitable given that all three of these newspapers are published daily.

Articles which focus on the Vatican's criticism of *The Magdalene Sisters* tend to often mention Peter Mullan's opinion on the matter and include other aspects to further suggest reasons why the Catholic Church may have criticised it so heavily. For example, a trenchant article in *The Irish Independent* in October 2002 titled 'The Magdalene movie. Washing the dirty laundries in public.' referred to the Vatican's condemnation of the film, but stated '(...) the film's director says the church must apologise to its many victims (...)', allowing a quotation from Mullan to portray the message instead of the writer of the article.⁹⁸ This era was one where suggestions of a deserved apology were not so common and Peter Mullan carries the call for an apology instead of the journalist's own words. Perhaps this allows the journalist to highlight Mullan as the source of the criticism, rather than the newspaper or the journalist himself. The article proved to be substantial, also referencing the treatment of the victims in the film and Irish society in the 1960's. It describes the almost emotionally-vacant character of

⁹⁸ 'The Magdalene Movie. Washing the dirty laundries in public'. *The Irish Independent*. Monday, 07 Oct. 2002. p. 8.

Sister Bridget, the Mother Superior of the convent in the film; ‘She psychologically bullies the women in her care and grants the other nuns carte blanche to do whatever is necessary to preserve order’.⁹⁹ Mullan’s film provides a biased version of the nuns in the convent and this image was repeated throughout critical responses to the film.¹⁰⁰ Irish society in the 1960’s is outlined in a poignant sentence which almost brings guilt to the audience; ‘It was a very conservative society and very patriarchal and obsessive in its notions of sex and sexuality’.¹⁰¹ This line may have potentially impacted the Irish audience and encouraged them to question the position of the Catholic Church and conservative nature in Ireland in the early 2000’s. It is a truth that could have appeared to be a new revelation at the time of the film’s release.

A later article, published in *The Irish Times* on 29 September 2003, also has a variety of focuses, primarily Irish society and the reception and quality of the film. While the writer is not disclosed in the article starkly titled ‘Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating’, the apparent humiliating perspective of the film is conveyed as the journalist initially mentions an article written in the United States by Father Richard Burke who refers to the case of the Magdalen laundries as ‘Gulag Erin’ in his review of *The Magdalene Sisters*.¹⁰² The term ‘Gulag’ is of course received with the greatest shame, as the word conjures images of the horrific Soviet forced labour camp system that existed under the rule of Vladimir Lenin and Joseph Stalin in Russia in the first half of the twentieth century. The linguistic boundaries are further pushed when the article references that Irish society, including the inmates themselves, were, at the peak of the Magdalen laundries era ‘(...) trapped in their own insularity, just like

⁹⁹ ‘The Magdalene Movie. Washing the dirty laundries in public’. *The Irish Independent*. Monday, 07 Oct. 2002. p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ James M. Smith, *Ireland’s Magdalen Laundries and the Nation’s Architecture of Containment*, Ch. 5, p. 19

¹⁰¹ ‘The Magdalene Movie. Washing the dirty laundries in public’. *The Irish Independent*. Monday, 07 Oct. 2002. p. 8.

¹⁰² Burke, Richard. ‘Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating’. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14.

the Taliban in the most inaccessible reaches of Afghanistan'.¹⁰³ This comparison would have been very poignant at the time the articles were published, as the United States war in Afghanistan and the Taliban would have been a key subject in the media only one year after the United States invasion of the state. Both of the subtle comparisons to the brutality of Soviet Russia and the outright comparison to the Taliban, makes the image of the Magdalen laundries more relatable, so that the 2003 audience could understand the severity of them and relate them to what they recognise from the headlines they regularly bear witness to. The journalist then pursues a humorous criticism of the film, claiming 'Given the chance between dental surgery without anaesthetic and *The Magdalene Sisters*, call your dentist for an appointment immediately'.¹⁰⁴ This attitude towards the film resolutely allows the audience to know that the film is almost unbearable to watch from the journalist's point of view, in terms of both the topic it approaches and the cinematic quality of the film. He is also compassionate towards the Catholic Church in the piece, through a further shroud of criticism for Mullan and the film; '(...) not one compassionate priest, nun or parent. They are all intolerant monsters, each of them'.¹⁰⁵ It is evident that he believes that the situation depicted in *The Magdalene Sisters* should have been shown from a balanced viewpoint. The article ends with a harsh conclusion of the writer's opinion: 'Peter Mullan's film is angry, harsh in its judgements, sensational to a fault, simplistic in its analysis and deliberately condemnatory'.¹⁰⁶ *The Magdalene Sisters* could potentially be viewed as an informative insight into the plight of 'fallen' women in Ireland in the past. It appears that Mullan was condemned for his theatrical depiction of the Magdalen laundries, be it for the quality or the harsh tone of the film.

¹⁰³ Burke, Richard. 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating'. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14

¹⁰⁴ Burke, Richard. 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating'. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14

¹⁰⁵ Burke, Richard. 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating'. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14

¹⁰⁶ Burke, Richard. 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating'. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14

As the newspaper that revealed the most results for the earlier period of the case of the Magdalen laundries, the *Irish Examiner* offered a wide range of articles on the subject, many of which were harsher in journalistic nature than the content of the other newspapers. An article which references other historical periods as a comparison to the laundries depicted, is ‘Convent film ‘is like Nazi movie’’, penned by Sean O’Driscoll and John Breslin on 18 September 2002. The article refers to the film as ‘An award-winning film about brutality in Irish convents (...)’, but in the same sentence, also notes that a strong United States Catholic group likened the film to Nazi propaganda.¹⁰⁷ The piece focuses on the reaction of the Catholic league throughout, further mentioning that Mullan was compared to (...) Leni Riefenstahl, the Nazi era director who made Hitler’s best propaganda films’.¹⁰⁸ Yet again, it is palpable that the focus of some journalists was the international reaction to the film, which could paint the film as a tool which disparages the Irish Catholic image. Heinous facets of history, such as gulags, the Taliban and the Nazis, have been utilised on more than one occasion in the reception of *The Magdalene Sisters* and have been used by supporters and opponents of the film. Surprisingly, an individual appearing in headlines recently, was also referenced by William Donohue, the president of the United States Catholic League; Harvey Weinstein, recently associated with sexual misconduct allegations in Hollywood, was cited as being ‘(...) known for such anti-Catholic movies.’, an interesting characterisation with today’s hindsight, which suggests that the film is an anti-Catholic film, as opposed to highlighting it as an informative piece.¹⁰⁹

An article published in *The Irish Examiner* on 01 November 2002 titled ‘The Magdalene Sisters movie heads for box office record’ was one which appeared to show the impact of the movie as a major Irish feature. Written by Michael Lahane, the piece claims that the film was ‘(...) one of the biggest-grossing movies ever screened here’, earning one million euros within

¹⁰⁷ O’Driscoll, Sean and Breslin, John. ‘Convent film ‘is like a Nazi movie’’. *Irish Examiner*. 18 Sept. 2002, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ O’Driscoll, Sean and Breslin, John. ‘Convent film ‘is like a Nazi movie’’. *Irish Examiner*. 18 Sept. 2002, p. 9.

¹⁰⁹ O’Driscoll, Sean and Breslin, John. ‘Convent film ‘is like a Nazi movie’’. *Irish Examiner*. 18 Sept. 2002, p. 9.

its first five weeks.¹¹⁰ Although this is an early review of the film, the film's reputation has longevity, so Lehane's portrayal of the film was accurate. He also addresses the treatment of Magdalene victims in the film, appealing to the unmarried mothers cause with the strongly-worded line '(...) the gruesome conditions pregnant girls endured in notorious workhouses'.¹¹¹ The article confronts the religious institution, as inmates had to '(...) fight to escape the brutality and humiliation of the Sisters of Mercy', which paints the group of nuns as the clear demonic influence in the film.¹¹²

The above articles encompass many topics, which were best assessed in this manner due to the quantity of information they included. However, many of the articles alluding to *The Magdalene Sisters* focused more or less on a single category previously listed. The institution of the Catholic Church was often approached because of its reaction to and portrayal in the film itself. In 'Magdalene Sisters' wins best picture at Venice Film Festival', *Irish Times* journalist Patsy McGarry claims that the film refuses '(...) to depict the nuns as stock villains. Instead it is said to present the nuns as institutionalised as their charges'.¹¹³ This analysis suggests that the nuns are somewhat innocent in the situation, owing their merciless behaviour to institutionalisation, instead of personal choice. This contrasts with one of the previous articles 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating', which claimed the nuns were presented as 'intolerant monsters'.¹¹⁴ Yet both articles defend the Catholic clergy.

¹¹⁰ Lahane, Michael. 'The Magdalene Sisters movie heads for box office record'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Lahane, Michael. 'The Magdalene Sisters movie heads for box office record'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 3.

¹¹² Lahane, Michael. 'The Magdalene Sisters movie heads for box office record'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 3.

¹¹³ McGarry, Patsy. 'Magdalene Sisters' wins best picture at Venice Film Festival'. *The Irish Times*. 09 Sept. 2002, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ Unknown author. 'Catholics will find the film both infuriating and humiliating'. *The Irish Times*. 29 Sept. 2003, p. 14.

In a poignant article in *The Irish Times* titled; ‘Loved by critics, but loathed by the Vatican’, Michael Dwyer conveys the Vatican’s criticism of the film; ‘The attack came from the Vatican, outraged that a film so bluntly critical of religious orders should win such a prestigious prize and benefit from the mass of subsequent media coverage’.¹¹⁵ Dwyer definitely highlights the Vatican as the villain in this article, with the term ‘attack’ painting the church as the reactive aggressor. The journalist also focuses on the treatment in the institutions; ‘(...) the degradation and brutality experienced by young Irish women (...)’; a term which many Irish readers may not expect to hear in reference to an element of their nation’s past, given Ireland’s less violent past on a global scale.¹¹⁶

Mullan attempts to portray the stringent Conservative Catholic Irish society of the 1960’s in *The Magdalene Sisters*, and many journalists in the leading newspapers took this into account when writing articles about the film and its release. *The Irish Independent* and the *Irish Examiner* offer the best examples of this. In ‘Magdalene Sisters to be box office hit’, *Irish Independent* journalist Tom Lyons outlines that the film is set in Ireland in the 1960’s and the reasons why the four main Magdalen victims in the film were sent to the asylum are ‘(...) ‘the raging sins’ of being unmarried mothers, too pretty, too ugly or being a rape victim and speaking up about it’.¹¹⁷ Given that being an unmarried mother, too pretty and being a rape victim are obviously assigned to Rose, Bernadette and Margaret; it is easily assumed that Crispina is given the label ‘too ugly’ by Lyons, although her reasons for admission to the asylum were most likely that she was an unmarried mother with accompanying ill mental health. All appear to be unmarried girls who either engaged in sexual acts or were at risk or partaking in them. This is a misconception that gives a hint of misogyny to the article as Lyon’s is effectively highlighting

¹¹⁵ Dwyer, Michael. ‘Loved by critics, but loathed by the Vatican’. *The Irish Times*. 05 Oct. 2002, p. 2.

