



## Guilt, Sin, and Salvation in *The Magdalene Sisters*\*

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### Abstract

This article analyzes *The Magdalene Sisters* as a cinematic representation of the mechanisms through which religious authority disciplines female corporeality by mobilizing the intertwined concepts of sin, guilt, and salvation. Additionally, it addresses the transformation of Christian theological narratives into instruments of social and psychological control within the historical context of the Magdalene Laundries. The film is analyzed through an interdisciplinary framework integrating psychoanalytic theory, Foucauldian conception of disciplinary power, and a trauma-informed perspective by employing a content analysis. The findings suggest that guilt operates not as an internal moral condition but as a socially constructed emotion that facilitates the internalization of institutional authority, while salvation is reframed as a discourse that legitimizes labor and obedience. The analysis further shows that trauma arises from the repetitive, normalized practices of punishment and silence, and that resistance emerges through acts of narrative self-assertion. By demonstrating how religious discourse functions simultaneously as ideology, discipline, and psychological regulation, the article contributes to broader discussions on the intersection of religion, gender, and institutional violence.

**Keywords:** Corporeality, Discipline, Religion, Resistance, Trauma

**JEL Codes:** B59, D83, Z1

## Günahkâr Rahibeler Filminde Suçluluk, Günah ve Kurtuluş

### Öz

Bu makale, *The Magdalene Sisters* filmini, dini otoritenin günah, suçluluk ve kurtuluş gibi birbiriyle iç içe geçmiş kavramları harekete geçirerek kadın bedenini disipline etme mekanizmalarının sinematik bir temsili olarak analiz etmektedir. Ayrıca, Magdalene Çamaşırhaneleri'nin tarihsel bağlamı içerisinde Hıristiyan teolojik anlatılarının sosyal ve psikolojik kontrol araçlarına dönüşümünü ele almaktadır. İçerik analizi kullanılarak, film psikanalitik teori, Foucault'nun disiplinsel güç kavramı ve travma odaklı bakış açısını birleştiren disiplinlerarası bir çerçeve içinde analiz edilmektedir. Bulgular, suçluluğun içsel bir ahlaki durum olarak değil, kurumsal otoritenin içselleştirilmesini sağlayan toplumsal olarak inşa edilen bir duygu olarak işlediğini, kurtuluşun ise emek gücünü ve itaati meşrulaştıran bir söylem olarak yeniden çerçevelendiğini göstermektedir. Analiz, aynı zamanda travmanın tekrarlayan, normalleştirilmiş ceza ve sessizlik uygulamalarından kaynaklandığını ve direnişin anlatımsal özerklik eylemleri yoluyla ortaya çıktığını göstermektedir. Dini söylemin ideoloji, disiplin ve psikolojik denetim olarak nasıl eş zamanlı işlediğini gösteren bu makale, din, cinsiyet ve kurumsal şiddetin kesişim noktası üzerine daha geniş tartışmalara katkıda bulunmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Bedensellik, Disiplin, Din, Direniş, Travma.

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## Introduction

Peter Mullan's *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) depicts the oppressive realities endured by women confined within the Magdalene Laundries, institutions governed by the Catholic Church in Ireland during the mid-twentieth century. These religious asylums, operating under ecclesiastical authority, functioned as spaces of confinement disguised as moral reformation. They detained women labeled as fallen, wayward, or merely disobedient and framed their incarceration as an act of spiritual cleansing, thereby converting religious discipline into a mechanism of societal control. The film illuminates how ecclesiastical power legitimizes the surveillance and punishment of female corporeality through the interwoven discourses of sin, guilt, and salvation.

Although dramatized, it functions as a historical drama grounded in documented realities, bridging cinematic narrative and historical testimony. Within this context, the narrative rearticulates psychoanalytic dynamics through a theological framework. Individual sin becomes a rhetorical veil concealing institutional culpability. Consistent with Foucault's notion of the disciplinary society, the Catholic institutions in the film operate through mechanisms of confession, surveillance, and punishment to regulate female corporeality. Guilt ceases to be a personal emotion and instead becomes an instrument for the internalization of religious ideology.

In this context, the film transcends the boundaries of a historical narrative, evolving into a cinematic discourse that intertwines psychoanalytic repression with theological redemption. Within this framework, sin functions as a socially reinforced apparatus of control rather than an individual moral lapse, while in the film, redemption emerges through awareness and collective resistance. Accordingly, this article examines how the narrative navigates the triad of sin, guilt, and salvation across both psychoanalytic and theological dimensions, thereby revealing the mechanisms of religious authority inscribed upon female corporeality.

## 1. Method

The article employs a content analysis approach to critically engage with *The Magdalene Sisters* (2002) as both a theological and a psychological text situated within rigid religious and patriarchal structures. As the film dramatizes verified historical abuses within Catholic institutions, it is analyzed here as cinematic testimony rather than as a theological critique. The analysis interrogates the film's narrative, characters, and symbols through an interdisciplinary theoretical synthesis that integrates psychoanalytic, Foucauldian, and trauma-informed perspectives. Freud's structural model of the psyche and Jung's archetypal typology provide the conceptual basis for analyzing both intrapsychic processes and collective psychological structures. Lacan's concepts of the mirror stage and the gaze underpin the analysis of power relations, the spectator's position, and gendered identification within the cinematic text.

Correspondingly, Foucault's theory of disciplinary society offers a sociological framework for understanding the regulation of the body and the normalization of behavior within institutional structures. The Magdalene asylums are thus interpreted as spaces of discipline and surveillance, materializing what Foucault (1995) termed a *political anatomy of power*, where control operates through the production of docile bodies and the internalization

of authority (pp.137-138). In the film, subtle punishments, routine humiliation, and enforced obedience exemplify Foucault's notion of micro-penalty, in which every gesture, delay, or error becomes subject to correction (Foucault, 1995: 178).

Complementing this Foucauldian perspective, Winell's concept of *Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS)* further elucidates the enduring psychic residues produced by authoritarian religious systems. It is a condition afflicting individuals who struggle to detach from dogmatic and coercive religious environments, while simultaneously coping with the psychological damage inflicted through prolonged indoctrination (Winell, 2024: 3).

In sum, an interdisciplinary reading of *The Magdalene Sisters*, integrating psychoanalytic theory, Foucauldian critique, and trauma psychology, facilitates a comprehensive understanding of how the film unveils the psychological and socio-religious mechanisms that underpin religiously sanctioned control, subjugation, and trauma.

