

shines brightest. As we approach the centenary of partition and contemporary politicians grapple with the awkward legacies which it left behind, Lynch's work is a thought-provoking and refreshing contribution to the existing historiography.

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THE IRISH ABORTION JOURNEY, 1920–2018. By Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart. Pp 158. Cham: Springer Nature / Palgrave Macmillan. 2019. €51.99.

Irish historians and histories of Ireland, north or south, have largely ignored the topic of abortion and so this Palgrave Pivot series book by Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart is a much needed contribution to ongoing contemporary debates. Scholars examining this field are well aware that the historiography on Irish abortion is limited and often contains far more input from sociology, politics, law and medicine. The authors have brought together the majority of the existing, disparate, interdisciplinary literature and the footnotes alone are worth the cover price of the publication. Anyone seeking to understand this island's 'journey' with abortion will benefit from this book.

In the introduction, it is stated that 'no woman [in Ireland] owned her own body as long as she did not have the legal right to control what happened to it'. Having made their position clear, this highly readable scholarly work is much the better for the honesty. The physical and emotional journeys of women are central to this research and the book uses these individual and collective experiences to chart the moral, political and societal changes on the island of Ireland over the last century. The chapters examine the well documented 'cultures of shame' that resulted in infanticide, illicit abortions, and the temporary and sometimes permanent emigration of pregnant and unmarried Irish women. Also covered are the 'politics of motherhood' and 'maternal health versus morality', and the link is made between the triumvirate of medicine, religion and government and their public attitudes towards women, pregnancy and contraception. These attitudes created a culture that resulted in high numbers of frequent pregnancies, elevated maternal mortality rates and in some cases, exile to the Magdalene laundries, the impact of which is still unravelling to this day.

One of the most original contributions to the historiography can be found in chapter three which researches 'legality and Irish abortion'. The exploration of the medical profession's legal 'therapeutic' abortions demonstrates clearly that despite public condemnation from religious and political quarters, doctors prescribed abortions for a variety of medically acceptable reasons and these procedures went unchallenged in the courts or the corridors of power. Publicly available birth control, at least to married couples, came to Northern Ireland in the late 1960s and the Republic of Ireland in the 1970s. This was after campaigners successfully reframed contraception as a 'private rather than public issue'. The argument is made that this success led to a well-orchestrated campaign by conservative groups to ensure that wider access to abortion did not follow. In a damning conclusion, the authors state that the harrowing result of maintaining 'the illegality of abortion at will impacted on women's health and cost some women their lives. This was known and acknowledged in both states by medics, judges, clerics and social commentators' (p. 50).

The later chapters discuss how legislative changes in Britain and Ireland (the Abortion Act 1967 and amendments to the Irish constitution) slowly created the space for public debates where women's experiences and women's medical needs came to the fore. The authors contend, successfully, that the ongoing referendums in Ireland allowed grassroots (female) activists to recover from the 1983 referendum defeat and change the national narrative by foregrounding the heartbreaking stories of women in the conversations that followed. For those unfamiliar with the history of the abortion campaign, the tragic and avoidable death of Savita Halappanavar in a Galway hospital in 2012 can sometimes be seen as the catalyst

for the most recent referendum success. However, as Eamer-Byrne and Urquhart demonstrate, the recent campaign had been building for at least thirty-five years and the line of women who died as a result of abortion legislation can, regrettably, be traced back to the start of the twentieth century and beyond.

‘[A]t the time of writing’ is not a phrase that one would normally expect to see in a main chapter of a history book but such is the pace of recent developments in Northern Ireland’s abortion debates that it is an unavoidable necessity. ‘The north is next’, covered in the later stages of the book, has become the mantra for a cross-border, female-led, inter-party, inter-generational and international campaign to decriminalise abortion in Northern Ireland. Abortion in Northern Ireland was no longer subject to criminal penalty after 22 October 2019. As such it has, ironically, the most liberal abortion provision regime in the United Kingdom. In this specific instance, the pace of change has outstripped the historians’ ability to contextualise events.

The main criticism of this work is really a criticism of the Pivot series; it is too short for this subject. The book attempts to cover almost a century of a very complex multifaceted topic in 141 written pages. Consequently, while the main issues are certainly discussed, the authors are limited in the level of detail they can offer. However, throughout the chapters, they have judiciously used the footnotes to point the reader towards further study. Despite the small limitations, this book succeeds in being both accessible to the general reader and of use to academics. For campaigners and activists, it is made clear that success has come through women’s rejection of ‘the cultures of shame and silence’ and that continued success will require the same. This is an excellent introduction to the Irish historiography, offering new research and a valuable insight into current events. It should quickly take its place among the international and interdisciplinary literature available.

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