

Editorial: Gains and Challenges in the Global Movement for Sex Workers' Rights

Annalee Lepp and Borislav Gerasimov

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Over the past two decades, there has been a growing body of excellent academic and community-based literature on sex workers' lives, work, and organising efforts, and on the harmful effects of anti-trafficking discourses, laws, and policies on diverse sex worker communities. Importantly, a significant portion of this work has been produced by sex workers and sex worker organisations.¹ When we decided to devote this Special Issue of *Anti-Trafficking Review* to the theme of sex work, we acknowledged this reality. However, we also thought that, given that the discourses, laws, and policies that directly impact sex workers globally are continually changing, the production of new evidence-based research and critical perspectives is constantly needed.

Sex Workers Organising for Change

While the history of sex worker activism can be traced to at least the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of the literature focuses on the emergence and growth of the global sex worker rights movement beginning in the 1970s and 1980s.² Since then, sex workers (women, men, trans, and non-binary people) have organised to demand recognition of sexual labour as labour;

¹ See, as one of many examples: P G Maciotti and G G Geymonat, *Sex Workers Speak. Who listens?*, Beyond Trafficking and Slavery, 2016, https://cdn-prod.opendemocracy.net/media/documents/BTS_Sex_Workers_Speak.pdf.

² See, for example, G Gall, *Sex Worker Union Organising: An international study*, Palgrave MacMillan, New York, 2006; NSWP, *History*, <https://nswp.org/history>; K Kempadoo and J Doezema, eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, resistance, and redefinition*, Routledge, New York and London, 1998.

challenge stigma, discrimination, and all forms of violence, including by law enforcement; improve working conditions; lobby for full human, social, and labour rights; advocate for the decriminalisation of sex work; and provide peer-based support and services. Many sex worker organisations also organise and support migrant sex workers in an effort to address the specific challenges they confront, such as racism and xenophobia, precarity due to their im/migration status, lack of access to health and other services, vulnerability to exploitation and violence, and the risk of detention and deportation.

Since the 1990s, sex workers and sex worker organisations have also had to contend with the emergence, expansion, and strengthening of the global ‘anti-trafficking industry’ with its strong anti-sex work, criminal justice, and border control agendas.³ Sex worker organisations in Spain, Thailand, and India, for example, pointed out in a recent Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women report that trafficking was ‘an issue that was introduced [or indeed imposed] from outside the industry itself, propelled by a moralistic agenda, that organisations have felt obliged to understand, in order to counter the harmful effects of conceptually conflating trafficking and sex work.’⁴ In many countries, anti-trafficking legislation, policies, and interventions have targeted sex workers with highly detrimental impacts. This has taken the form of greater police surveillance of the sex industry, raids on sex work establishments, forced detention in rehabilitation centres, arrests and prosecutions of sex workers as traffickers, and deportations of migrant sex workers—all of which undermine and ignore sex workers’ agency as well as their legitimate demands for better working conditions and human, social, and labour rights.⁵ Further, the crucial role of sex worker organisations in promoting the rights, safety, and security of sex workers and addressing working conditions in the industry has largely gone unrecognised by national and international policymakers, donors, and some non-governmental organisations. The ideologies, assumptions, and agendas that fuel the anti-trafficking industry have also resulted in the exclusion

³ K Kempadoo, ‘Abolitionism, Criminal Justice, and Transnational Feminism: Twenty-first century perspectives on human trafficking’, in K Kempadoo, J Sanghera and B Pattaniak (eds.), *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New perspectives on migration, sex work, and human rights*, 2nd edition, Paradigm, Boulder and London, 2012, pp. vii–xlii; see also: K Kempadoo, ‘The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man’s Burden: Trends in anti-trafficking and anti-slavery campaigns’, *Journal of Human Trafficking*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2015, pp. 8–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23322705.2015.1006120>.

⁴ M Stacey and B Gerasimov, ‘Introduction’, in Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, *Sex Workers Organising for Change: Self-representation, community mobilisation and working conditions*, GAAATW, Bangkok, 2018, p. 30.

