2015

The Body: Conceptualizing Abortion in Contemporary Ireland

Sofia Ellis-Curry
Portland State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/honorstheses>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Ellis-Curry, Sofia, "The Body: Conceptualizing Abortion in Contemporary Ireland" (2015). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 161.

<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.169>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. Please contact us if we can make this document more accessible: pdxscholar@pdx.edu.

“The Body: Conceptualizing Abortion in Contemporary Ireland”

by

Sofia Ellis-Curry

An undergraduate honors thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts

in

University Honors

and

Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Thesis Adviser

Ann Marie Fallon

Portland State University

2015

Abstract

Currently abortion is illegal in Ireland. This thesis uses personal and political discussions about abortion I had during a study abroad in Ireland to engage larger concepts of the institutional (Church and State) and the symbolic (justice and morality). This work seeks to highlight how the Catholic Church and the nation-state benefit from the regulation of women's bodies. Through the continued regulation of women's bodies, specifically around access to abortion, the nation-state can better control projects of race, class, gender, sexuality and ability in order maintain strict notions of citizenship and preserve Irish identity reclamation projects.

Key Words: abortion, potential life, Irish identity, citizenship, colonization.

Introduction

Ireland has some of the strictest regulations on abortion in the world and the most common explanation for why abortion is still illegal in Ireland is the presence of the Catholic Church. While the Catholic Church believes abortion is a sin and does influence conservative policy, this explanation ignores the many regulatory tactics of the nation-state and the larger current and historical contexts that Ireland is situated in. This project seeks to highlight a more complex and interrelated explanation for why abortion is still illegal in contemporary Ireland. This project developed at a time when Ireland was facing particularly harsh scrutiny from the international community due to the death of Savita Halappanavar in 2012 and the forced life support of a pregnant woman who was in an irreversible coma in 2014 (RTÉ & Gomperts)¹. As this project is coming to a close however, Ireland is being celebrated as a progressive and liberal nation due to the popular

¹ See historical context section.

vote legalizing gay marriage. This understanding is of course situated in neoliberal and homonormative policies. And while the right to marry should be granted to all who seek it, a nation-state that does not approve of a woman's right to her own bodily autonomy is not a nation-state that can be understood as solely progressive or liberal. While the Catholic Church plays a significant role, one that I will address in my paper, this basic explanation leaves little room to consider a more complicated and multifaceted analysis of the factors that play into the illegalization of abortion and the regulation of women's bodies. This thesis argues that while the Catholic Church plays a role in the illegalization of abortion, the State also directly benefits from the regulation of women's bodies. By regulating women's bodies the State is able to maintain other raced, gendered, and sexed projects that are the primary modes to controlling Irish social citizenship and rehabilitating Irish identity based on whiteness, marriage, and gendered roles.

Methods

This project came about because of a five-month study abroad in Cork, Ireland. During the time I spent in Ireland I interviewed people about abortion, Ireland's history, and current political tension. The discussions and interviews I had over the time spent in Ireland foreground every part of this thesis project and serve as the primary reason I became interested in analyzing the institutional and theoretical frameworks at play in Ireland.

The research method I employed was unstructured in-depth interviewing. Unstructured is one of three primary ways to conduct in-depth interviewing. In-depth interviewing takes place on a scale of formal to informal based on the ways in which the interviews are set up: structured, semi-structured, and unstructured (Hesse-Biber 3).

Structured in-depth interviewing seeks to produce specific answers, often with narrow and rigid goals in mind, “the researcher has total control over the agenda and respondents are all asked the same set of questions in a specific order” (3). Semi-structured interviews are “conducted with a specific interview guide” but the order and execution of how the questions get asked is not prioritized (3). Finally, unstructured interviewing has a topic and a general focus in mind but has “minimum control over how the respondents should answer the question” (3). I chose unstructured interviewing because it offered the most opportunity for flexibility and interpretation. Gender and sexuality studies ask us to resist binary modes of thinking and by implementing unstructured in-depth interviewing there is the ability for each individual to articulate the details of their experience. The interviewees were able to respond in their own words with their own understandings and take as much room as needed to explore their opinions, ideas, and experiences.

This method primarily appealed to me as it has the potential to center the voices of the people being researched. The word potential is key in understanding the power dynamic between researcher and researched. There is an inherent power differential in any research regardless of intention or viewpoint and therefore the interpretations around the interviews, are just that, informed interpretations. In theory, the use of a feminist lens throughout this work, or any work, is that it is more conscious and aware of power differentials, as it does not seek to erase them. By taking up reflexive research processes there is an opportunity to adjust and develop methods throughout the research process. If a feminist lens is being applied properly, it will not seek to present a non-bias approach. Instead by continually using processes of reflexivity there is an opportunity to analyze the various contexts and terrain I encounter throughout the research and writing process. By

recognizing my standpoint and discussing potential harms of the research, I seek to reveal what is often unspoken, left out, and seen as unimportant. In providing a more holistic picture there becomes the potential for readers, researched, and researchers to have a more honest and open understanding of events that transpired.

Feminist in-depth interviewing seeks to “gain qualitative data from those whose experiences have not always been included in research agendas” (Leavy 3). I allowed the interviews to shape themselves for the most part. I started off interviewing friends that I went to university with and from there I got invited to go up to Dublin for some political organizing around the legalization of abortion. It was there that I did the rest of my interviews. In-depth interviewing concerns itself with sample size, informed consent, probing, listening, and the power dynamics between researchers and researched (Hesse-Biber 4-12). Smaller samples allow for a more rigorous, detailed, and complex conversation with fewer people, instead of a larger sample size but often with more superficial data (4). I conducted ten interviews, providing the time and space to have longer sessions with participants. Ideally, informed consent minimizes harm to participants. While protocol was followed throughout the interviewing process, assessing harms or potential harms became quite ambiguous terrain to navigate. This is where probing and silences become incredibly important in the in-depth interviewing process. The desire to probe and potentially get more information comes at the risk of seriously harming the interviewee. I took a more conservative approach, rarely probing or asking clarifying questions. For some interviewees the personal experience with abortion created a more vulnerable atmosphere. Silence also becomes a tool to locate where there may be tension in the interviewees’ articulation of particular moments (7).

