

Rachel Moran at Femifest in London:

First of all I'd like to talk a little bit about what Radical Feminism means to me in the context of my work as an abolitionist activist, and also in an emotional sense, as a sex-trade survivor. Three years ago, when I began writing anonymous newspaper articles and blogging under the pseudonym FreerishWoman, I noticed pretty quickly that my words were shared amongst and disseminated by a particular group of feminists: Radical Feminists. Given that the recollections I described were the experiences of a homeless, socially-disowned, prostituted fifteen-year-old girl, I would have expected support from the feminist community, of all places. Just as well I wasn't completely politically ignorant with regard to the divisions between those who describe themselves as feminists, otherwise it would have been a shock to discover that while my words and experiences were honoured and shared by Radical Feminists, they were widely ridiculed and had their authenticity relentlessly challenged by some of those who referred to themselves as Liberal Feminists.

Liberal feminism - which holds that anything a woman does can be empowering as long as she does it without a gun pointed to her head - had always sounded like a crock of crap to me anyway, so I cannot say I was terribly disappointed. I was wounded though; and above all, I was galled. It is both wounding and galling for me to know that there is a whole army of twenty-something, white, socially-privileged young women out there talking of prostitution as the very epitome of female empowerment. That they've made this assessment about an experience they've never had, while having spent years being educated in an effort to keep themselves out of the social class of women who most commonly have to experience it, and have decided it's harmless, in spite of the tsunami of evidence that attests to its harm, is, to me, the most repulsive sort of hypocrisy.

Sometimes we who speak the truth about the global sex-trade find ourselves close to despair, crushed beneath the weight of the prevailing public view, steeped as it is in ignorance; both wilful and malignant, and in obliviousness, sometimes innocent in its nature, and when it is, all the more frustrating for it. We know the interests of patriarchy are served by the very existence of the global sex-trade and by the annihilation of the innumerable female lives snuffed out of existence within it. It is galling therefore, for all of us to listen to the Liberal Feminists toe the patriarchal line with the lie they buy for themselves and try to sell on to us that black is white, up is down, and imprisonment is liberating. Conflating consent with liberation is the business of those who do not know that oppression cannot operate without it. But the consent of oppression, consent under duress, is not true consent. The duress itself has morphed consent into a different shape and moved it away from its own nature. True sexual consent is not possible here. Sexual consent is beyond the laws of commerce; it is beyond sale and it is beyond purchase. Sexual abuse however, often has a price tag, and when it does, we call it prostitution.

I am tired of the ignorance of women who do not understand this, but is it surprising to anyone, really, that most of these women are, as I've said, young, white and privileged? I doubt that any of the women gathered here today are surprised by that, because, that the socially privileged are removed from the realities of the socially dispossessed is simply not surprising to any woman with a whit of political savvy.

But yes, I'll own that we are tired and frustrated and pissed off, and with good reason. Each time we speak out, they do their best to shut us down. We've seen examples of this in recent weeks, as we do in all weeks. As I speak, there are fools running petitions against this conference from Edinburgh to Brighton and back again. The most genteel advice I could give these women would be to consult their dictionaries, and turn to the word feminist. Of course, unfortunately, I'd have to also advise them, in many cases, to disregard what they had found, since so many dictionaries frame feminism

as a matter of sexual equality, which rather puts the cart before the horse. A woman who believes in the social, economic and political equality of the sexes is not a feminist, but a fantasist. We don't live in that world; we don't have equality, and, as Radical Feminists know, a prerequisite of equality is the dismantling of male supremacy. First, we must be liberated from it. Then, and only then, might we live our lives as equals.

The simple cruelty of the Liberal Feminist stance is something that also, apparently, escapes them. Their stance tells us sex-trade survivors that every rape we endured did not matter, that every sexual assault of every manner and variety were just occupational hazards, and that our gang-rapes would not have been gang-rapes had legislation just forced those men to use us one at a time. Well, I have news for them: flat rate brothels and gang-bang packages are all the rage in Germany now. For anyone who hasn't heard these terms, a flat rate brothel is prostitution's answer to an all you can eat buffet. Men pay a one-off fee, a 'flat rate', and for this fee they can use the body, or bodies, of women for as long as they are humanly able, climaxing as many times as they want, or can. These are sometimes combined with gang-bang packages, whereby five or six or seven men arrive at the brothel together, pay their 'flat rate' and use the body of a woman until she can barely stand. I have had photographs forwarded to me from one such a scene from a German brothel. The girl being used by a half dozen men was nineteen years old, and seven months pregnant. This is the true face of the regulated sex-trade that Liberal Feminists fight for.

It has been claimed, in the midst of the campaigns against this conference, that I am endangering the lives of women in prostitution. It is telling how the depths of their incomprehension is revealed by the very charges they level against me. There was only one group of people who were ever responsible for endangering my life when I was in prostitution, and they most certainly were not abolitionists; they were sex-buying men; the same sex-buying men whose dicks will never be sucked by the Liberal Feminists who defend and uphold the rights of those men, to have their dicks sucked by other women; economically disenfranchised, educationally disadvantaged, socially deprived and racially marginalised women.

