

‘They go to England to preserve their Secret’: The emigration and assistance of the Irish unmarried mother in Britain 1926-1952

Lorraine Grimes

Hundreds of Irish Catholic unmarried mothers go to England every year where they have little difficulty in finding non-Catholic adopters for their babies. The temptation for them to accept this easy means of disposing of their babies is very great and many, unfortunately, succumb to it.¹

Ireland during the period of 1926 to 1957 remained a country where contraceptives were illegal, adoption was illegal, abortion was illegal, there was no financial assistance for unmarried mothers, institutionalisation was the only form of social care, and guilt and shame were associated with sex outside marriage. Therefore many Irish unmarried mothers were left with little choice but to emigrate. With the legalisation of adoption in Britain in 1926, emigration to Britain provided an escape for the Irish pregnant girl, who could have her child adopted there and return home without anyone knowing the real reason for her departure. Many young women who found themselves pregnant attempted to escape the humiliation from their local community in Ireland. In an annual report from the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland adoptive services which could be sought in England were described as an 'easy means of disposing'² of children of Irish unmarried mothers. Fr. Cecil Barrett wrote to Archbishop McQuaid stating that 'they [Irish unmarried

¹Dublin, Dublin Diocesan Archive, John Charles McQuaid Papers, AB8/b/xxix/22/5/32, Catholic Social and Protection Society, Annual Report 1948.

² Ibid.

mothers] go to England to preserve their secret'.³ This article will investigate philanthropic, religious and state organisations which assisted Irish unmarried mothers in Britain. Firstly, this article will examine the reaction of the Irish Catholic clergy to the emigration of these women, incorporating the attitudes of the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland and the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau as well as the stigma associated with the mother and baby homes in Ireland. It will then investigate the assistance these unmarried mothers received in Britain focusing on Liverpool and the supports and accommodation available there. It will incorporate the reaction of British welfare organisations to these emigrants, particularly the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and her Child in London through critical analysis of personal cases dealt with by the Council. This article will incorporate letters from unmarried mothers to the National Council in London. These letters will give the reader an insight into the experiences of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain. This article argues that despite efforts to assist these women, repatriation was seen as the only solution to the problem of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain.

Emigration and Moral Panic in Ireland

Jennifer Redmond has noted that 'sexual behaviour and its regulation became a national obsession in the post-independence era in an effort to prove decency, respectability and capability in governing Ireland as an independent nation.'⁴ The early years of the Irish Free State experienced what historians are now referring to as 'a moral panic'.⁵ Historians have researched Ireland's moral welfare as linked with the morality of the newly established Free State.⁶

³John Charles McQuaid Papers, Adoption File, LII/A/40/2/1, Letter to Archbishop McQuaid from Fr. Cecil Barrett, 11 January 1960.

⁴Jennifer Redmond, "The Politics of Emigrant Bodies: Irish Women's Sexual Practise in Question", in *Sexual Politics in Modern Ireland* ed. By Jennifer Redmond and others (Sallins, Irish Academic Press, 2015) pp. 73-89 (p.73).

⁵ Jennifer Redmond, "The Politics of Emigrant Bodies", in *Sexual Politics in Modern Ireland*, ed. By Redmond, pp. 73-89, Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*, (London, Profile Books, 2009).

⁶See Maria Luddy, 'Moral rescue and unmarried mothers in Ireland in the 1920s', *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 30, 6, 2001, pp. 797-817, Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin: Sex and Society in Modern Ireland*. London: Profile Books, 2009, Jennifer Redmond, Sonja Tiernan, Sandra McAvoy and Mary McAuliffe, *Sexual Politics in Modern Irish History*, Dublin, Irish Academic

