

**Amelia Bonow:**

Welcome, everybody. My name is Amelia Bonow. I use she/her pronouns and I'm the executive director of Shout Your Abortion.

SYA is a nationwide and really an international organization working to normalize abortion and elevate safe paths to access regardless of legality. We make resources, campaigns, and media intended to arm existing activists, create new ones, and foster collective participation in abortion access all over the country and the world. I'm just going to start adding that globalized caveat to that sentence because it's real. And this session is an incredible example of that.

So Abortion Academy is a monthly webinar series where we introduce you to one of our brilliant colleagues who takes a deeper dive into their area of expertise. We have had a lot of incredible guests over the last year and a half or so, and all of those sessions are accessible on our website if you go click the take action tab in the menu. So if you're looking to deepen your knowledge, connect some dots between issues you're navigating regionally and what's happening at the national and international level, or just get some fresh ideas to take back into your community, please check out the backlog of Abortion Academy archives. They're really, really great.

And this session is the third in our study abroad series where we pair a US activist with someone working on abortion access internationally. Audience members will be off camera and muted for security reasons, but you will be able to ask questions in the chat throughout the session. Our speaker, Dr. O'Brien, will be speaking to us for about, did we say 45 minutes-ish or so? And then we will have a Q&A that's going to be moderated by Sarah Leonard, founder and editor-in-chief at Lux Magazine, a socialist feminist magazine that SYA loves dearly. So Sarah will be asking her own questions of Maeve. You can also feed questions into the chat that Sarah will bring into their conversation as well.

And we are so, so excited to welcome Dr. Maeve O'Brien today, who is an activist with Alliance For Choice Derry. Alliance For Choice Derry is an active, vibrant, non-hierarchical and proudly grassroots group informed by reproductive justice principles. They fight for abortion in the north and south of Ireland, and they offer international solidarity.

SYA has been working collaboratively with Derry for Choice for years now, and I had the opportunity to visit Derry in what Maeve and I believe was 2023. And it was one of the most inspiring, impactful, life-affirming trips I've ever taken in my life. Irish activists and specifically the folks from Alliance For Choice Derry who took care of me that week and showed me around are so incredibly fierce and tenacious and creative and hilarious in the blacker than black kind of way that only I think is developed under really, really tough circumstances, which is something that folks living in the north know a lot about.

I think that the Irish have also shown the world what solidarity looks like in many incredible ways. And free Palestine, we can just say that while we're all here today. I think that the Irish have been on that since, I don't know, for decades before much of the rest of the world was paying attention in this way.

So Dr. O'Brien hales from County Tyrone in the north of Ireland and participated in the fight for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland and for the decriminalization of abortion in Northern Ireland. She continues to advocate for enhanced access to abortion, particularly for people living in rural areas, as well as the removal of the three-day waiting period in the Republic. And Maeve is going to be talking to us about just abortion and abortion access in Ireland, including stigma and how it operates in an Irish context, and plotting some ways to support and educate each other in our fight for global abortion access.

We're very excited to have you here today, Dr. O'Brien. I'm going to hand it over to you.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Thank you so much, Amelia. And Sarah, it's so lovely to meet you. And just to say that we are so delighted to be here, it's always privileged to represent Alliance For Choice Derry at any kind of speaking event, but particularly working with Shout Your Abortion, who we just love working with. We have used materials that you so generously provide online. We print them out. They're stuck all over Ireland, the stickers and things, and just the camaraderie and solidarity that we've experienced from folks at Shout Your Abortion, it's what keeps us all going, I think.

And today I'm going to talk in a presentation. I'll try to keep it maybe just to about half-an-hour, but I'm going to talk about some of the wins that we've had in terms of pro-choice activism and achievements across the island of Ireland. And I think that's why global international solidarity is so important to us in Alliance For Choice Derry because we want to continue to learn. We want to continue to offer that solidarity across manmade artificial borders. We've been there, we've had some victories, but we're always aware. And I think the fall of Roe has really shown us that you always have to stay vigilant, that people are just waiting to roll back your rights as soon as they get the opportunity. So it's brilliant to be here to give a wee bit of a summary about the situation in Ireland.

As I say, we're so grateful to Shout Your Abortion. It was wonderful for us to host Amelia. We're delighted to connect with any groups, any organizations. So please do feel free to reach out to us at any time, and I'll just share my slides now.

Okay. I'm just going to put that up. I hope everybody can see that okay.

So today I'm really just going to talk about Irish Lessons in the Fight for Reproductive Justice. And that's me, Maeve. And I did put my own personal Substack there. I do write a lot about abortion on there in sort of an Ireland, Great Britain, European context. I also write about my dating life and life in the world. So you've been warned. You don't have to follow that. But if you're interested, there are occasional abortion-related ramblings there. And that's just the website for Alliance For Choice Derry and our Instagram as well. Please do feel free, keep in touch with us. We're only too delighted to meet with folks and strategize and break bread and share solidarity.

So I just want to give you guys a wee bit of a sense about Alliance For Choice Derry before I zoom out to sort of a more overall picture of the situation in Ireland. And I did write this presentation sort of with a largely American audience. So if there are things here that are maybe a little obvious to, maybe if you're from Ireland and you're watching this, I kind of wrote it with the American audience in mind.

So Alliance For Choice in Ireland, there are regional groups of this organization, which was founded in 1996. So we have comrades in Belfast and mid-Ulster as well as Derry. Pro-choice activism in Derry has been something that has always been there. I wrote an oral history piece, interviewing activists who were living in Derry during the height of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, and their concern, their primary concern was abortion rights. And it was so stunning to me that amidst such civil strife and daily tragedy that there were predominantly women there who were thinking about gendered roles and gender discriminations and the right to access abortion and the right to bodily autonomy with the sort of overarching marriage of far right Catholicism and far right evangelical coming together to really quash women's rights during that period of time in Northern Ireland's history.

So while Alliance For Choice was set up in 1996, there's been a feminist presence there in Derry in the Northwest for decades, and we're privileged in Alliance of Choice Derry to have that multi-generational comradeship. We have members who are in their 80s, 70s, 60s, 50s, 40s, 30s, 20s, and teenagers. And so we learn a lot and we really hold that intergenerational connection. Really, it's at the heart of what we do.

So since 1996, and sort of it's more of a solidified group, we have become the largest direct action feminist group in the northwest of Ireland. We're vibrant, non-hierarchical, proudly grassroots. We're informed by reproductive justice principles. And as Amelia said, we advocate for abortion rights north and south of Ireland and offer international solidarity. And you can just see a photo there of a recent workshop making some Brigid's Crosses, who actually, according to the annals of the history of Ireland, is noted as Ireland's first recorded abortionist. So next time anyone from the Catholic Church is talking to you about abortion, make sure and let them know that St. Brigid is our homegirl.

So we also engage in acts of civil disobedience. As you can see to the right of the screen, we had a spray-painting campaign around Derry, just to let everybody know that we see them, we love them, and we're with them, and that Derry is pro-choice. That was a nice Sunday morning well spent for two of our activists.

In general, and I'll do a wee bit of a deep dive into sort of our organizational structures later on, but we are informed by reproductive justice principles. As an organization, we don't take money from the philanthropic bodies or NGOs. That's just a decision we as a group have made. We feel like our relationship with our supporters is strong. If there's ever anything we need assistance for, there is a trust there and we are very well-supported when we need it. Of course, we understand that it's very important to be paid for the work that you do. But just in terms of our overall message and because we engage in acts of civil disobedience, we don't want to be

restrained in the things that we do by accepting money from sort of philanthropic bodies.

