Irish Historical Studies (2022), 46 (169), 155–178.
doi:10.1017/ihs.2022.8

'Her own and her children's share': luck, misogyny and imaginative resistance in twentieth-century Irish folklore

CHRISTINA S. BROPHY*
Triton College

ABSTRACT. *In twentieth-century Irish folklore, luck had much to do with women. While women were rarely seen as legitimate possessors of good fortune, luck was frequently perceived as being communicated through women's bodies and lost as a result of their actions. A caul, an intact amniotic membrane over a newborn's head and by-product of a pregnant woman's body, was believed to convey luck and health to either the mother or the child but not to both. The emphasis in this tradition on women's corporeality cast women and their maternal by-products as appropriable familial and communal resources. This and additional lore reveal that women were constructed as dangerous, 'object-like others' whose mere presence could threaten men's safety. Twentieth-century Ireland's folk and political cultures each operated within frameworks of supporting ideological systems. Despite being easily distinguishable in articulation, these cultures were frequently in concert with one another, especially relating to prescriptive gender roles. In numerous instances, lore about luck bolstered legislative, social and religious policies of the Irish Free State and the early Irish Republic regarding women. However, narrow divergences allowed women limited space to contest gender hierarchy in folk communities. Some women found opportunities for subversion in the very cultural fabric that restricted them, resorting to imaginative resistance to reject and counter misogynist discourse and assert female subjectivity.*

In twentieth-century Irish folklore, luck had much to do with women. While women were rarely seen as legitimate possessors of good fortune, luck was frequently perceived as being communicated through women's bodies and lost because of their actions. A caul, an intact amniotic membrane over a newborn's head and by-product of a pregnant woman's body, was believed to convey luck and health to either the mother or the child but not to both. This lore reveals the understanding that women, often specifically their wombs, were conduits of good or ill luck. The emphasis in this tradition on women's corporeality cast women and their maternal by-products as appropriable familial and communal resources. Other accounts also reveal that women were constructed as dangerous 'object-like others' whose mere presence could threaten

* *Faculty of History and Humanities, Triton College, River Grove, Illinois, christinabrophy@triton.edu*

men's safety.[1] Despite this, some women found opportunities for subversion in the very cultural fabric that restricted them.

I am a historian who has turned to folklore primary source material to discover how oppressive ideologies were interpreted by those they were designed to oppress, as well as instances and rationales of resistance. Twentieth-century Ireland's folk and political cultures each operated within frameworks of supporting ideological systems. Despite being easily distinguishable in articulation, these cultures were frequently in concert with one another, especially relating to prescriptive gender roles. In numerous instances, lore about luck echoed and bolstered the legislative, social and religious policies of the Irish Free State and the early Irish Republic regarding women. However, ideological ambiguities and narrow divergences allowed women limited space to use folklore to contest gender hierarchy.

Historical investigation of the ways non-elite individuals and groups interpreted and resisted oppressive ideologies is challenging. Folklore collections, however, are consummately useful in this enterprise as they have generally sought to preserve the communal traditions of non-elite members of society. Further, folklore has been one of the vehicles of protest available to marginalised individuals and groups.[2] Careful analysis of folklore materials yields communal articulations of interlocking hegemonic and popular ideologies. Within the same contribution one often finds traditional cultural forms employed to rationalise hegemonic ideologies, but also to modify, and sometimes to reject them. Employment of folklore sources expands and enriches cultural and social historical studies. Deeply analysed folklore materials, contextualised with historical sources, have the potential to reveal individual and communal mindsets, specifically popular rationales, dynamics of oppressive regimes and resistance to them.

By interrogating lore about luck and women and engaging in historical and cultural analysis, this article teases out folk articulations and support for hegemonic understandings of gender, as well as expressions of alternate ethos. It considers aspects of gender, cultural and social history of Ireland through the use of folklore primary source materials, an interdisciplinary approach, and intersectional feminist analysis that privileges the categories of gender, class, race and sexuality.[3] Section one briefly discusses folklore sources. Section two and three introduce women's limited luck lore which encapsulated recent social and economic changes, as well as the prevailing gendered ideologies of the new Irish nation. Caul lore reflected women's meagre opportunities and their reduction to their reproductive aspects. Subsequent sections delve into how assertions of female otherness and the imperative to domestically confine women in lore about red hair and fishing closely paralleled rationales for female containment in post-independence Ireland. While women were cast as appropriable resources in both folk and hegemonic contexts, folklore's embrace of the watery caul revealed ideological

[1] Regarding the conceptualisation of the female as 'other' and as 'object-like', see Simone de Beauvoir, *The second sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York, 1989).

[2] For examples, see Angela Bourke, 'More in anger than in sorrow: Irish women's lament poetry' in Joan Newlon Radner (ed.), *Feminist messages: coding in women's folk culture* (Urbana, IL, 1993), pp 160–82; Ríonach Uí Ógáin, *Immortal Dan: Daniel O'Connell in Irish folk tradition* (Dublin, 1984).

[3] The term 'intersectional' was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: a black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics' in *University of Chicago Legal Forum* (1989), article 8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

ambiguity and marked a fissure in male dominance. Moreover, women understood as 'unlucky' were able to resort to imaginative resistance to reject and counter misogynist discourse and assert female subjectivity.

I

This study is based on Irish folklore accounts submitted between 1938 and 1979 that are held in the National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin. Diarmuid Ó Giolláin has written extensively about how romantic nationalism and a now outdated view of folklore informed early collection efforts. Illustrating these issues, a 1937–8 booklet described the project of collecting folklore as 'the task of rescuing from oblivion' static ancestral traditions before they 'have passed away forever'. Seeking authentic Irish lore, collectors targeted areas and individuals deemed to be furthest from English cultural influences.[4] Gender also played a role in the selection of collectors and informants, and this has both shaped and limited the archive. As Fionnuala Nic Suibhne has reported, no woman was ever employed as a full-time collector. About 12.5 per cent of part-time collectors were female, and only 15 per cent of the informants were female.[5] In addition to the gender bias that colours representations of women in the work of western male ethnographers,[6] women's activities and story-telling tend to take centre stage in more private and sex-segregated settings; thus male collectors faced challenges in their ability to witness or record lore from women.[7] Gender bias and prudery can be observed in the main tool of Irish folklore collection, Seán Ó Súilleabháin's *A handbook of Irish folklore*. Nic Suibhne noted only one reference to menstrual blood and one reference to sexual intercourse in the entire volume, and, while there were some questions about customs around childbirth, there were none regarding women's experiences of or attitudes toward giving birth.[8]

Despite its biases, as Séamus Ó Duilearga noted in 1936, the National Folklore Collection contains 'a vast amount of material not available elsewhere'.[9] Due to collectors' targeting of impoverished and non-elite communities, the archive

[4] This quotation came from a 1937–8 publication: Diarmuid Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish folklore. Tradition, modernity, identity* (Cork, 2000), p. 134. Regarding 'authenticity' in folklore, see Regina Bendix, *In search of authenticity: the formation of folklore studies* (Madison, WI, 1997).

[5] Fionnuala Nic Suibhne, '"On the straw" and other aspects of pregnancy and child-birth from the oral tradition of women in Ulster' in *Ulster Folklife*, xxxviii (1992), pp 12–24.

[6] Henrietta L. Moore, *Feminism and anthropology* (Cambridge, 1988), pp 1–2.

[7] Claire R. Farrer (ed.), *Women and folklore*, special issue of *Journal of American Folklore*, lxxxviii (Austin, TX, 1975), p. xi.

[8] Fionnuala Nic Suibhne, 'Cúntas ar ghnéithe de shaol an bhaineannaigh as insint bhéil fhaisneiseoirí mná ó Chúige Uladh' (M.A. thesis, University College Cork, 1990), pp x–xi. Mícheál Briody asserts that though Ó Súilleabháin's *Handbook* 'limited the amount of specific women's lore that was collected by the Commission', the lack of attention to women's lore was similar to that of contemporaneous European folklore collecting schemes: Mícheál Briody, *The Irish Folklore Commission 1935–1970: history, ideology, methodology* (Helsinki, 2008), pp 470–72.

[9] Séamus Ó Duilearga, 'An untapped source of Irish history' in *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, xxv, no. 99 (1936), pp 399–400.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

contains a wealth of democratic primary source material.[10] Folklore sources are unique in that informants intentionally sought, and were specifically instructed, to represent their communities and to use common traditions in their accounts. Analysis of folklore yields insights into both individual and communal mindsets and affords opportunities to interpret and explain how people negotiated their social and cultural milieus. There is also great value for the historian in folklore accounts where contributors were encouraged to report lore that was passing out of use; in these instances, informants provided their understandings of what was shifting (or had shifted) and their evaluations of traditions — what was of value that should be preserved, what they found distasteful and wished to leave behind, and why. Folklore accounts offer insights into how non-elite people interpreted their culture, society and history.