## **2. The Institutional History of Magdalene Reformatories**

The history of Magdalene laundries in Ireland stretches back to the mid-eighteenth century, when Lady Arabella Denny founded the first such facility in Dublin in 1767 (Whitt, 2023: 4-5). The early institutions were variously titled Asylums, Refuges, and Penitentiaries, but over time came to be known as Magdalene Laundries (O'Mahoney, 2018: 14). Between 1765 and 1914, at least 40 asylums were established in Ireland; most remained active until the 1980s and 1990s. The title 'Magdalene', as referenced by the institutions, alludes to *Mary Magdalene*, who is depicted in contemporary Catholic doctrine as a reformed prostitute rewarded with love and compassion for her repentance and service to Jesus (O'Mahoney, 2018: 1-2). O'Mahoney (2018: 1) explains that the initial motivation of Magdalene Asylums in the 19th century was driven by societal and political concerns centered on prostitution and venereal diseases. In this context, the institutions became a significant focus of philanthropy, claiming to rescue fallen women.

Notwithstanding, the philanthropic rhetoric soon gave way to morally disciplinary institutionalized confinement practices. Sarah A. Whitt (2023) interprets this transformation as a joint initiative of the Catholic Church, acting as self-appointed guardian of Ireland's moral climate, and the nascent Irish Free State (p.5). Magdalene Laundries subsequently functioned as institutional sites for unmarried mothers, victims of sexual assault, and young women perceived as exhibiting sexual awareness or tendencies toward sexual nonconformity (O'Mahoney, 2018: 2).

The Irish independence of 1922 was a turning point. According to O'Mahoney (2018), the strong Catholic identity of post-independence Ireland created a need to exclude, silence, and punish wayward women who did not fit the model of the Irish family structure (p.2). During this period, voluntary admission rates decreased, while involuntary and indefinite confinements became widespread, turning Magdalene Laundries into institutions with a predominantly punitive function. Between 1922 and 1996, ten Magdalene Laundries operated in Ireland. These institutions were known for regimes characterized by prayer, silence, and hard labor (O'Mahoney, 2018: 2).

Even though Magdalene Laundries ostensibly aligned with principles of piety and atonement, they served primarily as instruments within a power structure predicated on the regulation of the female body. O'Mahoney (2018) characterizes the Catholic Church's governance of female sexuality as a fundamental strategy ensuring the continuity of power. This strategy enabled the systematic erasure of women labeled as sinners from historical memory; these women were stigmatized, socially ostracized, and imprisoned in Magdalene reformatories to re-establish the nation's prescribed sexual order (p.3).

Whitt (2023) positions these institutions as pivotal components within Ireland's broader architecture of containment, constituting a carceral network that systematically pushed a heterogeneous cohort of Irish women into social exclusion, alongside mother and baby homes, industrial schools, reformatories, and hospitals (pp. 5–6). Practices aimed at erasing individual identities; such as head shaving, renaming, assigning numerical identifiers, and enforcing uniform dress codes, obliterated personal distinctiveness (Whitt, 2023: 6). Survivor testimonies elucidate the carceral and oppressive nature of these institutions, revealing persistent forced labor, prolonged isolation, deprivation of educational opportunities, and systematic abuse (Whitt, 2023: 6–7).

The continued closure of archives perpetuates the historical silence. O'Mahoney (2018) interprets religious orders' refusal to grant record access to the public and to researchers as indicative of a protective collaboration between the Irish state and church concerning knowledge of gender-based violence toward survivors (p.5). Drawing on Connerton's concept of humiliated silence, the collective memory surrounding Magdalene history has operated as a tacit mechanism of forgetting a shared sense of shame (O'Mahoney, 2018: 7). This silence is manifested not only within historical documents but also persists in collective public memory: hundreds of women remain interred in unmarked graves, epitomizing the phenomenon of "being silenced even in death (O'Mahoney, 2018: 12).

In summary, Magdalene Laundries constituted a gendered carceral system undergirded by ecclesiastical authority, evolving from eighteenth-century philanthropic paradigms of redemption to a disciplinary mechanism embedded within the twentieth-century state apparatus. These institutions served as instruments of social engineering, aimed both at individual atonement for sin and at the preservation of national moral rectitude. Consequently, the Magdalene system functions not merely as a historical phenomenon but as an institutional repository of a religious-psychosocial order in which notions of guilt, sin, and salvation were systematically inscribed and regulated through female corporeality.

### **3. The Psychoanalytic Approaches to Film**

Cinema can be interpreted as a dreamlike experience in which the spectator's state resembles that of a dreamer (İri, 2011: 151). The cinematic process parallels the *dream-work* through condensation, displacement, and symbolic transformation, allowing forbidden impulses to emerge in disguised forms. The darkness of the movie theater, the relative passivity of the spectator, and the hypnotic effect of the flickering light and shadows create, a dreamlike state, albeit artificially (Kabadayı, 2013: 77). Through its hypnotic effect, filmic imagery constructs a coherent yet artificial reality, enabling the viewer to experience pleasure directly

since films operate under the dominance of the pleasure principle (Kabadayı, 2013: 77; Özden, 2004: 190-191)

Furthermore, film creation itself can be understood as a form of sublimation. In sublimation, a sexual drive is redirected toward a non-sexual goal of equal intensity (Bakır, 2008: 17). Hence, repressed or unconscious desires are transformed into aesthetically acceptable artistic expression (Freud, 2000: 87). The film director, analogous to a neurotic patient, unconsciously channels repressed desires into symbolic representations within film narrative structures. Through artistic means, the director covertly presents these unsatisfied urges, simultaneously engaging the audience and allowing for symbolic gratification of similar desires (Özden, 2004: 184-185).

Correspondingly, characters and stories mirror the dynamic interplay of the *id*, *ego*, and *superego*, with the hero's triumph frequently symbolizing the ego's mastery over instinctual drives (Arslantepe, 2012: 88); specifically, sexuality, aggression, and hunger constitute the primitive self known as the *id*, whereas the *superego* comprises the internalized system of rules, prohibitions, and values. In this structural model, the *id* operates according to the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification; the *ego* operates according to the reality principle, mediating between external demands and internal desires; and the *superego* embodies moral and conscientious standards, guiding personality formation by enforcing ethical considerations (Kabadayı, 2013: 174).

Moreover, the recurring narrative of rivalry and reconciliation in love stories can also be read as a dramatization of the *Oedipus complex*. In this context, who desires the mother as the primary source of pleasure within the complex, feels threatened with castration by either the father or mother. The boy must free himself from both his relationship with his mother and his conflict with his father. He can only hope to achieve power and happiness by finding a woman who will replace his mother (Butler, 2011: 76).