⁵ *Ibid.*; see also: Global Network of Sex Work Projects, *Policy Brief: The impact of anti-trafficking legislation and initiatives on sex workers*, NSWP, 2019, Edinburgh, <https://www.nswp.org/resource/policy-brief-the-impact-anti-trafficking-legislation-and-initiatives-sex-workers>.

and silencing of sex workers and sex worker organisations when it comes to the development of legislation and policies that directly affect their lives and work. Over the last ten years, this trend has certainly been evident in countries where governments have enacted laws that criminalise the purchase of sexual services in the name of gender equality, protecting the vulnerable, and preventing trafficking for sexual exploitation.

#20yrsFailingSexWorkers⁶

Twenty years ago, in 1999, Sweden became the first country in the world to criminalise the purchase—but not the sale—of sexual services, combining this with measures to support sex workers who wanted to exit the sex industry.⁷ Based on an ideological conceptualisation of prostitution as violence against women and an obstacle to gender equality, it was initially introduced with the aim of reducing prostitution by targeting men’s demand for commercial sexual services. However, with the adoption of the UN Trafficking Protocol in 2000,⁸ and the last-minute insertion of Art. 9 (5) that calls on states to ‘discourage the demand that fosters all forms of exploitation of persons, especially women and children, that leads to trafficking’,⁹ the Swedish model has since then been promoted as a way to prevent trafficking in the sex industry. Despite the lack

⁶ In March 2019, the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe chose this motto to mark twenty years since the introduction of Swedish model. See: <https://twitter.com/search?q=%2320yrsfailingsexworkers&src=typed>.

⁷ While proponents of the Swedish model point to the availability of exit services as a unique feature of the model, this is not true. Exit services can be provided under any legislative model. For example, in the Netherlands, where sex work is legal and regulated, the government allocated EUR 14,5 million (approx. USD 18 million at the time) for exit services between 2009 and mid-2011. According to the programme’s evaluation, by 2013, 1,800 people had accessed the programme and 1,002 had left the sex industry (including 139 potential victims of trafficking). See: L Heuts and G Homburg, *Overzicht en Stand van Zaken Uitstapprogramma’s voor Prostituees, Factsheet*, Regioplan, Amsterdam, 2013, https://wodc.nl/binaries/2404-volledige-tekst_tcm28-73359.pdf, p. 6. This programme was extended to July 2019, with the government providing EUR 3 million (approx. USD 4 million) per year, which is co-financed by municipalities and exit programmes are now available in two-thirds of all municipalities. See: M Timermans, M Kuin, and J van Leerdam, *Evaluatie Uitstapprogramma’s Prostitutie. Deelrapport landelijke dekking en toekomstige financiële regeling*, Regioplan, Amsterdam, 2018, https://wodc.nl/binaries/2943a_Volledige_Tekst_tcm28-368322.pdf. We are not aware of similar evaluations of exit services in Sweden, although they may well exist.

⁸ UN General Assembly, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*, 15 November 2000, (Trafficking Protocol).

⁹ *Ibid.*, Art. 9 (5).

of conclusive evidence that the model has managed to either reduce sex work or prevent trafficking in Sweden,¹⁰ it has been packaged as a mechanism to promote gender equality, protect the vulnerable, and prevent trafficking in the sex industry. As a result, sex purchase bans have since been adopted in Norway and Iceland (2009), Canada (2014), Northern Ireland (2015), France (2016), the Republic of Ireland (2017), and Israel (2018).

At the same time and over the same period, there has been mounting evidence that the Swedish model exacerbates the stigma against sex workers and forces them to engage in more dangerous activities, and increases the risk of HIV and STIs, and violence from clients and the police. This evidence has often been accompanied by support for the decriminalisation of sex work and has come from academics,¹¹ UN agencies,¹² human rights organisations,¹³ medical professionals,¹⁴ LGBTI+ organisations,¹⁵ anti-trafficking

¹⁰ A Jordan, *The Swedish Law to Criminalize Clients: A failed experiment in social engineering*, Center for Human Rights & Humanitarian Law, American University Washington College of Law, Washington, DC, 2012.