Regarding my use of folklore, rather than viewing it as a fossilised relic of past culture, mouthed by ahistorical peasants, I assert that folklore is an active and dynamic practice.[11] I interpret collected folklore as a communal articulation, through traditional, structured arts, of broader political, social and cultural trends and norms, as well as a place where practitioners processed and wrestled with these. In addition, folklore provides participants with a medium to promote or dispute the status quo, or to advance alternative ideologies. While similar lore might be articulated over many generations, its selection, and how such lore was related and contextualised, reflected the values and beliefs of tradition bearers at specific historical moments of collection. The particular details, external references, quips and anecdotes, along with the tone and moral, reveal individual variation, as well as communal and cultural change over time.

While I include accounts from many informants, this article foregrounds excerpts from the lengthy 1941 interview of Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, a school teacher from County Cork, by the folklore collector Seán Ó Cróinin. I have made this choice for several reasons. Ní Mhurchadha's wide-ranging contribution, which takes up an entire manuscript, refers to a great deal of interlocking material and in doing so provides clues as to the meaning of the lore for its participants. Given that she was forty-seven-years-old at the time of her interview, Ní Mhurchadha had witnessed the rise of the Irish nation and significant changes in women's roles and status. Unlike most of her gender in 1941, she was a paid professional with a position of public authority. As a teacher she was charged with educating children of the new Irish nation on behalf of the state, but Ní Mhurchadha was also a tradition bearer. Thus, Ní Mhurchadha herself was a nexus of hegemonic political and folk cultural streams. She was well situated to portray communal understandings of women.

[10] Gearóid Ó Crualaoich, *The Book of the Cailleach: stories of the wise-woman healer* (Cork, 2003), p. 158.

[11] This view is informed and inspired by the following: Angela Bourke, 'Fairies and anorexia: Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill's "Amazing grass"' in *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium*, xiii (1993), p. 27; Eugene Hynes, *Knock: the Virgin's apparition in nineteenth-century Ireland* (Cork, 2008), p. 13; Ó Giolláin, *Locating Irish folklore*, pp 1, 3; Ríonach Uí Ógáin, *Going to the well for water: the Séamus Ennis field diary 1942–1946* (Cork, 2009), p. 19; Ríonach Uí Ógáin, 'Music learned from the fairies' in *Béaloideas*, lx/lxi (1992/1993), pp 197–214; Guy Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French: Irish folk history and social memory* (Madison, WI, 2007), pp 315–17.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

II

Irish luck lore is part of a much larger cultural matrix in which tradition-bearers employ popular means to communicate their values and problems. Each culturally-coded bit of lore references numerous other interconnected beliefs in addition to social, racial and gender hierarchies.[12] Luck lore statements and short experiential narratives, called legends within the discipline of folklore, are related by tradition-bearers as if true, and are sometimes believed to be true. Luck lore is generally deployed to warn and instruct listeners in order to influence their behavior.

According to twentieth-century folklore informants, the presence or absence of luck had much to do with women. What informants indicated when employing the term 'luck' is a bit amorphous and varied by the context of the contributor, as well as their understandings and expectations of gender. Luck generally referred to an individual's or a family's possession of one or more of the following: health, wealth, fertility, vitality and/or the ability to avoid disaster. Informants consistently indicated their understanding that there was a finite amount of good fortune. If one had more than her share, another necessarily had less. This view is similar to that of many other peasant cultures where an underlying 'image of limited good' prevailed. As noted by theorist George Foster, 'if "Good" exists in limited amounts which cannot be expanded, and if the system is closed, it follows that an individual or a family can improve a position only at the expense of others'. Further, '[t]he individual or family that acquires more than its share of a "good," and particularly an economic "good," is … viewed as a threat to the community at large'.[13] Unfortunately, Foster's theory itself is limited, in that it takes gender hierarchy and exclusive male subjectivity as givens, rather than elements that complicate cultural phenomena.

Illustrating how limited luck was expressed in Irish lore is the following from Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha. Ní Mhurchadha reported, 'When one member of the family is very lucky it is said that he may take the luck from the others. That would mean that they would suffer, as a result. Also, when a priest cures a person it is said that he (the priest) or his relations, must suffer, as a result.' Later, after discussing other topics, Ní Mhurchadha noted, 'Sometimes it would be said of a girl who is lively and vigorous, "She has her own and her children's share" (of life and vigour)'.[14] While Ní Mhurchadha's discussion of luck started off quite generally, in a way that conformed to Foster's schema, it quickly took an interesting turn, appearing to indicate the exceptional, luck-disrupting character of healing priests and vivacious females. Ní Mhurchadha described a closed system where one's good fortune was another's disaster. A healing priest's intentional tampering with fated ill-luck in another transferred it to himself or inadvertently passed it to his

[12] This is not an exhaustive examination of women in Irish folklore, nor of luck lore. There are many types of folklore that engage women and issues of gender, examples include lengthy wonder tales and mythological materials in which women's roles vary greatly from what is presented here.

[13] George M. Foster, 'Peasant society and the image of limited good' in *American Anthropologist*, lxvii, no. 2 (1962), pp 296–7, 302.

[14] Interview with Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, Bóthar Buí, County Cork, July 1941 (National Folklore Collection (N.F.C.), Main manuscript collection, MS 790, ff 23–4, 28). This and other quotations from the N.F.C. are used with the permission of the director, Dr Críostóir MacCárthaigh. I am grateful to Ailbe van der Heide for assistance with Irish personal and place names and various vernacular terms.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

family.[15] However, a girl, merely by being lively, could deprive her as yet unborn children of good fortune. It is important to note that in twentieth-century Irish lore, a father's luck was not understood to harm or threaten his children. Irish boys and men were allowed and expected to possess and wield assorted cultural powers and privileges — luck if you will — in ways that women were not. In contrast to women, men were expected to be lucky and to easily communicate luck to others. Demonstrating this, it was viewed as unlucky for a woman to be the first to congratulate a bride, enter another's home and offer good wishes on New Year's Day, or be the first person a man encountered when he was beginning a new venture.[16] Providing another example, Ní Mhurchada noted 'When a man got a new suit of clothes a woman was not the first person to say — "Well wear!" to him. A man should be the first to say that. It was considered unlucky when a woman said it.'[17] At vulnerable times of transition, a man's words granted protection, while a woman, even when uttering an affirmation, admitted risk. Beyond reinforcing the notion that women are generally bad luck, such lore reveals gender hierarchy and encourages women to know their inferior place.

Ní Mhurchadha's gendered lore appears to begrudge luck — in this case life and vigour — to girls. The statement 'She has her own and her children's share' could be used as a compliment, but also carried with it a thinly veiled threat to the high-spirited female towards whom it was directed. Perhaps in addition to expressing jealousy, it was a way to say that she was not entitled to the excess of luck, life, or vigour she possessed. Many recorded folk and fairy narratives condone men's efforts to show an uppity woman her proper, lowly place. Females who attempted to claim more for themselves were often othered in Irish folklore by being framed as if they were in league with fairies and/or entangled in illicit folk practices.[18] As for a woman who had more than her share of luck, the intimation was that her arrogance would be punished; essentially the status quo would be restored, and her excess luck and vigour would be taken from her.

III

It is likely that the twentieth-century luck lore gender-differential was in part due to recent social and economic shifts. As Mary Daly writes, the period between 1851 and 1911 saw a significant decline in women working for wages, the largest drop

[15] In a similar vein, fishermen 'believed if they saved someone from drowning they would be drowned sometime themselves. The sea would claim them instead of the person they saved': fishing questionnaire from Pádraig Mac Coughamhna, Béal Deirg, Béal an Átha, County Mayo, Oct. 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 110). See also fishing questionnaire from Breda Lewis, An Spidéal, County Galway, Oct. 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 88); T. J. Westropp, 'A study of the folklore on the coasts of Connacht, Ireland (Continued)' in *Folklore*, xxxiv, no. 3 (1923), p. 235.

[16] See S. Ó Súilleabháin, *A handbook of Irish folklore* (Dublin, 1942), pp 180–81; Ráth Luirc, County Cork, *c.*1929 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 42, f. 203); Bairbre Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron: aspects of the occupational lore of Irish fishermen* (Dublin, 2018), p. 137.

[17] Interview with Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, f. 2.

