Although there are some glaring omissions in Johnson's book, including substantive discussions of Roy Cohn (a top aid to Joseph McCarthy) and FBI chief J. Edgar Hoover's involvement in the Lavender Scare, plus overarching connections between the anti-Communist campaigns with pervasive anti-Semitism in the United States, Johnson makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of an often forgotten and overlooked facet of US history, and to the sociopolitical mechanics of scapegoating, persecution, and marginalization.

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Locked in the family cell: gender, sexuality and political agency in Irish national discourse

Kathryn A. Conrad, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, WI, 2004,
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The notion of the 'family cell', which is the subject matter of this book, is taken from Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* which identified this as the form, in 18th century Europe, that 'made it possible for the main elements of the deployment of sexuality (the feminine body, infantile precocity, the regulation of births, and to a lesser extent no doubt, the specification of the perverted) to develop along its two primary dimensions: the husband-wife axis and the parents-children axis' (p. 4). This book, while acknowledging the significance of the family cell to all nations, associates its particular significance in the Irish context with the patriarchal system of familial relations that emanated from the forces of Christianity, but also from a British colonialism that identified the answer to 'the Irish problem' as lying in the trope of marriage in which the maiden Hibernia would be rescued and restored to order by a patriarchal John Bull. The centrality of the heteronormative family is echoed in Irish nationalist discourse, which located the Irish man at the centre of family and nation. Conrad identifies a pattern whereby family members hide transgressions in Irish families from the eyes of potentially disciplinary institutions (p. 9). The family cell in Ireland regulated itself then, according to Conrad, by keeping to itself and thereby keeping its instability out of view. This self-preservation drive within the family, in Conrad's view, promotes the interests of both the nation-state and capitalism.

Alongside her thesis that the family cell functions to maintain the heteronormative national *status quo*, the argument is also advanced that family can act as a site of resistance when it enables self-preservation and self-reliance in the face of colonization. The main aim of this book, however, is to show how private sexual relations and the operation of

the family cell are the foundations upon which the public sphere is built and reproduced. This raises important feminist questions about how to engage in a politically productive way with the reproduction of the gendered public/private divide. A further theme of the book is the centrality of information and informing as key sites of political intervention and resistance. Conrad's research points to the frequency with which gay men and sometimes lesbians are identified as potential informers and thus constructed as 'foreign bodies in the cell, pathological invaders threatening the very coherence of the cell' (p. 16). The only strategy for changing the *status quo*, according to Conrad, is a form of informing that 'cuts across public/private lines to destabilize a limited vision of the family cell as the only appropriate private model' so that the world might be imagined otherwise (ibid.). All of the propositions and challenges raised so far are examined in the book via reviews of critical political moments as well as a close reading of selected novels and films. Although the selection of novels and films works well with the thesis of the book, I would have been interested in Conrad's rationale for the selection of particular texts.

Drawing on the example of Roger Casement, who lost the support of Irish nationalists when diaries detailing his homosexual encounters were made public, Conrad points to how nationalist discourses construct homosexuality as a foreign threat. She develops this argument in a discussion of the 'queer-as-foreigner' in 20th century debates over the decriminalization of homosexuality in Britain, Northern Ireland and the Republic. Her theme of the homosexual as potential informer and agent of instability is further developed in relation to the treatment of lesbians in Irish feminist writing and in the controversy surrounding the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's (ILGO) attempts to march in New York St. Patrick's Day parade. In an interesting inversion of the construction of homosexuality as a private status, Conrad notes with irony the ways in which gay and lesbian demands to march in the New York St. Patrick's Day are rendered political while NORAID and Friends of Irish Freedom are allowed to march under banners without being identified as politically controversial. All of these illustrate, albeit in different ways, how the homosexual is positioned as personifying 'the breakdown first of the family cell and then of the borders of the nation-state' (p. 22). However, Conrad's discussion of the decriminalization of homosexuality in Northern Ireland and the Republic reveals a victory over the heterosexual definition of privacy but a failure to achieve public recognition of the homosexual 'as a member of a class of persons' ensuring that the public sphere remains a space in which only heterosexuality is performed (pp. 46 and 47).

Noting that feminism as a site of potential alternatives to entrapment in the family cell was more the focus of moral panic in the 1920s than lesbianism, Conrad proceeds to suggest that feminism can be seen to have (in a similar move

to that of nationalists in relation to feminism) silenced lesbianism in the name of 'freedom'. Conrad supports this claim via her reading of Gifford Lewis's biography of Eve Gore-Booth and Esther Roper, June Levine's *Sisters*, Edna O'Brien's *The High Road* and Levine's *A Season of Weddings*. She identifies a range of moves in which lesbianism is explained away, rendered invisible via silence about how denigratory constructions of lesbians were used to undermine feminists, and by the location of lesbianism outside the realm of Irish identity, as somehow foreign. Improvements in the status of queers in Ireland in recent years are put down to the value of the 'pink pound', as niche consumption replaces political citizenship in a nation-state that increasingly defines itself through economic and consumer culture.

