

Cristina Díaz Pérez

Lindsey Earner-Byrne/Diane Urquhart, 2019: *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920–2018*. London: Palgrave Pivot. 158 pages. 51.99 Euro

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On 25<sup>th</sup> May 2018 the Republic of Ireland voted ‘yes’ to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment which had criminalized abortion in the nation since 1983. This was a further step towards enhancing the rights of Irish women. Unluckily, Northern Ireland is still waiting to come next. This is the starting point of the creation of *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920–2018*. Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart argue that the history of abortion in Ireland should be examined heeding the similarities and differences of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Assessing previous works as well as contradicting underlying assumptions, the authors clearly and successfully aim at establishing a complete diachronic and synchronic analysis of the personal, social and political implications of abortion in Ireland and Britain, notably for Irish women of both jurisdictions.

The volume provides a detailed chronology of the main events that have shaped the understanding of the sexual and reproductive rights of Irish women over the last century before the eight chapters that make up the monography. Taking up the task of challenging misconceptions, the first two chapters outline how politics, religion and medicine have governed decisions concerning sexuality and birth control in the nations of Ireland. They share a conservative outlook converted into moral intolerance that have impacted on the wellbeing and autonomy of women. Despite this convergence, the authors signal that the dynamics of facing reality have been antagonistic in each jurisdiction. The Republic of Ireland has been fortunate in providing the grounds for discussion, whereas Northern Ireland has not been as successful.

The third and fourth chapters consider the situation concerning reproductive rights prior to 1967, when Britain made abortion legal, and the subsequent years. They move directly from therapeutic and illegal abortions to contraceptive methods in Ireland. The authors cunningly point towards the state of defencelessness that women face regarding their bodies and the lack of local networks to solve the situations prompted by the oppressive and recalcitrant Irish societies. Nonetheless, these are also the years of taking public action and achieving minor goals such as reducing the stigma towards contraception.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the volume is the capacity to place geography as the centre of the problem. “Pro-life States of Mind, 1967–2000s” indicates that abortion is exported to Britain after 1967. Women travel mostly to Liverpool to terminate their pregnancies. Travelling is available for (most) women despite its risks and dangers, so there was no impact on policymaking as a result of the geographical availability of Britain. Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart signal that each jurisdiction takes a different stance towards this circumstance. Northern Ireland disguises abortion as an infrequent problem while the Republic of Ireland establishes the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment because Catholic morality is under threat due to family planning, but also because of abortion.

This political and social framework is translated into “minimal official consideration of how abortion migration might impact, negatively or otherwise, on women and their health” (p. 97). The volume focuses on how women’s needs are continuously dismissed, journeys even became more dangerous due to even less knowledge and more restrictions.

Trauma is also examined in relation to the travelling and abortive experience. This volume, influenced by Gender Studies and Affect Theory, explores how the journey across the sea to end a pregnancy as well as women’s limited time while in Britain determines the experience. Based on trauma and the secrecy of these events, the authors explain how talking and sharing these stories led to the outcome of the campaign for repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in the Republic of Ireland. Irish people had been talking about abortion since 1983 in opposition to Northern Ireland. This becomes one of the main conclusions of the volume to understand the current unequal situation of the two locations. Reassessing the existing considerations of the question of the Irish abortion, the book suggests that the focus is now on Northern Ireland.

Departing from history, *The Irish Abortion Journey, 1920–2018* holds a potential for intersectionality. The Irish history of political revolution seems to be confronted in this volume with its lack of battling for sexual and reproductive rights. The authors make an outstanding connection between the history and politics of the last hundred years and the social and economic reality of women and Irish life on both sides of the frontier. Adding feminism as the core of the debate, they also pay a debt to many women. The richness of their debate must be extolled because it will serve as the basis for subsequent analysis. Lindsey Earner-Byrne and Diane Urquhart foster the reader’s curiosity towards an academic work and a social question. They superbly exceed their initial premises of analysing the historical context “to our understanding of the Irish abortion journey” (p. 138) while exposing the individual valuable accounts and stories of many women which changed the path of the journeys.

## Author’s details

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