
Introduction

Sex Work and the Politics of Public Policy

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When a woman is arrested for selling sex on the streets of Nairobi, the very first thing she does is pick up her mobile phone. She dials a number from a list of her colleagues, who will do what they can to earn sufficient bribe money to secure her release. As Chimaraoke Izugbara observes in this volume, participation in such information networks is critical to sex workers' survival in Nairobi. Sex workers, taxi drivers, and even night watchmen communicate via cell phone to help women navigate the dangerous streets of urban Kenya, securing clients while avoiding police harassment, arrest, and even worse fates. According to Kenyan sex worker Irene, "We have to watch out and act like sisters to each other. The one you help today will help you tomorrow." Once in custody, as twenty-five-year-old Melissa confirms, "you can't tell what they will do to you once the police have you with them." The list of indignities that sex workers suffer at the hands of law enforcement is long, and includes rape, physical and verbal abuse, illegal detention, and extortion. Such crimes against sex workers are perpetrated not only by police but also by clients who view them as easy prey. As twenty-three-year-old Comfort says, "People know they can get away with anything they do to you because they know you can't even go to the police."

Mónica sits waiting in the Anti-Venereal Medical Service of the legal, state-run brothel where she works in the southern Mexican city of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. She is surrounded by other women who also wait, clutching the Sanitary Control Cards that deem them registered with the city, disease-free, and able to work. When her turn comes, Mónica will receive a basic gynecological exam and any number of tests for illnesses ranging from simple bacterial vaginosis to HIV. Workers who test positive for any communicable infection are legally forbidden from exchanging sex for money until they are cured. Built in 1991, the Galactic Zone, as this particular brothel is called, is considered by municipal authorities a showplace for the successes of neoliberal

eral' social policy in general and state-regulated prostitution in particular. The countless numbers of men and women who sell sex illegally in Tuxtla's streets and bars, driven to do so, in part, by the neoliberal economic policies that have resulted in ever increasing rural to urban migration and immiseration due to the widespread failure of subsistence farming, are viewed by city officials as sources of disease and chaos.

In contrast, the highly regulated workers of the Galactic Zone are, to many, symbols of modern progress. For many workers themselves, the testing and regulation they experience is both socially and personally beneficial; as Lorena puts it, "It's like a secretary with her typewriter. I've got to keep my machine clean." Yet political agendas, economic interests, and gender discrimination sometimes combine to create a dangerous situation in the brothel. In one particularly sobering example, four women immediately tested positive for HIV upon switching medical laboratories, thus casting doubts upon the efficacy of the state's claims to have improved public health via increased regulation.

In the Thai village that anthropologist Heather Montgomery calls Baan Nua, slightly more than half the boys and girls between the ages of six and fourteen work in prostitution. Unlike common media depictions of Thai child prostitutes as poor girls deceived into leaving their rural homes or sold by their struggling parents to brothels where they will be forced to have sex with countless foreign men, the young prostitutes of this coastal village on the edge of a larger tourist town live with their parents, who know what they do, and see themselves not as victims or even as prostitutes but as sons and daughters fulfilling obligations to their families. As one twelve year old who sells sex to foreign clients put it, "[That's] only my body, but this is my family." In addition, it is their engagement in occasional commercial sex that, ironically, allows these children some of the pleasures of childhood that would otherwise be unavailable to them, such as trips to arcades and theme parks.

As Montgomery argues in this volume, extradition laws passed in tourist-sending countries that help prosecute foreign men who purchase sex from children abroad were meaningless for the young sex workers of Baan Nua, as "neither the children nor their families [have] any interest in seeing their clients prosecuted. . . . In the absence of any social support or any form of welfare, these men [are] the only form of income and protection they [have], no matter how damaging that might seem to outsiders." Montgomery further argues that Thai legislation focusing on commercial sex with foreigners is a simplification that ignores the countless local residents who purchase sex from children, corrupt law enforcement, and the Thai government's informal

promotion of sex tourism, or what the children of Baan Nua call “going out for fun with foreigners.”