[18] See Angela Bourke, *The burning of Bridget Cleary: a true story* (London, 1999), p. 38; Tudor Balinisteanu, 'Otherworldly women and neurotic fairies: the cultural construction of women in Angela Bourke's writing' in *Irish University Review*, xxxvii, no. 2 (2007), p. 496.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

being in female agricultural employment.[19] Joanna Bourke explains that, in the nineteenth century, butter-churning and poultry-keeping had been viewed as female pursuits and had provided women of the labouring and small-farmer classes with significant earnings. But, with the rise of large male-dominated creameries and newly legislated limits on the hours women were permitted to work outside the home, by the First World War men dominated dairy work.[20] Gradually, not only milk and butter, but also egg sales shifted to creameries. Even when women delivered eggs to creameries, creameries made payments to male heads of household rather than to women.[21] Ciara Breathnach notes that, in this period, women increasingly lost managing control of household budgets and access to money.[22] Because of the dearth of opportunities for waged work, young single women faced parental pressure to emigrate, independent of their families and at earlier ages than men.[23] Women were thought to be more dependable than men in posting remittances home — Janet Nolan writes that by the 1890s, Irish women emigrants sent over $5 million a year to their families in Ireland.[24] Daly considers that another factor in the decline of female employment was 'the virtual disappearance of the cottiers (agricultural labourers holding tiny plots of land) whose families were forced to engage in every form of occupation, however menial, to secure a living'. Fewer families living at subsistence levels and greater emigrant remittances translated to women being 'under less pressure to seek poorly paid employment' in Ireland.[25]

According to Bourke, the most momentous change of this period was women's shift into full-time housework. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Irish women were told by reformers and priests alike that despite the lack of wages accrued from child-rearing, cooking and house-cleaning, the performance of these domestic tasks was of paramount importance.[26] Influenced by this ideology, women's paid labour became an embarrassment to class-conscious men.[27] Irish census figures from 1926–61 reveal that most women, and almost all married women, listed their occupation as 'engaged in home duties'.[28] Bourke writes, 'the

[19] Mary E. Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State, 1922–39: the interaction between economics and ideology' in *Journal of Women's History*, vii, no. 1 (1995), p. 103.

[20] Joanna Bourke, 'Dairywomen and affectionate wives: women in the Irish dairy industry, 1890–1914' in *Agricultural History Review*, xxxviii, no. 2 (1990), pp 149–64.

[21] Joanna Bourke, 'Women and poultry in Ireland, 1891–1914' in *I.H.S.*, xxv, no. 99 (1987), pp 293–310.

[22] Ciara Breathnach, 'The role of women in the economy of the west of Ireland, 1891–1923' in *New Hibernia Review/ Iris Éireannach Nua*, viii, no. 1 (2004), pp 88–9.

[23] In this period, single Irish women emigrated in larger numbers than any other nationality: Mary E. Daly, 'Migration since 1914' in Thomas Bartlett (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Ireland*, iv: *1880 to the present* (Cambridge, 2018), pp 527, 536–7.

[24] Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves alone: women's emigration from Ireland 1885–1920* (Lexington, KY, 1989), p. 70.

[25] Daly, 'Women in the Irish Free State', pp 103–04, 106.

[26] Bourke, 'Dairywomen and affectionate wives', pp 161–2. See also Dympna McLoughlin, 'Women and sexuality in nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Irish Journal of Psychology*, xv, no. 2/3 (1994), pp 266–75.

[27] Breathnach, 'The role of women in the economy of the west of Ireland', p. 82.

[28] Caitriona Clear (ed.), 'Women of the house in Ireland, 1800–1950' in Angela Bourke, Siobhán Kilfeather, Maria Luddy, Margaret Mac Curtain, Gerardine Meaney, Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha, Mary O'Dowd and Clair Wills (eds), *The Field Day anthology of Irish writing*, v: *Irish women's writing and traditions* (New York, 2002), p. 591.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stress on housework carried certain threats with it. Domestic violence centred increasingly on accusations of poor housework.'[29] Wives were expected to endure domestic violence patiently and, because of their financial dependence, had few other choices.[30] Until the late 1950s, many Irish husbands were significantly older than their wives. Mary Daly has suggested that the age differential 'accentuated male dominance' and marital fertility.[31] Evidence of male dominance and marginalisation of women in marriage can be found in the distribution of household resources. Women were expected to eat less overall and to reserve meat for men's consumption.[32] Daly argued that rather than spending money to obtain running water and devices that would significantly ease women's burdensome domestic labour, politicians and householders prioritised electricity to power their radios and improve men's leisure time.[33] Given the historical context, it is not surprising that men would be seen as natural possessors of good fortune and women would be perceived as not being entitled to their own luck/money in this period.

Contemporary mutually-reinforcing social, religious and political ideologies of male dominance also bore striking similarities to the sentiments conveyed in gendered luck lore. In general, more fluid gender roles are tolerated during revolutionary periods and conservative gender roles tend to prevail in fascist or post-revolutionary eras. Maryann Gialanella Valiulis argues that, in the Irish case, the post-revolutionary return to 'narrowly and rigidly enforced' traditional gender roles was given urgency by civil war.[34] Minister for Justice Kevin O'Higgins feared the Irish Civil War had created 'a spectacle of a country … steering straight for anarchy, futility and chaos', thus validating British contentions that the Irish were unable to govern themselves.[35] O'Higgins and his ilk hoped the Catholic Church would fill the vacuum left by the diminished political and moral authority of the Irish Free State. In the eyes of socially conservative male revolutionaries, resort to Catholicism offered stability, justification for independence from Protestant Britain and a return to desired gendered hierarchy. Central to the ideological rationale for independence was imagined Irish female purity and virtue, which was contrasted with supposed English female immorality; Valiulis writes, 'Irish leaders pointed to the behaviour of English women, which they condemned as scandalous: drinking, smoking, in paid employment, living on their own and

[29] Joanna Bourke, *Husbandry to housewifery: women, economic change, and housework in Ireland 1890–1914* (Oxford, 1993), pp 266–7.

[30] Diane Urquhart, 'Irish divorce and domestic violence, 1857–1922' in *Women's History Review*, xxii (2013), pp 826–30; E. Steiner-Scott, '"To bounce a boot off her now and then": domestic violence in post-famine Ireland' in M. Gialanella Valiulis and M. O'Dowd (eds), *Women and Irish history* (Dublin, 1997), pp 125–43; Lindsey Earner-Byrne, 'The family in Ireland, 1880–2015' in Bartlett (ed.), *Cambridge history of Ireland*, iv, p. 664.

[31] For half of the couples who married in 1946, the husband was at least five years older; for a quarter, the age gap was at least ten years: Mary E. Daly, 'Marriage, fertility and women's lives in twentieth-century Ireland' in *Women's History Review*, xv (2006), p. 582; Earner-Byrne, 'The family in Ireland', p. 647.

[32] Earner-Byrne, 'The family in Ireland', pp 655–6; Bourke, *Husbandry to Housewifery*, pp 264–5.

[33] Mary E. Daly, '"Turn on the tap": the state, Irish women and running water' in Valiulis and O'Dowd (eds), *Women and Irish history*, pp 208–09, 213. In rural areas electricity to power pumps was an essential prerequisite to the provision of running water.

[34] Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'The politics of gender in the Irish Free State, 1922–1937' in *Women's History Review*, xx, no. 4 (Sept. 2011), pp 569, 574.

[35] John P. McCarthy, *Kevin O'Higgins: builder of the Irish state* (Dublin, 2006), p. 86.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

practicing birth control'. The discourse of a virtuous, Catholic, Gaelic state, exemplified by Irish women, 'dominated Irish life through the 1950s'.[36]

Part of what makes the lore Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha reported so interesting is the fact that she was a teacher. Judith Hartford and Jennifer Redmond argue that, because it 'delicately straddled the public–private divide and contributed to the social, cultural and economic stability of the country', teaching was one of the few careers recommended to respectable women. Especially after Irish independence, work in education associated Catholic women with the Catholic Church which was exceedingly influential in curriculum development, as well as the training and hiring of teachers. One of Hartford and Redmond's informants noted, 'the church was in charge of education at that time. In those days you got your job but in line with getting your job you had to be available on Sunday mornings to play the organ in church and that kind of thing.'[37] Within contradictory prescriptions for female teachers, one can discover the circumscribed place of women in Irish society, as well as ambiguities within which some women negotiated discursive space to claim authority and leadership. Catholic women teachers were supposed to be 'submissive, pure models of Mary', careful in their deportment and conscious of this position as 'influential moulders of young minds', 'addressed by politicians as the primary transmitters of culture and patriotism required for citizenship but as second-class citizens in matters of employment and pay'.[38]

Gerardine Meaney argues that the self-conscious celebration of a milky-skinned, sexually pure, disembodied Virgin Mary provided the post-colonial Irish with a way to claim white racial purity while distinguishing themselves from the British. In addition, enforced imitation of the Virgin Mary imposed 'a particular construction of sexual and familial roles', and shored up Irish masculinity by restricting feminine identity.[39] As Marina Warner and Luke Gibbons stress, since the 'devotional revolution', ideal Irish Catholic womanhood has been identified with a portrayal of Mary that emphasises her passivity, submissive obedience, few words and resignation to enduring great suffering.[40] Úna Ní Bhroiméil cautions that identification with Mary was not merely internalised patriarchal oppression, citing Mary's 'dual persona', as well as the dual identities adopted by female teachers. As Eleanor Heartney argues, Mary stands as both a subservient woman *and* the ultimate intercessor and unbowed Queen of Heaven.[41] Similar duality can be

[36] Valiulis, 'The politics of gender', pp 574–5, 577.

[37] Judith Hartford and Jennifer Redmond, '"I am amazed at how easily we accepted it": the marriage ban, teaching and ideologies of womanhood in post-Independence Ireland' in *Gender and Education*, xxxiii, no. 2 (2019), pp 6, 9–10.

[38] Úna Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and icons: female teachers' representations of self and self-control in 1920s Ireland' in *History of Education Review*, xxxvii, no. 1 (2008), p. 12.