Building on Freud's psychoanalytic framework, Carl Gustav Jung extends the model by introducing the concepts of the personal unconscious and the collective unconscious. The personal unconscious comprises the individual's forgotten or repressed experiences, whereas the collective unconscious contains universal, inherited psychic structures known as archetypes: primordial images that recur across time and cultures (Jung, 2015: 180; Yilmazer, 1996: 238). The hero archetype materializes as a prototypical pattern, revealing its variability; at one time, the hero may be a warrior, at another a detective, and possibly an intellectual (Hockley, 2004: 59).

It can be argued that, although the hero remains formally constant, its depiction as a warrior, detective, or intellectual is contingent upon adjacent factors (Hockley, 2004: 105). The individual drawn to taboos experiences them through the film's representation of evil. Analogous to repressed evil, which is not eliminated but merely confined, cinematic evil persists and is never entirely obliterated (Arslantepe, 2012: 191-192). The *anima*, representing the feminine inner aspect in men, contrasts with the *animus*, which signifies the masculine inner aspect in women (Hockley, 2004: 64). The *anima* is characterized by eroticism and emotion, whereas the *animus* embodies rationalization (Jung, 2015: 110).

Mythological and artistic figures such as sirens, femme fatales, and *La belle dame sans merci* exemplify the darker side of the anima (Kayır, 2012: 160-161). *Persona* denotes the mask an individual adopts to conceal the self when confronting the external world (Hockley, 2004: 112). Accordingly, film characters defined by their professions, partisanship, or social roles visibly embody the persona, such as a housewife character who manifests the persona through her roles as mother and spouse.

Within Jungian theory, cinema functions as a collective dream that, through symbolic meanings, unveils both the director's unconscious and society's shared unconscious fears and tendencies (Kabadayı, 2013: 85). As Hockley (2004) notes, films establish a connection between the human body, (the external world) and the psychological state, (the internal world), serving as depictions of archetypes within the objective psyche (p. 58). Ultimately, Freud's and Jung's psychoanalytic approaches converge in conceiving film as an expression of unconscious processes. For Freud, film dramatizes repressed individual desires; for Jung, it functions as the symbolic expression of collective archetypes. In both cases, cinema functions as a modern collective dream, a psychic space where concealed fears, desires, and mythic structures are projected, experienced, and symbolically resolved through narrative.

### **3.1. Lacan, the Gaze, and the Psychoanalytic Construction of Gender**

The concept of the gaze occupies a pivotal position in theoretical discussions concerning gender across the arts, particularly within photography, painting, and most notably cinema. The act of looking becomes the gaze when it is imbued with intentionality and structured by underlying relations of power and domination (Kirel, 2012: 137). The gaze, conceived as a drive, is articulated as the visual component of the instinctual center, insofar as it embodies an instinctual, autoerotic nature (Kütahneci, 2006: 148).

Within cinematic discourse, the male spectator has traditionally been positioned as the subject of the gaze, while the female figure has been constructed as its object. This dynamic is closely associated with voyeurism, which feminist film theory interprets as reinforcing the scopophilic tendencies attributed to a presumed male viewer. Voyeurism is conceptualized as the act of observing another individual's sexual activities or genitalia without consent, in which sexual gratification is derived from observation itself (Kabadayı, 2013: 99). It emerges as a manifestation of the desire to see and confirm what is private or forbidden; this voyeuristic pleasure, shaped by the spectator's position, is perceived as analogous to the misrecognition in Lacan's mirror image (İri, 2011: 169; Kabadayı, 2013: 99).

Drawing on Lacan's mirror stage, this analysis argues that the spectator's identification with the male protagonist parallels the child's identification with an ideal ego formed through the reflected image, which creates an illusion of unity with the mother. This developmental phase, from six months to three years of age, is termed the secondary narcissistic stage by Freud and the imaginary stage by Lacan (İzmir, 2015: 84; Kabadayı, 2013: 80). Within this framework, cinema's darkened space and isolating viewing conditions further reproduce the mechanisms of the mirror stage, reinforcing the narcissistic and power-laden fantasies embedded in cinematic spectatorship. Thus, it may be asserted that the narcissistic fantasy is present in the popular star personas of actors such as Clint Eastwood and Cüneyt Arkın (Arslan, 2009: 25).

In this regard, Arslan notes that Mulvey highlights the connection between such fantasies and the patriarchal imagery of masculinity, arguing that the spectator's on-screen representative, the male protagonist with whom spectator identifies, enacts this fantasy through his perceived perfection, wholeness, and boundless power (Arslan, 2009: 24). Lacan's concept of the gaze encompasses the feminist notion of the 'male gaze', which corresponds to scopophilic voyeurism (Smelik, 2008: 145). It commonly operates through a sequence of alternating shots that shift between the male character, who looks, and the female character, who is looked at, with the camera's perspective aligned with the male character's position. The male gaze frequently entails an undercurrent of violence, such as rape or murder, as the convergence of erotic pleasure and aggression reveals the unsettling power relations embedded within cinematic representation (Smelik, 2008: 96). Ultimately, mainstream cinema functions through an economy of the male gaze, wherein women are not the bearers but the objects of vision, a structure deeply entrenched in psychoanalytic conceptions of desire, fantasy, and lack.

#### **4. Synopsis of *The Magdalene Sisters***

*The Magdalene Sisters* is a film adapted from the real-life experiences of four young women who were coerced into confinement within the Magdalene laundries, the last of which ceased operation in 1996 (Solmuş, 2015: 245). The film is set in Ireland during the 1960s, a period marked by the pervasive influence of the Catholic Church. Margaret (Anne-Marie Duff) is institutionalized after being sexually assaulted by her cousin at a family wedding; Bernadette (Nora-Jane Noone), a young and vivacious woman, is condemned for engaging in innocent flirtations with boys; Patricia is punished for bearing a child out of wedlock; and Crispina (Eileen Walsh), a woman with an intellectual disability, is institutionalized.

Within the walls of the Magdalene Laundry, these women endure relentless physical labor, psychological torment, oppressive religious control, and rigid discipline, all of which are justified as spiritual purification for their alleged sins. The tragic circumstances and ongoing dehumanization ultimately drive Bernadette and Patricia to devise a daring plan to escape to seek liberation from the indefinite confinement and moral subjugation imposed by the ecclesiastical institution.

#### **5. Analytical Discussion of *The Magdalene Sisters***

This section provides an analytical discussion of *The Magdalene Sisters* through content analysis, examining how the film constructs its critique of religious authority, gendered morality, and disciplinary power. The narrative reveals how Christian theological concepts such as original sin, redemption, and obedience are transposed onto female bodies as mechanisms of patriarchal control, while selective judgments about sin and internalized guilt are interpreted through Freudian and Foucauldian dynamics.

