Abstract

The Shawlies: A Study of Early Neoliberal ‘Gender-fication’—The Street Trading Act, 1926, Modern Gender-fication, and the Implications for Cork’s Women Street Traders

For centuries Cork’s Shawlies, working-class women, survived by trading on public streets. My study explores how the first Irish Free State government, and Cork’s local authority, limited the rights of poor women to earn by subsistence trading with The Street Trading Act, 1926. The government insisted this would regulate street trading. In practice it further marginalised the women economically and socially, containing them outside the privileged, commercial city centre.

In Cork the legislation facilitated the gradual disappearance of the Shawlies amid entrenched social processes and relations, contingencies that allowed for the abuse of their rights in the service of amalgamated business interests. This study address the role of discourses in deepening this marginalisation.

My theoretical framework is designed to demonstrate how a seemingly innocuous piece of legislation would, in practice, do this. I set out the concepts of ‘Thriving State’, ‘Prosperous State’, and state of ‘Best Intentions’ that uses gentrification to meet these goals. The existing knowledge on women in trade is then examined, highlighting the gaps in what is known about the Shawlies.

Chapter 3 details the theory behind my genealogical method. The legislation, debate, and other data produced at the national level is then examined, before moving to the local data. Chapter 6 is devoted to the Shawlies, setting their stories in the larger context of the debates. An examination of studies of contemporary women street traders in poor nations follows, along with a brief history of the decline of street trading in New York city under gentrification. Points of convergence between that process and the one in Cork are identified, along with convergences between contemporary traders and the Shawlies. The conclusion sets out my methodological, theoretical and substantive discoveries, and comments on current nostalgic renderings of the Shawlies in Cork’s newly gentrified Corn Market Street.