¹¹ British journalist, radical feminist, and avid promoter of the Swedish model Julie Bindel has devoted a book chapter to examining why ‘the majority of academics within the UK, US and elsewhere’ support the rights of sex workers and call for decriminalisation of sex work. J Bindel, *The Pimping of Prostitution: Abolishing the sex work myth*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2017, p. xxxiv.

¹² See, among others: J Levine, *Risks, Rights & Health*, UNDP and HIV/AIDS Group, New York, 2012; UNAIDS, *Guidance Note on HIV and Sex Work*, UNAIDS, Geneva, 2012; World Health Organisation, *Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Prevention, Diagnosis, Treatment and Care for Key Populations*, WHO, Geneva, 2014; B Harkins (ed.), *Thailand Migration Report 2019*, United Nations Thematic Working Group on Migration in Thailand, Bangkok, 2019.

¹³ Amnesty International, *Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers*, AI, 2016; Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2014*, New York, 2014; M C Hinayon, ‘Sex Work Should be Decriminalized’, *American Civil Liberties Union Southern California*, 14 October 2016, retrieved 15 March 2019, <https://www.aclusocal.org/en/news/sex-work-should-be-decriminalized>.

¹⁴ One of the many examples is the special issue of *The Lancet*, ‘HIV and Sex Workers’. See: P Das and R Horton, ‘Bringing sex workers to the centre of the HIV response’, *The Lancet*, vol. 385, issue 9962, 2015, pp. 3-4, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(14\)61064-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(14)61064-3).

¹⁵ See: ‘LGBTI Organisations from across the World Call for Decriminalisation of Sex Work’, Joint statement by the International Lesbian and Gay Association, The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe and the New Zealand Prostitutes’ Collective, Wellington, 23 March 2019, <https://ilga.org/sex-work-lgbti-organisations-call-for-decriminalisation>; B Fedorko, *Sex Work Policy*, Transgender Europe, 2016; Lambda Legal, ‘LGBT Rights Organizations Join Amnesty International in Call to Decriminalize Sex Work’, *Lambda Legal Blog*, 20 August 2015, https://www.lambdalegal.org/blog/20150820_decriminalize-sex-work; J Bindel, ‘A Queer Defence of the Sex Trade’, in Bindel, 2017, pp. 277-303.

organisations,¹⁶ and, of course, sex workers themselves.¹⁷ This begs the question, then, why is it that with such strong and even overwhelming support for the decriminalisation of sex work, backed by extensive evidence-based research, more and more governments are adopting the Swedish model? While this question requires a much more in-depth examination than the space in this Editorial allows, we propose that it is part of a larger global trend towards social conservatism, overreliance on punitive responses to address social and moral ‘problems’ which serve to bolster the conservative agendas of those holding political power,¹⁸ and what has come to be termed *post-truth politics* and its intensification, where ‘objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’¹⁹

Previous issues of the *Anti-Trafficking Review* have documented the simplistic images and narratives used to describe migrant and trafficked women in the sex industry, and the lack of evidence behind many anti-trafficking policies and interventions. In 2016, Andrijasevic and Mai noted that ‘[t]he stereotypical image of the victim is of a young, innocent, foreign woman tricked into prostitution abroad. She is battered and kept under continuous surveillance so that her only hope is police rescue.’²⁰ In 2017, Harkins observed that ‘evidence has not been prioritised within the anti-trafficking sector.’²¹ The use

¹⁶ GAATW, 2018; La Strada International, ‘LSI Opinion: Criminalisation of the clients of sex workers’, n.d., <http://lastradainternational.org/about-lsi/lsi-opinion/criminalising-the-clients-of-sex-workers>; Freedom Network USA, ‘Freedom Network USA supports Amnesty International’s call to Decriminalize Sex Work’, FNUSA, 26 May 2016, <https://freedomnetworkusa.org/freedom-network-usa-supports-amnesty-internationals-call-to-decriminalize-sex-work/>.

