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vendere e comprare sesso. tra piacere, lavoro e prevaricazione

Giulia Garofalo Geymonat, Il Mulino Press, Bologna, 2014, 128pp., ISBN: 978-8-8152-4485-7, €11.00 (Pbk)

Exhaustive, accessible and balanced, Giulia Garofalo Geymonat's introductory text on sexual labour *Vendere e comprare sesso. Tra piacere, lavoro e prevaricazione* (*Selling and Buying Sex: Between Pleasure, Work and Prevarication*) is a useful tool for those readers of Italian who are beginning to navigate the complex set of issues to do with the definition, understanding, evaluation and regulation of the buying and selling of sexual services. At the same time, it will also appeal to more experienced activists and scholars who wish to broaden their perspective on a complex set of issues, as it summarises and elaborates on a great many sources (if not always explicitly citing them), both academic and also pertaining to the domains of journalism, policy, literature and art, which deal with prostitution across different locations.

While it provides a particularly detailed outlook on the Italian context, present and past, the book contextualises the development of sexual labour and its government comparatively, in a broader setting that mainly encompasses Western Europe, but with incursions into other parts of the globe as well. And it rightly foregrounds migration and its control as central forces at play in the composition (and often the exploitation) of today's sexual workforce worldwide. Indeed, one of the major strengths of the book lies precisely in showing how patterns of sexual labour, and their evolution in time, are related not only to laws and protocols that directly concern their regulation, but to legal and political apparatuses that govern spheres as diverse as those of health, security, unemployment, social reproduction, education, gender violence or human mobility, to cite just a few. On the other hand, against this tendency to overshadow sexual labour with other concerns (both at the level of government and more broadly in social terms), Garofalo Geymonat attempts to deal with it as a distinct set of phenomena, giving ample space to sex workers' own perspectives and views as they are expressed in the written sources she cites.

The politically and morally fraught nature of the issues the book addresses, both within and outside the feminist camp, is never short of attention. Debates around prostitution are often polarised between an abolitionist position, which considers all prostitution exploitative, and a more libertarian position, often put forth by sex workers' own organisations that reclaim the right to exercise sexual labour in safe, equitable and recognised forms. And yet, if the author seems careful not to dismiss one or the other position too readily, she nonetheless does not shy away from openly condemning the exploitation, stigma, violence and repression that most sex workers face. Beginning with a definition of prostitution as an *explicit* request or offer of money in exchange for an equally clear sexual prestation, Garofalo Geymonat shows how those who engage in it (workers more so than clients) are often exposed to legal, social, cultural and economic stigma, which in turn increases sex workers' vulnerability. Furthermore, she continues, the fact that the stigma of prostitution in its wider sense potentially concerns all women tells us that sex work as a practice is tightly bound to gender relations, and more precisely to structural

(social and economic) inequalities between women and men, but also between individuals categorised on the basis of 'ethnicity', place of origin or sexual orientation. From this perspective, the author is able to suggest that power inequalities cannot be postulated *a priori*, but must be ascertained contextually. After tracing a necessarily partial but efficacious history of prostitution and its regulation in Europe since the Middle Ages, which greatly helps in clarifying current opinions, reasons for stigma and forms of governance, Garofalo Geymonat proceeds to describe sex work in contemporary Italy and beyond. She attempts to provide (necessarily speculative) figures of sex workers and clients based on different studies, accounting for the reasons behind the buying and selling of sexual services and for the difficulties faced by workers engaged in these activities—from the different forms of stigma to the restrictions, violence and abuses they may be subjected to as a consequence. Subsequently, the author proceeds to review different models for the government of prostitution in different countries—from prohibitionism to abolitionism, through regulation and decriminalisation—lucidly providing arguments in favour and against them and leaving readers in a good position to independently reach their own conclusions. In the final chapter, Garofalo Geymonat accounts for the even more thorny issue of trafficking, relating the exploitation of migrant sexual labour to global inequalities, regimes for the control of migration and prostitution, and the criminalisation that these enforce, which might have negative effects in encouraging forms of trafficking. The author also favourably evaluates some of the provisions put in place by different legal regimes, most notably the Italian one, for the protection of victims. She also brings forth the request advanced by many sex workers' organisations for sexual labour to be recognised as giving migrants the right to live and work in their host country.

In conclusion, this lean but informative book masterfully manages to tread the line between different positions concerning the morally laden government of sexual labour, substantiating them with a wide range of historical and sociological data. If necessarily limited, in geographical and analytical scope (especially where attitudes towards prostitution, moral regimes and constructs of personhood are concerned), it nonetheless summarises a wide range of studies and other forms of representation of an extremely complex set of issues. Garofalo Geymonat does this with competence and skill, avoiding the ideological and judgemental attitude that too often informs engagements with prostitution, without renouncing her own convictions.

Irene Peano
University of Bologna

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