The scene in which Bernadette's hair is forcibly cut until her scalp bleeds further reflects the broader disciplinary structure of the convent, where micro-physics of power produce docile bodies through physical punishment, linguistic violence, and psychological coercion. Moreover, the film's use of silence, repetitive labor, and confinement articulates the persistence of trauma. In this context, the analysis highlights how obedience and resistance arise within the structures of domination that constrain agency. The social construction of women as "fallen"

illustrates broader processes of othering and moral exclusion that sustain patriarchal theology. Ultimately, the film exposes institutional hypocrisy and redefines redemption not as divine absolution but as the reclamation of narrative agency, positioning resistance as the basis for regaining one's narrative.

### **5.1. Original Sin, The Doctrine of the Trinity, and Redemption**

In *The Magdalene Sisters*, Christian soteriology, structured through the interlocking doctrines of original sin, Trinitarian hierarchy, and redemptive suffering, operates as a disciplinary epistemology that materializes on female bodies. The film's persistent deployment of the cross motif (from the wedding sequence to the convent's corridors) functions as a visual condensation of Christianity's narrative of fall and atonement.

Genesis 2–3, by locating humanity's transgression in Eve's disobedience, inaugurates a gendered moral ontology that marks femininity as the site of primordial guilt, whereas John 1:29 situates redemption in Christ's sacrificial suffering (*Eski ve Yeni Antlaşma (Tevrat, Zebur, İncil)*, 2013). The film reinscribes this theological economy by converting the cross into a cinematic technology of moral surveillance: it becomes the regulatory emblem through which the women's subjectivities are constituted as both sinful and in need of perpetual purification.

The film further mobilizes Trinitarian theology to stabilize this asymmetrical structure of agency. The Annunciation narratives (Luke 1 31–35; Matthew 1:20) encode divine creativity as exclusively masculine, rendering Mary a passive medium through whom the divine masculine reproduces itself. Bernadette's pedagogical insistence on Mary's virginity replicates this doctrinal logic and aligns with the contention that Christianity sustains male transcendence by instrumentalizing the female body (Baseri, 2014: 124).

Through a Foucauldian perspective, the convergence of these theological narratives makes visible the translation of religious discourse into a mode of biopolitical regulation. As Foucault (1995) observes, the body has long been subjected to "imperious and pressing investments" (p.136) and drawn into the machinery of power that dissects, rearranges, and renders it docile through domination. Within such a system, even the smallest gestures or deviations acquire significance, for discipline operates through a pervasive "micro-penalty" of time, behaviour, speech, and sexuality, in which every seemingly indifferent element may serve to punish (Foucault, 1995: 178).

This emphasis on minutiae, rooted in a theological tradition where every 'detail' carries moral weight (pp. 139-140), enables discipline to function not merely as an institutional practice but as a theological dispositif—one that defines virtue through the cultivation of docility. As O'Mahoney (2018) notes, the Church's authority is sustained by its regulation of female sexuality both in practice and in discourse, a strategy that routinely yields severe consequences for those judged to have transgressed these prescribed norms (p.3). The film visualizes this dynamic by rendering theology inseparable from corporeal regulation. In this sense, *The Magdalene Sisters* exposes how soteriology functions as a mechanism of patriarchal control, mapping the economy of sin and redemption onto women's lived experience as a form of spiritualized biopower.

## 5.2. Soteriology: Gendered Morality, Punitive Theology, and the Disciplined Female Body

In *The Magdalene Sisters*, sin, sexuality, and punishment are articulated through a gendered moral economy in which Christian doctrine is selectively enforced to privilege male transgressors and regulate female bodies. The Gospel of Matthew (5:27) asserts that even a lustful gaze constitutes adultery; this principle would clearly implicate Kevin, whose rape of Margaret constitutes both sexual violence and moral transgression. However, Kevin remains unpunished, revealing how Scriptural teachings are mobilized asymmetrically to exonerate men and to pathologize women's sexuality. Father Fitzroy's abuse of Crispina reinforces this patriarchal double standard: as a priest, he symbolically embodies divine authority, yet violates the prohibition against adultery that he represents. His actions expose the structural hypocrisy of clerical authority, which shields male transgressions with institutional protection while punishing women for deviations from prescribed sexual norms.

This disparity is internalized by women like Rose, whose remorse—"I know I have committed a great sin"—reflects a deep absorption of the Catholic doctrine of chastity. Her guilt exemplifies Freud's concept of the superego, the internalized voice of religious and familial authority that converts external judgment into self-reproach. Margaret's confinement in the laundry following her rape similarly reveals a punitive theology that imagines God primarily as a judge. She is forced to atone for "sin" through physical labor and moral submission, embodying a belief that suffering is necessary for purification. Crispina's despair upon losing her St. Christopher medal further illustrates the internalization of this punitive framework; she interprets the loss as divine punishment, demonstrating how guilt becomes a form of self-surveillance. Such internalized morality is sustained through Foucault's "political anatomy of power," in which the body becomes the primary site of discipline (p. 138).

What begins as internalized guilt within the individual psyche finds its external correlative in the institutional order of the laundries, where religious doctrine merges with disciplinary power. Within the laundries, physical punishment, verbal humiliation, and psychological coercion function as "micro-penalties" that regulate even the smallest deviations in behavior. The convent operates as a microcosm of carceral theology, where religious doctrine and disciplinary power converge to produce docile subjects. Elm, Kabalek, and Köhne (2014) emphasize that cinema renders trauma visible (p. 9); here, the repetitive labor of washing, the rigid spatial architecture, and the routinization of punishment transform suffering into a ritualized performance of institutional authority.

Psychological and linguistic violence deepen this disciplinary structure. Ritualized, repetitive scrubbing, confession, and constant prayer function as instruments of spiritual obedience, policing the boundaries of acceptable behaviour. Silence, too, is weaponized to enforce muteness, signifying both compliance and submission. Yet brief moments of resistance rupture this system of punitive faith: Crispina's whispered defiance—"You're not God"—and Margaret's refusal to apologize for being raped destabilize the linguistic and theological foundations of their oppression. These gestures expose the fragility of a system that depends upon guilt, silence, and bodily discipline to sustain patriarchal authority. By laying bare these fractures, the film reveals how gendered morality and punitive theology operate not as

transcendent spiritual truths, but as technologies of domination inscribed upon the body and the psyche.