In considering the various complications of this research the largest and most frequent obstacle that I encountered was that people were primarily interested in talking to me when it was off the record. While this created a stimulating, informative, and interesting travel environment it did not progress this project with regards to formal data. Therefore much of my research is informed by archival work and qualitative analysis. Finally, by participating in the process of reflexivity I do not seek to abstract the fact that there will always be a power differential between researched and researcher.

Feminist in-depth interviewing should consider the various ways in which the spaces of insider and outsider are navigated depending on specific context (Hesse-Biber 2). In my research it was clear that I was not an Irish citizen, primarily based on presentation and accent, positioning me as an outsider to culture, language, and shared citizenship. This created my permanent outsider position with regards to nationality, race, and ethnicity. However, there were some statuses that traversed both insider and outsider depending on the interviewees and discussions I had. When interviewing friends on their conceptions about abortion, they viewed me as an insider to their social circle often resulting in a more open and honest environment. Often when interviewing people I did not have any connection with, they often assumed I was interested in this subject because I had personal experience with abortion. Technically I was an outsider, but it was my perceived insider status that may have allowed some people to open up. This example speaks to the very complex ways in which insider and outsider statuses are both advantages and disadvantages depending on the positionality of the interviewer, the interviewee, the specific context of the interviews, and the way in which both researcher and researched make meaning of one another's status and presentation. In attempting to

give voice to the people who spent time talking to me I do my best to provide references to some of the major themes I found in discussion and situate their personal experience within the larger social, political, cultural and historical context. I do not claim that these are the only elements to consider but simply some of the themes that emerged from conversations and implicate larger systems of regulation.

Current & Historical Contexts

The current political climate in Ireland stems from a historical legacy of colonialism by the British. This violent and contentious history informs many of the projects in Ireland today that concern citizenship and the maintenance of national identity. Irelands relationship with English colonial rule began in 1542 and in 1801 Ireland became part of England, creating the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (Townshend 50). Like any colonial rule, violence was a tactic employed consistently by England. Many historians classify both the Cromwellian rule and the famine as genocide (100). Conservative estimates suggest that 25% of the Irish population was killed during Cromwellian rule while many other historians suggest that a more accurate assessment is 50% of the population (Foster 49). Conservative estimates suggest one million Irish peoples died from the famine but this number is also debated amongst contemporary historians. In addition, over two million people emigrated from Ireland to the United States and Canada after the famine (67). Thousands and thousands more Irish peoples have died in contemporary Ireland during Irelands Civil War and War of Independence where the English were implicated due to their funding of Northern Ireland (69). This is merely a snapshot of the death, violence, and colonial rule that

Ireland has been subject to. It was not until 1949 that the remaining British rule was legally removed (75).

This history of colonialism and now post-colonialism is crucial in understanding the current context and historical trauma that has been inflicted on Irish peoples. This context has largely influenced notions of Irish identity, Irish nationalism, and Irish politics. Under colonial rule, traditions, language, and cultures were suppressed, regulated, and often erased entirely (Moore 27). In healing from the historical trauma of colonialism the need for an authentic Irish identity developed. This identity largely influenced and continues to influence political, cultural, and moral views in Ireland. This need for a distinct identity is what I refer to as a recuperation project in the modern nation-state of Ireland. This recuperation calls for the regulation and maintenance of Irish identity, namely projects concerning heterosexual marriage, whiteness, Catholicism, and rigid gendering, all of which implicate the need to regulate women's bodies. By contextualizing Ireland's history of colonialism we can better understand the policies around citizenship and the need to maintain the illegalization of abortion.

In briefly contextualizing Ireland's colonial history, it is important to note the difference between Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland: Northern Ireland being part of the UK and Southern Ireland being an independent nation, commonly referred to as the Republic of Ireland. While the differences between abortion practices in Northern Ireland and Southern Ireland are quite interesting, and their history complex and contentious, all of my interviews and discussions were conducted with people from Southern Ireland and therefore this project focuses on Southern Ireland. Throughout this work I will refer to Southern Ireland as Ireland. This is not a political statement but rather a way to speak to

the national identity specific to the Republic of Ireland and more broadly to notions of nation-state, politics, and institutions.

The historical record of abortion in Ireland is complicated by the fact that the majority of work produced on the topic addresses the legal aspects. Very little is written on people administering and experiencing abortion illegally in Ireland both historically and currently. However, it is known that in 1861 The Offences Against the Person act criminalized abortion and the terminology to discuss abortion was that of miscarriage (Francome 437). It was a crime “to procure a miscarriage” and anyone who assisted a woman in procuring a miscarriage was also subject to life imprisonment. Interestingly enough, this law also spoke to persons who “secured and supplied the means to a miscarriage” (439). The majority of the language and legal predication for the illegalization of abortion is still based off of or directly cited from this act. This demonstrates that the regulation of women’s bodies as it pertains to abortion is not new phenomenon.

This historical legacy of regulating women’s bodies through criminalizing miscarriage did not change until 1983. In 1983 the language shifted from criminalizing miscarriage to criminalizing abortion. “The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right” (470). This is the first instance where language around abortion and around the life of a fetus became part of popular political and legal discourse. Shortly after in 1991 the Irish High Court took a group of students to court on the basis of prohibiting groups from distributing any information about how and where to get an abortion. While the European

Court of Justice did not rule in favor of the prohibition it did not protect students or student groups that did distribute information. It was not until 1992 when the largest and most significant precedents developed for abortion rights in Ireland, precedents that can still be found today in the constitution. In 1992 the X-Case was negotiated in the Irish Supreme Court. The X-Case concerned a 14 year-old girl who was raped, impregnated, began having suicidal thoughts, and ended up getting an abortion in England. This case established that the right to an abortion could be granted if the woman could prove her life is at risk, including risk due to suicide (471). Previous to this, if a woman was found to have had an abortion in another country, even in a country where abortion was legal, they could be sentenced to life in prison. This case established the precedent that women would no longer be criminalized for traveling outside of Ireland. Unfortunately, hospitals still have the right to turn away women and the decision to deem a woman's life "at risk" is highly ambiguous within Irish legal and medical institutions.

