BOOK REVIEWS

Not for Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography edited by Christina Stark and Rebecca Whisnant. North Melbourne, Australia: Spinifex Press, 2004, 445 pp., $24.95 paper.

The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globilisation of Sex Commerce edited by Joyce Outshoorn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 329 pp., $80.00 hardcover, $29.00 paper.

What's Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic by Denise Brennan. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004, 281 pp., $74.95 hardcover, $21.95 paper.

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Prostitution may be off the political radar screen in the United States, but it still gets the attention of feminist scholarship. New feminist works reveal the complexity of prostitution and the lives of sex workers as well as the political stakes involved. While each of the books reviewed here is ostensibly about prostitution, each provides a wider ranging analysis that includes reflections about the women's movement's political agency and the future of feminism.

The 28 articles in *Not For Sale: Feminists Resisting Prostitution and Pornography* cover the gamut of the prostitution experience while carefully placing prostitution in the larger context of the sex industry. The editors, Christina Stark and Rebecca Whisnant, explicitly include pornography as a form of prostitution thus immediately widening the scope of analysis and hinting at the important political stance that this book takes. *Not For Sale* is uncompromisingly feminist in its response to the sex industry. Despite widespread attention given to a split within the woman's movement over the moral legitimacy of prostitution, Stark and Whisnant take a critical stand: "We believe that feminists who defend pornography and prostitution are mistaken in their analysis, and that their political positions and alliances are harmful to women, to feminism, and to the cause of social justice" (xiii). In an era when sensitivity to pluralism (although a justified recognition of diverse positions) has sometimes masked the convictions of progressives, I found the editors' forthrightness refreshing. This position also impacts the character of the collection and its intended audience. While carefully covering the damage to women wrought by prostitution, the book also maintains a secondary theme of criticism for liberals who fail to label prostitution as the pariah that it is.

The range and quality of the articles make *Not for Sale* a must read for anyone seeking to understand the opposition to prostitution. Included are some of the important theorists, such as Andrea Dworkin, who offers a speech that places prostitution within a wider context of oppression while advocating a fundamental theory of connection: "Feminism is the politics of anti-abstraction. The men who hurt you have to be seen objectively as well as known intuitively; and in addition every woman standing on a street corner is your problem. When you see a prostituted woman, you have to know that you are not free, whatever your status in the male-over-female hierarchy" (141). One aspect of feminism's anti-abstractionism has been its ability to confront the use of language, and few are better at linguistic analysis than Jane Caputi. In her contribution to the collection, Caputi masterfully reappropriates an invective invoked by a critic of Dworkin's analysis of sexuality: "cuntspeak." Caputi suggests that this usage is reflective of a devaluation of the body perpetuated by porn. "Pornographic thinking of all kinds splits body from mind and deems the lowly genitals, both cunt and penis, as mindless. But this is a profound reversal" (379). For Caputi the denigration of the physical through pornographic objectifications runs to our core beliefs about how the world works, particularly the mind/body division. While many of the authors suggest legal, political, or behavioral resistance, Caputi seeks a metaphysical and linguistic resistance to the sex industry. John Stoltenberg believes that resistance begins with the prime consumers: men. Stoltenberg contributes a conference address where he discusses the apparent necessity of male sexuality to "own" others. Men appear to have a need to eroticize ownership: "Many men can scarcely discern any erotic feelings that are not associated with owning someone else's body" (402). While Stoltenberg primarily addresses pornography, the resonance of his notion of ownership with prostitution is clear.

Not For Sale has an international perspective with articles reflecting Asian, Australian, and Canadian contexts as well as several that address United Nations' activities and international human rights. The diversity of the articles also extends to perspectives. The collection includes authors who are former sex workers, crisis center workers, a psychologist, legal specialists, activists, and feminist theorists.

Not for Sale is organized into three parts. The first section includes articles that attempt to get past myths of prostitution's benign nature and clarify the harm and insidiousness of the sex industry. The third section includes stories and strategies for confronting prostitution and limiting its damage. The second section of articles has the particularly intriguing title, "Resisting the Sexual New World Order," which suggests that there is a widespread acceptance of the sex industry. Furthermore, the trajectory and momentum of the sex industry are posited as increasingly immune to criticism. Well-funded campaigns have severely limited and

marginalized anti-prostitution and anti-porn voices in the public square. Even purportedly liberal media outlets have accepted the notions that porn is an expression of human sexuality, and prostitution is a viable means for women to gain economic advantage. Feminists who oppose the proliferation of the sex industry are sometimes accused of being humorless, prudish radicals invoking a sexual morality of the past. Articles in this section seek to dispel these prevalent misconceptions and expose the forces behind the modern pro-sex industry movement.

Through the crafting of this anthology, Stark and Whisnant model a feminism that recognizes diverse positions but takes a clear stand on an issue that should galvanize feminists given the level of violence and exploitation of women associated with this industry. *Not for Sale* is a rallying cry for why feminism remains pertinent despite the media's frequent claims of its demise. What other group in society will stand against prostitution while not villainizing the prostitute?

