

Ireland – Migrant X refused an abortion and forced to have a C-section

A story of abuse at the hands of a racist, sexist authoritarian state

Andrew Flood

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This is as complete a story about what happened to ‘Migrant X’ that we are aware of. Migrant X is a young migrant women who it emerged was refused an abortion by the Irish state despite apparently meeting the grounds of the X-case legislation and instead forced to carry the pregnancy and agree to a C-section. The pregnancy itself was the result of rape, Migrant X attempted suicide after being refused the abortion and later went on a hunger and thirst strike. Once what had happened to her became known there were sizeable pro-choice solidarity demonstrations called across Ireland and at Irish embassies overseas.

We have been given information that the migrant woman at the centre of the current forced pregnancy was ‘committed’ to a psychiatric hospital following her initial request for termination. It’s already known that the initial request was made when she was 8 weeks pregnant. It was this crucial period in which she was being held incommunicado which led directly to the Caesarian option being possible to impose as an ‘alternative’ to allowing her to access the abortion she had asked for.

All those running the system which imposed such barbaric treatment on this women don’t want to talk about individual cases. Of course they don’t, when you can get away with speaking in broad generalisations you can avoid facing up to the barbaric situations created by the laws you administer and maintain. The victims of this system become a mere statistic.

But we know now what the outcome of the 8th Amendment & the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Act is. It is an 18 year old woman, fleeing an unknown country where she was raped. In a strange country with a cruel asylum system in which some people have already been detained for over a decade she is told that she is pregnant as a result of the rape.

When the story of her treatment eventually breaks she tells a journalist, who asks if she had people she could turn to, “No, I didn’t want people to know ... For me this was shameful. In our culture if a girl gives birth to a child before marriage everything is finished. No one can respect you. As well as that, for me, with the rape, it was difficult” Kitty Holland, the journalist describes her as a “softly spoken young woman, a migrant who looks about four years younger than her age” who is “thin, fragile”

At this point she is 8 weeks and 4 days pregnant. She has asked for an abortion. At this point in time this could have been a simple procedure, a medical abortion involving no more than taking a few pills. We know now that around this point she was committed to a psychiatric hospital following her initial request for termination – we don't know what reasons were given but ahead of the introduction of the bill we warned that a common consequence of revealing suicidal feelings was such a committal. For whatever reasons it appears this woman was messed around by a number of institutions in the weeks that followed after being led to believe she would be able to access an abortion.

It seems it was only 8 weeks later that she discovered she would have to find about 1500 euro for an abortion in England – a terrible situation that huge numbers of women in Ireland face every year. But as a migrant women forced to flee her own country as far as we know she had no income and no social network she could turn to for help, she also had limited English. We don't know her exact status but women similar to her who are in the 'Direct Provision' system receive only 19 euro per week. She also doesn't appear to have been informed of initiatives like the Abortion Support Network who "help women from Ireland and Northern Ireland travel to England to access a safe and legal abortion"

She says it was at this point that she decided to kill herself and returning to the place where she lived she tried to kill herself through hanging but "she was interrupted" Even after this it appears it was only when she subsequently made contact with a family friend that they finally advised her to "go to a GP and tell them she was suicidal because of the pregnancy"

It seems impossible to consider the account to this point and not wonder aloud as to how none of the officials she encountered explained to her that this was the only way she could access an abortion in Ireland. Was it fear for their own jobs or funding? Was it in some cases an ideological opposition to women being able to access abortion?

She went to a GP, the GP referred her to hospital where she saw first one psychiatrist who told her "No, you are already too far pregnant" and later that night a second who told her the same thing. The following morning she was scanned again, she was now 24 weeks pregnant and it was too late to have an abortion. She told them "You can leave me now to die. I don't want to live in this world anymore" and stopped eating and drinking. It appears she was put on a suicide watch as she was always watched over by a nurse who even accompanied her to the bathroom.

It appears the hospital took a case to the courts and were allowed to force feed her. She reports that after four days she was told by two doctors that she was going to be given an abortion the following week but that she would have to eat and drink to be strong enough for the procedure.

A few days later she says she was told she couldn't have an abortion, that she would have to have a Caesarean section. After another couple of days she was told "the authorities had been made aware of her situation" and it was only at this point that she received a solicitor via the HSE.

In terms of what she told Kitty Holland it seems that in these days she was paraded in front of a number of experts and legal figures but that she "didn't speak to anyone. I didn't want to see people. I just listened to what they said without looking at them"

She described being shown the legal forms for the Caesarean signed as required under the Protection of Human Life in Pregnancy Act by "two psychiatrists and one gynaecologist". She says "I didn't listen. I didn't have a choice. All the suffering I had gone through. Then on Wednesday at about 3pm they did it."

You can see why all those in power don't want to talk about 'individual cases.' Which of these details that have emerged piece by piece over the last week would they be proud to stand over. When you hear the details it becomes clear that the Irish state and its institutions treated this woman as an awkward nuisance — a legal complication that had to be shuffled around. For the HSE it appears it was a good outcome as their spokesperson told the Irish Times “a pregnancy can be terminated by way of delivery through Caesarean section, as it was in this instance” and that this mean there would be no need to review the process.

How many officials were involved in total in shuffling this women around? What government ministers knew, and were these “the authorities [that] had been made aware of her situation”? When Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald was in Geneva in July to answer the UN charge that “Irish abortion law treats women as a vessel and nothing more” did she already know the facts of this case? The HSE knew in May so it seems likely. It's hard to imagine a more clear cut case of a women being treated as a “vessel and nothing more”. Minister Charlie Flanagans cruel if perhaps careless words this morning that “There doesn't appear to be an appetite for a further referendum” confirm that attitude.

Our focus here is restating what is known, and adding this additional information about the the women being committed is not to target some minister or official for punishment for the way they allowed this women to be treated. What is on trial here are not individuals but the entire system of racist, sexist subjugation we have allowed to be constructed in our name. Repealing the 8th amendment and ending deportations are only the first small steps in bringing that system to an end.

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