¹⁷ Global Network of Sex Work Projects, *Policy Brief: The Impact of ‘End Demand’ Legislation on Women Sex Workers*, NSWP, Edinburgh, 2018, <https://www.nswp.org/resource/policy-brief-the-impact-end-demand-legislation-women-sex-workers>; Global Network of Sex Work Projects, *NSWP Consensus Statement on Sex Work, Human Rights, and the Law*, NSWP, Edinburgh, 2013, <https://www.nswp.org/resource/nswp-consensus-statement-sex-work-human-rights-and-the-law>.

¹⁸ For more on what American sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein has termed ‘carceral feminism’ (i.e. feminists who align with punitive state bodies, such as police and prosecution), see: E Bernstein, *Brokered Subjects: Sex, trafficking & the politics of freedom*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2018.

¹⁹ ‘Post-truth’, Oxford Dictionaries, <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/post-truth>.

²⁰ R Andrijasevic and N Mai, ‘Editorial: Trafficking (in) Representations: Understanding the recurring appeal of victimhood and slavery in neoliberal times’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 7, 2016, pp. 1—10, p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121771>.

²¹ B Harkins, ‘Constraints to a Robust Evidence Base for Anti-Trafficking Interventions’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 8, 2017, pp. 113—130, p. 130, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121787>.

of highly emotive images and stories of victims and the lack (or disregard) of evidence that aligns with the very definition of *post-truth politics* characterise the processes leading to the introduction of the Swedish model in several countries in the past few years.

In Northern Ireland, for example, Lord Morrow from the Democratic Unionist Party, the sponsor of the 2015 *Human Trafficking and Exploitation (Criminal Justice and Support for Victims) Act*, stated that, ‘I always said that additional research was unnecessary’,²² and a member of the Justice Committee concurred, ‘[s]ome of us do not need any research or evidence.’²³ Therefore, the Department of Justice research indicating that most sex workers in Northern Ireland were not trafficked and that the legislation would be hard to enforce and detrimental to sex workers was dismissed.²⁴ Instead, proponents of the law ‘relied heavily on the personal accounts of a small number of survivors of prostitution, who described the sex industry as inherently violent and supported the ban.’²⁵ In France, a survey conducted with 500 sex workers in 2015 prior to the implementation of the 2016 sex purchase ban showed that 98 per cent of respondents opposed the law and that around 7 per cent could have been potential victims of trafficking²⁶ but these findings were similarly ignored. Furthermore, while organisations and individuals supporting the law were involved throughout the process of its development, sex workers and other opponents’ testimonies were largely disregarded, and ‘MPs already knew they would not be convincing.’²⁷ In the Republic of Ireland, Ward argues that ‘by the time the Committee [tasked with developing a law on sex work]’s work began, the political debate was, in fact, all but over’ and that ‘oppositional views [were rendered] vulnerable to accusations of “pimp thinking”’: of being

²² M Morrow, ‘Briefing on Clause 6 of Human Trafficking Bill: Response to DOJ Research’, DUP, 2014, <http://www.mydup.com/publications/view/briefing-on-clause-6-of-human-trafficking-bill-response-to-doj-research>.

²³ As cited in: S Huschke and E Ward, ‘Stopping the Traffick? The problem of evidence and legislating for the “Swedish model” in Northern Ireland’, *Anti-Trafficking Review*, issue 8, 2017, pp. 16—33, p. 26, <https://doi.org/10.14197/atr.20121782>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31. For more on the process in Northern Ireland, see: G Ellison, ‘Criminalising the Payment for Sex in Northern Ireland: Sketching the contours of a moral panic’, *British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 57, issue 1, 2017, pp. 194-214, <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azv107>; G Ellison, ‘Who Needs Evidence? Radical feminism, the Christian right and sex work research in Northern Ireland’, in S Armstrong, J Blaustein and H Alistair (eds.), *Reflexivity and Criminal Justice: Intersections of policy, practice and research*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2016.

²⁶ N Mai, *Sondage sur la Pénalisation de Clients en France*, Marseille, 2015, http://www.lames.cnrs.fr/IMG/pdf/RESUME_ETUDE_PENALISATION-2.pdf.

