

When Work is Sex: Bodies, Choice and Capitalism

PROGRAMME

10am - welcome, conference registration and breakfast

OPENING SESSION

COLLECTIVE KNOWLEDGE / COLLECTIVE HISTORIES

Moderator: Kate Hardy

In this opening panel we invite conference participants to reflect and discuss powerful and historical texts that have been important in the development of the sex worker movement. Presentations will offer commentary and insights drawn from a selection of texts. The readings are in the reading pack. Pre-reading is highly recommended!

- ★ P.G Macioti: Globalizing Sex Worker Rights by Kamala Kempadoo
- ★ Katie Cruz: Sex, Work and Capitalism (2014) by Nancy Holmstrom
- ★ Luca Stevenson: For Prostitutes Against Prostitution - Crossing the Divide Between Sex Workers and Other Women by English Collective of Prostitutes (1990)
- ★ Margret Corvid: Migrants in the Mistress's House: Other Voices in the "Trafficking" Debate (2005) by Laura Agustin

11.30am - 1pm - MORNING PANELS (choose one)

MORNING PANEL: WHAT DOES SEX PRODUCE?

Moderator: Xanthe Whittaker

The Traffic in Young Girls: Crisis, Criminality, and Moral Currencies in the Libidinal Economy

- ★ Maya Andrea Gonzalez, University of California, Santa Cruz & Cassandra Troyan, independent scholar

Sex work and 'neo developmentist' regimes of accumulation

- ★ Kate Hardy, University of Leeds & Feminist Fightback

If Sex Work is Work, What Kind of Work Is It?

- ★ Camille Barbagallo, University of East London, x:talk project

MORNING PANEL: BEYOND THE WORK DEBATE: NEW QUESTIONS OF SEX WORK AS LABOUR

Moderator: Katie Cruz

Time & the Ageless Goddess: Performing Age in Femdom Fetish Porn

- ★ Itziar Bilbao Urrutia

Male Sex Workers: A comparative study of a fringe phenomenon in Italy and Sweden.

- ★ Marco Bacio - University of Milan & Lund University.

MORNING PANEL: SELF-ORGANISATION AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Moderator: Heidi Hoefinger

Radio Ava: an Internet radio show for and by sex workers

★ Ava Caradonna*

Winning the Culture Wars: Sex Worker Opera

★ Siobhan Knox

1pm - 2pm - lunch will be available for all

2pm - 3.30pm - AFTERNOON PANELS (choose one)

AFTERNOON PANEL: THE LIMITS OF CHOICE AND EMPOWERMENT

Moderator: Heidi Hoefinger

Rethinking the Specificity of Sex Work: The Limits of the Parameter of Free Choice

★ PG Maciotti - Hydra e.V., Berlin; ICRSE; x:talk project

Understanding the Impact of Clients Criminalisation and Gentrification on Migrant and Non-migrant Sex Workers in France and the UK

★ Nicola Mai - University of Kingston

AFTERNOON PANEL: FIGHTING THE LAW, DEMANDING THE LAW

Moderator: Xanthe Whittaker

Sex workers organising to end criminalisation

★ Laura Watson, English Collective of Prostitutes

Sex as Work: The Limits of Civil and Labour Rights Strategies

★ Katie Cruz - University of Leeds

AFTERNOON PANEL: ORGANISING FROM THE STREET TO THE GLOBAL

Moderator: Camille Barbagallo

Sex Worker Breakfasts and Spaces of Vulnerability

★ Ava Caradonna*

Sex Worker Organising at a European level

★ Luca Stevenson, ICRSE coordinator

4pm - 5.30pm CLOSING SESSION: WE SPEAK. YOU DONT LISTEN

Moderator: Camille Barbagallo

Building counter-power in the sex industry and developing an anti-capitalist perspective with presentations from Genera (Barcelona), STRASS (France) and Empower (Thailand)

6pm - 9.30pm - Celebrate 10 years of the x:talk project @ The Common House - Unit 5E Pundersons Gardens, Bethnal Green.

