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“Damning Men’s Souls”: The Evolution of Irish Prostitution Memoirs

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Abstract

This article considers the prostitution memoir as an overlooked category of women’s writing in Ireland. These memoirs are of socio-cultural importance, documenting significant moments in the feminist movement, the policing of women’s bodies by the Irish state, and arguments around violence and the legal status of prostitution. They illustrate the rapid development and growing sophistication of the sex industry in Ireland, and they offer an insight into prostitution from the 1960s, discussing the shift from street prostitution to the move towards indoor trade. Ireland’s increasing metropolitanism is evidenced by the strategies used by escort agencies with new technologies. These memoirs document a hidden history of marginalised women in Ireland, revealing the liminal spaces in which they are forced to exist, and providing a platform for them to construct legitimate spaces of belonging.

Keywords: Women – body; women – artistic representations; feminism and post-feminism; prostitution; sexuality

Résumé

Cet article étudie les mémoires des prostituées, forme méconnue de l’écriture féminine irlandaise. Ces mémoires sont aussi importants sur le plan socio-culturel, puisqu’ils documentent certains moments clés du féminisme, le contrôle institutionnel du corps des femmes par l’État irlandais ainsi que les débats sur la violence et le statut légal de la prostitution. Ils illustrent le développement rapide et le processus de sophistication de l’industrie du sexe en Irlande et donnent un aperçu de la prostitution dans les années 1960, période où ce commerce passe de l’univers ouvert de la rue à celui, fermé, des maisons. L’urbanisation et la « métropolisation » de l’Irlande se manifestent à travers l’utilisation des hautes technologies par les agences d’escort. Ces mémoires, véritables documents sur l’histoire cachée des femmes marginalisées en Irlande, révèlent les espaces liminaires auxquels elles sont confinées, et fournissent à ces femmes un moyen de se construire un espace légitime d’appartenance.

mots clés : Femmes – corps; femmes – représentations artistiques; féminisme et post-féminisme; prostitution; sexualité

The last twenty years have seen a worldwide proliferation of prostitute¹ “confession” memoirs, exemplified by the success of texts boasting titles such as *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* (2006) and *Confessions of a Working Girl* (2008)². These memoirs focus on an explicitly sexualised female identity, with women gaining pleasure from their work as prostitutes and emphasising the elements of choice and financial rewards available to them. These glossy, postfeminist narratives have been replicated in Ireland through the recent publication of Scarlett O’Kelly’s *Between the Sheets* (2012), which is in marked contrast to the gritty prostitute memoirs that have emerged from Ireland since the 1980s, documenting personal experiences of the violence of the sex trade and pervasive drug addiction. Whilst largely overlooked by critics, this sub-genre of Irish life-writing offers illuminating insights into prostitution in Dublin by the women who were involved in the sex industry. The development of this genre was underlined by the re-publication of *The Memoirs of Mrs Leeson: Madam* (originally 1798) by Mary Lyons in 1995. Leeson’s colourful account of prostitution in eighteenth-century Dublin establishes a long history of Irish women speaking about the sex trade and re-appropriating official versions of history. These books have yet to be situated within a tradition of Irish life-writing, as they map a peripheral history of female experience. Each of the memoirs share a preoccupation with the violence inflicted on the bodies of prostitutes, and a pervasive sense of anger that Irish law permits such brutality against women. The history of prostitution in Ireland is a history of intolerance and suppression. On one hand, prostitutes were seen as fallen women, victims of their own moral weakness³. On the other hand, they have been portrayed throughout Irish culture as disease carriers, symbolising crime and deviance⁴. In cultural representations, the prostitute is rarely a sexual agent in charge of her own identity, and there has been little opportunity for Irish prostitutes to give voice to their own lived experience. Taura S. Napier notes that the few well-known autobiographies of Irish women have been by “figures that are seen as exceptional rather than ‘representative’ in society” (2001, 2). The relative

1. For the purposes of this discussion the terms ‘prostitute’ and ‘sex worker’ are used interchangeably in order to reflect how the authors of these memoirs categorise themselves.