Emigration, and particularly female emigration, from Ireland to Britain rose significantly during the 1930s. Irish Catholic organisations were particularly concerned with the large number of young Irish females emigrating to Britain for employment. Sermons from the Irish Catholic church emphasised the Irish innocent girl who is an 'easy prey' and becomes victim of the 'smooth-tongued, well-dressed stranger' in large cities in Britain.⁷ It was believed that high illegitimacy rates and high numbers of unmarried mothers would damage the image of Catholicism and respectability of the Irish Free State. The Catholic Church became concerned with the welfare of the large number of Irish emigrants and in 1942, "The Emigrants Section" of the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau was established to deal with problems affecting the welfare of Catholic emigrants in Britain.⁸ This was controlled by the Archbishop, John Charles McQuaid, who corresponded frequently with societies assisting Irish emigrants in Britain. Clergy in London and Liverpool reported on the numbers of Irish immigrants in the parish, places of suitable accommodation and employment for them and reported on Irish centres in the locality. However the fear of young girls 'getting into difficulty' shortly after arriving in Britain became a great cause of concern for the Irish Catholic Church and also for social welfare societies in Britain.⁹ The repeated emphasis on girls 'falling' or 'getting into difficulty' shortly after arriving in Britain reiterated this fear of immorality in Britain and encouraged young Irish women not to go abroad.

Another organisation which was particularly apprehensive about the emigration of Irish unmarried mothers to Britain was the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland.¹⁰ Founded in 1913, their duty was to 'save Catholic children's souls from the evils of proselytism'.¹¹ The society prioritised religious welfare over that of physical welfare. Catholic children were taken from Protestant families and were placed in a Catholic institution or placed in Catholic

Press, 2015. Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press, 1922-37: Embodying the Nation*, Mellen Press, New York, 2002, **Maryann Valiulis, *Gender and Power in Irish History*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 2008.**

⁷McQuaid papers, Letter from Henry Gray to Fr. Mangan, 30 March 1954.

⁸McQuaid Papers, Catholic Social Welfare Bureau Emigrants Section.

⁹ This phrase was often used in reference to pregnancy in DDA files.

¹⁰The Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland will be abbreviated to the CPRSI for this article.

¹¹CPRSI, Annual Report, 1949, McQuaid papers, DDA, p.31.

foster care. The large Protestant population in Britain was of great concern to the CPRSI who believed that the soul of the Catholic child would be in great danger if the child was adopted by a Protestant family. The CPRSI stated that many Irish unmarried mothers who emigrated from Ireland wanted to place their children with English adoptive parents rather than putting them in institutionalised care.¹² The CPRSI aimed at avoiding adoption of Irish Catholic children in Britain to Protestant families and where possible, had them adopted by Catholic families or placed in a Catholic institution. Diarmid Ferriter has stated the irony on the emphasis of the family under the Irish constitution while institutionalisation of children was endorsed over adoption.

It was ironic that a society which placed such a premium on the family and the home environment was still prepared to incarnate children in institutions where childhood was all but non-existent, while legal adoption continued to be resisted on the grounds that it would threaten the religious welfare of children.¹³

Paul Michael Garrett has argued that the threat of incarceration in a mother and baby home where an illegitimate child could be adopted in America without consent of the mother was the main reason why hundreds of unmarried mothers emigrated to Britain.¹⁴ On admission into an Irish mother and baby home, a two year period must be served before leaving, unless payment of £100 was given to the home. James Smith has argued that the institutionalisation of women in Irish mother and baby homes and Magdalene asylums was an 'architecture of containment' by the Catholic Church to contain all those considered 'unvirtuous' by the Church.¹⁵ Maria Luddy states that women entered the homes voluntarily but once entered were subject to the strict and harsh discipline as well as limitations to their freedom. The idea of these homes was that through total self-abnegation and the suppression of their [the inhabitants] own desires this would lead to

¹² CPRSI, Annual Report, 1949, McQuaid papers, DDA, p.31.

¹³ Ferriter, Diarmaid, *The Transformation of Ireland*, (London, Profile Books, 2004) p. 392.

¹⁴ Paul Michael Garrett, "Unmarried Mothers in the Republic of Ireland", *Journal Of Social Work*, 2016.

