Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Sayı: 28, 2023, 328-345
DOI:10.30767/diledeara.1350013 Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Making of Scapegoats: The Complicity of Church, State and Society in Claire Keegan's Small Things Like These

Günah keçileri Yaratmak: Claire Keegan'ın Bunlar Gibi Küçük Şeyler adlı Romanında Kilise, Devlet ve Toplumun Suç Ortaklığı

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Abstract

Claire Keegan's novel Small Things Like These (2021) brings such notions as purity, impurity and scapegoating into discussion within the context of the convent laundries in Ireland. The novel critiques the reduction of morality and immorality to a sexist category and focuses on the "fallen women" as both victims and saviours of society. It also portrays the harsh socio-economic environment of New Ross, Ireland where capitalism and inequality prevail, and the characters are victims of the capitalist system. Drawing a sketch of the Magdalen Laundries, which served as institutions instrumental in creating ideal women for the Irish nation and protecting the public from the "fallen" women until 1996, Keegan points at the complicity between religious and capitalist influences. She emphasises the relationship between Christianity and capitalism by implying out that capitalism prioritises private ownership, profit and competition, and that Christianity propagates the core tenets of the system. The narrative underscores how capitalism's pursuit of profit can lead to the exploitation and marginalization of vulnerable groups, perpetuating a system of scapegoating to protect the interests of the rich and the powerful. Hence, the primary objective of this study is to analyse the phenomenon of scapegoating as exemplified, particularly by the girls at the convent who have been marginalized and confined within a convent in Keegan's literary work, Small Things Like These, drawing upon the theories related to "mimetic desire," "violence," and "scapegoating mechanism." It also aims to show how these girls, ostracised and accused of subverting national ideals, function as a mirror to the truth and reveal the unfeasibility of achieving true communal purification within the intricate interplay of church, state, and society– all of which are manipulated by the forces of capitalism.

Keywords: Irish literature, Claire Keegan, Scapegoat, Capitalism, Magdalen Laundries.

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Öz

Claire Keegan'ın Small Things Like These (2021) adlı romanı, İrlanda'daki Magdalen Çamaşırhaneleri bağlamında saflık, kirlilik ve günah keçisi ilan etme gibi kavramları tartışmaya açmaktadır. Roman, ahlak ve ahlaksızlığın cinsiyetçi bir kategoriye indirgenmesini eleştirmekte ve toplumun hem kurbanları hem de kurtarıcıları olarak "düşmüş kadınlara" odaklanmaktadır. Roman aynı zamanda kapitalizm ve eşitsizliğin hüküm sürdüğü İrlanda'daki New Ross kasabasının sert sosyo-ekonomik ortamını ve kapitalist sistemin kurbanları olan karakterleri de tasvir etmektedir. Keegan, 1996 yılına kadar İrlanda ulusu için ideal kadınların yaratılmasında ve halkın "düşmüş" kadınlardan korunmasında etkili olan Magdalen Çamaşırhaneleri'nin bir taslağını çizerek, dini ve kapitalist etkiler arasındaki suç ortaklığına işaret eder. Kapitalizmin özel mülkiyeti, kârı ve rekabeti önceleğini ve Hıristiyanlığın sistemin temel ilkelerini yaydığını anıştırarak Hıristiyanlık ve kapitalizm arasındaki ilişkiye vurgu yapar. Anlatı, kapitalizmin kâr arayışının savunmasız grupların sömürülmesine ve marjinalleştirilmesine nasıl yol açabileceğinin, zenginlerin ve güçlülerin çıkarlarını korumak için bir günah keçisi ilan etme sistemini nasıl sürdürdüğünün altını çizmektedir. Dolayısıyla, bu çalışmanın temel amacı, Keegan'ın Small Things Like These adlı eserinde özellikle ötekileştirilen ve manastıra kapatılan kızlar ve diğer karakterler üzerinden örneklenen günah keçisi olgusunu, "mimetik arzu," "şiddet" ve "günah keçisi mekanizması" ile ilgili teorilerden yararlanarak incelemektir. Çalışma ayrıca, dışlanan ve ulusal ideallere zarar vermekle suçlanan bu kızların hakikate ilişkin nasıl bir ayna işlevi gördüğünü göstermeyi ve hepsi kapitalizmin güçleri tarafından manipüle edilen kilise, devlet ve toplumun karmaşık etkileşimi içinde gerçek bir toplumsal arınmaya ulaşmanın imkansızlığını ortaya koymayı hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: İrlanda Edebiyatı, Claire Keegan, Günah keçisi, Kapitalizm, Magdalen Çamaşırhaneleri.

Gönderilme Tarihi / Received Date:
25 Ağustos 2023
Kabul Tarihi / Accepted Date:
8 Ekim 2023

Atıf/Citation: Hakkıoğlu M. Güneş M. (2023). Making of Scapegoats: The Complicity of Church, State and Society in Claire Keegan's Small Things Like These
doi.org/10.30767/diledeara.1350013

Extended Abstract

René Girard, one of the most influential theoreticians studying scapegoating and its mechanisms in various contexts, points at the significance of the practice as a part of social dynamics and claims every community that suffers violence or a major catastrophe blindly goes on a scapegoat hunt and individuals refer to a violent solution, that is putting all the troubles they go through on a scapegoat, that is someone that can be disposed of, someone weaker or already spared for such causes. Girard defines scapegoating as a collective violence that has been applied as a remedy for the rising tension or the need for violence because of the mimetic desire, which simply purports a theory that motivations for human are based on imitative desire mechanisms and rivalries and conflicts are all results of the elimination of differences among the members of the society. As per Girard, in various narratives including literature, traces of scapegoating mechanism might be observed albeit being a primitive ritual in essence. Revolving around the protagonist, Bill Furlong, a coal merchant, and young girls employed in a fictional convent laundry, Claire Keegan's novel, *Small Things Like These* (2021), not only provides a lens through which the author critiques the oversimplification of morality and immorality based on gender, but also portrays the enactment of a primitive ritual of scapegoating in a twentieth-century society via the collusion of religion and patriarchy.