2. An Amazon search for “prostitution memoir” currently produces a list of 96 memoirs. Some of the most notable books in this genre include *Pauline’s: Memoirs of the Madam on Clay Street*, Pauline Tabor (1971); *Miss Bangkok: Memoirs of a Thai Prostitute*, Bua Boonme (2007); *Escort Girl*, Melodie Nelson (2009); *Hooked: Confessions of a London Call Girl*, Claire Gee (2011).

3. A useful discussion of the fallen woman stereotype can be found in Frances Finnegan, *Do Penance or Perish: Magdalen Asylums in Ireland*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001.

4. The definitive history of prostitution in the nineteenth century in Ireland can be found in Maria Luddy, *Prostitution and Irish Society 1800 - 1940*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007. Literary examples of Irish prostitutes as deviant include Rosie Redmond in Sean O’Casey, ‘The Plough and the Stars’ in *Three Dublin Plays*, London, Faber and Faber, 1998; Teresa Burke in Liam O’Flaherty, *The Puritan*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1932; Nan Harding in Maurice Leitch, *Silver’s City*, London, Minerva, 1971.

obscurity of some of these memoirs, and their failure to be recognised and discussed by feminist scholars, suggests an unwillingness to engage in debates about the regulation and legalisation of selling sex. It is only through reading Irish prostitute memoirs that one can trace the evolution and difficulties within the world of prostitution. Financial need and escape from abusive home situations define the earlier prostitution narratives, whilst financial opportunity categorised Celtic Tiger memoirs. In recent months, the publication of Rachel Moran’s *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution* (2013) illustrates a renewed social concern around prostitution issues and a return to conservative constructions of prostitution as sexual slavery. By tracing the socio-cultural and legal evolution of the modern Irish sex industry through the experiences of sex workers, it is possible to provide new contexts and alternative perceptions of the period of rapid change in Ireland towards the end of the twentieth century.

■ Early Memoirs and Street Prostitution

Lyn: A Story of a Prostitute (1987) by Lyn Madden, written in conjunction with radical Irish feminist June Levine, is the first modern account of prostitution in the second half of the twentieth century. The memoir caused a sensation upon publication because of its account of the terrorism and murder of ex-prostitute Dolores Lynch by the brutal pimp John Cullen, which Madden witnessed⁵. Madden entered prostitution in 1967 and spent almost twenty years selling herself on the Grand Canal, though her narrative does not speak explicitly of these experiences. The ethos of radical feminism is evident in the text, which categorises prostitution as exploitative and degrading to all women. The preface states that “prostitution is the inevitable outcome of universal patriarchy” (Madden, 1987, 5), and the memoir forcefully expounds the “plight of the women on the streets” (1987, 6). This text is an excellent example of second wave feminist writing in Ireland. Levine is vehemently anti-prostitution, to the extent that her opinions make Madden feel humiliated in her profession:

Once Lyn and I were discussing prostitution and I snapped: “Nonsense. Prostitutes are used like public lavatories.” She did not look me in the eye for days. (*Lyn*, 1987, 8)

This policing of Madden within her own narrative illustrates how Levine’s politics shape the tone of Madden’s memoir. This kind of mediated autobiography is problematic, but illustrates the heavy influence of the ideology of the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement and the Legion of Mary upon the ex-prostitute.

5. Cullen murdered Dolores Lynch in her home, along with Lynch’s mother and aunt, in 1983. The case attracted much media attention because of the brutality of the act, and because of John Cullen’s links to prostitution.

Madden's memoir works as an item of propaganda for the anti-prostitution lobby, as she renounces her previous campaigning to legalise prostitution:

I did numerous interviews in the past where I justified prostitution, believing everything I said at the time. Through therapy and the love of friends, I've learned that there can be no justification for that life. It is no way for people to relate to one another, and every single woman is too precious to be wasted on the "game". (*Lyn* 1987, 270)

