Irish women and the Celtic Tiger economy

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The term ‘Celtic Tiger’ has connotations that extend well beyond the realm of the purely economic. It has, for instance, become a metaphor for a new national consensus that constantly reminds us how ‘we have never had it so good’. This chapter takes issue with this consensus and argues instead that, while the recent boom in the Irish Republic has produced enormous wealth for a small minority, the majority of Irish people have benefited little from this apparent economic miracle. In fact, there has been a direct transfer in wealth from the poorest sections in society to the richest. The chapter will offer a critical examination of the realities of the Celtic Tiger for Irish women.

The changing position of women in Irish society is one of the most overlooked aspects of Ireland’s recent economic prosperity. In this context, there is a consensus among political commentators and academics that the shift towards a more liberal and secular Ireland is the inevitable result of the process of modernisation or a result of the liberalisation inspired by the European Union (EU). The premise of this chapter is that the changes that have occurred in Irish society over the past ten years can be better understood if they are viewed in terms of the shifts in patterns of economic production. Changes in capitalism have resulted in a transformation of family structure, sex and sexuality and, ultimately, the lives of Irish women. One of the defining features of the Celtic Tiger era has been the sheer number of women with children who are returning to the workforce. Since the early 1990s, women have been entering the workforce in large numbers but this radical shift in labour market dynamics has received little more than a passing comment in the growing literature on Ireland’s recent apparent economic success.¹ Furthermore, feminist analysis frequently attempts to create a seamless connection between women regardless of their class position. All too often there is an assumption, albeit frequently an unconscious one, that ‘we are all in this together’. This perspective ignores, of course, the fact that class position mediates one’s experience of oppression.

The feminisation of the workforce

Ireland's membership of the EU, infrastructural development and a decreased economic dependence on the United Kingdom had transformed the Irish economy by the late 1970s. Irish women grew up expecting and demanding a life outside the home, wanting to be more than wives and mothers. Between 1971 and 1983, the number of women in the workforce grew by thirty-four per cent. The number of married women in the workforce increased by 425 per cent over the same period. More remarkable are the changes that we have seen over the past decade, in the era of the Celtic Tiger. The majority of new female employment is in the service sector, many in jobs that used to be relatively well paid, high-status male jobs, such as in computers and banking, but which have been deskilled and demoted in the job hierarchy. By 1996, there were 488,000 women working in Ireland, an increase of 212,000 since 1971, compared with an increase in male employment of just 23,000 for the same period.² Between 1991 and 1996, female employment grew by 102,000, equalling the growth of the previous twenty years. A further 128,000 women entered the workforce between 1996 and 2000.³ One of the principal reasons for this shift was that women no longer saw marriage or having children as a reason to leave the workforce. Participation in the labour force is highest among women aged between twenty-five and forty-four, running at around ninety per cent and equalling the EU average.⁴ The overall level of female participation in the workforce had risen from thirty-nine per cent in 1994 to over fifty per cent in 2002, equalling the EU average.⁵

This feminisation of the formal workforce has been a contradictory experience for the majority of women. While women have entered employment in growing numbers, they continue to earn less than men, and sometimes less than men who are doing the same job. Women's low pay is related to their concentration in occupational groups which are predominantly female, understood as low skilled and poorly paid.⁶ The differential is even greater among the lowest-paid women. Research conducted by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) in 1993 found that low pay in Ireland was most common in areas of traditional female employment, such as textiles, clothing and cleaning and at the lower grades of the civil service.⁷ Four years later, in 1997, despite an unprecedented economic boom and successive national wage agreements, the average weekly earnings of women employed in the industrial sector, while increasing, were still just sixty-five per cent of men's. For women who were employed in white-collar employment and senior management, it rose to eighty-three per cent.⁸

This clear wage differential between men and women can, in part, be explained by the number of hours worked. There is an increasing trend

among women to work part-time and part-time employment in Ireland is a primarily female activity. In 1994, eighteen per cent of women worked part-time; by 2000, that figure had increased to twenty-nine per cent.⁹ This increase in part-time employment has been one of the ways that women have attempted to get around the inadequate provision of childcare. The 1996 *Living in Ireland Survey* showed that seventy-three per cent of those who were in part-time employment were women and that women with children under ten years of age made up forty-one per cent of part-time female workers.¹⁰ The majority of these part-time jobs are regular rather than occasional and can, thus, arguably be seen as part of the restructuring of the labour force and capitalism's increasing need for a flexible and cheap workforce.

