

# From State Pump to Transnational Abolitionist

## CHANGING DISCOURSES AND APPROACHES TO PROSTITUTION

**B**uzz words such as “human trafficking,” “sex work,” and “slave trade” haunt the daily media and evoke a gamut of emotions. Enunciated by activists, sectarians, public officials, and sex workers alike, discourses on prostitution abound. Why are such discussions on prostitution so prolific? And, what is at stake for the people who publicize them? How do the words and ideas that surround and define “the prostitute” shape the business of sex work in the first place?

Ann Marie Davis opens the panel with a consideration of the anti-prostitution movement in late nineteenth-century Japan. In particular, her research explores how transnational discourses on abolitionism (re)presented “the prostitute” in the midst of overarching debates on the future of “modern” Japan. Next, Shawna Herzog suggests that due to the restructuring of Russian polities, certain Russian women were at greater risk of being “pimped-out” through sex trafficking across state lines. She notes especially that an

affiliation with western-style feminism was seen as detrimental to anti-sex trafficking organizing, and that women involved in the Russian sex worker movement actively distanced themselves from those women labeled “feminist.” Third, Jennifer Musto investigates the unexpected networks and alliances that have formed in current U.S. movements against human trafficking. Considering the “prostitution question” from various angles, her analysis sheds further light on the shifting inscriptions that human trafficking debates have imposed on the very notion of sex work. Finally, Michiko Takeuchi focuses on a “reverse course” for Japan, in which “ordinary” women were recruited by the Japanese government to cater sexual services to U.S. Occupation Forces after World War II. Her paper reveals how both the U.S. and Japan benefited from the commodification of women, despite their imbalanced post-war relationship.

This panel offered an exciting array of recent scholarship on trafficking, and the audi-

ence exchange with the panelists was lively and informative. Many of the questions centered around the importance of terminology to accurately describe different types of trafficking (for example, sex trafficking and labor trafficking) and sex work. The terms become important for understanding how women who have been trafficked self-identify and why they often do not align themselves with groups who might seem, to outsiders, “natural allies”. This panel took a multidisciplinary and transnational approach in considering some of these critical issues. By tracing how discourses on prostitution have changed across time and space, the panel members drew attention to a surprising array of approaches and strategies for investigating the phenomenon of prostitution.

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