Quoting from Emma Goldman's essay "The Traffic in Women", this text clearly aligns prostitution with white slavery⁶. However, Madden's account of the friendships and camaraderie on the Dublin Canal suggest that there were moments of enjoyment during her time as a prostitute. Martina Keogh's memoir, *Survivor: Memoirs of a Prostitute* (2003), documenting forty years of prostitution in Dublin, is a more subjective example of the genre. She explicitly condemns the police and the abusive attitudes of the public towards women in the sex industry. Keogh has experienced all types of sex work, from streetwalking to brothels and managing a massage parlour, and this memoir is an incisive account of the violence she witnessed against women in Ireland. It is a critique of the public discourses that sanction the policing of women's bodies, and an invective against the treatment of prostitute bodies as dehumanised. Brought up in poverty in a tenement and abused by her stepfather, by the time Keogh was eight she had already earned money in the local park giving men hand jobs. She recognises such an early sexual awareness as a key reason for her involvement in the sex industry. Poverty and a lack of child protection services created the working conditions of Keogh's life. Constantly hungry and often on the streets, selling sex was a means of survival for Keogh:

No woman grows up wanting to work as a prostitute. It is a choice that we make when options are limited; when it appears there is no other option. It is a way of making a living that doesn't hurt anyone, except the woman herself (Keogh 2003, 22)

Her lack of pleasure in sex work is emphasised throughout her narrative. For Keogh, the sex industry stole her sense of self: "From the night I started working as a prostitute, I stopped living and merely existed" (2003, 101). Each author struggles against being defined by prostitution. The sexual act becomes a vaguely defined action, never directly approached. For Keogh and Madden the monotony of selling sex every night is emphasised and nowhere is the trade eroticised. Distancing and rituals of separation are important, and in *Survivor* and *Lyn* there is

6. Emma Goldman, 'The Traffic of Women' in *Anarchism and Other Essays*, New York, Cosimo Classics, 2006 (1913).

a strong sense of frustration over the stereotypical representation of the whore. Each author constructs an identity that is oppositional to the traditional picture of the fallen woman. Linda Anderson terms this an “active appropriation of identity” (1997, 3). These memoirs present a feminised world in which men are rarely present. The clients are given little description, and the narratives often focus more on mother-daughter relationships or the experiences of other prostitutes. They are exclusionary to men, who exist peripherally in their experiences. The discussion of violence is particularly depicted as a female experience and a collective problem for women:

Sometimes a couple of us used to venture along the canal bank, to investigate what we thought was a man’s elbow sticking out from behind a tree, only to find a misshapen branch, and we’d giggle in relief. You never knew who was lurking in the shadows waiting to hurt you in some way. (Madden 1987, 264)

Violence was commonly perpetrated against street prostitutes, and became almost a normalised pattern of behaviour:

Throughout my many years as a prostitute, I sustained several broken noses, bruises, and numerous black eyes. They became a mundane reality of life after a few months. Prostitutes often have bruises and cuts from being attacked, but they learn how to cover them up and hide the pain from onlookers. (Keogh 2003, 129)

This concealment of injuries and abuse is used to maintain control over her life and present a façade that is unaffected by this treatment. Keogh’s narrative however, is an invective against cultural acceptance of this treatment of women in vulnerable positions. Her anger builds throughout the memoir, as she points out more and more occasions of society turning a blind eye to vicious treatment of sex workers. Prostitute behaviour was regulated and controlled in ways that fail to safeguard the women involved. The women working on the canal were often forced to flee whenever a Gardaí car is spotted. For Martina Keogh, this policing was always one-sided:

Part of my job as a prostitute involved clashing with the police over and over again. We skirted around the edge of the law and some members of the police really had a thing against women. I was arrested and charged countless times over the years, but the police never charged a punter caught having sex with me. (Keogh 2003, 121)

The memoirs repeatedly return to gendered double standards of behaviour and police intolerance of women in sex work. Up until the Supreme Court ruling

in 1981, it was legal for Gardaí to arrest women loitering on the street with the intention of committing a criminal act. There was no need to present evidence of the person's intent to solicit, and both Madden and Keogh were victims of this law in the 1970s. Another significant moment in the "policing" of prostitution in these narratives was the so-called "turf wars" of the 1970s. Madden gives an explicit account of this in her memoir, as her common law husband, Craig Grey, played a key part in events. The violence broke out at a time when foreign prostitutes began to work on the streets of Dublin. The Irish women working on the canal felt threatened by the growing numbers of overseas women, and fights broke out between Irish and non-Irish prostitutes. Dave Mullins, in his sensationalist account of prostitution, *Ladies of the Kasbah*, asserts that the attacks were racially motivated because the interlopers were "a Jamaican pimp gang led by the notorious Tyrone Fletcher who regularly flew scores of his black prostitutes into Dublin backed up by heavy black muscle". (Mullins, 1995, 71) According to Madden,