¹¹⁶ Dwyer, Michael. ‘Loved by critics, but loathed by the Vatican’. *The Irish Times*. 05 Oct. 2002, p. 2.

¹¹⁷ Lyons, Tom. ‘Magdalene Sisters to be box office hit’. *The Irish Independent*. 29 Nov. 2002.

the minor causes that resulted in incarceration in the laundry for those women, but he does not criticise the church.

In *The Irish Independent*, Anne Dempsey uses the attention surrounding *The Magdalene Sisters* to bring the case of the modern single mother to the table in an article published on 17 December 2002; '(...) we have been forced to confront the memory of the bad old days by seeing films such as Peter Mullan's 'The Magdalene Sisters''.¹¹⁸ Dempsey highlights the charity 'Cherish', which supports women; 'Young single mothers used to have to give up their children. Now, with the help of groups like Cherish, they can live rewarding lives'.¹¹⁹ By comparing the situation of unmarried mothers today to the situation of the past, Dempsey affirms the support that mothers have today and encourages the support of charities that contribute to a better life for unmarried mothers, thus avoiding repetition of the past and also drawing positivity from such a bleak film.

The Irish Examiner also touches on Irish society of the past in an article published on 05 October 2002, claiming that an estimated 5,000 people do not know the identity of their biological mothers because of the Magdalen laundries and the corruption that has occurred in the twentieth century.¹²⁰ The article also iterates the experience of Marian Dempster, a Magdalen victim, who describes being beaten every day for a plethora of minor occurrences in the asylum.

The treatment of victims in the Magdalen laundries was a topic which became widely documented in Irish newspapers following the release of *The Magdalene Sisters*, as the harrowing scenes in the movie attracted the attention of the public and the release of the movie

¹¹⁸ Dempsey, Anne. 'We have been forced to confront the memory of the bad old days by seeing films such as Peter Mullan's 'The Magdalene Sisters'. *The Irish Independent*. 17 Dec. 2002, p. 14

¹¹⁹ Dempsey, Anne. 'We have been forced to confront the memory of the bad old days by seeing films such as Peter Mullan's 'The Magdalene Sisters'. *The Irish Independent*. 17 Dec. 2002, p. 14

¹²⁰ *The Irish Examiner*. 05 Oct. 2002, p. 5.

encouraged victims to reveal their experiences of abuse in the institutions. *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Times* and *The Irish Examiner* aptly confronted this subject. The articles are examples of how Irish newspapers began to reveal and criticise the treatment of women, particularly unmarried mothers, in Catholic Ireland in the past, thus tainting the image of Irish Catholic institutions involved, and in turn, the Irish Catholic Church. However, in most articles, the contents of the film is the focus and the system of the Magdalen laundries; not the Catholic Church which financially supported the facilities. Criticism is rarely aimed directly at the church, even in the descriptions of the treatment of the victims, which is the darkest newspaper material in this period.

The Irish Independent makes a blunder in the plot information of the film, as Niamh Hooper and Sophie Gorman claim that the drama takes place in a ‘Dublin orphanage’, in ‘Magdalene girls’ film will open here next month!’.¹²¹ Although the location is incorrect, the ill-treatment of the Magdalen victims is still evident; ‘[The Magdalene Sisters] (...) depicts a graphic account of young women being abused and degraded (...)’.¹²² An article by Nicola Anderson in the same newspaper in early September 2002 also refers to ‘the abused girls in a Magdalene laundry’ as being the main focus of the movie but does not deal with any specific details.¹²³ These articles focus on the film in a context that is limited to the current events at the time and do not integrate wider information about the Magdalen laundries system.

In an interesting article ‘Italy’s Catholic establishment denounces ‘Magdalene’ film’ in *The Irish Times*, Paddy Agnav speaks of the Magdalen laundries and the treatment of young Irish women in years gone by. Agnav makes a persuasive statement which summarises the victims of the Magdalen laundries; ‘(...) the work force comprised unwed mothers, orphans

¹²¹ Hooper, Niamh, and Gorman, Sophie. ‘Magdalene girls’ film will open here next month’. *The Irish Independent*. 21 Sept. 2002, p. 5.

¹²² Hooper, Niamh, and Gorman, Sophie. ‘Magdalene girls’ film will open here next month’. *The Irish Independent*. 21 Sept. 2002, p. 5.

¹²³ Anderson, Nicola. ‘The abused girls in a Magdalene laundry’. *The Irish Independent*. 09 Sept. 2002, p. 3.

and even rape victims, all of them usually from poor backgrounds'.¹²⁴ He notes the wide variety of victims, which as history tends to show, that the poorest in society are usually the biggest victims of state abuse such as this. Agnav likens the system of the Magdalen laundries to a political regime of sorts; '[victims were] (...) abused and treated as virtual slave labour, being subjected to a regime of hard work, physical and mental cruelty and prayer on the road to redemption', with the last term certainly making reference to the religious nature of these horrific institutions.¹²⁵ This poignant and informative piece does not directly blame the Catholic Church or Irish State as such.

In 'Revisiting the Nightmare', an article published on 05 October 2002, Patsy McGarry recalls two Magdalen victims, Mary Norris and Sarah Williams, viewing *The Magdalene Sisters* at a preview screening with her. She characterises Mary weeping and claiming 'I see now how they dehumanised us'.¹²⁶ By involving two victims in her review of the piece, McGarry encourages the reader to see how the brutality of the laundries is part of a very recent history and affects victims who are still very much traumatised. This inclusion and introduction of Magdalen victims evokes pity for the victims of the Magdalen laundries and encouraged sympathy for the victims, as well as judgement towards the Catholic institutions which committed the injustices.

The Irish Examiner provided examples of articles which addressed the treatment inside institutions. Shasta Darlington in 'Magdalene Sisters wins top film award', also uses the term 'slaves' to describe the status and treatment of women inside the laundries; '(...) [victims] forced to work as virtual slaves in laundries and abused by the Sisters of Mercy'.¹²⁷ This

¹²⁴ Agnav, Paddy. 'Italy's Catholic establishment denounced 'Magdalene' film'. *The Irish Times*. 10 Sept. 2002, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Agnav, Paddy. 'Italy's Catholic establishment denounced 'Magdalene' film'. *The Irish Times*. 10 Sept. 2002, p. 1.

¹²⁶ McGarry, Patsy. 'Revisiting the nightmare'. *The Irish Times*. 05 Oct. 2002, p. 2.

¹²⁷ Darlington, Shasta. 'Magdalene Sisters wins top film award'. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 Sept. 2002. P. 6.

characterisation of the Sisters of Mercy taints the prestige of this particular institution while referencing the treatment of its victims. Another article about *The Magdalene Sisters* in *The Irish Examiner* was published on 13 September 2002 and referenced the Golden Lion award. Titled ‘Venice boost to festival’, the article calls the film an ‘(...) unflinching look at abuse and cruelty inside one of Ireland’s Catholic charitable institutions [which] continues this challenging path already laid down by its predecessors’.¹²⁸ This article mentions that the Catholic church in Ireland has already been attacked on these grounds and the staunch use of the terms ‘abuse’ and ‘cruelty’ aptly summarises the treatment of victims.

The quality of the film was critically assessed in many reviews that feature in the three newspapers researched in this paper. Overall, many reviewers claimed that the film itself was not artistically strong and lacked content to keep the audience engaged, despite that fact that it addressed a sensitive topic. Advertisements stating the film times in local cinemas and the amount of money the film grossed in the box office every week made up a significant portion of the articles. *The Irish Independent* published a review on 23 October 2002 admitting that while Mullan’s film ‘(...) ruffled the church’s feathers to the extent that the church is huffing and puffing with indignation (...)’, it mentioned a number of critical faults; ‘(...) the pace is frequently patchy and even [Geraldine] McEwan’s wonderful performance [as Mother Superior of the laundry] fails to make this the gut wrencher it could have been’.¹²⁹ This harsh but perhaps accurate remark about the film was not unique to this newspaper. ‘Vatican thumbs-down a plus for film’ in *The Irish Examiner* emphasises a theory which other articles analysing the film appear to exclude; that the condemnation from *L’Osservatore Romano* and the United States Catholic League proved to be nothing but profitable for the marketing and financial gains of the film and could even be suggested as a marketing miracle in the eyes of the production

¹²⁸ Unknown author. ‘Venice boost to festival’. *The Irish Examiner*. 13 Sept. 2002, p. 28.

¹²⁹ *The Irish Independent*. 23 Oct. 2002, p. 69.

team.¹³⁰ The fact that the film received such negative criticism from the church, created a taboo that attracted a greater audience.

While most of the above articles were not seemingly supportive of the Catholic church or defending the institution, many suggested that the religious characters in the film were depicted too harshly. The opinions on the portrayal of certain aspects greatly differs between journalists. One article in particular emerges as an example of Catholic support; ‘Not all the religious were bad’, an article by Miriam Donohoe in *The Irish Times* on 01 November 2002, attempted to highlight that perhaps only a small number of religious patrons were perpetrators in the clerical abuse towards women in the Magdalen laundries. Donohoe explains that it is impossible to justify the abuse committed in the Magdalen laundries, but then continues to attempt to justify the actions of the nuns. She strongly suggests that the unmarried mothers should show gratitude to the Magdalen laundries, as she indirectly blames the families of the victims; ‘(...) don’t forget these institutions were often the only refuge for young women who had been abandoned and rejected by their own families’.¹³¹ She sympathises with young women who were forced to become nuns, due to the social pressures of perhaps being from a poorer family or being the one chosen to enter into a religious life, and thus Donohoe almost excuses their treatment of Magdalen victims; ‘It is little wonder that some were bad and cruel nuns who took their frustrations and unhappiness out on children in their charge’.¹³² To conclude, she advises viewers to ‘(...) remember that, just like priests, not all nuns are bad’.¹³³ This type of article provides an alternative viewpoint, which in the eyes of some, could be viewed as offensive to Magdalen victims.

¹³⁰ Unknown author. ‘Vatican thumbs-down a plus for film’. *The Irish Examiner*. 24 Sept. 2002, p. 38.

¹³¹ Donohoe Miriam. ‘Not all the religious were bad’. *The Irish Times*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 18.

¹³² Donohoe, Miriam. ‘Not all the religious were bad’. *The Irish Times*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 18.

¹³³ Donohoe, Miriam. ‘Not all the religious were bad’. *The Irish Times*. 01 Nov. 2002, p. 18.

Conclusion.