Irish women's participation in the labour force is still below the EU average, especially if we consider parental rather than marital status.¹¹ Ireland has the lowest level of labour market participation in Europe among women with children under five years of age. In the Irish Republic, as well as in Italy and Greece, less than fifty per cent of women with young children work outside the home. Yet, in Denmark, for example, eighty per cent of women with children of preschool age work.¹² Provisions for early childhood education and publicly funded childcare services are lower in Ireland than the rest of Europe. Just one per cent of three-year-olds in Ireland have access to preschool education, compared with forty-five per cent in the United Kingdom, sixty per cent in Germany and ninety-eight per cent in Denmark.¹³ Irish parents spend a higher proportion of their earnings on childcare than their European counterparts, with at least twenty per cent of maternal earnings going towards paying for it. The lack of state-sponsored childcare and its privatised provision discriminate against working-class mothers and force them out of the workforce.¹⁴

Unsurprisingly, childcare has become an important issue among women in Ireland, yet successive governments have failed to create an adequate solution or even to address the question. The average cost of a Dublin full-time crèche place in December 2000 was €500 per month. This had risen to €1,200 per month by June 2002. Over thirty per cent of nurseries operate from converted houses and only thirteen per cent use purpose-built facilities.¹⁵ The Expert Working Group on Childcare, which commissioned the *National Childcare Strategy* report, argued the case for tax relief for childcare providers who upgrade their facilities and personal tax relief for parents. The issue has created a dilemma for policy makers trying to juggle a desire for more women to enter the labour force, in order to redress labour shortages, and a desire to reduce public spending and maintain a low-tax regime for the wealthy.¹⁶ Unfortunately, the trade union movement, while continuing to lobby for better childcare facilities, has capitulated to this tax credit solution. Needless

to say, this is not an adequate resolution. The care of children should not be subject to the demands of the marketplace. Furthermore, tax relief is a solution that benefits the rich. Two high earners will get more tax relief, especially if they are in higher tax bracket, than a low-paid single parent.

The principal effect of the feminisation of the workforce has been to increase the already stark class divisions among women. Between 1997 and 1998, over fifty per cent of all workers (fifty-six per cent of women and fifty-one per cent of men) earned less than IR£13,500, or two-thirds of the average wage. At the other end of the spectrum, fifteen per cent earned in excess of IR£40,000, or more than twice the average wage. While two-thirds of the latter were men, it is clear that there is a layer of women who are doing considerably better than the average man or woman.¹⁷ According to the 1996 *Labour Force Survey*, fifty-three per cent of those in professional or technical occupations are women. In the survey's sectional categories, sixty-five per cent of those in the professional services sector and sixty-two per cent of those in the personal services sector are women.¹⁸ Women at the higher end of the scale do suffer from discrimination but not all women's work is low paid.¹⁹ However, the point that is often missed is that these figures highlight a sharp class divide. While all women suffer serious difficulties fulfilling child-care and work commitments, not all women experience these difficulties equally. A checkout operator in Dunnes Stores cannot afford to pay for domestic backup, whereas a well paid professional woman can afford a full-time nanny or au pair.

The gap between rich and poor continued to increase during the years of the economic boom and, despite government protestations to the contrary, there has been little attempt to distribute the benefits of the Celtic Tiger equally. The Justice Commission of the Conference of Religious in Ireland (CORI) estimates that the average income gap between rich and poor in Ireland for 2001 was a staggering £IR191 per week, the largest difference in the entire EU. This disparity is particularly evident when one examines the situation of women and children during the Celtic Tiger years. A study by Nolan and Watson found that the risk of poverty for women living alone was twenty-four per cent.²⁰ The risk of women being low paid, while being equal to that of men when below the age of twenty-five, becomes much greater between the ages of thirty-five and forty-four.²¹ Even more worrying is the fact that for female lone parents, who are heads of households, the risk increases to 31.7 per cent.²² The single-parent organisation Cherish, in its 2002 pre-budget submission, recommended a weekly payment of €253.96 for single parents with one or two children in order for them to avoid serious and persistent poverty.²³ Child Benefit, which is paid to all parents with children, regardless of financial position, increased to €117.60 in 2002 for each of a family's

first two children. Child Dependant Allowance, which is targeted at children in poor households, had not increased since 1996 and remained in 2002 a paltry €16.76 per week and will make no significant difference for families living in poverty according to the Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed.²⁴ Therefore, a class analysis concerning the position of women in society cannot just be about creating a league table of poverty: it must involve a strategy to end class society and the inequalities – not least those of gender and sexuality – which it produces.

