

CULTURAL STUDIES IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

History and Collective Memory from the Margins

A Global Perspective

Sahana Mukherjee, Ph.D.
Phia S. Salter, Ph.D.
Editors

NOVA

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A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

SAHANA MUKHERJEE

AND

PHIA S. SALTER

EDITORS



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Chapter 5

SITES OF MEMORY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: WATERFORD’S MAGDALENE LAUNDRY

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ABSTRACT

The Magdalene Laundries were institutions where Irish girls and women were effectively imprisoned because they were deemed not to confirm to society’s strict moral standards. Established across Europe, America, and Australia in the 18th Century, the Laundries were not uniquely Irish, nor Catholic. After Irish Independence from Britain in 1922, the Laundries were run solely by the Catholic Church until 1996. The Magdalene Laundries are a prominent part of Irish social history, forming an “architecture of containment” (Smith, 2007), which enabled the Irish State to incarcerate children and women who were deemed immoral. The history of the Magdalene Laundries continues to be contested, and the voices of survivors marginalized. The Waterford Memories Project is an oral history project, documenting survivor narratives of the Waterford Laundry. This chapter will analyze the oral history interviews, focusing on how the women have used narrative similarity to contest the State and Religious Orders’ othering of the “fallen” Magdalene women. Narrative similarity refers to stylistic elements and tropes in stories can be used to mobilise support and social change. The chapter will consider how the Magdalene women create a sense of “us” (e.g., a collective identity) through stylistic similarities in their oral history narratives.

INTRODUCTION

The Magdalene Laundries are a prominent part of Irish social history. They operated in Ireland initially as lay institutions in the 1700s. In the mid-1800s ownership of the institutions were transferred to the Religious Orders, who ran the institutions until the last laundry closed in 1996. The institutions were consistent in their use of psychological control, using strict regimes of prayer, silence, and physical labour (without pay) to ensure compliance of the girls

and women who bore the label of penitents (Finnegan, 2004; Smith, 2007). The Religious Orders have not released records for women entering the laundries after 1900. The archives of the Laundries are heavily restricted, pointing to the role of the Irish State and Religious Orders as gatekeepers of information, and participants in, continued gendered silencing towards these survivors (O'Mahoney-Yeager & Culleton, 2016). As a result, the history of the Magdalene Laundries continues to be contested, and the voices of survivors marginalized.

Waterford is Ireland's oldest city, located in the South-East of the country, with a population of just over 53,000 (CSO, 2016). The former Magdalene Laundry in Waterford is now the College Street campus of the Waterford Institute of Technology, housing the Department of Humanities (see Figure 1). The campus houses the former site of a convent of the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of Angers (commonly known as the Good Shepherd Sisters), as well as the St. Mary's Good Shepherd Laundry and St. Dominick's Industrial School for Girls. These institutions formed part of an "architecture of containment" (Smith, 2007), which enabled the Irish State to incarcerate children and women who were deemed to be "sexually aware" or immoral, including unmarried mothers, victims of sexual assault, and girls who engaged in acts of petty crime.



Figure 1. The College Street Campus of the Waterford Institute of Technology.

The Waterford Memories Project is an oral history project, documenting survivor narratives of the Waterford Laundry. This chapter will analyze the oral history interviews, focusing on how the women have used narrative similarity to contest the State and Religious Orders' othering of the women through their characterisation as immoral. Narrative similarity

refers to stylistic elements and tropes used when people tell stories to each other. In order for a person's story to be understood by a listener, the story told relies on the collective stories produced by that culture (Bruner, 1987; Rice, 2002). As survivors narrate their experience in the Magdalene Laundries, they are publicly retelling what happened, how, and why to a listener (Rice, 2002). As Rice (2002, p.80) explains, "there is a narrative structure to individual identity, and this structure is derived from collective - cultural - narratives in relation to which, and *only* in relation to which, the story of an individual life can be rendered anything other than idiosyncratic." These cultural narratives are the basis for the stylistic elements and tropes used when people organize the stories they tell. In this way, narrative similarity ensures coherence in the stories told so that the listener can better understand the narratives being revealed. This chapter will consider how the Magdalene women create a sense of "us" (e.g., a collective identity) through stylistic similarities in their oral history narratives, and will consider stories how this collective similarity in narratives can be used to mobilise support and social change.

The analysis will consider how the survivor narratives demonstrate notable similarities within and across experiences, generating social connections, which encourage social change (Squire, 2012). These narratives encourage progressive change and social justice, as they are future oriented via their relationship with a public audience who listens to the story (Bamberg, 2006; O'Mahoney, 2018; Squire, 2012; Young, 2006). Further, the collective identity achieved through rhetoric similarity across these narratives challenges the psychological processes, which motivate both the survivors to stay silent and facilitators of the institutional abuse to remain ignorant.