The material analysed in this chapter was taken from the articles that addressed *The Magdalene Sisters* film from 30 August 2002 until 31 December 2003. It seems that most articles were sympathetic to the Magdalen victims, but were also conscious of not causing intentional offence to the Catholic Church. Some stepped away from this trend. Although the release of the film was in the twenty-first century, the majority of the articles that addressed the film were either of a very mild critical nature or of an informative nature, which may have introduced many members of the Irish public to details of the Magdalen laundry system and its abuse of women. Instead of criticising the Catholic Church or the institutions it managed, many articles focused on the antagonists of the film, highlighting them as the perpetrators in many cases.

The articles which were analysed in regards to the earlier mother and baby home period encapsulated the scandals of the 1990s, showed a similar journalistic stance to the articles analysed for the earlier Magdalen laundries period in which the response to *The Magdalene Sisters* was discussed; both seem to suggest a receptive atmosphere which was not open to a heavy discussion about who was to blame for the abuse that occurred in Ireland's past. The culpability of the Catholic Church or any Catholic institution was not a major topic of discussion in either case, which in turn could suggest a more religious audience. The readers were introduced to the experiences of the victims of these institutions and systems, but due to the lack of direct criticism of the Church and its institutions, it could be suggested that the Irish public was not ready for a discussion on the Church's role in the injustices committed.

In terms of the secularisation of the Republic of Ireland, the newspaper discourse surrounding the release of *The Magdalene Sisters* could be seen to have introduced some members of the public to what had occurred inside Ireland's Magdalen laundries, as well as given them a view of the institutions in hindsight. In turn, this could have led to a more

informed nation with less trust in the Catholic Church to some extent. Given the fact that this was among the other scandals surrounding the Church in the early 2000s, it could have been another factor tainting the previously trustworthy image of the Church.

4. The McAleese Report and Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalen Women.

The Magdalen laundries scandals in the later investigation period can be defined by the media attention surrounding the McAleese report and the State apology to the victims of the Magdalen laundries. The apology was issued on 19 February 2013, by then Taoiseach Enda Kenny, in Leinster House, which is the current seat of the Irish Parliament. The speech received widespread media attention in Ireland and revealed intimate details of the McAleese report, which had been released on 05 February 2013 and gave rise to the need for a formal state apology. The two are unequivocally linked and are best assessed as one case study. During the speech, it was confirmed that a financial reparation scheme would soon commence to compensate for the periods of unpaid labour spent in the institutions.

The McAleese report, formally known as the *Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to establish the facts of the state involvement with the Magdalen laundries*, was an 18-month inquiry report, overseen by Senator Martin McAleese. It provided some insight into the Magdalen laundry system, including the working conditions and the number of admissions, alongside the reasons the women entered the laundries. The report attempted to analyse information regarding 10 laundries, but information from 2 was not attained, as they were previously managed by the Sisters of Mercy who failed to provide data. The report deals with figures from Irish independence (1922) onwards. Many women who resided in Magdalen laundries are excluded due to this restriction.

Since reported numbers of Magdalen victims widely vary, the McAleese report is important for establishing a justifiable estimate of the minimum number of women who resided in the laundries. It is generally estimated that approximately 30,000 women resided in Magdalen laundries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, the McAleese report claims that

within the eight laundries assessed, 10,012 women were interned since 1922.¹³⁴ The number of inmates admitted prior to 1922 is therefore likely to number over 20,000, which leaves a large unexplained gap in the history of the Magdalen laundries and a large number of victims unrecognised by the state. The introduction of the report states that 26.5% of referrals to these laundries were facilitated by the Irish State.¹³⁵ The report presented the results of an investigation into five areas of the Magdalen laundries, which were:

1. Routes by which girls and women entered the Magdalen laundries;
2. State inspections;
3. State funding of the Magdalen laundry system;
4. Routes by which girls and women left the laundry system;
5. Death registration, burials and exhumations.

The above categories showed significant state involvement in the system and revealed information which the media could potentially use to criticise the Irish State and the Church. There was also an aspect of the laundries which appeared to be ignored by the report; in the public image of the laundries in the late twentieth century, it was widely believed that the religious orders inflicted substantial emotional and physical abuse upon the inmates but this was not addressed in the report.

The publishing of the McAleese report made it evident that, as the representative of the Irish Government, Enda Kenny would be obliged to speak about the findings of the report. Immediately following the report's release, Kenny failed to make a statement which led to mounting pressure and criticism, but the public soon learned that he met with many Magdalene

¹³⁴ Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to establish the facts of the state involvement with the Magdalen laundries. Executive summary. Point 4.

¹³⁵ Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to establish the facts of the state involvement with the Magdalen laundries. Introduction. Point 2.

survivors during this period. His delay and careful planning proved to be beneficial; the speech and formal apology appears to be one of the greatest successes of Kenny's career as Taoiseach.

While recognising the women's role as victims, his speech acknowledged the harsh judgement inflicted by the Irish State and society at the height of the admissions. The work avoids blaming any groups, with the general tone being one of 'our' guilt as a nation. Kenny began by emphasising the companionship utilised in the process and thanking McAleese and his team, the Magdalen survivors and the religious orders for providing Ireland with a 'document of truth'.¹³⁶ Shortly after, he reiterates the guilt as a nation; 'The reality is that for 90 years Ireland subjected these women and their experience to a profound and studied indifference'.¹³⁷ The indication that Ireland as a whole is the perpetrator continues throughout the speech. This method lessens the guilt placed solely on the Irish State but also avoids further confrontation with the Catholic Church. He describes the Ireland that incarcerated the women; '(...) by any standards it was a cruel, pitiless Ireland distinctly lacking in a quality of mercy'.¹³⁸ Thus, he not only apologised on behalf of the Irish Government, but also on behalf of the people of Ireland with the excerpt 'I believe I speak for millions of Irish people all over the world when I say we put away these women because for too many years we put away our conscience.'¹³⁹ While this was a daring move, it worked in Kenny's favour and he continued to further address Ireland as a nation when he questioned the values of the country, '(...) least of all a republic', appealing to the national pride of Ireland, and emphasising the importance of freedom in the nation.¹⁴⁰ After firmly positioning the guilt on the nation, Kenny was adamant to distance the Ireland of the past from the Ireland of today; 'Today we live in a very different Ireland with a

¹³⁶ Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalene Women. Available at <http://www.thejournal.ie/full-text-enda-kenny-magdalene-apology-801132-Feb2013/>

¹³⁷ Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

¹³⁸ Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

¹³⁹ Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

¹⁴⁰ Enda Kenny's State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

very a different consciousness awareness – an Ireland where we have more compassion empathy insight heart’.¹⁴¹

The apology statement itself is simple and direct, covering all potential perpetrators and incriminating acts;

‘Therefore, I, as Taoiseach, on behalf of the State, the government and our citizens deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them, and for any stigma they suffered, as a result of the time they spent in a Magdalene laundry’.¹⁴²

Kenny’s sincerity was supported by the change in tone of his voice and movement to tears by the end of the speech, alongside many members of the congregation. He concluded with an address of the Magdalen victims directly, followed by his hopes for a pivotal result of the speech; ‘Let me hope that this day and this debate – excuse me – heralds a new dawn for all those who feared that the dark midnight might never end’.¹⁴³

The long-lasting applause echoed the respect held for the Magdalen survivors and the moving speech delivered by Kenny.

Media reaction to the McAleese Report and Kenny’s speech.

Much of the newspaper reaction to the release of the report and Kenny’s speech appear to overlap.

In *The Irish Independent*, *The Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Times*, the search terms utilised were ‘Magdalen apology’ and ‘McAleese report’

¹⁴¹ Enda Kenny’s State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

¹⁴² Enda Kenny’s State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

¹⁴³ Enda Kenny’s State Apology to the Magdalene Women.

The search result figures were as follows:

‘McAleese report’:

The Irish Independent: 170

The Irish Examiner: 111

The Irish Times: 85

‘Magdalen apology’:

The Irish Independent: 40

The Irish Examiner: 56

The Irish Times: 57

The dates 05 February 2013 – 31 December 2013 were used for searching ‘McAleese report’ and the dates 19 February 2013 – 31 December 2013 were used for ‘Magdalen Apology’. Although articles regarding the general topic are still published today, the frequency is much lower post-2013; for this reason, later articles are not included in this study.

For the purpose of the paper, the results will be dealt with thematically. The categories to be employed, which aim to effectively divide the material in an appropriate manner, are;

1. Criticism of the McAleese report itself and the government’s reaction.
2. Blaming the Catholic Church and/or Irish society.

Some of the research data features material that is relevant to more than one category. However, articles will be presented in the category to which they are most applicable and other significant aspects of the articles will be mentioned, even if they are somewhat significant to

other categories. The reason for this is that there were not many articles that touched on a lot of categories; most were relevant to a single category.

Criticism of the McAleese Report and the government's reaction.

In the days following the release of *The Report of the Interdepartmental Committee to establish the facts of the state involvement with the Magdalen laundries*, harsh criticism was evident in the press. The lack of inquest into matters such as the treatment of the women in the laundries became an issue, as many victims had previously come forward noting the prominence of abuse during their time in the institutions. The failure of the government to give an adequate reaction soon became a significant issue in the press, which gave rise to even further criticism.

Bruce Arnold in *The Irish Times* on 11 February gave an overview of his opinion on the report; 'The Martin McAleese report on the Magdalene laundries is a flawed document. It is not based on the best evidence. Its focus is inappropriately narrow'.¹⁴⁴ The evidence Arnold refers to is likely the records provided by the religious orders in charge of the laundries, as the falsification of documents had occurred in the past, as was the case with birth certificates presented in the 1990s. He goes on to further criticise the report, noting the manner in which the information was delivered; 'The report is jaundiced by a creaking, sanctimonious tone, unctuous towards the congregations, whose evidence is treated with humble respect I find laughable'.¹⁴⁵ Arnold's suggestion that that the tone of the report is somewhat disrespectful and usage of the term 'laughable' certainly undermines the reputation of respect that the report wished to impart.