As an organization, we're trans-inclusive, we're pro-Palestine, we're anti-Zionist. We support the decriminalization of sex work and drugs, and we are supporters of Black Lives Matter. And within our organization, we have trans members, sex-work members, members who are from marginalized communities. So we really take our lead from those people in how we sort of define and organize as well.

Oh, that's a little photo, sorry. Some of you guys might know Derry Girls, the TV show. There's a big mural in the city, and that's us. That's some of the Derry girls just posing outside it. And we've actually received so much support from the cast of Derry Girls. When we need a wee bit of visibility, they're so supportive and always happy to give us a shout. So we're very enmeshed in the community in that regard.

But I just want to zoom out a wee bit now and give a whistle-stop tour on the history of Ireland and Northern Ireland. And I mean, whistle-stop in the most serious of terms, because it's going to be one slide each, because we could spend 800 years going on about this. But just so that you guys can get a sense of the visuals. So Alliance For Choice Derry operate in Northern Ireland, the yellow part of the map of Ireland here on the screen. So we are in the northwest, so sort of just above where the end of that little pointer, just a little more north than that, that's where we are.

Ireland, the island, it was partitioned in the 1920s after fighting for independence in 1916 and from the years thereafter. And a forced partition was placed on the island. So the Republic of Ireland is the green area that's a Republic. And then Northern Ireland is still governed by Westminster in London. And we have a devolved parliament now as part of peace building called Stormont. And I'll get a wee bit into that shortly.

But just to give you an idea of the different laws and circumstances that you're dealing with depending on the region of the island. So if we think about the Republic of Ireland and post-partition, there was a series of successive conservative Catholic governments that really have and still have an enduring imprint on our society today. We're still dealing very much with the aftermath of horrific institutions like Magdalene laundries, which only closed in 1996. For example, some of you may have seen the Cillian Murphy film or the book, All ... I was going to say All The Small Things like Blink 182 there. The name has just slipped by mind, but it was the recent, I'll come back to it, the recent film that documents the 1980s and 1990s experience in Ireland and how women were sent to these Magdalene laundries if they were pregnant outside of marriage.

So you can imagine the stigma, the control of the Catholic church, the power, just cultural shame. And there's an excellent book, The Republic of Shame, that really taps into the swirling vortex of shame and misogyny that permeated Ireland in the post-partition years. And that can very literally be seen in looking at how the governments in the republic banned information on reproductive healthcare.

There was no access to contraception in Ireland until the 1990s, homosexuality was criminalized in Ireland until 1993, and divorce was only legalized in 1996. I talked about the Magdalene laundries, which closed the last one in 1996, and there were systemic abuses by the

Catholic Church in schools in the Republic of Ireland, and everyone in the Republic of Ireland attended a Catholic school, that's how enmeshed the religion was in the country. There was a marriage ban for women workers and government jobs, civil service until 1973. So that meant that if you got married, you were forced to leave your job and fulfill your role as a homemaker.

So part and parcel of this perfect storm of misogyny was the Eighth Amendment to the Irish Constitution, which was ratified in 1983. And essentially, this amendment equated the right to life of the unborn with the right to life of the mother. And the specific statement in the Constitution is: "The state acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and with due regard to the equal right to life the mother guarantees in its laws to respect as far as practicable by its laws to defend and vindicate that right."

So you can even see, if you're thinking about this from a medical perspective, how confusing, general, and vague this amendment to the Constitution is, except for that sentence, "the right of the life of the unborn to the equal right of life of the mother." So you're inhabiting a world there where there's this very vague criminal law that medical folks, there was such a chilling effect. People were afraid to really administer any kind of reproductive healthcare in general because of this Eighth Amendment.

And because of this, we're seeing, because there was no services available in Ireland, we did a very typically Irish response to this and exported our problems. So we have women traveling, women in their tens per day traveling to Great Britain to pay for abortion services in England in cities like London, Birmingham, Manchester, which are all cities with huge Irish diaspora populations. So this close availability of abortion really just meant under the veneer of Irish society, misery, suffering, abortion access for people who could afford it, who could afford to travel, who had the passport to be able to make it over to England for abortion. So underneath the surface, pain, trauma, stigma, just permeating this whole situation.

Northern Ireland, not much better. Unfortunately. Post-partition, Northern Ireland became a Protestant state for Protestant people, as it's been called, and Stormont that area that governs Northern Ireland through devolved government was the headquarters of this Protestant state for a Protestant people. And what this really meant was that in terms of jobs, housing, opportunities, there was serious discrimination occurring in Northern Ireland. And this resulted in the late 1960s into the 70s, 80s, and 90s, The Troubles. And you may have read the book *Say Nothing*, or there was recently a television document or television adaptation of the book, which gives a fairly accurate surmising of the situation and of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. So governed by Westminster and Stormont. In 1998, we had our peace accord, which saw devolved administration to Stormont, saw peace building.

Throughout this time period, contraception was broadly available. Abortion pills were not typically stopped by customs. This is into the 2000s when abortion pills became part of our armory. And you find post 2000s, there was a lot of collaboration between North and South in order to disseminate abortion pills. So you have these secret networks essentially between the north where abortion pills could get in via post, often hand delivered, often brought over the

border, clandestinely, to bring to networks in the Republic of Ireland because they were finding that these pills were being stopped by customs and there was an embargo essentially about getting abortion pills into the Republic of Ireland.

So if Northern Ireland was governed by Westminster, why, you may ask, was the 1967 Abortion Act not extended to Northern Ireland? This act was not extended to Northern Ireland because of that marriage, essentially, between far right Catholic views and far right Christian evangelical folks who were largely in power in Northern Ireland in Stormont, having this Protestant state for Protestant people. So I've actually looked through some of the debates that were going on at the time as to why the Abortion Act wasn't extended to Northern Ireland, and the men exceptionalized Northern Ireland as a God-fearing Christian region. And I think that's very much part of the partition years as well, is trying to define Northern Ireland as something very distinct and different to the Rome rule of the Republic of Ireland. But we don't see much pushback from the Catholic side of Northern Ireland because the priests were only too happy to have abortion really not extended at all to Northern Ireland.

So until 2019, when we decriminalized abortion in Northern Ireland, the laws we were operating under were the 1861 offenses against the Person Act, and that act came in before women could vote, before the invention of the light bulb. So up until 2019, that's what we were living under in Northern Ireland. And that inclusion of that under criminal law had dire ramifications for people in the North. And I'll touch on that a wee bit going forward.

So we've kind of looked over our dark history. The good days have come. In 2018 through a national referendum in the Republic of Ireland, we repealed the Eighth Amendment. This came off the back of a national referendum on marriage equality a few years prior where marriage equality for all relationships was brought through and supported through a national referendum. Now, these referendums are sometimes glorified in terms of how people report this massive sea change in the Republic of Ireland, going from un-illegalizing homosexuality in the '90s to 20 years later, everyone's celebrating marriage equality. The damage that has been done to the folks from the communities affected by these referendums in terms of mental health, in terms of having to go and literally knock on doorsteps to defend your right to exist, there's been a lot of long-term damages there. So I'd be quite reticent to promote the idea of referendums. They're always a gamble.

In terms of repealing the Eighth Amendment, we repealed that by just over 66% of people in Ireland voting for the repeal of the Eighth Amendment and abortion services in Ireland.

