

BODY POLITICS AND MAGDALENE LAUNDRIES IN IRELAND

The Magdalene Laundries were correctional institutions for “fallen women” that existed in Ireland since the 18th century up to 1996. The main methods of rehabilitation were heavy manual labor, prayers, and enforced silence. Such a long history of the Laundries may be explained by the great impact of the Catholic Church on the society which remained strong up to the beginning of the 21st century. The “loose behavior” (which in fact meant sexual behavior) led to serious consequences. This case illustrates the theory on body politics, which was developed by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1995). According to his research, the relationship of power has direct control over body. Building on Foucault’s ideas, medical anthropologist Margaret Lock came to the conclusion that the body is not natural but a social and cultural construction, subject to historical and geographical change (Lock 1993). Thus, viewing the body as a site for demonstrating power gives the researcher a new perspective of the studied communities. This paper will consider the Irish traditional dance in relation to the body politics. In the context of Ireland, traditional dance becomes a visual representation of this systematic suppression of sexuality and the influence of body politics.

Keywords: Body politics, Irish dance, Ireland, Magdalene Laundries, performing arts

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