

Laidlaw Reflective Report Summer 1 2022 – Mairéad Butler | TCD

What is the overall structure and methodology of your research project?

The structure of my research project consisted of three distinct phases: a literature review to build a solid theoretical foundation for the historical research, conducting work in historical archives to build case studies of experiences of gender-based violence, and comparative analysis of these case studies using the aforementioned theoretical framework. While this was a historical research project, with a particular focus on military and women's history, I was keen to maintain an interdisciplinary approach. As such, the research drew insights from gender theory, memory and trauma theory, cultural studies, and modern languages. Therefore, the key findings of the literature review centred around the gender theory of Butler (2006) and Scott (1999), and theories of gender-based violence and rape drawing from Brownmiller (1986), Cahill (2001), and Bourke (2010).

The archival work involved consulting archives in both Ireland and Spain, visiting the military archives of the Bureau of Military History in Cathal Brugha Barracks, Dublin, and the *Archivo General Militar* in Ávila; psychiatric hospital archives in the *Archivo Histórico del Hospital Universitario José Germain* in Madrid; and university archives in Trinity and UCD. I studied military, governmental, medical, and legal documents, as well as the extremely limited number of personal testimonies that I could find. Using these documents, I compiled case studies of incidents of gender-based violence and women's experiences of such violence during the Irish and Spanish civil wars. Due to the lack of first-hand accounts available, I focused on the language used within these sources and on what was excluded from these accounts.

The comparative phase of the research involved comparing the different historical contexts of Ireland and Spain, as well as finding points of comparison and contrast across three areas of thematic analysis: discourse, the type of source in question, and memory. This comparative analysis aimed to answer key questions relating to womanhood and gendered experiences of civil war, the framing of gender-based violence in civil-war discourse, the ways in which women narrated their experiences, the relationship between different types of sources and contemporary perspectives on gender-based violence, and ultimately, the repression of women's voices in these sources.

What were the final findings of your project?

Gender-based violence was a feature of both civil wars, despite presenting differently in each context and the limited availability of primary sources. The discourse of femininity and masculinity was pivotal in its execution, contemporary understanding, and subsequent memory.

In both Ireland and Spain, there was a great emphasis on women's behaviour and morality. The Irish case studies discussed this in relation to the credibility of women's accusations of gender-based violence in military court cases, often in a dismissive fashion: "a trouple of tarts".¹ Whereas when women were discussed in the Spanish case studies, it was only in relation to concerns about the effects of prostitution and venereal disease on the National Army.²

There was undoubtedly a repression of women's voices and their experiences of gender-based violence within institutional archives. Indeed, in the *Archivo General Militar* in Ávila, searches for terms related to gender-based violence yielded no results and the psychiatric records of the *Hospital Universitario de José Germain* discussed women's civil-war related trauma in heavily biased, anti-Republican terms: "*nuestro glorioso Ejercito*".³ However, the lack of first-hand accounts does not imply such violence did not occur, but rather that it was overlooked and silenced. Furthermore, the use of euphemistic language, such as "outrage" in the Irish sources and "*persecución*" in the Spanish sources hides the extent and character of incidents and experiences of gender-based violence.⁴

Women's voices could only be found in the limited witness statements from military court cases in the Irish case studies. These sources demonstrated a pronounced fear of persecution and societal shame on the part of the women who experienced gender-based violence: "my character has gone far and wide and it is up to me now to bring it back if I possibly can".⁵ Evidence of profound psychological trauma is evident within these Irish witness statements and in the Spanish psychiatric records. The lack of personal testimonies exemplifies the censorship of women's stories of gender-based violence at a personal, societal, and institutional level, both during and after the Irish and Spanish civil wars.

How does your finished project compare to your original proposal and objectives?

¹ Ernest Blythe, 1954. *Statement by Witness Document No. W.S. 939*, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, p. 182

² El Jefe de Sanidad de Maniobras, 1937. 64:777:2:1, P.C. 15 de Julio de 1937, *Archivo General Militar*, Ávila; Ejército del Norte E.M., Sección Sanidad, 1937. *Letter (8)*, 2-14 abril 1937, *Archivo General Militar*, Ávila; Sr General Jefe del Ejército del Norte, Dirección de Servicios Sanitarios, 1937. *Letter Número 907 (20)*, 2-14 abril 1937, *Archivo General Militar*, Ávila

³ Translation: "our glorious Army". *File XXSIO1160*, 1939, *Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain*

⁴ Miss Florence McCarthy, 1923. *2nd Witness*, Army Inquiry Committee: Proceedings at Court of Inquiry in McCarthy Case Kenmare, CMA-151, Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Brks, p. 4; Ernest Blythe, *Statement by Witness*, p. 181; Miss M Doherty, 1923. *2nd Witness*, Proceedings of General Court Martial Ballina, DOD-A-11837, Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Brks.