Off the back of that success, we then were able to work with Labor MPs in Westminster to attach a bill to an amendment to decriminalize abortion in Northern Ireland, and we were successful in doing that. It's interesting to note that Northern Ireland has now leapt forward and we occupy a vanguard in terms of abortion rights and abortion law. England, Scotland, and Wales are still under the 1967 act, which is simply an amendment to that 1861 act and abortion is still under criminal law in England, Scotland, and Wales. But in Northern Ireland, it is decriminalized. So I could go up the street, do cartwheels-

In... Ireland it is decriminalized. So, I could go up the street, do cartwheels at 30 weeks pregnant, and take abortion pills. And I cannot be criminalized, I cannot be sent to jail for that. We've had five years of it now. And as I'll come to tell you, folks, in a couple of slides' time, just the absolute dignity and even for medical professionals, the freedom to actually do this work, and not worry about criminalization, it has been a radical, profound change in Northern Ireland. Not only in terms of how we view abortion, but just how people think about it as well.

So, how did we achieve these abortion rights? Because there were dark days, and it's been a long fight. I'm going to show you just some very brief examples of some historical documents, but, essentially, as long as Ireland has been there have been feminists, we have been here. The bottom-up groundswell of activists and activism was always in existence.

Even in the dark days of the 1980s in Northern Ireland under the Troubles, you had feminists advocating against the Eighth Amendment in the Republic of Ireland. You're seeing cross-border solidarities, both ways, in fact, and engagement by people who have been partitioned artificially by this border, and a country that's dealing with the economic downturns, the clutch of the Catholic Church, the armed patriarchy of the north.

But even at that, there were still feminist activists working on abortion. They might not have been grabbing headlines during the eras, but they, certainly, were there.

So, we have this core group of feminist abortion activists in Ireland throughout all the decades. And then we see wider public reactions triggered by events such as the X case in 1992 where a young woman wanted to travel for abortion. She'd been the victim of rape. And it was actually taken to court to try and stop her to travel to England to procure an abortion. So, that brought a lot of people out onto the streets.

And then significantly, the death of the dentist Savita Halappanavar in Galway in 2012 lit a fire that still has not gone out, and we keep Savita in our hearts when we do our activism. Savita developed sepsis, and because doctors had to equate the right to life of the unborn with that of the mother, they were unable or unwilling to provide her with an abortion that would have saved her life, and she developed sepsis, and died.

One of the last words spoken to Savita Halappanavar was by a nurse in the University of Galway Hospital where when she asked for an abortion, Savita was told, "This is a Catholic country."

Savita Halappanavar was a migrant. She hailed from Asia. The racism and Eurocentricism of, "This is a Catholic country" is something that still sends a chill down my spine. And she was left to die by medical professionals in Ireland.

That lit a match, and opened a groundswell. And pushed the Irish government to take decisive action, because prior to this, even though, we were members, and are members of the EU, the government just fobbed off being called out by the UN, by the European Court of Human Rights

on the violations that abortion was producing, and juxtaposing from this allegedly modern and progressive Ireland that we have.

So, after the death of Savita the push for another referendum really gained traction. And what you saw is ... So, Ireland, we're a very small country, but we're very distinct. We have 32 distinct counties, and those counties are embedded into our sports, into our culture. You're very much like, "I'm from Tyrone," somebody else is from Dublin.

But what was really beautiful and meaningful about Repeal was that all of these people in these different regions brought that flavor, and that individuality to their activism. So, you had, for example, people in Limerick using colloquialisms in their slogans. You had people doing knit-bombing, knitting all over Catholic fences, Catholic Church fences. You had really inventive ways of gaining the public consciousness. We did stalls in streets in the rain on Saturdays, on Thursday nights in the cold. It wasn't just something that was led by the cities. It was led by an entire groundswell of both rural and urban.

And a lot of talk during that time was the rural/urban divide. And the media had almost convinced us that rural people were more conservative, and they were going to vote to keep abortion. But actually we found that across the island, two-thirds of the people of this island, no matter rural or urban, wanted abortion rights.

And we see that mirrored in cases, like, Kansas and Missouri where we see people who, stereotypically, seen as rural and conservative are voting in their hundreds for abortion rights.

So, just some images there. I'm going to put a few week links on the Abortion Academy page, but we have some really great archives that preserve some of the moments of Repeal. You can see from the late '80s, early '90s, the Women's Information Network fighting for access, information, choice. And then you can see the very interesting cartoon of the judge and the priest holding the puppets of women. And you can see, "Nursery closed, backstreet abortion," highlighted there in the cartoon. I just thought it was very opposite.

So, the leaders of the movement for Repeal were together for yes. They were a short-term organization made up of civic society, and activists coming together to get this over the line. And the abortion rights campaign in Ireland are still very much active, and they have been leading on ensuring that the government do what the public voted them to do. And, unfortunately, as we'll see, that hasn't really worked in the years after 2018.

And in Northern Ireland context then, we have an interesting pivot away from the extension of the 1967 Abortion Act. So, you can see there at the top right I've got summer 1985. It's a Northern Ireland Abortion Law Reform Association are advocating for the 1967 Abortion Act.

And, primarily, we did fight for that up until around 2008 when we were betrayed by the Labor government, who promised us that they would try and bring accession of the '67 act in, but, ultimately, reneged on a political machination.

So, we then pivoted to this objective of decriminalization, and that flexibility I think was really, really key. What's different in Northern Ireland is we had to raise public consciousness outside of green and orange beliefs. So, Northern Ireland politics are, basically, you will vote for whoever either sports a United Ireland or supports the Union with the UK.

So, you could be very pro-choice, you could be a feminist, but you'll vote for a party who want to maintain the Union, and they could be misogynistic, homophobic, and against abortion rights. But the green and orange are the two defining characteristics of Northern Ireland's politics.

So, we had a lot of work to do in trying to unpack that sectarianism, and to highlight what each individual politician's attitudes towards abortion were. We did a lot of research on that. We then introduced ... Again, Northern Ireland's smaller than Ireland. So, we were able to really develop relationships with politicians. We introduced on the fence politicians to experts. We find that, particularly, those middle class, well-to-do politicians respond well to getting a telling off from a doctor. So, that really was very helpful. We brought people into the room. We had discussions. We utilized connections through the UK affiliation with the UN, Amnesty International, and pre-Brexit, the European Court of Human Rights.

And then we used political symbols as well to highlight the intersectional nature of abortion rights. If you see the bottom right, "You are not entering Free Derry," that's a symbol that was very symbolic in the civil rights era. It's, "You are now entering Free Derry." It was a free place during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. They claimed it as freedom from British occupation.

And you see that imagery used a lot, particularly, in Palestine discourse at the moment as well. But we changed that, that gave a wall to say, "You are not entering Free Derry," because you couldn't get an abortion here.

So, you can also see some of the civil disobedience we got up to as well, bottom left, Diana King, Colette Devlin, and Kitty O'Kane, some of our OGs of Alliance for Choice Derry. They handed themselves into the police for breaking abortion law. This was when a mother was being prosecuted under the 1861 Abortion Act for procuring abortion pills for her daughter. So, in response to that, Diane, Kitty, and Colette handed themselves into the police, and said, "We've done this. Prosecute us." But the fact is that this was a mom from a working class area of Northern Ireland, and an easy target rather than three women who were backed up by media, activists, and supporters.

So, Diane, Colette, and Kitty nothing happened to them. In the case of the mother who had procured the pills for her child, thankfully, decriminalization came in, which just obliterated the legal case against her.

So, just some images to give you a sense of the groundswell. And we had a lot of engagement from our diaspora as well, London-Irish Abortion Rights, a lot of Irish in Australia as well, really just taking to the streets demanding this. And there was a beautiful moment where people, all the diaspora came home to vote as well. When Twitter was good, people were sending each other money, and GoFundMe raising to get people back, so, that they could vote for Repeal.