These legal rulings are still incredibly limiting yet in theory should make it easier to have an abortion within the context of extreme cases. Recent events surrounding women's reproductive rights however, prove otherwise. In 2012 Ireland faced extreme scrutiny due to the death of Savita Halappanavar. Halappanavar was suffering a miscarriage at a hospital in Galway and needed an abortion to save her life. Despite Halappanavar being in a position where she qualified for an abortion, she was denied and died in the hospital. This unjust death resulted in mass protests and vigils across Europe and international news media attention (RTÉ). Even more recently, in, December of 2014, a woman in an irreversible coma who happened to be pregnant was forced to stay on life support, despite the family's wishes, until massive demonstrations broke out

(Culp-Ressler). These examples, both historical and current, speak to the consistency in Ireland's policies surrounding the illegalization of abortion. In addition all forms of contraception were illegal in Ireland until 1980 (United Nations). While condoms are now sold across Ireland, birth control and emergency contraception, commonly referred to as the morning after pill, are legal but only available in Ireland with medical consultation. Pharmacies also have the right to deny prescriptions for anyone seeking these forms of contraception (United Nations). The historical and current contexts of Ireland clarify that legal changes have not always manifested in the securities they claim to produce and that abortion is still largely illegal for those seeking it within Ireland.

Gendering Nature & Culture

Historical context provides a timeline of colonialism, abortion, and political developments but it is also important to consider the theoretical frameworks at play. One of the primary theoretical frameworks that inform social understandings of gender and sexuality are theories on nature and culture. Notions of nature and culture have become understood as gendered and hierarchal ways of knowing and being. Feminist philosopher Karen Warren argues that Locke's theory of man as the steward of earth and Bacon's theory of nature as female reinforces the socially constructed ideas of a gendered world view (Warren 35). Since man is the steward, he controls the earth otherwise thought of as nature. If man is the steward to earth then he is something that can transcend nature, he is culture. Culture is understood as a space that creates and produces knowledge, and sustains these systems of knowledge (40). Culture is evolving, growing and exists beyond the realm of the present, it is male and therefore superior (Ortner 10). Nature on the other hand, is associated with the body. It is something that lives, dies, it is cyclical and can

only regenerate and reproduce the same processes. If the body is nature and nature is not male then nature is inherently female. Nature is confined by culture insomuch that it does not have a consciousness and therefore culture dictates how nature develops and exists. If culture controls nature, and culture is male and nature is female, then male controls female. This work foregrounds much of the gendered, raced, and sexed projects that are currently being regulated by the nation-state. In using this framework I will not reproduce it, I seek to complicate notions of gender, the body, and race. This framework acts as a foundation to understanding much of the logic employed today in Ireland. At first glance these binary notions of gender may appear archaic, yet through deconstructing these naturalized ideas it becomes clear that these logics are still employed as dominant narratives today.

Naturalizing Gendered Notions

The idea that culture is male and nature is female is now engrained in Western society, because over time these notions have become naturalized. Naturalizing is the process of making certain people and ideas appear as if they have always existed (Foucault Ethics 50). Part of the naturalizing process is repetition, in which ideas are repeated with such authority and so frequently that they become true (50). Furthermore, if there becomes a prevalent socially constructed idea, a vast range of experiences, knowledge, and facts become funneled through and understood in reference to this one notion. In this case, nature as male and culture as female. The naturalizing process creates a cyclical relationship in which an idea exists and is repeated again and again until it becomes the dominant explanation for everything. A truth becomes the truth, and the truth becomes the way of explaining society and people. Once society and people know

this idea to be true they mirror the truth and then their actions act as a way of reinforcing that truth and so on and so forth. It is important to note that the process of naturalizing is as much about the creation of the category unnatural as it is natural. There can only be the category of deviant or unnatural if there is a standard for what is normal (43). With these socially constructed ideas in place, men controlling woman becomes natural and is then deemed normal and the need to control women's bodies becomes a necessary function of the nation-state.

Naturalizing certain systems and modes of thinking is a politicized process because it becomes a point of reference in which people and societies understand and organize themselves. The process of naturalizing renders the socially constructed concept of nature and culture as a universal truth. The idea of a universal truth can only be understood if it is in reference to another set of ideas. In Western culture the binary is a valued form of thinking and often the way people organize thoughts, therefore in this context, truth becomes real and universal only in reference to things that are untrue. These notions are further complicated when they are assigned value, it is no longer just about socially constructed ideas as truth or these truths as natural, these truths take on meaning by assigning different values to them. Thus rendering the ideas of natural and normal as good, and unnatural and deviant as bad. These valuations produce hierarchal ways of knowing and being. Hierarchy produces inequality and inequities often employed through ascendancy. The mode of naturalizing can be found in the logic that understands abortion as wrong, sinful, and not needed.

The Logic of Domination

The idea of hierarchy, in this case, men controlling women, “only takes on significance of superior/inferior within the framework of culturally defined value systems” (Ortner 9). Western culture continues to rely on the socially constructed categories of nature and culture in order to create the notion of male as superior and female as inferior. Human is superior to nature because consciousness is superior to the physical. Culture and nature are interdependent and inform one another. Consciousness must have a category to measure itself against and make it superior, and nature must have a category that informs its construction as inferior. If male is human and female is nature, then male is superior to female (14). This logic of superior and inferior functions as an integral part of Western society and is most often referred to as systems of domination (Warren 42). The need to justify the logic of domination is rendered useless by the process of naturalizing this set of beliefs as truth. Culture and nature are relational, meaning that domination is not simply about control, it is also about systems of regulation that sustain the power to control (Foucault History 36). Naturalizing notions of nature and culture is not enough to sustain the logic of domination. Instead, there are frameworks and sets of ideas that help navigate and justify the boundaries of culture as superior and nature as inferior. This hierarchy is rarely recognized or spoke of when framing the abortion debate.