Vignettes drawn from the women of Nairobi’s streets, the workers of the Galactic Zone, and the children of Baan Nua reveal the highly complex nature of commercial sexualities and the limits of policies and protections both local and global. The women, men, and children presented in the following pages are not simply criminals, victims, or even liberated individuals who shirk social norms, as some scholars, feminists, and activists might portray them. Indeed, recent ethnographic work² on commercial sexualities demonstrates the diverse and multidimensional nature of sex work, moving well beyond previous binary debates about structure versus agency and exploitation versus liberation.³ The chapters in this volume provide ample evidence of the deficiencies inherent in subscribing to such polarized perspectives, which de-historicize, de-contextualize, and homogenize sex work, limiting our understanding of sexual labor and those who engage in it.

The ethnographic nature of the portraits in this volume richly illustrates the myriad ways in which discriminatory and counterproductive policies ranging from criminalization to forced medical testing to flawed legal protections coexist with discourses of agency presented by the workers themselves. As cultural anthropologists, we view the nuanced qualitative data collected through long-term fieldwork as essential to understanding commercial sexualities and forming effective policies to address them. Ethnography, the linchpin of anthropological research, gives readers the sense of “being there” (Bradburd 1998) by capturing the diversity of sex workers’ experiences as well as the larger patterns of stigmatization, discrimination, and persecution that they face from Bahia, Brazil, to Dalian, China. The findings presented here make a strong case for using ethnographic work to inform more realistic and beneficial public policies.

The chapters in this volume also vividly illustrate how the pervasive global reach of neoliberal ideologies and practices permeates both public policy and the worldview of sex workers themselves, many of whom see sex work as part of their individual self-improvement strategies. In recent decades the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in many nations has resulted in a marked decline in subsistence agriculture, widening gaps between the rich and poor, increased economic migration, and the explosive growth of a highly gendered service sector. Many scholars have argued that the present phase of late capitalism results in the commodification of all things, especially domestic and other forms of service work (Basi 2009; Bernstein 2007a; Freeman 2000; Parreñas 2001; Spar 2006).

These factors combine to make sex work, whether organized or de facto, full-time or informal, an increasingly common way to survive in an unstable economy. Service-sector employment, including sex work, is one of the few available options many underprivileged individuals have to generate income. Work in the service sector often requires strict management of emotions and great discipline, and workers who perform it may consequently suffer self-estrangement and problems of identity (Hochschild 1983). This estrangement is equally evident in the fragmentation of community bonds as families struggle to survive at a time when neoliberal economic policies dramatically reduce social services and other state benefits. Such atomization is equally evident in the words and actions of individuals who, through sex work, view themselves as independent entrepreneurs rather than organized laborers.⁴

Despite these commonalities, this volume is not intended to recommend a universal policy on sex work. Indeed, as anthropologists, we stress the importance of cultural context and the continuing relevance of the local, even in an era of globalization. In heeding the call for sex work policy that is evidence-based rather than informed by cultural, moral, and other ideological values, as presented in chapter 2 by Michael Goodyear and Ronald Weitzer, this book provides concrete recommendations for improving policy across municipal, state, and national lines. In uniting these chapters, all based upon diverse geographical and cultural regions, we strive to answer two interrelated questions: What accounts for the striking parallels and patterns at work in the lives of individual sex workers in such a variety of divergent cultural contexts? And how, in turn, might ethnographies of the sexual labor of women, children, and men offer unique recommendations for improved public policy on sex work?

Public Policy Debates on Sex Work

In the interests of a holistic approach to the topic, the chapters in this volume define sex work as a continuum of behaviors involving the commodification of intimacy. The vast majority of studies presented here document the lives of marginalized individuals who engage in such behaviors as part of their strategies for survival or social mobility.⁵ Their strategies generally involve the strategic use of sex or sexualized attention in exchange for money or something of value, and the highly nuanced and individual nature of these situations do not always lend themselves easily to clear-cut generalizations about sex work. Nonetheless, the ethnographic accounts presented here very effectively document an often sharp disconnect between policy and its practice.

It is certainly not our intention to portray the women, men, and children in this volume as unwitting sex workers whose poverty or innocence gives them a greater moral ground upon which to stand (as neither we nor our contributors believe that sex work is moral or immoral in and of itself). That the workers we write about are marginalized and that this arouses (intended or not) the sympathy of many readers and policy makers reflects many of the debates in the ensuing chapters on trafficking versus migration, morality, and beliefs about victimization that often inform faulty policy. Indeed, almost all the chapters demonstrate the nuanced ways in which prostitution policy impacts individuals differently based on class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and age.

