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doi:10.1017/ihs.2022.47

Exploring the ordinary: migration, sexuality and crime, and the progression of the 'Agenda' in Irish women's history, 1850s–1950s

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ABSTRACT. *This article reflects on some developments in women's history based on the 1992 'An agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500–1900', particularly responding to the section authored by Maria Luddy, incorporating work grounded in the nineteenth century up to the first half of the twentieth. Specifically, it considers developments in Irish women's social history over the past thirty years on the period from the 1850s to 1950s. The focus is on themes of poverty and migration, crime, and sexuality, which were touched on in the 'Agenda' and identified as areas for future research. Analysis on these subjects allows for an insight into lived realities for 'ordinary' women. These are areas which reveal the growth and development of historical research and its impact on public narratives and policy. Taking its cue from the 'Agenda', this article also identifies other fruitful research topics that could be further explored in future scholarship.*

We can now proudly acknowledge that women's history in Ireland has developed over the past fifty years into a thriving, diversified field of scholarship that is firmly embedded in the academy and public consciousness. That is in no small part due to the high calibre, challenging and intellectually stimulating work of the three authors of the 'Agenda for women's history in Ireland', Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy.[1] The original 'Agenda' discussed tensions between 'mainstream history and women's history', yet it is impossible now to refer to 'mainstream history' without a level of self-consciousness (and the requisite quotation marks).[2] In 1985 Mary Cullen advocated for complexity and nuance in writing history: 'History, in the sense of the closest approximate reconstruction of what really happened that can be achieved, will always need the convergence of as many different stories from as many different points of view as possible.'[3] This challenge, taken up in the 'Agenda' and in the authors' subsequent scholarship, continues to be a motivating force behind much women's and gender history. Intersectional approaches to women's history,

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[1] Margaret MacCurtain, Mary O'Dowd and Maria Luddy, 'An agenda for women's history in Ireland, 1500–1900' in *I.H.S.*, xxviii, no. 109 (May 1992), pp 1–37.

[2] Ibid., p. 1.

[3] Mary Cullen, 'Telling it our way: feminist history' in Elizabeth Steiner-Scott (ed.), *Personally speaking: women's thoughts on women's issues* (Cork, 1985), p. 254.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.47 Published online by Cambridge University Press

particularly on youth, region, class and ethnicity, has helped to broaden our understanding of the Irish past in and outside the academy.[4]

The historiographical turn in Irish scholarship in recent decades, and more intensely since the 'Agenda', has been the growth of social history and consideration of women's history and gender perspectives in the writing of history more broadly. It is noteworthy that while many monographs and collections mentioned in this article do not focus exclusively on women's history, women's distinct experiences are highlighted, suggesting that in some instances attention to historical gender differences is now an assumed aspect of scholarship.[5] This shows developments since the debacle caused by the publication of the *Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, volumes i–iii (a year before the 'Agenda'), which failed to feature women's contributions to Irish culture and writing in any significant way; an omission that was described by Nuala O'Faolain as 'immensely wounding'.[6] Later remedied by the commission of another two volumes, the rich sources available for the study of women's history were showcased. The 'Agenda' sparked intense interest in gathering further sources and in discussing the importance of analysing gender in Irish history.

MacCurtain and O'Dowd identified in 1992 that the 'most important task for writers of Irish women's history is the publication of research on all aspects of Irish women in the past'.[7] This article responds to Luddy's Part II of the 'Agenda', on modern Irish women's history, and specifically reflects on developments in women's social history over the past thirty years, from the 1850s to 1950s. It focuses on themes of poverty and migration, crime, and sexuality, which were touched on in the 'Agenda' and identified as areas for future research. Analysis of these subjects allows for an insight into lived realities for 'ordinary' women. The valorisation of histories of the ordinary person in recent years is evidenced by funded research projects, university academic hires in these areas of expertise and significant public attention. This is not to suggest that histories of high politics, war, international relations, political leaders or other traditional areas of scholarship are not important but, rather, that the community of scholars engaged in historical research has broadened and that scholarship in social history is filling the 'empty spaces' identified in the 'Agenda'.[8] Taking its cue from the 'Agenda', this article also identifies other fruitful research topics that could be further explored.

[4] On age, see, for example, Catherine Cox and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Adolescence in modern Irish history* (London, 2015); Carole Holohan, *Reframing Irish youth in the sixties* (Liverpool, 2018); Maria Luddy and James Smith (eds), *Children, childhood and Irish society: 1500 to the present* (Dublin, 2014); Eleanor O'Leary, *Youth and popular culture in 1950s Ireland* (London, 2015). On class, see Mary Hatfield, *Growing up in nineteenth-century Ireland: a cultural history of middle-class childhood and gender* (Oxford, 2019).

[5] *The Cambridge history of Ireland,* volumes i–iv (Cambridge, 2018) feature numerous essays that consider women's experiences of the past. Similarly, Eugenio F. Biagini and Mary E. Daly (eds), *The Cambridge social history of modern Ireland* (Cambridge, 2017) is a wide-ranging collection that reflects on the changing status of women over time, most notably Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart, 'Gender roles in Ireland since 1740', pp 312–26.

[6] Cited in Catriona Crowe, 'Testimony to a flowering' in *Dublin Review* (2003) (https://thedublinreview.com/article/testimony-to-a-flowering/) (5 Jan. 2021).

[7] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 5.

[8] Ibid., p. 2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.47 Published online by Cambridge University Press

I

In the 'Agenda', Luddy pointed to gaps in our knowledge of vagrancy and experiences of poverty despite the wealth of primary sources. Several scholars have addressed this lacuna since, and the lens has shifted somewhat from the examination of philanthropists and those experiencing poverty as victims, to a more nuanced portrayal of people who found strategies to alleviate their destitution. In recent years, Lindsey Earner-Byrne has been at the vanguard in critically examining the intersection of poverty, class and religion in Ireland.[9] Earner-Byrne found that due to 'the paucity of state assistance, most Irish people in need depended on convincing charities of their "worthiness." This was an intricate balancing act requiring tact, technique, and tenacity.'[10] Her findings relate primarily to the post-independence period, but find echoes in work by scholars investigating the world of religion, charity and gender in the nineteenth century.[11] Virginia Crossman and Ciarán McCabe have explored strategies poor women utilised to ameliorate their precarious finances through begging, char work and the use of charities, which, like Earner-Byrne notes, renders these women less as victims and more as agents.[12] Local studies, such as Susan Marie Martin's examination of the 'shawlies' in Cork, emphasise the potential of microhistories and case studies and the benefit of using local sources to reveal the reality of working-class entrepreneurial activities like street trading in fruit, vegetables and second-hand clothing.[13] The digitisation of the 1901 and 1911 censuses, as well as surviving fragments from the nineteenth century, has been one of the biggest digital projects to emerge since the publication of the 'Agenda' and continues to be useful at national and local level, in the interrogation of demographic, employment and social trends in Ireland.[14]

The study of agency and power, lived experiences of poverty, and gendered norms has illuminated women's roles as both givers and recipients of care. An

[9] Lindsey Earner-Byrne, '"Should I take myself and family to another religion?": Irish Catholic women, protest, and conformity, 1920–1940' in Christina S. Brophy and Cara Delay (eds), *Women, reform and resistance in Ireland, 1850–1950* (Basingstoke, 2015), pp 77–99; eadem, *Letters of the Catholic poor: poverty in Independent Ireland, 1920–1940* (Cambridge, 2017).

[10] Earner-Byrne, '"Should I take myself"', p. 77.