Regulating Women's Bodies

If nature is female then women and women's bodies are things that need to be controlled because they are inferior. The socially constructed idea of nature and culture are relevant to understanding abortion because the concept of nature and culture get

played out in the constructed realm of theory, institutions that adopt and reify this logic, and on real women's bodies. Furthermore, nature's ability to regenerate connects with the idea of female reproduction. If a female body can reproduce, it should. Reproduction becomes a normal expectation and one that women are not only obligated to fulfill but one that they should naturally want to fulfill. If this is what the body, what nature, can do, it should do it. If nature is female and female is the body, then the female body becomes the most important site for conceptualizing reproduction and femininity as a whole (Warren 123). Women's bodies are the vehicles for the production of potential life and men are the creators of knowledge of culture. Women help to maintain life and men create all that is informed by life. This reinforces the superiority of men and the belief that regulating women's bodies in order to maintain this hierarchy is acceptable.

These dualism originated from Western thought, specifically the enlightenment period, yet have largely influenced the ways in which academics theorize and conceptualize the modern nation-state (Martin). Gendered and sexed conceptions have filtered through social and political thought influencing the social ideology, policies and governing practices that are found in the West today. State power consolidates around these conceptions in order to justify regulatory practices around women's bodies. That is to say that if people, policies, and The State largely understand women's roles as primarily mothers, and children as sacred, then policies that continue the illegalization of abortion do not appear unjust. In fact often, these practices and policies are so widely accepted that they are not viewed as regulatory practices.

Regulation however, is one of the primary ways to control women's bodies. Abortion is one of the most significant modes of control the State uses to continuously

and constantly dominant women's bodies. The need to criminalize abortion, the politics around abortion in Ireland, and the need to reproduce can be understood through the framework of morality. In which nature and culture are good, right and true so long as they are reinforcing their assigned roles. This ideology clarifies why abortion, when conceptualized within the idea of nature and culture becomes such a contentious issue. Abortion is no longer understood just an act that violates an individual's body or a woman's duty as female but instead abortion becomes understood as a violation of all that is nature and therefore all that is culture. Morality becomes a way to justify the control and regulation of women's bodies.

The Framework of Morality

The framework of morality helps define certain ideas as natural, good and right: reproduction- and others as deviant, wrong, and undesirable: abortion. Specifically within the context of Ireland, morality often takes shape through the religiosity of the Catholic Church. The importance of using a moral framework in relation to abortion is that it is one of the primary ways individuals and institutions conceptualize abortion. Morality is one example of a value system that informs who or what gets regulated and how. Regulation helps to sustain systems of domination on the individual, the social, and the symbolic level (Ortner 7-8). Another way of understanding moral framework is as a discourse, one that is "a historically, socially, and institutionally specific structure of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott 35). The interdependent relationship of nature and culture create other socially constructed dualist ideas of man and woman, public and private, and right and wrong. The concepts of public and private can be understood by the idea that if women's consciousness is tied up within the body and

men's consciousness is free and exists beyond the boundaries of time, the public sphere becomes something that is inherently male and the private sphere is inherently female (Ortner 10). These concepts of right and wrong are mirrored in the policy and politics surrounding the current abortion debate in Ireland.

Like the dualist concept of nature and culture, the discourse of morality can only judge or understand something as good and moral through the negation of something else. This negation or opposite becomes increasingly devalued and marginalized as the acts and ideas that are good become naturalized and normal. In the case of this thesis, reproducing citizens for The State is naturalized as good and expected, while aborting potential citizens is mired in sin and illegality. What becomes valued and devalued, good and bad, is culturally specific but the power in these frameworks is that they present themselves as universal and above any cultural specifics, thus creating an inherent and universal "truth." The appearance of an overwhelming universal truth is reified: good and bad, moral and just, and continues to be an authoritative and powerful system of control because of its simplicity. If a moral framework was complicated and contextualized it would very quickly become clear that regardless of cultural specifics all discourses are nuanced, complex, and contradictory. Power and systems of domination prosper in simplistic notions of right and wrong that both The State and the Church uphold and reify. The ability to disrupt systems of domination lay in the complications and dismantling of the binary (Scott 36). The belief that some people, actions, or ideas are simply wrong, immoral or unjust "leaves in place a faulty neutrality" (39). If something simply is immoral, for example abortion, then there is no need to interrogate

why it is wrong, it just simply is. This moral framework is reflected in The State's policies and rhetoric surrounding abortion as well as the Church's ideology.

The Body

A moral framework is one way regulation plays out on the body. Female autonomy cannot exist as long as the regulation of the body, the female, is sustained. Abortion is an act of bodily autonomy and therefore is a disruption to the interdependent relationship of culture and nature. In this work, conceptions of abortion are explored through the individual, the institutional and the symbolic. The literal and the figurative body take on different meanings at all three levels. On an individual level, the body is the literal physical body. At an institutional level, the body becomes a site of inscription for social institutions. On a symbolic level, the body represents the intellectual and theoretical framework that informs institutions and individuals. Just as all three bodies are regulated, all three bodies disrupt this regulation through abortion.