²⁷ See C Calderaro and C Giametta in this issue.

an apologist for pimps, brothel owners and the exploitation of women and children.²⁸

In Canada, scholars have documented how at the parliamentary hearings on Bill C-36 *The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act* (PCEPA), which introduced the Swedish-style client criminalisation in 2014, more individuals and organisations supportive of PCEPA were invited to present testimony than those opposing it. Furthermore, while Committee members were generally fair and respectful to all witnesses, they were positively biased toward those in agreement with the proposed legislation and at times highly disrespectful to those in opposition to it.²⁹

After testifying before the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights in July 2014, for example, Kerry Porth wrote that ‘From the very first day, current and former sex workers who spoke out against Bill C-36 have been dismissed, ridiculed, subjected to hostile questioning, and heckled in what should be called the “Shame and Loathing Hearings” ... Remarkable Canadian academics ..., who have researched the sex industry in Canada for many years, were regarded as people who are trying to “make it easier for pimps and johns to operate openly in communities across Canada”, rather than as academics providing evidence-based comments to the committee about the dangerous effects of the bill ... Anti-prostitution campaigners, along with victims of human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children and youth in commercial sex, told disturbing stories of violence and abuse ... [T]hose who supported the bill were lauded for their courage in coming forward.’³⁰

What research has shown is that the introduction of the sex purchase ban in all these countries (as well as anti-trafficking legislation more generally) was made possible largely through the forging of powerful alliances among ruling conservative parties, faith-based groups, and prostitution prohibitionist and

²⁸ E Ward, ‘The Irish Parliament and Prostitution Law Reform. A neo-abolitionist shoe-in?’, in E Ward and G Wylie (eds.), *Feminism, Prostitution and the State. The politics of neo-abolitionism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2017, pp. 86-87.

²⁹ G F Johnson, M Burns, and K Porth, ‘A Question of Respect: A qualitative text analysis of the Canadian Parliamentary Committee hearings on The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act’, *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 50, issue 4, 2017, pp. 921-953, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423917000294>.

³⁰ K Porth, ‘Justice Committee on Bill C-36 ignored sex workers’, Pivot Legal Society, 14 July 2014, http://www.pivotlegal.org/justice_committee_ignored_sex_workers. See also: K Porth, M Burns and G F Johnson, *Shouting into the Wind: Experiences of testifying against Bill C-36 The Protection of Communities and Exploited Persons Act*, Vancouver, May 2017, https://www.academia.edu/37590782/Shouting_Into_The_Wind_Experiences_of_Testifying_Against_Bill_C-36_The_Protection_of_Communities_and_Exploited_Persons_Act.

carceral feminists who rely on highly gendered and racialised understandings of sex work and trafficking.³¹ Despite this coordinated attack on sex workers' rights, the dismissal of extensive academic and community-based research on sex workers' lives and work, and the exclusion of sex worker perspectives in the realm of policy development in a *post-truth* environment, the global sex worker rights movement continues to grow and is making itself heard.

This Special Issue

The articles included in this Special Issue examine a range of topics related to sex work. These include explorations of sex worker organising and forms of creative resistance in various countries across Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. While a number of authors highlight the achievements of the sex worker rights movement historically and/or contemporarily, they also identify some of the current challenges, many of which emanate from the implementation of misguided and punitive prostitution and anti-trafficking laws, as well as the broader backlash against human rights and evidence-based policies. Several of the authors are current or former sex workers while others are scholars affiliated with academic institutions. All are strong supporters of and advocates for sex workers' rights and the decriminalisation of sex work.