[11] Cara Delay, 'Confidantes or competitors? Women, priests, and conflict in post-Famine Ireland' in *Éire-Ireland,* xl, nos. 1 & 2 (spring/summer 2005), pp 107–25; Margaret H. Preston, *Charitable words: women, philanthropy, and the language of charity in nineteenth-century Dublin* (Westport, CT, 2004).

[12] Virginia Crossman, 'Attitudes and responses to vagrancy in Ireland in the long nineteenth century' in Kyle Hughes and Don MacRaild (eds), *Crime, violence and the Irish in the nineteenth century: themes and perspectives* (Liverpool, 2017), pp 264–79; eadem, 'Writing for relief in late nineteenth-century Dublin: personal applications to the Mansion House in 1880' in *Cultural and Social History*, xiv, no. 5 (2017), pp 583–98; eadem, 'Viewing women, family and sexuality through the prism of the Irish poor laws' in *Women's History Review*, xv, no. 4 (2006), pp 541–50; Ciarán McCabe, *Begging, charity and religion in pre-Famine Ireland* (Liverpool, 2018); idem, 'Charwomen and Dublin's secondary labour force in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries' in *Social History*, xlv, no. 2 (2020), pp 193–217.

[13] Susan Marie Martin, *The shawlies: Cork's women street traders and the 'merchant city', 1901–50* (Dublin, 2017).

[14] The census is freely accessible via the National Archives of Ireland: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie.

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important source has been workhouse records. Indeed, the management, financing, political significance and experience of living in the workhouse continue to intrigue scholars. The national system of poor relief has been examined by several, including Crossman in her comprehensive study of the Poor Law system, which specifically examines the experiences of single mothers and women engaged in prostitution.[15] The gendered segregation of residents in workhouses and other institutions facilitates a gendered analysis.[16] Case studies, such as Martin McCarthy's examination of the admission of two girls to the Kinsale industrial school in 1893, reveal the gendered concerns expressed by the authorities.[17] Further studies using such sources are possible, and the digitisation of records from institutions opens up the potential for researchers to adopt comparative and/or regional approaches.[18] It is yet to be seen what new insights into women's and gender history can be gained through the Virtual Record Treasury of Ireland, a digital reconstruction of the Public Record Office of Ireland destroyed at the Four Courts during the Civil War in 1922.[19]

The history of women's migration, particularly women who travelled to the U.S.A., attracted early attention from scholars. Economic need was the major driving force behind female migration, with emigrants well aware of employment opportunities and differences in rates of pay for similar work elsewhere.[20] In the 'Agenda', Luddy especially highlighted the world of women's work as requiring further study, and while some areas are well developed, gaps remain. Histories of ordinary emigrant lives have emerged through oral history collections, but there is still more research to be done on areas such as Irish women's integration into their new communities. It is also still possible, despite recent scholarship, to see that 'women's experiences remain peripheral or ignored completely in many general accounts of migration and the Irish diaspora', and 'the Irish' is still used to describe research that is solely focused on male migrants without it being explicitly

[15] Virginia Crossman, *Poverty and the Poor Law in Ireland 1850–1914* (Liverpool, 2013).

[16] Geraldine Curtin, '"Most vicious and refractory girls": the reformatories at Ballinasloe and Monaghan' in *History Ireland*, xxi, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 2013), pp 24–6; Pauline Prior, *Madness and murder: gender, crime and mental disorder in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 2008); Olwen Purdue, 'Surviving the industrial city: the female poor and the workhouse in late nineteenth-century Belfast' in *Urban History*, xliv, no. 1 (Feb. 2017), pp 69–90; Oonagh Walsh, 'Gender and insanity in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Anne Digby (ed.), *Sex and seclusion, class and custody: perspectives on gender and class in the history of British and Irish psychiatry* (Liden, 2003), pp 69–93.

[17] Martin McCarthy, *The committal of two Mallow children to an industrial school in 1893* (Dublin, 2016).

[18] The Enhanced Parliamentary Papers on Ireland (EPPI) database contains government reports, including on schools, prisons, and universities and is free to use; petitions, reports and debates all feature in the ProQuest, Parliamentary Papers database, available through individual or institutional subscription. Some county archives have digitised their workhouse records, including Clare, Limerick and Wicklow, while others (such as Dublin) are accessible via the FindMyPast subscription-based genealogical database. The Workhouse Drawings collection held by UCD has been digitised and contains architectural drawings of buildings around the country, allowing for a detailed examination of the gendered spaces in workhouses, available at: https://digital.ucd.ie/view/ucdlib:260452.

[19] For more on this project see https://beyond2022.ie/.

[20] See, for example, Mary E. Daly, *The slow failure: population decline and Independent Ireland, 1920–1971* (Madison, 2006); Jennifer Redmond, *Moving histories: Irish women's emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic* (Liverpool, 2018).

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acknowledged as such.[21] This is being addressed in recent scholarship, which offers a more nuanced account of female emigrant experiences. This includes the exploration of 'deviancy' and criminality in Nolan's study of lesbian encounters as a form of dissent among women transported from Ireland, critical analyses of Irish female immigrants involved in crime, and research on materiality and material connections between migrants and those at home in Ireland.[22] Increased access to letters written by female migrants is also likely to encourage further insight into their lived realities.[23]

Luddy discussed women's community and philanthropic organisations such as the Girls' Friendly Society (G.F.S.) and questioned if their 'philosophy had any impact on society'.[24] In a broader sense, this history has yet to be written, but organisations such as the G.F.S., along with the International Catholic Girls' Protection Society and the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau (largely staffed by volunteers from the Legion of Mary under the control of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid), certainly had an impact on ideas that circulated about female emigrants. Their depiction as excessively naïve, vulnerable and prone to moral error if left without strict guidance, infiltrated general discourses about female emigrants from the nineteenth century.[25] Further research on women's migration to destinations outside of the U.S. and Britain, and additional research on women emigrants in the post-Second World War era, will illuminate this history further.

III

In the 'Agenda', Luddy wrote that 'we know very little about the sexual activity of Irish women in the last century. How did women of the various classes view sexuality?'[26] In the intervening period our knowledge has grown considerably about some areas of female sexuality and behaviour while others are still ripe for further research. There has been a focus on women who went against societal norms or were considered deviant or criminal. Luddy herself has pioneered work on prostitution and attempts to reform those whose behaviour was believed to go

[21] Redmond, *Moving histories*, p. 3.

[22] Sophie Cooper, 'Something borrowed: women, Limerick lace and community heirlooms in the Australian Irish diaspora' in *Social History*, xlv, no. 3 (2020), pp 304–27; Bláthnaid Nolan, 'Knowing dissent: lesbian sub-culture in the female factories of Van Diemen's Land' in Jennifer Redmond, Sonja Tiernan, Sandra McAvoy and Mary McAuliffe (eds), *Sexual politics in modern Ireland* (Dublin, 2015), pp 16–35; the Bad Bridget project (BadBridget.wordpress.com).

[23] This includes the Mellon Centre for Migration Studies' Irish Emigration Database, available at mellonmigrationcentre.com and the collection of letters Kerby Miller donated to the University of Galway for future digitisation.

[24] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 24.

[25] See, for example, Samantha Caslin, '"One can only guess what might have happened if the worker had not intervened in time": the Liverpool Vigilance Association, moral vulnerability and Irish girls in early- to mid-twentieth-century Liverpool' in *Women's History Review*, xxv, no. 2 (2016), pp 254–73; Henrietta Ewart, 'Protecting the honour of the daughters of Éire: welfare policy for Irish female migrants to England, 1940–70' in *Irish Studies Review*, xxi, no. 1 (2013), pp 71–84; Redmond, 'Safeguarding Irish girls: welfare work, female emigrants and the Catholic Church, 1920s–1940s' in Brophy & Delay (eds), *Women, reform, and resistance*, pp 79–106.