And if you can see on the right, even international solidarity from the queen Angela Davis, who supported our strike for Repeal, so, that we could try and bring the country to a standstill, and insist the government declare a referendum date.

If you've been touched by the story of Savita Halappanavar, I've included the link at the end, but this is a rapid response archival collection of Post-Its from the Together For Yes campaign where people wrote their messages to Savita, and it was stuck to a wall in Dublin City. And you can go into this collection, and actually look at all the notes that people wrote to Savita, "My vote was for you," "A modern Ireland," and really just how Savita changed Ireland, and how we still remember her.

That's just a picture to give you a sense of Stormont, this home of the Protestant land for the Protestant people, and the celebrations of decriminalization after that.

So, in terms of abortion on the island of Ireland today, apologies for the text-heavy slides, but, essentially, people wanted more than what they got in the Republic of Ireland. And the Republic of Ireland after that brilliant win we had, you could only have an abortion if your pregnancy is no more than 12 weeks. And then after that, you can only have an abortion in exceptional circumstances. So, we're still seeing quite a lot of people traveling to London, to Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool to get abortion services, which they have to pay for.

In the Republic of Ireland there's also a punitive three-day waiting period, which has been brought in with no medical advice, with just on a whim, probably just to ensure that everyone feels as much shame as they can. So, you have to go in, and then you have to come back three days later, and be certified. And then you can have your abortion procedure.

And this is very difficult, because if you go over 12 weeks during this time period, you will not be assisted by medical professionals. The certification is also a real issue. You have to be certified that you are no more than 12 weeks pregnant by a doctor or GP at the time of the abortion. Again, this can delay depending on the GP that you get, as well we have a lot of issues with people who are conscientious objectors. So, it's hard, especially, if you're in a rural area to even find a doctor who will certify you.

So, there's a lot of issues that we're working on, and Abortion Rights Campaign commissioned a review in 2022. I'll not go through this folks, but you can, certainly, have a look. The links will all be at the end, but, essentially, the review, which really just looked at the problems of abortion care post-Repeal. It's not the idyll that we had all hoped for. There's a lot of need to remove barriers to abortion, remove barriers in clinical guidance, and remove barriers in implementation as well. For example, there's been very limited public health messaging on My Options, which is the central access point that you telephone in order to be linked in with abortion providers.

But, happily, in Northern Ireland it is a different story. And sometimes I can't believe how well things have gone in Northern Ireland. Decriminalizing abortion ceased all ongoing legal cases. As I said, one of the most prominent, the working class mother prosecuted for procuring pills for

her daughter. In Northern Ireland, you can get an abortion up until 21 weeks and six days. If you're between 22 and 24 weeks, and you need a surgical abortion, you can get one free in England.

Our medics are currently undergoing training to bring their skills up to provide abortions after 22 weeks. Our medics are incredible. We have a cohort of conscientiously committed medical professionals, who care about communication, who care about expanding their knowledge banks, and about actually integrating abortion care into university modules for doctors as well.

So, we're a long way off on actually legitimizing abortion care in Northern Ireland in terms of getting it taught here, but we have skilled clinicians who are going out of their way to learn.

As yet, we have no telemedicine in Northern Ireland. We are the only region in the UK without this, which created a lot of issues during COVID. There was a lot of work we were doing as activists to try and get people over to Liverpool, to Manchester, to London to procure abortion, and to use pills as well.

Interestingly, abortion pills are only allowed under clinical guidelines up to 12 weeks in Northern Ireland, but we know the World Health Organization allows them up to 14 weeks. And because abortion has been decriminalized here, you can join the dots. There's a lot more flexibility, freedom, and protection for abortion seekers as well. If there are complications, they can go to a medical professional and seek help without fear of being criminalized.

And just for anyone who is interested in the statistics, just to show you how well things are going, and how quickly this service has been embedded into Northern Ireland, and Northern Ireland is a very conservative place, but the number of abortions carried out was just over 2700 in 2023/2024, which is a 29% increase on the year before. So, it shows you the message is getting out there, people are aware of the service, the service is very well becoming embedded in our healthcare systems.

There were 72 abortions carried out on women under 18 in 2023 to 2024. The vast majority were carried out on women aged 18 to 34 years, and the 567 were carried out on women aged 35 years or over. And these match the figures of service users that we had been previously assisting prior to decrim. The vast majority of abortions are under 12 weeks. Like, the infrastructure is working like a dream. And we're so delighted, and we're so supportive of our medical professionals in that regard.

I'll briefly touch on safe access zones, because I know folks in the States really struggle with this, but, happily, we were able to bring in off the back of this safe access zones in Northern Ireland in 2023, and in the Republic of Ireland in 2024. We've also helped Scottish folks with their Back Off campaign. In the north, the minimum distance anti-choicers can stand to a hospital is 100 meters. So, they have to be, at least, 100 meters away at all times, which is great.

We do have anti-choice presence. We like to alter their posters. We like to take the piss out of them, essentially. It's the only way to deal with them at this stage. So, you could see there's some of the crew standing outside the hospital. Because abortion is embedded into our healthcare system, there's no private abortion clinics unlike the Planned Parenthood kind of setup in the States.

So, these are people standing outside a hospital where maybe people are going in to visit a loved one, someone going in to get their appendix out, someone who's just been bereaved. These people are standing outside with their horrendous signs. So, we like to digitally alter the signs, and then put them up on Facebook. And because so many of them are Boomers, they don't really know what's going on. So, it gives us a laugh anyways.

And we've actually noticed ... I was over in New York. I met up with some of the New York abortion activists in February, and we share a common troll in that Father Fidelis guy, maybe some of you know him, he comes over here a lot to inflict his own version of peace and love.

We also have issues with rogue clinics, Stanton Healthcare, Advocate Women's Care, Gianna Care, all have a presence here. They manipulate Google searches to become the top result for abortion seekers. These clinics are largely funded by American monies, and during Repeal it's suspected many of the anti-choice organizations on this island receive donations from American organizations. Many American anti-choicers were over campaigning for a no during that period in 2018.

So, just us, Alliance for Choice Derry, in terms of organization, we operate horizontally. We're aware of the difficulties of that, but, by and large, we try to have no leaders, no positions. We try to utilize a bottom up approach. We get people to step up for specific tasks, if they have the time and space and capacity.

We vote on WhatsApp. We also make decisions at meetings. We don't work with law enforcement, that's the PSNI, or the Gardai in the Republic. And we tend not to work with government bodies in general. We don't like to be taking photo opportunities. There's a lot of historic injustices that have been carried out on the people of Derry by the British government. So, by and large, we tend not to involve ourselves with the Northern Ireland office, or with Westminster.

I did go to Westminster in May, and I was proud to wear one of the Shout Your Abortion t-shirts that said, "Fund abortion, not war," and features the Palestinian scarf and poppies. And I was proud to wear that to the House of Lords where I was forced to turn it inside out, but I got a good photograph of that outside Westminster, because, as we all know, the British government are actively funding and supporting the genocide in Palestine. So, we were proud to do that on a political level.

As I say, we don't accept funding from philanthropic bodies. What we do do, we do a lot, we provide abortion support ranging from doulas to assistance with money, transport, because we're dealing a lot with rural areas. We do civil disobedience. We do merch drops. You might

have seen our scarves in the previous image. We sign posts to new services, because there's not a lot of public health money being funneled to promote the services. We do community education around abortion pills. We conduct research. You can see there on the left. We developed a booklet. There was a consultation survey about sex education in our schools in Northern Ireland, and we give a guide to people, help them figure out how they might want to reply to that.

