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sex slaves and discourse masters

Jo Doezema, Zed Books, London, 2010, 224pp., ISBN: 9781848134133, £17.99 (pbk)

sex work matters

Melissa Hope Ditmore, Antonia Levy and Alys Willman, Zed Books, London, 2010, 288pp., ISBN: 9781848134331, £18.99 (pbk)

There has been an increasing amount of academic literature (of varying quality) written on sex, sex work and sexual trafficking. However, Doezema's *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters* (2010) and Ditmore, Levy and Willman's edited collection *Sex Work Matters* (2010) are two stand-out contributions.

In the first book, Doezema convincingly argues that the contemporary concept of 'traffic in women' is a resurrection of the myth of 'white slavery'. Here, 'white slavery' refers to 'the supposed traffic in women and girls for the purposes of prostitution, primarily between the mid-nineteenth and the mid-twentieth centuries' (p. 4). Rather than providing yet another empirical study of the 'facts' about trafficking, the work is instead a genealogical examination of how these myths discursively came into being. Through craftily weaving together in-depth historical and theoretical analyses of myth, metaphor and ideology, combined with ethnographic work, she produces an incredibly detailed and well-researched study on the effects of power on the production of knowledge, and the ways in which dominant constructions of 'trafficking in women'—which are grounded in prostitution, and have their roots in the images of the 'white slave'—are incorporated into contemporary laws, rhetoric and policies on 'sex work' and 'trafficking'.

While the first half of the book centres on historical and theoretical investigations of the myth of white slavery in the UK and US during the Victorian and Progressive Eras, Doezema—in an auto-ethnographic turn—spends the second half detailing her own experiences as a lobbyist at the Vienna negotiations (which preceded the signing of the UN Trafficking Protocol in Palermo, Italy in 2000), where she was a member of the liberal feminist lobby (as opposed to the abolitionist feminist group). This reflexive 'insider account' of the ideological tensions between the two groups is perhaps the most interesting section of the book, as she reveals the ways in which both factions played a role in theoretically 'invisibilising' the sex workers during the negotiations—the abolitionists, by collapsing women and children into one 'sexless' category; and the sex workers within the liberal feminist camp, by erasing themselves from the public negotiation process. She explains that

after the Global Network of Sex Work Projects publicly opposed the Protocol, which they viewed as an international anti-trafficking document that could potentially lead to more abuses against sex workers, the self-identified sex workers at the meetings could not participate openly in the negotiations, as this would contradict their opposition to the Protocol: How could they offer suggestions to fix something that they did not support in the first place? What transpired was the 'supremely ironic' clandestine participation of 'secret sex workers' offering suggestions from the shadows, 'highly visible yet invisible; there but not there' (p. 152).

Doezema goes on to illustrate the agonising deliberation over the definition of trafficking that followed, which hinged on the 'fulcrum of consent' when trying to establish who were 'real' victims ('defiled innocents') and those who weren't (complicit 'chaos-bringers')—just as it did during white slavery campaigns. She ultimately struggles with this notion of consent throughout the book, and argues that sex work must be taken out of this framework (and the forced vs. voluntary dichotomy—which echoes her earlier work), so that alternative ways of thinking about sex work can be explored and expanded. She concludes that myth and ideology are, in fact, unavoidable, and suggests that the creation of new emancipatory myths might be necessary—those that are based on sex workers' own desires and perceptions, and that can only be achieved through praxis and the type of political change that occurs within solidarity-building with larger social movements. The book ends with a political call to action for sex worker activists so that the 'spectre of the white slave' can finally be put to rest.

The overall strengths of the text are the unique and interesting ways in which Doezema contextualises the 'myth' of trafficking in women at the transnational and transhistorical level—of which there has been little examination to date. The breadth and depth of examples given to convince readers of the ways in which white slavery discourse has shaped and haunted the traffic in women discourse are immense—and at times, perhaps, even a little redundant (some of the illustrations used to highlight similarities between melodramatic narrative conventions in the US and UK in Chapters 2–3, for example, could probably be consolidated in some way to avoid repetition). However, for a relatively short book, it is meticulously comprehensive and theoretically dense. It provides an excellent and effective mix of theory, history and ethnography that would be useful and interesting for any graduate/postgraduate student, or scholar of prostitution and trafficking.

While the sex workers in Doezema's book may have ostensibly 'disappeared' in parts, they reappear with a vengeance in Ditmore, Levy and Willman's collection—taking a front row seat in the depiction of their everyday realities (with Doezema herself surfacing in parts of the text). A product of a conference sharing the same title that took place in New York in 2006, the volume shifts away from typical media and academic treatments of sex work that tend to

emphasise trafficking and public health concerns, and instead highlights more of the day-to-day concerns for sex workers that revolve around partner and family intimacy, social stigma, challenges to collective organising, policing and laws, and managing finances.

The book opens with a provocative piece by Brents and Hausbeck that explores the ways the 'upper-class' sectors of the sex industry are converging with mainstream culture—which, itself, has become increasingly sexualised in late capitalism. Koken offers a useful literature review of both sides of the feminist ideological debate around sex work, and spends time describing the same Vienna negotiations that are central to Doezema's book. Koken ends with a call for decriminalisation, similar to that made in the Petro and Garofalo pieces.

Two essays that veer away from heteronormative perspectives on sex work are those by Kaye and Hossain. Kaye's discussion of 'street families' within gay male prostitution is an informative empirical contribution to academic discourse on alternative kinship. Perhaps the most uniquely stylistic and theoretically robust piece (with an interesting psychoanalytical twist) is Hossain's work, the first half of which is spent providing detailed social and gender analyses of South Asian 'transgender' *hijras*. The much-awaited discussion on sex work comes in the final section, where Hossain bullet-points the many ways *hijras* find sex work a liberating alternative to the few other professions available to them due to the social stigma they face as a sexually marginalised group.

Although the Sex Work Matters conference took place in the US, and thus contributions are mainly focused on sex industries in the US and Europe, the book might have benefited from more voices from the global south (in addition to Hossain's work, and Kelly's piece on Mexican workers). More class analysis throughout the volume would have been useful as well—Brents and Hausbeck touch on it, as does Kaye, while Bradley-Engen and Hobbs point out their blatant omission of it, which is ultimately unhelpful and results in the piece (about erotic dancers and their 'poor-quality' relationships) being the least convincing contribution.

The dominant messaging throughout the book is that sex work is a form of work that should be decriminalised and de-stigmatised, and that there is a need for new research to be carried out—preferably by sex workers themselves. There are many references to the same scholars throughout the collection (Agustín, Chapkis, Ditmore, Doezema, Sanders, Brewis and Linstead, for example,) which suggests, perhaps, that the world of (high-quality) liberal feminist scholarship on sex work is quite small and ready for expansion.

Taken as a whole, the collection provides an excellent mix of political, first-person, policy-based, legal, economic and even psychoanalytical analysis of various aspects of the sex industry written by sex workers, academics, activists and those who identify as all three. No other book addresses the financial

aspects, motivations and realities of sex work, particularly from the workers' points of view. The suggestions for new areas of research and activism are practical and insightful. Though less theoretically rigorous than Doezema's book, this text will appeal to undergraduate and graduate students of sex work and sex worker activism, as well as to more popular audiences due to its accessible style, multidisciplinary nature of analysis, and variety of perspectives represented. Together, the Doezema and Ditmore *et al* texts provide a very well-rounded historical and contemporary overview of important sex work issues, while emphasising the struggles that remain in the fight for sex worker rights.

Heidi Hoefinger
Birkbeck College, University of London

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