¹⁵ James Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007).

these women's repentance.¹⁶ The CPRSI stated that 'we have little doubt that many of the girls would never willingly go to England, or would willingly return, if the term to be spent in the Special Homes here was shortened.'¹⁷ If mothers were free to leave whenever they wished, the numbers emigrating to Britain may not have been as high. In Britain each home was individually run and there were no length of stay restrictions. The majority of homes had a minimum six month stay after birth. Reverend Mother General of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters and Mother Margaret, Superiors, of Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe, wrote to the Department of Local Government and Public Health suggesting that the time in the homes be shortened. She stated that:

She disagreed with this period [of two years]. The Franciscan Missionary Sisters felt that it was much preferable to retain the mothers for only about three months after the birth of the baby. Their aim was to get these persons back to normal existence and a normal occupation as quickly as could be arranged.¹⁸

As the Mother Superior of a large maternity hospital in the west of Ireland and a member of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters, Sister Margaret appealed to the department to change the two year rule. However no efforts were implemented by the department to shorten the length of stay in the homes.

The media and the Church both outlined the dangers of travel. Louise Ryan has examined the emigration of Irish women to Britain during the 1930s and the reaction of the Irish media to this emigration. She argues that the Irish media focused on negative cases of Irish emigrants in Britain in order to encourage Irish women to stay at home. Although the newspapers gave voice to a range of opinions and perspectives on emigration these were frequently underpinned by issues of nation building, fears about depopulation, and the need to

¹⁶ Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Rescue Work in Nineteenth Century Ireland*, in *Women Surviving*, ed. By Maria Luddy and others (Dublin, Poolbeg, 1990) p.75

¹⁷McQuaid Papers, CPSRI, Annual Report 1949, p. 2-3.

¹⁸ Department of Health and Children, Repatriation Papers,A124/25/22 E25Discussion with Minister for Health, 31 January 1948.

maintain a unique national identity.¹⁹ Ryan has also critically analysed the articles of Gertrude Gaffney entitled 'Irish Girl Emigrants' in the *Irish Independent* as partially hysterical and hyperbolic. Gaffney researched Irish emigrants in Britain in the 1930s and found that Irish emigrants were admitted in 'every shelter for the destitute, in every maternity hospital, in every home for unmarried mothers, or worse still in the common lodging houses in certain parts of the great cities'.²⁰ Gaffney appears to show genuine concern for the welfare of emigrants abroad and criticises conditions in Ireland. Jennifer Redmond has stated that these articles 'tend to examine the worst case scenarios of "sinful singleness."²¹ Ryan has depicted these female emigrants as symbols representing the new Free State in Britain. The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child was an organisation which assisted unmarried mothers in London and will be discussed in detail later in this article. This organisation outlined two different types of Irish unmarried mothers which they encountered:

There are two classes of cases which present particular difficulty; one is the girl who runs away from Ireland to hide in England or Scotland, trusting that she may be able to return home without the child, and the other is the girl in employment here who gets into trouble either in the place of her employment or, as commonly happens, whilst on holiday in Ireland.²²

Social welfare societies and religious organisations in Britain developed a negative image of Irish female emigrants and Irish unmarried mothers. One city in particular experienced a large amount of Irish female emigrants: Liverpool.

The Irish Unmarried Mother in Liverpool

¹⁹ Ryan, Louise, Sexualising Emigration: Discourses of Irish Female Emigration in the 1930s, *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25(2002) pp.51-65 p. 52.

²⁰ Gaffney, Gertrude, "Irish girl emigrants", *Irish Independent*, December 7, 1936, p. 5.

²¹ Redmond, Jennifer, "Sinful Singleness? Exploring the Discourses on Irish Single Women's Emigration to England, 1922-1948", *Women's History Review*, 17 (2008) p. 467.

²² London School of Economics, Women's Library, 5OPF/10/1 Box 110, National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Annual Report 1926.