We do a lot of events, consciousness-raising, we lobby politicians. We advocate for sex education in schools. We write articles. We engage. And we support a wider range of intersecting issues like sex work decriminalization, drug decriminalization, anti-racism, and poverty issues.

And we have a lot of fun while we do it. This is just some examples of events and activism. Fundraising parties, speaking at protests and events, having some of our words printed in books, Palestine solidarity rallies, cross-making, and then decriminalization discussions with folks from around the world. So, we really see the value in learning from others and imparting our wisdom as well.

We do run these abortion stigma and pills workshops. If anyone in this call is interested in collaborating with us about these, we would only be too delighted. They are so successful. They can be run online as well. We do a lot of values clarification. We do a lot of group work. And then when you complete the workshop, you get a little poster. And that's just an image from one of our abortion stigma and pills workshops in Belfast. It was really successful. And we have been invited to work with some healthcare providers in doing values clarification work in late 2025. So, we're really excited about that as well.

As I say, some instances of our solidarity, you can see bottom left is a photo of Bethany and Sophia with our banner at the Shout Your Abortion Abortion Camp. Up top right, that, "Fuck your laws, we do what's right," that was after the fall of Roe. So, we sent that to a lot of our comrades.

We support Justina in Poland. We hold vigils for violence against women and girls in our area, and more broadly. And that's top right ... Or top left is us at Pride with the phenomenal Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners. You might have seen the film Pride that the whole film is about. So, we do a lot of solidarity.

And I guess just to finish, folks, and, sorry, I've been talking for ages I feel, but I think one of the key learnings we had was witnessing the fall of Roe, and realizing we can't be complacent, that people are just sitting in the wings, waiting to roll back your rights.

So, what we prioritize is staying active, and that's through continued allyship with other marginalized folks, including abortion access for marginalized people, especially, in a very predominantly white country like Ireland. People of color are often left out of the conversation. We're very interested, and I'm personally very interested in developing my skillset more, learning about third trimester abortions. We, certainly, feel a responsibility towards the Irish diaspora, and their often harmful and conservative values, particularly, in the United States,

Australia, and New Zealand. It's such a privilege today to be speaking to so many of you internationally. We know that our diaspora do contribute to a lot of issues like police brutality, the situation in America right now. There's a lot of Irish diaspora, similar to America right now, there's a lot of Irish diaspora very up to their necks in racism and claiming an Irish identity at the same time. So we do feel a responsibility to bust that bubble. We also feel very keen about enhancing existing services, both in Northern Ireland and the Republic. We're fighting for telemedicine in Northern Ireland. We're troling rogue clinics as best we can. We're working on busting stigma. The decriminalization element has lifted stigma a lot in Northern Ireland.

We're also trying to empower healthcare providers to be conscientiously committed to providing and to help bust stigma around folks who might conscientiously object. And we fight for decriminalization in the Republic of Ireland and England, Scotland, and Wales as well. So that's just a bibliography. I'm going to obviously share that with the Shout Your Abortion folks. Thank you very much. Please do keep in touch with us. We'd love to collaborate more. If you're fancy coming over to Ireland, we'll host you. Do follow us, and thanks so much for your time, folks.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Thank you so much. That was such a terrific presentation. I learned so much. Truly, thank you for that. And about... And for your words about the diaspora, which as a half Irish American person, I relate to very much. And we think about that a lot too. And I was wondering, I want to get into so many things, including the international solidarity work that you do, but I was curious right off the bat, you've accomplished so much and there's still so much to do.

And particularly in the Republic of Ireland, you mentioned many things that are still in progress under certification, the 12-week limit, all sorts of things that we'd like to change. And I was curious if there were any specific campaigns you are running right now or particular actions you're taking right now that you might want to tell people about so they also have a picture of what you have your hands in at this moment.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah, Sarah, that's a great question. The shocking thing is, to be honest, I've never seen... And COVID was an issue for sure, but I've never seen a movement fall away so quickly after repeal, as I've seen in the Republic. I mean, we would've got 10,000, 15,000 people out protesting regularly. And now if you hold an event, if you've got 20 people, you'd be doing well. So there's been a massive fallback. The wider public, I think, are under the impression that the situation has been resolved.

And the details and the minutiae largely, until it specifically affects you, I don't think it's come home to a lot of people. And sadly, the thing is is it going to take another case? Another example? Is it going to take someone who's bleeding publicly on the way home from an abortion? Because this is you're getting a short flight or a boat journey across the water to England to awaken the public consciousness. I mean, we do have very committed activist abortion rights campaign. Dr. Lorraine Grimes, in particular, works on amplifying the situation here, creating reports, lobbying politicians.

To be honest, I wish I had a better answer for you, but the wind has gone out of it. And that frightens me when I see what happened in the States. When you have a bit of... When the swells go on your way, we need to be making more and more advancements. That's why I was so glad that we managed to get the safe access zones over the line so quickly after decrim and repeal. And I worry about that. So there aren't really any ongoing, strong, ongoing campaigns. Academics are certainly doing work. Abortion rights campaign are worth following.

Derry for Choice will follow their lead and do what we can as well, but there's a big housing crisis going on in Ireland right now, so a lot of our... and a lot of issues actually with right-wing extremism. So, a lot of our social justice-minded folks are working on that, but we always try to put it out there, as this is an intersectional issue. A person who's a migrant in Ireland won't be able to go to England for an abortion if they're over 12 weeks because they don't have the passport or the visa to do so. So unfortunately, I don't have a positive answer for you there, but it's just the truth.

**Sarah Leonard:**

That makes so much sense to me. Obviously, we had that problem in the States post-Roe, but even after various crises like Dobbs, there's a huge swell of activism and support, and then people fall away. And I remember after Dobbs, so many people gave money to small abortion funds and wanted to volunteer and all these sorts of things. And I was reporting on it, and I would call them and be like, "What are you doing with all these new volunteers? Everyone's so passionate about getting involved." And they were like, "These people are going to disappear in three months. We don't have time to onboard all of them."

And it was a really, really big challenge in exactly the way you're describing. And now we are obviously dealing with about 9,000 other emergencies at the same time, and that doesn't help. And I guess to sort of tie the Irish and US experiences together, you mentioned to me before that you have been doing solidarity work with activists in the States, particularly in Kansas and Missouri, and thinking a lot about borders. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about that, because I thought that was absolutely fascinating.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah, thanks, Sarah. And I suppose just to finish on that discussion we were just having, I think as well, it's like a strategy, a centrist strategy to wear us down as well, to create situations where people will drop off after three months, because we've been so extinguished as the idea of community, it's sort of out of our consciousness. And I think you look at Missouri as well, even getting people in to vote again and again and again until people just get fatigued. So I think that that is a strategy that people are employing that we're maybe naive.

Well, I'm naive to the idea [inaudible 00:54:53] these activists down in very dry legal words, and it'll put people off joining them and they'll get tired. So I think that that is massively an issue too. But yeah, the borders thing is fascinating. There's great work been done. There's a great book by Deirdre Duffy. She wrote about Abortion Trails. Now, it's looking particularly at Northern Ireland, Ireland, and England. But if you think about it, where we're situated, so you've got

Northern Ireland, the Republic, and then you've got GB. So you're dealing with lots of different legal systems, lots of different people.

Just the way that we are is very different. But in terms of, so Derry is situated very close to the border. So Donegal and Derry. Donegal will be in the Republic, Derry's in Northern Ireland, very close. We would... You just need to walk across a bridge, and you're in Donegal. So there'd be a lot of people who are members of Derry for Choice that live in Donegal and vice versa. And certainly during repeal, we were one and the same, and we campaigned a lot in Donegal. So you're automatically thinking with two jurisdictions in your head.