From the legal brothels of the Netherlands to the illegal but very visible red light districts of urban India, public policy approaches to sex work are informed by shifting political climates and public perceptions of gender, health, and labor. Although these approaches vary cross-culturally, three broad categories emerge: legalization, criminalization, and decriminalization. This volume presents examples of the impact of legalized sex work in the Netherlands and in a state-run brothel in Mexico and discusses the consequences of criminalization in China, India, the United States, and South Africa, as well as the specific case of criminalization via municipal by-laws in Nairobi, Kenya. The impact of decriminalization is addressed in the context of New Zealand and in three very different Brazilian sites. Two chapters additionally address the problematic issue of age and the ability to consent in Thailand and South Africa, and another chapter raises unsettling questions about the rather unclear divisions between serial monogamy and sex work.

Where legal, sex work is often highly regulated by local or state authorities and generally requires that sex workers register with state authorities and have mandatory health screenings for HIV and other sexually transmitted illnesses. Women working in the legal brothels of rural Nevada are tested for gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, and HIV before beginning work and then subsequently throughout their careers (Brents, Jackson, and Hausbeck 2009), whereas in urban Tijuana, Mexico, legal sex workers are given blood tests for some illnesses whereas other illnesses, such as syphilis, are screened for only visually (Katsulis 2008:99). In addition to medical management and bureaucratic oversight, legal sex work is often spatially regulated, as many countries confine legal sex work to bars, brothels, or particular districts with police oversight. Such areas are often far from private homes, businesses, and schools, and are characterized by the police and the public as places that tolerate sex work and other forms of “vice.” Tellingly, such areas are called *zonas*

de tolerancia (tolerance zones) throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America, and workers selling sex outside the boundaries of such zones, such as in a bar or on the street, may be subject to police harassment and arrest.

Though laws and policies surrounding sex work are generally shaped by those in positions of privilege, in certain nations, such as Brazil, sex workers themselves participate in designing national health-care policy (particularly with regard to HIV/AIDS) and social-service provisions. Proponents of legalized sex work believe that this approach protects the health and safety of sex workers and society while also providing valuable tax revenue for local and national governments. Approaches to criminalization vary from the threat of stoning in Iran (Tait and Hoseiny 2008: 17) to police tolerating its concentration in peripheral and low-income areas where residents, whether engaged in sex work or not, experience marginalization and economic distress. Decriminalization also varies in the degree of permissiveness and enforcement, varying from a low priority accorded to sex work-related offenses to its legal definition as work, with sex workers accorded the same rights, responsibilities, and protections as other workers.

Debates surrounding sex work can be said to suffer a particular sort of ailment involving “too much heat, not enough light” (Valverde 1987). The bitter polemics that have divided scholars, writers, journalists, sex workers, and activists have done little to improve public policy on sex work. As such, this volume hopes to dispel myth and moralizing by shining a bright light on a subject that is often, both figuratively and literally, confined to the darkest recesses. Debates around sex work can be divided into two primary camps: those who oppose all forms of sexual commerce because they view it as a threat to public health and morality as well as a form of violence against women⁶ and those who recognize prostitution as an enduring reality. The latter group often takes either the position that state regulation minimizes the risks and dangers incurred by sex work or that participants in such activities should be free from government control, which they view as intrusive and even harmful.

Governments, organizations, and individuals that support anti-sex work legislation often contend that sex work is damaging to society at large and to women in particular. Those who take this position argue that sex work can never be considered legitimate employment, because it is always degrading, never freely chosen, and is characterized by extreme levels of exploitation. For those who believe that sexual labor is essentially a sexist and violent act, legalization represents governmental complicity and endorsement of gendered violence. States that legalize certain or all aspects of sex work concep-

tualize sex work similarly, and Goodyear and Weitzer illustrate the impact of this policy in Sweden in chapter 2.