[39] Gerardine Meaney, 'Sex and nation' in Ailbhe Smyth (ed.), *The Irish women's studies reader* (Dublin, 1993), p. 233; Gerardine Meaney, 'Race, sex and nation' in *Irish Review*, xxxv (2007), pp 51–2. See also Tom Inglis, *Moral monopoly: the rise and fall of the Catholic church in Ireland* (2nd ed., Dublin, 1998).

[40] Marina Warner, 'What the Virgin of Knock means to women' in *Magill* (Sept. 1979), p. 39; eadem, *Alone of all her sex: the myth and cult of the Virgin Mary* (London, 1978), pp 83–4; Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish culture* (Notre Dame, IN, 1996), pp 107–08.

[41] E. Heartney, 'Thinking through the body: women artists and the Catholic imagination' in *Hypathi*a, xviii, no. 4 (fall 2003), pp 3–22, quoted in Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and icons', p. 10.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

found in how twentieth-century female teachers understood their roles. Quoting the *Annual* of the trainee teacher organisation, the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade (M.D.D.C.), Ní Bhroiméil notes that these teachers saw themselves as possessing a 'vocation which was second only to that of the religious'. They asserted their middle-class status, equal or superior to that of 'doctor's and banker's daughters', and claimed that 'their training and education fit them to be leaders in the movements of the day'. Thus, women in the M.D.D.C. found agency and 'fashioned a subjectivity out of the very language and tropes which had been marshalled to control them'.[42]

Hyper masculinism accompanied the formation of the Irish Free State. Catherine Nash notes, 'The homosocial bonding of Irish nationalism depended upon the exclusion of women from the body politic'.[43] This was not unique to Ireland. Peggy Watson explains the 'masculinism at the heart of Western democracy' as follows: prior to national independence, 'men tend to experience emasculation as a result of their inability to exercise real power and initiative in the public domain'. Once national independence occurs, 'the purging of the emasculation of men' requires eradicating 'women from the new public sphere, and essentially involves the de-grading of feminine identity'.[44] Valiulis suggests that the fledgling Irish governments were 'typical of post-revolutionary societies, which often consolidate their power by enacting measures against women', such as circumscribing women's political participation, wage earning and reproductive rights. Also, besides women, there was not much that the new Irish state could control, constrained as it was 'by the restrictions of Dominion status, by international monetary forces, by the reality of their own lack of resources and natural advantages'.[45]

After independence, male Irish politicians sporadically worked to restrict women's access to full political participation and gainful employment. Women's equality and access to justice was undermined by the 1924 and 1927 Juries Acts, which dramatically reduced the number of women jurors. In preventing female teachers and civil servants from working after marriage, the 1933 public service marriage bar 'reinforced traditional assumptions that marriage and career were incompatible for women'. The Conditions of Employment Act, 1936 gave the minister for industry and commerce the power to restrict the number of women working in any industry.[46] Informed by a conservative gender ideology, and driven by economic concerns during the interwar depression, the marriage ban required female

[42] Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and icons', pp 10–12.

[43] Catherine Nash, 'Remapping and renaming: new cartographies of identity, gender and landscape in Ireland' in *Feminist Review*, no. 44 (1993), p. 47.

[44] Peggy Watson, 'Eastern Europe's silent revolution: gender' in *Sociology*, xxvii, no. 3 (1993), pp 479, 482, 485. See also Nira Yuval-Davis, 'The citizenship debate: women, ethnic processes and the state' in *Feminist Review*, no. 39 (1991), p. 63; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the public sphere in the age of the French Revolution* (London, 1988); Nirmal Puwar and Carole Pateman, 'Interview with Carole Pateman: "the sexual contract", women in politics, globalization and citizenship' in *Feminist Review*, no. 70 (2002), pp 123, 126.

[45] Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'Defining their role in the new state: Irishwomen's protest against the Juries Act of 1927' in *Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, xviii, no. 1 (1992), p. 54; Joan Wallach Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis' in eadem, *Gender and the politics of history* (New York, 1988), p. 47.

[46] Caitriona Beaumont, 'Women, citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922–1948' in *Women's History Review*, vi, no. 4 (1997), pp 570–71; Diarmuid Ferriter, *Occasions of sin: sex and society in modern Ireland* (London, 2009), p. 546.

primary school teachers to resign upon marriage.[47] Eoin O'Leary cites 'the jealousy aroused in the country areas by the wealth of two teachers who were married to each other' as playing an influential role in the decision.[48] Female teachers appear to have been 'scapegoats' targeted because the Irish government was unable to create enough jobs for men. In addition to the economic jealousy they incurred, married female teachers could become pregnant and, thus, in a patriarchal view, would 'literally embody sexual relations' and be 'too visible a symbol of sexuality and reproduction'.[49]

Under the new Irish regime, domestically-confined women were expected to be passive symbols of the Irish nation.[50] Expected passivity was informed by classist discourse. Women were expected not only to embody the virtue of self-sacrifice but also to find fulfillment in doing so. Adoption of this aesthetic offered women moral superiority as well as bourgeois distinction.[51] Evidence of efforts to reduce women to symbolic status and twentieth century promotion of bourgeois ideals of femininity can be found in changes in how Irish courts dealt with women before and after achieving independence. Carolyn Conley's examination of pre-independence Irish criminal courts records dating from 1865 until 1892 reveals that 'the treatment of Irish women before the law was primarily determined by their individual actions rather than their gender'. Conley notes that there was understanding for women experiencing the full range of human emotions and behaviors: for example, courts 'recognised that women, like men, might respond to provocation with violence'.[52] While it had been relatively acceptable to be a feisty Irish woman in the late nineteenth century under a colonial regime, after the achievement of Irish independence, women were expected to adhere to bourgeois modes of comportment. As Brigittine French's research into 1930s Clare courts revealed, when women of the labouring class swore, spoke or behaved aggressively in ways that 'went against the imagined nationalist ideal of womanhood in the Free State', they were censured and punished by powerful men.[53]

The only role allotted to women in Ireland's 1937 constitution was the Catholic, nationalist, bourgeois concept of woman as domestically-confined mother.[54] Anne

[47] The marriage ban for teachers was in effect for teachers who qualified between 1933 and 1958: Jennifer Redmond and Judith Hartford, '"One man one job": the marriage ban and the employment of women teachers in Irish primary schools' in *Paedagogica Historica*, xlvi, no. 5 (Oct. 2010), pp 639, 648, 651, 652.

[48] Marriage bars also applied elsewhere after the great depression: Eoin O'Leary, 'The Irish National Teachers' Organisation and the marriage bar for women national teachers, 1933–1958' in *Saothar*, xii (1987), p. 48.

[49] Redmond & Hartford, 'One man one job', p. 648.

[50] Gerardine Meaney, 'Race, sex and nation', pp 49–50.

[51] See Peter Gray, *The bourgeois experience* (London, 1998), pp 5, 14; Joan Perkin, *Victorian women* (London, 1993), p. 111; Tom Inglis, 'Origins and legacies of Irish prudery: sexuality and social control in modern Ireland' in *Éire-Ireland*, xl, no. 3/4 (2005), p. 16.

[52] Carolyn A. Conley, 'No pedestals: women and violence in late nineteenth-century Ireland' in *Journal of Social History*, xxviii, no. 4 (1995), p. 801.

[53] Brigittine M. French, 'Gendered speech and engendering citizenship in the Irish Free State: ordinary women and County Clare District Courts, 1932–1934' in Christina S. Brophy and Cara Delay (eds), *Women, reform, and resistance in Ireland, 1850–1950* (London, 2015), pp 140, 155.

[54] Regarding Catholic influences, see Maria Luddy, 'A "sinister and retrogressive" proposal: Irish women's opposition to the 1937 draft Constitution' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, xv (2005), pp 184–5.

McClintock's work on race and gender in the construction of Afrikaner nationalism offers insightful analogy to the situation of Irish women. In a prominent nationalist spectacle, while numerous individual white, male Afrikaner heroes were celebrated by name, only cursory, generic reference was made to woman as 'wife and mother'. McClintock writes, this 'symbolised woman's relation to the nation as indirect, mediated through her social relation to men, her national identity lying in her unpaid services and sacrifices, through husband and family, to the *volk*'.[55] Similarly, in twentieth-century Ireland, as attempts were made to marginalise women and exclude them from the public sphere, women's citizenship, access to money and status were largely mediated through men. Limited national identity was allowed to a woman if she was in a church-sanctioned marriage, confined herself to her home and provided free domestic labour to an Irish man. The Irish Republic, however, was designed to serve Irish men, state resources were allocated for men's interests.[56] If a woman had no official relationship to an Irish man there was little place, concern or care in the nation for her or her children.