An Irish solution to an Irish problem

An examination of abortion law in Ireland illustrates the difficulties facing many women today and the class forces that operate in Irish society. Abortion is illegal in almost all circumstances in Ireland, but it is very much a reality for Irish women.²⁵ Between 1967 and 1998, almost 95,000 women who had abortions in Britain gave Irish addresses.²⁶ In their comprehensive study of Irish abortion, Mahon, Conlon and Dillon, on the basis of available statistics,²⁷ estimated that the Irish abortion rate was 5.6 abortions per year per 1,000 women of childbearing age (fifteen to forty-four years) (this figure had risen to 7.2 in 1999).²⁸ British statistics show that the numbers of Irish women having abortions has steadily increased and that, in 2000, 6,381 women who had abortions in Britain indicated that they were resident in the Irish Republic; this is approximately eighteen women every day.

It is widely accepted that many women resident in the Irish Republic who travel to Britain to have an abortion do not give their real address. It is impossible, therefore, to be precise about the number of Irish women who have terminations every year, except to say that the figure is far higher than official data would indicate. British statistics also indicate that eighty per cent of Irish women have their pregnancies terminated in the first twelve weeks, although the percentage of Irish-resident women having later abortions is higher than that of British-resident women.²⁹ The fact that Irish women have later abortions than their British counterparts may indicate that many women encounter difficulties in accessing information. Furthermore, the need to raise funds necessary to pay the cost of travelling to Britain and obtaining accommodation there, as well as paying for the abortion itself, is likely to cause significant difficulties for less well-off women.

The Mahon report is the best available qualitative study of the reasons why Irish women decide to terminate their pregnancies, comprising as it does data collated from interviews with eighty-eight Irish-resident women availing themselves of abortion services in British clinics.³⁰ The reasons given by the women for choosing a termination were varied and included

job- and education-related concerns, fear of the effects of the stigma of lone parenthood, financial difficulties, concern for existing children and the desire to exercise their right to control their fertility. There is no evidence that the lack of legal abortion in Ireland has had any effect on the Irish abortion rate, although the expense entailed in travelling to Britain and the cost of paying for the abortion itself may cause difficulties, particularly for less well-off women and other vulnerable groups. In some instances, this may mean that Irish women cannot travel to Britain, but more often this means that they have abortions later than they would wish. The Women on Waves Project and the visit of the Dutch ship *Aurora* to Dublin in June 2001 saw over 200 women seeking abortion services. Clearly, requiring women to travel abroad to obtain abortions has resulted in extreme hardships for a significant number of Irish women.³¹

In November 1992, the Irish electorate voted in favour of proposals to liberalise the law relating to abortion information and the freedom to travel abroad to obtain an abortion, and voted to reject a proposal that would have restricted the constitutional right to life of pregnant women identified by the Supreme Court in the X case, the details of which will be outlined later in this chapter. More recently, in March 2002, a government led by Fianna Fáil once again attempted to restrict risk of suicide as grounds for obtaining a termination in Ireland.³²

It is difficult to establish the views of Irish people on abortion, as, for example, in both 1992 and 2002, some of the electorate who voted against the government's proposal to exclude suicidal risk as a ground for the termination of pregnancy did so because they thought the proposal would undermine women's right to life, whereas others did so because they felt it did not give sufficient protection to the foetus. Furthermore, some people may have voted in favour of the proposals because they (mistakenly) assumed it would provide increased protection for Irish women. However, the net effect of the vote in 1992 was to support proposals to liberalise the law relating to abortion information and travel and, in both 1992 and 2002, the electorate rejected proposals that would have restricted the constitutional right to life of a pregnant woman identified by the Supreme Court in the X case. It is worth remembering that, despite protestations from anti-abortion campaigners about the democratic right of the people to vote to outlaw abortion, Irish people have never been given the right to vote for the liberalisation of abortion law. Yet when, in 1992 and 2002, they have been given the opportunity to vote on the issue at all, they have refused to restrict abortion rights.