Fr. Henry Grey, the Honorary Secretary of the Catholic Social Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland, stated that:

It is true and most disturbing, that girls of 16 or 17 years of age are going across to England with at most a few shillings in their pockets and neither employment nor relatives to whom to go... I would say that quite a few Irish girls who had reasonable home backgrounds in this country are to be found living in the most degraded conditions in Liverpool lodgings frequented by coloured seamen, etc.²³

The Liverpool Vigilance Association was set up in 1908 to protect the interests of women, girls and children travelling through the port and city and gave counsel and advice to travellers in difficulty. It was set up as a branch of the National Vigilance Association founded in 1885 in London as an organisation to campaign against white slave traffic and the exploitation of women from 'moral dangers' such as prostitution, alcohol, drugs or unmarried motherhood. The minutes of the Irish Girls Sub-Committee of the British Vigilance Association stated that:

The type of help given to the girls in addition to escorting or finding accommodation had been contacting employers, making telephone calls, changing money, finding luggage, directing to special addresses, monetary assistance in some cases information about the church and clubs.²⁴

Their assistance was mainly administrative however their work was vital to the assistance of Irish female emigrants. Due to the large number of Irish emigrating to Liverpool, the societies in Liverpool forged closer links with other associations doing the same kind of work in Dublin.²⁵ Fr. Henry Grey of the CPRSI corresponded frequently with societies in Liverpool and stated that the Liverpool Vigilance Association is the body 'which does most excellent work. It works in very close harmony with the local Catholic organisations in Liverpool

²³McQuaid papers, Letter from Henry Gray to Fr. Mangan, 30 March 1954.

²⁴Liverpool Vigilance Association Papers, Merseyside Records Office, VIG4/1.

²⁵ Liverpool Vigilance Association Papers, Merseyside Records Office, 326/VIG/6, The Travellers Friend: Issue no. 11, January 1953.

and has a working arrangement with us [CPRSI] under which they sent us names and both Irish and English addresses of the girls they meet.²⁶ In 1921, the Liverpool Vigilance Association became the Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International White Slave Traffic in Women and Children,²⁷ and came to include all persons, not just women and children. The association also extended its facilities to take an increasing concern over social welfare, with particular reference to child assault, unemployment and moral laxity. Between 1922 and 1927, of the 3,420 women the Liverpool Society helped at its ports, 2,292 were Irish.²⁸ From 1926 to 1930, the Liverpool Society met 1,947 Irish expectant mothers at the docks and at Lime Street Station, Liverpool,²⁹ over a period of four years nearly 2,000 Irish unmarried mothers emigrated and sought assistance in Liverpool. The Travellers Aid Society, established in Liverpool in 1898, was set up to aid female passengers arriving at ports and railway stations. Accredited station workers of the Society included representatives from the Girls' Friendly Society, the National Vigilance Association, The Reformatory and Refuge Union as well as individual members. In May 1938 the Travellers Aid Society had helped 1,189 women 1,125 of these were of Irish nationality.³⁰ The Secretary of the Liverpool Vigilance Association stated that a large amount of Irish girls arrived 'without money, without prospective work and without references. These girls had to be housed and kept at this State's expense until the girls found employment or some other means of obtaining money to return home.'³¹ For example, the Liverpool Vigilance Association reported one Irish girl who arrived in Liverpool with a baby and possessed only five shillings.³² The fact that this young girl possessed limited financial resources was not uncommon for many emigrants arriving in Liverpool at this time. Irish agencies were blamed for

²⁶McQuaid papers, Letter from Henry Gray to Fr. Mangan, 30 March 1954.

²⁷ The Liverpool Society for the Prevention of International White Slave Traffic in Women and Children will be abbreviated to the Liverpool Society in this article.

²⁸Dublin, Dublin Diocesan Archives, Archbishop Byrne Papers, Lay Organisation (2),LII/A Letter from Rev. Craven, Crusade of Rescue London to Mrs Crofts, Department of Local Government and Public Health, c.1929.

²⁹ Ibid, p.28.

³⁰Liverpool, Merseyside Records Office, Liverpool Vigilance Association Papers, VIG/1/1, Travellers Aid Society: Minutes of 173rd Executive Committee Meeting, 9 May 1938.

³¹LVA papers, VIG 326/1/3(1) Report on the British Vigilance Association, March – April 1953.