MORNING PANEL SESSIONS: 11.30 - 1.00pm

PANEL: WHAT DOES SEX PRODUCE?

Kate Hardy

Sex work and 'neo developmentist' regimes of accumulation

Sex work has been identified as an important dimension of the 'survival circuits' which have developed in the majority world in the context of neo-liberalisation, as a response to the deepening misery of the Global South (Sassen 2002). Drawing on data with sex workers across ten cities in Argentina gathered between 2007 and 2014, this presentation examines multiple spaces of sex workers' lives, including the workplace, the home and the state in a context of what has been dubbed a 'neo-developmental' regime of accumulation. It argues that sex work contributes multiple forms of value and subsidies for the state and capital. First, in the form of the provision of 'employment', second, female sex workers provide unwaged reproductive labour in the family and third, in the labour movement. Yet despite these three contributions to the reproduction of the working class and therefore of capital, the state undermines sex workers' capacities through violence and the sustained repression. The paper concludes the neo-developmentalism has led to 'uneven divestment of the state' in the reproduction of particular sections of the working class, namely those outside the formal and 'productive' sectors.

Camille Barbagallo

If Sex Work is Work, What Kind of Work Is It?

In this presentation the work of sex is discussed within the Marxist feminist concept of reproductive labour and sexualised labour is considered within broader trends of the commodification of reproduction that have provided one of the central mechanisms of growth and accumulation for neoliberal capitalism. The presentation considers to possibilities and alliances that emerge from situating the struggle of sex workers within broader social movements of waged and unwaged reproductive workers. The dynamics of race and migration that structure the globalised sex industry are also interrogated through considering how campaigns to decriminalise and regulate the sex industry often work against the interests of undocumented migrant sex workers.

Cassandra Troyan & Maya Andrea Gonzalez

The Traffic in Young Girls: Crisis, Criminality, and Moral Currencies in the Libidinal Economy

This paper provides a cognitive map of contemporary globalization by constellating the lives and labors of young sex workers across the Global North and South. This talk, only part of a much larger project, draws out implicit connections between the disparate socio-economic constraints under which young women reproduce their lives in the aftermath of economic crisis. Under the aegis of "conscious capitalism" and private sector white-saviorism in Anti-Trafficking NGOs, we argue that states are waging tactics of criminalization and social abjection against sex workers in order to harness the latent capacities of low-cost, female labor-power. By freeing adolescent workers from "sexual slavery" for commercial purposes, the current war on sex work additionally stands to mitigate popular and fiscal uncertainty around the rising tide of immigrant and surplus populations rather than attacking the structural causes of global inequality, staggering under-employment and epidemic homelessness.

PANEL: BEYOND THE WORK DEBATE: NEW QUESTIONS OF SEX WORK AS LABOUR

Itziar Bilbao Urrutia

Time & the Ageless Goddess: Performing Age in Femdom Fetish Porn

I gave a paper on ageing and female fetish performers at a conference two years ago, organised by Sarah Harman. Since then, my interest on the subject of how more niche porn subcultures represent, express and value older women's sexuality, has only grown. I specialise in Femdom fetish, so today I will talk specifically about it. For this paper, I am reframing the subject within mainstream culture, by comparing the roles and representation of older women in femdom fetish porn, to the roles and representation that we find in mainstream culture and society. We hear a lot about young people being brainwashed into unrealistic, damaging narratives about their bodies and sexuality by porn, but the subject of women in their 40's and over and their sexuality, that has been inspiring rivers of pixels lately, is also creating narratives that are becoming canon and that I find just as damaging, negative, unrealistic and disempowering.

Marco Bacio

Male Sex Workers: A comparative study of a fringe phenomenon in Italy and Sweden.