### 5.3. Trauma, Witnessing, and the Politics of Redemption

*The Magdalene Sisters* mobilizes cinematic form to render visible dynamics of institutional trauma that would otherwise be unrepresentable, transforming spaces of discipline into visual and sonic inscriptions of psychological wounding. Cinematic trauma takes shape “in the interstices of what is shown and what remains unspoken”, a tension Mullan translates into an aesthetic of stillness, silence, and repetition (Elm et al., 2014: 5). One frequent outcome of traumatic experiences is a representational void coupled with a loss of memory; trauma, it seems, defies expression and remains fundamentally unrepresentable. Within this framework, the Magdalene laundries’ routinized “care” and penitential labor exemplify what Winell (2024) identifies as “mind-control and emotional abuse” in authoritarian religious systems, forms of coercion that silence victims precisely because such practices are culturally legitimized and thus perpetuate the trauma process through repetitive, normalized acts of discipline (p.4).

The repetition functions as a mechanism of doctrinal internalization, often producing anxiety, guilt, and dissociation, while Margaret’s defiant gaze or Crispina’s prayer by the window suggests the possibility of transcendence, though these moments are ultimately subsumed by the institution’s disciplinary system. Redemption, in this context, is reframed not as divine forgiveness but as the reclamation of agency through resistance. The convent’s theology equates suffering with purification, positioning labor as the pathway to salvation; however, Mullan’s narrative systematically subverts this soteriological paradigm. Margaret’s refusal to confess guilt for her rape constitutes an early act of narrative self-assertion, rejecting the punitive religious order that conflates victimhood with sin. Her eventual escape signifies the commencement of recovery and the reclaiming of the capacity to articulate one’s own story in defiance of institutional oppression.

Her refusal also aligns with Winell’s (2024) description of Religious Trauma Syndrome as a dual-faceted trauma, in which both indoctrinatory violence and severance from a controlling community produce lasting psychological damage (pp. 2–3). Margaret’s clarity in rejecting the institution’s ethical discourse marks the difficult process that Winell calls “the shattering of the assumptive world,” where previously unquestioned religious paradigms collapse (p.9).

In contrast, Crispina’s psychological collapse illustrates how trauma can dismantle an individual’s core sense of self. The loss of her St. Christopher medal, a symbol of divine protection, echoes Winell’s (2024) argument that authoritarian religions cultivate a worldview in which the self is inherently bad, sinful, or depraved, which produces profound guilt and self-loathing (p.5). Moreover, the absence of catharsis aligns with Winell’s (2024) assertion that leaving a coercive religious structure is itself a traumatic event, the death of one’s previous life, often accompanied by social ostracism, guilt, fear, and anxiety instilled by years of indoctrination (pp. 7- 8).

The film’s epilogues thus gesture toward what Winell (2024) describes as the obscured nature of religious trauma: survivors not only endure internal disintegration but also confront

the societal refusal to acknowledge their psychological harm (pp. 12–13). The film encapsulates trauma as a complex narrative, portraying redemption as an act of resilience and principled testimony against institutional violence. It not only unveils the systemic abuses within the Magdalene Laundries but also elucidates the multifaceted psychological processes, including cognitive disorientation, emotional distress, social disintegration, and the fragile reassertion of personal agency in opposition to oppressive structures.

#### **5.4. Religious Power, Embodied Agency, and the Formation of the Penitent Self**

One night before falling asleep, Bernadette confided to Rose that she would commit even the gravest sin if it meant escaping the convent. The following day, after being verbally harassed by a young man and responding with firm resistance, she proceeds to kiss him and deliberately expose her genitalia.

In this context, the eye, a region distant from the sexual object but capable of transmitting the specific arousal quality that evokes the sense of beauty plays a significant role in apprehending sexual object (Freud, 2012: 77). In another scene, when Rose inquires of Bernadette the reason for stealing Crispina's necklace, she replies that it was "because she had not endured sufficient suffering; as penitents, we are required to suffer." This dialogue reveals the internalization of religious discourse that equates virtue with pain. The concept of self is formed through relationships with others (Sevim, 2013: 42); a person is what others define them to be (p.37).

Moreover, the influence of authority figures is crucial to the formation of religious attitudes. The hypocrisy or corruption among religious leaders can provoke negative attitudes toward religion itself (Kavas, 2013: 9). The submission, although seemingly leading to happiness, may unconsciously generate hostility and a desire for revolt (Turan, 2009: 38). Bernadette's increasing resentment toward the Mother Superior and priests reflects a profound crisis of faith, in which devotion transforms into rebellion as sacred authority loses its moral legitimacy. This contradiction equating obedience to God with obedience to earthly representatives generates both repression and resistance.

#### **5.5. Psychic Vulnerability, Social Abjection, and the Drive Economy of Institutional Violence**

The experiences of Rose, Margaret, and Bernadette in *The Magdalene Sisters* reveal how psychological fragility, social exclusion, and unconscious drives uphold the convent's disciplinary regime. Rose's decision to relinquish her baby exemplifies what İzmir (2015) terms *narcissistic injury*: a psychic wound stemming from rejection and the fear of losing affection dependent on institutional validation for a sense of self-worth. As İzmir (2015) explains, such submission arises not from spiritual conviction but from the ego's need for external affirmation (pp. 29-30), indicating that Rose's obedience reflects emotional deprivation rather than authentic faith, and demonstrating how religious authority exploits psychological vulnerability to enforce compliance.

Margaret's introduction to the convent further exemplifies the construction of the subject through institutional power and the mechanism of exclusion. Her expressed desire to leave is met by the Mother Superior's insistence on exercising control: "If you are to leave, I will decide

when,” indicating a substitution of paternal authority by an equally coercive ecclesiastical authority. As is evident, those who deviate from normative expectations are stigmatized as “the other” and subjected to moral judgment (Baş, 2011: 79).

The scene in which the women are paraded through the streets under clerical supervision confirms this dynamic; onlookers, particularly women, respond with disgust or avert their gaze, thereby transforming the convent into a locus of abjection rather than of purification. Evyapan’s theorization of otherness as the projection of repressed desires, sexuality, impurity, and moral anxiety onto an external figure elucidates how the Magdalene women become repositories for the community’s disavowed impulses (Evyapan, 2012: 144). Their suffering does not restore their social standing; instead, it accentuates their symbolic function as embodiments of the abject feminine.

The symptoms of psychological and social marginalization intertwine with unconscious dynamics of violence, as exemplified by Bernadette’s capture after her escape attempt, which culminates in the Mother Superior violently cutting her hair until her face bleeds while other nuns restrain her. The violent act can be understood through the concept of sadism within the sexual instinct (Freud, 1959: 47). The coexistence of life drives and aggressive forces, identifying outward aggression as sadism (Charrier, 2013: 41-42).