The dominant discourse in Ireland during the early twentieth century emphasized purity, chastity, and virtue, confining and restricting women to traditional roles. The Magdalen Asylums were used to create ideal women for the Irish nation and protect the public from "fallen" women. The institutions isolated women from society and subjected them to various interventions, including changing their names, and the laundries eventually became centres of income-generating labour forces. The novel portrays these women as both victims and saviours of society, serving as modern scapegoats in Irish society. Their plight, to cleanse the society of perceived impurities and to purify themselves through their sacrifices, parallels the context of the early twentieth century in Ireland, which underscores the pressure on women to conform to traditional roles of maintaining chastity, family honour, and domestic virtue. Nevertheless, it entrapped women within rigid norms, pigeonholing them as embodiments of both virtue and vice, stifling their agency and independence. The narrative unfolds within a network where religion, business, and politics intersect, shedding light on the complex dynamics of a society grappling with its identity. Keegan highlights the cyclical nature of scapegoating, a means of restoring harmony in times of chaos, while simultaneously perpetuating the silencing and isolation of those targeted.

Girls in the laundry together with Bill Furlong and Furlong's daughter Kathleen, are portrayed as scapegoats of the capitalist system in the novel. The sinful acts of the community are connived into a form in which the real perpetrators are acquitted and cleansed of all charges or burdens since they are rich and powerful whereas a surrogate victim is blamed and penalized as s/he is expendable or weak. This sheds light on the relationship among capitalism, religion and scapegoating, emphasizing how scapegoating is embedded in economic practices and behaviours. It challenges the notion that economic value is solely determined by objective factors and underscores the role of subjective experiences and sacrifices in shaping economic systems. It is a manifestation of Girardian mimetic desire where shared desires intensify competition and, ultimately, lead to violence and scapegoating. The convent laundry in the novel uses its religious influence to normalize intensified violence and blamestorming, functioning as an agent of discipline which generates income for itself in the meantime while society remains silent against the abuse, not only to find internal

peace by attributing its crimes and sins on to chosen victims, but also to use this scapegoating mechanism to shape an ideal society through the idealized role of women.

Thereby, the major purpose of the study is to explore *Small Things Like These* written by the Irish author, Claire Keegan, to claim that the church, symbolizing Jesus, the state with its concealed yet potent affiliations, and the patriarchal society all find themselves ensnared within the intricate web of the capitalist framework, entangled in deeply flawed practices. The individuals cast into the role of scapegoats to veil these imperfections are marginalized young women and disavowed fallen women, forsaken by their families, marginalized by society, and confined within the walls of a convent either through coercion or personal choice, with the promise of redemption. However, their expulsion does not alleviate the underlying issue; instead, it appeases the societal indignation directed towards the problem's exposure.

Introduction

Since antiquity, scapegoating has been practised almost everywhere in the world, retaining its core logic, although its form, actors and reasons have changed. In ritual period, the scapegoats were banished from the community or sacrificed to put an end to disasters such as contagious diseases, floods or droughts. Undoubtedly, similar dispositions did not stop the calamities for which they were blamed. Since such crises naturally affected interpersonal relations, scapegoats were the key to solving internal rather than external problems. In a sense, their role was not to prevent disasters, but to release the accumulated internal anger by bearing all the blame and negative attitudes that the members of the community directed towards each other in times of crisis, and thus to restore peace. This basic framework of scapegoating has remained the same despite the passage of time. Campbell argues that there are two types of scapegoats in the modern or post-ritual period: The first is created unconsciously as an expression of our anger and intolerance in a communal structure where everyone believes that the others are guilty, and the second is created by those who want to take the blame off themselves as a conscious act (2011, p. 27). In both cases, the scapegoats serve as useful vehicles to be resorted to in the most problematic moments.

Scapegoats are both vulnerable entities, unable to resist what has been inflicted upon them, and the possessor of a great potential that even they themselves are not aware of. They are victims as well as saviours. Considered dirty due to their inadaptability to the established standards, they are still important to the society because they can be easily sacrificed when necessary. What facilitates their sacrifice or exile is their accessibility and expendability. In this respect, they are often treated as worthless nothing, but when the time comes, "to be nothing is to be nothing in particular, and thus to be potentially everything" (Eagleton, 2018, p. 177). It is possible to see the traces of such a context in *Small Things Like These* (2021) by the Irish writer Claire Keegan. The novel deals with the Magdalen laundries, which created one of the most shocking facts in the history of Ireland and focuses on a multidimensional complicity in a patriarchal society through the little girls employed in the convent laundry. In a network of intricate relations in which religion, business and politics are intertwined, she criticises the perspective that reduces morality and immorality to a sexist discourse and opens the issue of "fallen women" to discussion. The potential threats of the established order in the novel are almost exiled from society; they atone for their sins and the crimes they are accused of by carrying out an income-generating role. Their segregation and incarceration will supposedly have a double function, both to save the society by purifying it from the pests like them and to ensure their own rebirth by cleansing themselves.

Highlighting all these points, this study aims to discuss the practice of scapegoating through the girls stigmatised and incarcerated in a convent in Keegan's novel *Small Things Like These* and to expose how these girls, as the outcasts accused of undermining national ideals, serve as a mirror showing the impossibility of a genuine collective purification in a triangle of church, state and society, all of which are instrumentalised by capitalism. In doing so, it first draws the theoretical framework of the discussion by revealing the sources of the scapegoating practice, then tells how the Magdalen asylums corrupted and turned into scapegoat centres, and finally reveals the traces of the given theoretical and historical framework in the novel.

Sacrifice, Scapegoats and Capitalism

The practice of "sacrifice" has emerged from the human need to embrace the belief in a higher creator, establishing a profound connection between their existence and a superior entity responsible for empowering and safeguarding all living creatures. In ancient cultures, extending from the Aztecs to the Chinese, various forms of sacrifice held great significance and were employed for different purposes. For instance, in the Hittite civilization, "sacrifice basically occurs in every ritual context we can think of: purification, exorcism, or any other curative ritual context, but also cultic contexts such as state festivals," and animals not older than one year or the earliest ripened fruit were preferred as sacrificial offerings to the gods, and there were strict rules, regulations, and roles for those participating in the practice (Mouton, 2017, p. 240). Among ancient Greeks, it was highly common to offer ceremonial sacrifices of animals or even human *pharmakos* to maintain good relations with divine powers, and some parts of the sacrificed animal were burnt or feasted in banquets by all attending the ritual (Detienne & Vernant, 1989, p. 25; Girard, 1989, p. 9). In Chinese tradition, sacrificial meat was presented to ancestors, both deceased and living. Apart from sacrifice ceremonies like *fengshan* where slaves or other human beings are often decapitated, there was the ceremonial immolation of servants after the monarch's death since it was believed they would continue to serve the ruler in the afterlife (Bokenkamp, 2002, p. 387). Similarly, in ancient Egypt, servants were buried alongside Pharaohs to serve their masters even in the afterworld (Shimazono & Kitts, 2013, p. 2). In ancient Japan, sacrifice played a crucial role as a means of communication between the sacred and the profane, and the Japanese offered essential life sources as sacrifices to the creators. In ancient India, it was considered a necessary requirement for the salvation of the spirits of the departed, and the best parts of certain food or animals were immolated and burned in temples to appease the gods (Upanishad, para 7). For ancient Turks, sacrifice often served as an act of celebration and gratitude towards the gods. They would sacrifice specific animals during events such as births, weddings, festivals, rainy seasons, before wars, and after droughts, diseases, or deaths (Akgün, 2007, pp. 143-144).