File XXSIO1160, 1939; *File XXSIO1198*, 1940, *Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain*; *File XXSIO1293*, 1941, *Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain*

⁵ Miss M Doherty, *2nd Witness*

My finished project differs from my original proposal, insofar as it involves a greater emphasis on the gendered experience of the Irish and Spanish civil wars than personal memory. This was a necessary adjustment due to the lack of first-hand accounts of gender-based violence, upon which an analysis of personal memory could be based. Furthermore, the case studies themselves were less clear-cut and divided along the proposed lines of pro- and anti-Treaty for the Irish Civil War, and Republican and Nationalist for the Spanish Civil War. I was also unable to use the oral testimonies that I originally proposed to use as I did not receive them in time from Dr Leira-Castiñeira. While the case studies were less extensive than I had planned, the broadened analysis of the language used and what was left unsaid in these primary sources offered interesting insights into the relationship between womanhood and these civil wars.

What is the next step for this research in your view?

This research represents a step forward in an under-researched and exciting field, although it is by no means conclusive. In the future, it will be important to consult a more diverse range of primary sources, going beyond institutional archives and exploring sources at a more local, personal level, as well as fictional sources, following Aiken's (2022) recommendation. This inclusive approach may help counteract the difficulties related to studying personal memory. Following the example of my project's use of the psychiatric records of the *Hospital Universitario José Germain* is a good point of reference in terms of broadening avenues of investigation. It is also important to continue to follow the theoretically grounded, interdisciplinary approach of this project in future research, to gain a more holistic understanding the contentious and divisive issue of gender-based violence in these civil wars. Greater exploration of the construction of womanhood and manhood in post-civil-war Ireland and Spain through the theme of gender-based violence is also important and could be achieved through analysing more post-civil-war sources. I plan on expanding upon this research in my undergraduate dissertation. Indeed, while I am on Erasmus in Spain this year, I will avail of the opportunity to conduct in-person archival work in different Spanish archives.

What were the significant achievements and challenges of the research project experience?

The sheer lack of first-person accounts of gender-based violence from either civil war presented a major challenge during my research journey. Therefore, the question of where were women's voices became the central concern of my project. Indeed, when I visited the military archives in Ávila, the archivist told me that I would not find much of use there and that the topic itself was extremely difficult to research. However, I believe my decision to change research focus away from personal memory towards a broader comparative exploration of women's experiences of gender-based

violence represents an achievement on my part. I was able to overcome this pivotal obstacle by reading between sources and interrogating the gaps in these accounts. This project also addresses the gender imbalance in the historiography of the Irish and Spanish civil wars by giving these women back their voices and helping to give their stigmatised and marginalised experiences meaning within the broader narrative of these civil wars.

On a personal level, I did not expect to find the research project experience as emotionally challenging as I did. It was harrowing to read these accounts of gender-based violence and even more upsetting to realise that they represented a mere fraction of Irish and Spanish women's experiences. I learned the importance of self-care and of a work-life balance, skills that will be of great importance in my future career working on such sensitive issues and with vulnerable groups. I developed the skills to maintain a healthy professional distance from the subjects of my research, all whilst maintaining a high level of empathy in my research approach. I consider this learning experience as the greatest achievement of the research project experience and one that will go on to inform my future work in this area as a researcher and in a practical sense in my LiA.

What did you learn about yourself as a researcher?

I found that I enjoyed the research process, particularly being able to work independently and to manage the project by myself. It was a very freeing and exciting experience. While it was difficult at times to maintain a high level of personal motivation, by focusing on making plans day-by-day and week-by-week, I was able to remain in control. I especially liked the archival work and gaining an insight into the day-to-day life of a working historian. This was encapsulated by my research trip to Spain, where I thoroughly enjoyed the challenge of putting my research, language, and cultural skills into practice in a new environment. I also had the fantastic opportunity to engage with other historians studying the Irish Civil War throughout my research project. I attended the launch of Dr Síobhra Aiken's book, *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War*, in Queens University at the beginning of my research project experience, where I found my conversations with historians and other academics to be both very academically fruitful and personally motivating.