The foreign pimps did not like their women flying back to Derby sporting black eyes instead of money. A carload of them arrived on the square and spread about, threatening the Irish women'. (Lyn, 1987, 110)

This fracas highlights a number of features of prostitution in the 1970s and 1980s. Prostitution in Ireland was almost exclusively undertaken by Irish women until the 1970s, when cheaper transportation and Ireland's slow move towards globalisation and an opening of its borders created a more diverse industry. Street prostitution was controlled by pimps, and violence was commonplace. The reception of the foreign women was driven by the Irish prostitutes' fear of losing their livelihoods and being undercut by cheaper and more exotic migrant labour. The slow trickle of foreign sex workers to Ireland heralded the beginnings of change to the sex industry. In the twenty-first century the Immigrant Council of Ireland claims that up to 97% of prostitutes in Ireland are migrant women⁷. A memoir of migrant experiences of prostitution in Ireland is yet to be published, and this does constitute a large gap in the genre⁸, but what is clear is that prostitution, like most other aspects of society, was transformed in the last decades of the twentieth century.

7. The Immigrant Council of Ireland claim that 'between 3 and 13 per cent of the women in indoor prostitution are Irish, which means that up to 97 per cent are migrant women' in their 2009 Report *Globalisation, Sex Trafficking and Prostitution: The Experiences of Migrant Women in Ireland*, Monica O'Connor and Jane Pillinger, Immigrant Council of Ireland, 2009.

8. The escort website *Escort Ireland* hosts a number of blogs by international workers, which detail their experiences of sex work in Ireland.

■ Celtic Tiger and the Transition of Sex Work

The end of the Troubles in the North and the booming Celtic Tiger economy in the Irish Republic created a period of rapid social change in the 1990s, marked by heavy industrialisation and investment in Ireland, whilst the thriving economy attracted mass immigration for the first time. Essential to these changes was the growing wealth that fuelled new demand for sexual services and more luxurious prostitution experiences. This evolution of the sex industry is discussed in Marise O’Shea’s *The True Story of the Vice Queen* (1997). For O’Shea, prostitution was “just something I did for ten quid” (O’Shea, 1997, 25). Born into a middle class family, O’Shea chose prostitution for the easy money and flexible hours. Her narrative declares that she “changed the face of prostitution in Ireland” by modernising the industry and creating one of the earliest escort agencies, Exclusive Escorts. Her eighteen years in Irish prostitution is a narrative of a rapidly changing industry and the growing availability of drugs. She endorses the legalisation of the industry and suggests that the “sense of being admired and constantly complimented” kept her in prostitution (O’Shea, 1997, 78). O’Shea breaks taboos in Irish society by daring to suggest that she enjoyed the work. This unapologetic approach, matched fifteen years later by Scarlett O’Kelly’s sex positive narrative, opens prostitution up to the possibility that it can be a rewarding profession for women. However, there is still an acknowledgement of the possibilities for violence:

A lot of them are harder types; so many women messed up, coming out of poverty, totally abusing themselves, not using protection, having no control over their lives. I met women having babies and they didn’t even know which customer it was. They’d be saying, “I hope it isn’t Chinese or black”. Sometimes I found it hard to believe what was going on around me. (O’Shea 1997, 36)

I saw some of the women deteriorating in front of my eyes. The streets ate their souls away, but I wouldn’t let it eat mine. (Keogh 2003, 209)

The memoirs of Martina Keogh, Marise O’Shea and Lyn Madden all describe the nightly danger of working on the streets in Dublin. Prostitution was characterised by violent customers and pimps, abusive Gardaí, and paramilitary involvement. The high profile murders of prostitute Dolores Lynch, and the unsolved murders of other prostitutes haunt these narratives. There is a sense of fear and injustice surrounding these deaths. The list of prostitute murders is growing in Ireland. From the murder of Peggy Flynn in 1966, there has been a steady stream of names to add to the category of murdered prostitutes: Teresa Maguire (1978);