The chapter's focus on the psychological relevance of oral history narratives of survivors of institutional abuse considers their relevance for current social justice issues, in light of the dramatic power dynamics between the historical and collective memory constructed by the Irish State and Religious Orders in opposition to that of the Magdalene survivors.

IRELAND'S MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES

Magdalene Asylums were founded in Britain, Ireland, France, North America, and Australia in the 19th century in response to a public philanthropic desire to "rescue" women from prostitution and venereal disease (Finnegan, 2004). As a result, by 1900 there were more than 300 Magdalene Asylums in England; at least 20 in Scotland; and at least 40 in Ireland (Finnegan, 2004). While most of these institutions closed in Australia, America, and the UK in the early to mid 20th Century, they survived into the 1990s in Ireland (Luddy, 2007; Smith, 2007).

The institutions' label of Magdalene Asylums referred to Mary Magdalene, who, according to Catholic teachings at the time, was a prostitute reformed by her penitence for her sins and continued service to Jesus. The independent Irish State was formed in 1922, after the three-year Irish War of Independence, which was fought between the forces of the self-proclaimed Irish Republic, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and British Crown forces (Hopkinson, 2004). The departure of British soldiers reduced the demand for prostitution in Ireland, forcing the Laundries to reform their ethos and intake. Simultaneously the new Irish Government was attempting to establish effective governance of a poor and fledgling Irish State. The wealth afforded by the Catholic Church placed the institution in a strong position to offer practical

support to the new Republic, leading to the formation of strong Church and State relations and a marked Catholic identity in Ireland.

In particular, this allowed the Catholic Church to enforce a moral control through the exertion of control and power across legal, political, and domestic life, in education, health, the arts, and welfare entitlements (O'Mahony & Delanty, 2001). Some of the core legal and economic restraints are described by Cullen and Luddy (2001, p.1):

The 1926 Civil Service Act legalized a sex barrier in competitions for posts; from 1927 women were effectively barred from jury service under the Juries Act; from 1932 female civil servants and teachers lost their jobs on marriage; in 1934 the Criminal Law Amendment Act placed a complete ban on the importation of all contraceptives; in 1936 the Conditions of Employment Act empowered the Minister to restrict the employment of women in industry; the 1937 Constitution clearly signified the place of women as being exclusively in the home.

However, it was primarily control over women's lives and bodies, which was exerted by the Catholic Church and State. Women were restricted from participation in political and social life, and championed with creating and maintaining the image of Ireland as a sexually pure and moral nation (Finnegan, 2004). Any divergence from these puritanical ideas of the moral woman and family (in particular extramarital sex and pregnancy) were met with severe consequences (Inglis, 1998; Luddy, 2007). Controlling women's bodies and sexualities was a core strategy for the Church's maintenance of power and central role in Irish politics and life.

As a result of the departure of British soldiers and dominance of the Catholic Church in Irish life, the Magdalene Asylums evolved to ensure their continuation in Ireland. The institutions targeted unmarried mothers, victims of sexual assault, and girls who were demonstrating "marked tendencies towards sexual immorality" (Raftery & O'Sullivan, 1999, p.27). The strong Catholic identity of the Independent Irish State in 1922 greatly influenced the State's targeting of women who did not fit the puritanical notions of sexuality postulated by the Church. The Magdalene institutions began to accept fewer voluntary admissions, and increasing numbers of women were detained for longer periods as the institutions increasingly served a punitive purpose. Ten Magdalene Laundries (as they subsequently became known) operated between 1922 and 1996. Many of these institutions shared overriding characteristics, including "regimes of prayer, silence, work in a laundry and a preference for permanent inmates" (Smith, 2007, p. xvi).

Life in the Laundries was physically and psychologically demanding, involving unrelenting silence, prayer, and hard labor as women worked long days laundering and ironing soiled sheets from hospitals, hotels, and other businesses (Department of Justice, 2013; O'Donnell, 2011). The girls were kept in a volatile and unpredictable state under the control of the Religious Orders, typically not aware of why they had been sent to the Magdalene Laundries, how long they were to stay, or if they would be transferred to another institution. The girls were deprived of an education, rest, and privacy, denied their given names and any personal effects (O'Rourke, 2011).