The Mother Superior’s sadistic act serves as a symbolic enactment of these destructive impulses, concealed under the guise of disciplinary and purifying authority. A comparable dynamic is evident in Rose’s brutal whipping, inflicted for attempting to deliver a message to Crispina’s sister, which further exemplifies the institutionalized violence used to enforce control and compliance. The conflation of punitive authority with eroticized domination aligns with Freud’s (1959) notion of masochism as “sadism turned round upon the subject’s own ego (p.48), revealing how the nuns’ cruelty externalizes repressed self-punishment. It is evident that sadism inherently involves domination, which is vividly embodied in the Mother Superior’s punishments (McGowan & Kunkle, 2004: 230).

Her violent treatment of Rose illustrates Freudian displacement, whereby anxiety about the missing money is redirected into aggression toward a powerless subordinate. Thus, the convent’s disciplinary rituals operate simultaneously as institutional mechanisms of control and as expressions of unconscious drives, revealing the psychological, social, and libidinal dimensions embedded in religiously sanctioned violence.

### **5.6. Mary Magdalene, Ascetic Discipline, and the Spiritualization of the Body**

Within Christian tradition, Mary Magdalene occupies a paradoxical position: portrayed as a former prostitute who repents and becomes a devoted follower of Jesus, she simultaneously signifies sin and its transcendence. Canonical texts recount how she, alongside two other women, visits the tomb following the crucifixion, witnesses its emptiness, and thereby emerges as one of the earliest figures associated with the resurrection (Gündüz, 1998: 252).

The Mother Superior invokes this narrative to construct a theological model of penitential womanhood, depicting Magdalene as one who “sold her flesh to the wayward and the lustful” and attained salvation only through extreme bodily deprivation, renouncing pleasure, denying sleep and nourishment, and enduring labor “beyond human endurance” to enter the gates of

heaven. This discourse perpetuates a longstanding Christian dualism privileging the spirit over the body, sustained by scriptural references such as Matthew 26:41 (“The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak”) and Romans 8:11, in which the mortal body perishes but the spirit, endowed with the Spirit of Christ, attains eternal life. Such texts uphold a theological hierarchy that positions corporeality as the locus of weakness and the soul as the site of transcendence.

As Hockley (2004) highlights, such scriptural passages undergird the doctrinal premise that bodily death is a precondition for spiritual immortality (p. 244). Consequently, the Mother Superior’s rhetoric reinforces a soteriological schema wherein bodily suffering transcends mere penitence to become the essential medium through which salvation is attained. This ascetic ideology, embedded in her speech, aligns with Max Weber’s theorization of asceticism as the renunciation of worldly pleasures in pursuit of divine favor (Suvari, 2014: 114).

Prayer, labor, and cleanliness are construed not only as moral obligations but also as sacramental practices by which women are restored to divine grace. The laundering of linens functions as a metaphor for the purification of the soul; labor constitutes the means of redemption from eternal damnation. However, this theological narrative simultaneously conceals the economic exploitation and disciplinary mechanisms inherent in the laundries, representing coerced labor as a sacred obligation rather than institutionalized control.

A Jungian interpretation further elucidates the psychological processes involved. The Mother Superior’s prioritization of spirit over body exemplifies the repression of the shadow: the “darkness which clings to every personality” (Jung, 1959: 123). By projecting sin and impurity onto the penitents’ flesh, the nuns externalize their own repressed desires, displacing the shadow onto the penitents. Consequently, the body becomes the repository of this projected evil, while the soul, idealized, abstracted, and purified, functions as the institutional persona through which religious authority conceals its inherent moral contradictions. Thus, asceticism operates not only as a theological injunction but also as a psychological and disciplinary apparatus that sanctifies suffering as a virtue and suppresses the contradictions inherent in the institution’s moral discourse.

### **5.7. Religious Ideology and Institutional Hypocrisy in *The Magdalene Sisters***

The film *The Magdalene Sisters* constructs religious authority as an ideological apparatus that legitimizes economic exploitation, suppresses dissent, and ensures the continuity of institutional power through spiritual discourse. Although Bernadette, Rose, and Margaret are required to lead lives founded on prayer, labor, and abstinence, the convent materially profits from the unpaid labor of these women. The sustained visual emphasis on the Mother Superior’s money box as she exhorts the girls to “work harder” reveals the economic rationality concealed beneath the rhetoric of penitence. Subsequent scenes, depicting the Mother Superior sealing bundles of money, affirm that spiritual discipline has been institutionalized as an extractive labor regime.

This instrumentalization is equally evident in the management of sexual violence. Upon the revelation of Father Fitzroy’s abuse of Crispina, the Mother Superior’s response was characterized not by moral accountability but by bureaucratic suppression, resulting in Crispina being sent to a psychiatric institution to safeguard the institution’s reputation. Jung’s (1959)

insight that the shadow “personifies everything that the subject refuses to acknowledge about himself and yet is always thrusting itself upon him” (pp .284-285) clarifies the psychological cleavage underlying such conduct. The Mother Superior’s persona, anchored in piety, discipline, and moral certainty, depends upon the disavowal of her shadow aspects: greed, sadism, and authoritarian domination.

Father Fitzroy represents an even more pronounced manifestation of the persona–shadow dialectic. His persona is that of a gentle, devout priest, yet his shadow, “a living part of the personality” that “takes possession of the ego-consciousness” (Jung, 1959: 123), emerges in his predatory exploitation of Crispina. Crispina’s anguished cry, “You are not a man of God!”, marks the moment at which the institution’s repressed shadow surfaces in collective awareness. As Jung (1959) observes, this confrontation with the shadow produces an “alteration of personality” (p.270), revealing an enantiomorphic collapse in which sanctity transforms into sin and holiness into hypocrisy.

These psychological and moral contradictions are situated within a broader ideological framework. Althusser’s conception of ideology as constituting not only the content of subjects’ perceptions but also the very conditions of their perception (McGowan & Kunkle, 2004: 194) is crucial for comprehending the operation of religion within the Magdalene Laundries. Moreover, one of religion’s social functions is to impart a worldview that fundamentally shapes adherents’ attitudes and behaviors toward the world (Gürhan, 2010: 61). The nuns systematically indoctrinate the girls into a Catholic ideology that conflates female sexuality with sin, silence with virtue, and labor with redemption. Speech itself is rigorously monitored. When Crispina confides in Rose regarding her child and the abuse, they must whisper. This enforced silence exemplifies what Nayar (2012: 40) characterizes as the sacred, which functions as an “instrument of oppression belonging exclusively to men”, wherein the voice operates as a site of moral regulation.