Surveys asking people whether they support the holding of a referendum on abortion are meaningless unless it is indicated what the motivation is for the referendum. Surveys consisting of questions as to

whether or not they favour a particular legislative or constitutional proposal are of limited value unless respondents understand the proposal. For example, just after the announcement, in October 2001, of the 2002 referendum on further restrictions to access to abortion, *Ireland on Sunday* carried out a survey. It showed that fifty-three per cent of people supported the referendum proposal, thirty-five per cent opposed it and twelve per cent did not have an opinion. Conversely, forty-nine per cent of people favoured liberalising Irish abortion law, with only thirty-one per cent wishing to make abortion legally more difficult to obtain. This evidently reflected a lack of understanding of the nature of the government's proposals. In-depth surveys may provide a more definitive illustration of public opinion. A survey carried out by Landsdowne Market Research Limited for Abortion Reform in March 2001 is a good example.³³ In that survey, 1,200 persons over the age of fifteen were asked to give their opinions on three options (which were fully explained) put forward by the All-Party Oireachtas Committee. The survey found that only sixteen per cent of respondents thought that abortion should be illegal in all instances. Fifty-two per cent indicated that abortion should be permitted where a woman's life is physically at risk; forty-seven per cent thought that abortion should be available in cases of rape or incest; forty-one per cent thought that abortion should be permissible when continuation of pregnancy would cause irreparable damage to the woman's health; thirty-seven per cent thought that a woman at risk of suicide should be permitted to terminate her pregnancy; twenty-three per cent thought that it should be permissible in cases of foetal abnormality incompatible with life; nineteen per cent thought that abortion should be available on request. What the Abortion Reform poll illustrated is that people have a wide variety of opinions on abortion and that a significant percentage of the public favours greater rather than less access to abortion in Ireland.

No political party, including the Irish Labour Party, has been willing to introduce the legislation that would implement the judgement in the X case and allow suicidal risk as grounds for abortion. The only political consensus that exists on the issue is to do nothing and, meanwhile, eighteen women on average are forced every day to travel to Britain to have abortions. The cowardice of traditional left parties, which are unwilling to stand up to the dictates of the Catholic Church, goes back to the 1940s and 1950s. Many Labour TDs were more worried about what the Church would say than about their female voters. Furthermore, there has always been a reticence, even within the pro-choice movement in Ireland, about openly arguing the position of a woman's right to choose, primarily out of a fear that it will alienate the middle ground, but also from an approach that sees change as a gradual process of persuasion and mitigation.

The X case

On 6 February 1992, the then Attorney General, Harry Whelehan, obtained an interim injunction restraining a fourteen-year-old girl, pregnant as a result of rape and reportedly suicidal, from obtaining an abortion in Britain. The injunction was confirmed by the High Court eleven days later, when Justice Declan Costello ruled that the girl and her parents were prohibited from leaving Ireland ‘for a period of nine months from the date thereof’.³⁴ The story of the ‘internment’ of a fourteen-year-old rape victim was leaked to the media and across the country there was an explosion of anger.

Dublin’s traffic police had to escort march after march down O’Connell St. Thousands took part in a silent, candlelit march to Leinster House, the parliament buildings, and festooned the railings with white ribbons on behalf of the girl and her family. A group of several hundred stood outside the gates of the parliamentary debating chamber, chanting the telephone number of an abortion information line in between cries of ‘Not the Church, Not the State. Women must decide their fate’.... In Waterford in the south, thirty-seven girls at the Sacred Heart of Mary’s Convent walked out of class to join fellow students from the city’s Mercy Convent in a demonstration. They said they had ‘made their stance for freedom of choice’ because of their profound sympathy for the girl. Their disobedience led to mass suspension.³⁵

The case became known as the X case and would prove to be a turning point in Irish society.³⁶ The protests shook the political establishment to its core and forced a dramatic U-turn by the judiciary. The case was appealed to the Supreme Court and the injunction was overturned. The court stated that, because Ms X was suicidal, not only did she have the right to travel to Britain for an abortion but she also had the right to an abortion in Ireland, an unusual interpretation, by any standards, of the ‘pro-life’ clause inserted into the Irish Constitution in 1983. An examination of the events of February/March 1992 show that the judgement had at least as much to do with the fear of further mass mobilisations on the streets as it had with abstract legal logic.