The Silencing of Personal Narrative through the Dominant National Narrative

When considering the formation of personal and national narratives, the Irish case is described by Foster (2001, p.xi): “The elision of the personal and the national, the way history becomes a kind of scaled-up biography, and biography a microcosmic history, is a particularly Irish phenomenon.” In other words, Irish national narrative has been formed, in no small way, by scaled-up biographies of Irish men, facilitating the “Isle-of-Saints-and-Scholars view of Ireland’s world role peddled a hundred years ago” (Foster, 2001, p.xiii). This international stereotype of the Irish as devoutly Catholic, “up for the craic” (willing to have fun), and providing C  ad M  ile F  ilte (a hundred thousand welcomes), combined with a strong sense of Irish nationalism in the decades after Irish independence, was to be met with resistance from anyone who challenged it. Unsurprisingly, the stories of human rights violations by the Magdalene women did not reach the public until the 1990s.

It is only since the events of the 1990s that the conspiracy of silence around the Laundries was challenged, forging public awareness of the institutional abuses. In 1993 High Park Convent in Dublin was sold to developers, leading to the discovery of unmarked graves containing the remains of 133 women previously held in the Laundry. The remains were exhumed, cremated, and interred in Glasnevin Cemetery without attempting to identify any of the women. The media coverage of this event began a conversation about Ireland’s Magdalene Laundries. Notably, the final Laundry in operation closed 3 years later in Dublin in 1996.

Despite the location of these institutions in Ireland’s major cities, these incarcerated women were forgotten, disposed of behind convent walls, and disappeared from society and our national history. These girls and women were punished for what was deemed to be deviant sexuality in order to protect the moral sexual order of the nation (Lenz, 2010; O’Mahoney-Yeager & Culleton, 2016). The patriarchal role of the Catholic Church and Irish State has facilitated a continuing, gendered national narrative about women in Ireland. This narrative has powerful implications for our collective, cultural memory of the Magdalene women and Irish women generally today.

The Waterford Memories Project (WMP) is an oral-history driven project in digital humanities, focused on collating and disseminating the stories of survivors of the Magdalene Laundries in the South-East of Ireland. The project aims to directly challenge the official silencing of the Magdalene women to publicly disseminate their stories (O’Mahoney, 2018). The project, therefore, operates as an awareness campaign; a method for recording our cultural heritage; and to encourage further analysis of the historical, social, and psychological impact of these institutions. The WMP has worked to provide a platform from which to amplify the survivors’ narratives while locating these stories in a broader local and national narrative. This historical, national narrative of a moral and Catholic Ireland has also constructed a cultural memory of these survivors as wayward and fallen women, which persists with the continuing silencing of the survivors.

NARRATIVE PSYCHOLOGY

This chapter will consider the narratives documented by the WMP, focusing on how the women have used narrative similarity to contest the State and Religious Orders’ marginalisation

of their experiences. Telling their stories has a dual importance for many of the Magdalene women; the stories facilitate meaning-making for the women and provide a record of these narratives as a direct action towards achieving social change.

People use stories to make sense of their world, across a variety of experiences; these sense-making stories are particularly useful when we experience negative or unexpected events (Bruner, 1987; Hammack, 2011; Riessman, 2008). Narrative Psychology has focused on the important role of personal stories for social change, by examining the ways in which people tell stories about their lives. This approach maintains that how a person constructs their identity and personal knowledge is based on telling stories and interpreting new and novel events in light of these previous stories (Laszlo, 2008; Schank & Abelson, 1995). Schiff (2017) goes further, arguing that the entire field of psychology would greatly benefit from a shared narrative perspective, by grounding research in people's experiences and how they construct and understand themselves and the world. This focus on narrative, Schiff (2017, p.6) maintains, "can transform our understanding of human beings...and psychological processes." At its core, psychology can be considered the study of theoretical constructs (variables), and has correspondingly little concrete to say about *people* and their social worlds (Mishler, 1986; Schiff, 2017). The focus of psychology is on generalisability, avoiding the particulars of an individual person; as a result, individuals' actions and thoughts are decontextualized from the social context in which they occur. After all, psychological processes can only exist, and be considered as part of, the actions or thoughts of a person in a particular context (Schiff, 2017). Narrative reorients psychology back into the context of a person's physical body, social relationships, and cultural worlds. Hammack (2011) has similarly argued that a narrative approach to psychology is better able to capture the reality of people's experiences in context and to make possible social and political transformation than the dominant focus on examining variables in experimental psychology. "Personal narratives say a great deal about culture, history, and collective intention as they catalogue life events. They represent texts of social and psychological *integration*, and thus they fulfill both an individual psychological and sociocultural *purpose*" (Hammack, 2011, p.312). In this way, personal narratives are used to make sense and communicate meaning, while reproducing collective and cultural stories (Bruner, 1990; Hammack, 2011).