The Politics of Prostitution: Women's Movements, Democratic States and the Globilisation of Sex Commerce, edited by Joyce Outshoorn, is a collection of articles with a more social scientific approach to prostitution. This anthology addresses the politics and policy debates regarding sex work in twelve countries: Australia, Austria, Britain, Canada, Finland, France, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. Each contributor utilizes a proscribed approach. First, an introduction provides an overview of the history of prostitution and the sex industry legislation in the country. Then these debates are reviewed for the extent to which they are "gendered" and the ability of the country's women's movement to have an impact on the discussions. For example, Dorothy McBride Stetson remarks about the absence of policy discussions on prostitution in United States politics. For her analysis, Stetson examines policy debates of the late 1970s when concern for child pornography was propelled onto the national scene. While this debate focused on child exploitation and abuse in the 1980s, Stetson claims the issue transformed into a moral one. Finally, in the late 1990s, concern about trafficking in women and young girls came to the fore. After reviewing the history of those debates, Stetson concludes that state-sponsored feminism was ineffective in the United States: "Women's policy offices provided no links between movement activists and substantive procedural responses" (263), a conclusion different than most of her European counterparts. Ultimately, according to Stetson, U.S. feminists became more focused on internal squabbles over pornography rather than prostitution. Feminist activists who wanted to combat trafficking women found themselves forming alliances with right-wing moral leaders who had similar goals in this area. This kind of insight into policy formation is repeated for each of the twelve countries examined.

The essential hypothesis of the collection is that "Women's movements in democratic states have tended to be successful in increasing both substantive representation as demonstrated by policy content, and descriptive representation as demonstrated by women's participation in policy making process" (280). Because the international authors for this book are careful to maintain consistency in their analysis, their claims that state feminism can play a positive role in influencing policy debate (despite the above mentioned failure in the United States) are more authoritative than anecdotal claims to the women's movement's efficacy.

The Politics of Prostitution is an important resource for understanding the political history of prostitution in the twelve countries studied, but perhaps more importantly Outshoorn has collected evidence to suggest that it is important for feminists to maintain their institutional struggles because they can make important differences despite the challenges and negativity that persists. This book is more overtly "academic" than *Not for Sale* in its systematic and sometimes quantitative approach, but it is very accessible and an important contribution to the study of international gender politics.

What's Love Got to Do with It: Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic by Denise Brennan provides a twofold reminder about the study of prostitution: One, we can never be too vigilant in avoiding universalization of experience. The prostitution in the town of Sósua, Dominican Republic, studied by Brennan for over a decade, is radically different than the experience of prostitution in North America. Sex workers in Sósua depend upon international tourists from Europe and Canada for the majority of their clients but do not utilize the intermediaries of pimps in the process. They attempt to foster long-term relationships with clients for economic survival and advancement. The other important reminder is that regardless of the differences in experience, prostitution remains a horrible life choice. The women of the sex industry in Sósua, despite some advantages, only eek out a marginally superior economic existence than other women. Whatever material gains they make, the prostitutes of Sósua give up a great deal. One loss is balanced loving relationships: "There is an expected trade off of emotion-driven love for financial mobility. Both sex workers and resort workers candidly admit that they sacrifice romantic love for a better future" (108). Unfortunately, few ever find that future. In the words of Rita, one of Brennan's interviewees, "This job is shit. It's the worst job you could have. There are diseases, rape, and then the police" (163).

Of the three books reviewed, *What's Love Got to Do with It?* is the easiest cover-to-cover read because Brennan tells a unified narrative. To further bring cohesion to her work, Brennan begins and ends with the story of Elena, a 22-year-old sex worker when the study began, and

Jurgen, her German client/husband. The relationship is long term and complex—nothing like the one-night stands of transactional prostitution. Nevertheless, the relationship still must be described as prostitution because one side expects sex and the other side expects payment. Brennan crafts an ethnography of particular people and a particular place during a particular period of time. However, Brennan tells the story with heart. She is not merely the objective social scientist collecting data for reporting. She is a human being who lives in continuity with her subjects and is not afraid to let her emotions show: "I worry about Elena, not because she cannot take care of herself—quite the contrary, she is impressively driven, focused, and responsible—but rather because her many responsibilities and limited resources are daunting" (214). Brennan allows the reader to do a bit of what Maria Lugones refers to as "world travelling" in the process of creating sympathetic understanding and allowing compassion to flow. In a wonderful example of feminist scholarship, facts are not alienated from the lives in which they impact.

These three books tell very different tales about prostitution, but each reveals how important feminism is as a nexus of scholarship and action. One might ask, "Do we really need more books on prostitution?" and the answer is "yes." The public may have forgotten the women who are forced to face intimacy with strangers for money, but feminists cannot.

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Reference

Lugones, Maria. 1987. "Playfulness, 'World-Traveling' and Loving Perception." *Hypatia* 2(Summer):3–20.