Political commentators usually underestimate the significance of mass mobilisations such as those provoked by the X case. This is mostly because there tends to be a general reluctance to believe that change can come from below, when ordinary people storm onto the stage of history. Commentators tend to be more comfortable with the notion that changes come slowly from on high, from the actions of enlightened men. Yet, as Kieran Allen argues:

slow molecular changes in quantitative relations can at some point transform into decisive qualitative changes.... These struggles sometimes stop

short and often simply force our rulers to reorder the manner of their rule, but they are nonetheless the decisive conjunctures on which historical changes pivot.³⁷

The years following the X case prove this point to be true. In 1993, the sale of condoms in vending machines was legalised and homosexuality decriminalised. In 1995, Irish people voted to legalise divorce and the changed atmosphere in Ireland following the X case gave people who had been victims of clerical sexual abuse the confidence to speak out.

However, one should also be careful of overestimating the changes that have occurred in Ireland in the past decade or so. It became popular in the late 1990s, particularly in the pages of the *Irish Times*, to speak of the completion of the liberal agenda. Nonetheless, a broader ideological offensive against the power and influence of the Catholic Church has not emerged – schools and hospitals, for example, remain under the control of the Church. Middle-class women can afford to travel to Britain for abortions but their working-class counterparts, at best, struggle to get the money together or, at worse, are forced to continue with pregnancies against their will. The struggle that emerged in the context of the X case was sudden and dramatic but it was not sustained because those catapulted into power after it failed to push through reforms. The X case allowed people to see abortion not as an abstract moral issue but rather as a real concern, with serious implications for the type of society people want to live in. What is clear is that rights have to be fought for and won and a liberal abortion regime will emerge in Ireland only when a mass movement emerges that is willing to fight for and defend those rights.

Backlash

The changes in the lives of Irish women during the era of the Celtic Tiger have been varied and profound, as we have seen, and the myth of equality – that women have achieved it all – dominates Irish society. We are constantly told in the pages of newspapers and glossy magazines that women everywhere are enjoying the fruits of liberation. Women outperform men in school and university, dominate the business world, feel good about sex and refuse to accept discrimination or abuse. Women have excelled to such extents that it is now men, we are told, who are discriminated against in society. A variant of this argument can be found in the writings of John Waters, who regularly devotes his *Irish Times* column to polemics against the horrors of what he calls a ‘feminazi’ conspiracy that pervades all aspects of Irish society. Waters, who is also the consultant editor of the political magazine *Magill*, uses his influential position in the media simultaneously to bemoan his status as a male in

feminist-dominated Ireland and to exalt his heroic status as the one lone voice daring to speak out.

Few people in Irish society have the access to the media, to promote their views, which Waters enjoys; he seems to participate in most major political media programmes in Ireland.³⁸ He is particularly passionate about the mainstream media's unjust representation of the issue of domestic violence:

The domestic violence issue is one of the key areas of propaganda-creation in the now relentless attack on the character of men and fathers.... I would hope that men would begin to take a look at the society they are alleged to dominate, and ask themselves: where is the evidence of such domination in a society which demonises and denigrates them at every turn, which conspires to steal their children at the whim of mothers and institutions.³⁹

He chides the Irish government for having succumbed to 'nearly thirty years of relentless campaigning by misandrist forces ... having developed a multimillion pound industry out of the demonisation of the adult male'.⁴⁰

Waters returns to this theme again and again, usually quoting the *British Home Office Survey*. Waters claims that the core finding was that an identical proportion (4.2 per cent) of women and men had been assaulted by a current or former partner in the previous year and argues that this shows that domestic violence is roughly a similar phenomenon among men and women. The study he refers to did find that the same proportion of women and men reported a physical assault by a current or former partner in the previous year (1998). However, the study also found that women were twice as likely as men to have been injured by a partner in the last year and three times as likely to have suffered frightening threats. They were also more likely to have been assaulted three or more times. Not only are women more likely to have been injured in assaults but also they are far more likely to be 'living in fear of their partners'. These findings Waters has conveniently ignored. Men who suffered from domestic violence were typically working part-time or suffering from a long-term illness or disability. Regardless of sex or age, men and women living in poverty were most likely to suffer violence.