The first set of articles focuses on sex worker organising. Whether in Toronto, Bogota, Manila, or Cape Town, sex workers around the world are organising to tell their own stories, claim their human, social, and labour rights, resist stigma and punitive laws and policies, and provide mutual and peer-based support. The issue opens with an article by Alex Tigchelaar who reflects on a salient contradiction evident in many urban contexts: the celebration of the local histories of sex work to attract tourists to certain neighbourhoods and the persistent politics of exclusion, which takes the form of the criminalisation of sex work and the implementation of urban revitalisation and gentrification projects that displace sex workers from those very historic areas. Drawing on her experience organising a public exhibition called *The Viminal Space*, in collaboration with three sex worker organisations, at the 2017 Toronto Nuit

³¹ See: Ellison, 2016; Ward, 2017; A Lepp, “‘Collateral Damage’: Anti-trafficking campaigns, border security, and sex workers’ rights struggles in Canada”, in P Gentile, G Kinsman, and L P Rankin (eds.), *We Still Demand! Redefining resistance in sex and gender struggles*, University of British Columbia Press, Vancouver, 2017, pp. 222-249; and, more generally, Bernstein, 2018. In France, the ban was introduced under a socialist government but it was voted in by only 64 members, or a little over 10 per cent, of the National Assembly. See: A Chrisafis, ‘France passes law making it illegal to pay for sex’, *The Guardian*, 6 April 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/apr/06/france-passes-law-illegal-to-pay-for-sex-criminalise-customers>.

Blanche festival, Tigchelaar shows how sex workers can use the arts to draw attention to these ongoing contradictions in the politics of urban spaces. Importantly, she suggests ways in which sex workers can encourage those involved as producers and consumers of neoliberal urban revitalisation projects to connect these paradoxes to the laws that criminalise sex workers' labour.

Sex workers' creative and collective resistance through art and media is also the focus of the article by Amalia Cabezas. In challenging the notion that sex workers first organised in the Global North in the 1970s, she argues that the sex worker rights movement in Latin America and the Caribbean emerged organically and has its own independent and distinct history of organising for social recognition and labour rights and against violence and oppression. Cabezas begins by presenting two examples of sex worker mobilisation in Cuba and Mexico in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She continues by showcasing some of the movement's current political, judicial, and media initiatives and achievements in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Argentina, as well as at the regional level. She concludes by warning that these successes are being threatened by prohibitionist and anti-trafficking ideologies, policies, and practices promoted by the region's powerful neighbour to the north.

Next, Sharmila Parmanand's article focuses on the confluence of factors that inhibit the ability of Filipino sex workers to organise, access resources, and build alliances with other organisations in the country. Based on interviews with members of the Philippines Sex Workers Collective, she explores how advocacy for sex workers' rights is nearly impossible and highly risky in this formerly colonised, deeply Catholic country in which powerful prostitution-prohibitionist discourses dominate at the state, policy-making, and civil society levels. Parmanand points out, for example, that there were no consultations with sex workers during the drafting of the *Anti-Prostitution Law*, formally proposed in 2010, which assumes that all sex workers are victims of trafficking. She also documents the disastrous impact that President Duterte's war on drugs has had on sex workers, with some of her interviewees having suffered harassment, arrest, jail time, and loss of partners due to police corruption and extrajudicial killings. She concludes by proposing a number of strategies that the Collective could adopt to expand its membership, enhance its visibility, and strengthen its advocacy (for example, through the production of evidence-based research and strategic uses of the media).

In their article, Ntokozo Yingwana, Rebecca Walker, and Alex Etchart argue that it is necessary to move away from the dominant 'sex workers as victims' and 'sex work versus trafficking' frameworks and to recognise sex worker rights organisations as legitimate stakeholders in anti-trafficking work. Drawing on interviews with sex workers and sex worker organisations in South Africa, the authors point out that sex workers can and do report cases of trafficking

in the sex industry, but the criminalisation of sex work creates the conditions in which they are often reluctant to do so or are forced into silence. Yingwana, Walker, and Etchart also propose a new model for understanding exploitation and trafficking, based on clear distinctions among migration/mobility, labour (including sex work), and coercive exploitation, and where these situational variables or experiences overlap. The authors suggest that this model can better address the needs of all migrants and sex workers and allow for potential cooperation and alliance-building among organisations working on sex worker rights, migrant rights, labour rights, and anti-trafficking.