Institutions and individuals that recognize sex work as a pervasive and enduring (albeit problematic) institution maintain that criminalization does not effectively end sex work in its many forms but only removes it from public view, making it more dangerous for sex workers and society by raising the risk of violence, abuse, disease, and involvement by criminal elements. Feminist activists and organizations that support legalization or decriminalization insist that criminalizing sex work criminalizes sex workers, making them more vulnerable to social stigmatization, abuse, rape, and even murder. One of the central arguments for legalizing all forms of sex work is that, through government oversight, health risks for sex workers, clients, and society at large are reduced. Many institutions and individuals concerned with public health believe that medical testing, safe sex education, and condom distribution are effective means of preventing the transmission of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). As the ethnographic examples presented throughout this book clearly demonstrate, however, there is often a great difference between such discourse at the state level and its everyday practice by individuals.

Synopsis of Key Themes

The chapters that follow consistently reveal that sex work is itself inseparable from state actions and, indeed, is sometimes engendered by them. Much of the research presented in this volume offers strong evidence of how this intimate relationship between sex work and the state exists in all countries, albeit in divergent forms that alternately reject, accept, or tolerate the existence of sex work. Although state interest in regulating sex work is often couched in the rhetoric of public health, morality, or safety, the research presented here indicates that the relationship is in fact often much more complex for a variety of nuanced reasons. Chimaraoke Izugbara, for example, argues that sex work in Nairobi is inseparable from the postcolonial politics of Kenyan life, wherein economic difficulties and crises in neighboring African nations, pervasive rural-urban migration resulting in the growth of informal housing settlements, and crop failures have all contributed to greater numbers of women and men engaging in sex work. At the same time, however, the police actively benefit from this illegal activity in their capacity as state agents through the elaborate (and illicit) exchanges of bribes, women, and gifts between sex workers and police officers.

Even more troubling is that such a situation is hardly unique to Kenya, as Tiantian Zheng also notes this collusion between Chinese police and other state authorities with local officials and brothel managers. In such an uncertain atmosphere, where violence and extortion are the norm, sex workers are forced into a state of constant vigilance. This is particularly significant given that most of the sex workers Zheng describes are rural migrants who have come to the northeastern port city of Dalian in search of increased economic opportunities that will allow them to send remittances to their home villages. Notably, Zheng observes, such women report that the conditions of sex work compare quite favorably to sweatshop or low-wage service work, the only jobs available to them as low-status rural migrants in urban China's burgeoning economy. They often note that sex work gives them a hope for urban social mobility that would otherwise be impossible.

Like Izugbara and Zheng, Treena Orchard also analyzes the disconnects between public policy and everyday practice in her chapter on *devadasis*, women who practice sex work as part of an ancient Hindu practice that has come under increasing scorn by the contemporary Indian state. She describes the similarities between colonial and post-independence efforts to "reform" such women as deeply embedded in moral-medical discourses of hygiene that, in turn, deeply contradict *devadasis'* understanding of their work as religiously motivated. This repositioning of sex work as a social problem in India, in turn, mirrors broader global debates regarding its appropriate role in neoliberal economic systems. Patty Kelly, for instance, documents the establishment of a government-owned brothel in the troubled Mexican state of Chiapas as part of broader efforts to modernize the region by extending state control, particularly via the implementation of agribusiness and other initiatives that generate revenue for elites through the privatization of large-scale agribusiness, while disenfranchising the poor.

Dawn Pankonien and Susan Dewey also draw an explicit connection between state economic policy and sex work, as both note the elaborate intersections between neoliberal reforms and poor people's increased need to devise creative strategies for survival. Pankonien describes the dramatic growth in the number of women who describe themselves as "single mothers" in Huatulco, a federally developed tourist region on Mexico's southern Pacific coast. Like the women in the chapters by Izugbara and Zheng, mothers in Huatulco are often rural migrants who have come to this beach town in search of economic opportunities in a tourist economy. Pankonien characterizes the strategic relationships these women engage in with men as "smart sex," a calculated set of practices in which men are sought out for

their ability to temporarily provide for a woman and her children in what are, at best, unstable economic circumstances.