Dolores Lynch (1983); Belinda Periera (1996); Sinead Kelly (1996); Paiche Onyemaechi (2004); Lynette McKeown (2004). As Canter, Iannou and Young (2009, 4) have observed, prostitute murders are often unsolved because of the low public opinion of the victim, unwillingness of other prostitutes to speak to the police, and a lack of credible witnesses⁹. The brutal murder of Teresa Maguire in particular is an iconic example in these memoirs of how society ignores prostitute murders. In an attempt to reform the industry, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act of 1993 criminalised soliciting and the public practise of prostitution. The women in these memoirs condemn this 'hiding' of the sex industry. In *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution*, Rachel Moran has recently described this legislation as harmful to women:

The Sexual Offences Act of 1993 robbed me and many others of the right to have some level of control over our already disempowered lives, while not only allowing brothel prostitution to persist, but encouraging it to expand' (Moran 2013, 254).

Martina Keogh also decided to move towards indoor prostitution in the 1990s:

[I] decided to start working indoors to get away from the streets. Things were getting more dangerous than ever and I was constantly on the watch for perilous pimps or punters. I set up a massage parlour [...] it transpired that it wasn't that much safer than the streets, because the punters still beat us and raped us occasionally, but we were out of the pimps' sight. One night the police raided it and the Sunday World exposed it (Keogh 2003, 118)

Keogh feels not only under attack by pimps, but also by clients and journalists who endanger prostitutes by exposing them in national newspapers. For the writers, this is clearly a betrayal that is seen as another form of violence. Autobiography here becomes a mode of writing that enables these women to give voice to the betrayals inflicted by a censorial media. Marise O'Shea devotes an entire chapter to the devastation she felt at having her name in print and being publicly exposed as a prostitute after being called as a state witness. She notes with bitterness that the identities of the clients caught in the Bay Tree brothel were protected. As a result of the court case, the pimp received a £50 fine. The case had a huge effect on O'Shea, forcing her family to move house, and driving her to become addicted to heroin.

9. 'Operation Enigma' was set up by Scotland Yard in 2006 to investigate links between 207 murders of sex workers and other vulnerable women in the UK since 1986. Whilst homicide figures in Ireland are relatively low by comparison, over 50% of prostitute murders remain unsolved.

I did it because I knew the papers were coming out and I dreaded the disgrace on my family and myself. Because of the way the case had been handled in court, I was totally destroyed, ripped apart: I just wanted to get away from it all. (O’Shea, 40)

By situating this account of her own devastation and addiction within a larger context of societal injustice, O’Shea critiques the media and the court system that view prostitutes as criminals unworthy of the same rights as the men who purchase them. What all these narratives have in common is a critique of conservative Ireland, or in the more recent texts, a critique of a hypocritical country of double standards. *The True Story of a Vice Queen* and *Survivor: Memoirs of a Prostitute* demonstrate the growing interest of the media in the prostitute industry as well as the growing visibility of sex workers.

■ Recent Memoirs

Scarlett O’Kelly’s recent memoir, *Between the Sheets* (2012) advances a liberal and somewhat postfeminist view of prostitution. Her book is self-labelled a “recession” memoir, in which the economic downturn drove her into the sex industry in order to pay her mortgage. This book provides an important comparison to earlier memoirs. O’Kelly writes as an independent middle-class escort, running a sophisticated high-class business from the internet. This is far on the spectrum from street prostitution, and marks an important change in the way prostitution is conducted in modern Ireland. The increasing use of the internet as a space for the purchase of sex has revolutionised the industry, allowing women to work discreetly without attracting attention from law enforcement. O’Kelly encounters little violence from her clients, and speaks frankly about some of her sexual encounters. This is much more explicit than the street prostitutes, who avoid the details of transactions in favour of stories about other women working the streets. O’Kelly’s account argues that the selling of sex has become accepted by society, and she encourages the reader’s sexual voyeurism in order to declare herself liberated from the discursive conservatism of “old” Ireland. However, the author also writes under a pseudonym, denying her readers the objectifying gaze of exposing her “real” self. Her memoir is being marketed as the true story of an “escort”, a deliberately vague sobriquet that disguises sexual activity behind an alias of respectability. O’Kelly embraces her identity and the terminology that is associated with it: “I am a hooker, a prostitute, a whore or an escort – whatever you like to call me, I’m it.” (2012) However, she goes on to point out “I’m also an ordinary mum” in an attempt to normalise her situation.