So where do we go, with our frustrations? And what do we do, with the anger that is so inevitable here, such an intrinsic human reaction to the injustice of telling the truth and being called a liar. The first thing I would say is take heart: this situation will not last forever. It is precisely the hypocrisy of the Liberal Feminist stance which will be its undoing. The doctrine that says 'empowerment can be found in these experiences (which we will fight tooth and nail to avoid for ourselves)' has a shelf life. That type of nonsense has a sell-by date. However popular it might be, for however long, such doctrine is doomed to exposure – Emperor's New Clothes style.

I have been profoundly comforted these last years (and especially this last eighteen months, since my book, *Paid For*, was published) not only by the truths that were accepted from me, but by the truths that were told by so many other women, most of whom did not have to have lived these realities to acknowledge them. I have been comforted to see, in country after country, abolitionist movements spring up where none had existed before, or become strengthened where they had been floundering, and everywhere I have seen the strengthening of abolitionism I have seen a strong overlap between the abolitionist movement and the Radical Feminist movement, or, at the very least, a strong adherence in abolitionism to Radical Feminist principles.

The reality is that Radical Feminists are on the right side of history here, and they are the only feminists who get the full picture, and the reasons why it exists. Socialist Feminists have my respect, but they don't have the whole picture here. Prostitution does not exist as a consequence of women's economic disenfranchisement. Poverty is a supporting factor. Not a reason. Supporting factors are not reasons. They are simply supporting factors. Prostitution exists for only one reason; that reason

is male demand. No amount of poverty would be capable of creating prostitution if it were not for male demand.

I have come here today to ask for the support of every woman in this room in fighting this scourge that weighs almost exclusively on girls and women. We need to fight this, not by ripping at the leaves, nor hacking at the branches, nor even cutting this off at the trunk; we need to rip it up by the roots. As daunting as this task seems, we already have the tools to do it. We are not, thankfully, totally bamboozled like the liberals, nor are we hobbled in our understanding like the socialists. We know that prostitution is both a consequence and good evidence of the subordination of women, and it is from the standpoint of this understanding that we can dismantle it. It is very important that we never give an inch in this fight. We must never concede to the tactics of the pro-prostitution lobby, the first of which is to pretend that prostitution is not a moral issue. Let me say in front of you and in front of the world: You can be damn sure that prostitution is a moral issue, as human rights always are.

Abolitionists, the pro-prostitution lobby contend, are engaged in a 'moral crusade' to rid the world of prostitution. Crusade, here, is a pejorative term, and it is linked with morality in order that some of its contemptuous derision will rub off. Morality itself, we are told, is negative, ill-founded and, well, wrong. The straight-up foolishness of asserting that discerning between right and wrong is itself wrong apparently escapes some people.

I am tired of hearing people frame abolitionist arguments by beginning 'I am not a moralist, but...' We are all moralists, unless we are psychopaths, and since when was morality a dirty word? Here's the answer to that: morality has been a dirty word since it suited certain people that we look the other way and pretend that morality is null and void here; and you will find, time and again, that people who espouse that position are defending something which is very plainly wrong, hence their absolute insistence that morality shouldn't get a look in.

There is also the nonsense claim that those who oppose prostitution do so necessarily from a religious standpoint, as though there were any shortage of ethical atheists in the world. The moral principles that govern or influence conduct often have no basis other than our own innate sense of what is or is not harmful human behaviour. Prostitution is damaging to the human psyche on every conceivable level; it is exactly its harmful, degrading nature that gives rise to the instant sense of objection we feel when we imagine prostitution as a feature in the lives of the women we love.

So let us stand firm on these points: That prostitution exists because of the male demand for it, and that we know damn well and will not be shaken in our assertion that it is flat-out wrong. There is a reason we are fought so consistently on these points; the reason is our opponents know we can win on them.

Let me repeat that I have come here today to ask for the support of every woman in this room in fighting prostitution. Please hear this as a call to action. Across Europe, our politicians are beginning to discuss prostitution more frequently, and just this February the European Parliament voted by an overwhelming majority to adopt the Honeyball report, which calls for a Europe wide adoption of the Nordic Model. When your politicians speak out, please support them by letters both public and private. When they do not, please encourage them to do so. When you see abolitionist campaigns spring up – and you will see more of them; the abolitionist movement is growing – please lend your time and your energy and your voice.

I am working with a group called SPACE International. SPACE stands for 'Survivors of Prostitution-Abuse Calling for Enlightenment'. Our membership spans seven countries now and all of us have made the deeply painful sacrifice of speaking out publicly about our abuse in the sex-trade. We have friends and allies in several international organisations and we are gaining ground, but we cannot do

this without the support of women in the general public. I encourage you to join RadFemUK and other groups like them, and to support their actions by sharing and disseminating their campaigns and materials. We need a groundswell of support from women, but maybe before that happens, we need to remind women that the bodies of their daughters would be just as welcome in the brothels and the red-light zones as ours ever were, should the circumstances of their lives ever happen to place them there.

Rachel Moran