Moreover, on the day that Crispina’s sexual abuse by the priest is disclosed, the women of the convent are shown engaging in recreational activities, such as sack races and tug-of-war contests, and are filmed by the priest. These images, projecting an illusion of harmony, serve as propaganda, which is defined as the systematic dissemination of selected information to influence societal beliefs and behaviors (Evyapan, 2012: 193). In this context, the camera functions as a propagandistic tool used by the Catholic Church and, by extension, the Magdalene Convent, to reinforce institutional legitimacy and to garner mass support.

In this configuration, the film predominantly depicts extrinsic religiosity, as defined by Cirhinlioğlu (2010, p. 62), wherein religious behavior is driven by utilitarian or social ends rather than genuine faith. The Mother Superior exemplifies this orientation: her outward display of piety is merely a persona that masks ulterior motives of domination, economic interests, and institutional self-preservation. Nayar’s assertion that “the visceral emotional reaction to violence and suffering compels moral reflection” (2012: 171) underscores Mullan’s strategy by revealing the brutal realities behind religious institutions. The film compels viewers to confront the corruption hidden beneath the sacred.

Ultimately, the Magdalene laundries function as a locus where ideology, economic exploitation, and repressed psychic forces converge. Sacred discourse operates as the

legitimizing rhetoric of domination; propaganda constitutes the visual syntax of institutional denial; persona serves as the psychological architecture through which religious authority conceals its shadow. By unveiling these dynamics, the film critically elucidates the ideological role of religion both as a belief system and as a mechanism of control, a complex structure that sanctifies violence while asserting its redemptive capacity.

### **Conclusion**

This article analyzes *The Magdalene Sisters* as a cinematic articulation of the intertwined operations of sin, guilt, and salvation within a carceral religious order that disciplines female corporeality. Through an interdisciplinary framework integrating psychoanalytic theory, Foucauldian analyses of disciplinary power, and trauma analysis, the article shows that the Magdalene system functions as a mechanism through which theological narratives become instruments of domination.

In the film, Christian soteriology, grounded in the doctrines of original sin, Trinitarian hierarchy, and redemptive suffering, functions not as a promise of spiritual renewal but as a regulatory discourse, legitimizing institutional control and enabling the systematic surveillance, punishment, and moral disqualification of women. The analysis demonstrates that guilt is not represented as an interior moral condition but as a socially manufactured instrument that facilitates the internalization of religious authority.

Through confession, silence, and repetitive labor, the convent produces what Foucault calls “docile bodies,” rendering the women simultaneously penitent subjects and productive laborers. Psychoanalytic readings further reveal how the superego, narcissistic injury, sadistic aggression, and the persona–shadow dialectic shape the psychological dynamics of both subjugation and resistance. The Mother Superior’s sanctified persona masks authoritarian impulses, whereas the priests’ shadow selves manifest in sexual exploitation and moral hypocrisy, thereby exposing the collapse of theological legitimacy.

At the level of trauma, the film depicts the rupture between lived experience and representational capacity, thereby illustrating the psychic disintegration engendered by coercive religious contexts. The routinized discipline of the laundries aligns with Winell’s definition of Religious Trauma Syndrome, in which guilt, fear, and dependence are cultivated through prolonged exposure to dogmatic and punitive systems. Against this backdrop, redemption emerges not through divine mediation but through the embodied acts of defiance and the reclamation of narrative agency.

The escapes of Margaret, Bernadette, and Rose, however incomplete, constitute gestures of counter-discourse that destabilize the institutional economy of sin and purification. Taken together, the film exposes the Magdalene Laundries as a site where theology, ideology, and disciplinary power converge to regulate gendered bodies and suppress dissent. By foregrounding the historical silencing of survivors, the psychological mechanisms of internalized guilt, and the institutional disavowal of violence, *The Magdalene Sisters* not only critiques a particular religious system but also elucidates broader structures through which spiritual authority is mobilized as a form of social control. Ultimately, the film reconceptualizes salvation as a collective and human praxis rooted in resistance, solidarity, and the ethical

imperative of bearing witness, thereby contesting the theological narratives that historically legitimized the obliteration of women's voices and lived experiences.

### Genişletilmiş Özet

Bu çalışma, Peter Mullan'ın 2002 yapımı *The Magdalene Sisters* filmi, dini otoritenin günah, suçluluk ve kurtuluş kavramlarını kullanarak kadın bedeni üzerindeki disiplin mekanizmalarını ayrıntılı bir biçimde incelemektedir. Film, İrlanda'da faaliyet göstermiş olan Magdalene Çamaşırhaneleri'nin Hristiyan teolojik "anlatılar" üzerinden toplumsal ve psikolojik kontrol araçlarına dönüşümünü dramatize eden güçlü bir görsel metin olarak ele alınmıştır.

Araştırmanın temel amacı, dini söylemin kadın bedeni üzerindeki tahakkümünü psikanalitik teori, Michel Foucault'nun disiplinsel güç kavramı ile çağdaş travma kuramı çerçevesinde çok disiplinli bir yaklaşımla değerlendirmektir. Bu kapsamda, filmin anlatısında günah ve suçluluk kavramlarının toplumsal olarak nasıl inşa edildiği ve kurtuluşun kurumsal yapıların biyopolitik işleyişi içinde bir direniş alanı olarak nasıl işlevselleştirildiği incelenmiştir. Günah, kadınların cinselliğini denetleyen ve bedensel özerkliğini ortadan kaldıran bir ahlaki çerçeve üretirken; suçluluk duygusu, dışsal otoritenin birey tarafından içselleştirilmesini sağlayan bir araca dönüşmektedir. Bu yönüyle çalışma, dini ideolojinin örtük ama derin biçimde işleyen güç ağlarını temsil etmesi bakımından, teolojik söylemin sinemadaki yansımalarını inceleyen özgün bir çalışma alanı yaratmaktadır.