In *Between the Sheets*, O’Kelly baldly states that financial necessity was her motivation for joining the sex industry. She depicts herself as a victim of the recession, having lost her job, divorced her husband, and when she is burdened with a house with negative equity, the escort business seems like the natural solution:

I enjoyed sex, I had a strong sense of my own identity, and surely I could use some kind of screening process to weed out the gobshites and protect myself. It’s money for old rope after all, and the oldest profession in the world. (O’Kelly 2012, 8)

For O’Kelly, her high-end escort service enables her to continue living her comfortable middle-class life. She objectifies her own sexuality, describing herself as a “product” and an “enterprise”. She personifies Tasker and Negra’s definition of postfeminism as “white and middle-class by default, anchored in consumption as a strategy (and leisure as a site) for the production of the self” (2007, 2). O’Kelly emphasises the freedom involved in her choice and celebrates her own commodification. As an educated and empowered woman, she can charge a higher price for her product. Her experience is vastly different from the street prostitution of the previous generation. She addresses this aspect of prostitution with distaste and horror:

Let’s face it, no one relishes the idea of standing on a cold pavement waiting for a total stranger to stop his car and call her over. The women who are engaged in that sort of prostitution are motivated by other things, and if those factors were removed, you can be sure they wouldn’t choose that life willingly. (O’Kelly 2012, 59)

O’Kelly attempts to disassociate herself from street prostitutes, but the motivation of money attracts women of all classes. Whilst she charges more (€400 in comparison to the £30 charged by Martina Keogh) these women essentially provide the same service. O’Kelly has no interaction at all with other prostitutes, working as an independent escort, and her experiences are vastly different to the other women writing in this genre. Her lived experience is also much more internal and reflective. It is more of a confession than a traditional autobiography. Rita Felski has outlined the sexual confession narrative as “a female subject writing a non-fiction work about her own sexuality and her emergence as a subject” (Felski, 1989, 113). O’Kelly’s memoir focuses exclusively on her two years in the escort industry, wilfully blurring the facts of her background in order to protect her identity. She fears media discovery and consequent unmasking of her identity. This paranoia fills her work:

I had a Plan B – maybe it was a C or D – that if I ever got found out, my mini nest egg would get me and my children out of Ireland immediately. (O’Kelly, 156)

Whilst privately she is not ashamed of her profession, O’Kelly understands that society would condemn her. If discovered, “my life here would be over” because of the notoriety the publicity would cause (v). She voices subversive possibilities, suggesting that if prostitution was legalised, “it could possibly have been my occupation of choice” (O’Kelly, 62). Scarlett O’Kelly is acutely-aware of her image and other people’s perceptions. She constructs an identity for herself as a modern devoted mother embroiled in domestic tasks, yet sexually confident and intelligent. She denies the victim status, or at least only accepts being a victim of the recession. O’Kelly’s book further fits Irene Gammel’s definition of the confession:

Many readers and spectators feel uneasy about the genre’s characteristics: its transgressive sexual nature, its sometimes scandalous excess, and its breaking of the boundaries of normality’ (Gammel 1999, 10).

One of the main differences between this memoir and the older auto/biographies of prostitutes is the sexual explicitness of descriptions of experiences with clients. In the accounts of Madden, Keogh and O’Shea, the sexual act itself is avoided as much as possible. There is a conscious fear that they will be defined by the sexual act rather than their narratives. O’Kelly, perhaps aided by her *nom de plume*, describes appointments and her own sexual enjoyment in detail. She discusses the sexual taboo in normal bourgeois Irish society, instructing her readers on issues such as how to perform anal sex. This is also perhaps a result of the post-feminist moment. O’Kelly’s narrative is more comparable to other recent escort memoirs such as Claire Gee’s *Confessions of a London Call Girl* (2011) rather than drawing any inspiration from the earlier Irish auto/biographies. Her preoccupation with the correct outfits, sex toys and her own orgasms makes this memoir at times read more like a modern chick lit novel. The main event of this narrative is the upheaval of an economic downturn, and the shock value of the fact that a middle class woman would turn to prostitution to enable her middle class spending habits rather than make some spending cuts in her lifestyle.