[26] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 28.

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against societal norms.[27] Women are also revealed as being more prevalent than men in reproduction-related crime. In 1992 Luddy noted: 'Abortion, infanticide and abandonment were the methods most commonly used by women to get rid of unwanted children, but we have little information on these subjects.'[28] In the years since, scholarship has flourished, shedding much light on how women and men reacted to unwanted pregnancies and how couples regulated family size. Work by Cara Delay, Sandra McAvoy, Leanne McCormick, Cliona Rattigan, and Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart points to the use of abortion in the twentieth century.[29] The history of abortion and abortifacients in Ireland during earlier periods largely remains to be written.

The stigma and shame attached to illegitimacy is further revealed in scholarship on infanticide. James Kelly convincingly argues that infanticide was not uncommon in eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Ireland.[30] Dympna McLoughlin points to diverse sources on the subject in *Field Day Anthology*.[31] Monographs on infanticide by Elaine Farrell on the period 1850-1900 and Rattigan on unmarried women in the following fifty years reveal how cases were detected and punished.[32] Anne O'Connor demonstrates the wealth of material that can be gleaned from folklore sources, while Louise Ryan's analysis of newspaper representations identifies infanticide as a weekly phenomenon in the Irish Free State.[33] Local studies by Michelle McGoff-McCann and Joan Kavanagh point to regional differences in cases and responses.[34] Scholarship on the murder of children born outside marriage makes clear that Irish society was not as chaste as we had previously been led to believe, and that pregnancies did indeed occur outside wedlock. But what of families who absorbed children born outside marriage? What of the use of state and

[27] Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society, 1800–1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

[28] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 28.

[29] Cara Delay, '"Wrong for womankind and the nation": anti-abortion discourses in Ireland, 1967–1992' in *Journal of Modern European History*, xvii, no. 3 (2019), pp 312–25; eadem, 'Pills, potions, and purgatives: women and abortion methods in Ireland, 1900–1950' in *Women's History Review*, xxviii, no. 3 (2019), pp 479–99; Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart, *The Irish abortion journey, 1920–2018* (Cham, 2019); Sandra McAvoy, 'Before Cadden: abortion in mid-twentieth century Ireland' in Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O'Shea and Carmel Quinlan (eds), *The lost decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork, 2004), pp 147–63; Leanne McCormick, '"No sense of wrong-doing": abortion in Belfast, 1917–67' in *Journal of Social History*, xlix, no. 1 (2015), pp 125–48.

[30] James Kelly, '"An unnatural crime": infanticide in early nineteenth-century Ireland' in *I.E.S.H.*, xlvi, no. 1 (2019), pp 66–110.

[31] Dympna McLoughlin, 'Infanticide in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Angela Bourke *et al.* (eds), *Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, iv: *Irish women's writings and traditions* (5 vols, Cork, 2002), pp 915–22.

[32] Elaine Farrell, *'A most diabolical deed': Infanticide and Irish society, 1850–1900* (Manchester, 2013); Cliona Rattigan, '*What else could I do?' Single mothers and infanticide, Ireland 1900–1950* (Dublin, 2012); Pauline Prior, 'Psychiatry and the fate of women who killed infants and young children, 1850–1900' in Catherine Cox and Maria Luddy (eds), *Cultures of care in Irish medical history, 1750–1970* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp 92–112.

[33] Anne O'Connor, *The blessed and the damned: sinful women and unbaptised children in Irish folklore* (Bern, 2005); Louise Ryan, *Gender, identity and the Irish press, 1922–37: embodying the nation* (Lewiston, NY, 2001), chapter 6.

[34] Michelle McGoff-McCann, *Melancholy madness: a coroner's casebook* (Cork, 2003), chapter 2; Joan Kavanagh, 'The case of Eliza Davis' in *Tasmanian Ancestry*, xvii (1996), pp 101–06.

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voluntary institutions as survival strategies for women and families? More research on abandonment and desertion in cases where babies were discovered alive would yield valuable insight into parenthood, survival strategies and responses to unwanted pregnancies.

Research on institutions established to 'reform' or 'rescue' women has in recent decades focused largely on Roman Catholic religious-run Magdalen laundries. Researchers, including Luddy and Frances Finnegan, were able to access nineteenth-century records for these institutions, before they were largely closed to scholars.[35] However, twentieth-century records have been mostly unexamined by (and unavailable to) historians, with the exception of work by Prunty on the archives of the Sisters of Charity.[36] Scholarship on the Magdalen laundries in the twentieth century has largely focused on the coercive nature of these institutions in Ireland following partition, and the lack of access to archival records means scholars have utilised oral histories and other methodologies.[37] There has been less consideration of the situation in Northern Ireland, where Magdalene laundries and rescue and reform homes were also established in the nineteenth century and in some cases continued to operate until the final decades of the twentieth century.[38] Smith has identified these and other institutions in the Irish Free State including 'mother and baby homes, industrial and reformatory schools, mental asylums, adoption agencies', as part of an 'architecture of containment'.[39] Clara Fischer argues that this containment was prompted by the 'national interest' of the new state, which was 'taken to be so closely bound with women's sexuality' that 'women's embodied moral impurity posed a fundamental threat to the project of national identity formation', meaning that 'a restriction of their physical presence in accordance with moral classification prevailed'.[40]

[35] Frances Finnegan, *Do penance or perish: Magdalen asylums in Ireland* (Oxford, 2004).

[36] Jacinta Prunty, *The monasteries, Magdalen asylums and reformatory schools of Our Lady of Charity in Ireland, 1853–1973* (Dublin, 2017).

[37] Oral History collections include: http://jfmresearch.com/home/oralhistoryproject/ and https://www.waterfordmemories.com/home. See also, Laura McAtackney, 'Materials and memory: archaeology and heritage as tools of transitional justice at a former Magdalen laundry' in *Éire-Ireland,* lv, no. 1 & 2 (spring/summer 2020), pp 223–46; Jennifer O'Mahoney, Lorraine Bowman Grieve and Alison Torn, 'Ireland's Magdalene laundries and the psychological architecture of surveillance' in Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay (eds), *Surveillance, architecture and control* (Basingstoke, 2019), pp 187–208; James M. Smith, 'The Magdalene Sisters: evidence, testimony … action?' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, xxxii, no. 2 (2007), pp 431–58; Erin Costello Wecker, 'Reclaiming Magdalenism or washing away sin: Magdalen laundries and the rhetorics of feminine silence' in *Women's Studies,* xliv, no. 2 (2015), pp 264–79; Jennifer Yeager and Jonathan Culleton, 'Gendered violence and cultural forgetting: the case of the Irish Magdalenes' in *Radical History Review*, cxxvi, no. 126 (Oct. 2016), pp 134–46.

[38] For more, see Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*; McCormick, *Regulating sexuality*; Leanne McCormick and Sean O'Connell, with Olivia Dee and John Privilege, *Mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries in Northern Ireland, 1922–1990: for the Inter-departmental Working Group on Mother and Baby Homes, Magdalene Laundries and Historical Clerical Child Abuse* (Belfast 2021).

[39] James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen laundries and the nation's architecture of containment* (Manchester, 2007), p. xiii.

[40] Clara Fischer, 'Gender, nation, and the politics of shame: Magdalen laundries and the institutionalization of feminine transgression in modern Ireland' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, xli, no. 4 (2016), pp 821–43.