And in a way, actually, it allows you space to be inventive too because you're inhabiting one world one minute and then another another. And you're like, "Oh, well, look, there's a gap here." So you can fill all that in. But particularly in the early 2000s, getting abortion pills into Northern Ireland, meeting folks, just getting in the car and driving down to Kilkenny or to Galway and depositing abortion pills in someone's hands so that they can distribute amongst their communities, and the trust involved in that as well, those lengths.

And then, as well prior, to the advent of abortion pills, folks supporting each other with money, the whisper networks, and these are everywhere. Everywhere that abortion is criminalized or unavailable, we see communities of resistance that really obliterate our global understanding of what borders are as well. We talk a lot about a United Ireland. For me, I see a United Ireland happening in feminist activism without even being thought about. It's just there's no border. We're getting people across. So there would've been a lot of work in that.

It's changed slightly now because we're seeing a lot of racial profiling on buses and trains for people coming from the Republic to Northern Ireland and vice versa. Diversity has really only hit Ireland in the past 20 years, so you were dealing with the very, very white Ireland, and now we're seeing more and more instances of that overt racism that was always there, always present in our society and not to erase the experiences of people of color who lived in Ireland prior to more immigration, but we're seeing that more as an issue now and that border barrier becoming really, really enforced across racial lines.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Certainly something we have a common experience of. And I was thinking about what you said about the American funding that's behind so many of the anti-choice institutions in Ireland and the way that gets exported, particularly by evangelicals, by the Catholic Church.

And I was curious how that shapes your thinking about international solidarity, because obviously we can learn from each other in terms of the types of institutions we set up and the sort of tools that we have and we can share with each other, but also it's a fact that we're here in the States, these are our day-to-day combatants, but they're also affecting you and doing... wreaking all sorts of havoc abroad.

And so when we practice international solidarity, they're practicing international solidarity too. And I wonder how you think about the strategy for people who are fighting for abortion rights in

trying to sever those links or attack from different sides from different countries. I was curious how you think about that.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah, that's really interesting. I think they have the greatest Rolodex because they've got the Catholic Church, and if you need to send over 10 young anti-choice people to Ireland, there's a lot of empty parish houses left now because no one's joining the priesthood anymore. So you're already being in... They have this global community that they can just come and assimilate into in a way that, again, I think that the concept of solidarity in communities has been so eroded by Reaganism, Thatcherism, and we're all still feeling the effects of all of that.

There's a long... I don't know if this quite answers your question, but for us, there's a long, long history of Irish global solidarities. Even in terms of Daniel O'Connell, one of our great politicians and orators, who was an abolitionist, used to write to the diaspora magazines in America. [inaudible 01:00:30], "If you're an Irishman, you should not own slaves." And so there's been a lot of... And conversely, the other way as well. It was funny when Amelia visited Derry, actually, because that father Fidelis guy from New York, he actually married the queen bee of anti-choicers in Derry.

He married her to their partner or whatever. And it was such a small world, and we kind of take the pests out of them. And yeah, I don't know. I think we've tried... I know that you guys have the different experience because you've got the Planned Parenthood clinics, which are just so easily to be targeted. You don't see priests out protests and outside a hospital. It's bad, bad, bad optics for them, but we have had Franciscan friars kneeling and weeping and doing the rosary outside our abortion stigma and pills workshops.

I don't know how to combat them. I think that us doing this kind of work together is important to share stories and foster our international solidarities. As I say, we've tried to make fun of them. That's how we... And because Ireland's coming out of a very controlled Catholic era, where people are kind of happy to laugh a wee bit too. So I don't know, Sarah, if I've answered that right, but they're everywhere, and we need to connect with each other and fight fire with fire.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Yeah, absolutely. That's very funny that we're literally sharing specific priests.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah.

**Sarah Leonard:**

I see that guy around a lot.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

The worst.

**Sarah Leonard:**

He's the character. And I should say too, if folks have questions, we would really welcome them at this time. I can ask questions forever, but we would love to have questions from folks who are here and...

**Amelia Bonow:**

I'm...

**Sarah Leonard:**

Sorry?

**Amelia Bonow:**

Oh, I was just going to... I put a question in the chat chat that's not the official Q&A place, so I don't know if you saw it, but this has been incredible, Maeve. Thank you so much. This is very related to what you were just talking about, but I was wondering if you could... One of the most incredible things about my visit to Derry was the day that I visited the Bloody Sunday Museum. I forget its official name.

But I would love, Maeve, if you could speak a little bit about how that particular era of organizing in the North was taking cues from and was working in sometimes overt solidarity with US civil rights organizations, including the Black Panthers, and how some of those tactics were being mirrored. And yeah, if you could just talk about that for folks.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah. Amelia, that's a fantastic question. As I say, we are so lucky in Alliance for Choice Derry to have generations before us to learn from. We are such a strong group, and it's to do with those foundations. But essentially, for folks who aren't too aware, late '60s, civil unrest broke out in Northern Ireland due to housing issues, no jobs for people from the Catholic background. And in Derry, there was a massacre where unarmed civilians were shot and killed by the British Army after a civil rights protest, and that has really shaped the city. For 30 years, the people of Derry worked to clear the names of their loved ones who were murdered.

The British government at the time had said that they had arms on them, that they had guns on them. There was children shot in the back. These people were innocent, and they were vindicated finally in the 2000s. So the city has a strong, strong sense of self, and so much of the sort of resistance in Northern Ireland came from Derry. So, as Amelia rightly says, because of the time period as well, like 1968, '69, '70, we were very, very inspired by the African American struggle, looking at the tactics, walking across bridges. We would've done that in Northern Ireland and been beaten at bridges by the police, very, very inspired by that.

It's problematic. I look back at it now, and I do think that there's sometimes a problem with white Irish people aligning ourselves with the struggles of Black people and not taking into consideration our participation in white supremacy. Even good people participate in it. We profit from our whiteness. So a caveat all of that... all of this with that, but certainly the connections made by people in Derry, many of whom are members of Alliance for Choice Derry have

endured. We would host members of the Black Panther Party at Bloody Sunday Memorials. They would come and talk about their experiences. They'd be welcome.

Similarly, that has trickled into, there's a lot of pollution, threats of pollution, and Canadian companies coming over to mine gold in Ireland, and we have actually linked in a lot with Native American water defenders. And that praxis of looking to others for inspiration and solidarity is born out of what was been done in the civil rights era. Because if you are being beaten down by your government and the people in the Republic weren't... they weren't too interested, their own stuff going on, you do look elsewhere for solidarity, and we receive that, and that has been inbuilt in our understanding of this work. Until everyone is free, no one is free, would be very much how we see ourselves.

It'll never be won. And I think that that and going through that and going through the troubles. And even myself, my hometown, there was a terrible atrocity there in 1998, and I always felt reticent about doing an abortion stall in my hometown because in my head I was like, "I just don't want to... People have been annoyed enough. I don't need to have been annoying them." But I did do it, and it was one of the greatest days because, despite the civil unrest and the struggle, people do have empathy for what other people are going through. And throughout the troubles feminism endured, there were strong feminist women underneath it all.

And even now, and especially you see so much cross-border solidarity in abortion rights, and you see Protestant women from Belfast going down to Dublin to fight for Catholic women in the Republic's right to have an abortion. And that was incredible that how it united and transcended actually a lot of the sectarian divisions. But Amelia, absolutely. And if anyone's ever in Derry, it's the Free Derry Museum Amelia's talking about, and you could do a walk and tour of the area and all as well, but Alliance for Choice Derry is fundamentally shaped by the history of the city, a city of proud activism and resistance and fighting for what's right as well.