The State:

The State encompasses a host of institutions (medical, legal, economic) and projects (marriage, race, gender, the family). In invoking ideas of nation (nature) and The State (culture) abortion can be understood as a symptom or an indication of a national identity crisis and a threat to citizenship. If citizens are one of the primary ways, if arguably not the most important factor, in keeping the nation alive and developing, then in the most literal sense aborting potential life is a threat to the sheer amount of potential Irish citizens. Figuratively women render themselves vulnerable through their inability to adhere to strict and rigid notions of gender laid out by the State. Women render the State vulnerable through the ending of potential life. In other words, Irish women who get

abortions risk their status as woman and women who abort potential life are also aborting the project of citizenship. Through individual's abortions, notions of identity and citizenship are put at risk and so the State aborts these women, through the stripping of their status as women and through the oftentimes legal and medical ramifications of getting an abortion. Part of the power in feminizing the nation is that the individual lives of women become intrinsically linked to the life of the Irish nation. An abortion is no longer just a violation of a woman's own body, or a violation of the legal institution, it can be viewed as a violation of the nation. Thinking through the theoretical feminization of the State helps to understand why the regulation of bodies is so important to the State and offers one of numerous explanations to why abortion has been and continues to be, such a contested and contentious topic.

The State is one of the primary ways in which women's bodies are regulated. This bodily regulation gets negotiated through many factors, only some of which I will discuss. Gender, sexuality, and race are regulated through ideas of citizenship. In the broadest sense citizenship becomes the means to reward some and deny others Irish identity. National identity is a feeling of belonging to the State, a sentiment of groupness (Moore 30). Citizenship can be understood on both a social and legal level, I am prioritizing social citizenship, which is one's ability to follow society's outline of what is normal and good. The closer one performs to these standards the more likely they are to be socially valued and rewarded. Conversely, if you disrupt the normal, (whiteness, hetero/homonormativity, patriarchy, etc.) a person is seen as not only deviant but as a threat to normalcy, as a threat to the balance of nature and culture. Specific constructions of sexuality, race, and gender have been created and laid out by the Irish State. State

regulation acts as a tool to monitor social citizenship. Access to institutions such as legal services, medical services, education and many others come at the price rigid regulation. In other words, even women who by all other definitions would be considered a “good” citizen (fulfilling female specific roles: straight, white, and married) could endanger their social and legal citizenship status by getting an abortion. Often times, when nations become independent or are legally and constitutional recognized as autonomous, strict rules, socially and legally, about what it means to be a citizen develop as a means to construct or reclaim an identity and culture that is understood as authentic to notions of a now independent nation- especially in contexts of colonialism (Mullaly 82). Ireland represents a unique case because of the historical legacy of emigration and its status as a white colonized state. In addition its historical and current relationship with the Catholic Church and its need to define a distinctly Irish identity give way to strict gender roles and policies that are typically labeled as more conservative.

In order to discuss reproduction and abortion it is first important to complicate the notion of gender. Gender is not a universal understanding and therefore I draw on a current Western feminist understanding in which gender is understood as assigned, socially constructed, and fluid. However, when considering Ireland, the category of woman is highly gendered and often fixed in its understanding. This fixed identity category that is used by the State, the church, and political rhetoric, leaves out a multitude of gendered, sexed, and sexual identities and assignments in addition to women who cannot reproduce. While this is important to note, I am focusing this discussion on the bodies that the State views and understands as female reproducers. By explaining this strict idea of female it perhaps further clarifies the ease at which women’s bodies are

regulated. If there is only a very strict idea of what it means to be female, then domination of those bodies is highly specific and easier to dominate. Not only is the act of abortion one that regulates the female body, but it also becomes a way to understand who and what gets to be female in the eye of the State. People assigned female who do not identify as female, cis gendered females who cannot reproduce, who choose not to have children, who give their baby up for adoption, or pursue alternative methods of impregnation are not the conceptions of female the State is regulating when it comes to the issue of abortion. The State seeks other avenues of regulation for the multitude of bodies that do not fit the specificity of the female bodies I am discussing in this project.

In conceptualizing who gets to be female and who is read as female it is also important to consider notions of citizenship and nationalism. Symbolically The State is gendered female, as something that needs to be protected, maintained, and regulated. With this in mind, the need to maintain reproduction, and abortion as illegal, becomes the need to maintain the State as a means of citizenship and as means of protecting the State. Strict limitations on notions of gender serve my papers goal of discussing a particular aspect of reproductive rights and autonomy and it also clarifies the strict notions of gender that are reinforced by the Irish State.

Race also becomes important to the topic of abortion when considering who gets access to legal and medical institutions and how the State regulates projects of race. White supremacy informs all structures of the nation-state, yet Ireland has a unique history with race and whiteness. During colonial rule Irish peoples were pathologized and regulated as non-white (Moore 22). Because of this, after independence there was a development, however contradictory, of Ireland desiring to be seen as Irish above

anything else and the simultaneous valuation of whiteness as a means of claiming Irish citizenship and identity (23). There is a tension that develops around the how Ireland was viewed and is viewed today. Currently Ireland is understood as one of the many Western hegemonic powers. With regards to their colonial history however, Ireland is situated in difference. “Of groups now called ‘Caucasians,’ we must listen more carefully to the historical sources than to the conventions of our own era; we must admit of a system of ‘difference’ by which one might be both white *and* racially distinct from other whites” (Jacobson 6). With this argument in mind we can better understand the distinctions between whiteness used as a tool of difference during colonialism, and whiteness used as a tool of supremacy and citizenship making during the current political modern moment. In this contemporary moment whiteness acts as a tool, a racist tool yet a tool, to classify who is read, understood, and seen as a citizen. This relates directly to abortion because whiteness acts as an indicator of whose bodies (white bodies) should not abort potential life. Contemporary constructions of whiteness act as a way to access groupness and citizenship (legal and social) making it even more difficult to name and deconstruct. The project becomes even more important when we consider that Ireland historically and currently has one of the highest rates of emigration in the entire world (CSO). Historically famine, disease, and war were cited as the primary reason for emigration. Currently however, many younger people ages 18-26 are leaving the country for job opportunities and better living wages (CSO). Emigration creates an even larger sense of urgency with regards to maintaining whiteness as a tool for citizenship.