Personal Narratives

Personal narratives have often played an important role in claiming and recording human rights violations (Schaffer & Smith, 2004). As part of the Waterford Memories Project, survivors have told powerful personal stories about historical events, sometimes in the first personal plural (stories about the Magdalene women as "us"), in testimonio form (Patterson, 2008). At its very core, storytelling is related to both personal and social change and development. Applying an intersectional feminism lens can be useful when considering this potential disparity between individual versus collective storytelling. An intersectional feminism lens argues that while inclusivity should be an essential goal, there is often a tension between trying to achieve collective solidarity and affirming individual identities. When referring to the Magdalene women or Magdalene survivors, there is the danger that we reinforce the notion that women are a homogeneous group, and that Magdalene women are similarly alike.

A more nuanced examination of stories shows that narratives, which are developed concomitantly, create a relationship and shared association, which can act as a catalyst for social and political change (Plummer, 1995). Hammack (2011) explains that meaning making through storytelling is both personal and *political*, as stories will always have implications for particular social groups. Human development can be viewed as a continuous process of “*narrative engagement*,” where people constantly engage with stories formed around the social categories we identify and interact with (e.g., nationality, gender, sexual identity, class, ethnicity, and race) (Hammack, 2011, p.312). In this way, the survivors’ engagement with the social categories of victim or Magdalene survivor, for instance, demonstrate shifts in their narratives, as they change social categories, catalyzing social and political change.

Shared narrative connections can generate social connections through the use of similar plots or narrative content. A shared way of telling stories of the Magdalene Laundries progresses past a shared experience to the creation of shared narrative devices from which to tell stories of personal experiences and social change. This is certainly not to infer that narrative content of similarization (demonstrated in the following excerpts) reduce contradictions or minimise the wide variety of experiences within the shared group of “Magdalene survivors.” Instead, narrative similarization is a rhetorical device (Squire, 2012), and not a claim of a consistent, singular identity amongst the women.

It is through narratives of personal experience that the survivors create a community identity centred on the collective exposure to a stigmatised label of “Magdalene” woman. Key to this shared identity is the telling of personal experience (Plummer, 1995). In this way, many of the survivor narratives work to indicate connection through narratives of similarity within and across experiences (Squire, 2012) of working within the Magdalene Laundries, as illustrated here:

And we’d be going into mass, and we’d come down and we’d have our breakfast. We used to have bread and dripping for breakfast. And, you know like that cup and saucer, you put the cup there and the saucer on top and you get your milk and you dip your bread in it.

They had a plate with dry bread. There was no butter on it, enamel plate, and a pot.

A typical day we’d get up at six. Straight to the church for mass. And silence from then on. We’d come in for breakfast, a cup of tea and stale bread and butter and we could smell the cooking in the nurses department the nun’s sorry, the nuns’ department. We were hungry really.

But I was working in the laundry every day, cleaning the cleaning the corridors then you go to mass, then you’d come in and you’d have watered down milk, drippin’ on bread and enamel mug.

Canons or tropes are common across all narratives as they represent a very effective communication device from teller to listener (Bruner, 1987; Squire, 2012). Narratives are inherently social, requiring coherence in order to be understood. How this coherence is structured depends on to the collective stories produced by the individual’s specific culture (Bruner, 1987; Rice, 2002). As the Magdalene survivors tell about their experiences, these narratives can be understood as a public retelling of cause and effect relations selected by the survivor (Rice, 2002). As Rice (2002, p.80) explains, “there is a narrative structure to individual

identity, and this structure is derived from collective - cultural – narratives.” Cultural narratives form the basis for constructing personal identity.

The Irish culture into which these Magdalene women were born is therefore replete with a “stock of canonical life narratives...from which its members can construct their own life narratives: canonical stances and circumstances” (Bruner, 2004, p.694). The victim narrative or trope is thusly grounded within shared cultural narratives, framing how we tell stories about victims or survivors. Similarity in how we tell stories is not only to be expected, but is essential in order that our stories and meaning is understood by the listener. The Magdalene women’s narratives about their experiences often follow a victim trope, framed by cultural and linguistic stereotypes of victimisation (Doherty & Anderson, 2004).

For instance, the consistency of experience in the daily routine highlighted previously by survivors, emphasises the monotony, lack of control, and disempowerment they experienced on a daily basis. The factual description of the enamel mug and bread across the quotes support the women’s narratives. Silence and the control of the women’s voices and self-expression is another recurring themes in the interviews:

You’re to keep your silence for so many days, so many hours every day...she catch us talking we’d be punished.

It was continuous silence...If you spoke the girl in charge would tell you, ‘don’t speak again’ or give ya a worse job than you were at...We tried to talk we’re weren’t allowed to talk, we were on silence all the time, but when we could whisper, we did.

I think I was so disturbed and so confused, I didn’t know what was happening to me, I didn’t understand all about, and the old women that was there, were told not to speak to one another, going over in the morning.