Dramatic demonstration of women's tenuous position in Irish society was demonstrated by the treatment of known unmarried pregnant women.[57] Pregnant single women and post-partum single women were commonly socially and physically excluded from Irish society unless they managed to conceal their pregnancies and rid themselves of their infants.[58] While no law required it, many unmarried pregnant women were institutionalised for an average of two years in mother and baby homes and Magdalen asylums.[59] Elaine Farrell has found that between 1850 and 1900 there were 4,645 recorded cases of infanticide and concealment of birth in Ireland, concluding that such activities 'were embedded in Irish society and involved entire communities'.[60] In 1929, the Catholic bishop of Ossory stated that in Ireland, the life of a child born to a single woman was 'less valued than the life of the ordinary child'. In her study of 233 infanticide cases, Clíona Rattigan found much evidence to support the bishop's contention.[61] These children 'had

[55] Anne McClintock, 'Family feuds: gender, nationalism and the family' in *Feminist Review*, xliv (1993), p. 69. A 'rigidly gendered' ideology can be found in fiction of the period too: Leeann Lane, '"In my mind I build a house": the quest for family in the children's fiction of Patricia Lynch' in *Éire-Ireland*, xliv, no. 1/2 (2009), pp 174–5.

[56] For examples, see Sarah-Anne Buckley, 'Child neglect, poverty and class: the NSPCC in Ireland, 1889–1939 — a case study' in *Saothar*, xxxiii (2008), pp 57–70; Jennifer Redmond, 'The largest remaining reserve of manpower: historical myopia, Irish women workers and World War Two' in *Saothar*, xxxvi (2011), pp 64–5.

[57] See Elaine Farrell, *'A most diabolical deed': infanticide and Irish society, 1850–1900* (Manchester, 2013), p. 250.

[58] Uncharitable attitudes toward single mothers were common in Ireland both among Catholics and Protestants. For example, see Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: a century of change* (Belfast, 2003), p. 29; Clíona Rattigan, *'What else could I do?' Single mothers and infanticide, Ireland 1900–1950* (Dublin, 2012), pp 9, 54, 61; Sandra McAvoy, 'Aspects of the state and female sexuality in the Irish Free State, 1922–1949' (Ph.D. dissertation, University College Cork, 1998).

[59] 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 52, 58, 64.

[60] Farrell, '*A most diabolical deed*', p. 247.

[61] Clíona Rattigan, '"Done to death by father or relatives": Irish families and infanticide cases, 1922–1950' in *The History of the Family*, xiii, no. 4 (2008), pp 370, 372, 375–6, 380. See also Clíona Rattigan, '"I thought from her appearance that she was in the family

no rights and retained the stigma of illegitimacy', and records reveal that the mortality rate of illegitimate infants that was more than five times greater than that of legitimate infants.[62] The treatment of unmarried mothers and their children reveals that they were not considered to be equal citizens: unclaimed by Irish men, they were viewed as relatively expendable.

IV

Irish caul lore illustrates females' limited luck, how family luck was mediated through women's wombs, and one of the ways women were reduced to their reproductive capacities. A newborn is understood to be born with the caul if it emerges from the womb with an unbroken amniotic sac over its face, head or entire body: this is highly unusual, as generally the amniotic sac comes apart just before birth. Cauls were believed to convey good luck to those who possessed them.[63] However, the good luck of the possessor might be to the detriment of either the child or the mother. Further, when the child was a girl, her luck was said to have repercussions for the next generation. Ní Mhurchada related that 'Some children are born with a cowl [*sic*] on the head. Of a girl born with a cowl it is said that she will become a nun.'[64] In 1941, a Kerry contributor, P. J. O'Sullivan, reported: 'If the caul is saved and put away [for the child] the mother will have at least one year of ill health. When the child grows up to the age of about fourteen years, her mother gives her the caul, she puts it in her clothes. It is supposed to bring great luck to the person who wears it, but if it's a girl and she marry she never will have any children, but always be rich.'[65] Nuns and childless women retained their own and their children's share of luck but forfeited those children.

This lore also acknowledges that mothers sometimes endure ill health for extended periods after childbirth and sees that ill health as a sacrifice made for their infants. Luck arising from possession of a caul is highly gendered: for females it implies marital fecundity or wealth. Good fortune for a daughter is predicated on the postpartum suffering and sacrifice of her mother. Communication of the caul at puberty emphasises its ties to female fertility and contributes to the diminution of women to their reproductive capacities. The lore reflects economic and cultural realities: having children created increased financial burdens but while those afflicted by infertility incurred social censure, their finances did not suffer. The

way": detecting infanticide cases in Ireland, 1900–1921' in *Family & Community History*, xi, no. 2 (2008), pp 146–7; James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen laundries and the nation's architecture of containment* (Manchester, 2007), p. 55.

[62] Maria Luddy, 'Unmarried mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973' in *Women's History Review*, xx, no. 1 (2011), pp 123, 118. See also Moira Jean Maguire, 'The myth of Catholic Ireland: unmarried motherhood, infanticide and illegitimacy in the twentieth century' (Ph.D. dissertation, American University, Washington D.C., 2000), pp 161–2.

[63] See E. Moore Quinn, 'The caul in Irish folk belief and practice: a birth-related example of continuity and change' in Salvador Ryan (ed.), *Birth and the Irish: a miscellany* (Dublin, 2021), pp 188–93. Caul lore varies by culture: see, for example, Carroll Y. Rich, 'Born with the Veil: Black Folklore in Louisiana' in *Journal of American Folklore*, lxxxix, no. 353 (1976), pp 328–31.

[64] Interview with Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, f. 62.

[65] Contribution of P. J. O'Sullivan, Derrygorman, Annascaul, County Kerry, 1941 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 782, ff 250-51).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

limits on caul luck are specific to women. There is a sense in this lore that a wealthy, married woman would be blamed if she was childless.[66]

If stolen, the luck attached to cauls could be transmitted to familial outsiders, This in turn had negative consequences for the child but adverse effects for the mother were not addressed. In 1938, Seán Óg Ó Dubhda, from County Kerry, commented, 'A cure for barrenness in a woman is to get a caul boil it and drink the water from this. A child whose caul is used for this purpose will always be delicate and misfortunate and the caul has to be stolen generally by the mid-wife because of this.'[67] Thus an infertile woman could restore her luck/fertility by stealing what is rightfully a child's luck/health. The fact that there was a cure for barrenness that involved co-conspirators reveals the extraordinary fertility pressures married women faced. Irish Catholic women who married were expected to have numerous progeny.[68] The omission of the effects of luck stealing/caul theft on mothers implies that mothers commonly surrendered caul luck to their children and were expected to do so despite the ill effects they experienced. In summary, cauls could bring the luck of female fertility, health or wealth, but not a combination of those things, and only to one woman.

Twentieth-century caul and luck lore aptly reflected the limited opportunities for women and the reality that few would be able to marry and have children. Earner-Byrne writes that from 1870 to the late 1960s, 'Ireland had one of the lowest marriage rates in the world'.[69] Bourke notes that in 1911, 25% of women aged 45–55 were unmarried.[70] As Yvonne McKenna writes, 'exactly at the time the church and state were promoting married motherhood, economic and social realities — which themselves resulted in rising emigration and falling marriage rates — intervened to make married motherhood a less likely reality for many women'.[71] Irish luck and caul lore clearly illustrate the concept of limited good fortune common to many societies. However, the way twentieth-century Irish lore was gendered, specifically women's intergenerational low luck ceiling that was explicitly tied to female reproduction and its by-products, reveal how this ideology was used to maintain hierarchical gender relations and to enforce female inferiority. Clearly, luck and caul lore were part of a cultural conversation in which tradition-bearers

[66] Regarding stigmatising of childless wives, see Bourke, *Husbandry to housewifery*, p. 267.

[67] Contribution of Seán Óg Ó Dubhda, An Clochán, Caisleán Ghriaire, County Kerry, Sept. 1938. (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 554, f. 164).

[68] Earner-Byrne writes that though Ireland ranked among the highest in marital fertility, 'family size was in slow decline by 1911.' B. Walsh, 'Marriage in Ireland in the twentieth century' in A. Cosgrove (ed), *Marriage in Ireland* (Dublin, 1985), pp 132–50, 142; Earner-Byrne, 'The family in Ireland', pp 643–5; Yvonne McKenna, 'Embodied ideals and realities: Irish nuns and Irish womanhood, 1930s–1960s' in *Éire-Ireland*, xli, no. 1/2 (2006), p. 47.

[69] Earner-Byrne, 'The family in Ireland', p. 643. Finola Kennedy found economic factors more influential than Catholic teachings: Finola Kennedy, *Cottage to crèche: family change in Ireland* (Dublin, 2001), pp 1, 6.

[70] Bourke, *Husbandry to housewifery*, p. 267. Beaumont reports the same statistic for 1926: Beaumont, 'Women, citizenship and Catholicism', p. 566. Daly notes, 'Irish-born women in Britain had better prospects of marrying than if they remained at home': Daly, 'Migration since 1914', p. 537.

[71] McKenna, 'Embodied ideals and realities', p. 44. See also Inglis, 'Origins and legacies of Irish prudery', pp 16–18, 21.

grappled with socio-economic changes, religious teachings and political ideologies. In a sense, the lore was a folk articulation of the gendered status quo.