Whether it involves repudiation, extermination, or annihilation of something possessed, for the purpose of appeasing a greater being (often a creator), is closely linked to the concept of a "scapegoat." The ritual of sacrifice always involves an exchange of roles or positions during execution, where the valuable possession, person, or state of being aimed to be protected by the act of sacrifice is replaced by another possession that is less valuable or can be repudiated more easily. As a result, the sacrificed victim acts as a 'surrogate' for the saved possession. This ritual, facilitated by an act of immolation, originates from the belief system, or "the religion" in which people situate themselves, and it serves as a medium of communication between the sacred and the profane (Hubert & Mauss, 1981, p. 55). Although René Girard is known to be the doyen of

scapegoating critique, the early twentieth century anthropologist James George Frazer has been one of the earliest theoreticians for the understanding of these concepts. His influential work, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, explores the rituals and rites of the act of sacrificing, not only animals or food, but also humans around various cultures extensively. Analysing the cultural and psychological implications of sacrificial practices, Frazer highlights the broader significance of scapegoating across human history. He concludes that it is carried out because primitive cultures believed that they could influence natural and social phenomena by imitating or symbolically enacting certain rituals (Frazer, 1922, p. 345).

Frazer cites examples from numerous cultures and compares these to make an analysis of recurrent patterns of sacrificial rituals, enlightening the process of selecting scapegoats. He claims that such rites in primitive communities involve the identification and expulsion of an individual, that is usually a human being or an animal on which all the sins of the community are transferred, hence that being is held responsible for societal troubles and disruptions (Frazer, 1922, p. 706). Therefore, with the sacrifice of that scapegoat, those primitive communities believed to achieve the restoration of societal harmony, appeasing supernatural forces and, hence cleansing themselves of impurities. For Frazer, such ceremonies, that is the selection of a scapegoat and the sacrifice of that being through either expulsion or murder, are not only a primitive ritual that used to occur in bygone eras, but throughout centuries, the sacrificial act of scapegoating has also served as a mechanism for social cohesion, resolving tensions and reinforcing shared beliefs and values even in contemporary religious, societal, cultural practices (Frazer, 1922, p. 798).

Following Frazer, Girard has contributed immensely to our understanding of the scapegoating mechanism in literature thanks to his eminently known books, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*, *Violence and the Sacred*, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, and *The Scapegoat*. In Girard's books, the dynamics of human desire, rivalry, violence, and the sacrificial rituals that serve to restore social equilibrium are explored within the context of literature. In *The Scapegoat*, he introduces his theory of "mimetic desire" and alleges that human desires are imitative and prone to conflicts and rivalries (Girard, 1986, p. 144). He argues that societies, in order to alleviate this inherent tension, engage in the selection of a scapegoat, a sacrificial figure onto whom blame and hostility are collectively projected. This sacrificial act serves as a means of "purging" societal tensions and reaffirming communal bonds (Girard, 1986, p. 16). Girard delves into the profound underpinnings of civilization, positing a distinct form of violence or sacrifice known as "generative violence" as its foundation, and he contends that "the generative violence constitutes at least the indirect origin of all those things that men hold most dear and that they strive most ardently to preserve" (1989, p. 93). He argues that the path towards violence begins with the gradual elimination of differences among individuals, driven by a cycle of mimetic desire that operates behind human actions and behaviours. He suggests that at the core of every act of human violence lies a fundamental desire, and beneath each human desire lies the concept of mimesis. People imitate the actions of a model and desire the same things because the model desires them. Through this process, the imitator not only mimics the model's behaviour but also internalizes the model's desires as their own. As the cycle of imitation persists endlessly, a point is reached where the imitator's sole remaining desire becomes the replacement of the model itself (Girard, 1986, p. 130). In essence, the imitator perceives the model as the only obstacle to fulfilling their desire and achieving self-realization, thereby transforming rivalry into a manifestation of violence.

For Girard, the distinctions within a community are eroded gradually through various processes of mimetic desire, and collective tension arises among its members. This tension can only be assuaged through an act of violence, mirroring the original sacrificial act. Eventually, one individual within the group becomes the scapegoat. Girard introduces the concept of "the elimination of differences," encompassing not only the eradication of distinctions among community members through mimetic desire but also the various forms of violence that emerge (1989, p. 49). According to Girard, this process leads to a state of "sacrificial crisis" that can only be resolved through re-enacting a surrogate murder, which echoes the original generative violence that Girard views as a form of murder (1989, p. 49). Thus, a surrogate ritual takes place, wherein a substitute victim, serving as a scapegoat for the original victim, is sacrificed. This act releases the pent-up tension and resolves the sacrificial crisis. Girard asserts that throughout history, this recurring pattern has unfolded in similar ways, serving to ensure the well-being of civilizations and maintain social order, transcending primitive tribes. Emphasizing the relationship with the sacred in *Violence and the Sacred,* he exemplifies the primitive rituals of sacrifice in various cultural and religious contexts and emphasizes the role of violence as a mechanism for social order and cohesion. He states that the scapegoating mechanism and the sacrificial rites allow societies to externalize their internal conflicts and maintain stability, albeit at the cost of an innocent victim or victims. Although Girard's arguments explain the motivations and consequences of scapegoating and violence in communities, there is an undeniably inherent paradox in his theories. While scapegoating resolves conflicts and relieves the tension rising because of mimesis in societies, this is a temporary resolution and as it is based on the perpetuation of cycles of violence, it hence leads to the perpetual reinforcement of oppressive social structures.