While concepts of the nuclear family and heterosexuality are not unique to Ireland, Irelands status as a relatively new independent country, its history of colonialism

and current emigration rates renders reproduction in Ireland an urgent matter. In the most literal sense, reproduction becomes central in creating more citizens for the nation-state. Figuratively, reproduction becomes a way to reify gendered roles, understandings of women as vessels for culture, and to maintain the modern nuclear family unit. Colonialism is an inherently violent process and Ireland was no exception when experiencing British rule. Through their status as a colonized state a very distinct Irish culture emerged as a way of resisting British colonialism. When Ireland became a free country these Irish traditions continued on. Reproduction can be understood then not only as a way to maintain the nation-state but also as a way to preserve Irish culture and history. The status of Ireland as a fairly new independent country frames Irish identity as a celebration, and so reproduction becomes the way to produce more citizens that can partake in the maintenance of Irish identity. Whiteness becomes one of the ways this identity is accessed. Gender becomes significant in its relationship to whiteness as it sets a standard for which female bodies should be viewed as reproducers, as mothers. A large part of citizenship relies on conceptions of whiteness, therefore the women who are reproducing citizens of the State should also be white for these are the bodies the State views as desirable.

The Church:

Ireland has maintained a complicated relationship with Catholicism dating back as early as the 14th century (Dillon 26). The Catholic Church has developed and intervened in much of the political landscape in Ireland, both under colonial rule and currently in the postcolonial state. In order to focus the discussion of the Catholic Church and abortion I will highlight certain interventions and positions the Catholic Church has taken over the

years. This in no way is the full scope of the policies and mandates that the Church has participated in over the past thirty years. Rather it demonstrates some of the ways the Church has intervened in the politics and policy of the State. The late 1970's and 1980s marked a period in which abortion debates in Ireland became a more public topic of conversation. Fletcher suggest that "Abortion was debated less on its own terms and more in terms of the consequences that freedom of choice would have for Ireland's inherited religious-cultural traditions" (Fletcher 19). Additionally Mullally argues that "The Catholic Right in Ireland, concerned with preserving the conservative ethos that permeates the Irish Constitution, has portrayed feminism and human rights discourse not only as a threat to Ireland's "pro-life" and "pro-family" traditions, but also as a threat to Ireland's sovereignty" (Mullally 83). From these excerpts alone we can begin to understand that the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland is much more than an articulation of religiosity. Instead, it is an active and engaged political force that becomes quite difficult to understand insomuch that it is a political giant masked as an apolitical entity that when needed can rest on the laurels of moral authority. That is to say, the image presented is that of Ireland's moral compass and it is this strategic position that leverages the Church to a position where it can simultaneously influence policy and abstain from being politically implicated through its ability to invoke Catholic morality.

After years of British colonial rule, Ireland's transition to a free nation in a postcolonial context has been greatly shaped by the desire to outline clear definitions of what the nation is and is not. In addition to State influences, we must also consider the role of the Church in shaping what the Irish nation is and is not. In outlining the categories of Church and State I do not wish to formulate a binary analysis in which

Church and State are positioned as separate, opposite, autonomous institutions. Rather, by attempting to define the particular ways in which these institutions operate in shaping the nation, its citizens, and national values, we can begin to view Church and State as institutions that inform one another and within the context of Ireland, are intrinsically linked. The importance of engaging with the Catholic Church in this paper is to understand specifically the ways in which it has shaped and ultimately limited women's citizenship status and in doing so hindered women's ability to fully realize and access their right to bodily autonomy.

In an attempt to link citizenship and the Church we must consider that "Women's reproductive autonomy was sacrificed for the greater good of a postcolonial political project, and women were defined not by their equal capacity for moral agency, but by their reproductive and sexual functions" (Mullally 83). Mullally suggests that limiting women's reproductive autonomy was foundational in creating the Irish State and in doing so constructed the idea of Irish women as synonymous with their "reproductive and sexual functions." If this is one of the primary ways in which the Catholic Church defines women then it becomes necessary to view all women and girls as expectant mothers. That is to say, that regardless of age or circumstance a female's duty is to reproduce. The Catholic Church then can be seen as an institution that supports and reinscribes definitions of womanhood. Often in discourse today, liberal positions blame solely the Catholic Church for creating Pro-Life stances but with Mullally's scholarship in mind, it seems more apt to understand the Catholic Church as one of many institutions that perpetuates ideas about womanhood as part of a much larger discourse on Irish tradition and values.

Along with specific conceptions of what it means to be a woman the Catholic Church also holds a specific idea surrounding the life of an unborn child. Namely that potential life is more valuable than an already existing human. Perhaps in part this is because a woman's citizenship and therefore her personhood is never fully realized through the limited definition of woman as citizen. Under this conception of womanhood there is no way for a woman to fully access reproductive agency, for her agency is tied up in her ability to reproduce and is in service to the nation. Furthermore the potential threat of ending, as the Catholic Church positions, "unborn life" demands an institutional intervention. The Catholic Church positions itself as central to that intervention and because the Catholic Church is so intrinsically linked the Irish identity and Irish freedom the constant perpetuation of their ideology goes largely unquestioned.

Political & Personal Discussion on Abortion:

I primarily used an unstructured interview approach in which I had a general topic, abortion, but no specific questions.² I tried to keep questions open ended and flexible. I conducted ten interviews over the time I spent in Ireland. These interviews happened through networking and the snowball effect. I began with interviewing friends on their opinions and ideas on abortion and from there was put in contact with activists and women who had actually had abortions. The preliminary discussions I had indicate that a much more extensive collection of interviews is needed. Not only would this result in a wider range of opinions and experiences but it would offer insight into the ways in which Irish women navigate the State and the Church.

² See methods section.

