

NEW FOUNDATIONS:
Structure & Agency in the
Contemporary Politics of
Gender & Sexuality

Gender
Culture
& Society @UL



Colloquia Series 2014 University of Limerick

29th – 30th May 2014

University of Limerick

Colloquium



IRISH RESEARCH COUNCIL
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7pm 29th May 2014, Charles Parsons Theatre, Room C1063

Public Film Screening of Prof. Nicola Mai's documentary 'Normal'

Q&A Session afterwards with Prof. Nicola Mai

How can we represent the complexity of migrants' trajectories within the global sex industry? How can we give voice to migrants while protecting their identities? How can we interrogate the politics of victimhood in representations of all migrant sex workers as either victims or villains within hegemonic fictions and documentaries on sex trafficking?

These issues and questions are at the core of Normal, a 48 minute creative documentary that brings the life stories of male, female and transgender migrants working in the sex industry to the screen. Drawing on original interviews with people working in the sex industry in Albania, Italy and the UK, documentary director and ethnographer Nicola Mai reveals their unheard stories. The viewer is continually challenged by their words, their dreams and the lives that they lead. Actors portray all the characters in order to guarantee the anonymity and safety of the original interviewees; this approach also challenges the criteria of authenticity underpinning research, humanitarianism and documentary film-making.

Trailer: <http://vimeo.com/50289487>



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Colloquia Series 2014 University of Limerick

9.15am 30th May 2014 Wood Room, Plassey House, UL

Colloquium bring together national & international academics with local NGOs, activists & policy-makers

9.15am Registration, Foyer of Plassey House, UL *with tea, coffee and croissants*

10.00am Welcoming remarks by Dr Breda Gray, Department of Sociology, UL

10.10am **Dr Eilís Ward, School of Political Science and Sociology, NUI Galway:**

'Minding the gaps...what we know (and don't know) about the sex trade in Ireland'

10.40am **Dr Rutvica Andrijasevic, School of Management, University of Leicester:**

'Multiple Scripts: Mother, Whores and Victims'

11.20am *Coffee Break*

11.40am **Dr Monica O'Connor, Independent Researcher:**

*'Consent, agency and harm in the lives of women in prostitution and women trafficked to
Ireland for sexual exploitation'*

12.10 **Prof Nicola Mai, Sociology and Migration Studies, London Met University:**

'Queering Sexual Humanitarianism: Migration, Sex Work and (anti)Trafficking'

12.30 Discussion & closing remarks

13.00 Lunch

Prof Nicola Mai, Sociology and Migration Studies, London Metropolitan University

‘Queering Sexual Humanitarianism: Migration, Sex Work and (anti)Trafficking’

Abstract

The social protection of vulnerable migrant groups has become a strategic border between the West and the Rest of the world. Asylum and fundamental rights are allocated on the basis of well-rehearsed politics of compassion, whose credibility is assessed on the basis of the performance of stereotypical victimhood scripts. Anti-trafficking moral panics and social interventions play a strategic role within the deployment of these neoliberal governmentalities. By criminalising the involvement of young female and male migrants in the sex industry in terms of trafficking and exploitation, they enforce new biographical borders and hierarchies of mobility. By engaging in the global sex industry young migrant men and women challenge these borders and hierarchies because they are able to afford, morally and economically, ‘abroad’ cosmopolitan individualised lifestyles that are ambivalently queer in relation to established sexual/gender roles ‘at home’. This complexity and fluidity is not recognized in public debates and policies on the nexus between migration and the sex industry. Doing so would mean recognising the shared conditions of increased exploitability and fragmentation we all experience in neoliberal times, whether we migrate or not, whether we sell sex or not.

Dr Rutvica Andrijasevic, School of Management, University of Leicester

‘Multiple Scripts: Mother, Whores and Victims’

Abstract

Studies about ‘trafficked’ women disagree about how to best define this category of women: should they be seen as victims of crime, both when it comes to non-consensual migration and labour exploitation? Or should they be seen instead as labour migrants and therefore as migrant sex workers who entered sex work consensually? It is my stance that these positions draw an unfeasible distinction between ‘victims’ and ‘agents’ and presuppose a static notion of the subject. I will illustrate instead how women’s subjectivities, constituted through migration and prostitution, do not map neatly onto any one of the categories. Drawing on the fieldwork material, I will show the multiple social positions that women took up and through which they negotiated various contradictions produced by the discursive and juridical regimes that regulate their lives. I will then finally argue that to make visible women’s efforts to negotiate and remain loyal to a set of social positions such as those of migrant, victim, mother, wife and sex worker that are not compatible with the discursive and legal schemes pertaining to sex trafficking, is to pay attention to the importance of gender difference and sexuality in relation to the constitution of the subject.

Dr Eilís Ward, School of Political Science and Sociology, NUI Galway

‘Minding the gaps...what we know (and don’t know) about the sex trade in Ireland’

Abstract

This paper explores the structure/agency debate in the context of the current proposals for legislative change in Ireland, viz, the proposal to criminalise the purchasing of sex. It focuses on structure and agency in relation to sex workers or those who sell sex. It posits parliamentary debate as a site of framing of the debate and pays attention to how the selling of sex is presented as consequent to recurring structural patterns or arrangements or as indicative or reflective of agency, however defined. It explores, further, the role of advocacy literature and research (data and analysis) in this process and seeks to trace the role of this research in wider knowledge production in relation to the sex trade in Ireland and women’s (as sex workers) role therein.

Monica O'Connor, Independent Researcher

‘Consent, agency and harm in the lives of women in prostitution and women trafficked to Ireland for sexual exploitation’

Abstract

This paper will discuss the issues of prostitution and trafficking for sexual exploitation within the framework of a continuum of sexual exploitation rather than in rigid distinctive realms, with freely chosen sexual engagement on the one hand and coercive sexual violation on the other. Drawing on over six years of research and interviews with Irish, migrant and trafficked women directly affected by prostitution in Ireland, I will examine the concepts of consent, choice, agency, harm and coercion in girls’ and women’s entry to and entrapment within prostitution.

The paper will also address the policy and legislative framework of the Irish State pertaining to prostitution and trafficking and the extent to which the concept of consent underpins the current response to these issues in Ireland. The paper will analyse whether sustaining a rigid demarcation between victims of trafficking and/or those who are coerced into prostitution, and those who apparently choose to enter the industry, reflects the lived experience of girls and women. It will also analyse whether this rigid demarcation is sustainable or effective as a basis for the formulation of policy and legislation.

Colloquia Organisers:

Ann Marie Joyce, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick

Dr Breda Gray, Department of Sociology, University of Limerick

Colloquia Partners:

Gender ARC Galway; Dr Eilís Ward, NUI Galway

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Special thanks to Niamh O'Sullivan, Natalia Brodecka, Anne McCarthy and Natalia Mazurkiewicz



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