Moreover, it is essential that, when statistics on domestic violence are quoted, the nature of the research and in particular the methods used are closely scrutinised. To argue from the results of a particular survey that women and men are equal perpetrators of violence is to ignore the fact that all the other evidence indicates that men are overwhelmingly the instigators of violence in intimate relationships.

Domestic violence has only recently even been defined as a crime in the Republic of Ireland. Marital rape, for example, has been directly covered by sexual assault legislation in Ireland only since the 1990 Criminal

Law (Rape) Amendment Act. At the time of writing, only three cases of marital rape had come before an Irish court, and only one conviction had been secured. Research has shown that rape, sexual assault and sexual coercion are often used by abusive men as part of a pattern of violent and coercive behaviour intended to control their partners. Almost one in five Irish women have experienced some form of violence in their relationships with men. Of these, just over twenty per cent experienced sexual assault.⁴¹ For women in violent relationships, forced pregnancy, pregnancy as a result of rape and actual or threatened use of violence during pregnancy are common strategies employed by abusers.⁴² In a major literature review on the subject of violence against women and reproductive health, Lori Heise *et al.* cite several studies (from 1994 to 1998), spanning more than fifteen countries, which clearly document sexual coercion as a major component of domestic violence. In the studies cited, women frequently reported being 'physically forced to have sex and/or engage in sex they found degrading or humiliating'. Large numbers of women also reported 'defensive acquiescence', whereby they agreed to sex with a violent partner 'out of fear of the consequences of refusal, such as physical abuse, loss of economic support or accusations of infidelity'.⁴³

Waters' other target is the judicial system, which, he argues, is prejudiced against men in child custody cases. He argues that when custody is contested, judges are more likely to rule in favour of the mother than the father, because of the feminist agenda that dominates the Irish law courts. Due to the nature of the family court, statistical data are difficult to acquire. Waters may well be right but his conclusions are wrong. The fact that members of the judiciary are more likely to grant custody to the mother has more to do with the conception of women and the family in Irish society than it has to do with a feminist conspiracy. Instead of attacking an archaic system that sees women as the primary source of childcare, a system that benefits neither men nor women, Waters blames women, who, he argues, deliberately prevent men from having access to their children. His argument stems from a failure to understand the function of the family in society and the essential role it plays within capitalism in the creation of a future source of labour and a unit of consumption.

Waters' argument has found an echo among men, especially working-class men, who experience injustice at the hands of family courts. On the surface, the family does not have an obvious economic role. While the conventional couple is usually presented in terms of individual romantic love, this should not obscure the family's economic function as a source of care and education for a future workforce in a crisis-ridden, profit-oriented system. Historically, it was women who were associated both with childcare and domestic labour and, while changes in capitalism have seen women enter the labour force, they still bear the primary responsibility for housework and childcare. The judiciary is

notorious for being out of touch with how people live their lives and is dominated by middle-class men, the majority of whom have nannies or partners who bear the primary responsibility for childcare. It is hardly surprising, then, that judges tend to assume that childcare is a predominantly female responsibility.

The family can operate a contradictory role: as well as being a place of comfort, it can also be the source of horrendous violence, and so it is inevitable that men also suffer. If one considers the central role that the family has played in Irish society, it is no surprise that Ireland has one of the highest rates of child sexual abuse, higher than in either Europe as a whole or North America. *The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland Report*, commissioned by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, showed that forty-two per cent of women and twenty-eight per cent of men in Ireland had been subjected to sexual abuse in their lifetime.⁴⁴ These figures are unusually high. Similar studies in Europe show that seventeen per cent of European women have experienced sexual abuse as children. In Ireland, that figure is thirty per cent.⁴⁵ Among men, five per cent in Europe and seven per cent in North America have experienced abuse as children. In Ireland, however, twenty-four per cent of men were sexually abused as children. The majority of abuse occurs within the family or by an individual close to the family unit, such as a teacher or a priest.