Despite the influences of secularization and modernization, the notions of sacrifice and scapegoating continue to exist in modern times, and while various forms of sacrifice and self-sacrifice remain connected to religion and spirituality, even subtler manifestations have emerged in secular contexts (Alonso & Rodríguez, 2021, p. 127). Sacrifice continues to hold significance within the realm of modern capitalist economy, where principles of exchange are just as crucial as they are in religious practices. In both religion and modern capitalist systems, sacrifice is appropriated as a significant tool to appease or please a higher power, and it is believed to be crucial to bring about blessings or spiritual growth in religion and career development or financial progress in money, hard work, and success-oriented capitalism. In the pursuit of success or growth, individuals engage in acts of sacrifice which may even include self-sacrifice, and they might sacrifice their time, energy, or personal desires to advance their economic career or spiritual growth. In this context, sacrifice is closely linked with the capitalist principles of exchange and value since individuals feel the need to repudiate something they have with the hope of acquiring something else which would be more valuable or meaningful for them.

The affiliation of religion with the contemporary economic system of capitalism, reinforces the prevalence and significance of the sacrifices and scapegoats made for individual or communal gain within such a system. In his book, *The Philosophy of Money*, Georg Simmel emphasizes the significance of sacrifice in the economic system (2011, p. 79). He argues that the subjective condition of economic value does not arise from the pleasure of possessing an object, but rather from the desire derived from its nonpossession and the sacrifices that individuals need to endure in order to obtain such objects (Alonso & Rodríguez, 2021, p. 2). He suggests that economic practices are not solely based on "objective economic conditions (such as scarcity of resources)", but also

on "subjective conditions for the exchange of objects of value" (Ossewaarde & Reijers, 2017, p. 613). Simmel's perspective on sacrifice in the economic system aligns with his broader analysis of the role of sacrifice in society. He argues that sacrifice is not limited to religious or spiritual contexts but is also embedded in economic practices and behaviours (Alonso & Rodríguez, 2021, p. 2). For him, the origins of money and currency can be traced back to the mechanism of ritual sacrifice. This perspective suggests that sacrifice is not only a consequence of economic exchange but also a foundational element in the development of monetary systems. This perspective challenges the notion that economic value is solely determined by objective factors and highlights the role of subjective experiences and sacrifices in shaping economic systems.

Terry Eagleton also draws attention to the complex relationship between sacrifice, scapegoating, ideology, capitalism and power in his *Radical Sacrifice*, interrogating the sacrificial logic deeply ingrained in societal narratives. He asserts, "if sacrifice involves yielding something up, it is in order to possess it more deeply," and posits that sacrifice is often employed in order to uphold existing power structures, reinforcing dominant ideologies, and maintaining social order (2018, p. 8). Considering the sacrificial ideologies deeply embedded within society, Eagleton unveils the underlying ideological mechanisms of scapegoating. He explores the ways in which individuals or groups are chosen as sacrificial victims, often marginalized and stigmatized by dominant cultural, political, or religious systems. Eagleton's critique of sacrificial logic extends beyond its manifestation in traditional religious practices, encompassing political, economic, and social domains. Scapegoating in capitalist societies serves to maintain social order and solidarity among the dominant groups. It provides a means to justify and rationalize social inequalities by attributing them to the alleged deficiencies or actions of marginalized groups. By directing blame towards weaker members of society, a sense of cohesion and unity is fostered among those who benefit from the existing power and economic structures. Scapegoats become symbols of the "other," reinforcing a sense of superiority and entitlement among the privileged. In capitalist societies, religious ideologies intertwine with economic interests, further perpetuating the scapegoating and sacrifice of marginalized groups. As a result, religious rhetoric often reinforces and justifies existing power dynamics by portraying wealth and success as indicators of divine favour while stigmatizing poverty or failure as moral shortcomings.

One such example in history, where the discourse of religious faith colludes in the ideology of the powerful and the fortunate, is the Magdalen Laundries where women are scapegoated and sacrificed for the sake of perpetuating the existing economic system and hierarchies. The collective violence addressed to the "fallen women" who might also be tagged as disadvantaged delinquents of the society, led to the scapegoating of these women in Ireland with the help of a religious institution, Magdalen Laundries, as a means to excuse the sins of men, viz., the privileged and the more powerful. Hence, in Irish history, the victimization and scapegoating of individuals with the collaboration of religion and capitalism can be explored drawing upon the theories about the role of sacrifice, scapegoating, and capitalism in societal dynamics.

Incarceration of Scapegoats in the Magdalen Laundries

The dominant discourse in Ireland in the early twentieth century urged women to act in accordance with their nature, to protect their chastity and family honour, to be faithful wives and devoted mothers, in short, to stay within their traditional roles. Especially after the independence, the Irish embraced the Catholic ideals of "purity, chastity, and virtue" to distance themselves from the

British, and identified their foes with "impurity, licentiousness, and vice" (Fischer, 2016, p. 822). While Ireland's desire to create a new identity against the colonial imposition is understandable, its obsessive focus on "moral purity" pushed women into a problematic area. Aiming to build the newly established state on solid foundations, this policy not only confined and restricted women but also idealised them. In other words, they became the embodiment of both morality and immorality at the same time. Broadly speaking, such an approach is based on the idea of purifying the woman so that society can be purified. The Irish identity to be created would thus be superior to that of the English, at least theoretically. But woman, as the symbol of moral purity, was seen also as the utmost threat to the national ideal, given her potential to transgress the social boundaries and violate the established norms.

To avoid undermining the national ideal, all related parties formed alliances and developed strategies to counter the threats. Gray and Ryan note that the church and the state were united in their desire to create a new imagined and purely homogeneous community free from internal conflicts and contradictions and closed to the corruption of the outside world (1998, pp. 126-127). Emphasising that the results of the strategic partnership between the two were most evident on the outcasts who did not fit into the model, Conrad writes that they were excluded, silenced, or punished, and all of them, including those seemingly empowered and authorised within the system, were held captive by that model (2004, pp. 3-4).