V

In lore about luck and fishing, women's hair and bodies were problematised as disruptive and dangerous to men on the water and women were held responsible for mitigating that which was uncontrollable. Thus blamed, women were more easily marginalised. This lore helped rationalise domestic confinement of women and enlisted women in disseminating the view that their public presence was pernicious. Women were usually banned from fishing boats due to the belief that they could jeopardise both catch and crew. This excluded women from fishing and, thus, from economic competition with fishermen. Reflecting their internalisation of the belief that women were conduits and custodians of fishing luck, women commonly took personal responsibility for protecting the men of their families and even of their communities when they went to sea. In 1979 an inshore Donegal fisherman, Paddy O'Brien, told collector Brian MacAodhagáin that 'The wife of Skipper, on first day of fishing season would sprinkle Holy Water and placed the holy medal [of St Christopher] in boat for safe journey'. In addition, 'women shook holy water on the men when leaving house' on their way to the boats.[72] Pádraig Mac Coughamhna of Mayo reported that as well as holy water, women sometimes threw a horseshoe or tongs after a fisherman when he left home to bring him luck.[73]

Holy water and horseshoes were not enough to ensure men's safety: protection of men also involved confinement of women. Eamonn hOireabard of County Kerry stated that fishermen were wary of 'women in general and brown haired women in particular. They never liked to meet them as they went to the river.'[74] To safeguard men on their way to the water, it was best for women to stay indoors. Pádraig Mac Coughamhna commented, 'Women in general were regarded as unlucky to meet when going to sea but red-haired women were most unlucky to meet. Many men returned home when they met a red haired woman.' It was women who assumed blame for these chance encounters and tried to reduce the ill luck caused by their presence. Mac Coughamhna continued, 'Women remained indoors when men were on their way to the sea. If a woman happened to be on the road and she saw a man approaching her on the same road on his way to the sea the woman would turn back and walk slowly seaward and allow the man to pass her out. This took some "harm" out of the meeting.'[75] This lore conveys the idea

[72] Fishing questionnaire from Paddy O'Brien, Drumcliff, Donegal Town, County Donegal, 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 191).

[73] Fishing questionnaire from Pádraig Mac Coughamhna, f. 110. In a similar vein, Clodagh Tait discusses women's 'apotropaic labour': see Tait, 'Worry work: the supernatural labours of living and dead mothers in Irish folklore' in S. Knott and E. Griffin (eds), *Mothering's many labours*, supplementary issue no. 15 of *Past & Present*, ccxlvi, (2020), pp 217–38.

[74] Fishing questionnaire from Eamonn hOireabard, An Baile Dubh, Trá Lí, County Kerry, 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 133).

[75] Fishing questionnaire from Pádraig Mac Coughamhna, f. 108. There are analogies with Irish customs regarding funeral processions. 'A person, on meeting a funeral on the road, turned around and took a few steps with it. It was said that three steps would do': interview of Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, f. 187. Both death rituals and men's work should take precedence over more mundane activities.

that a man could be endangered merely by seeing a woman in public, and the responsibility on women to prioritise men's activities over their own.

Paddy O'Brien recalled the following about a local red-haired woman named Mrs Connolly who 'sold *duileasc* [dillisk – edible seaweed] on market and fair days during the first quarter of the twentieth century' in Donegal Town: 'If ever she met the fishermen on their way to fish, she thought and felt that meeting her would bring bad luck, and implored the fishermen to return home. A few fishermen would ignore her, and the rest were reluctant to go, with result a full crew for boat could not be got.'[76] There is an interesting wrinkle here: while the patriarchal point of this lore was to circumscribe women's movements for men's benefit, that is not what happened. Empowered by the belief in the luck-sapping nature of her presence, Connolly adopted an agential, decision-making role and urged *men* to stay home. Perhaps that is why the anecdote unfavorably judged Connolly, not the belief that marginalised her, when a full crew could not be assembled.

Certain women in particular were vulnerable to having communal fears projected onto them. Men's apprehension regarding a woman increased along with her degree of social or situational ambiguity. Females not under the immediate control of a man or outside of their homes, wittingly or unwittingly, were perceived as admitting disorder and danger. Pregnancy and the postpartum period prior to the ceremony of churching (that served to reincorporate the mother into the community) were viewed as liminal phases. Not coincidentally, it was unlucky to have a pregnant woman or an unchurched woman on a boat.[77]

The greatest female liminality accelerator was red hair. References to inauspicious red-haired women are ubiquitous in Irish folklore. In 1979, Breda Lewis from Spidéal in County Galway provided a typical instance when she asserted, 'Redhaired women were unlucky to fishermen'.[78] As Bairbre Ní Fhloinn writes, for fishermen the *bean rua*, or red-haired woman, was the 'ultimate harbinger of misfortune'.[79] The Irish term *rua* indicates the colours reddish-brown, russet and copper brown, as well as red-haired.[80] It was used to refer to both brown and red-haired people, as well as the colouring of foxes and hares. Ill luck connected to the colour *rua* was most likely due to associations with female supernatural creatures. Malevolent fairies and the occasional mermaid were often described as possessing red hair. Women with red hair were thought to be more vulnerable to fairy abduction, and elderly women credited with the power to magically steal butter were thought to take a hare's form. Fishermen were also to go home if they saw a hare or a fox on the way to fish.[81]

Bad luck was not consistently associated with all possessors of red hair.[82] In 1979, inshore fisherman Jim McNern of Donegal told collector Brian

[76] Fishing Questionnaire from Paddy O'Brien, f. 190.

[77] The list of ambiguous or liminal characters likely to bring bad luck to fishermen included priests, unbaptised babies, engaged men before they wed, barefoot and/or childless women: Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron*, pp 134–5, 248–9.

[78] Fishing questionnaire from Breda Lewis, f. 88.

[79] Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron*, p. 140.

[80] Niall Ó Dónaill, *Foclóir Gaeilge-Béarla* (Dublin, 1977), p. 1012.

[81] Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron*, 59, 66–8, 109, 144–6, 150, 191–6, 210–15.

[82] While there was some suspicion of red-haired men, it did not compare to the dread of red-haired women. Of the forty-five replies to a 1979 fishing belief questionnaire, twenty-two specifically identified bad luck with red-haired women, an additional seven reported bad luck following either women or men with red hair: Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron*, pp 140–41.

MacAodhagáin, 'The members of crew believed that meeting a red haired woman … when on way to fish was unlucky. Fishermen would not fish that day. Red haired women were and are thought to be unlucky. Red haired men, or red things were not regarded as unlucky.'[83] Especially noteworthy here is the double standard regarding gender and red hair.[84] Further, some red objects were employed for apotropaic purposes. As Charles Conaghan of Donegal explained in 1979, 'red ribbons or thrums were tied to the clothing of small children, or to the manes of horses, to protect them from the "evil eye"'.[85] Red hues were mainly a problem when on or associated with a woman.

Adopting an exclusively male subject position, this lore, projected dangerous ambiguity or liminality onto women and blamed them for ill luck. This is in many ways analogous to how the Irish state scapegoated unmarried mothers, and women in general, by projecting sin, or potential sin, onto them.[86] While accompanied by different rationales, both folk and political cultures contained the idea that a woman could endanger others with her mere physical presence. In both contexts, the patriarchal solution was to curtail women's freedoms and remove them from the public sphere to protect more valuable men.

In two accounts of fishing lore, twentieth-century folk and political rationales appear to coalesce. In both excerpts women's threat was connected to sinful sexuality. As reported by Eamonn hOireabard, fishermen 'were reluctant to take them [women] in the boat at any time especially a woman of "doubtful reputation"'.[87] The immediate slide in this excerpt from women to dishonourable women reveals the projection of sinful sexuality onto women and the accompanying idea that all women could imperil men. As there were no prohibitions for taking men of doubtful reputation aboard, this scheme elides men's responsibility for their sexual desires and behaviour. Women were cast as solely culpable for sexual immorality and inextricably tied to fishing luck/safety. Similarly, Pádraig Mac Coughamhna related, 'Usually there would be no discussion about women or females while fishing — especially no lewd talk'.[88] The association of immorality to a discussion of females indicates how closely the two were linked in the mind of this informant.[89] For these two fishermen, the way to elude dangerous sexuality and ensure fishing luck was to avoid women. This view was predicated on portraying women as both objects and others.

The patriarchal perspective of this lore allowed no subject position for women. The lore did not address women's need for work or wages or autonomy nor the threats men might pose to women. The message to women was not to be lively,

[83] Fishing questionnaire from Jim McNern, Bruckless, County Donegal, 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 183).

[84] A similar gendered understanding of red hair can be found in England: M. E. Ringwood, 'New Year customs in Co. Durham' in *Folklore*, lxxi, no. 4 (1960), pp 252, 254.

[85] Fishing questionnaire from Charles Conaghan, Fintragh Road, Killybegs, County Donegal, 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 187).

[86] Luddy, 'Unmarried mothers in Ireland', pp 110, 112–15, 117. Magdalen asylums were resorted to at a significantly higher rate after Irish independence: Clíona Rattigan, '*What else could I do?*', p. 209. Regarding national sexual self-identification, Ferriter notes, 'Delusions about Irish sexual purity proved to be quite durable': Ferriter, *Occasions of sin*, p. 546.

[87] Fishing questionnaire from Eamonn hOireabard, f. 133.