It is clear that the canonical victim narrative is useful to the women. Reference to victimisation employs cultural stereotypes of the “iconic victim,” who is female, docile, young, completely blameless, and a good witness. In this case, the Magdalene survivors often meet these stereotypes; they were children, completely powerless, and physically incarcerated. Use of the victim cultural canon, then, is effective and powerful in their storytelling.

However, the victim trope is equally limiting when the women want to move past these stereotypes in their stories. There is also consistency in their *resistance* to the victim narrative and being unilaterally described in such terms. The women also recount times where they clearly rebelled against being seen as powerless and docile:

There was a few times anyway I lost my temper. I used to work on the presses and I got burned and all that. And, I lost my temper one day and I fired this clothes hanger up the laundry and she got a string and she tied it round my neck for three days and three nights. And I had to get down on my knees and eat off the floor for three days in the refectory. There was eighty – eighty of us – in it. And I had to get down. And she was up on the throne. And I used have to say “I beg on Almighty God’s forgiveness for pardon. Mother (*name removed*) Pardon.”

(*name removed*) gave me some pennies to put in the priest’s place, and she brought me to mass in the car, and I was determined I was going to escape then. Cos it was on my mind all the time in the laundry, I was going to escape, it was on my mind all the time.

And that was Troublesome (*name removed*) again, (*name removed*) was in trouble for saying something simple, asking a simple question.

So, it dawned on me after two years, nobody is going to look after me here. So I plotted and schemed and I ran away with another girl from Kilkenny.

Canonical life narratives can be combined to construct life narratives to reflect the complexities of circumstance (Bruner, 2004), allowing for the simultaneous use of both the victim trope and a resistance to this limiting device. These excerpts reflect both dominant victim discourses, and opposition to the role of victim. The following extracts highlight how, despite the prevailing disempowerment within the Laundries, the women focused on getting out and creating a better future:

I went down to the Church every day and I prayed to the Virgin Mary. I just wanted to go to England, I just wanted to get out.

She you have to get a job now. I said, I will, cos I didn't learn anything in the laundry, I'm very good in the laundrettes. But I said I want to go now and try to get an education, and the best place would be England. So I'll apply there. Which I did...I was trying to achieve something else.

[The nun] said, 'I thought you'd get a better chance in life if you were a typist'. They were her exact words. I had enough of institutionalisation at this stage now, I wanted to get out. Where I was going, I didn't think for a moment, I just knew I shouldn't be locked up. I just knew it wasn't right.

When I seen the church interfering in my life again, I thought, no, I've got to go. I can't handle here. I've got to get out of here. I was left destitute, on the streets, with no home. They never thought of that, they never looked into it, they never but they didn't care, they got their money's worth out of me. They thought they done their duty... We were nights on the streets, we couldn't get jobs, but I was more determined.

The consistency across narratives is again apparent here, as the women demonstrate both the lasting negative impact of life in the Laundries, while constructing themselves as resilient.

Personal Narratives and Social Change

Whether embodying or resisting canonical tropes, the women show marked similarities in themes across their narratives. Stories of personal trauma and disclosure can "build communities" around the experiences within Ireland's Magdalene Laundries, while simultaneously looking towards the future. While narratives can function to reminisce or justify the past, many researchers have argued that narratives are "forward-looking" via their relationship with an audience or listener (Bamberg, 2006, p.140-1). Freeman (2009) has argued that through revisions of the past, stories invoke and infer a sense of what it to come in the future. It is through stylistic similarity in their narratives that the women create social connections and a group identity, which constitutes the foundation of social change (Squire, 2012).

Narratives are clearly important for psychological change as they use stories to make sense of their world (e.g., Andrews, 2014; Bruner, 2004; Schiff, 2017). However, narratives also play an essential role in broader social change (O'Mahoney, 2018; Squire, 2012). Survivor testimony has played an essential role in demanding that both national and international communities bear witness to their traumas. One survivor told the WMP, "About us Irish, we love to think we are loved around the world. We give a false impression about ourselves. We can't accept that we are corrupt, that we are immoral, that we are . . . so wrong about human rights." Responding to reports submitted by the Justice for Magdalenes advocacy group (now JFMR) in 2011, the UN Committee against Torture requested the Irish government launch an investigation into human rights violations in the Magdalene Laundries and consider redress for survivors. The experiences of the Magdalene women were been recognised by the UNCAT's (2011, p.6) concluding report, which states:

The Committee is gravely concerned at the failure by the State party to protect girls and women who were involuntarily confined between 1922 and 1996 in the Magdalene Laundries, by failing to regulate and inspect their operations, where it is alleged that physical, emotional abuses and other ill-treatment were committed, amounting to breaches of the Convention. The Committee also expresses grave concern at the failure by the State party to institute prompt, independent and thorough investigations into the allegations of ill-treatment perpetrated on girls and women in the Magdalene Laundries.