And I'm not from Derry, so I can't speak. I'm a blow-in, but they've welcomed this Tyrone girl into the coven, so I've been very lucky, but absolutely, Amelia. And the We Oral History essay I wrote touches on that. We've got activists who are saying, "Yeah, they were blowing up the town, but I cared more about Apartheid and abortion rights." But it humanizes it as well too, because sometimes all you want to do is get away from where you're from. And people had a global perspective. So thank you for that question, Amelia.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, and thank you for that beautiful answer. I will say that visiting that museum and sort of making this practical connection about international solidarity between movements, it's always been just the most... It's impossibly profound to me when I see groups in other countries using SYA materials. And it's been happening since the very beginning. Our friends in Poland with Abortion Dream Team, pretty much out the gate, started emulating our tactics in the most... It was such a quick turnaround.

It was like we couldn't even believe it. It would be like we would project on a building and they would do it two days later. And that has happened in a back-and-forth way for the last decade, basically. And I remember being in Derry and meeting one of, as Maeve said, one of the group's OGs, a woman named Goretti Horgan, who comes from a legendary... She's one half of a legendary power couple. Is it Eamonn McCann? Is that her husband?

Lots of lore around both of these two. They've been just in the struggle, in all the struggles for many decades, and they are... It was a real honor to be able to meet them both. But I remember SYA did an action in the States. Some of you may know, the day of opening arguments of the Dobbs argument... the day of opening arguments in Dobbs, we stood outside the Supreme Court, and four of us took a Mifepristone while holding a banner that says, "We are taking abortion pills forever."

And I cry like every Abortion Academy. It's like a wonder that it took this long. But I just remember meeting Goretti and Goretti telling me about a similar action that she had been a part of. I don't know if it's the same one that you referenced earlier with the three women you showed in a photo outside of the police station. I don't know if that's what Goretti was a part of or if it was another pill-taking action.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

It's another one.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

It was-

**Amelia Bonow:**

... or if it was another pill-taking action.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Is another one.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. And it was-

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

[inaudible 01:12:04].

**Amelia Bonow:**

... it was so incredible because I hadn't even known about that. And I already was having just this profound experience of being like, "Oh my God." And at the same time as people were doing nonviolent sit-ins of politicians' homes in the United States, the Irish were seeing that and doing that in Derry, in members of the Parliament's homes the next day. My mind was so lit up.

And then it was this really cool thing where it was like, I didn't even know that pill-taking actions were occurring in Ireland, but it's like we're on some other shit, too. I really believe that we're on... It's not just a literal, "Oh, we saw that they did this," but we are connected, I think, in a way that transcends just a literal emulation of tactics. We are part of a consciousness, I think, that is global and that is shared. And it's my most profound source of inspiration, I think.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

No, definitely. Amelia, I couldn't agree more. And you know, it's funny, I was so lucky. In 2018, I actually went to South Africa to present... I collected information. Northern Ireland's small, it sounds bigger than it is, but I asked every single person running for election their opinions on abortion. I had made it into a spreadsheet and it was all very methodologically sound, and I went over and presented a paper on it, on the findings, and gave templates out to folks who might want to copy the idea or whatever.

So you go there, and what would a wee white Irish girl have in common? But we were all fighting the 1861 Act because of British colonialism. So we were clicked in. We started five miles down the road from where I thought... You'd just be like, "How are you doing," kind of thing. And we were all on the same wavelength, and we were all using the same tactics and dealing with the Catholic Church, and it was just... As you say, it transcends all these fucking borders that don't exist.

**Amelia Bonow:**

There are a couple of great questions for you in the chat, Maeve, that are both about references you've mentioned. One is about books that you might recommend to learn more about the history in Ireland, which is of course dense and layered and complex and profoundly inspiring. And the other is a person asking about your oral history project and how we might be able to get a peek at that.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

I'm just having a... Small things like these. Thank you for the... I'm just looking through the chat.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Oh, yeah.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

[inaudible 01:14:54]. All the small things. No. So again, in terms of books, so I'll just give you some authors that I would really recommend. In terms of legal stuff, Mairead Enright and Fiona de Londras would be two very good... So it's D-E L-O-N-D-R-A-S, Fiona de Londras. They write a lot on the legal machinations. They do it in a very user-friendly way.

Deirdre Duffy's Abortion Trails book is very, very good as well. Camilla Fitzsimons has put out some really interesting post-repeal work. So it's Camilla Fitzsimons. There were two books, two collected essays edited by Fiona Bloomer and Emma Campbell, who is from Alliance for Choice

in Belfast. So they're very comprehensive from a Northern Ireland perspective. It's Deconstructing, Decriminalization, something like that.

And my oral history essay is in that, just FYI, it's in the second volume, but I have it on the Alliance for Choice Derry website. If anyone wants to read that, it's just available. You just go into [allianceforchoiceni.org](http://allianceforchoiceni.org). It's under resources and research, and you can just go there. I hope it's a friendly read and it really captures some of the activists that I interviewed as well.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I feel like we might have to get some links and send people the names in a follow-up email.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yes.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I think that folks might appreciate that.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Absolutely. And I can put a few wee links in, actually. Amelia, that's no problem.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Okay.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

I just see there's a question there, "If Maeve can talk about fighting British Occupation and..." Oh, someone's already asked that. That's okay.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, that was me.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

That was great. Even just the process of collecting. I was very lucky in collecting the oral history stories that I just sat down with people with my mobile phone. I work in archives, well, now. Yeah, I was just able to have really good conversations. Myself and a colleague are actually working on trying to look at Ireland 1940s, '50, '60s, looking at herbal remedies and things. And I loved the previous Abortion Academy on abortion and plant medicine and things like that. Because in Ireland, you would have a lot of folklore. Even now, you would go to an old man if you had a sore ear or something and he could cure your ear, the cure. So there's bound to have been cures, like abortion cures. So we are trying to do a bit of investigating into that in our spare time.

**Sarah Leonard:**

I was actually curious if you wanted to say more. You've written about and mentioned the links between your own organizing work and activists around the world who are also colonized by the British, Sierra Leone, Uganda, referencing similar or the same laws.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

The same. Yeah.

**Sarah Leonard:**

It's pretty crazy. And I was curious, I just wondered if you could say more about that. That's really interesting international solidarity work that I don't think most people know much about. And obviously, even though you're responding to the same very old law, you're operating on super different terrain. And I was just curious what the linkages looked like or what meeting with or discussing or collaborating with those folks was like.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah. There was a lot of squealing. We were like, "Oh my God, you too? You have to deal with this shit too?" That's the thing too, though, isn't it? White, European, Western world, North American, it's hard to engage with the Global South through our own making. We've created these infrastructures where we appoint ourselves the authorities.

But for me, and from having the privilege, the conference was really great because it was in South Africa and there was a lot of people from Global South countries who could get there. And you're learning about abortion practices in New Zealand and the Māori tribe and just tribal community responses to abortion and how so many tribes conceptualize abortion within the ecosystem of life. And then you see British colonialism coming in and rupturing all of that, all of those very holistic community-formed principles and values, and British colonialism came in and cracked that and rendered that a relic of the past kind of thing and entrenched this criminalization.

And there's a lot of overlap, particularly in African countries with the AIDS crisis as well, and poverty issues and issues like that, that we would have very little... grossly ignorant of. And the West in general's complicity in creating those living conditions as well. But actually, we just had a great laugh and we're able to just join forces in critiquing the British Empire over a few small glasses of wine and just different structures, like how the 1861 Act is implemented.