[88] Fishing questionnaire from Pádraig Mac Coughamhna, ff 108-09.

[89] See J. J. Lee, *Ireland, 1912–1985: politics and society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 645; Inglis, 'Origins and legacies of Irish prudery', pp 12–14, 23–4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

remarkable or near men outside their homes, lest they be responsible for disaster. Women were to internalise the view that they were inferior and dangerous. These ideologies indirectly attributed great, if disruptive, power to women — regardless of their intentions. In the words of female teachers of the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade, a woman's mere 'weakness' or 'thoughtlessness' when dressing immodestly 'may affect the eternal destiny of souls'.[90]

VI

While women's presence was believed to imperil men at or on the way to sea, in Irish folklore, by-products of pregnant women's bodies were believed to protect them. Thus, despite the risks engendered by having women on boats, their children's cauls were believed to prevent drowning and shipwreck. As Ní Mhurchadha noted in 1941, 'It is said that if a person is in possession of this cowl (in his pocket, for instance) he will not be drowned'.[91] In 1979 Bridget Thorton of County Wicklow explained, 'Sometimes a baby is born with a caul over their face, a caul is a very fine tissue it is washed very carefully, and left to dry, it is then put into a piece of leather and sown like a purse, and a sailor will pay a lot of money to have one, he believes if he wears this caul around his neck, it will keep him safe and he will never drown'.[92] In 1938, Séamus De Bhanbille (who was seventy at the time) explained this belief as follows: 'Sailors although they are all divil may care sort of fellows will give their last penny for a baby's caul. They say that if they have wan [one] of them on board a ship that it will never be sunk.'[93] Career sailors were not the only ones who used cauls to ensure their safety. Arnold Schrier discovered that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, before an emigrant left Ireland for the United States, he/she attempted to borrow a caul for the transatlantic journey with the promise of posting it back (upon safe arrival) so that it could be used by others.[94]

In luck and caul lore there is a tension between the desire to sideline women but being unable to part with their luck/contributions. As in the larger socio-political context of mid-twentieth-century church and state solutions to controlling women, their sexuality and fertility, the broader remedies were containment and appropriation. Cauls functioned as preservatives from ill luck/drowning, but women were not seen as the rightful owners of the cauls their dangerous wombs produced. Rather, women were expected to sacrifice them to their children or have them appropriated for others' water safety. Yvonne McKenna writes of twentieth-century Irish women religious that 'In a functionalist relationship to

[90] Quoted in Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and icons', pp 8–9.

[91] Interview of Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, f. 62. See also C. C. Baines, 'Children born with a caul' in *Folklore*, lxi, no. 2 (1950), p. 104.

[92] Fishing questionnaire from Bridget Thornton, 2 Glenview Road, County Wicklow, 1979 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 2071, f. 124).

[93] De Bhanbille reports that he heard an old woman say she 'got a good price' for two cauls she sold: contribution of Séamus De Bhanbille, County Wexford, Sept. 1938 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 553, ff 152, 157–8); Ní Fhloinn, *Cold iron*, pp 228–9.

[94] Arnold Schrier, *Ireland and the American emigration 1850–1900* (Chester Springs, PA, 1997), p. 94.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

society, the religious were in a sense *owned* by that society, a resource for it rather than equal members within it'.[95] This is a good analogy for attitudes towards women in twentieth-century Irish luck lore. Women were not perceived as rightful owners of their own luck, sexuality, reproductive capacities or bodies; neither were they viewed as legitimate possessors of vitality or subjectivity. Rather, they were to know their inferior place and surrender all for others' benefit. McKenna found female embrace of this ethos in the women religious she interviewed. As one of McKenna's informants related when asked what drew her to become a nun, 'Josephine remarked, "I *wanted* to do things for other people … Maybe I felt I wasn't entitled to a life of my own"'.[96]

While caul lore echoed hegemonic ideologies of gender, it did so by employing a discourse that was not approved by the Irish ruling class.[97] In Irish hegemonic contexts, the only female it was safe to contemplate was the Blessed Virgin Mary, but even with Mary, there were limits. Despite her fame for being the mother of God, Irish portrayals of Mary do not feature pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. Indeed, as Moynagh Sullivan writes, there is great discomfort with women's bodies, reproductive processes and secretions in Irish culture.[98] In folklore, however, there is no disgust for the watery caul. Rather, this product of a woman's womb was a coveted item of great value. When acquired by infertile women or sailors, the folk value of the appropriated caul contained an acknowledgment of women's awesome power to create and to preserve life. Thus, despite traditions that supported misogynist views, twentieth-century folklore revealed at the very least ambiguous attitudes toward women and their bodies. That ambiguity and recognition of value revealed a fissure in male dominance that could be exploited by opportunistic women.

VII

Though coded societal lore reinforced misogynist ideologies and burdened women, it also offered opportunities for subversion, as well as a vehicle to promote alternate ethos. In fact, through much of the twentieth century, Irish women were able to resort to folk narratives and lore to imaginatively resist their circumstances.[99] I created the concept of 'imaginative resistance' to indicate the movement

[95] McKenna, 'Embodied ideals and realities', p. 59.

[96] Ibid., pp 41, 56.

[97] Middle- and upper-class Irish nationalists had eagerly appropriated certain bits of Irish folklore, especially any traditions connected to historic resistance to colonial rule: see Beiner, *Remembering the Year of the French,*; Hilary Joyce Bishop, 'Memory and legend: recollections of penal times in Irish folklore' in *Folklore*, cxxix (2018), pp 18–38. Meanwhile, these same nationalists were loath to acknowledge traditions they found unseemly: see Henry Morris, 'Irish wake games' in *Béaloideas*, viii, no. 2 (1938), pp 123–41; Bourke, *The burning of Bridget Cleary.*

[98] Moynagh Sullivan, 'The treachery of wetness: Irish Studies, Seamus Heaney and the politics of parturition' in *Irish Studies Review*, xiii, no. 4 (2005), pp 451–68. See also 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 41, 53.

[99] See Christina S. Brophy, '"What nobody does now": imaginative resistance of rural labouring women'; E. Moore Quinn, '"All I had left were my words": the widow's curse

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of resistance to the imaginative realm through inventive articulations of rebelliousness in contexts where direct defiance could be dangerous for the resistor. Through this concept, I attend to a 'creative confrontation with an oppressive reality' that re-frames and re-envisions actors and events in ways that, from the storytellers' viewpoints, are more just.[100] Also, at least in part, some folk narratives functioned as a space to resist: to imagine different outcomes, specifically outcomes that would be more favorable to the marginalised teller; to avenge indignities suffered by oppressed individuals; to indicate righteousness by positing miraculous intervention and/or supernatural sanction; and to communicate this counter-discourse. Some women used folklore to assert themselves, challenge their inferior status and condemn poor treatment. Unfairly maligned women could ridicule neighbours for their prejudice or, when all else failed, curse their enemies.

The flip side of being credited with the ability to cause disaster was the acknowledgment of great power. Aware of their power, some women, instead of circumspectly safeguarding men, used their unluckiness to antagonise. One example was related in 1956 by an informant from Ballintoy, County Antrim. The informant asserted that a certain woman of Dunseverick, who had a reputation for causing bad luck, 'would make it her job (do so purposely) to meet the fishermen' and thwart them. 'I seen us climbing the face (hill) behind the house here to get out of the way of a woman here. But she'd be at the Port before us. I knew the woman. "You might as well stay where you are," she says. We never caught a thing!'[101] Clearly, power was available to those women willing to wield it.

As with going fishing, in Irish folklore, it was bad luck to meet a red-haired woman on the way to market. Illustrating the popular belief, Michael Haverty of Curraghboy, a ninety-year-old Roscommon farmer, stated in 1959, 'goin' to a fair if you met a red-haired woman first, it would be better for you to turn back'. According to Michael, he, his brother, and father 'went to a fair one mornin' and first thing we met a red haired woman and we all came back'. James G. Delaney, the collector who took down Michael's remarks, reported

> there's a story told around Curraghboy, where this belief of Michael's is well known, that a neighbour of Michael's had a red-haired daughter and on three occasions, in succession, that Michael was goin' with beasts to the fair, this neighbour sent the daughter out, so that she was the first person Michael met. Each time he met her, he returned home with his stock. Then the neighbour offered Michael a far lower price for the beasts than the current price, and Michael sold them. This may just be a yarn built on Michael's well-known fear of red-haired women.[102]

Whether or not the anecdote accurately reflects the sale of Michael's livestock, it demonstrates communal awareness of this belief, derision of the believers, and the possibilities for subversive use of the lore by red-haired women and their

in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Ireland' in Brophy and Delay (eds), *Women, reform, and resistance in Ireland*, pp 185–210, 211–33.

[100] Brophy, '"What nobody does now': imaginative resistance of rural labouring women', p. 188.

[101] Ballintoy, County Antrim, 1956 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 1432, f. 98), quoted in Ní Fhlionn, *Cold iron*, p. 156.