Conall O'Fatharta, the journalist whose name commonly appears on unflinching articles regarding the Magdalen laundries, penned an article dated 09 February 2013, titled 'Report

¹⁴⁴ Arnold, Bruce. 'Kenny was right to hold fire – report is badly flawed'. *The Irish Times*. 11 Feb. 2013. p. 33

¹⁴⁵ Arnold, Bruce. 'Kenny was right to hold fire – report is badly flawed'. *The Irish Times*. 11 Feb. 2013. p. 33

promised so much but delivered so little'; a poignant and straight forward statement which reveals the public disappointment regarding the McAleese report.¹⁴⁶ He notes in the days following the release of the report, Magdalen survivors had voiced their dissatisfaction regarding McAleese's claim that physical abuse was not prominent in the laundries.¹⁴⁷ The same journalist was also responsible for a piece dated 19 July 2013, which addresses the inaccurate depiction of the laundries; 'The report (...) gave a remarkably benign account of the laundry system and presented a picture wildly at odds with the horror stories of the Magdalene laundries which we had read for decades'.¹⁴⁸ O'Fatharta makes a valid point here as the public image of the laundries was unequivocally a negative one, particularly after the release of *The Magdalene Sisters* in 2002, when discussions intensified. He addresses the fact that the report pities the religious orders, which are first mentioned in the twelfth paragraph of the report alongside the 'profound hurt' felt by the religious sisters given the harsh portrayals of the laundries in recent years.¹⁴⁹ O'Fatharta also brings an international perspective to the argument against the reports authenticity; he refers to criticism of the project by the vice chair of the United Nations committee against torture, Felice Gaer. According to O'Fatharta, Gaer claimed that '(...) the inquiry was not independent and failed adequately to examine allegations of physical abuse, forced labour, and arbitrary detention'.¹⁵⁰ This viewpoint from a respected international organisation adds great depth to the journalist's criticism of the government and the McAleese report. In general, Gaer's comment certainly dents the credibility of the

¹⁴⁶ O'Fatharta, Conall. 'Report promised so much but delivered so little'. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 Feb. 2013. p. 8.

¹⁴⁷ O'Fatharta, Conall. 'Report promised so much but delivered so little'. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 Feb. 2013. p. 8.

¹⁴⁸ O'Fatharta, Conall. 'The government's recent tough talk that religious orders should pay compensation to Magdalene survivors is at odds with its stance on the McAleese report, writes Conall O'Fatharta'. *The Irish Examiner*. 19 July 2013. p. 15.

¹⁴⁹ O'Fatharta, Conall. 'The government's recent tough talk that religious orders should pay compensation to Magdalene survivors is at odds with its stance on the McAleese report, writes Conall O'Fatharta'. *The Irish Examiner*. 19 July 2013. p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ O'Fatharta, Conall. 'The government's recent tough talk that religious orders should pay compensation to Magdalene survivors is at odds with its stance on the McAleese report, writes Conall O'Fatharta'. *The Irish Examiner*. 19 July 2013. p. 15.

McAleese report, and if negative feedback from the UN committee against torture was offered, it undeniably suggests that the Magdalen laundries should be reinvestigated.

Conall O’Fatharta’s name arises again in the Magdalene discussion following the speech but in reference to the McAleese report. On 21 February, he voiced the fact that physical abuse occurred in the laundries had already been long established and although there were 800 pages of testimony regarding ‘serious and prolonged physical abuse’ from 20 women, none of this was referred to in the McAleese report.¹⁵¹ O’Fatharta claims that this material appears to have been utterly disregarded.¹⁵²

On 06 February, *The Irish Examiner* published a full page of short articles about the Magdalene Scandal, which addressed a variety of topics within the debate. ‘Benign report plays down harsh, brutal regimes’ written by Claire O’Sullivan and Conall O’Fatharta engages with the reality versus report aspect; ‘[there is a] stark contrast yesterday [report’s release date] between horrific stories (...) and the report that was published yesterday’.¹⁵³ The journalists verifies further to showcase that the report directly undermined the public image of the laundries; ‘The committee found no evidence that unmarried girls had babies there or that many of the girls were prostitutes. It found no evidence of torture or physical abuse’.¹⁵⁴ This statement, plus the title of the article itself, unequivocally damages the public trust in the report, as the collective memory of the public is drastically disparate to the report’s findings. The article criticised that the report did not investigate the religious orders’ role in maintaining ‘(...) a cruel regime which had long psychological effects on thousands of women’.¹⁵⁵ The usage of the term

¹⁵¹ O’Fatharta, Conall. ‘Though welcome, the Taoiseach had no choice but to make an apology to the victims. The next big step that must be taken is compensation’. *The Irish Examiner*. 21 February 2013. p.

¹⁵² O’Fatharta, Conall. ‘Though welcome, the Taoiseach had no choice but to make an apology to the victims. The next big step that must be taken is compensation’. *The Irish Examiner*. 21 February 2013. p.

¹⁵³ O’Sullivan, Claire and O’Fatharta, Conall. *The Irish Examiner*. 06 Feb. 2013. p. 9.

¹⁵⁴ O’Sullivan, Claire and O’Fatharta, Conall. *The Irish Examiner*. 06 Feb. 2013. p. 9

¹⁵⁵ O’Sullivan, Claire and O’Fatharta, Conall. *The Irish Examiner*. 06 Feb. 2013. p. 9

‘cruel regime’ has a strong impact; it echoes the effects of horrific twentieth century regimes such as China’s Communist regime, the Soviet Union Communist regime and the Nazi Dictatorship of the Third Reich, all of which cost millions of lives and left lasting scars on humanity. The comparison of the Catholic religious orders to the rulers of such regimes certainly highlights the negative image that the journalists wish to impart on the public.

Very shortly after the release of the report, Enda Kenny appealed for time to be given to allow the government to address the issues. This request only appeared to invite criticism for a lack of appropriate response. John Waters compares Kenny’s initial response to the report with his responses to the Vatican’s response to the clerical child abuse detailed in the Cloyne report; ‘Few can have missed the dramatic contrast between the Taoiseach’s weak response to the McAleese report in the Dail last Tuesday and his momentous attack on the Vatican in July 2011’.¹⁵⁶ In 2011, the blame weighed heavily on the Catholic Church but with the investigation into the Magdalene laundry, the focus was on the state’s involvement, which strays away from the government’s usual pattern. Waters questions the state’s motives further and asks whether the growing discontent towards the Catholic Church in Ireland was used in order to deter the responsibility and pressure from being placed with the government?¹⁵⁷

Shortly before Kenny’s state apology to the Magdalen victims, Maeve O’Rourke claimed that the government was hiding behind the façade of the Catholic Church and the image of the laundries that is portrayed in the report; ‘But this is where the government is hiding: they obviously knew went on behind those doors (...)’.¹⁵⁸ This a another suggestion that the material of the report was less truthful than was to be expected and that the government’s surprised reaction can not be one of a genuine nature.

¹⁵⁶ Waters, John. *The Irish Times*. 08 Feb. 2013. p. 16

¹⁵⁷ Waters, John. *The Irish Times*. 08 Feb. 2013. p. 16

¹⁵⁸ O’Rourke, Maeve. ‘Take this chance Taoiseach – apologise to each and every one’. *The Irish Times*. 16 Feb. 2013. p. 35

Almost one month after the state apology, an article was published in *The Irish Times* questioning the legitimacy of the report, given the evidence that was provided. Diarmuid Ferriter, in ‘Cartoon history of nuns in Ireland needs challenging’ claimed that we have a ‘(...) weak grasp of the multi-layered history of nuns in Ireland in the period the McAleese report covered’.¹⁵⁹ Ferriter supports his claims by emphasising that the evidence utilised by the committee was not broad enough to create an authentic and comprehensive image of the nuns organisation of the institutions since Ireland’s independence and up until the 1990’s. He criticises Kenny’s labelling of the McAleese report as a ‘document of truth’ considering the inconsistency of the evidence used and lack of research into the abuse that occurred in the laundries; ‘(...) producing a report that would justify that description is an impossibility given the fragmentary nature of the evidence available’.¹⁶⁰ It is also important to note that given the use of admissions and inspections records plus the general authoritarian atmosphere in the Magdalene laundries, it is difficult for the darker aspects of the treatment of victims to come to the surface, as it is highly unlikely that they would be included in the records of the religious orders. Doing so would only incriminate the orders at the time and result in a greater liability.

Given that it is unlikely that the public would take the time to read the actual report themselves, the essence of the report was conveyed through the newspapers; which, as is evident, showed mostly negative opinion on and insight into the report.

The blame game; the State, Irish Society and the Catholic Church.

It is palpable that the Irish State, Irish society and the Catholic Church’s decisions of the past would be placed under severe scrutiny in the press in the months surrounding the release of the McAleese report and the state apology. While some articles addressed the treatment of

¹⁵⁹ Ferriter, Diarmuid. *The Irish Times*. 18 Mar. 2013. p. 14.

¹⁶⁰ Ferriter, Diarmuid. *The Irish Times*. 18 Mar. 2013. p. 14.

the women in the Magdalen laundries, the discussion was focused on justice for the Magdalen women and the need for apologies or remittance for the wrongs of the twentieth century.

The criticism regarding the McAleese report and initial delayed response to the report appears to be what the Irish government primarily received negative press coverage for. This was outlined previously. While both the Irish state and society of the past received some criticism over their role in the Magdalen laundry system, the Church received a significantly larger amount, due to their position in the management of the laundries and partially for their lack of substantial apology and failure to contribute to the compensation fund. Firstly, the blame directed at the Irish state will be assessed, subsequently Irish society of the past and finally the heavy blame placed upon the Catholic Church.

It is important to note that as the malpractices regarding the Magdalen laundries were in the past, the question of blame is a difficult one. It is too late for the perpetrators of the past to apologise, so it is their successors that must rectify history. Eamon Delaney penned a heated, controversial, article titled ‘Bankrupt state left paying for the sins of others’, which was published the day following the apology and which claimed ‘(...) it is simply ahistorical to condemn the standards of another time by the improved standards of the present’, suggesting that the Irish government should not have to rectify the past today.¹⁶¹ This is a theme which does not appear often in press coverage in 2013 but it is a relevant mention, considering that the parties of today were criticised for the sins of the past.

Government.

The Irish state has generally been criticised for allowing the Catholic Church to hold an excess of power in Ireland, and for henceforth allowing the church to uphold laws or practices that

¹⁶¹ Delaney, Eamon. ‘Bankrupt state left paying for the sins of others’. *The Irish Independent*. 20 February 2013. p. 31

abided by Catholicism, instead of the police force or prison systems dealing with some of the incidences that resulted in admittances to Magdalen laundries. Anne Ferris in *The Irish Examiner* in July 2013, highlighted that by admitting women to laundries and children to industrial schools, ‘the state saved money and the church made money’; the financial benefits seemed to be advantageous to both, which certainly would have encouraged the corrupt system that was in place.¹⁶² The prominent Irish artist Sinead O’Connor penned an open letter in *The Irish Examiner* on 09 February 2013, in response to the published apology by the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity. O’Connor which spoke of the institutionalisation system in a much more brazen manner. O’Connor firstly outlined that she personally enjoyed a pleasant period in a Church-run institution, in which her passion for music was encouraged, but was unfortunate enough to witness a fellow inmates child been taken by nuns; unbeknownst to the birth mother.¹⁶³ O’Connor confronts her audience with a simple question: ‘Answer this: why were the nuns and not the police enforcing the laws of the land?’¹⁶⁴ She goes a step further to blatantly state what other journalists were perhaps too inhibited to produce; ‘It is highly important the state acknowledge that it, in plains terms, used to be the Church’s bitch. And apologise for that.’¹⁶⁵ O’Connor, as a popular showbiz figure, would have had a greater impact on younger readers. Her piece strays from the usual material presented in the newspapers. On all fronts, it appears that the media beliefs were that the state was very passive, yet complicit in the operation of the Magdalen laundries and other related institutions.