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Public and academic interest in mother and baby homes in Ireland has grown in recent years following the controversy surrounding burial practices at the St Mary's mother and baby home in Tuam, first uncovered by historian Catherine Corless.[41] Previous work, again pioneered by Luddy, considered the experiences of unmarried mothers in institutions in Ireland.[42] A number of scholars have examined the experiences of women who left Ireland on discovery of a pregnancy outside of wedlock.[43] Historians have also examined attempts to police and control unmarried mothers and those women who were considered a threat to the new Irish state as well as attitudes towards women and sexuality more generally in the 1920s and 1930s.[44] Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin suggest that the wide variety of legislation passed within the first few decades of the Irish Free State created a 'disciplinary regime that was … highly gendered, focusing almost exclusively on the regulation and self-regulation of women'.[45]

Attempts to control female behaviour and sexuality do, of course, have longer antecedents, including the implementation of the Contagious Diseases Acts (CDA) in Cork, Cobh and the Curragh Camp. The impact of these acts has been considered by Luddy, Elizabeth Malcolm and Ann Daly.[46] In a 2003 *I.H.S.* article,

[41] See, for example, Sarah-Anne Buckley and Caroline McGregor, 'Interrogating institutionalisation and child welfare: the Irish case, 1939–1991' in *European Journal of Social Work*, xxii, no. 6 (2019), pp 1062–72; Paul Garrett, 'Creating "common sense" responses to the "unmarried mother" in the Irish Free State' in *Éire-Ireland*, lv, nos. 1 & 2 (spring/summer 2020), pp 120–41; James M. Smith, 'Knowing and unknowing Tuam: state practice, the archive, and transitional justice' in *Éire-Ireland*, lv, nos. 1 & 2 (spring/summer 2020), pp 142–80.

[42] See, for example, Lindsey Earner-Byrne, *Mother and child: maternity and child welfare in Dublin, 1922–60* (Manchester, 2007); Maria Luddy, 'Unmarried mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973' in *Women's History Review*, xx, no. 1 (2011), pp 109–26; Paul Garrett, '"Unmarried mothers" in the Republic of Ireland' in *Journal of Social Work*, xvi, no. 6 (2016), pp 708–27; Donnacha Seán Lucey, *The end of the Irish Poor Law? Welfare and healthcare reform in revolutionary and independent Ireland* (Manchester, 2015), chapter 3.

[43] Paul Garrett, 'The abnormal flight: the migration and repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers' in *Social History*, xxv, no. 3 (2000), pp 330–44; Louise Ryan, 'Sexualising emigration: discourses of Irish female emigration in the 1930s' in *Women's Studies International Forum*, xxv, no. 1 (Jan.–Feb. 2002), pp 51–65; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The boat to England: an analysis of the official reactions to the emigration of single expectant Irishwomen to Britain, 1922–1972' in *I.E.S.H.*, xxx (2003), pp 54–71; Jennifer Redmond, 'Sinful singleness? Discourses on Irish women's emigration to England, 1922–1948' in *Women's History Review,* xvii, no. 3 (2008), pp 455–76.

[44] Catriona Beaumont, 'Women citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922–1948' in *Women's History Review*, vi, no. 4 (1997), pp 563–85; Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland* (London, 2009); Chrystal Hug, *The politics of sexual morality in Ireland* (Basingstoke, 1999); Maria Luddy, 'Sex and the single girl in 1920s and 1930s Ireland' in *Irish Review*, xxxv (2007), pp 79–91; Sandra McAvoy, 'The regulation of sexuality in the Irish Free State, 1929–35' in Greta Jones and Elizabeth Malcolm (eds), *Medicine, disease and the state in Ireland, 1650–1940* (Cork, 1999), pp 253–66; Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'Power, gender, and identity in the Irish Free State' in *Journal of Women's History*, vii, no. 1 (1995), pp 117–36.

[45] Una Crowley and Rob Kitchin, 'Producing "decent girls": governmentality and the moral geography of sexual conduct in Ireland (1922–37)' in *Gender, Place and Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*, xv, no. 4 (2008), p. 367.

[46] Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 124–55; Elizabeth Malcolm, '"Troops of largely diseased women": VD, the Contagious Diseases Acts and moral policing in late

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Philip Howell considered the association of prostitution with venereal disease in the early years of the Irish Free State. His conclusions were challenged by Susannah Riordan in 2007. She advocated for the importance of the politics of public health in venereal disease debates, conclusions that Howell re-countered in the next edition of the journal.[47] Further work by Riordan and McCormick has considered venereal disease policies and treatment both north and south of the border in the first half of the twentieth century.[48] Our knowledge, therefore, has grown considerably about sexual behaviours which were considered deviant or in need of suppression. Nonetheless, it is still lacking on 'normal' sexual experiences or indeed, as Diarmaid Ferriter describes, 'the absence of accounts of the joys of sex'.[49] Exceptions to this include O'Riordan's analysis of intimate letters during the courtship of a couple from the Anglo-Irish elite, oral history research carried out by Leane on sexual knowledge and experiences, and recent work by Luddy and O'Dowd on marriage, courtship and sex within marriage.[50] Their work highlights how marital sexual experiences has been a largely neglected topic particularly from the mid nineteenth century, given recent work by Leanne Calvert on the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[51]

Analyses of sources that depict deviant or criminal sexual behaviour also reveal the corollary of what was considered 'normal'. The more 'common' female sexual experiences are revealed through scholarship on family planning or birth control. While limited work exists on the nineteenth century,[52] research on birth control and regulation of family size in the twentieth century is considerable.[53] Oral history

nineteenth-century Ireland' in *I.E.S.H.,* xxvi (1999), pp 1–14; Ann Daly, '"Syphilis is given over to sentimentalists": the *Dublin Medical Press and Circular* and the drive to extend the Contagious Diseases Acts' in *I.H.S.*, xxxix, no. 155 (May 2015), pp 399–416.

[47] Philip Howell, 'Venereal disease and the politics of prostitution in the Irish Free State' in *I.H.S*, xxx, no. 131 (May 2003), pp 320–41; Susannah Riordan, 'Venereal disease in the Irish Free State: the politics of public health' in *I.H.S.*, xxxv, no. 139 (May 2007), pp 345–64; Howell, 'The politics of prostitution and the politics of public health in the Irish Free State: a response to Susannah Riordan' in *I.H.S.*, xxxv, no. 140 (Nov. 2007), pp 541–52.

[48] Leanne McCormick, 'The treatment and prevention of VD in interwar Northern Ireland' in Luddy & Cox (eds), *Cultures of care*; Susannah Riordan, 'In search of a broadminded saint: the Westmorland Lock Hospital in the twentieth century' in *I.E.S.H.*, xxxix (2012) pp 73–93.

[49] Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, p. 9.

[50] Maeve O'Riordan, 'Elite courtship: the case of Mabel Smyly and Dermod O'Brien, 1901–2' in Redmond *et al*. (eds), *Sexual politics*, pp 36–52; Máire Leane, 'Embodied sexualities: exploring accounts of Irish women's sexual knowledge and sexual experiences, 1920–1970' in Máire Leane and Elizabeth Kiely (eds), *Sexualities and Irish society: a reader* (Dublin, 2014), pp 25–52; Maria Luddy and Mary O'Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland, 1660–1925* (Cambridge, 2020).

[51] Leanne Calvert, '"He came to her bed pretending courtship": sex, courtship and the making of marriage in Ulster, 1750–1844' in *I.H.S.,* xlii, no. 162 (Nov. 2018), pp 244–64.

[52] An exception is Ann Daly, '"Veiled obscenity": contraception and the *Dublin Medical Press*, 1850–1900' in Farrell (ed.), '*She said she was in the family way'*, pp 15–34.