It is difficult to ignore the cross-cultural parallels prompted by the growth of neoliberalism, an economic and moral philosophy in which sociologist Zygmunt Bauman notes, “the responsibilities for resolving the quandaries generated by vexingly volatile and constantly changing circumstances is shifted onto the shoulders of individuals—who are now expected to be ‘free choosers’ and to bear in full the consequences of their choices” (Bauman 2007:3–4). Bauman essentially argues that neoliberalism’s deceptively seductive offer of increased individual choice comes at a heavy price, rendering individuals more and more vulnerable. Neoliberal economic policies have increasingly impacted individual lives throughout the world through the unprecedented untethering of workers and the workplace so that those in positions of power and privilege have less direct contact with or responsibility for those who work at the lowest levels of the same industry. Such new labor practices are a constant reminder to workers that they are expendable, easily replaced, and thus not in a position to negotiate the terms and conditions under which their labor is carried out.

Such vulnerability is even more pronounced for those who already inhabit the margins of social life because of their poverty or other forms of social exclusion. This is particularly true for situations wherein particular types of state-endorsed socioeconomic inequalities create a larger pool of feminized labor that is typically lower paid, less respected, and less able to unionize. For instance, Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki analyzes apartheid’s enduring legacy of inequality on the lives of South African adolescent sex workers in their complex use of racialized discourses of danger in avoiding clients from particular ethnic backgrounds while adhering to “the language of the new democratic ‘rainbow’ nation of South Africa.” Just as the marginalized South African sex workers described by De Sas Kropiwnicki alternatively embrace and reject the broader social frameworks that structure their lives, so, too, do many sex workers actively negotiate economic systems that equate feminized labor with low pay. Thaddeus Gregory Blanchette and Ana Paula da Silva explore this issue at length by noting the importance of situating sex work in the macroeconomic context of feminized labor. Seeking to escape the ghetto of female sub-employment otherwise available to them, the Brazilian sex workers the authors describe consistently mention that the conditions of their labor are not significantly worse than other forms of work open to them.

Yet such statements should not be read as a ringing endorsement of sex work; though it is true that this volume features many examples of how rural

to urban migration does create new opportunities for social mobility that may involve sex work, these are often part of what anthropologist Denise Brennan has called “the opportunity myth” (2004:14), whereby individuals become sex workers in the hope of eventual upward mobility but generally end up living in increased poverty after they leave prostitution. Part of the power of ethnography lies in its ability to illuminate the minutiae of individual life circumstances, and in the case of sex work it can be exceptionally revealing. Many of the authors who tackle this issue clearly demonstrate that much of the autonomy that rural-urban migrants ascribe to their independence is, in fact, quite precarious. Pankonien notes that the ability of Mexican women in Huatulco to freely choose and abandon male partners at will stems from the absence of older family members, who remain in the countryside. Zheng similarly observes how women’s efforts to subvert the urban-rural hierarchy through their migration to the city are constrained by the Chinese state’s severe limits on rural-urban migration, much of which is forbidden and subject to a residency permit system, and the violent environment in which their work takes place.

The advent of the neoliberal era has ushered in a host of complex new relationships between the state and workers, raising, in particular, the problematic question of how states both pursue and reinforce the “global race to the bottom” while maintaining strict border control and limitations on citizenship. This practice is most evident in the contemporary focus on anti-sex-trafficking initiatives in countries that receive large numbers of migrants. Contemporary sex work is in many ways a microcosm of broader neoliberal labor practices, and it is hardly coincidental that sex trafficking has become a matter of international concern at the same time that large numbers of women (and men) are forced to seek work outside their home countries because of economic hardship. Erica Lorraine Williams tackles this issue in examining how trafficking-related discourse is often explicitly racialized in ways that eerily mirror state migration policies. This, she notes, raises a timely question with respect to the Afro-Brazilian women of Bahia, who are depicted as uniquely “at risk” of victimization by the predominantly white European male tourists who engage in relationships with them: “Who is allowed to enjoy the privileges of transnational mobility, and who is not?” Williams argues that, in this case, trafficking discourse is used as a convenient mechanism to deny Afro-Brazilian women their right to freedom of movement.

The vicissitudes of global mobility for the privileged undeniably influence the number of tourists and sex workers in locations that prove particularly

popular for various reasons. Gregory Mitchell, for example, notes the disturbing introduction of a 6,001 percent annualized inflation rate in Brazil alongside dramatically increased numbers of both sex tourists and heterosexually identified sex workers who cater to gay male clients. Pankonien also notes this phenomenon in Huatulco, as this state-developed tourism region on Mexico's Pacific coast has attracted a number of rural migrants, many of them women, whose precarious economic situation necessitates multiple sexual partners chosen for instrumental reasons.