The report also found that forty-seven per cent of those interviewed said that they had never told anyone about the abuse. Just one per cent of men and eight per cent of women had disclosed the abuse to the gardaí. This is not surprising if one considers the finding by Sue Lees, reported in her book *Carnal Knowledge*, that, increasingly, rapists are known to their victims and are former boyfriends and husbands. During a trial, sexual history is frequently called into account and raped women are often not believed in court. Lees monitored a series of rape trials in Britain over a two-week period and found that grounds for disbelieving a woman included: 'Whether she had suffered from depression, taken Prozac, been in care, been abused, had an abortion, allegedly had more than one relationship or invited home someone she had just met'.⁴⁶ More disturbing is the recent trend towards the commodification of sexual violence, particularly towards women. Sexual violence is becoming something that is no longer deplored by society but something that can be commodified to sell everything, from sports bras to popular music.⁴⁷

Conclusions

Irish women have seen their lives transformed in recent years. This transformation has been a result of the interaction of changes in women's relationship to production. Women workers, such as nurses and teachers,

have been among the first to demand their share of the Celtic Tiger. However, the feminisation of the workforce has also been a contradictory experience for most women. On the one hand, becoming economically independent has led to women having more choices about what they do with their lives. On the other hand, the 'double burden' faced by women because of their role in the family means that the lives of women workers are incredibly difficult, as they try to reconcile work and family life. Attitudes to female sexuality, in particular, have changed but not always favourably. Ireland now has a burgeoning sex industry. The country that banned *Ulysses* as a pornographic text for much of the twentieth century now has shelves full of pornography,⁴⁸ Irish versions of 'New Lad' magazines, a growing prostitution industry and a selection of lap-dancing clubs.

However, as we live in an increasingly globalised world, it is important to situate the experiences of Irish women in an international context. The changes and challenges faced by Irish women workers are similar to those being experienced by women across the world. The global development of capitalism over the past twenty years has depended almost everywhere on large numbers of women entering the formal workforce. Women's oppression has its roots in the contradiction between social production and privatised reproduction. Childcare remains the responsibility of the individual family and, overwhelmingly, of the female parent. Even most non-parental carers are women. While there are many alternatives to this in an advanced capitalist society, the logic of economics raises its head and the privatised family, with the woman at the centre, continues to provide the majority of care-giving under capitalism. The family reproduces the next generation of workers, ensures that there is a constant replenishment of labour power, which is cared for, educated and socialised to enter the marketplace.

A small number of women across the world have been able to sidestep the worst oppression and have made it into the parliaments and the boardrooms. Yet the exploitation and oppression of the majority of women and men is necessary for the survival of global capitalism. If the Celtic Tiger cannot deliver the needs of the majority of women – and men – it is clear that capitalism never will. Perhaps, therefore, the only real alternative for women across the world is the emerging anti-capitalist movement, which challenges the fundamental inequalities in society and champions a world that is about people, not profit.

Notes

- 1 For example, D. O'Hearn, *Inside the Celtic Tiger: The Irish Economy and the Asian Model* (London: Pluto, 1998), P. Sweeney, *The Celtic Tiger:*