This research aims at mapping and analysing the phenomenon of male sex workers (specifically men that sell sex to other men, M2M or M\$M) in Italy and Sweden. If female sex work has been studied from different scholars worldwide, a lack of attention exists on the male side of the phenomenon. This gap in the academic literature mirrors a more general 'invisibility' of the issue also in other domains - politics (governments and public institutions), press and public opinion. Why should men in XXI century still be willing to pay for sexual encounter, when sex among gay people appears so easily and freely accessible?

PANEL: SELF-ORGANISATION AND SELF-REPRESENTATION

Ava Caradonna*

Radio Ava: an Internet radio show for and by sex workers

In this presentation / performance, Ava Caradonna discusses the possibilities for community internet radio and the strategic need for self-organisation and self-representation in the sex worker movement.

Siobhan Knox

Winning the Culture Wars: Sex Worker Opera

The Sex Workers Opera, was a multimedia production based in London created by sex workers and allies, telling stories of sex workers (positive, negative and complex) both locally and globally.

AFTERNOON PANEL SESSION 2pm - 3.30pm

PANEL: FIGHTING THE LAW, DEMANDING THE LAW

Laura Watson

Sex workers organising to end criminalisation

Across the world women face a critical situation as war, economic and environmental devastation fuel an increase in prostitution. Millions, who survive and support their families through sex work, risk persecution and prosecution. In the UK destitution and poverty, particularly among people seeking asylum, single mothers and young people has soared. Sex workers are the targets of police illegality and racism, especially those of us who work on the street. If we report rape and other violence we risk prosecution for prostitution offences while our attacker goes free. Anti-trafficking is primarily used to detain and deport migrant workers while genuine victims don't get help.

Katie Cruz

Sex as Work: The Limits of Civil and Labour Rights Strategies

Challenging the criminalization of sex work, activists stress the need to respect the sexual autonomy of sex workers and/or the autonomous choice of sex work as a profession (My Body, My Business). This perspective is sometimes framed as a demand for the privacy rights of consensual sex workers and their clients. UK governments remain far from viewing sex work as a private matter. Indeed, the last Labour government insisted that sex workers, on the basis of their vulnerability, are incapable of consenting to engage in prostitution. The first question I ask and answer is whether sex workers could successfully use the right to privacy (Article 8 combined with the Article 14 prohibition on discrimination) to challenge criminalisation. Focusing on the brothel keeping provision, I argue that this approach suffers from some likely insurmountable courtroom hurdles.

However, of equal interest to me is the political, legal, and subjective effects of the claim that sex work is a private matter. Paraphrasing Wendy Brown's discussion of privacy in the context of US abortion debates: 'What is analytically and politically forfeited by discursively situating' sex work 'as a privacy issue?' (2000, 476). In the second part of this paper, I answer this question in two ways. First, I argue that the right to privacy depoliticises dominant social relations in sex work and reproduces sex workers in line with hegemonic neoliberal ideology: the self as enterprise or entrepreneur. Second, I argue that the demand that sex work be viewed as a private matter necessarily troubles arguments for rights as workers. And so, while sex workers often work in conditions of false self-employment (wherein treatment appears closer to an employer-employee relationship) it is by no means clear that sex workers are going to attempt to secure labour protections as 'employees' or 'workers'. What, then, is the content of the demand for rights as workers? Given increasing acceptance that sex work is work perhaps it is time to fill up the demand for rights as workers with concrete legal and political demands.

PANEL: THE LIMITS OF CHOICE AND EMPOWERMENT

PG Maciotti

Rethinking the Specificity of Sex Work: The Limits of the Parameter of Free Choice