Throughout my time in Ireland I worked with political organizers in Dublin who are working on measures to legalize abortion. These rallies and community action meetings led to many fruitful conversations and insights around abortion on a social and political level. One pattern that emerged throughout my discussions and organizing is that term abortion is rarely used. Instead, many women refer to abortion as “it,” “that procedure,” or “the process.” The constant use of nondescript language throughout discussions highlight an effort, conscious or otherwise, to distance and separate from the negative connotations that the word abortion holds for many. On an individual level, this may act as a distancing mechanism in order to separate ones self and ones conception of morality from the act of getting an abortion. This distancing can also be understood as a political tactic in order to invite more people to discuss women’s rights generally and abortion specifically. Much of the political organizing that is being done uses phrases like “repeal the 8th” instead of “legalize abortion.” This political strategy indicates that even at the current moment abortion is still imbued with negative connotations and is a highly charged term.

Many of the discussions I had with women revolved around their male partners, marriage, and family. The rhetorical distancing that political movements have taken up is also mirrored on an individual level. Individuals felt that if they could distance themselves from their own abortion experiences then they could rewrite their own narratives as if their abortion experience didn’t happen. Dreams of having a family also acted as a way to justify an abortion they felt way wrong or immoral. The nuclear family and heterosexuality became the answers to mending the abortion experience, which in their minds was wrong or sinful.

Imbedded in the act of reproduction are the assumptions that biological reproduction is superior, that women can reproduce and therefore they should, and most importantly, that all women should want to reproduce. On an institutional level, a female citizen choosing not to reproduce disrupts the State. The State attempts to regulate the individual through the social institutions of family and marriage. The institution of marriage is rewarded to heterosexual couples as a means of reaffirming certain religious values of what marriage should be, between a heterosexual man and a heterosexual woman, and certain state values of marriage, a marriage as a means for reproduction.

Reproduction is of the utmost importance to the State because it is the primary means of creating Irish citizens and therefore maintaining Irish identity. This also provides an explanation for why heterosexuality is such an important project to the State, it regulates and rewards those who are able to reproduce on their own and acts as a primary way to continue the nation-state. Marriage and reproduction only become structures that are valuable to the State if they mirror what the State views as an ideal citizen. In Ireland this is someone who is white, legally Irish, heterosexual and can reproduce. In other words, heterosexuality becomes understood as natural and normal as a means to incentivize reproduction. Reproduction is only valuable to the State if the life is Irish and therefore can contribute legally and socially to Irish identity. Race and whiteness become important because it is constructed and understood as inextricable from Irish identity.

Heterosexuality is key to the project of biological reproduction, which is central to the institution of the State because the population cannot just be maintained it must grow. Morality and justice and nature and culture are binary frameworks that are

sustained by their ability to regulate, to dominate. The nuclear family and the institution of marriage are two projects deeply embedded in Ireland's political understanding of good and just citizens. Children and family are projects that are only viewed as good if it happens within the strict boundaries of a monogamous marriage. The definition of marriage has recently expanded but still within the strict boundaries of homonormativity and monogamy, making gay marriage a project aligned with the State. The institution of marriage acts as a way to regulate bodies. Even though gay marriage is legal, heterosexual marriage is still upheld as the superior union because of the presumption that partners will be able to reproduce. The State views heterosexual marriage as natural (nature) normal (culture) and good (moral). Reproduction is valuable to the State because it acts as a way to produce more citizens and enforces the naturalness of reproduction in nature. Marriage and reproduction act as reclamation projects, a reclaiming of heterosexuality, the nuclear family, and gender specific roles.

In many of the conversations I had, there was a tendency to suggest that abortion was not a woman's right but rather a human right. By framing it in such a way the conversation moved from a private matter to a public matter. Abortion becomes de-gendered which disregards the very specific ways the State regulates female bodies. In addition if abortion is made a public issue instead of a private matter State intervention becomes necessary. When other experiences with oppression are linked or made synonymous with abortion, it is more likely to be conceptualized as a human right. In linking other oppressions to a women's inability to access bodily autonomy and a safe abortion women become erased from the larger political discussion. This de-gendering redirects the framing of abortion as a human right. This makes it much easier for the State

to intervene because it concerns the general public and *all* citizens. Women's bodies become part of a political and public economy that the State can regulate. This violent yet reoccurring theme of using women's bodies in public discourse is normalized and echoes the logic of domination. By making abortion a human rights matter, the State can more easily introduce conversations around marriage, citizenship, values, and morality. By doing so it reinforces the idea that this is a national conversation not a conversation about a women's bodily autonomy. Furthermore, a primary theme that emerged from discussion is that it would still be better if abortion did not exist. Once again this removes the idea that women should be able to have access and control over their own reproductive organs, over their own bodies. This desire to rid abortion from anyone's life experiences echoes respectability politics in which women should and must act a certain way under patriarchal society. In addition, it offers a disturbing glance at futurities, ones where conceptions of morality, citizenship and goodness are based off of heterosexist patriarchal standards.

Irish tradition, culture, and identity were also carted out as logic to justify the illegalization of abortion in Ireland. Classmates and younger students commented on the need for their parents and grandparents to maintain tradition. Abortion then becomes a violation of tradition and values. If abortion can be understood as a violation of religious ideas and cultural values then it is not simply wrong on an individual level or even a state level, instead it transcends and violates all of Irish tradition. This is where the connections between abortion, Irish identity, and Irish citizenship come together and interlock in the project to regulate women's bodies. Once tradition is naturalized it goes unquestioned and the assumption is that it has always been and always will be, it is the

essence of all that is Irish, of Irish identity. And if tradition can be linked directly to notions of citizenship and identity then a violation of tradition is also a violation of citizenship.