The Committee recommended that the State party institute prompt, independent and thorough investigations into all complaints of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment that were allegedly committed in the Magdalene Laundries. Further, the Committee maintained that perpetrators should be prosecuted and punished commensurate with the gravity of the offences committed, and that all victims have an enforceable right to compensation and redress.

Justice for Magdalene's initial submission to the UNCAT consisted a 145-page document, which was supported by 795 pages of survivor testimony and 3,707 pages of archival evidence and legislative documentation¹. The human rights violations experienced by the Magdalene women were claimed and voiced through the survivors' narratives, which formed a compelling and substantial part of the report submitted to the UNCAT. Notably, the Irish Government's report (in response to the UNCAT's call for an investigation) had the limited scope of only establishing the facts surrounding the extent of the state's involvement with the running of the Laundries. While the report includes testimony from survivors in chapter 19, "the Committee did not make specific findings in relation to [the living and working conditions in the Magdalene Laundries], in light of the small sample of women available" (Dept. of Justice, 2013, p.925). The report has received extensive criticism from both survivor groups and professionals working towards social justice for not being survivor focused or responsive. Survivor narratives call for us to recognise the disparity between the statements of the Irish government and the actuality of life in Laundries by those who directly experienced it, allowing us to humanise and empathise with their traumas beyond sanitised state reports.

¹ Dr Jennifer O'Mahoney and WIT Libraries have previously digitised the Justice for Magdalenes Archive. An online, searchable interface for the archive is currently live for public use (funded by the Heritage Council) and available at <http://www.wit.ie/jfmr>.

The consistent silencing of the women's voices has meant that survivor narratives are essential in challenging the Irish cultural narrative maintaining these women were not harshly treated in these institutions. As Schaffer and Smith (2004, p.1) have noted, "life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims." As more women tell their stories publicly, the pressure to listen and support social change increases. The similarities noted across the extracts from the survivor narratives can contribute towards normalizing stigmatised conditions (Plummer, 1995; Squire, 2012), bringing the silenced and hidden Magdalene women into contact with mainstream Irish society. There is "strength in numbers," and the subversion of individual identity is at least partially necessary when working towards connection and social change. The strategy of using common rhetorics in narratives enables a shared, future-oriented identity, as depicted in the previous excerpts about resisting the stereotypical victim trope. These narratives, when publicly disseminated, "test the values that nations profess to live by against the actual experiences and perceptions of the storyteller as witness" (Schaffer & Smith, 2004, p.3).

STORYTELLING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: CONTEMPORANEOUS RESPONSES TO SURVIVOR NARRATIVES

The survivor stories quoted here were documented as part of the ongoing Waterford Memories Project, and have been used by theatre studies and visual art students in live art performances; by schools and universities in lessons about local and national history; and by researchers to consider testimony of human rights and institutional abuses in Ireland. Bearing witness to these narratives encourages the listener to consider how to respond to stories of injustice and to facilitate social change so these abuses are not repeated.

One such response has been the Waterford Memory Project's *When Silence Falls* event, held on the site of the former Magdalene Laundry in Waterford in 2016. Engaging with the sites of Magdalene history has become increasingly pertinent as Irish citizens bear witness to the destruction of these physical memory sites across Ireland, as the sites are either demolished or repurposed for property development. It was this recognition of the import of the sites of history as context for the Magdalene women's narratives, which led to the development of *When Silence Falls* by the Waterford Memories Project. *When Silence Falls* was a one-day, multidisciplinary event, focused on recognising the history and memory of the Laundries and Industrial Schools in the South-East of Ireland, with the aim of documenting and amplifying the voices of survivors as cultural heritage memory. The event encapsulated site-specific, live art durational performances, professional talks, and screenings of recorded interviews with the Magdalene survivors. The oral history interviews informed the live art performances and were the focal point of the event. Access to the records of the Laundries held by the Irish State and Religious Orders are completely inaccessible to both the public and researchers. The survivor narratives are paramount, therefore, in tackling the continuing silencing of the women's stories. The public screening of these narratives counters the continuing silence of the Magdalene story through engagement with a site of emotive memory through active memorialization (O'Mahoney, 2018).

