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migration, agency and citizenship in sex trafficking

Rutvica Andrijasevic, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2010, 184pp., £50.00,
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Sensational headlines of 'sex slavery' haunt the study of women's migration. It has become well-nigh impossible to discuss women's migration without grappling with their being cast as 'victims of trafficking'. This is by far the dominant framework for understanding women's experiences of crossing borders at the moment. Indeed, the (mostly radical) feminist discourse of 'anti-trafficking' has been implemented by national governments and international government bodies. These have shown an unusual willingness to work on a putatively 'pro-woman' policy agenda by 'getting tough' on 'traffickers' and 'rescuing' women migrants. Ironically, not unlike the 'pro-woman' agenda of unveiling burqa-clad women that legitimizes many of today's wars, the 'anti-trafficking' agenda is about rescuing women from those who would bare them for profit.

As with the 'anti-terrorism' wars, 'anti-trafficking' efforts foreground ending violence against women as the reason for taking action. Yet, in both discourses, only a particular kind of violence against women is made visible, while another, one implicating those doing the 'rescuing', is made invisible. Within the 'anti-trafficking' paradigm, attention is focused on the (supposedly always) men who facilitate the (supposedly always) undocumented movement of women migrants and the (supposedly always) men who purchase (supposedly always) forced sex from them. Many of the social processes that *organize* the illegality of women moving across borders or facilitate their movement into the sex sector are not dealt with. This renders the plethora of border controls as unproblematic and places them outside of the bounds of 'anti-trafficking' politics.

Such a disavowal of one of the most important structural factors in creating the conditions of vulnerability, violence and exploitation for migrating women (not the least of which is their need for third parties to move them across and within state-fortified borders or to locate housing and paid work for them) is no simple and momentary lapse within the analysis offered by those proposing to end a 'modern-day slavery' in women. Instead, as Rutvica Andrijasevic amply demonstrates through her analysis of fifteen unstructured, in-depth interviews she conducted with women who had moved to Italy and engaged in third-party-controlled sex work, such a disavowal of the significance of border controls can only be fully comprehended as a crucial

aspect of the hierarchical re-organization of contemporary European Union (EU) citizenship regimes.

Within the EU's agenda of 'anti-trafficking', a particular kind of response to women's migration is organized and legitimated, one that criminalizes those who facilitate women's cross-border mobility, sanitizes deportation by re-framing it as a 'return home' and grants, in paltry numbers, limited residency rights to those women who can successfully convince EU authorities (state and NGO) that they fit the normative gendered and sexualized profile of a 'victim of trafficking'. What this approach cannot offer migrating women, however, are precisely the things they desire: an autonomous and free route to migration; secure access to the full range of residency; labour, social welfare and citizenship rights within the EU; and the ability to live a life in which their mobility (spatial, social, economic, political and affective) is secured.

In the best tradition of engaged sociological analysis, Andrijasevic advances the scholarship on migrant women by showing that agency includes more than the act of making choices and/or acts of resistance, but also entails a process of subject (re)formation, one replete with conflicting versions of events and contradictory impulses and one where migrant women often collude with power as much as they challenge it. In her close reading of women narrating their own migration strategies, Andrijasevic shows that the decisions that women make are influenced by their efforts to reconcile their sense of themselves in ways that do not compromise their ability to live within a society structured by precisely the kinds of borders (state, gender, sexuality, 'race') they are agentively crossing. Whether this is to try and fit the figure of the 'victim of trafficking', the 'sacrificing mother', the 'romantic lover' or the 'respectable wife', the subjectivities of migrant women need to be understood as partly being constructed *through* the discourse on 'sex trafficking'. This discourse's reproduction of the false dichotomy between 'forced' and 'voluntary' sex work reinforces the equally false dichotomy between 'forced' and 'voluntary' migration. Together, the subjection of migrant women sex workers that such discourses produce significantly shapes women's subjectivities.

Andrijasevic persuasively argues that migrant women should not be simply seen as 'victims of trafficking'. However, she goes further by arguing that they should not be seen as wholly free agents engaged in fully consensual sex work either. Although force does play a major part in migrating women's lives, it is a force that is organized by both structural and affective processes. These include the politics of shifting (but increasingly fortified) EU borders, the re-organization of family and the implementation of neo-liberal policies. In this sense, migrant women doing sex work in Italy are not unlike EU citizens subjected to the same processes.

In this, perhaps, lies Andrijasevic's greatest contribution: she shows the close similarities between the women's lived experiences of what has been called 'trafficking' and other kinds of migration experiences not called 'trafficking'. In this book, the partition that normally divides women migrants from other women (or men) is shown to be a part of migrant women's subjugation. If an important aspect of establishing and maintaining ruling relations is the process of differentiation, particularly categorical differences encoded in the law (such as 'illegal migrant' or 'prostitute'), then scholarship such as Andrijasevic's, which shows the similarities not only in people's experiences, but also in the legal structures that keep them subjugated (for instance, anti-sex work legislation that empowers third-party control over sex workers whether they are 'migrant' or not) is a much-needed challenge to the relations of ruling.

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