Elene Lam and Annalee Lepp's article explores a number of the aforementioned themes—creative resistance, evidence-based research, laws and policies and their impacts, and alliance-building—through a case study of the work of Butterfly, a grassroots and peer-based organisation that is led by Asian and migrant sex workers in Toronto, Canada. The authors document how Butterfly, through various mediums, has sought to challenge the discourses and policies that directly impact Asian and migrant sex workers' lives and work in Canada. These efforts have involved initiatives to resist oppressive immigration, criminal, and municipal laws, to expose the harmful effects of anti-trafficking interventions, and to raise awareness about sex workers' experiences and needs. Lam and Lepp also point out that Butterfly contributes an important intersectional perspective to the sex worker rights movement, grounded in an understanding of the issues faced by Asian and migrant sex workers, including racism, classism, and xenophobia, and the need to build strong alliances among the sex worker, labour, migrant, and racial justice movements.

The next two articles examine sex work through a labour rights lens. Leo Bernardo Villar uses the Unacceptable Forms of Work (UFW) Framework, developed by the International Labour Organization to address 'non-standard' forms of employment, including casual and informal work, to analyse the working conditions in the sex and entertainment sector in Thailand. Based on interviews with sex workers, social service providers, and government officials, Villar demonstrates that all twelve indicators of UFW—related to income, health and safety, working time, and social protections, among others—are present in the sector. The author attributes this to the criminalisation and stigmatisation of sex work and insufficient labour oversight of entertainment venues. To reduce instances of UFW, Villar recommends the decriminalisation of sex work, the amendment of labour and social protection laws to be inclusive of sex workers, and their adequate implementation.

Unlike Villar, Simanti Dasgupta takes a community-based approach to examine sex workers' labour. Drawing on ethnographic work with Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee (DMSC) in Kolkata, India, she conceptualises anti-trafficking raids as a form of state violence. She also explores the significance of anti-trafficking raids in relation to the fact that the brothel is not only a place

of work, but also sex workers' home and a space to organise for labour rights. Through the use of *atyachar* (oppression), the Bengali word sex workers use to describe the violence of raids, Dasgupta argues that they experience the raids not as a spectacle, but as an *ordinary* form of violence in contrast to their *extraordinary* experience of return to the brothel to rebuild their lives. Their return signals both a reclamation of the ordinary and a subversion of the state's attempt to undermine DMSC's labour organising.

The final three thematic articles examine the introduction of recent laws and policies that directly affect sex workers in the United States and France. In her article, Alexandra Lutnick reflects on the process of developing the 'Prioritizing Safety for Sex Workers Policy' enacted by the San Francisco District Attorney's Office and the San Francisco Police Department in 2016. The policy guarantees that sex workers will not be arrested or prosecuted for involvement in illicit activities when they report violent crimes, including trafficking, committed against them. While not without its challenges, the creation and adoption of the policy was made possible through the forging of an alliance comprised of sex workers, anti-trafficking organisations, service providers, women's rights policy makers, and law enforcement. Their point of departure was the recognition that no one wants people in the sex industry to experience violence. The policy, then, provides a unique example of how stakeholders who may hold very different ideological positions on sex work can work together towards a common goal.

The San Francisco policy, however, is an exception. Most laws affecting sex workers are developed *without* their involvement. This trend is well-documented in the article by Charlene Calderaro and Calogero Giametta, who discuss the political debates that led to the adoption of the sex purchase ban in France in April 2016. They point out that the construction of prostitution as a 'social problem' and the adoption of the sex purchase law in France must be linked to broader political anxieties over immigration, security, and public order and to the alliance forged between mainstream feminists, radical left feminists, and traditional neo-abolitionist actors in the campaign against prostitution. Calderaro and Giametta also draw comparisons between the sex purchase ban and the 2004 ban on wearing the hijab in schools, both of which were enacted in the name of women's empowerment and gender equality but were, in fact, prompted by stereotypical and stigmatising representations of poor, immigrant, and Muslim communities. In both cases, there was very little or no consultation with those most affected by the legislation—veiled women and sex workers.