Society.

With regards to blaming the society of the past, it appears that it was blamed as a whole; with no single journalist shaming the older members of today’s Ireland. Michael Kelly of *The Irish*

¹⁶² Ferris, Anne. ‘Orders cannot deny the suffering inflicted’. *The Irish Examiner*. 03 July 2013. p. 13

¹⁶³ O’Connor, Sinead. ‘Church must account for “stolen babies”’. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 February 2013. p. 8

¹⁶⁴ O’Connor, Sinead. ‘Church must account for “stolen babies”’. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 February 2013. p. 8

¹⁶⁵ O’Connor, Sinead. ‘Church must account for “stolen babies”’. *The Irish Examiner*. 09 February 2013. p. 8

Independent placed the blame on Irish society, claiming ‘Magdalene laundries were the product of a society steeped in petty snobbery’.¹⁶⁶ He further characterises the exclusionary Ireland of the times of old; ‘An Ireland of squinting windows where people who didn’t fit the mould of an unrealistic idyll were to be hidden from view’.¹⁶⁷ This excerpt may have resonated with Kelly’s audience. The conservative Catholic nature of Ireland is witnessed, particularly in comparison to other European countries. Those who were mentally unfit, pregnant out of wedlock or homosexual for example were shunned by society and forgotten about, for their deviation from the typical Catholic family image. Frances Finegan speaks of the benefits that Irish society of the twentieth century availed of; ‘[it] benefitted from the system for over a century by ridding itself of unwanted women (...) or employing former inmates’.¹⁶⁸

Victoria White of *The Irish Examiner* delivered an interesting conviction shortly after the release of the McAleese report. In ‘It’s not just the state that needs to say sorry to the Magdalene survivors’, White outright claims ‘it was our society which confined these women in those laundries’.¹⁶⁹ She progresses further, speaking of the impact of the report; ‘(...) we may finally move away now from our habit of blaming the Catholic Church for everything we have done wrong as a society’.¹⁷⁰ It is evident that White places the blame entirely on Irish society of the twentieth century and alludes to the fact that the fears of society led to the creation of the institutions in question that dealt with the social issues of the time. She summarises the angst and guilt of the past; ‘We incarcerated women because we were terrified of female sexuality. We incarcerated pretty girls, girls who had babies out of wedlock, girls who had been abused

¹⁶⁶ Kelly, Michael. ‘The nuns’ story: Why Magdalene orders feel they’ve no case to answer’. *The Irish Independent*. 19 July 2013. p. 26

¹⁶⁷ Kelly, Michael. ‘The nuns’ story: Why Magdalene orders feel they’ve no case to answer’. *The Irish Independent*. 19 July 2013. p. 26

¹⁶⁸ Frances Finegan. ‘The People Should Say Sorry Too’. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 March 2013. p. 13

¹⁶⁹ White, Victoria. ‘It’s not just the state that needs to say sorry to the Magdalene survivors’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 February 2013. p. 12

¹⁷⁰ White, Victoria. ‘It’s not just the state that needs to say sorry to the Magdalene survivors’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 February 2013. p. 12

by their relations'.¹⁷¹ White effectively sums up the minor and unjust reasons that women were imprisoned for in the Catholic Ireland of the past, in a harsh and unfiltered tone.

Patsy McGarry mentions that former Tanaiste Eamon Gilmore outlined that the Magdalene laundries were a significant source of profit for the Catholic Church; 'These laundries were private businesses, run by these orders, which benefitted from the unpaid labour of the women committed to them'.¹⁷² Gilmore's comment unintentionally brings to mind other participants in Ireland who contributed to the Magdalene system, for example, the wide range of commercial hotels and institutions that benefitted from the services that the laundries provided.

Catholic Church.

It is palpable that the Catholic Church and the four orders which ran Magdalene laundries would receive heavy criticism from the press. As with previous scandals, the call for investigation into the laundries, the McAleese report itself and the formal state apology helped the press dredge the Republic of Ireland's religious past in order to retrieve the darkest parts which could be used to attack the Church on its injustices. The criticism of the Catholic Church was particularly unsympathetic around the time of the apology; the tone of which could be attributed to growing hostility towards the Church in Ireland, following the series of scandals regarding the Irish Catholic Church since the 1990's.

Eamon Delaney outlines that it is, yet again, the state's burden to pay for the Church's mistakes; 'They were mainly religious, not state, institutions, and yet it is our broke state which has to pick up the tab', he writes.¹⁷³ The McAleese report recalled that approximately 25% of

¹⁷¹ White, Victoria. 'It's not just the state that needs to say sorry to the Magdalene survivors'. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 February 2013. p. 12

¹⁷² Patsy McGarry. 'Religious have role in Magdalene payments'. *The Irish Times*. 20 Feb. 2013. p. 3.

¹⁷³ Eamon Delaney. 'Bankrupt state left paying for the sins of others'. *The Irish Independent*. 20 February 2013. p. 31.

admissions were through the state yet it appears that in the official apology, the state and society took more of the blame than was necessary and much less was placed on the Catholic Church, who managed and created the institutions . Even though only 25% of admissions were the fault of the State, it was forced to cover the whole compensation scheme, with little financial responsibility being placed on the Church.

It is evident that while the Irish state, society and Catholic Church all had significant input into the Magdalene system, it was ultimately the church that managed the institutions. Shortly after the formal apology, Gerard O'Regan claimed that there was a 'moral obligation' on the orders and the leadership of the Catholic Church in Ireland' to put the horrific events that occurred in the Magdalene laundries into 'some kind of historical and religious context'.¹⁷⁴ O'Regan also emphasised that 'legally and technically' the state was in charge of the institutions in questions, but the running of the laundries undoubtedly laid entirely with the church orders.¹⁷⁵ He also highlights that considering the social norms throughout the twentieth century with regards to the Catholic Church, the state or anyone involved with the system would be unable to intervene in the dark cases of abuse and disrespect that occurred in the laundries.¹⁷⁶ Frances Finegan asked a poignant question to his readers in *The Irish Examiner*; 'Is the state really to be held responsible for the conduct of one-time, enclosed religious orders, who, for many years were accountable to nobody and practically a law unto themselves?'.¹⁷⁷ The State was forced to carry the burden, while the Church kept a tight lip throughout the scandals.

¹⁷⁴ Gerard O'Regan. 'The week I finally lit a candle for Sister Columba and honoured a promise made many years ago'. *The Irish Independent*. 23 February 2013. p.13

¹⁷⁵ Gerard O'Regan. 'The week I finally lit a candle for Sister Columba and honoured a promise made many years ago'. *The Irish Independent*. 23 February 2013. p.13

¹⁷⁶ Gerard O'Regan. 'The week I finally lit a candle for Sister Columba and honoured a promise made many years ago'. *The Irish Independent*. 23 February 2013. p.13

¹⁷⁷ France Finegan. 'The Irish public speak of being shocked by the report on the Magdalene laundries, but everyone knew what was going on, writes Frances Finegan'. *The Irish Examiner*. 01 March 2013. p. 13

The lackadaisical nature of the religious orders with regards to formal apologies to the Magdalene victims was also a topic that Irish newspapers addressed. Claire O’Sullivan of *The Irish Examiner* highlighted that Senator McAleese was not instructed to assess the role of the religious orders in the Magdalene laundry system; he was solely focusing on the position of the State with regards to the matter.¹⁷⁸ Although the orders were under scrutiny from the public and the press, only one of the four which were mentioned in the McAleese report offered an apology. The Religious Sisters of Charity, who operated in Donnybrook and Peacock Lane issued a formal apology but claimed that it acted in good faith, considering the societal judgement towards women that committed minor offences in the past that resulted in their admission to the laundries.¹⁷⁹ The remaining three orders persevered with the notion that they acted in good faith given the context of the times. As James Smith puts it; ‘the nuns claim there is nothing to apologise for – they provided refuge to women abandoned by their families, the state and Irish society’.¹⁸⁰ However, there was no mention of the physical and mental abuse that occurred, which certainly could not be considered to have been done in good faith. Enda Kenny’s apology may have contributed to a source of support for the nuns in some ways, as the apology appeared to come more so from the State and Irish society, therefore absolving the religious orders from a large portion of the blame.

Of all the journalists whose articles were analysed in this section of the paper, a segment of Breda O’Brien’s article in *The Irish Times* on 9 February 2013 summarises the blame game of the Magdalene laundries situation best; ‘There were the religious orders that ran them; but family members, priests, the Legion of Mary, the NSPCC, the courts, Gardaí, industrial schools,

¹⁷⁸ Claire O’Sullivan. ‘Regret should not be on an ex gratia basis. Religious orders should be made to pay and apologise for their treatment of the women’. *The Irish Examiner*. 21 February 2013. p. 14

¹⁷⁹ Claire O’Sullivan. ‘Regret should not be on an ex gratia basis. Religious orders should be made to pay and apologise for their treatment of the women’. *The Irish Examiner*. 21 February 2013. p. 14

¹⁸⁰ James M. Smith. ‘Magdalenes need enquiry with legal and political clout’. *The Irish Times*. 24 July 2013. p. 14

mother-and-baby homes, psychiatric hospitals – they all send women there’. O’Brien highlights that it was the culmination of the acts of the state, Irish society and the religious orders that resulted in the exclusion of and poor treatment of many of Irish women throughout the twentieth century.

Conclusion.

The scandals surrounding the release of the McAleese report and the deliverance of the formal state apology were conveyed by Irish newspapers with a forthright attitude which looked at placing the accountability on the Irish state, society and the Catholic Church. The media coverage focused on justice for the Magdalen victims and the failures of the McAleese report. Enda Kenny was heavily criticised for his delay in apologising, but his apology was widely admired once it was finally delivered. The lack of contribution from the institutions mentioned in the McAleese report to the retribution fund was widely mentioned, as was the question of whether the state was taking responsibility for the wrongs of the church. A significant number of articles were chosen to analyse the society that encouraged the Magdalen laundry system and how Ireland was truly under the thumb of the Catholic Church.