In this way, the location of the former Laundry for this event constructed the physical location as both a site of commemoration and contestation. The event responded to the

experiences of the women where their incarceration took place, bearing witness and commemorating their lives. It simultaneously provided a site for live art performances, which contemporaneously interpreted the themes of the oral history interviews in performances, which began to deconstruct the social constructions of Magdalene women from within the site of their containment. By opening the site of a former Laundry to the public, the project facilitated engagement with the silencing of survivor testimony when “the official State record on the experiences of Magdalene women is neither accurate nor respectful of what they endured” (McGettrick, 2015, p.5). These site-oriented performances function to simultaneously resist the institutions of the Irish State and Catholic Church, and to commemorate the Human Rights violations, which the Magdalene women experienced. The site becomes a physical embodiment of the suppression of the Magdalene women by the Catholic Church; the architects of their silencing and the site’s physical construction (O’Mahoney, Bowman-Grieve, & Torn, 2019).

Such events ask both activists and the public to consider, discuss, and act towards social change. This is particularly salient when our broader, national narrative of Magdalene history and heritage is significantly fragmented and contested. The women’s stories disrupt national discourses about the Laundries, by challenging the “official” record. Despite a national apology to the Magdalene women in 2013 explicitly confirming State involvement in the running of the Laundries, Justice Minister Fitzgerald told Dáil Éireann in February 2017 that a State apology was issued to the women who worked in Magdalene Laundries despite the fact that there was “no finding in the McAleese Report which indicated that the State had any liability in the matter.” The State’s unwillingness to appropriately acknowledge the Magdalene women’s suffering again highlights the power and import of the survivors’ direct accounts of life in the Laundries.

The use of the survivor narratives in contemporary education, research, and art installments generates further public awareness of these contested claims. However, this does not, of course, guarantee that the public will acknowledge responsibility to hear and support the women’s narrative. These stories challenge local, national, and international narratives about Irish history. As Schaffer and Smith (2004, p.5) argue,

Whether or not storytelling in the field of human rights results in the extension of human justice, dignity, and freedom depends on the willingness of those addressed to hear the stories and to take responsibility for the recognition of others and their claims.

By telling their counter-histories, the Magdalene women require listeners to consider different ways of remembering and altered versions of the future in light of a restructured past. Active discussion of our past, present, and future will encourage a collective consciousness about what happens when society, the State, and Church collaborate to silence girls and women deemed problematic. This active discussion in response to narratives is not *the* catalyst for social change, but is an essential catalyst.

The public has responded with a call for dignity and justice for the Magdalene women, in response to their stories. In June 2018 Justice for Magdalenes Research organised the *Dublin Honours Magdalenes*; a two day event, which had the core aim of bringing the survivors together, and facilitating their discussions about how they would like their experiences in the Magdalene Laundries to be officially remembered (Justice for Magdalenes Research, 2018). What resonated most strongly for the women across the 2-day event was the public gathering

to greet and show their support for the survivors as they arrived to a dinner at the Lord Mayor of Dublin's residence (see Figure 2). One supporter's sign reads "Amazing women. Solidarity and love."

Stories have immense power for galvanizing social change, both on a micro and macro level. The women's narratives were initially silenced through shame and fear, which continued through suppression on the part of the Irish State and Religious Orders. These stories called for people to listen empathetically, and to amplify and sustain the survivors' voices. This amplification demanded social justice for the survivors, continuing the process of social change started with the breaking of silence by survivors. Remembering the Magdalene women demands that we reconsider our national narrative and to re-engage with what we have forgotten through a collective "voluntary amnesia" (Foster, 2001, p.58).



Figure 2. A public gathering outside the Lord of Mayor of Dublin's residence to greet the Magdalene women.

CONCLUSION

How nations remember and commemorate their pasts has generated strong academic interest internationally (Bruckmüller, et al. 2017; Carretero, 2011; De Saint-Laurent & Obradović, 2018; Noor, 2017). National narratives, as representations of history, provide meaning and a sense of belonging across social settings (De Saint-Laurent & Obradović, 2018; Walker, 1990). The subjective and personal narrative meaning-making of the Magdalene

survivors is framed within these dominant national social discourses. Post-independence from Britain, the Irish state has a long history of policing women's bodies and sexuality to construct and manage a national identity of Irish purity (Luddy, 2007). The gendering of Irish national identity has been examined by numerous academics, across disciplines ranging from psychology to history to women's studies (e.g., Inglis, 1998; Luddy, 2007; O'Mahoney-Yeager & Culleton, 2016; Smith, 2007). The intersection of the Irish State and Catholic Church led to the formation of the Magdalene Laundries (and related institutions) in a concentrated effort to police this moral reform (Crowley & Kitchen, 2008; Lentin, 1998). Lentin (1998) explains how the 1937 Irish Constitution establishes a direct link between family and nation, where the Irish woman and mother is assigned the moral responsibility to maintain this pure, national identity. The Magdalene Laundries, then, are an institutional representation of "othering" girls and women who do not fit this strict moral code, and threaten the homogeneity of this national narrative.