³² Liverpool Vigilance Association papers, The Travellers Friend: Issue No. 14, October 1953.

sending young Irish girls over to Britain with no money, providing them with only the price of a ticket and the details of the local charitable organisations once they landed in Britain. A number of homes and hostels were available for Irish female emigrants. The Liverpool House of Help and Hostel for Women and Girls, offered publically provided accommodation for women with no other alternative. St. Hilda's Hostel, was a hostel for unmarried mothers and was run by the Liverpool Diocesan Board of Moral Welfare. The hostel provided a home for the mother and baby until the child reached eighteen months old.³³ There was also St. Monica's Home which offered before and after care for pregnant girls and mothers. Paul Michael Garrett has described Ireland's largest mother and baby home as Britain and in particular, London.³⁴

The Irish Unmarried Mother in London

On 25 May 1939 Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster, London, wrote to the Tasoiseach, Éamonn de Valera, stating that:

There are, alas, not a few who come to England with the deliberate intention of concealing from their families and friends the shame of an illegitimate pregnancy. It would appear that my secretary for Social work is annually made aware of the presence in Westminster (alone) of nearly 100 cases of single girls who have become pregnant in Eire and whose purpose is to give birth to their child in one of our public assistance hospitals, intending to leave the child in England as a charge upon the generosity of English Catholics.³⁵

Hinsley had also written to the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau noting that the Westminster Office for Social Work for Women and Girls had received 538 applications from unmarried mothers, 327 of which were Irish, 70 of which had admitted conception in Ireland and only 12

³³ London, London Metropolitan Archives, A/LWC/326.

³⁴ Paul Michael Garrett, "Unmarried Mothers in the Republic of Ireland", *Journal of Social Work*, 2016.

³⁵ Dublin, Department of Health and Children, Clandillon Papers, 22/4/F32, Letter from Archbishop of Westminster Cardinal Hinsley to Éamonn de Valera: Report prepared by Moral Welfare work for Irish women and Girls in Westminster, 25 May 1939.

consented to return to Ireland.³⁶ The Cardinal pressed for the repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers and their children and pressed the Irish government to provide a weekly maintenance for each of the mothers who were presently in an English mother and baby home. The Crusade of Rescue was also based in London and funded by the Catholic clergy. It was reported in 1938 that 25 percent of the children in their care were Irish. There were 163 Irish illegitimate children in their care out of a total of 693. 32 of these mothers had admitted conception in Ireland. They reported that the total cost of these 163 children was £21,057.11.6³⁷. There were a number of religious welfare organisations which assisted Irish unmarried mothers in London. Numbers of Irish mothers in English rescue homes were noted by the Cardinal and Irish societies were informed regularly of these numbers.

A governmental organisation, the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child³⁸ was founded in London in 1918. The aim of the Council was to 'help unmarried mothers to rebuild their own lives, and encourage the fathers of illegitimate children to face their responsibilities, to do this, many ask us to find suitable employment, and also decent accommodation in which to bring up their children.'³⁹ The Council dealt with women on a case by case basis and received many letters from both British and Irish women seeking assistance. The Council emphasised the problem of the Irish emigrant arriving in Britain and seeking accommodation and assistance. These women were encouraged by the Council to get in touch with agencies in Ireland. A letter from an Irish girl ran as follows:

I am unmarried and the doctor has informed me I am pregnant. I wish to enlist your aid to see if you can assist me in my trouble... You will see the sad plight I am in, there is only my father and myself as my mother is dead, so I dare not let my father know my condition. You will please write to me privately and give me your advice. I enclose stamped addressed envelope for your reply as I am afraid of my father

³⁶ McQuaid Papers, Emigrants Welfare box 1, Report of the Crusade of Rescue, 1938.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ The National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child may be abbreviated to as the Council or the National Council for the remainder of this article.