However, I found the process quite lonely at times, a feeling undoubtedly heightened by the emotional intensity of the subject matter of my research and the fact that I started my research project before many other Laidlaw Scholars. I discovered that I thrive in a collaborative environment, as I found my fortnightly meetings and regular email exchanges with my supervisors to be reassuring and invigorating. While my supervisors were less hands-on than I had expected, our relationship worked

well in the context of my project which involved a great deal of independent work on my part. The beauty of having two supervisors was that they offered diverse perspectives and insights from two different fields within Arts and Humanities, reflecting my interdisciplinary research ethos.

What did you learn about yourself as a leader, and about your perspective on leadership during the summer?

As I worked predominately independently, much of my learning about leadership centred around self-leadership and personal growth. In terms of my relationship with my supervisors, I appreciated the empowering style of leadership they used, which gave me a great deal of agency within the project. This allowed me to develop my self-motivation and project-management skills and made me feel a true sense of ownership over the project and the direction it took. This empowering and empathic style of leadership was similar to the style that I took within my ALS group. I was the first one in the group to both start and finish the project, so I found myself giving advice to my peers. I focused on listening to their needs and giving experience-based advice when requested. Interestingly, we all adopted this collaborative approach within the group, bringing our diverse expertise and leadership experiences to our problem-solving efforts.

I always give a huge amount of myself to everything I do and as such, I often find myself emotionally exhausted. I learned this summer that it is not selfish to put yourself and your needs first and that you do not need to give all of yourself all the time to make a difference. Indeed, it is necessary and healthy to keep a level of distance from your work. In the case of this research project, by giving too much of myself I would lose the authenticity of the voices of the women I wished to highlight, centring myself as the researcher and not the marginalised people I had aimed to empower. A leader is someone who can step forward when they are needed but who also knows when to step back to give others space and amplify their voices.

How did your experience compare and contrast to the goals you set out in your PDP?

As I wrote my PDP near the end of my research project, it was informed by the experience of completing the project, reflecting the areas I discovered during the experience upon which I would like to improve. I see self-belief as the key strength that I want to develop over the course of the Laidlaw Scholarship. It is a skill that requires constant work and cultivation. However, I can already see marked progress in the ways in which I managed my heightened self-criticism through my increased ability to verbalise these feelings and discuss it with my peers. To know that I was not alone in these worries was not something that I had expected, but it was of great solace to me. With each time that

I am faced with feelings of self-doubt throughout this process and persist in spite of it, that is an achievement in my eyes.

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

- Blythe, Ernest, 1954. *Statement by Witness Document No. W.S. 939*, Bureau of Military History, 1913-21, p. 182.
- Ejército del Norte E.M., Sección Sanidad, 1937. *Letter (8)*, 2-14 abril 1937, Archivo General Militar, Ávila
- El Jefe de Sanidad de Maniobras, 1937. *64:777:2:1*, P.C. 15 de Julio de 1937, Archivo General Militar, Ávila.
- Doherty, Miss M, 1923. *2nd Witness*, Proceedings of General Court Martial Ballina, DOD-A-11837, Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Brks.
- File XXSIO1160*, 1939. Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain.
- File XXSIO1198*, 1940. Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain.
- File XXSIO1293*, 1941. Archivo del Hospital Universitario José Germain.
- McCarthy, Miss Florence 1923. *2nd Witness*, Army Inquiry Committee: Proceedings at Court of Inquiry in McCarthy Case Kenmare, CMA-151, Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Brks.
- Sr General Jefe del Ejercito del Norte, Dirección de Servicios Sanitarios, 1937. *Letter Número 907 (20)*, 2-14 abril 1937, Archivo General Militar, Ávila

Secondary Literature:

- Aiken, S., 2022. *Spiritual Wounds: Trauma, Testimony and the Irish Civil War*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press.
- Bourke, J., 2010. *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day*. London: Virago.
- Brownmiller, S., 1986. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Butler, J., 2006. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge Classics.
- Cahill, A., 2001. *Rethinking Rape*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Scott, J., 1999. *Gender and the Politics of History*. New York: Columbia University Press.