Northern Ireland, it's the key. We put the key in and we unlock the door. If you can remove sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act, you cannot be criminalized for abortion. And people can write, people can have clinical guidelines. The issue with telemedicine in the north is that the clinical guideline says that the Health Department of Northern Ireland has the right to determine places that abortion can happen. So obviously what they should do is determine the home is a site where abortion can happen, thereby enabling telemedicine. They won't do that. We had a very anti-choice health minister, but decriminalization kind of leapfrogs at all because if you take an abortion pill at home, you're not going to be criminalized for it. What are they going to do to you?

So with Northern Ireland, we hope that it is providing, particularly for countries living under the 1861 Act who haven't had an amendment like the '67 Act in Britain, because that kind of muddies the waters. There's a whole issue in May. That's why I was over in Westminster about they were trying to bring decriminalization through in England and Wales, but because the '67 Act kind of already set up an existing infrastructure, it's just not quite as simple as removing the two sections.

But if you're a country that the 1861 Act has largely been untouched, that simple removal, and it puts politicians, especially many in some African countries who are so enmeshed with Christianity, it puts them on the back foot because the question you're asking is not, do you support abortion or a women's right to choose? The question is, do you believe a person should be criminalized for seeking abortion? And an answer and a no to that is, again, extremely bad optics. So you're changing the goalpost a wee bit, and we hope that that has provided a template there.

And certainly the research that I did and the methodology about how do you hold your politicians to account, I know that some girls in Uganda did use that, which was great. But again, there's so much more that we should be learning from the Global South and letting them take center space as well, but that's for another day.

**Sarah Leonard:**

That's extremely interesting. We have a question in the chat. "What trends are you seeing in the age groups of people getting involved and being outspoken?"

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Oh yeah, that's interesting. We are finding... Again, we have our OGs, like Diana and all, they're all in their 80s now and they're the queens. And then Goretti would be... Amelia, she would see herself as a youngster still. We try to make it really fun. We have that Girls, Gays, and Theys fundraiser. I'm sure we recruited about 40 people at that. Some of them just come to hang out and party and take photos and be a bit feminist. But we play the long game. People come back, people come back.

Northern Ireland is the third most dangerous place in Europe for women. Just yesterday, a mother and her two children were killed in a murder-suicide by her husband, there's 28 women I think have been killed in Northern Ireland in the past two years, and we're a very small region. So people are aware of the misogyny of Northern Ireland. And a lot of that could be to do with living in a post-conflict society. Where does that violence go?

And there was always violence towards women. Women were tarred and feathered in Northern Ireland if they dated a British soldier, for example, and they were from a Catholic nationalist Republican community. To a lesser extent, there was stigma and revulsion at children born outside of marriage.

We get a lot of youngsters come, teenagers come to hang out, and then they would come back in their later 20s to join. We have an amazing group of 20 to 30-year-olds who are incredible. We have TikTok, people who are fabulous on TikTok. We have pink-hair public speakers. We have people who are doing law degrees and are bringing all those skills in. There's always a place. If you're arty, you can do arty stuff. If you're arty and you want to do law stuff, come on ahead, do law stuff. We're very open and welcoming, but we do have all the age groups. And I'm really very proud of that actually because you learn so much.

**Sarah Leonard:**

This is a great time for any last questions folks might want to get in.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Thank you so much, everybody. I'm so sorry. I talked for ages there, so I just... Sorry the presentation ran over.

**Amelia Bonow:**

No, it was brilliant, Maeve.

**Sarah Leonard:**

[inaudible 01:26:30].

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, we always want these to take as long as they're supposed to take, and you were remarkable. I could listen to you talk. I wish that I could just go to audit your classes, Professor O'Brien.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Yeah, sign us up.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Thanks so much, guys. Such a pleasure.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Yeah. It's a real pleasure to be here.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Sarah, is there anything that you can tell us about Lux and what Lux is up to these days? Anything to keep in mind? You said you have a new issue coming out.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Sure. Yeah, we have a new issue out now that we think is pretty great, which includes actually an incredible essay by one of our contributing editors, Jessie Kindig, about abortion's presence through the full history of American literature, obviously not every book, but it's a big sweep from a couple hundred years of literature and how it appears, disappears, is referenced obliquely depending on the time period and shifting political attitudes, but also the ways in which having to maintain a political line about abortion, which we have to when it's under threat, can restrict the full range of emotions that you can express about abortion and how that works or doesn't work in literature in different periods.

And it's a really interesting, thoughtful essay. So that's a piece I really loved from this issue that's probably relevant to everything we're talking about right now. I would love for folks to subscribe, obviously that's the thing that keeps us going so we can pay all our writers and make the magazine happen. And you can also just subscribe to our newsletter, which is free, and we do lots of interviews.

And we actually just did one with Dr. Sella, who does third-trimester abortions, or did for many, many years in the US, one of the few doctors who does. And she worked with Dr. Tiller, who was assassinated, and she has now retired from abortion care and wrote a book. So the book is really amazing, and we did an interview with her. That's a type of thing we do, and we're trying to travel more as well. We'll be touring American colleges actually in the fall, spring, given what's going on. We want to talk to students and keep an eye out for events.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Please come to Seattle.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Oh, we would love to.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Let's do a thing. I'm actually interviewing Dr. Sella on September 11th, never forget. And I will shout out as well that SYA is about to turn 10 and we're having a big-

**Sarah Leonard:**

Oh, wow.

**Amelia Bonow:**

I know. Isn't that wild? And we're having a big birthday party in Seattle on September 6th, and everyone in the world is invited that we love, which is, if you can hear me saying this, it's you.

**Sarah Leonard:**

We actually just discovered that we are present in more bookstores in Washington than practically anywhere else. We're not sure why, but we love it.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Awesome. Well, Jessie's from here, right? Jessie's-

**Sarah Leonard:**

Yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah. Okay. Well, let's talk.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Congratulations on your anniversary.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Thank you. It's really special. We're so proud and we're so... I don't know. I feel like we're ready for the next decade. Fuck it.

**Sarah Leonard:**

Oh, yeah.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Game on.

**Sarah Leonard:**

The next decade's ready for us.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, that's right. That's right. Maeve, do you have any shout-outs, ways that folks can support the group from afar? I mean, obviously following you on the socials.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Yeah, definitely, Amelia. And just to say, we're so happy to do just closed-door chats or share any of our training materials and stuff for the abortion and stigma pills workshops. They can be very easily edited to your own region. If you're ever in Derry or Ireland, give us a shout, but do keep in touch.

We have our email, actually, I'll pop it in as well into the chat here or maybe... You know what? We'll send it all out in a post email because people can feel free to send us an email as well if they want to keep in touch. And Sarah, that magazine, abortion in literature, it's literally my sweet spot. So me getting all that sorted and looking at that.

**Sarah Leonard:**

We're going to send you a batch.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Maeve is a Sylvia Plath scholar. If that doesn't-

**Sarah Leonard:**

[inaudible 01:31:36].

**Amelia Bonow:**

I know. I know.

**Sarah Leonard:**

So cool.

**Amelia Bonow:**

Yeah, it's the coolest. You're both the coolest. It's been an honor to just listen and bask in this conversation. And I feel like it was one of my very favorite sessions, but I feel that often, but this time for really real. So thank you both. Yeah, thank you both for being here. Thank you everyone for hanging out for an hour and a half of your day, and we're sending love and solidarity all over the world.

**Dr. Maeve O'Brien:**

Thank you guys so much.