[53] Mary E. Daly, 'Marriage fertility and women's lives in twentieth-century Ireland, *c*.1900–1970' in *Women's History Review*, xv, no. 4 (2006), pp 561–85; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'Moral prescription: the Irish medical profession, the Roman Catholic church and the prohibition of birth control in twentieth-century Ireland' in Cox & Luddy (eds), *Cultures of care*; Deirdre Foley, '"Too many children?": family planning and *Humanae Vitae* in Dublin, 1960–1972' in *I.E.S.H.*, xlvi (2019), pp 142–60; Greta Jones, 'Marie Stopes in Ireland: the Mother's Clinic in Belfast, 1936–47' in *Social History of Medicine*,

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has been used particularly effectively by Kelly to uncover common heterosexual attitudes and practices.[54] Similarly, our understanding of sexual activities of women who did not marry has been expanded by work such as that by Leeann Lane on Rosamond Jacob.[55]

Although it was an area that was outside the scope of the original 'Agenda', research on the experiences of women in same-sex or queer relationships in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has begun, albeit not to the same degree as male experiences.[56] This is an area which, like so many in women's history, requires a re-reading of sources. Female same-sex relationships were not criminalised or policed in the same way as male same-sex relationships were, so queer lives and lived realities are not as obvious in the archive. Women like Eva Gore-Booth, or literary figures who have left strong archival records, have been studied, and work is being undertaken on queer women in the revolutionary period, but we still have much to learn about the range of female relationships.[57] Further consideration of the public and private discourses surrounding women, femininity and gendered behaviour will allow for a fuller understanding of the wider female sexual experience in Ireland within the context of both heterosexual and queer relationships.

IV

In her examination of parliamentary divorce proceedings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Urquhart draws attention to domestic abuse and marital cruelty in women's applications, while acknowledging that 'Ireland's history of divorce is the history of a minority'.[58] Historians who mined newspapers and contemporary writings revealed domestic violence not to have been rare in the Irish past. Elizabeth

v, no. 2 (Aug. 1992), pp 255–77; Sandra McAvoy, '"A perpetual nightmare": women, fertility control and the Irish state: the 1935 ban on contraceptives' in Margaret Preston and Margaret Ó hÓgartaigh (eds), *Gender and medicine in Ireland, 1700–1950* (Syracuse, 2012), pp 189–202; Leanne McCormick, '"The scarlet woman in person": the establishment of a family planning service in Northern Ireland, 1950–1974' in *Social History of Medicine*, xxi, no. 2 (Aug. 2008), pp 345–60.

[54] Laura Kelly, 'The contraceptive pill in Ireland *c*.1964–79: activism, women and patient-doctor relationships' in *Medical History*, lxiv, no. 2 (Apr. 2020), pp 195–218; eadem, 'Debates on family planning and the contraceptive pill in the Irish magazine *Woman's Way*, 1963–1973' in *Women's History Review*, xxx, no. 6 (2021), pp 971–89.

[55] Leeann Lane, *Rosamond Jacob: third person singular* (Dublin, 2010).

[56] Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, pp 73–6; Mary McAuliffe and Sonja Tiernan (eds), *Tribades, Tommies and transgressives; history of sexualities: volume i* (Cambridge, 2008); Paul Ryan, *Asking Angela Macnamara: an intimate history of Irish lives* (Dublin, 2011), chapter 6; Sonja Tiernan and Mary McAuliffe (eds), *Sapphists and sexologists; histories of sexualities, volume ii* (Cambridge, 2009).

[57] Sonja Tiernan, 'Challenging presumptions of heterosexuality: Eva Gore-Booth' in *Historical Reflections,* xxxvii, no. 2 (summer 2011), pp 58–71; Marie Mulholland, *The politics and relationships of Kathleen Lynn* (Dublin, 2002); Mary McAuliffe, *Margaret Skinnider* (Dublin, 2020); Eibhear Walshe (ed.), *Sex, nation, and dissent in Irish writing* (New York, 1997).

[58] Diane Urquhart, 'Irish divorce and domestic violence, 1857–1922' in *Women's History Review*, xxii, no. 5 (2013), p. 830. See also eadem, *Irish divorce: a history* (Cambridge, 2020).

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Steiner-Scott identifies court hearings of women's abuse at the hands of their husbands as a daily occurrence in Ireland. Yet, she observes, 'a virtual silence about a phenomenon that was so widely reported that the historian can only surmise that there existed some kind of collective wish either to ignore this social crime, or to accept it as commonplace'.[59] Luddy and O'Dowd too observe this silence, extending the historical lens on marital violence from the eighteenth to the twentieth century, and exploring how victims could be supported and protected from abusive spouses by courts, as well as by neighbours or relatives.[60] They observe an increased likelihood of conviction and sentencing after the 1890s.[61] Luddy and O'Dowd also point out that spousal murder and manslaughter was not as uncommon as previously thought.[62] Karen Brennan's exploration of spousal murder from 1930 to 1945, and Cara Diver's analysis of marital violence in post-Independence Ireland, similarly point to negative familial interactions.[63] Angela Bourke's absorbing microhistory of the killing of Bridget Cleary by her husband in Tipperary in 1895 demonstrates the importance of single case histories to the narrative of domestic violence. Through the imaginative use of criminal court records, newspapers and folklore sources, Bourke explores how marital tension and supernatural beliefs resulted in Cleary's death in rural Ireland.[64] Earner-Byrne's exploration of physical and sexual abuse up to the 1990s makes clear that the Irish home was not the safe haven it was often portrayed to be.[65] In the first historical account of incest in Ireland, Sarah-Anne Buckley traces political and legislative developments across the twentieth century, and explores how the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and criminal courts responded. The application of a gender approach to the topic enables Buckley to identify perceptions of female victims of incest as 'tainted'.[66]

Scholarship to date on domestic abuse is illuminating on many fronts but gaps in our knowledge remain. The Schools' Collection in the National Folklore Collection points to stories, poems and rhymes about domestic abuse, which could be fruitfully utilised as part of a comparative analysis of rural and urban localities.[67] How did abuse change across a marital relationship and how did attitudes,

[59] Elizabeth Steiner-Scott, '"To bounce a boot off her now and then …": domestic violence in post-Famine Ireland' in Maryann Gialanella Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd (eds), *Women in Irish history: essays in honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin, 1997), p. 126.

[60] Luddy & O'Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland*, ch. 10.

[61] Ibid., p. 328.

[62] Ibid., p. 336.

[63] Karen Brennan, 'Murder in the Irish family, 1930–1945' in Niamh Howlin and Kevin Costello (eds), *Law and the family in Ireland, 1800–1950* (Basingstoke, 2017), pp 160–80; Cara Diver, *Marital violence in post-Independence Ireland, 1922–1996* (Manchester, 2019).

[64] Angela Bourke, *The burning of Bridget Cleary* (New York, 1999).

[65] Lindsey Earner-Byrne, '"Behind closed doors": society, law and familial violence in Ireland, 1922–1990' in Howlin & Costello, *Law and the family in Ireland*, pp 142–59. See also Sarah-Anne Buckley, *'The cruelty man': child welfare, the NSPCC, and the state in Ireland, 1889–1956* (Manchester, 2013).

[66] Sarah-Anne Buckley, 'Family and power: incest in Ireland, 1880–1950' in Ciara Breathnach, Liam Chambers, Catherine Lawless and Anthony McElligott (eds), *Power in history: from medieval Ireland to the post-modern world* (Dublin, 2011), pp 185–206. See also Anthony Keating, 'Sexual crime in the Irish Free State 1922–23: its nature, extent and reporting' in *Irish Studies Review*, xx, no. 2 (2012), p. 139.