It is clear that the phenomenon of nation's assigning the burden of moral representation to women is not unique to Ireland. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) have argued that women's bodies are used to act as both metaphorical and physical boundaries of national, ethnic and religious narratives. The authors also raise the important point that women's bodies are simultaneously the location of where these boundaries and narratives are contested.

The Magdalene survivor narratives can be considered as contested counter-narratives to these imposed ideologies. This phenomenon of the nation using women's bodies as representation of "Irishness," while disappearing the women who do not meet these expectations, demonstrate direct attempts by the Irish State and Catholic Church to engage in a continued control of the national narrative. There continue to be demonstrated attempts to perpetuate the silencing of the Magdalene women's stories (i.e., Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald's (2017) previously mentioned statement that there was "no finding in the McAleese Report which indicated that the State had any liability in the matter").

COUNTERING THE NATIONAL NARRATIVE

The survivors countering of the national narrative through storytelling forms the basis for establishing a new collective memory of the Magdalene women, in their own words. In calling for social change, the women's voices have simultaneously created a sense of a collective identity through their narratives, which is informing a new collective memory. This new collective remembering is also mediated by the same cultural resources and tropes described by Bruner (1987; 2004) Hammack (2011), which allow the women to assign their stories meaning (such as the victim trope).

However, narratives of victimisation are often complex and contested. The extracts in this chapter demonstrate the women seeking social justice via established victim status, while dominant Irish patriarchal discourses challenge the authenticity of these claims. Survivors also actively resist the victim trope, creating an opportunity for survivors to reframe their experiences and consider their coping and future lives. Narrative psychology allows us to understand these seemingly counter positions as a reflection of the complexity involved with narrating victimisation, agency, and responsibility (Leisenring, 2006). Agency in these

narratives of change is progressive (O'Mahoney, 2018), showing the women as achieving some control over their circumstances as they work towards future social change in their lives.

De Saint-Laurent and Obradović (2018) have argued that this future focus is an essential part of more accurately understanding a group's collective memory. They maintain that the past can only be ascribed meaning from a present perspective; because of this, any talk about the past requires a form of foreshadowing, as the purpose of talking about the past is to give meaning to the present. In a reciprocal relationship, then, the past gives meaning to the present, but the present also gives meaning to the past when we consider the formation of collective memory. De Saint-Laurent and Obradović (2018) maintain that we should also recognize that history and collective memory can be prospective and transformative, as it helps us to imagine what may come next and to anticipate the future. While past events can give meaning to the present situation, anticipating the future can give it significance, by allowing us to imagine what may or may not matter down the line (de Saint-Laurent et al. 2018). Vygotsky's (2004) argument that our conceptualisations of the future are rooted in our representations of the past can also apply to collective memory.

Similarly, the future orientation in the survivor stories discussed here are part of their formation of a new collective memory of the Magdalene women and their past, present, and future. A closer examination of the women's narratives demonstrates that their narratives of victimisation and agency are progressive, signifying that these states are not fixed, but malleable, in response to social changes and context. Narrative psychology highlights the power of stories with a recognition of the context in which these stories are told. Through storytelling, the women are able to challenge national discourses, which seek to derogate their experiences. The significance of narratives for considering current social justice issues cannot be underestimated. In the case of the Magdalenes stories, they have provided truth-telling and counter-histories, which challenge the Irish State and Religious Orders' efforts to continue their silencing tactics and control of archival information. The ability to think about the future in these narratives and shared memories allows the women to act in the present; thinking about the consequences of what is happening now (or what has happened in the past), affords the ability to change behaviours in the present to either encourage a future outcomes or avoid a negative one (De Saint-Laurent and Obradović, 2018; Glăveanu 2018). Thus, "collective memory can be used to transform the present, encouraging people to try to alter what they perceive to be the course of history" (De Saint-Laurent and Obradović, 2018, p.10; De Saint-Laurent, 2018). The women's stories have achieved this. The very act of telling their stories to a public oral history project, and agreeing to disseminate them online, have supported the challenge to the national narrative and their continued silencing. Their stories have mobilised public responses in the form of art installations, educational materials and poetry (among others), in demonstrations of public support towards the survivors' accounts.

The Magdalene Laundries form a significant, but willfully ignored, part of Irish social history. The system allowed the Irish State to incarcerate children and women who were deemed to be "sexually aware" or immoral, by forming a national narrative of moral purity where female sexuality was to be controlled and suppressed. The history of the Magdalene Laundries continues to be contested, and the voices of survivors marginalized. The women's voices have been (and continue to be) paramount in calling for social change; how the Magdalene women create a sense of a collective identity in their oral histories is central to this process. Responding to the raw, brave storytelling is the role of the wider public in amplifying this call for social change and continuing the process.

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