The women who transgressed the social norms were judged to have lost their purity and sometimes considered to be "fallen" in the new society built on that model. The rather old term "fallen woman" was used in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to denote to prostitutes, unwed mothers, women and girls who went beyond the accepted behaviour codes, victims of sexual abuse and even those who engaged in consensual extramarital relationships. It is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d) as "a woman who has lost her chastity, honour, or standing, or who has become morally degenerate; (sometimes) a prostitute". Religiously, it refers to Eve, the protagonist of the expulsion from paradise in Christianity, and Mary Magdalen, the archetype of the penitent woman. The role of the former as the scapegoat responsible for the Fall directly influenced the development of the figure of Mary Magdalen as the second Eve (Haskins, 1993, p. 67). As a biblical character, she has culturally, historically and theologically evolved into a symbol of the fallen who subsequently have achieved redemption through devotion. Thus, the term associated with her evokes both Eve, whom the traditional narrative blames for the Fall, and adulterous women who transgress the established mores and fail to maintain their chastity.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, there were various organisations in Ireland and Britain, albeit with different names and management systems, based on religious principles and dedicated to the salvation and rehabilitation of the fallen women (McCormick, 2005, pp. 373-374). The best known of such organisations on the Catholic side were those that emphasised the redemption of Mary Magdalen and concerned with the women who suffered a similar fate. According to Smith, in a society where even the slightest whiff of scandal threatened the dignity of an exemplary Irish family, "the Magdalen asylum existed as a place to contain and punish the threatening embodiment of instability" (2007, p. xiv). These institutions created highly disciplined organisations to leave no room for the instability that Smith highlights. The women there were isolated from society and subjected to various interventions, down to their identities. Giving them new names, mostly from the Bible, was one way of having absolute control over them. It was part

of a strategy to move women from a past of shame, sin and deviance into a new world that required commitment. The act of renaming was a declaration of the death of the former self and "the initial step in establishing the tenets of magdalenism" (Wecker, 2015, p. 265). Therefore, in that context, magdalenism is "the process of identity inversion for the sake of controlling a class of women in the name of moral righteousness and power" (McCarthy, 2010, p. 4).

In the last two hundred years, thousands of Irish women washed the dirty laundry of society, supposedly purifying themselves of their sins, worshiped day and night and gave up their individual identities to achieve spiritual renewal (Smith, 2007, p. 431). However, the service which started as a mission of salvation in the name of Christianity was transformed into a source of income-generating labour force after they realised the untapped potential of penitents. Although the apparent perpetrator was the church, the organisation continued its activities for many years with the support of the state and society. Therefore, the laundries were essentially the product of the alliance of a triple mechanism, and the corruption of such a structure based on a relationship of mutual interest was inevitable. Rumours and testimonies about the scandals and brutalities that took place behind the doors of the convents led to some protest waves. As a result, it became imperative to clarify the never-ending allegations about the Magdalen asylums, which had played an important role in the project of building national identity but had turned into commercial enterprises in the course of time. A committee of inquiry was set up to investigate the matter, which concluded its work with the publication of "The Report of the Inter-departmental Committee to Establish the Facts of State Involvement with the Magdalen Laundries", shortly known as "The McAleese Report", in February 2013. The report confirms many of the allegations and underlines the state involvement in what happened in the laundries, disproving the dominant discourse according to which church-run organisations were managed without state intervention and involvement (2013, p. xi). It also writes that about 10,000 women and girls entered the Magdalen Laundries between 1922 and 1996 (2013, p. 150-1), and approximately 27% of all known referrals were made by the state or through the channels opened by it (2013, p. 163). These included women from courts, prisons, detention centres, probation centres and those sent from psychiatric hospitals and state-run institutions with referrals from the departments of health and social services (2013, p. 152).

Lentin argues that the exposure of the incarceration of unwed pregnant women in institutions like the Magdalen laundries, the last of which was closed in 1996, and the child abuse in Irish industrial schools shocked Irish society. For her, this shock implied a denial which "represented a disavowal of something Irish people had been aware of and were repressing all along" (2016, p. 24). In other words, their denial was an acknowledgement of facts that were known but unspoken, seen but ignored. The apology made by the Irish Prime Minister, Enda Kenny, on 19 February, 2013 to these women, who had been treated as victims and scapegoats for years, is in some ways an indicative of this:

> I, as Taoiseach, on behalf of the State, the Government and our citizens deeply regret and apologise unreservedly to all those women for the hurt that was done to them, and for any stigma they suffered, as a result of the time they spent in a Magdalen Laundry. [...] What we discuss today is your story. What we address today is how you took this country's terrible 'secret' and made it your own. Burying it, carrying it in your hearts here at home, or with you to England and to Canada, America and Australia on behalf of Ireland and the Irish people [...] But from this moment on you need carry it

> no more. Because today we take it back. Today... we acknowledge the role of the State in your ordeal. (Kenny, 2013)

Although the Magdalen laundries denoted to a big socio-political problem, the issue was discussed on a moral ground concerning women. The laundry women, in effect, were the invisible objects of deviances such as incest, rape, paedophilia and male sexual desire in a patriarchal society. They were victims and scapegoats of collective judgement and the vehicles of purification, thus being the saviours of society. In a sense, they served "to inoculate against future misery and failure by evicting the presumed cause of misfortune" (Perera, 1986, p. 9). The girls in *Small Things Like These,* incarcerated in the convent and obliged to work in the laundry, are fictional examples of such an inoculation.

Modern Scapegoats of the Established Order in *Small Things Like These*

The laundry in Keegan's novel, like many of its real-life counterparts, serves a wide network of customers ranging from restaurants to guesthouses, from nursing homes to hospitals, from clergymen to the wealthy, on the shoulders of the training schoolgirls, as they were known. In fact, they are the scapegoats of society and the child labourers of the capitalist order. The townspeople are full of rumours that they are not "students of anything, but girls of low character who spent their days being reformed, doing penance by washing stains out of the dirty linen" (Keegan, 2021), that they work under harsh conditions from dawn till night often with nothing but only a slice of bread in their stomachs, and that their babies born out of wedlock are sent to America and Australia by the nuns in exchange for money (Keegan, 2021). There are several direct or indirect references in the novel to such rumours based on historical facts, which are discredited by the dominant discourse of the church.