³⁹London, London School of Economics: Women's Library, 5OPF/10/A/1National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, 5OPF/10/A/1.

knowing. Could you please tell me of any home or institution in Liverpool which I could go to privately during my trouble?⁴⁰

Secrecy was a common concern for many unmarried mothers, not only those from Ireland, unmarried mothers in Britain also wished to keep their pregnancy secret and have their child put up for adoption so they could continue with their employment as before. Tanya Evans and Pat Thane have examined the secrecy surrounding unmarried motherhood in Britain and suggest that the grandmother raising the grandchild as her own was quite common while the birth mother played the role of an older sister. In 1945 a study on 11 counties and 16 boroughs showed that 59 per cent of children with unmarried parents lived at home with their grandparents.⁴¹ Although these mothers were urged to seek assistance in their own country, information was usually given on homes and institutions available if requested.

Another letter received by the National Council from an Irish girl revealed that her parents were unsupportive and therefore adoption or institutionalisation was unavoidable.

I am writing to ask if you could help me as I am expecting my baby any time early this month of June and I am unable to keep it or take it home. My parents want me back home but I cannot take the baby, could you please help me. I will be willing to give it up and finish with it and leave it entirely with you. I am a Catholic and from Ireland.⁴²

These children were not unwanted necessarily by their mother, but by extended family and society. In the first year of its introduction in Britain, the 1926 Adoption Act showed that 3,548 adoption orders had been made that year.⁴³ Financial difficulty affected the majority of unmarried mothers. Mothers who had their children adopted usually

⁴⁰National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, 5OPF/10/1 Box 110, Annual Report 1926.

⁴¹ Sheila Ferguson and Hilde Fitzgerald, *Studies in the Social Services*, (London, H.M. Stationary Office, 1954) p. 132-3.

⁴² National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Annual Report 1926.

⁴³Pat Thane and Tanya Evans, *Sinners? Scroungers? Saints?: Unmarried Motherhood in Twentieth Century England*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012) p. 45,

did so reluctantly because they were unable to support themselves and the child. If there had been some outdoor relief provided for unmarried mothers, the adoption figures may not have been as high. One case from an Irish girl, from county Kildare, confirmed:

I am writing to know if you can help me. I am unmarried and about to become a mother in May. I wonder do you know of any maternity home that I can go to in London or any home that I can send my child to as I cannot afford to keep it.⁴⁴

The National Council provided many Irish women with suitable accommodation as well as advice and information on affiliation orders, adoption rights, fostering and children's homes. However the Council's opinion of Irish mothers was a rather negative one:

Irish mothers in England and those who write from Ireland begging for accommodation for their confinement over here, give work to the Individual Case Department and to many Roman Catholic Committees. Irish girls frequently contend in the office that other girls have come over for the birth of a baby and gone back leaving the child here...the Committee was recently consulted about a little boy aged 4 and a half years whose mother had returned to Ireland soon after his birth, leaving him in a Home: she had never seen him since and now refused to have him in Ireland.⁴⁵

The aim of the National Council was to keep mother and child together and did not want to become an association where mothers could leave their children and have them adopted, fostered out or institutionalised. Each of these was regarded only as a last resort if all else failed. Efforts were made with the Irish government to reduce the numbers of Irish unmarried mothers emigrating to Britain and repatriation was enforced by the National Council.

[Irish]Girls arrive in the latest stages of pregnancy and expect to find shelter and attention, as well as to be relieved of the child. It is a constant question as to where commonsense and justice to English taxpayers and

⁴⁴ National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Annual Report 1926.

⁴⁵ National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Annual Report 1931.

subscribers begin...every step should be taken to send back to Ireland unmarried mothers who come over for the birth of an unexpected child, and to discourage their arrival in every possible way.⁴⁶

Repatriation was enforced by the Council however it was the organisations of the Catholic Church who controlled the repatriation. In most repatriation cases the mothers returned home to Ireland without their child, leaving them in the hands of a social welfare organisation such as the National Council, or in the hands of a Catholic Church or Church of England welfare organisation. The majority of these children would have been adopted by British parents or would have remained in a Children's home in Britain.