[67] See, for example, Mrs Hughes, 'Story', collected by Fred Hughes (National Folklore Collection, Schools collection, MS 746, pp 220-1); 'Story', collected by Brigid McCann

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expectations and lived realities differ between generations? Carolyn Conley's comparative approach to the study of women and violence in the late nineteenth century showcases differences in perceptions and treatment of violent women in courts in Ireland and England.[68] Conley posits that the emphasis on physical labour, particularly for rural woman, rendered it 'perhaps not surprising that in late nineteenth-century Ireland little stigma was attached to women who were physically violent'.[69] Luddy and O'Dowd document some cases of wives abusing husbands in Ireland.[70] Further examination of spousal abuse by women could provide nuance to concepts and expectations of masculinities. Scholarship to date points to rich sources that could be used to interrogate abuse across place and time, which is facilitated by the large-scale digitisation of regional and national Irish newspapers.

In 2020 TG4 aired *Cogadh ar Mhná* 'War on women' featuring several historians of Irish women or gender to explore sexual and physical assault during the Irish revolutionary years. In *Cogadh ar Mhná* Louise Ryan observed that the War of Independence was 'about the heroic deeds of young men and women have until very recently been removed from that whole story'. Mary McAuliffe asserted: 'We owe these women their histories back, we owe these women to lift the veil of silence that has lain upon their experiences and we owe these women a rewriting back into the history books.' Using newspapers, the Military Service Pensions Collection and the Bureau of Military History, an emerging body of scholarship has examined women as victims of rape, and sexual and physical assault during the Irish Revolution.[71] Earner-Byrne's discovery of a letter in the papers of the Archbishop of Dublin from a Mary M., who recounted having been raped during the War of Independence, points to the importance of individual voices and stories. She argued: 'A careful (re)construction of Mary M.'s story serves to highlight that the individual in history can be resurrected to heighten our historical understanding of broader patterns and the unique "otherness" of each protagonist, an approach that

(N.F.C., Schools collection, MS 775, p. 248). The Schools collection has been digitised at www.duchas.ie.

[68] Carolyn Conley, *Melancholy accidents: the meaning of violence in Post-Famine Ireland* (Maryland, 1999); Carolyn Conley, *Certain other countries: homicide, gender, and national identity in late nineteenth-century England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales* (Columbus, 2007).

[69] Carolyn Conley, 'No pedestals: women and violence in late nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Journal of Social History*, xxviii (1995), p. 802.

[70] Luddy & O'Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland*, pp 329–30.

[71] Susan Byrne, '"Keeping company with the enemy": gender and sexual violence against women during the Irish War of Independence and Civil War, 1919–1923' in *Women's History Review,* xxx, no. 1 (2021), pp 108–25; Gemma Clark, *Everyday violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014), esp. chapter 5; Marie Coleman, 'Violence against women in the Irish War of Independence, 1919–21' in Diarmaid Ferriter and Susannah Riordan (eds), *Years of turbulence: the Irish Revolution and its aftermath* (Dublin, 2015), pp 137–56; Linda Connolly, 'Towards a further understanding of the violence experienced by women in the Irish Revolution' in Linda Connolly (ed.), *Women and the Irish Revolution* (Dublin, 2020); Linda Connolly, 'Sexual violence in the Irish Civil War: a forgotten war crime?' in *Women's History Review*, xxx, no. 1 (2021), pp 126–43; Frawley (ed.), *Women and the decade of commemorations*; Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican women, 1900–22* (Cork, 2010); Louise Ryan, '"Drunken Tans": representations of sex and violence in the Anglo-Irish War (1919–21)' in *Feminist Review*, no. 66 (2000), pp 73–94.

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respects the complexity of experiences like rape and unwanted pregnancy.'[72] The insights proffered by gender history approaches to non-familial sexual and physical assault during these turbulent years point to the importance of assessing rape in other contexts.

Court records, newspapers, folklore sources and institutional records recount the sexual assault of men and women, boys and girls, and allow for assessments of how rape as a standalone crime was viewed and punished, and influenced by age, gender, class, region or time. Conley argues that 'the history of sexual violence has a great deal to tell us about gender, politics, culture, and power'.[73] Using newspapers and periodicals, James Kelly has pointed to the occurrence in eighteenth-century Ireland of vicious and violent rape, gang rape, the rape of children, outdoor opportunistic rape, rape at school, work, home, prison, in care and on the street, topics that deserve further attention for subsequent centuries.[74] Other studies have centred on the abduction of wealthy women and their rape or sexual assault as a feature of forced marriage.[75] Luddy and O'Dowd argue that nineteenth-century abductions were less concentrated in the higher classes than in previous centuries. They note that for abductors, 'sexual intercourse or rape appears to have been an important point of ownership'.[76] Conley's examination of rape in nineteenth-century Ireland reveals striking differences to England: 'In Victorian England rape charges were usually only sustained when a respectable woman of good character had been brutally assaulted in public by a total stranger. In the Irish evidence cases meeting these criteria were extremely rare.'[77] Bourke also points to attitudes in her comparative study of rape from 1860, suggesting that women who brought cases in Ireland were not believed.[78] Research on rape and sexual assault in twentieth-century Ireland likewise provides insight into societal, legal, press, (Catholic) church and state attitudes.[79]

Girls and women are typically outnumbered by their male counterparts as perpetrators of criminal activity in the past and today, and as a result the criminal or prisoner has been sometimes assumed to be male by default.[80] Farrell's examination of

[72] Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The rape of Mary M.: a microhistory of sexual violence and moral redemption in 1920s Ireland' in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, xxiv, no. 1 (2015), p. 78.

[73] Carolyn Conley, 'Sexual violence in historical perspective' in Rosemary Gartner and Bill McCarthy (eds), *The Oxford handbook of gender, sex, and crime* (Oxford, 2014), pp 207–24.

[74] James Kelly, '"A most inhuman and barbarous piece of villainy": an exploration of the crime of rape in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, x (1995), pp 78–107.

[75] Michael Durey, 'Abduction and rape in Ireland in the era of the 1798 Rebellion' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, xxi (2006), pp 27–47; James Kelly, 'The abduction of women of fortune in eighteenth-century Ireland' in *Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ix (1994), pp 7–43; Thomas P. Power, *Forcibly without her consent: abductions in Ireland, 1700–1850* (Bloomington, IN, 2010).

[76] Luddy & O'Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland*, p. 201.

[77] Conley, 'No pedestals', p. 811.

[78] Joanna Bourke, *Rape: a history from 1860 to the present day* (London, 2007), p. 29.

[79] Sandra McAvoy, 'Sexual crime and Irish women's campaign for a criminal law amendment act, 1912–35' in Maryann Valiulis (ed.), *Gender and power in Irish History* (Dublin, 2009), pp 84–99; Ryan, *Gender, identity and the Irish press.*

[80] For a detailed analysis of sources relating to crime and punishment, see Brian Griffin, *Sources for the study of crime in Ireland, 1801–1921* (Dublin, 2005).

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the female convict prison shows that women in Ireland were involved in diverse forms of criminal activity.[81] Lynsey Black's research on women sentenced to death points to their involvement in violent crime.[82] Research on women deemed criminally insane, particularly those who killed, has been pioneered by Pauline Prior.[83] Luddy and O'Dowd cast light on several criminal and deviant acts, such as marital desertion, adultery and bigamy, committed by women and (more typically) men.[84] A gendered approach to these specific offences would be illuminating for what it might reveal about femininities, masculinities and reputation.