Filmin dramatik yapısı, tarihsel gerçekliklere dayalı belgesel bir nitelik taşıdığından dini kurumların bireyler üzerindeki psikolojik etkilerini görünür kılmaktadır. Bu anlatı biçimi, çalışmanın nitel içerik analizi yöntemine dayanan çözümlenmesi için kavramsal bir temel oluşturmaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, film hem teolojik hem de psikolojik bir metin olarak değerlendirilmiştir ve anlatı, karakterler ile semboller Freud'un psikanalitik yapısal modeli ve Jung'un arketip kuramı çerçevesinde yorumlanmıştır. Foucault'nun disiplin toplumu teorisi doğrultusunda Magdalene Çamaşırhaneleri'nin mikro-cezalandırma, gözetim ve beden siyaseti uygulamaları incelenmiş; ayrıca Winell'in geliştirdiği Dini Travma Sendromu (RTS) kavramı aracılığıyla dinsel kurumların bireyde yarattığı kalıcı psikolojik etkiler değerlendirilmiştir. Bu kuramsal çerçeve, yalnızca filmdeki karakter dinamiklerini değil, aynı zamanda dini otoritenin tarihsel sürekliliğini ve toplumsal norm üretim süreçlerini de anlamaya katkı sağlamaktadır.

Araştırmanın bulguları, suçluluğun bireysel veya ahlaki bir durumdan ziyade toplumsal olarak inşa edilmiş bir duygu olduğunu göstermektedir. Filmde günah, kadın bedeni üzerindeki toplumsal denetimin vazgeçilmez bir aracı olarak işlev görmektedir; kurtuluş kavramı ise emek gücü, itaat ve sessizlik yoluyla meşrulaştırılan bir söyleme dönüşmektedir. Travmanın temel kaynağı, tekrar eden ceza, sessizlik ve itaate dayalı ritüellerdir. Kadın karakterlerin yaşadığı direniş, ancak anlatısal özne olarak kendilerini ifade edebildikleri anda görünür hale gelmektedir. Bu durum, dini kurumların toplumsal cinsiyet hiyerarşilerini meşrulaştırma biçimlerini açığa çıkardığı kadar, bireysel direnişin de sessizlikten çıkışla nasıl anlam kazandığını göstermektedir.

Makale aynı zamanda Magdalene Çamaşırhaneleri'nin tarihsel arka planını irdeleyerek bu kurumların hayırseverlik kisvesi altında işleyen birer hapisane sistemine dönüştüğünü ortaya koymaktadır. Kadınların isimlerinin silinmesi, rakamlara indirgenmeleri, zorunlu çalıştırılmaları ve eğitimden mahrum bırakılmaları gibi uygulamalar, kurumsal şiddetin ve toplumsal dışlanmanın göstergeleri olarak değerlendirilmiştir. Böylelikle Kilise'nin kadın bedeni üzerindeki tahakkümü yalnızca dini değil, aynı zamanda politik ve ekonomik bir iktidar biçimi olarak kavramsallaştırılmıştır.

Dolayısıyla, film Hristiyan teolojisinin orijinal günah, teslis doktrini ve kurtuluş anlayışlarını yeniden yorumlayarak kadın bedeniyle özdeşleştirilen ahlaki sorumluluk, itaat ve baskı ilişkilerinin kökenini sorgulamaktadır. Günah kavramı erkekleri koruyan, kadınları ise sürekli cezalandıran cinsiyetçi ahlakın meşrulaştırıcısı olarak işlev görmektedir; suçluluk, içselleştirilmiş dini normların birey üzerindeki baskısının simgesine dönüşmektedir. Buna karşılık, kadınların kendi hikâyelerini anlatma eylemiyle birleşen kurtuluş kavramı, bireysel bir kefarettir olmaktan çıkarak kolektif bir direniş ve yeniden biçimlenme pratiğine dönüşür. Bu süreç, aynı zamanda travmanın dönüştürücü potansiyelini de açığa çıkarır; acının paylaşımı, sessizliğin kırılmasıyla birlikte iyileştirici bir anlam kazanır.

Psikanalitik çözümleme, filmdeki karakterlerin bastırılmış arzularını, korkularını ve otoriteyle kurdukları ilişkileri görünür kılar. Freud'un süperego kavramı, kadın karakterlerin dışsal otoriteyi içselleştirerek kendilerini suçlama biçimlerini açıklarken; Jung'un gölge arketipi, rahibelerin dinsel sadakat maskesi altında bastırdıkları saldırganlık ve arzuların sadistik eylemlerle dışavurumunu anlamamıza olanak tanır. Lacan'ın bakış kavramı, kadın bedeninin hem erkek karakterler hem de seyirci tarafından sürekli gözetim altında tutulduğunu, böylece film dilinin dahi patriyarkal bir izleme pratiğini yeniden ürettiğini göstermektedir.

Bulgular, aynı zamanda dinsel söylemin ekonomik bir boyut taşıdığını da ortaya koymaktadır. Manastır, kadınların ücretsiz emeklerinden elde ettiği kazancı ruhsal arınma retoriğiyle meşrulaştırmakta; böylece dini disiplin söylemi ekonomik sömürüyle birleşmektedir. Dinsel ideoloji, hem bedensel hem de ekonomik bir üretim düzeni yaratmakta; kurtuluş ise bu düzenin devamını sağlayan bir disiplin aracına dönüşmektedir. Bu çerçevede, film dinin ekonomik, psikolojik ve sembolik boyutlarını bir arada sorgulayan güçlü bir eleştirel çerçeveye sunmaktadır.

Buna ek olarak, *The Magdalene Sisters*, Katolik teolojisinin günah, suçluluk ve kurtuluş kavramlarını tersine çevirerek kurtuluşun ilahi bir bağış değil, direniş, konuşma ve özneleşme süreciyle mümkün olduğunu ileri sürmektedir. Kadınların sessizlikten çıkışı, anlatı üzerindeki denetimi yeniden ele geçirmeleri, dini söylemin ahlaki hiyerarşisini kırar. Böylece film, kurtuluşu bir inanç kategorisinden çıkarıp ahlaki bir eylem ve özneleşme biçimi olarak yeniden tanımlar. Magdalene Çamaşırhaneleri'nin tarihsel bağlamında şekillenen bu sinematik anlatı, dini otoritenin biyopolitik işleyişini hem bedensel disiplin hem de psikolojik denetim mekanizmaları üzerinden görünür kılar.

Sonuç olarak, çalışma, din, cinsiyet ve kurum arasındaki ilişkiyi eleştirel bir bakışla yeniden düşünmeye çağırırken, kadın öznesinin direniş potansiyelini sessizliğin içinden yükselen bir ahlaki çağrı olarak konumlandırır. Film, yalnızca tarihsel bir trajediyi değil, aynı

zamanda kutsal olanın iktidar aracı hâline gelişini, kadınların kurtuluş arayışını ve insan onurunun yeniden inşasını temsil eden güçlü bir sinematik belge niteliği taşımaktadır.

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<b>Çıkar Çatışması</b>	: Herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.
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