These seeming contradictions between sex workers' professions of agency and the severe socioeconomic constraints and stigma that shape their lives is particularly evident in chapters that deal with the politics of activist organizing and donor aid. In her powerful chapter, Heather Montgomery documents the huge amount of international attention granted to pedophilia and child-sex tourism in Thailand, resulting in the passage of Thai laws that in no way benefit minors who sell sex. Such minors, Montgomery reports, see sex work as a more lucrative choice out of a number of equally exploitative options that are more highly paid and used to support their families; in many ways, such Thai laws were developed along Western European/North American discursive lines. Mitchell presents a striking parallel as he describes why *michês*, heterosexually identified men who sell sex to gay North American and Western European tourists, refuse to become involved in Brazil's sex worker movements because they feel their work is temporary, they fear being labeled as "gay," and their machismo prevents them from engaging in activist organizing with one another. Orchard similarly traces the moral-medical discourse with respect to *devadasis*, which has serious health implications, particularly in terms of international, donor-funded, anti-HIV/AIDS campaigns that focus solely on condom use rather than the more substantive issues of sustainable alternatives to sex work. The frequency of such public-policy failures prompts us to ask a significant question: What can the ethnography of sex work offer public policy on sex work?

Ethnography, Sex Work, and Public Policy

Chapters in this volume, largely written by anthropologists, offer a number of concrete suggestions and recommendations to policy makers regarding how public policy on sex work could be improved in a diverse set of cultural and geographic contexts. In the volume's sole non-ethnographic chapter, Goodyear and Weitzer present a case for evidence-based public policy on sex work that is amply supported by ethnographic evidence documented in

the rest of the chapters. The authors argue that many contemporary public policies on sex work are ineffective precisely because they are based upon morally loaded assumptions about sex work that do not draw upon actual research on the subject. Numerous chapters in this volume provide examples of the myriad ways in which such policies are often unable to meet their goals because of policymakers' lack of knowledge about the circumstances under which sex work takes place.

Kelly, for instance, documents the failures of moral-medical reform efforts in a state-owned Mexican brothel that strictly regulates its women workers under the premise of moral and medical hygiene but fails to protect them from violence or stigma. The ostensible public health-related goal of state involvement in sex work in this case is the reduction of HIV and other STIs through mandatory testing of sex workers, although their clients are not similarly screened. The obvious result of such a skewed policy, of course, is the state sanctioning of sex workers as vectors of disease despite vast amounts of evidence that sex workers are far more likely than non-sex workers to consistently use condoms during sex (Waddell 1996). By placing sex workers under its watchful eye, Kelly argues, the state asserts control in ways far more beneficial to the state than to those the state is regulating. Kelly's chapter opens with the murder of a sex worker in a state-owned brothel, a particularly jarring reminder that state involvement does not, ultimately, trump social stigma and deeply ingrained disregard for the dignity of sex workers.

Such violence is clearly evident in Susan Dewey's discussion of how exclusionary zoning policies in a mid-size U.S. city that never recovered from deindustrialization in the 1970s combine with the feminization of poverty to create a dangerous work environment for topless dancers. Dewey offers examples of dancers' efforts to obtain autonomy through increased earning power and flexible working hours, yet their constant fears of violence stem from a vast array of institutional and interpersonal obstacles that render them vulnerable to harassment in the isolated regions where they work. Izugbara similarly describes the intricate set of arrangements that sex workers employ to protect themselves and one another from violent assaults by police and clients in Nairobi, where sex work is made illegal via a number of municipal by-laws. He notes the frequency with which sex workers clearly named criminalization as the source of their stigma, unfavorable working conditions, and, most notably, the consistency with which they confronted violence in their everyday lives.

Similarly, Mitchell argues that activists and state officials alike ignore the heavy toll of stigma and its impact on particular communities at high risk of

HIV infection at their own peril, and sometimes with disastrous and counterproductive results. He commends the laudable efforts put forth thus far into raising awareness and changing risky sexual behaviors among heterosexually identified men who have sex with men, noting that such energies successfully recognize “the separation of identity and behavior.” Nonetheless, Mitchell also takes such actors to task for failing to understand the complex cultural reasons why such men resist involvement in sex workers’ rights movements. In order to be more successful, Mitchell argues, such efforts must make a deeper effort to understand the powerful role stigmatization plays.