Women also committed crimes against property and public order. Research on drunkenness and gender shows how drinking by women and men could evoke different societal and judicial reactions.[85] Ciara Breathnach, Anna Clark and Nolan have demonstrated women and girls' agency in riots and arson attacks at home and abroad.[86] Kelly, and Donald MacRaild and Frank Neal have examined child-stripping, the practice of stealing clothing from child victims, noting women's heavy involvement in this offence.[87] Luddy's pioneering study of prostitution revealed the way that some women involved in sex work engaged in theft to supplement their incomes, a crime that deserves examination in its own right.[88] We also need to consider how other occupations, like domestic service, factory or mill work, lent themselves to criminality. Perceptions of domestic servants solely

[81] Elaine Farrell, *Women, crime and punishment in Ireland: life in the nineteenth-century convict prison* (Cambridge, 2020).

[82] Lynsey Black, '"On the other hand the accused is a woman": women and the death penalty in post-independence Ireland' in *Law and History Review*, xxxvi (2018), pp 139–71. See also Ciara Breathnach, 'Capital punishment in Irish prisons, 1868–1901' in *Health and History*, xxii, no. 1 (2020), pp 104–25.

[83] Prior, *Madness and murder*. See also Brendan Kelly, 'Clinical and social characteristics of women committed to inpatient forensic psychiatric care in Ireland, 1868–1908' in *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology*, xix (2008), pp 261–73.

[84] Luddy & O'Dowd, *Marriage in Ireland*. See also Rebecca Gill, 'The imperial anxieties of a nineteenth-century bigamy case' in *History Workshop Journal*, no. 57 (2004), pp 58–78; Niamh Howlin, 'Adultery in the courts: damages for criminal conversation in Ireland' in Howlin & Costello (eds), *Law and the family in Ireland*, pp 87–106; Deirdre McGowan, 'Class, criminality and marriage breakdown in post-Independence Ireland' in Howlin & Costello (eds), *Law and the family in Ireland*, pp 125–41; Michael Sinnott, 'The action for breach of promise of marriage in nineteenth-century Ireland' in Howlin & Costello (eds), *Law and the family in Ireland*, pp 44–65; Maria Luddy, *Matters of deceit: breach of promise to marry cases in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Limerick* (Dublin, 2011).

[85] Holly Dunbar, 'Women and alcohol during the First World War in Ireland' in *Women's History Review*, xxvii, no. 3 (2018), pp 379–96; Leanne McCormick, '"The dangers and temptations of the street": managing female behaviour in Belfast during World War One' in *Women's History Review*, xxvii, no. 3 (2018), pp 414–31; Conor Reidy, *Criminal Irish drunkards* (Dublin, 2017), esp. chapters 6 and 7.

[86] Ciara Breathnach, 'Even "wilder workhouse girls": the problem of institutionalisation among Irish immigrants to New Zealand 1874' in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxxix, no. 5 (2011), pp 771–94; Anna Clark, 'Wild workhouse girls and the liberal imperial state in mid-nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Journal of Social History*, xxxix, no. 2 (2005), pp 389–409; Nolan, 'Knowing dissent'.

[87] James Kelly, '"Horrid" and "infamous" practices: the kidnapping and stripping of children, *c*.1730–*c*.1840' in *I.H.S.*, xlii, no. 162 (2018), pp 265–92; Donald MacRaild and Frank Neal, 'Child stripping in the Victorian city' in *Urban History*, xxxix, no. 3 (2012), pp 431–52.

[88] Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish society*, pp 46–7.

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as vulnerable or ignorant obscures their agency in criminal activity and the ways many sought revenge for perceived mistreatment.

Delay's focus on the materiality of crime,[89] as well as the work of crime historians outside Ireland, like Amy Helen Bell, Sarah Deutsch and Alexa Neale, demonstrate how historical sources, including crime scene photography, can be used in imaginative ways to explore gender, space and materiality.[90] Descriptions of crime scenes and stolen goods also offer insights into the material lives of Irish people, ordinary details not often documented in such detail. Alison Matthews David has shown how explorations of the use of clothing and accessories, as weapons of attack or self-defence and as crime aids, offer insights into societal attitudes and fears, as well as technological and scientific developments and fashion trends.[91] A medical approach to suspected crime in the courts and exploration of forensics from a gender perspective would also likely prove illuminating in an Irish context.[92]

Gender history approaches to policing, trials and punishment are revealing of lived experiences, perceptions, and attitudes towards criminality and deviance.[93] Brian Griffin has demonstrated the wealth of insight that can be gleaned from records relating to police applications for approval to marry, the dismissal of men who married without permission and chastisement for misbehaviour, which included domestic abuse and visits to brothels.[94] Work by Senia Pašeta and John Johnston Kehoe demonstrates women's roles as police, particularly in Dublin, while McCormick has examined similar histories in Belfast.[95] Research on the transportation of Irish women from Ireland and Britain has added much to our knowledge of the punishment of convicts up to the mid-1850s, and their

[89] Cara Delay, 'Kitchens and kettles: domestic spaces, ordinary things, and female networks in Irish abortion history, 1922–1949' in *Journal of Women's History*, xxx, no. 4 (2018), pp 11–34.

[90] Amy Helen Bell, 'Abortion crime scene photography in metropolitan London 1950–1968' in *Social History of Medicine*, xxx, no. 3 (2017), pp 661–84; Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the city: gender, space and power in Boston, 1870–1940* (New York, 2000); Alexa Neale, *Photographing crime scenes in 20th-century London: microhistories of domestic murder* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

[91] Alison Matthews David, 'The fabric of crime', lecture for the National Arts Club, 30 Oct. 2020 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YuXDfuBIByo&feature=youtu.be) (4 Nov. 2020); Alison Matthews David, 'First impressions: footprints as forensic evidence in crime fact and fiction' in *Costume*, liii, no. 1 (2019), pp 43–66.

[92] See, for example, Victoria Bates, *Sexual forensics in Victorian and Edwardian England: age, crime and consent in the courts* (Basingstoke, 2016).

[93] See, for example, Katie Barclay, 'Singing, performance, and lower-class masculinity in the Dublin magistrates' court, 1820–1850' in *Journal of Social History*, xlvii (2014), pp 746–68; Brian Griffin, 'The Irish police: love, sex and marriage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries' in Margaret Kelleher and James H. Murphy (eds), *Gender perspectives in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Dublin, 1997), pp 168–78; Conor Heffernan, 'Physical culture, the Royal Irish Constabulary and police masculinities in Ireland, 1900–14' in *I.H.S.*, xliii, no. 164 (Nov. 2019), pp 237–51; Elizabeth Malcolm, *The Irish policeman, 1822–1922: a life* (Dublin, 2006).

[94] Griffin, 'The Irish police', pp 170–73.

[95] John Johnston Kehoe, '"Whenever a woman was needed": Garda women assistants in 1950s. Dublin' in Redmond *et al.* (eds), *Sexual politics*, pp 90–108; Senia Pašeta, '"Waging war on the streets": Irish women patrol, 1914–22' in *I.H.S.*, xxxix, no. 154 (Nov. 2014), pp 250–71; McCormick, 'The dangers and temptations of the street'.

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circumstances and behaviours, before and after sentencing.[96] In 1992, Luddy commented: 'As yet we have almost no information on Irish women within the prison system … An examination of the records would illuminate the ideas which existed concerning female criminality.'[97] Published works on the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Rena Lohan, Christina Quinlan and Farrell focus on the imprisonment of women deemed serious offenders.[98] Lohan has also examined female prison staff, while Luddy has considered women visitors to prisons in her examination of philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland.[99] Further study of local jails, like Geraldine Curtin's assessment of women in Galway,[100] would offer an opportunity to assess survival strategies, responses at a local level, and allow for the tracing of women between prisons and other institutions. Outputs from the Wellcome-funded project, 'Prisoners, medical care and entitlement to health in England and Ireland, 1850–2000', led by Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland, will likely address some gaps.[101] The proclivity for precise prosopographical detail in prison records has facilitated quantitative and qualitative research on age, diet, medical treatment, height and tattoos, showcasing methods that could be applied specifically to records relating to women.[102] Taking an intersectional approach to the study of Ireland's criminal past facilitates an analysis of

[96] See, for example, Catherine Fleming, *The transportation of women from Kildare to Van Diemen's Land in 1849* (Dublin, 2012); Leonora Irwin, 'Women convicts from Dublin, 1836–40' in Bob Reece (ed.), *Irish convicts: the origins of convicts transported to Australia* (Dublin, 1989), pp 161–91; Perry McIntyre, *Free passage: the reunion of Irish convicts and their families in Australia, 1788–1852* (Dublin, 2011); Nolan, 'Knowing dissent'; Deborah Oxley, *Convict maids: the forced migration of women to Australia* (Cambridge, 1996).