In comparison to the two cases from the earlier period of research, the discussion of Ireland’s conservative Catholic past was very open and evident. The journalists had no issues with confronting the fact that the religious institutions were not willing to contribute to the retribution fund. The accountability was directed towards the Catholic Church to some extent, and if not, its influence on state and society were shown

It appears that the newspaper response to the McAleese report and the formal apology in 2013 differed greatly from the response to *The Magdalene Sisters* movie in 2002. This offers a particularly interesting comparison to the press material relating to the release the movie, as a large amount of the press material then was of an informative nature, describing the

Magdalene laundry system and the treatment of women within the laundries. Magdalene survivors featured in newspapers appeared particularly brave in 2002, whereas the number of Magdalene survivors was more of a focus in 2013. The tone towards women was different in 2013 than it was in the 1990s in the mother and baby homes discussions. In 2013, the women were hailed as strong survivors who were widely accepted in present day Ireland and there was no stigma towards unmarried motherhood. The material was much less informative in 2013 as there was less need to inform the public about Ireland's history with Magdalen laundries, and more of a need to find justice for the victims. The criticism of the Church and State appears much more punitive in 2013, as journalists penned more unrestricted articles. It appears that the Catholic Church lost a large amount of public and press support in the period between the release of *The Magdalene Sisters* movie and the release of the McAleese report and the formal apology to the Magdalene survivors. Although the report did not reveal as much abuse as the public had perhaps assumed, the response was strong, perhaps suggesting a shift in public opinion towards the Catholic Church in the decade that lay between the two assessment periods. There is a strong difference between the openness in discussion between that articles shown in the earlier period and those shown in the later period and this suggests secularisation in journalistic approach which could be linked to a secularisation of the audience of the newspapers.

5. Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, Tuam, County Galway.

The case of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby home in Tuam is the most current of the cases that are analysed within this paper. The institution gained international negative notoriety circa March 2017 after the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation confirmed that human remains, aged 35 foetal weeks to 2-3 years old, had been found in an underground structure on the site. A list of the 796 deceased was published later in the month, including name, age and cause of death of each victim. The reaction from the Irish media was intense following an acute reaction from the international media, which had exacerbated the shame that was already heavily burdening the image of the Catholic Church in Ireland, as the Church had already dealt with child sex abuse claims and the report of the Irish Child Abuse Commission in May 2009, which revealed widespread emotional, physical and sexual abuse of children in State institutions in the seventy years prior to the report.

The initial attention surrounding the Tuam mother and baby home came from heavy speculation about the possibility of human remains at the site began in 2012, after local Historian Catherine Corless of the 'Children's Home Graveyard Society' published an article titled 'The Home' in which she iterated that she had searched The Tuam Cemetery Register for burial records that matched with the death records of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home, but the results provided little reassurance; '(...) on viewing the register, I found that only two of the children who had died in the Home were registered in this book, but they have been buried with their kinfolk. Where were all the others buried?'.¹⁸¹ The graveyard that was attached to the former mother and baby home housed no plaques or markers that showed where individual plots were, but the discovery, or lack thereof, of burial records for the deceased children led Corless to believe that the majority of the children were buried in the little

¹⁸¹ Catherine Corless. "The Home". Journal of the Old Tuam Society. Children's Home Graveyard Committee. 2012. p. 18

graveyard, which was known to contain a mass grave. Much to her further dismay, Corless found that the Ordinance Survey map of 1905 suggested some strange coincidences between the site, which held a workhouse in 1905, and the former Mother and Baby Home in the 2007 Ordinance Survey map which she compared it to; ‘(...) [in] the layout of the workhouse, before it became known as the Home, I noted a sewage tank in the vicinity of the graveyard’.¹⁸² This is what sparked Corless’ suspicions that the children’s bodies may have been disposed of in the old sewage tank.

Corless’ new theory that the sewage tank and the mass grave were connected, plus the fact that she heard rumours of an incident in which two young boys stumbled upon a pile of infant skeletons as early as 1975, led her to further pursue the case. In 2014, her work was mentioned during a ceremony at the unveiling of a memorial at the Bethany Mother and Baby Home in Dublin, after 222 infant corpses were found to have been buried in a mass grave in Mount Jerome Cemetery in Dublin. Corless’ new theories were embraced by the Irish press and eventually the international press, which led to mounting pressure on the Irish government to pursue an investigation into Ireland’s Mother and Baby Home system. However, the case of the Bethany mother and baby home in Dublin will not be accessed in depth in this paper, as it did not become a media scandal.

From February 2015 onwards, the government took initiatives in order to investigate the claims regarding mother and baby homes. The three- person Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation itself was established in order to investigate and report on the conditions of mother and baby homes in Ireland and was initially estimated to cost in excess of twenty-one million euros.¹⁸³ Fourteen mother and baby homes were included in the research

¹⁸² Catherine Corless. "The Home". *Journal of the Old Tuam Society. Children's Home Graveyard Committee*. 2012. p. 18

¹⁸³ Paul Michael Garrett, 'Excavating the past: Mother and Baby Homes in the Republic of Ireland', p. 370

project, including the Bon Secours mother and baby home in Tuam and the Bethany Home in Dublin, which has been led by Judge Yvonne Murphy.¹⁸⁴ The commission published three interim reports as of February 2018, which was the intended deadline for the final report, however, an extension was granted until February 2019. Excavations at the site in Tuam, done on behalf of the commission confirmed the presence of human remains at the site and led to a press storm following the confirmation of the fact in March 2017.

Media Reaction to the Tuam Mother and Baby Home Scandal.

The Bon Secours case could be considered the most horrific scandal to be associated with the Catholic Church in recent years. While the treatment of unmarried mothers in Magdalene laundries and mother and baby homes was a massive issue, as was the clerical child abuse scandals, the discovery of a mass grave containing potentially almost 800 infant corpses is one that undeniably involves a destruction of innocence to such an extent that even religious citizens could not defend the church, if it was culpable. Irish newspapers descended upon the scandal and the Church with ferocious attacks. There has been a large amount of poignant news articles published regarding this case.

The search terms utilised in the research process were ‘Tuam mother baby home’ and ‘Tuam babies’, which produced the following results:

‘Tuam mother baby home’:

The Irish Independent: 77

The Irish Examiner: 223

The Irish Times: 218

¹⁸⁴ Paul Michael Garrett, ‘Unmarried Mothers’ in the Republic of Ireland’, p. 709

'Tuam Babies':

The Irish Independent: 132

The Irish Examiner: 255

The Irish Times: 167

The topic is still very much relevant in Irish newspapers, as the public have started to question the findings and consider other mother and baby home sites. The beginning of the research period is 01 June 2014, chosen because this was the month when Irish newspapers began to report on Catherine Corless' article. As the issue is still relevant, the cut-off point for newspaper research has been set to 31 February 2018; the last day of the month of the intended release of the final report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation.

It is evident that there are many articles that appear within the results of both search terms. In this chapter, the division is thematic, with material being divided into the following categories:

1. Reactions to the scandals.
2. Coverage of previous awareness of ill-treatment or high mortality rates.

Newspaper reactions to the discovery.

The material analysed throughout the research process of the Tuam babies scandal is concentrated from June 2014 to March 2017, when the scandal had its peak in media attention. The revelation of the number of "missing" baby bodies at the ceremony outside the Bethany home caught national and international media attention and the Irish newspapers began to

inform the public about the nature of the mother and baby home system. There were major calls for an inquiry during this initial period of the scandal. March 2017 is the point where excavators at the site of the Mother and Baby home in Tuam confirmed that there was in fact a very significant number of human remains located at the site and that two structures had been discovered; in which the second one contained human remains in at least 17 out of its 20 chambers. As it was assumed to be a sewage tank, the international media created a whirlwind around the topic and the Irish Catholic church took one of its hardest blows to its reputation internationally. The disregard that was held for the bodies of the infants in the past and the dismal fact that a sewage facility was utilised as a burial ground became an image which the national and international media thrived on.

The Irish Examiner was the newspaper which assessed the global reaction to the Tuam mother and baby most notably. As Michael Clifford claims; ‘The story only began to gain traction when the world outside looked in’.¹⁸⁵ This could be regarded as accurate, as the Irish government and media refused to pay attention to any reports of remains of babies being found on the grounds of religious institutions up until this point. The only exception being the limited amount of local attention given to the Bethany mother and baby home mass grave in Dublin. The Tuam Mother and Baby home scandal being on the international stage forced Ireland to react – the scandal could prove disastrous to the reputation of the Irish State in terms of violations of human rights which had occurred under the supervision of the Church and State in the past. Clifford mentioned that the Tuam scandal was introduced to the public as a story which was gaining international media attention on the afternoon news of Wednesday, 04 June 2014; ‘It was as if the world outside had awoken the media here, and all other organs of state and society, to the horror that had been uncovered’.¹⁸⁶ Clifford paints an interesting picture

¹⁸⁵ Michael Clifford. ‘We’ve become indifferent to dead babies’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 June 2014. p17.

¹⁸⁶ Michael Clifford. ‘We’ve become indifferent to dead babies’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 June 2014. p17.

here; it is as though he has alluded to the blind eye that Ireland has turned to the brutal Irish Mother and Baby home system that was once so popular in the twentieth century.

As Taoiseach of the Republic of Ireland at the time, Enda Kenny's response was relevant, just as it had been just two years previously at the height of the Magdalene laundries scandal. On 11 June 2014, John Downing penned a broad article in the *Irish Examiner* covering Kenny's announcement of a state inquiry into the mother and baby home system in Ireland, in which Kenny referred to unmarried mothers being treated as 'an inferior sub-species' in the past.¹⁸⁷ This was one of Kenny's earliest responses to the scandal. Downing also informed the public that up to 35,000 unmarried mothers spent time in Irish mother and baby homes and reiterated that these homes will be investigated on the basis of; '(...) the infant mortality rate, vaccines, medical trials, the geographic spread of these institutions and the legal complexities'.¹⁸⁸

In *The Irish Times*, Marie O'Halloran and Fiach Kelly covered Kenny's reaction to the confirmation of human remains at the site in Tuam. In the article, titled 'Home a 'chamber of horrors', says Kenny', the two journalists outline how Kenny promised to deal with the scandal and referred to the mother and baby homes period in Ireland in a less-than-flattering light.¹⁸⁹ O'Halloran and Kelly encapsulate Kenny's stance on the scandal perfectly with a well-chosen quote; "We gave them [the children of unmarried mothers] up to save them the savagery of gossip, the wink-and-elbow language of delight in which the 'holier than thous' were particularly fluent...we gave them up because of our perverse, morbid relationship with what

¹⁸⁷ John Downing. 'Kenny hits out as major inquiry into mother-and-baby homes announced'. *The Irish Independent*. 11 June 2014. P14

¹⁸⁸ John Downing. 'Kenny hits out as major inquiry into mother-and-baby homes announced'. *The Irish Independent*. 11 June 2014. P14

¹⁸⁹ Marie O'Halloran and Fiach Kelly. 'Home a 'chamber of horrors', says Kenny'. *The Irish Times*. 08 March 2017. p2

you call respectability”.¹⁹⁰ Kenny scolds Irish society for the wrongs of the past but his speech skills could be considered to capture it in a way that does not offend the Irish public, but tries unites them over the past.