- Ireland's Economic Miracle Explained* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 1998) or R. MacSharry and P. White, *The Making of the Celtic Tiger: The Inside Story of Ireland's Boom Economy* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2000).
- 2 Central Statistics Office, *Women in the Workforce* (Dublin: CSO, 1997).
 - 3 Central Statistics Office, *Quarterly National Household Survey* (Dublin: CSO, December 2000).
 - 4 Central Statistics Office, *Labour Force Survey 1987* (Dublin: CSO, 1987); Central Statistics Office, *Quarterly National Household Survey First Quarter 2001* (Dublin: CSO, 2001).
 - 5 Central Statistics Office, *Labour Force Survey 1996* (Dublin: CSO, 1997); Central Statistics Office, *Quarterly National Household Survey Third Quarter 2002* (Dublin: CSO, 2002).
 - 6 P. O'Connor, *Emerging Voices: Women in Contemporary Society* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1999), p. 197.
 - 7 Irish Congress of Trade Unions, *ICTU: Mainstreaming Equality* (Dublin: ICTU, 1993).
 - 8 Irish Congress of Trade Unions, *Delivering Gender Equality 1999–2004. Fourth Equality Programme* (Dublin: ICTU, 1999), p. 11.
 - 9 T. Fahey, H. Russell and E. Smyth, 'Gender equality, fertility decline and labour market patterns among women in Ireland', in B. Nolan, P. O'Connell and C. Whelan (eds), *Bust to Boom? The Irish Experience of Growth and Inequality* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 2000), p. 263.
 - 10 *Living in Ireland Survey* (1996), cited by Fahey *et al.*, 'Gender equality', p. 264.
 - 11 A. Barrett and T. Callen (eds), with A. Doris, D. O'Neill, H. Russell, O. Sweetman and J. McBride, *How Unequal? Men and Women in the Irish Market* (Dublin: Oak Tree Press, 2000), pp. 18–21.
 - 12 European Commission, *Key Data on Education in the European Union* (Luxembourg: European Commission, 1997), p. 144.
 - 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 144–4.
 - 14 Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on Childcare, *National Childcare Strategy* (Dublin: Stationery Office 1999), p. 12.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.
 - 16 K. Allen, *The Celtic Tiger: The Myth of Social Partnership in Ireland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 91–2.
 - 17 Revenue Commissioners, *Statistical Report* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999).
 - 18 *Labour Force Survey 1996*, cited in O'Connor, *Emerging Voices*, p. 199.
 - 19 See O'Connor, *Emerging Voices*, p. 199 and chapter 8 for fuller discussion.
 - 20 Nolan and Watson (1999) cited in P. Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress: Growth with Inequality in Ireland* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), p. 65.
 - 21 O'Connor, *Emerging Voices*, p. 61.
 - 22 Nolan and Watson (1999) cited in Kirby, *The Celtic Tiger in Distress*, p. 65.
 - 23 Cherish, pre-budget submission 2002, available at www.cherish.ie (accessed February 2002).
 - 24 Department of Social Welfare, www.welfare.ie (accessed December 2001).
 - 25 Abortion is also illegal in most circumstances in Northern Ireland. Therefore women from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland must travel to Britain to obtain an abortion. All figures relate to women from the Irish Republic unless otherwise stated.
 - 26 *Green Paper on Abortion* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999), p. 5.
 - 27 Figures calculated on the basis of the number of women giving Irish addresses to British clinics between 1967 and 1998.

- 28 All-Party Oireachtas Committee, *Fifth Progress Report: Abortion* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 2000), p. 86.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 86.
- 30 E. Mahon, C. Conlon and L. Dillon, *Women and Crisis Pregnancy* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1998).
- 31 See R. Gromperts, *Women on Waves* (Amsterdam: Women on Waves, 2002) and www.womenonwaves.org.
- 32 The 2002 Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Act, which Irish voters voted on in the referendum, also attempted to extend the scope of the criminal law and enshrine the criminality of abortion in the constitution, in that, if the Act was passed, it would have had constitutional status.
- 33 Details of the poll are available at www.abortionreform.ie.
- 34 See A. Smyth, 'A sadistic force: women and abortion in the Republic of Ireland 1992', in A. Smyth (ed.), *The Abortion Papers, Ireland* (Dublin: Attic Press, 1992).
- 35 W. Holden, *Unlawful Carnal Knowledge: The True Story of the Irish X Case* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 80.
- 36 C. Hug, *The Politics of Sexual Morality in Ireland* (London: Macmillan Press, 1999), pp. 6 and 199f.
- 37 Allen, *The Celtic Tiger*, p. 166.
- 38 The list includes mainstream radio and television programmes such as *Five-Seven Live*, *The Last Word*, *Agenda* and *Prime Time*.
- 39 J. Waters, *Irish Times*, 12 January 1999.
- 40 J. Waters, *Irish Times*, 8 June 1999.
- 41 P. Kelleher and M. O'Connor, *Making the Links: Towards an Integrated Strategy Towards the Elimination of Violence Against Women in Intimate Relationships with Men* (Dublin: Women's Aid, 1995).
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- 43 L. Heise, M. Ellsberg and M. Gottemoeller, *Ending Violence Against Women*, Population Reports, series L, no. 11 (Baltimore: Population Information Program, Johns Hopkins University School of Public Health, December 1999).
- 44 See H. McGee, R. Garavan, M. de Barra, J. Byrne and R. Conroy, *The SAVI Report: Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2002).
- 45 K. Holland, *Irish Times*, 20 April 2002.
- 46 S. Lees, *Carnal Knowledge: Rape on Trial* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 13.
- 47 J. Freedland, *Guardian*, 17 July 2002.
- 48 *Playboy* sells more issues per capita in the Irish Republic than in any other European state.