This exclusion of sex workers from policy development, and, increasingly, the closure of their online spaces for expression, is analysed in the final thematic article by Ben Chapman-Schmidt. He demonstrates how in US legal discourse, the term 'sex trafficking' refers not to human trafficking for sexual exploitation,

but to all sex work. Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's work, he argues that the propagation of the term by US institutions and prostitution prohibitionists, and the attempt to reframe all sex work as 'sex trafficking', represents a form of *epistemic violence* against sex workers, as it deprives them of the tools to express themselves and forces them to speak the language of their oppressors. In this analysis, the 2017 *Allow States and Victims to Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act* (FOSTA), which aims to end 'sex trafficking' on the internet, is the latest in a long series of examples of this form of violence. Chapman-Schmidt concludes by urging activists, academics, and journalists concerned with the wellbeing and rights of sex workers to stop using the term 'sex trafficking' in order to end the reproduction of epistemic violence against sex workers.

The implications of FOSTA are also explored—in practical terms—in the short article by Meghan Peterson, Bella Robinson, and Elena Shih. Drawing on an online survey conducted with 262 sex workers, they demonstrate how the law has led to increasing financial insecurity, exploitation, and unsafe practices among sex workers. The authors also suggest that FOSTA may affect sex workers outside the US, with at least two other countries introducing or debating similar legislation.

The other short article, by Nadia van der Linde, emphasises that, with the establishment of the Red Umbrella Fund in 2012, of which she is the coordinator, there have been some advances made in terms of funding the sex worker rights movement globally. However, with only USD 11 million in grants to support sex worker rights worldwide made by private foundations in 2013, much more donor support is needed. Van der Linde makes a passionate argument that self-identified social justice and all donors for that matter cannot 'stay neutral' on the issue of sex worker rights and need to commit to investing more funds in sex worker organisations and initiatives.

The issue concludes with Katrin Roots' review of the book, *Responding to Human Trafficking: Dispossession, Colonial Violence, and Resistance among Indigenous and Racialized Women* (2017), by Julie Kaye. Roots praises the book for its unique perspective on trafficking that shows how anti-trafficking frameworks reproduce structures of domination that naturalise settler colonialism in Canada. The author also points out that the book fills an important gap in anti-trafficking scholarship in Canada, where there is a notable lack of substantive empirical work.

Conclusion

Taken together, the articles in this Special Issue contribute to the ever-growing corpus of academic and community-based literature on sex work, sex worker organising, and the impact of repressive prostitution and anti-trafficking laws and policies on sex worker communities. In the face of mounting and incontrovertible evidence, all of the articles gesture toward the conclusion that, like the donors that Nadia van der Linde challenges, no one can claim ‘neutrality’ on the issue of sex workers’ rights anymore. In particular, given the intersectional diversity of sex workers—along the lines of gender, sexuality, racial, ethnic, and class background, im/migration status, etc.—and the differing working conditions in which sex workers labour, it is imperative that more cross-movement alliances be cultivated and forged. In other words, in light of the multiple and complex social and labour dimensions that need to be addressed, organisations that advocate for the rights of women, LGBTI+ people, formal and informal workers, migrants, and trafficked persons, as well as movements that work for social, economic, and racial justice need to join in the struggle for sex workers’ rights and the decriminalisation of sex work.

Annalee Lepp is Associate Professor in the Department of Gender Studies at the University of Victoria, Canada. She is a founding member of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)—Canada, which was established in 1996, and is a member of GAATW’s Board of Directors. Since 1997, she has been involved in various collaborative research projects that examine Canadian state policies and practices as they relate to trafficking in persons and irregular cross-border movements as well as the impact of anti-trafficking policies on sex workers’ rights in Canada. Email: alepp@uvic.ca.

Borislav Gerasimov is Communications and Advocacy Officer at the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women and the Editor of the *Anti-Trafficking Review*. He holds a degree in English Philology from Sofia University St Kliment Ohridski, Bulgaria and has previously worked at Animus Association, Bulgaria and La Strada International, the Netherlands. He has also been involved in the work of NGOs supporting Roma youth, LGBTI people, people living with HIV/AIDS, and sex workers in Bulgaria and the Netherlands. Email: borislav@gaatw.org.