Small Things Like These takes place just before the Christmas of 1985 in New Ross, Ireland. There is a great economic depression, and young people in particular, seeking to escape the misery, leave the small market of their small town for London, Boston and New York, the centres of capitalism. Bill Furlong, the protagonist of the novel, is a thirty-nine-year-old coal merchant, born to a mother who was ostracised by her family when she fell pregnant at the age of sixteen, probably as a result of rape. They survived thanks to Mrs Wilson, a rich Protestant widow; she gave Furlong generous financial and moral support until her death. Furlong works hard day and night to lead a comfortable life with his wife Eileen and their five daughters raised obedient to the social and political norms. Thus, he is able to send them to St Margaret's, the only good Catholic school for girls in the town and offer them opportunities that most of their peers do not have access to. His sole aim is to forget his past and preserve his present. Making his living from wood and coal, he owes his comfort to the cold weather; the warmth of his home depends on the problems of others. On a symbolic level, he carries fuel to the fire of the capitalist order, and he does it wholeheartedly:

> Even while he'd been creaming the butter and sugar, his mind was not so much upon the here and now and on this Sunday nearing Christmas with his wife and daughters so much as on tomorrow and who owed what, and how and when he'd deliver what was ordered and what man he'd leave to which task, and how and where he'd collect what was owed – and before tomorrow was coming to an end, he knew his mind would already be working in much the same way, yet again, over the day that was to follow. (Keegan, 2021)

Furlong's trauma of being an illegitimate child has never healed. He cannot stop thinking about what his fate would have been if Mrs Wilson had not lent a helping hand to his mother in time. He is neither someone who would desire to be a part of the class of his mother nor a person who would embrace the middle class he has worked his way up to. He is a suffering individual suspended between the past and present. Furlong's spiritual and mental divisions deepen after he meets the poor girls polishing the floor of the convent where he goes to deliver coal. Apart from them, what really shakes him is the little Sarah Redmond, whom he finds locked in the coal shed. She claims to have a fourteen-month-old son taken away from her by the nuns. Called Enda by her new identity in the convent, Sarah is obviously named after the wife of Abraham who gave life to Isaac in her old age. On the other hand, Sarah is also the name of Furlong's mother. This context, like many others created throughout the novel, connects Sarah and Furlong and the Biblical characters to each other, and makes them the intersecting clusters of similar fates.

In fact, Sarah is a nobody from nowhere. Her expulsion to the convent is for the communal purification and integrity. Unable to punish the perpetrators of child abuse, the authorities preferred to put the blame and sin on the weakest. According to Girard, every community that suffers violence or a major catastrophe blindly goes on a scapegoat hunt and "its members instinctively seek an immediate and violent cure for the onslaught of unbearable violence and strive desperately to convince themselves that all their ills are the fault of a lone individual who can be easily disposed of" (1989, pp. 79-80). When violence begins to threaten the community, those who were previously at odds with each other league together and exert violence against the scapegoat, which is a kind of "expel[ing] violence by violence" (Girard, 1989, p. 191) or the "taming of terror" (Becker, 1975, p. 145). Thus, the death or expulsion of the scapegoat would restore peace within the community and reorganise interpersonal relations. In other words, when it is not possible to prevent violence in moments of crisis, the only solution is to find someone "vulnerable and close at hand" (Girard, 1989, p. 2) and transfer violence to that victim. Here, the chosen person is guilty because the community believes him or her to be so; it is this perspective that makes Sarah a scapegoat.

The scapegoat to bear the crimes and sins of the society should not be an ordinary person, but a special one with a capacity to convince the others that he or she is the real source of the crisis. The functionality of contemporary scapegoats depends especially on a similar demeanour. Sarah and many other girls, who became mothers at a very young age, with their illegitimate babies are very good examples for this framework. Further, Bill Furlong's mother and even Furlong himself, who avoided such a misfortune with Mrs Wilson's support, are also victims of that context. Then, the girls stigmatised as unchaste and immoral and their babies as the offspring of the fallen represent the sick side of society.

Having been born out of wedlock, Furlong is subjected to some insulting behaviours at school that can be considered peer bullying. The culture of scapegoat is so deep and influential on the society that the violence of adults has taken over even children: "As a schoolboy, Furlong had been jeered and called some ugly names; once, he'd come home with the back of his coat covered in spit" (Keegan, 2021). The spit of his peers evokes the anger and desire that society directs towards the victim in order to purify and relieve itself in moments of crisis. This is precisely what Girard calls "mimetic desire". For him, violence is the result of the desire that arises from the human capacity to resemble and imitate other people. When everyone desires the same object, each person hinders the realisation of the others' desire, and that hindrance strengthens their mimetic

desire. After a while, instead of desiring the same object, they become obsessed with each other and such an obsession has the potential to turn into a physical or psychological violence (1989, p. 81). Girard thinks that "when mimetic violence permeates an entire group and reaches a climactic intensity, it generates a form of collective victimage that tends towards unanimity precisely because of the participants heightened mimetic susceptibility" (1987a, p. 125). If the tension of unsatisfied mimetic desire climbs to a threshold, then the mob phenomenon begins to take shape and "the logic of the mob is at one with the logic of nonconscious scapegoating in its most brutal form" (Girard, 1987b, p. 85). Scapegoating behaviour, then, is a revival of mob violence which is a deeply rooted social fact.

The fact that Furlong's father is unknown makes him illegitimate and his mother the victim of an extramarital affair. Furlong's presence reminds the others that the man who is the perpetrator of that affair and those who turn a blind eye to that crime continue to live among them. He is a mirror showing the truth and an Oedipus who is believed to bring a ruin to his society. Therefore, the disappearance of him means the salvation of national identity, the family and ultimately the country. Like Furlong, Oedipus is not a criminal in the modern sense, but he is responsible for everything that have befallen his kingdom. The role he plays is literally that of the human scapegoat (Girard,1989, p. 77). Just as the plague that struck Thebes is attributed to Oedipus, Furlong and his ilk are blamed for the moral corruption in the town of New Ross. In this case, they become instruments of condemnation and distraction, giving the rest a sense of purification. Frazer's account of the mythical origins of scapegoating fits well within this framework:

> The main object of the ceremony is simply to effect a total clearance of all the ills that have been infesting a people. For here, on the one hand, the evils are invisible and intangible; and, on the other hand, there is a visible and tangible vehicle to convey them away. And a scapegoat is nothing more that such a vehicle. (1922, p. 753)

Assessing Keegan's fiction, which presents fragments of real life, from the perspective of the mythical world, it can be said that the girls in the convent are precisely instrumentalised in this way. The basic idea has remained unchanged from the self-protective rituals of ancient communities to the institutionalised practices of contemporary Ireland.