The public reaction to the Tuam mother and baby home scandal was also covered by the newspapers in question. Olivia Kelleher of *The Irish Times* addressed a ‘protest for justice’ that was held outside the Bessborough mother and baby home in Cork, as mothers of children who died in the home ‘(...) tied toys and teddy bears to the gates of the building yesterday as they stated their hope to be included in any inquiry (...)’.¹⁹¹ The reaction of former mother and baby homes residents is important, as it shows that the changes in Irish society have been significant enough for mothers to finally come forward about their experiences. In March 2017, the call for more action became louder as groups began to campaign harder for justice. Conall O’Fatharta highlighted that the Irish First Mothers group, a group of survivors, family members and advocates who campaign for access to records of institutions, contacted the attorney general of the United Nations in a bid to move towards persecution under the Irish Genocide Act 1973, claiming ‘(...) religiously motivated grievous injuries which they suffered (...)’ as the main cause for concern.¹⁹² After the confirmation of bodies, the Magdalene cause was also in the limelight again as the Magdalene Survivors Together Group pledged for Magdalene women and children in mass graves in Ireland to be exhumed, as O’Fatharta iterates.¹⁹³ A number of similar support groups also called for the terms of the inquiry to be broadened so it did not cover just 14 institutions, but the 180 institutional and professionals that dealt with unmarried mothers

¹⁹⁰ Marie O’Halloran and Fiach Kelly. ‘Home a ‘chamber of horrors’, says Kenny’. *The Irish Times*. 08 March 2017. p2

¹⁹¹ Olivia Kelleher. ‘Protest ‘for justice’ held outside former Bessborough mother and baby home’. *The Irish Times*. 09 June 2014. p3

¹⁹² Conall O’Fatharta. ‘Evidence may be inadmissible in criminal case’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 March 2017. p6

¹⁹³ Conall O’Fatharta. ‘Evidence may be inadmissible in criminal case’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 March 2017. p6

throughout the country.¹⁹⁴ The terms of the inquiry were not altered and still cover only 14 institutions.

The reactions to matters directly related to the Tuam mother and baby home were still of a nature of disgust but did not focus on the whole mother and baby home system. Catherine Corless was frequently mentioned in newspaper reports due to her compelling role in the speculation of the size of the mass grave on the site of the Tuam mother and baby home. In early June 2014, *The Irish Independent* stated that Corless had emphasised that her group, the Children's Home Graveyard Committee were not 'focusing on an inquiry or any criminal investigation', but only on the erection of a plaque citing the names of the deceased children.¹⁹⁵ On the same date, *The Irish Times* published an article titled 'The trouble with the septic tank story', in which Rosita Boland remarks on how the sensationalism of the Tuam story had 'upset, confused and dismayed' Catherine Corless due to the use of the word 'dumped' in reference to how the children's bodies were disposed of after their deaths.¹⁹⁶ Initially, it appears that her wish was simply a memorial, not an investigation. It appears that four years after the initial outbreak of the scandal, Corless' outlook may have changed slightly, as in February 2018, *The Irish Times* reported that she urged the Irish public to 'support full exhumation and DNA testing of the remains'.¹⁹⁷ The article later states that she also supported a full forensic investigation. This contrasts with her initial wishes for the grave to remain undisturbed, with the only addition being the remembrance plaque.

The need for an inquiry into Irish mother and baby homes and the nature and scope of the report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission of Investigation is a subject that

¹⁹⁴ Conall O'Fatharta. 'Terms must be widened for a full probe'. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 March 2017. p6

¹⁹⁵ Caroline Crawford. 'Nine missing women may also be in baby grave'. *The Irish Independent*. 07 June 2014. p12

¹⁹⁶ Rosita Boland. 'The trouble with the septic tank story'. *The Irish Times*. 07 June 2014. p3

¹⁹⁷ Elaine Edwards. 'Corless urges public to back DNA testing of Tuam babies' remains'. *The Irish Times*. 24 February 2018. p2

frequently arose in newspaper articles. At the beginning of June 2014, Harry McGee and Ronan McGreevy of *The Irish Times* covered the immense pressure building for an inquiry, claiming; ‘There were numerous calls from TDs, senators and councillors yesterday for a full inquiry (...)’.¹⁹⁸ McGee and McGreevy highlighted Galway councillor Hildegard Naughton’s claim that the case in Tuam was ‘manslaughter’ but also noted that she was the only politician who made such extreme claims regarding the nature of the deaths. The local religious reaction was also outlined, as the archbishop of Tuam’s statement was referenced; ‘while the archdiocese would cooperate with any inquiry, it did not have any involvement in the running of the home and had no records in its archives’, attempting to absolve the local diocese from any potential blame or guilt that may arise as the case raged on in the Irish press.¹⁹⁹

The revelations of March 2017 led to more pressure for excavations and action at other mother and baby homes throughout the country. *The Irish Examiner* reported on the findings of the partial excavations of two underground structures in Tuam; ‘In the second structure, ‘significant quantities of human remains’ have been discovered in at least 17 of the 20 underground chambers’, and it was confirmed that the ages of the remains varied between 35 foetal weeks to three years old’.²⁰⁰ The same article quoted Paul Redmond from the coalition of Mother and Baby Home Survivors as claiming ‘the worst is yet to come’ when the secrets of homes such as Bessborough in Cork and the infamous Sean Ross Abbey are revealed.²⁰¹ There is increasing pressure for mother and baby homes to be further investigated.

¹⁹⁸ Harry McGee and Ronan McGreevy. ‘Pressure builds for Tuam babies inquiry’. *The Irish Times*. 05 June 2014. p9

¹⁹⁹ Harry McGee and Ronan McGreevy. ‘Pressure builds for Tuam babies inquiry’. *The Irish Times*. 05 June 2014. p9

²⁰⁰ Conall O’Fatharta and Fiachra O’Clonnaith. ‘Demanding the truth and answers’. *The Irish Examiner*. 04 March 2017. p1

²⁰¹ Conall O’Fatharta and Fiachra O’Clonnaith. ‘Demanding the truth and answers’. *The Irish Examiner*. 04 March 2017. p1

As excavation and exhumation theories were outlined in Irish newspapers, the question of DNA was inevitably going to arise. Would there be action taken to identify the remains? Would the mothers or family of the children who died wish to find out information or would they prefer to let their secrets remain in the past? Cormac O’Keeffe covered Doctor Geraldine O’Donnell’s input in *The Irish Examiner* in March 2017; ‘she said the biggest unknown factor with Tuam is that all the relatives might not come forward, making identification impossible’.²⁰² The challenge could also be that it may be difficult to find living relatives of the children who died at the home, according to Peter Murtagh in *The Irish Times*.²⁰³ Murtagh also enthusiastically references unknown professionals, a geneticist and a pathologist to be exact, to claim; ‘It is highly likely that DNA can be retrieved from some if not all of the human remains found (...)’.²⁰⁴ O’Keeffe interpretation is perhaps less realistic than it may seem, as he outlines the difficulties in the identification process; ‘Sources say it was highly likely the remains would have degraded and dispersed and would have to be linked to individual children’.²⁰⁵ The difficulties that arise during forensic research done on mass graves is much more complex in the Tuam case due to the sheer scale of the operation and the lack of embalming procedures prior to burying the corpses.

The reactions to the information that was discovered regarding the mass grave at the mother and baby home differed. It is evident that the general response was that of disgust and shock from all groups. The newspapers were eager to inform the public on the process involved in the discovery. The coverage of the topic was particularly heavy in June 2014 and March 2017. Although the catholic church was not blamed in the initial reactions, further reports went on to discredit the catholic church, Irish society and the Irish government.

²⁰² Cormac O’Keeffe. ‘This is body identification at ‘an industrial level’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 March 2017. p6

²⁰³ Peter Murtagh. ‘Intact DNA probably recoverable, experts believe’. *The Irish Times*. 07 March 2017. p2

²⁰⁴ Peter Murtagh. ‘Intact DNA probably recoverable, experts believe’. *The Irish Times*. 07 March 2017. p2

²⁰⁵ Cormac O’Keeffe. ‘This is body identification at ‘an industrial level’. *The Irish Examiner*. 07 March 2017. p6

Coverage of previous awareness of ill-treatment or high mortality rates.

The three newspapers in question undoubtedly addressed the theory of the public and state being aware of the ill-treatment of unmarried mothers and their children in Ireland and the high mortality rate that accompanied institutionalisation. This material can be divided into two sub-categories; firstly, the reports of two young boys stumbling upon the mass grave in 1975 and secondly, the reports of the government being informed of the situation in Tuam circa 2012-2014;

A number of newspaper articles detail reports based on inspections at mother and baby homes during the periods of operation, however, the details of these previous reports written during the twentieth century are too broad for the scope of this paper, as the material of the reports could constitute a separate research project. On 11 June 2014 in *The Irish Independent*, Colette Browne mentioned a 1947 report which dealt with the Tuam mother and baby home in particular. The health inspectors report referred to the children in the Tuam institution as “emaciated”. ‘flesh hanging loosely on limbs’ and ‘mentally defective”, according to Browne, which should have been a sure indicator of the neglect occurring in the home.²⁰⁶ However, at the time of the earlier investigations, no action was taken to ensure that conditions in the home improved and there were no consequences for the Bon Secours order.

The case of the two young boys discovering the mass grave in 1975 was detailed in articles in all three newspapers. This is considered the initial discovery of the mass grave in recent years and has been often touched upon either directly or passively. In *The Irish Times*, Brian McDonald mentioned the discovery at the beginning of the scandal on 02 June 2014; ‘After the home was closed in the 1960s (...) two boys discovered partially broken concrete slabs covering a disused septic tank (...). The boys broke the concrete and discovered a hole

²⁰⁶ Colette Browne. ‘Church isn’t the only one with questions to answer on mother-and-baby home scandal;’, *The Irish Independent*. 11 June 2014. p32

‘filled to the brim with bones’.²⁰⁷ The imagery described in this article portrays the disposal of the bodies efficiently and the enormity of the mass grave well, which would further succeed in disgusting the Irish public. In March 2017, another journalist from *The Irish Times* outlined the saga of a woman, named Mary Moriarty, who claims to have fallen into the mass grave in 1975.²⁰⁸ Edwards quotes Moriarty on her experience; ‘they were all piled on top of each other like sausages’, and retells the woman’s experience of the ground collapsing under her.²⁰⁹ What had attracted Moriarty to the site was the sight of a local child parading through the streets with a skull on a stick – a quite alarming occurrence.²¹⁰ Events such as these appear to have attracted little or no attention from the local community or church in general. Considering that 1975 was so soon after the closing of the Bon Secours Mother and Baby home and disuse of the grave site, there was no intervention following earlier discoveries of the mass grave and the conditions of burial.