Ethnography’s greatest potential contribution to public policy lies in its ability to represent the everyday realities of life for individuals who often constitute a population invisible to policy makers. This is particularly notable in the case of laws that do not benefit the intended party, as Montgomery observes in her discussion of Thai anti-pedophilia laws passed under heavy pressure from Western European and North American governments. Although these laws were passed with positive intentions, they erred by failing to consult the very individuals they were meant to protect. She notes that “focusing on the perpetrator meant that the children themselves became marginal to discussions about their own lives.”

When contextualized within the broader realities of many sex workers’ everyday life experiences cross-culturally, public policy on sex work is often shown to be seriously lacking. The infinitely more pressing issues at stake for many sex workers around the world, as the chapters in this volume amply illustrate, include the lack of sustainable economic alternatives and a pervasive risk of violence. These chapters clearly demonstrate that the continuum of control sex workers experience in their work is a significant factor in the amount of violence they experience, both from state agents and their clients. For instance, Henry Trotter argues that dockside prostitution in South Africa, which involves in-port sailors and independent local sex workers who have significant control over the terms of the exchange, serves as a model style of sex work that, if used to inform public policy, could significantly reduce the otherwise endemic violence against sex workers.

Trotter argues that if all forms of South African sex work followed the model presented by dockside prostitution, sex workers would likely find themselves in a much safer environment in which they incur far fewer risks to their health and safety. He offers recommendations for prostitution’s decriminalization and the provision of independent-operator status to

sex workers alongside the promotion of ancillary third-party involvement. These recommendations may seem surprising given popular perceptions that dockside prostitution is associated with violence owing to its clientele's transient nature. Because ethnography is based, as noted, in the everyday life experiences of sex workers, it has enormous potential to offer such recommendations. The following chapters encourage us to come to terms with the reality that sex work exists nearly everywhere in the world and warrants serious attention from policy makers.

NOTES

1. Chapters throughout this volume follow geographer David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as

a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up those military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions required to secure private property rights and to guarantee, by force if need be, the proper functioning of markets. Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution) then they must be created, by state action as necessary. But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit. (Harvey 2005:2)

2. Particularly nuanced examples of this kind of ethnographic writing can be found in Brennan 2004; Brents, Jackson, and Haubeck 2009; Cabezas 2009; Day 2007; Dewey 2011, 2008; Kelly 2008; Padilla 2007; Zheng 2009a.

3. There have been many divisive and bitter polemics among scholars and activists about the nature of sex work in general and prostitution in particular. Melissa Farley (2004) perhaps most fully captures the contemporary perspective that prostitution is not work but is exploitative gendered violence that embodies women's inequality. Così Fabian's statement that "by using a pre-patriarchal model of female sexuality as a noble, even divine power, I have constructed a life that is extraordinarily sweet" (1997:45) would likely be greeted by Farley and other antiprostitution activists with cries of false consciousness, whereas those in agreement see sex work as a valid and even spiritual path. For an excellent discussion of the diversity of contemporary scholarly perspectives on sex work, see Weitzer 2009b.

4. Although dissent and collective organizing are possible under neoliberalism, many scholars have characterized these policies as potentially politically demobilizing (Brooks 2007; Farmer 2003; Farthing 1995; Gill 2009).

5. Studies of more lucrative forms of prostitution are outside the scope of this volume and might result in a different set of policy recommendations, as the privacy of such exchanges results in reduced public scrutiny. Analyses of more “upscale” forms of sex work can be found in Bernstein (2007b), Kokken, Bimbi, and Parsons (2010), Kuo (2002), and Lucas (2005), as well as in Viviana Zelizer’s (2007) fascinating sociological analysis of the commodification of intimacy. Social scientists interested in sex work might do well to heed anthropologist Laura Nader’s (1972) call to “study up” in this regard.

6. For examples of this perspective on sex work, which is often termed “abolitionist” because it advocates outlawing prostitution on the grounds that it constitutes violence against women, see Barry 1996; Dworkin 2006; Farley 2004; Jeffreys 2008; Raphael 2004.