The girls are treated as "impure" because they do not conform to standards of the society, and they threaten the idealised female typology. Therefore, their incarceration will ostensibly save the society from the danger of "impurity", which denotes, in effect, the scapegoat's traditional exile to the wilderness. However, there is an important difference between the Biblical scapegoat and those of the novel; while the former is given a wide range of movement in the wilderness, the latter is confined within the walls of the convent. They are blamed, polarised and silenced, thus constrained from expressing themselves. The authorities deprive them of the opportunity to talk about what happened to them.

Keegan's girls are a reminder to the townspeople of what they should not be. As scapegoats, they keep the society at a certain level of consciousness. To underline this point, the author juxtaposes them with Furlong's wife, Eileen. For Eileen, it does not matter who does what as long as they pay their debts and thus contribute to their comfort. She limits her responsibilities to her own daughters and worries only about her family. She seems to have found the formula for success: "If you want to get on in life, there's things you have to ignore, so you can keep on" (Keegan, 2021).

Eileen's point of view represents the treatment that feeds the practice of sacrifice. What she says to her husband makes it clearer:

> But if we just mind what we have here and stay on the right side of people and soldier on, none of ours will ever have to endure the likes of what them girls go through. Those were put in there because they hadn't a soul in this world to care for them. All their people did was leave them wild and then, when they got into trouble, they turned their backs. It's only people with no children that can afford to be careless. (Keegan, 2021)

Eileen probably, on a symbolic level, fears that if she empathises with the fallen girls, their dirt will contaminate her family. Accordingly, she turns her back on the problems around and concentrates on the requirements of her individual world. With her superficial piety and insensitivity, she represents the average of the townspeople. As understood, she knows the mechanism that creates scapegoats very well. Standing in the wrong place, transgressing the social norms, being abandoned by families and forced to live in the edges of life are some of the points that feed this mechanism in New Ross. Such points justify why it is very easy to choose and banish the scapegoats who already live on the peripheries of society. Since they are vulnerable, they can be marginalised and demonised when necessary. These victims, whose deaths or exiles will not cause any problems but unite the community, end the cycle of mimetic violence, and thus restore the social order.

The scene in which Furlong is invited in when he takes Sarah from the coal shed to the convent is quite meaningful. The nuns who pretend to be the epitome of compassion and mercy show their true colours when they learn that Furlong does not approve of the patriarchal views and practices, and does not find it right to distinguish between sons and daughters as a man still bearing his mother's surname. His objections to the dominant discourse end with the abbess implicitly threatening him with the future of her daughters. Thereon Mrs Kehoe, a friendly publican, warns and advises him to be careful when talking about the convent and the nuns: "[B]ut you've worked hard, the same as myself, to get to where you are now. You've reared a fine family of girls – and you know there's nothing only a wall separating that place from St Margaret's" (Keegan, 2021). This society needs a silence breaker, and that is Furlong, who believes that there is no point in living without helping others, and the authorities are "only as strong as we give them strength" (Keegan, 2021).

Small Things Like These continues with Furlong's giving Sarah a helping hand and ends with his walking home with her, fearful of what will happen to him, but with a clear conscience of having done the right thing. In a way, he sacrifices himself to touch the life of a girl by taking on a Jesus-like role. This sacrifice carries a great danger because it is quite likely that the wrath of the church and the forces it can mobilise will be directed not only against him but also his family. In a sense, Furlong, who was born as a scapegoat to a scapegoat and managed to forget his past by working hard and earning a lot of money, has now chosen to become a scapegoat of his own free will.

Christian theology reads the scapegoat as a type of Jesus. According to it, Jesus was not a sinner but "the innocent victim whose death was restorative for the sins of humankind (or, at least, Christendom)" (Edell, 2022, p. 51). Since he increased the number of his followers every day, the leaders of the community, fearing that they would incur the wrath of the Romans, decided that "one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not" (John: 11: 50). Girard finds a manifestation of political reason here and writes that to limit violence as much as possible

and prevent a greater one, it is preferable for a person, especially the one who brings the danger closer to die for all others (1986, p. 113). In Keegan's novel, it is Bill Furlong who refuses to keep his head down and plays with the boundaries and structure of the established order. As a self-sacrificing scapegoat, it is obvious that a bright future does not await him.

Sacrificing the Vulnerable or the Victims of Capitalism

Apart from the sociological and religious level, there are many examples of sacrifice in the novel, including that of Furlong, which must be interpreted within the framework of capitalism. As known sacrifice holds significance within the realm of modern capitalist economy, where principles of exchange are just as central as they are in religious practices. In both religion and modern capitalist systems, it is appropriated as a significant tool to appease or please a higher power and is believed to be crucial to bring about blessings or spiritual growth in religion and career development or financial progress in money, hard work, and success-oriented capitalism. In the pursuit of success or growth, individuals engage in acts of sacrifice which may even include self-sacrifice, and they might sacrifice their time, energy, or personal desires to advance their economic career or spiritual growth. In this context, sacrifice is closely linked with the capitalist principles of exchange and value since individuals feel the need to repudiate something they have with the hope of acquiring something else which would be more valuable or meaningful for them.

Furlong sacrificed himself to the capitalist order for his family, partly by choice and partly by circumstances. He escaped his life of deprivation and social abuse by becoming a merchant. Although Furlong is the Catholic son of a Catholic mother, he seems to have absorbed something of the tradition and worldview of the Protestant Mrs Wilson: "He'd a head for business, was known for getting along, and could be relied upon, as he had developed good, Protestant habits; was given to rising early and had no taste for drink" (Keegan, 2021). These habits undoubtedly have deep historical roots. In his work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber notably points at parallel associations between different Christian denominations and the business structure during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when, he claims, specific religious ethics and mindsets developed within the emerging secular and profit-driven society have ultimately transformed into practices and behaviours that laid the foundation for the capitalist worldview. This perspective, or the "spirit of capitalism" (Weber, 2012, p. 13) in Weber's parlance is the Protestant ethic of the Puritan sects of the age, who forcefully placed work and material success in the middle of their lives; little else seemed to matter greatly to them, not even family, friendship, leisure, or hobbies (Kalberg, 2012, p. xi). As a result of the religious and cultural emphasis on a strong work ethic, personal responsibility and individual accountability during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a belief emerged in certain religious circles, particularly among the Protestant sects, that poverty was a result of personal laziness and avoidance of work. Salvation was possible through methodical work and wealth and profit were signs of one's salvation (Kalberg, 2012, p. xxxv). Engaging in hard work and worldly pursuits was a means of serving God fulfilling one's calling. The accumulation of wealth through honest labour was seen as a sign of God's favour and indication of a person's election for salvation. As per Weber, the belief in the moral superiority of hard work and financial success became deeply ingrained in the cultural and economic mindset of many societies, influencing attitudes towards poverty and prosperity, and "puritanism gave birth to a Protestant ethic" (Karlberg, 2012, p. xxxi). Given that Furlong is a workaholic and has acquired all his wealth by working hard, it can be said that he is heavily influenced by that ethics and sense

of commerce. Moreover, he raises his eldest daughter, Kathleen, with the same tendencies. She works in her father's office on Saturdays preparing deliveries and keeping financial accounts and earns her allowance. In other words, a new individual who will turn the wheel of capitalism is grown up. Kathleen herself wants to get into this wheel, primarily to have the brands on display in the shop windows.