If we can understand the Catholic Church as one of the primary pillars of Irish identity and Irish culture it becomes reasonable to invoke the argument of tradition in understanding why abortion continues to be illegal. Ireland has a fairly small population of living residents who are Irish citizens due to large numbers of emigration. Because of this, often there is an allegiance to culture and identity that is based off of religiosity. The Catholic Church is one of the primary forces that has and continues to shape Irish identity. At least within the Southern part of Ireland, Catholicism and Irish identity are synonymous. In suggesting that Irish identity is inextricably linked to Catholicism it becomes clear that the Catholic church doesn't even need to be named in a discussion around abortion. The church is so engrained in the social fabric of what it means to be Irish that identity, tradition, and culture become the elements that are invoked as an explanation for why abortion is illegal. In cases where the Catholic Church does publicly speak out it can be understood as for the greater good of the nation-state and purity of tradition. Tradition is often constructed as an apolitical and dehistoricized notion of culture that has always been and will always be. What this ideological construction allows is the idea that without Irish tradition there cannot be Irish identity and without Irish identity the nation-state in its current conception cannot exist.

In naturalizing notions of Irish tradition, the Church becomes a way to reinforce tradition and therefore uphold Irish identity. The Catholic Church helps to naturalize the social and the political climate, which is how it becomes an invisible entity. What God

and religion are in the metaphorical realm, tradition is in the everyday realm. There is no separation of Church and State in Irish tradition and Irish identity, because of this women who attempt to advocate for themselves, for abortion rights or for women's rights more broadly are confronted with the heavy realization that in the formulaic understanding of preserving the nation's freedom, they are not even considered part of the conversation because they are vehicles for the State and the church. The intertwined relationship of church and State make it to where the church can intervene in the public space by being both social and political and is justified in regulating women's bodies because it is no longer a private matter but a public moral too. The Catholic Church does not serve simply as an institution that promotes religiosity and morality but it becomes a political actor in policing women's bodies and regulating their identity and ability to access autonomy on an individual level and also on a moral level through its religiosity.

Conclusion:

Through the individual (interviews), the institutional (church and state) and the symbolic (justice and morality) it becomes clear that the need to regulate women's bodies is more complicated than Catholic tradition. Rather, the modern nation-state benefits from the regulation of women's bodies as this site of regulation acts as an entry point for other regulatory projects around gender, sexuality, and race. Historical legacies of colonialism and past and present emigration rates position Ireland as a nation-state in a unique position, in a situation where the need to reclaim and maintain Irish identity and culture is vital to the project of citizenship.

Abortion is often framed in simplistic terms: good/bad, right/wrong, immoral/just, yet this project has highlighted the complexity of social and political narratives at play.

This project helps us to understand the many ways the nation-state utilizes women's bodies to maintain a modern postcolonial positioning. Political organizers are continuing to work toward legalizing abortion in Ireland; in moving this research forward it is imperative to consider how the legalization of abortion, if it were to pass, would change the modern nation-state. On the one hand many more women would live and have more control over their bodies. Socially, politically, and theoretically however, that nation-state will continue to find other modes of female bodily regulation. For we know that women's bodies are integral to modern nation-states ability to maintain and control other projects of citizenship.

Works Cited:

- Central Statistics Office (CSO). 26. Aug. 2014.
<<http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications.>>
- Connolly, Linda. "The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution." Sociology PhD. National University of Ireland Maynooth, 1997. Web.
- Culp-Ressler, Tara. "Against Her Family's Wishes, Ireland Forces Brain-Dead Pregnant Woman To Stay On Life Support." *ThinkProgress*. Web.
- Fletcher, Ruth Post-colonial Fragments: Representations of Abortion in Irish Law and Politics, 28 J. L. & SOCIETY 568, 574 (2001).
- Foster, Robert Fitzroy. *Modern Ireland, 1600-1972*. Penguin (Non-Classics), 1989.
- Foucault, Michel. *Ethics, Subjectivity and Truth: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984 (Vol. 1)*. New York: The New Press, 1997. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. 1980 ed. New York: Random House Inc, 1976. Print.
- Francome, Colin. "Abortion in Ireland." *BMJ* 305.6851 (1992): 436-476.
- Hearne, John. "Bunreacht na hÉireann, Constitution of Ireland." 2012: Print.
- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. "The Practice of Feminist In-Depth Interviewing." *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (2007): 1-16.
- Gomperts, Rebecca. "Women on Waves." *Women on Waves*. Web.
- Jacobson, Matthew Frye. *Whiteness of a different color*. Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Leavy, Patricia L. "The Practice of Feminist Oral History and Focus Group Interviews." *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer* (2007): 1-16.
- Lentin, Ronit. "Strangers and Strollers: Feminist Notes on Researching Migrant M/others." *Women's Studies International Forum* 27.4 (2004): 301-314. Print.
- Martin, Angela K. "Transnationalism, Bodies and Abortion in Late Twentieth-Century Ireland." *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*. 2002nd ed. Lane, London UK: Routledge. 65-86. Web.
- Moore, Robert. "Race Relations in the Six Counties: Colonialism, Industrialization, and Stratification in Ireland." *Race & Class* 14.1 (1972): 21-42.

- Mullaly, Siobhn. "Debating Reproductive Rights in Ireland." *Human Rights Quarterly* 1.27 (2005): 78–104. Web.
- Ortner, Sherry B. "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" *Feminist Studies* 1.2 (1972): 5–31. Print.
- "RT News." *RT News*. Web.
- Sawicki, Jana. *Disciplining Foucault: Feminism, Power, and the Body*. 1991st ed. New York, NY: Routledge , 1991. Print.
- Scott, Joan W. "Deconstructing Equality-Versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism." *Feminist Studies* 14.1 (1988): 33–50. Print.
- Smyth, Lisa. "Feminism and Abortion Politics: Choice, Rights, and Reproductive Freedom." *Women's Studies International Forum*. 25.3 (2002): 335–345. Web.
- Townshend, Charles. *Political violence in Ireland: government and resistance since 1848*. Oxford, OX: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Warren, Karen. *Ecofeminist Philosophy: A Western Perspective on What It Is and Why It Matters*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Inc, 2000. Print.
- United Nations. "World Abortion Policies 2013." 2013.