A more recent event which suggested that the Irish state knew about the occurrences in Tuam was the discovery of a HSE memo, which advised that the HSE review the cases in Tuam and Bessborough and launch a state inquiry, due to errors in the death records which hinted at potential child trafficking operations.²¹¹ Both Tuam and Bessborough were reviewed as part of the McAleese report in 2012, however, it was understood that due to the fact that the information was not relevant to the Magdalene laundries investigation, the material was omitted from the report. There was no alternative inquiry launched in order to investigate this and the issue was simply swept under the carpet. In June 2017, Conall O’Fatharta of *The Irish Examiner* covered the story in depth, highlighting the infant mortality numbers and the unforeseen fact that the orders had been receiving financial aid from the parents of children

²⁰⁷ Brian McDonald. ‘Children’s grave may be subject of inquiry’. *The Irish Times*. 02 June 2014. p7

²⁰⁸ Elaine Edwards. ‘Woman recalls falling into grave’. *The Irish Times*. 04 March 2017. p5

²⁰⁹ Elaine Edwards. ‘Woman recalls falling into grave’. *The Irish Times*. 04 March 2017. p5

²¹⁰ Elaine Edwards. ‘Woman recalls falling into grave’. *The Irish Times*. 04 March 2017. p5

²¹¹ HSE: Health Service Executive. The public health service in the Republic of Ireland.

who had already vacated the homes or passed away.²¹² But the discrepancies in the records caused the most concern; the memo mentioned that it is possible that almost one thousand infants may have been illegally adopted from the home and false death certificates may have been produced, and as the memo itself stated; ‘this may prove to be a scandal that dwarfs other, more recent issues with the Church and State’.²¹³ With the Church, State and society being well aware of illegal adoptions since the 1990s, it is a wonder that there was no further research conducted by the State previously. With regards to the State knowing the infant mortality rates in the Tuam mother and baby home, the McAleese inquiry was aware that the rates were in excess of 50% and in fact, The Report of The Interdepartmental Group on Mother and Baby Homes failed to record in their 2014 report that the mortality rates suggested that Tuam mother and baby home certainly was not a safe institution for illegitimate children.²¹⁴ The Bon Secours order was not confronted on the mortality rates following the release of the 2014 report and were not asked to explain the high mortality rates.

Conclusion.

The case of the Bon Secours mother and baby home could be considered the most sombre of the scandals surrounding the Catholic Church in Ireland, as it is evident that the large death count could be accounted for by the poor conditions children of unmarried mothers had to reside in. It appears that the newspaper coverage surrounding this scandal was highly critical of the Bon Secours order and by association, the Catholic Church. A large portion of the criticism was due to the conditions in which the remains of the children were buried. The fact that international newspapers reported on the scandal before Irish journalists followed the story may suggest that Irish journalists and the public were perhaps desensitised to the harrowing nature

²¹² Conall O’Fatharta. ‘Government already knew of baby deaths’. *The Irish Examiner*. 03 June 2017. p7

²¹³ Conall O’Fatharta. ‘Government already knew of baby deaths’. *The Irish Examiner*. 03 June 2017. p7

²¹⁴ Conall O’Fatharta. ‘McAleese inquiry told of Tuam deaths’. *The Irish Examiner*. 22 May 2017. p24

of new scandals surrounding the Church. Newspapers spoke of the mortality rates in the home and how knowledge of these and the mass grave were known to authorities and the local community decades prior to Corless' revelations.

In contrast to the earlier mother and baby home period, represented by the 1990s scandals, and the earlier Magdalen laundry period, represented by the film *The Magdalen Sisters*, this later period shows a journalistic approach that is more confident in its articles relating to the Bon Secours mother and baby home and more willing to place the blame on the institution involved and the Church, as well as the neglect shown by the State towards these mothers and their children. The Catholic Church and more serious issues regarding the operation of the home were discussed, such as the conditions children lived in and the variety of illnesses or nutritional deficiencies that led to their deaths. It appears that the newspapers felt that they could freely discuss the wrongs of the Church without fear of offending a delicate audience. It seems that there was less apprehension about a negative public reaction, which could suggest a more secularised society.

The changes in information, tone and culpability in the Tuam case, in comparison with the two cases in the earlier period, suggest that Ireland had become more secularised in the period since the earlier scandals. This case is much more comparable to the previous case which constituted the later period of the Magdalen laundry discussions in Irish newspapers, in terms of attitudes towards the Church and religious institutions. The willingness of the journalists to reveal more information about the Tuam mother and baby home scandal compared to the 1990s scandals or the discourse surrounding *The Magdalene Sisters* suggests that the three newspapers were less restricted in the respect held publicly for the Catholic Church in Ireland. It appears that the journalists were less fearful of attracting backlash and losing a percentage of its readership. Overall, it suggests an audience that was more receptive of and desensitised to criticism of the Catholic Church in Ireland.

6. Conclusion.

Magdalen laundries and Mother and Baby homes were undoubtedly a principal feature of the single motherhood experience during the twentieth century in Ireland. At the height of their prosperity, the atmosphere inside these institutions and ill-treatment that occurred towards mothers and at times, their children, was not known in detail to the Irish public. It appears that over the course of the past three decades, the Irish public has come to know these institutions to some extent and ever since, their outrage has grown at a fast pace.

Irish newspapers reacted on the scandals that I have outlined in this thesis and the journalists that wrote the articles outlining the wrongdoings of the institutions most likely had an influence on informing and shaping public opinion and discourse on the concept of Magdalen Laundries and mother and baby homes in the past, and thus, on the public discourse on the Catholic Church, which was once on a pedestal and permitted to indirectly control the country and society's social guidelines it seems. What accompanied negative public opinion, was the contamination of the Church's reputation and the eventual drastic decline in its role in Irish life.

The research undertaken in preparation for this paper has answered the question as to what extent the secularisation of Ireland was reflected in how Irish newspapers addressed the scandals surrounding mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries. As is evident, the scandals or key moments were divided into two different periods and analysed. In the earlier periods, both institutions were addressed in an informative nature, and in the latter periods, they were addressed more openly and harshly, to reveal a system that had not been openly discussed in Ireland in the past. The debate continues today, and it is unknown how long it will continue to do so, as it is likely that many more scandals will be revealed, particularly surrounding mother and baby homes, as more archaeological and theoretical research may be undertaken on every mother and baby home that operated in the past in Ireland.

In a chronological matter, the changes in the way the Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes were written about is even more evident. In the earlier mother and baby home period, the concept of single motherhood being popular and accepted was presented as an issue and it appears that criticism of the Catholic Church was not notable. The adoption scandal was presented as an issue created by society and upheld by the adoption agencies involved. Although the earlier Magdalen laundry research period is within the twenty-first century, it contrasts heavily with today. The criticism of the Catholic Church was kept to the antagonists of *The Magdalene Sisters*, with very few journalists speaking out about the mother and baby home system. Even so, the contrast between these two early periods is clear. With approximately ten years between the mother and baby home earlier period and the Magdalen laundry earlier period, and another ten years between that and both later periods for the mother and baby homes and the Magdalen laundries, it is visible that the change in journalistic approach and potentially also the public opinion was quite drastic. Both later periods showcase many articles which harshly critique the Catholic church and the institutionalisation of women, including single mothers who have evidently the focus of this paper. The articles in case of the McAleese report and the State apology heavily criticised the Irish society of the past, the Irish government of the past, at the time of the scandal, and the Catholic Church in the past and throughout the scandals. Although the scandals surrounding the Tuam mother and baby home took place shortly after, and are an ongoing feature in Irish newspapers, the discourse on the case was significantly harsher than with the latter case of the Magdalen laundries, primarily due to the nature in which the infants' bodies were disposed of, but also due to the minor secularisation due to scandals over the period. Therefore, the tone in which the Magdalen laundries and the mother and baby homes were addressed indubitably became more critical of the Church and the institutionalisation system over the period from the 1990s until present day.

This also answers the question as to what extent the Catholic Church was made responsible for the treatment of single mothers in Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes during the scandals that were highlighted in this thesis. In the earlier periods, the Church was barely portrayed as a perpetrator, but in the later periods, it received a much larger amount of criticism in the three newspapers utilised in this study, and the criticism was very severe in nature at times.

The important question in this paper is whether newspaper reports such as these contributed to the secularisation of Ireland. While the secularisation of a country cannot be technically measured by the opinions of the journalists, it is palpable that newspapers aim to please their readership, therefore material is usually published to follow the interests of the public. In the case of Irish secularisation in this way, the increase in articles criticizing the Catholic Church, Magdalen laundries and mother and baby homes were a response to the scandals and public interest in the scandals. It could be considered that there is a correlation between the increasingly brutal nature of the criticism of the Church in newspaper articles over the past three decades and the public opinion and devotion to the Church in the same period. It is feasible that increasing volumes of information about the scandals that the Church was involved in, greatly influenced public discourse about the church; older generations with a presumably stronger relationship with newspaper coverage would be presented with journalistic approaches to the scandals, which they would be more likely to trust, and younger generations would be more likely to research scandals online if they became lightly acquainted with them in important Irish newspapers. The popularity of online editions of these newspapers may have also contributed to the influence on younger citizens. Social media could also be considered a strong influence in the spread of newspaper articles, but that is not within the scope of this paper.

The limitations of the subject in question in this paper are firmly determined. The period from 1990 until today was chosen as it encapsulates the period in which the secularisation of Ireland was at its fastest pace and most concentrated. The institutions that were analysed in this paper were decided upon due to their relevance to the case of the unmarried Irish mother in the twentieth century; these two particular types of establishments were frequently by women who found themselves in the unfortunate situation. Most significantly, the issue of unmarried motherhood in post-independent Ireland was chosen because it is a cause that has arisen frequently in Irish newspapers in recent years and has been a topic of huge debate. It is also a subject which has touched the lives of many Irish women and many children adopted from or in Ireland in the past one hundred years, and although some women or their children may never find solutions to their questions, open discussions of the issue in the academic sphere and the fact in Irish newspapers may contribute to healing of the trauma and hurt that has been done in the past. This paper does not reach further back than 1990, therefore, the discussions revolving around this subject from 1922 until 1989 could not be analysed within the scope of this thesis. As the newspaper material focused on topics and scandals related to unmarried mothers, mother and baby homes and Magdalen laundries, other scandals relating to the Catholic Church in Ireland outside of this focus were not brought into this argument. The paper also does not address the topic of protestant institutions or non-religious institutions. Thus, the contribution of the case of the unmarried mother in this context cannot be effectively analysed in relation to all of the other scandals that influenced the decline in trust in the Catholic Church in Ireland.

Aside from this fact, the secularisation of Ireland can also be seen in the events that have happened in recent years. The coverage of the plight of the Irish single mother in the past and the institutions in which she resided, alongside the extent to which this contributed to the secularisation of Ireland, cannot be measured in its entirety, however, it is almost certain that it had a significant contribution alongside the various other religious scandals. The overwhelming

public support for legalising abortion and the criticism that the Church received during the campaigning period, appears to be the ‘cherry on top’ for secularisation in recent years and demonstrates the vast changes that have occurred in Irish society from 1990 to today.

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