On the other hand, her name evokes Kathleen ni Houlihan, the old woman commonly used in literature as a mythical symbol of Irish nationalism, who calls the Irish youth to fight for her against British colonialism and become martyrs. In W. B. Yeats's play of the same name (1902), she is transformed into a beautiful woman rejuvenated by the blood of the young people who respond to her call. The youth who are invited to die for their homeland in Yeats's play are directed to integrate into the capitalist system to create capital accumulation that will sustain the country economically in Keegan's novel. In this case, Kathleen is a victim sacrificed for the market by her family. Although she appears to be a free girl, she lives in a symbolic convent surrounded by the overprotective and stereotypical attitudes of her mother. She is the ideal daughter of the ideal woman and will remain so as long as she is fortunate and has no conflict with the established norms.

Furlong has worked hard to achieve a secure status and a comfortable life. He is one of the lucky guys in New Ross, which is in the throes of an economic crisis. He is aware of the good fortune he has, but also knows that everything can change suddenly. He has met many people in difficult situations and witnessed many tragic scenes. The dole queues that grow longer every day, people who cannot pay their ESB bills and sleep in their overcoats in freezing houses, hungry women lining up the post office on the first Friday of every month with shopping bags in their hands to receive their children's allowances, schoolboys drinking the milk out of the bowls of cats behind the priest's house (Keegan, 2021) are only some of them. They are all, in fact, the dark pictures of the capitalist system. It is known that capitalism is mainly characterised by private ownership of resources, profit-driven production, and market competition. At the core of this system, there is the inherent problem of accumulation of wealth, resources, opportunities, and thus, the power, in the hands of a limited number of people or institutions. Such a fact leads to the exploitation and marginalisation of certain weaker groups within the society. As the pursuit of the maximum profit and the accumulation of the maximum capital are the core tenets of this system, an environment where competition and self-interest often take precedence over considerations of social welfare and equality is formed. Therefore, in such a system, power imbalances, marginalisation of certain segments of society, and the privilege bestowed upon those who hold economic and social power become inevitable.

Among the many scenes in the novel to be evaluated within the context of capitalism, two of them stand out in particular. In the first one, the crows roam the dark skies of the town in flocks, descend on the carcasses along the roads, dive thuggishly on everything, and perch on the huge trees around the convent at night. The second one is about Furlong's coming across "a black cat eating from the carcass of a crow, licking her lips" (Keegan, 2021) on his way to take Sarah out of the convent. These scenes give a good summary of the capitalist order in New Ross miniature, where everyone feeds on each other. The black colour of the crows and the cat blends into the darkness of the night and symbolically becomes one with the darkness of the convent. This darkness is balanced with the glittering preparations for Christmas, but they also correspond to the darkness of capitalism, which offers no alternative at all other than accepting the established order.

The Santa Claus as a means of commerce, the shop windows where the appetite for consumption is whetted, and the uncontrollable shopping desire show how the celebration of the birth of Jesus is intertwined with capitalism.

In *Small Things Like These*, the church which represents Jesus, the state which has invisible but strong ties with it, and the patriarchal society adhere to both are caught in the web of the capitalist system and in the grip of largely flawed practices. From this point of view, they move in a sphere that does not conform to approved religious goals, national ideals and moral norms. The scapegoats who are pushed to the stage in order not to expose the flaws are outcast girls and fallen women abandoned by their families, stigmatised and driven to the peripheries of the society, and incarcerated in the convent by force or by choice with the promise of purification. They represent the sick sides of the society. Their expulsion does not eliminate the existing problem, but the anger of the society that problematises that problem.

Conclusion

In *Small Things Like These*, the child-mothers, who are incarcerated in the convent and made to believe that everything they do there is necessary for the purification of their souls and the discipline of their minds, are the denotative of the true face of the dominant order. By their very presence, they pose the greatest threat to the society, but at the same time function as very useful instruments for it. They remind the townspeople how to live and show them what will happen if they go beyond the borders, thus keeping them at a certain level of consciousness. Therefore, they have parallels with the rituals, theories and practices in the range of meanings emphasised by the concept of the scapegoat. With their dual functions, they are, like their ancient counterparts, both victims and saviours of the society.

In the novel, besides the girls in the convent, Bill Furlong's mother and himself are also scapegoats. They are victims of state ideology, the church and the patriarchal society. Keegan shows how these three are intertwined with capitalism, instrumentalised and transformed by it, and how the service of God and national ideals are eviscerated in their complicity. In fact, in the town of New Ross, the religious sphere (the convent) and the secular sphere (the civil world) met on the axis of capitalism. This indicates, above all, the secularisation of the church and the metamorphosis of morality as the ground of commerce.

The decision Bill Furlong fictionally made in 1985, risking his family and comfortable life, led to the closure of the last Magdalen laundry in reality in the Republic of Ireland in 1996. In 2013, thanks to the struggle of people like Furlong, the inner face of those institutions was revealed in the report of the commission set up to investigate the rumours. Their connections, external partners and business relations were mapped out, and the abuse of penitents in the name of religion and the living conditions they were subjected to were exposed in all their nakedness. In the end, the brutal realities experienced in these places were accepted by the state, and an official apology was made to the laundry women who had been carrying the burden of all nation for many years as scapegoats. Although it is stated at the very beginning that the novel is a "work of fiction" and that the characters, organisations and events in it are the product of the author's imagination, *Small Things Like These* offers the reader a fictional reality in which fiction and reality are intertwined.

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