Conrad also traces the 'discursively obscured link between the 'private' choices of women and the 'public' interests of the nation-state' via a discussion of the abortion debates in Ireland in the 1980s (p. 71). Although questions of the reproduction of the nation-state and population control were central here, it was the morality or immorality of the individual reproductive choices of Irish women that were the focus of these debates. This discussion is expanded via Conrad's readings of Nell McCafferty's *A Woman to Blame: The Kerry Babies Case* and Margo Harkin's 1989 film *Hush-A-Bye Baby*. The explorations of real and fictional lives in these texts demonstrate how 'the suppression and circulation of information affect individual agency' (p. 99). For example, Conrad argues that Harkin's film 'forces the viewer to accept that every possible end to the pregnancy narrative, every 'choice' she might make, is shaped by political and religious discourse' (p. 98). Conrad also discusses the X Case, the 1992 Abortion Referendum, and Edna O'Brien's novel *Down by the River*, all of which reveal how the assumed sanctity of the family cell is enforced via the silences of young pregnant women. Information is manipulated and exploited to serve the ends of those who want to maintain a notion of Irish specificity based on the constructed 'purity' of the family cell. In Northern Ireland, Conrad notes that the cross-community Northern Ireland Women's Coalition has not taken a pro-choice stance as a party because the issue is considered divisive of women. The lack of debate about abortion in the north is, for Conrad, a reflection of a 'desire to remain 'fetal' – a political entity unwilling to acknowledge fully its relationship to a changing Great Britain, Ireland, and Europe' (p. 115).

Another theme of this book is how the flow of information between public and private spheres is closely monitored by state and resistant nationalism in struggles over territory and ideology. This discussion is developed via the argument that the future of Northern Ireland rests on numbers with a Catholic majority being predicted by 2050. In this sectarian situation, Conrad argues that women are expected 'to sacrifice political agency for the so-called greater good of the (unionist/loyalist or nationalist/republican) community' (p. 119). She points to the absence of any condemnation of the firebombing

of a women's health and reproductive advice clinic on the Lisburn Road in 1999, which would have been forthcoming if it had a nationalist, unionist or church group attachment. Conrad interprets the silence of politicians as evidence 'that reproduction remains the unspoken substructure of sectarian politics' (p. 120). Indeed, the notion of 'parallel consent' enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement means that 'groups *and* individuals currently can have access to a politically recognized self only if they define themselves in sectarian terms' (p. 121). It is women and queers, Conrad argues, who trouble this static view of selfhood and draw attention to 'the politics of information and the politics of space in Northern Ireland' (ibid.). Anyone who exposes the instability of the heteronormative and patriarchal family cell, for example, the unfaithful wife, or the gay prisoner becomes 'an informer'. This theme is developed in the book via a discussion of *The Crying Game*, which is based on Frank O'Connor's short story 'Guests of the nation', and Stephen Birkett's 1999 novel *Ulster Alien*, which is a 'coming out story' set in Northern Ireland. In each case, Conrad argues that private affective bonds are presented as the only hope of challenging the state of affairs in the public sphere and then these bonds effectively undermine that hope. Moreover, in her reading of Fiona Barr's short story 'The Wall Reader', Conrad suggests that 'privacy is allowed only in so far as it reproduces politics as usual' (p. 134). Access to the public sphere is shaped by patriarchal, heteronormative, and sectarian assumptions so that the self that engages in the public sphere 'can do so only if it conforms to those assumptions' (p. 137).

Conrad's political intervention is to call for more informers. Starting from her position that information 'shapes literal space' she argues that informing 'breaks the taboos and allows dissident voices to enter and reinvigorate a stagnant public sphere' (p. 138). The reproduction of sectarian communities and national communities relies on the reproduction of the family cell. For Conrad, true sexual agency could come about through informing (which might be via pamphlets, protests, or cultural texts) and could destabilize family, nation, and sectarianism, thereby providing 'an opportunity for more people to contribute to a more flexible, less oppressive definition of 'self'' (pp. 137–138). The clearing of discursive space that would follow on from such informing would, in Conrad's view, enable a reimagining and renegotiation of geopolitical space and so a future with more possibilities for everyone.

This book brings a discussion of novels, film, and critical political events together to examine the workings of the family cell in the context of Ireland. I think this approach works well and enables the author to address the many different gestures by which the family cell is reproduced. A particular strength of the book is the way in which events north and south of the border are interwoven and discussed simultaneously, which also necessitated a discussion of the British context. This is a rare accomplishment in the context of academic work on

Ireland and demonstrates that it can be done well. Another achievement of the book is the successful interweaving of questions of sexuality, gender, and feminism with the workings of nationalism, sectarianism, and diasporic politics of identity. A concluding chapter would have brought the different strands together potentially strengthening the theoretical argument of the book. However, this book represents a unique intervention in debates about sexuality, feminism, and nationalism in Ireland and is an accessible, challenging and enjoyable read.

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Sex, gender and science

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Myra Hird opens *Sex, Gender and Science* with an observation from teaching that anyone who teaches on feminist or gender theory will recognize immediately: the keenness with which students are willing to explore gender, and to accept its social construction, but the parallel reluctance to relinquish the biological 'facts' of the sexed body. Her book has two primary aims: firstly, to make the argument that Western understandings of 'sex' are '...based less upon an actual knowledge of sex 'differences' rooted in morphology than in a cultural discourse that emphasizes sex dichotomy rather than sex diversity' (p. 2); and secondly, to draw on 'new materialism' in order to contest those cultural assumptions. For Hird, the new materialism '...refers to a significant shift in the natural sciences that emphasizes openness and play within the living and non-living world, contesting paradigms which posited a changeable culture against a static nature' (p. 145). She identifies four central tenets to the new materialism – non-linearity and self-organization, contingency, variation and diversity – and explores these via literature from both the physical sciences and from the social sciences, making a powerful case for the role of 'science-literate analyses of matter' (p. 13) within feminist theory.

The scope of the book is wide-ranging, beginning with a review of feminist writing on science and the cultural construction of materiality. Hird then sets out the features and implications of the epistemic and political shifts of the Enlightenment that facilitated a transition from the 'one-sex' body to the understanding of two different, and complementary, sexes, and explores the ways in which the 'essence' of sexual difference – in bones, hormones and genes – has been written into scientific accounts of the sexed body. Chapter 4 revisits