The aim of this paper is to give an insight into the reasons that make sex work and prostitution such a contested ground within feminism, within the academia, and at many different political levels. My presentation analyses sex works' specificity in order to identify what better politics on sex work could look like, referring to different legislative approaches. To do this, I introduce the labour aspect of sex work and put forward a critique of the parameter of "free choice" in capitalist societies. Then, I proceed to analyse the specificity of sex work, which is the moralising of "sex" in our societies and the gendered, sexualised and racialised power relations which are at the basis of the whore stigma. In order to do that, I look first into the gendered aspect of stigma; then into its links with heteronormativity, and finally into its interactions with matters of race and migration. To conclude, the paper turns to sex work and governance, claiming that under the current socio-political conditions, perfect prostitution politics are not possible. Under these circumstances I suggest that the main focus of legislation should be the improvement of the life conditions of sex workers, that is, the fight against the stigma against them, rather than the pursue of paternalistic and further stigmatising politics of rescue which completely forget to ask the opinion of the so called "victims" to be "saved." Overall, this paper is an attempt and call to further analyse the complexity of sex work and of the relations of power in which it is embedded, in order not to reproduce easy and misleading polarisations between positions pro- and against it.

Nicola Mai

Understanding the Impact of Clients Criminalisation and Gentrification on Migrant and Non-migrant Sex Workers in France and the UK

Recent public and political debates on prostitution have been characterized by a renewed interest in the so-called 'Swedish model' as a possible future legal and policymaking framework. In the UK, the 2009 Policing and Crime Act gave the police even more arbitrary power to crack down on the sex industry and to potentially fine clients of people 'subject to exploitative conduct' in the name of the fight against trafficking and exploitation. For instance in London under the growing pressure of gentrification and regeneration anti-trafficking rescue raids and heightened policing have been used in Soho and in the Olympic boroughs to disrupt and close down established indoor and outdoor commercial sex venues. In France, the resonance acquired by debates on the criminalization of clients since 2013 has meant that law enforcement agencies, local authorities, sex workers and clients have often behaved as if the criminalization of clients (recently abrogated at the French Senate in October 2015) was already in place. In both countries the passing of restrictive provisions targeting sex workers in the name of an ill-defined fight against 'modern slavery' and the resonance of wider debates on the criminalization of clients have partially anticipated the effects that such criminalization is likely to have. While prices of sexual services are decreasing, sex workers try to escape increasing police controls by moving to more hidden and

unsafe areas and take much greater risks to keep earning their livelihoods. This presentation will draw of the findings emerging from original peer-based research data gathered between 2007 and 2015 in London and Paris, showing that only a minority of migrants working in the sex industry are trafficked and that the vast majority of sex workers (98% in France) are against the criminalisation of clients. I will discuss the ways in which highly mediatized debates on the criminalization of clients become powerful embedding mechanisms for the deployment of anticipatory and complementary measures that have exacerbated migrant and non-migrant sex workers' vulnerability to violence, crime and exploitation.

PANEL: ORGANISING FROM THE STREET TO THE GLOBAL

Ava Caradonna*

Sex Worker Power Breakfasts and Spaces of Vulnerability

The organisers of a regular sex worker space share their thoughts on hosting, organising and having a regular sex worker space, organising and anti-organising, respite, recovery, routine, incitement, on spaces that are never safe, attempts to seek greater safety, what sorts of 'solidarity' are possible, the kinds of impossible challenges and surprises we're facing on a week-in and week-out basis.

Luca Stevenson, ICRSE coordinator

Sex Worker Organising at a European level

In December 2015, ICRSE published its report on 10 years of sex workers' rights activism and advocacy in Europe to mark to 10th anniversary of the Declaration on the rights of sex workers in Europe. <http://www.sexworkeurope.org/news/general-news/december-17-launch-10-years-report-sex-workers-rights-europe-and-central-asia>. Luca Stevenson will present the findings of the report and the different trends affecting sex workers in the region drawing on his personal and professional experience as activist and coordinator of ICRSE organising with sex workers communities from UK, France, Romania or Turkey

Who is Ava Caradonna?

Ava Caradonna is a migrant, a sex worker, a student, a mother, a citizen, a trans woman, a person of colour, a teacher, a lesbian and a militant. She allows us to speak from different positions as sex workers and as allies, without the stigma of using our 'real' names and allows us to speak to the different realities in the sex industry and beyond. We do not wish to participate in a politics that creates individual 'celebrity' activists. As a result, when required we use the collective identity of Ava Caradonna (which roughly translates to 'Eve the Good Woman').