[97] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 33.

[98] Elaine Farrell, '"Having an immoral conversation" and other prison offenses: the punishment of convict women' in Brophy & Delay (eds), *Women, reform, and resistance*, pp 101–18; Rena Lohan, 'Mountjoy female prison and the treatment of Irish female convicts in the nineteenth century' in Bourke *et al.* (eds), *Field Day anthology*, v, pp 752–63; Christina Quinlan, *Inside: Ireland's women's prisons, past and present* (Dublin, 2011), chapter 2.

[99] Rena Lohan, 'Matrons in Mountjoy female convict prison 1858–83' in Bernadette Whelan (ed.), *Women and paid work in Ireland, 1500–1930* (Dublin, 2000), pp 86–101; Maria Luddy, *Women and philanthropy in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cambridge, 1995), chapter 5.

[100] Geraldine Curtin, *The women of Galway Jail: female criminality in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Galway, 2001).

[101] Catherine Cox and Hilary Marland, 'Broken minds and beaten bodies: cultures of harm and the management of mental illness in mid- to late-nineteenth-century English and Irish prisons' in Social History of Medicine, xxxi, no. 4 (2019), pp 688–710. For more on this project, see https://histprisonhealth.com/.

[102] Ciara Breathnach, 'Medical officers, bodies, gender and weight fluctuation in Irish convict prisons, 1877–95' in *Medical History*, lviii, no. 1 (2014), pp 67–86; Ciara Breathnach and Elaine Farrell, '"Indelible characters": tattoos, power and the late nineteenth-century Irish convict body' in *Cultural and Social History*, xii, no. 2 (2015), pp 235–54; Cox & Marland, 'Broken minds and beaten bodies'; Ian Miller, *Reforming food in post-famine Ireland: medicine, science and improvement, 1845–1922* (Manchester, 2014), chapter 3; Cormac Ó Gráda, 'Heights in Tipperary in the 1840s: evidence from prison registers' in *I.E.S.H.*, xviii (1991), pp 24–33.

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girl offenders.[103] The study of old age is an emerging field of inquiry in Ireland but could be illuminating on themes such as poverty, career criminality and perceptions of aged women, as could further investigations of women who worked in prisons in various capacities: cleaners, wardens and matrons, for example.

V

Irish women's social history scholarship is now so rich that space constraints dictated many omissions in this article. Yet we are still 'rediscovering' past writers, activists and innovators who were famous in their own time but have subsequently been forgotten, a process that Gerda Lerner called 'compensatory history'.[104] 'Contribution history', which elucidates women's contribution to and status in patriarchal societies, is ongoing, as the discussion above attests.[105] This is not only research into working-class or poor women (although as we have expounded, this is a welcome development); the lives of elite women who contributed to the landed estates that pepper Ireland's countryside are the subject of collective and individual biographical studies, with much research left to do on their roles in their own domains and wider society.[106] There are also some signs that we have concomitantly reached Lerner's envisaged stage of a new universal history, described by Thompson Tetreault as 'a gender-balanced or multifocal perspective that fuses women's and men's experiences into a holistic view of the human experience'.[107] In addition to the recent multi-volume *Cambridge history of Ireland*, the *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* contains multiple contributions by and about women.[108] New assessments of historic male figures have also included reflections on the women in their lives.[109] While representation of women's experiences in Irish history could be increased (particularly in the texts used in schools), the fact that such history is sought and included in contemporary collections is a positive step.

Progress in the field of Irish women's history is seen in the availability of collections of essays by two pioneers of the discipline, Margaret MacCurtain and Mary

[103] See Geraldine Curtin, '"Most vicious and refractory girls": the reformatories at Ballinasloe and Monaghan' in *History Ireland*, xxi, no. 2 (Mar./Apr. 2013), pp 24–6.

[104] See, for example, Faith Binckes and Kathryn Laing, *Hannah Lynch, 1859–1904: Irish writer, cosmopolitan, new woman* (Cork, 2019).

[105] Gerda Lerner, 'Placing women in history: a 1975 perspective' in *Feminist Studies*, iii, nos. 1 & 2 (1975), pp 5–15.

[106] See, for example, Terence Dooley, Maeve O'Riordan and Christopher Ridgway (eds), *Women and the country house in Ireland and Britain* (Dublin, 2018); Maeve O'Riordan, *Women of the country house in Ireland, 1860–1914* (Liverpool, 2018).

[107] Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, 'Phases of thinking about women in history: a report card on the textbooks' in *Women's Studies Quarterly*, xiii, no. 3/4 (1985), pp 35–47.

[108] John Crowley, Donal Ó Drisceoil, Mike Murphy and John Borgonovo (eds), *Atlas of the Irish Revolution* (Cork, 2017); John Crowley, Cormac Moore and Mike Cronin (eds), *Atlas of Irish sport* (forthcoming).

[109] See for example, Margaret Ward, 'Anna Parnell: challenges to male authority and the telling of national myth' in Pauric Travers and Donal McCartney (eds), *Parnell reconsidered* (Dublin, 2013), pp 47–60.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.47 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Cullen.[110] There is a continued appetite to hear about women's past experiences in documentaries, podcasts, exhibitions and television dramas too numerous to name here. As this article has demonstrated, there is a wealth of scholarship on 'ordinary' Irish women and it is clear that the public also has a strong interest in these narratives. Poverty and migration form a part of family histories and lived realities of so many on this island, and an understanding of the gendered dimension in the scholarship allows for more nuanced and complex discussion. The continued research on aspects of sexuality and crime also reveals much about how state, religious and voluntary agencies managed and dealt with those they considered deviant. Both the public and historians have been given the opportunity to reflect on the repression of women in modern Ireland with the publication in January 2021 of the *Final report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes* and the *Interdepartmental Report on Mother and Baby Homes and Magdalene Laundries in Northern Ireland*.[111] Both are based on archival and oral history sources and provide an important basis for further understanding of and research on this difficult history. In 1992 MacCurtain and O'Dowd noted their hope that 'the energy and the enterprise of historians of women in Ireland will not allow this agenda to go the way of others published in *Irish Historical Studies*: interesting in theory but ignored in practice.'[112] The authors must feel satisfied; the 'Agenda' provided much inspiration to historians now in permanent academic roles and remains a key text in almost every Irish women's history class.

[110] Mary Cullen, *Telling it our way: essays in gender history* (Galway, 2013); Margaret MacCurtain, *Ariadne's thread. Writing women into Irish history* (Galway, 2008); eadem, *Metaphors for change. Essays on state and society* (Dublin, 2019).
[111] *Final Report of the Commission of Investigation into Mother and Baby Homes* (2021) (https://assets.gov.ie/118565/107bab7e-45aa-4124-95fd-1460893dbb43.pdf) (9 Apr. 2021); McCormick *et al.*, *Mother and baby homes and Magdalene laundries*.
[112] MacCurtain, O'Dowd & Luddy, 'Agenda', p. 5.

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