I was making up to twelve hundred euro per week, but with the mortgage, household bills, school demands and extra-curricular activities, I was only just breaking even. (O’Kelly 2012, 110)

The popularity of this memoir suggests an overwhelming change in the perception of modern prostitution in Ireland. It has become a discreet industry, and O’Kelly asserts that it is now an industry based on choice. This view is not shared

by Rachel Moran in her recent expose of the sex industry, *Paid For: My Journey Through Prostitution* (2013). Her memoir is exceedingly anti-prostitution, utilising Kathleen Barry's language of "prostituted women" to emphasise the victimisation of women in sex work, as well as quoting Andrea Dworkin's radical feminist polemic. Moran's account of prostitution denies the possibility of choice, and openly urges readers to support Ireland's Turn off The Red Light campaign:

Prostitution, to me, is like slavery with a mask on, just as it is like rape with a mask on, and we are no more recompensed for the abuse of our bodies by our punters' cash than slaves were recompensed by the food and lodgings provided by their slave masters. (Moran 2013, 471)

Moran's opinion of prostitution undoubtedly is formed by the fact that she entered the industry out of desperation at fifteen, when she was homeless, whilst O'Kelly's privileged attitude fits the sexually liberated discourse of postfeminism, and suggests the possibility of prostitution as normalised work:

I think of it as a normal job where you have your professional self and then your weekend self. If I'd been any other committed responsible professional from Monday to Friday, would you have expected me to feel guilt if on Saturday, I wore a mini dress, drank ten cocktails and had a one night stand with a stranger? (O'Kelly 2012, 158)

The radically different points of view promoted by O'Kelly and Moran provide a useful binary for the arguments currently surrounding prostitution in Ireland. The Turn off the Red Light campaign in recent years has utilised the discourse of victimisation and sex trafficking in order to further their agenda of criminalising prostitution for male clients, emphasising the abhorrent practice of forced prostitution. Their campaign has taken on the aspect of a Victorian moral crusade, where the evil of the traffickers and the men who use prostitutes is only matched by the untainted innocence of the female victims. This argument returns to the radical feminism espoused by Sheila Jeffries and Kathleen Barry in the 1970s, where all women are forced into prostitution, and are victims of "sexual terrorism" (Barry 1984, 43). In Ireland, this anti-prostitution discourse has been largely successful in conflating sex work and sex trafficking as two versions of female exploitation, where the women involved can only be passive dupes. This attitude is now mainstream, and is evident in advertising campaigns in the Republic of Ireland. Increasingly, the discourse of sex trafficking is utilised in Irish cultural forms as a coded metaphor for the anxieties surrounding inward migration and the xenophobic response to this by Irish society. Meanwhile, Diane Negra has argued that one of the remarkable elements of the postfeminist sensibility is the removal of the stigma that once came from participating in the sex industry. She has critiqued the "new respectability" of the female sex

worker and society’s acceptance of sex work as a legitimate industry (2008, 100). This relates directly to what Feona Attwood has termed “the mainstreaming of sex” (Attwood 2009), and the new visibility of the sex industry within Irish society. Despite prostitution moving indoors, sex is now visible everywhere in culture, and television productions such as *Secret Diary of a Call Girl*¹⁰ promote the possibility of middle-class, liberated women joining the sex industry out of choice rather than financial need. The globalisation of Celtic Tiger Ireland has irretrievably changed the expectations of sex work, with the market creating greater demand for more exotic sexual experiences in more luxurious surroundings. The experience of prostitutes as related in their memoirs helps us to trace the history and evolution of sex work in modern Ireland, and to come to judgements based on the lived experiences of Irish prostitutes.

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