Repatriation of the Irish Unmarried Mother

Paul Michael Garrett argues that the numbers of Irish women travelling to Britain in order to have their babies was not entirely displeasing to the Irish authorities as it kept the nation's illegitimacy rate at an artificial low and took the pressure from Irish authorities to support these mothers.⁴⁷ In contrast, Lindsey Earner-Byrne has argued that the idea that Ireland's moral linen was washed in Britain was anathema to the aspirations of the new state.⁴⁸ Earner-Byrne believes that the state did not want the emigration of these women as it proved that the Free State was failing to provide for them with sufficient care at home. Diarmaid Ferriter has argued that there was a widely held belief that 'emigration would compromise the chastity and morality of the Irish by leading emigrants to immoral climates and environments that were the antithesis of what they had left behind'.⁴⁹ There was serious concern for the reputation of Irish unmarried mothers in Britain and opposition increased from Church and British social welfare organisations dealing with numerous Irish mothers in their care. Garrett has revealed that some Irish women were forced to return to Ireland, have their child adopted and pay for their stay in the

⁴⁶ National Council of the Unmarried Mother and Her Child, Annual Report 1932.

⁴⁷ Paul Michael Garrett, *Social Work and Irish People in Britain: Historical and contemporary responses to Irish children and families*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2004) p.34.

⁴⁸ Lindsey Earner Byrne, *Mother and Child: Maternity and Child Welfare in Dublin 1922-1960*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2007) p. 192.

⁴⁹ Diarmaid Ferriter, *Occasions of Sin* (London, Profile Books, 2009) p. 258.

Mother and Baby Home. One girl was charged 3 guineas a week.⁵⁰ However only pregnancies conceived in Ireland were recognised as Irish and therefore eligible for repatriation. Conception in Ireland was difficult to prove therefore the numbers being repatriated in the 1930s and 1940s were quite small. However, as numbers began to increase throughout the 1950s numbers rose to an average of 100 per year throughout the 1950s.⁵¹ While the Irish State did not assist these emigrations they did operate a blind-eye policy. Joseph Walshe, the secretary of the Department of External Affairs, stated that, 'so far as the Irish state was concerned, the 'moral' problems posed by the migration of thousands of young women fell within the remit of the pastoral work of the Irish and British Catholic clergy and that consequently such matters were not the responsibility of the Irish State.'⁵² The State's inability to deal with the problem allowed emigration and repatriation of these women to continue into the 1960s. The repatriation of Irish unmarried mothers did not end until 1971.

In conclusion, with the legalisation of adoption in Britain in 1926, Irish unmarried mothers fled in their hundreds to London and Liverpool. The large scale emigration of Irish unmarried mothers to Britain caused moral panic for the Irish Catholic Church who kept in close correspondence with clergy in Britain. Societies in Liverpool and London assisted hundreds of Irish women by providing information, advice and accommodation. However, repatriation and emigration back to Ireland was seen as the only solution for social welfare organisations in Britain who were not eager to support the financial upkeep of these mothers. This article elaborates on our understanding of Irish unmarried motherhood in Britain during this period. It encompasses attitudes from those in Ireland on the emigration of these women including analysis from the Catholic Social Welfare Bureau and the Catholic Protection and Rescue Society of Ireland. This article gives an overview of the assistance offered by the Liverpool Vigilance Association and the Travellers Aid Society as well as noting the homes and hostels in Liverpool. The Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal

⁵⁰ Paul Michael Garrett, *Social Work and Irish People in Britain: Historical and Contemporary responses to Irish Children and Families*, (Bristol, Policy Press, 2004) p. 42.

⁵¹McQuaid papers, CPRSI Annual Reports 1950-1959.

⁵² Delaney, Enda, *Demography, State and Society: Irish Migration to Britain, 1921-1971*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2000) p. 67.

Hinsley, displayed a negative attitude towards Irish unmarried mothers in Britain. Examples of letters received by the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child outline the problems facing these mothers. The analysis of these letters illustrates the experiences of these women and gives the reader a better insight into the understanding of Irish unmarried mothers seeking assistance in Britain during the mid-twentieth century. The legalisation of adoption in 1952 did not bring an end to emigration. Instead Ireland witnessed a shift in the reasons for emigration in 1967 with the legislation of abortion in Britain. This abortion trail continues to this day. Irish women have been emigrating since 1926 from Ireland in order to obtain of better social assistance and sadly, this emigration continues to this day.