[102] Interview of 'Michael Haverty', Curraghboy, County Roscommon, 1959 (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 1550, ff 174–5).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

fathers. This anecdote pokes fun at Michael but also at the idea that women are dangerous and must be confined to the home. The moral of this story is that maintaining such attitudes toward women will stymie one economically and make one the object of village ridicule. This locally-told short narrative imaginatively undermines malignant lore about red-haired women and creates room for females to move freely without censure.

Ridicule was not the only tool of resistance exploited by marginalised individuals. In Irish folklore, victims of tragic loss and past suffering were believed to possess compensatory luck. Ní Mhurchadha explains, 'It was said that orphans should be shielded, as any wrong done to an orphan was considered an awful crime. As a rule orphans were supposed to be attended by much luck during their career.'[103] In addition, the previously unlucky, especially orphans and widows, were believed to have supernatural advantages when in contentious situations with the more fortunate, since their curses were believed to be particularly effective. This supernatural evening of the odds armed the otherwise socially and/or economically defenseless. Ní Mhurchadha noted: 'The old people were greatly afraid of being cursed by somebody. Cursing was very common in the old days. The reason for this was that the people had no other weapon which they could use when they were wronged. Landlords, agents, etc. were often cursed by the tenants and the curse was richly deserved. A widow's curse was especially bad and dreaded greatly.'[104] Cursing was generally a weapon of last resort employed by desperate individuals. Ní Mhurchadha's remark that curses on landlords and agents were 'richly deserved' underlines the fact that there was communal support for vulnerable women cursing. Further, as Cork contributor Diarmuid Ó Cruadhlaich noted in 1938, 'I think of all the misfortunes that people dreaded in years past, the "widow's curse" was the most dreaded … It was believed that a "widow's curse" always "fell," or that a widow was given the power to crush with a curse anyone who caused her an injury.'[105] E. Moore Quinn writes 'the community believed that the widow's curse would take effect because it was intricately associated with the concept of justice'.[106]

To curse another is to claim that the fortunate person is undeserving of what he has, that he is an illegitimate holder of luck/power and wealth, and that right lies elsewhere. Cursing reveals the uneasy peace in communities of great inequality where some endure the indignities and misery of impoverishment while others enjoy plenty and privilege. An anecdote and commentary from Cork contributor Diarmuid Ó Cruadhlaich illustrate these points:

> In years back, it was in the days of the landlord tyranny, a widow, who was unable to pay her rent was visited almost daily by her landlord to demand payment. One morning, however, as she sat milking her cow, he came as usual, and being refused, on her honest plea of inability to pay, he became so enraged that he kicked the bucket containing the milk she had milked from her cow, and spilled it. In her anger at seeing the milk flow over the yard she cried out, "That you might carry the leg that kicked it to the

[103] Interview of Siobhán Ní Mhurchadha, f. 21.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Contribution of Diarmuid Ó Cruadhlaoich (N.F.C., Main manuscript collection, MS 553, f. 194).
[106] E. Moore Quinn, 'All I had left were my words', pp 215, 216, 219.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> grave." The story states that only a short while afterwards he was kicked by a horse, and his leg became so bad that it had to be amputated. It proved to those who heard it that a "widow's curse" was sure to "fall" … Old people dreaded to incur the displeasure of a widow, on the contrary they did all they could to help them to gain their favour.[107]

Like Ní Mhurchadha, Ó Cruadhlaich removed the cursing to long ago in the 'days of landlord tyranny'. Framed thusly, the cursing would have been towards illegitimate, exploitive communal outsiders. Though not explicitly stated, the presumption is that these terrible injustices and the need for cursing would have ended with Irish independence, but the cautionary narrative remains. The callous landlord's impulsive action deprived the widow of sustenance, and, in this telling, through her curse: the widow turned her suffering into the landlord's loss.

There was righteousness in the widow's curse, because of her misfortune she was *owed* charitable treatment and respect. In folk belief, women's socially and economically precarious position offered limited protection and supernatural leverage in contentious situations. This alternate folk ethos challenged the idea that the wealthy were deserving of their high status and that the poor were deserving of their deprivations. It also challenged male dominance. The poor widow endured her circumstances as her landlord fumed. Given their relative fortunes, her frustration would have made more sense than his. It was his wealth, race, and gender that gave him the privilege to menacingly rant while she milked. If she had attempted to physically harm the landlord (rather than cursing), the consequences likely would have been severe. Instead, she engaged in imaginative resistance. In uttering a curse, she rejected the subservient position she was assigned by her poverty, race and gender. She claimed the role of unapologetic aggressor entitled to vengeance. In the narrative, her words resulted in the landlord losing his physical dominance and ability to harass. The outcome indicated supernatural support for the widow and condemnation of the landlord.

Cursing narratives could upend misogynistic lore. Illustrating this point, Eamonn hOireabard reported in 1979 that the belief that women of 'doubtful reputation' imperiled fishing vessels was

> shattered many years ago when one of the older and strict fishermen took such a woman in his boat when she wanted to take out breakfast to her son and crew who had been fishing all night. When she left the boat she went on her knees and prayed that they would have full nets for the day with nothing for the rest who had refused her transport. And it happened like that, the Carthys had "reeks" of salmon—the rest came home without a *scad*![108]

The anecdote gives the impression that this woman endured ongoing censure due to past indiscretions. Aware of how the community judged her, this mother persisted in trying to feed her son. As in other curse anecdotes, the marginalised woman's suffering gave her compensatory power. This woman turned the tables on the fishermen who had humiliated her. Seizing the narrative with her curse-prayer, this

[107] Contribution of Diarmuid Ó Cruadhlaoich, ff 194–5.

[108] Fishing questionnaire of Eamonn hOireabard, f. 133. '*Scad*' possibly refers to *scadán*, an Irish word for 'herring', or the scad family of fish that includes mackerel. Curses made when kneeling were believed to be more efficacious: see Henry Morris, 'Features common to Irish, Welsh, and Manx folklore' in *Béaloideas*, vii, no. 2 (1937), p. 174.

https://doi.org/10.1017/ihs.2022.8 Published online by Cambridge University Press

woman of doubtful reputation asserted her value and her right to demand punishment of unworthy men. This mother judged men for their cruelty and called for *them* to be humbled with deprivation. Realisation of her curse-prayer indicated the righteousness of her cause and supernatural censure of the fishermen. Countering hegemonic and folk ideologies, this anecdote rejected the idea that a woman's sexualised body jeopardised fishing safety or success. Here, endangerment of lucrative pursuits originated from men's poor treatment of a woman. While this anecdote condemns misogynist discrimination and offers an alternate ethos, it does still portray women as mysterious, ambiguous others who can impact the luck of fishermen.

In cursing narratives women are not merely sinful obstacles to male domination; rather, they are individuals entitled to charity, compassion and justice. Cursing imaginatively reframed situations so that marginal women were elevated and powerful men were shamed. It was a temporary rejection of the status quo and of hierarchical gender ideologies. It was also a forceful assertion of dignity and subjectivity by a woman. In cursing, a woman demanded that others see events from her perspective and conveyed the idea that supernatural forces shared her point of view. Countering misogynistic lore, communally-remembered narratives of supernatural intervention on women's behalf indicated a belief in the righteousness and worth of marginalised women.

VIII

Ní Mhurchadha's comment 'She has her own and her children's share' succinctly summarised hegemonic ideologies of gender and the challenges that women faced in post-independence Ireland. Her luck lore reflected women's narrowed economic opportunities and contingent citizenship. While surely Ní Mhurchadha related what she heard from others, it is likely that her own experiences were also echoed in the lore she reported. During Ní Mhurchadha's early years, many Irish women lost access to meaningful wages; in her young adulthood, women were squeezed out of jury service and, once they married, out of certain jobs through early Irish Free State legislation; several years before she was interviewed by Seán Ó Cróinín, the 1937 Irish constitution defined women as mothers who should be confined to their homes; and throughout her life, many Irish women were unable to marry. Indeed, in 1941, when Ní Mhurchadha related her lore, little luck was allowed to women.

A great deal of twentieth-century Irish luck, caul and fishing lore tacitly supported the ideologies and policies of the early Irish state that marginalised women. While women's actions, or in some cases, mere presence, were cited as the root cause for assorted inexplicable mishaps, these same beliefs revealed women's power. The same marginalisation that made women into dangerous others who were not entitled to their own vitality provided limited opportunities for subversive action and imaginative resistance. Women could claim a subject position by ridiculing neighbours for their prejudice or cursing those who harmed them. Imaginatively resistant cursing lore ran counter to the misogynistic stream that made women into object-like others, undeserving of compassion. Further, communally remembered accounts of women's imaginative resistance created room for others to question, counter and defy prevailing narratives of women's inferiority and position as scapegoat. Indeed, Irish luck lore functioned as a double-edged sword; while it was used to justify maligning and confining women in twentieth-

century Ireland, it also functioned as a vehicle for protest that a woman could use to claim her fair share.[109]

[109] A Fulbright Fellowship funded research for this project. I presented an earlier version of this article to the 2016 Women's History Association of Ireland conference at Queen's University Belfast. I am grateful for the invaluable feedback fellow panelists and attendees provided. Many thanks to Aedín Ní Bhróithe Clements for her generous assistance in procuring materials.