

Hl jg'XcW a Ybh]g'YI fUWYX'Zca 'fi bYI dYWYX'7 JhñYbg. 'GYI žK cf_ž
AcV]Jmž9i fcdYfiVmFi hj JWU5bXf]UgYj JWž7`U XJU5fUXU ž
>YZ<i nga UbgžUbX'J]W_]Gei]fY"

Collective subjectivity

The sex workers coming together in the European Parliament around the Declaration and Manifesto transgressed the notion of active citizens in a double way. [...] In this section we will argue that they also constituted novel political subjectivity by coming together and exercising collective political action in ways that challenged the institutional instruments, specifically criminalization and victimization in their case, that divide people between those with capacity for active citizenship and those without. Both transgressions are closely linked. The 'right to have rights' does not only displace given formulations of citizenship both nationally and in the EU, but requires collective power through the mobilisation of a collective subject to do so.

Levelling hierarchies

The constitution of the collective subject of sex workers entails what we call the mobilisation of mobility – namely significant political work that brings people together across borders. In the case of the sex workers' mobilisation, this was an arduous process that was initiated nearly two years earlier by the Netherlands based International Committee for the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE). The conference Organising Committee consisted of 15 members from different European countries, and engaged sex workers and sex-work projects from across Europe in a six-month long consultation process on the content of the Declaration and the Manifesto. These were translated into thirteen languages in order to solicit Europe-wide participation, before being discussed once again and finalised by the Conference delegates.

In order to reach out to and engage sex workers and sex work projects in drafting the Declaration and the Manifesto, significant work went into challenging existing categories that differentiate and separate sex workers in terms of their national status, gender and entitlement to rights. This required that the OC worked to level hierarchical arrangements concerning gender and citizenship status. In respect to issue of gender, the Brussels conference differed considerably from two previous Congresses, namely 1st and 2nd World Whores' Congresses, held respectively in Amsterdam in 1985 and in the European Parliament in Brussels in 1986. Contrary to the previous two events (which were attended exclusively by female sex workers), the Brussels conference delegates were female, male, and transsexual sex workers. This produced a rupture with the body that was in charge of other two Congresses which had insisted that the conferences were for female sex workers only. The OC disagreed and stood by its position by arguing that having a female only conference is not representative of today's reality of sex work and would be an exclusionary move:

“[One activist] in particular was not comfortable in some of the goals and aims that we were looking to achieve and how we were going to achieve them, so she requested that we set up our own foundation or an independent foundation, to enable us to move away from a women's only perspective or a women's focus. Despite that we all recognise that the vast majority of people engaged in the industry are women

working, we wanted very clearly to show solidarity with male and transgender sex workers, that the issues were very much the same, so we decided we would set up our own foundation". (Morgan Thomas 2009)

While the move to include male and transgender sex workers might seem a rather obvious one, the split this decision provoked becomes clear when examined in the context of feminist politics surrounding sex work. Women doing sex work are often affected by the 'whore stigma' that establishes a differentiation between decent and indecent, chaste and unchaste, worthy and unworthy women (Pheterson 1996). At the symbolic level, the latter attributes become the other to the 'proper' femininity and are associated with the prostitute. The 'whore stigma' demarcates the separation between 'deviant' and 'normal' femininity and carries a large range of legal and social consequences such as denial of rights, mistreatment and violence against those labelled as 'whores'.

In order to counter social stigma and invoke a feminist politics of empowerment, sex workers rights activists jettisoned the term 'prostitute' and adopted instead the term 'sex worker' in order to draw attention to the fact that sex work is an income generating activity, namely a form of labour and not an identity. The emphasis on sex work as labour allowed sex workers rights activists to critique those positions that saw prostitution as a form of psycho- or socio-pathological deviance of individual women and to point out the similarities between sex work and other types of labour, in particular between migrant sex work and other forms of globalised low-wage labour. The challenging nature of this approach for some feminists became evident when a small group of feminist MEPs protested against the sex workers conference and mobilized the security staff in an attempt to remove the sex workers from the EP.

To open up the space commonly occupied by women to male and transgender sex workers means, as in the case of the Brussels conference, to broaden the category of who is a sex worker by shifting the basis of political alliance away from the gender identity of sex workers towards issues of labour that sex workers perform. It means to (Doezema 1998; Kapur 2008). Due to this differentiation, sex workers' claims for rights have been often dismissed or delegitimised as a class-based issue pertaining to the rich Western countries:

"[P]reviously we have been accused ... [by people] within the sex workers rights movement of saying: it's people from ... the global north countries, ... from western European, rich, primarily ethnically white countries, so the UK, France, Italy, Germany, maybe Spain a little bit... but what we wanted to try and say by listing the number of countries is that actually there were women, men, transgender from many more countries, this is not a rich western European issue, it concerns sex workers throughout Europe". (Ruth Morgan Thomas)

By cutting across these national, social and gendered boundaries, existing hierarchies are levelled while the assumption that Europe is coeval to the EU is problematised. Rather than rendering 'others' peripheral and less-than-European, Europe is enacted as a relatively open, dynamic and contested site through the sex workers' mobilisation.

The importance of this for our purposes is that we can see how the sex workers mobilisation challenges the definition of Europe as a geographically-bound legal political site, as it is generally assumed to be in the institutional sphere. Hence, the Conference broadens the category of European citizenship and extends our understanding of who can be conceived as a legitimate political actor:

“... and we would have rather not [have] the conference if it turned into a conference where we would have 120 allies and 80 sex workers, or if we would have 120 sex workers but 100 from them from Western Europe. This is why we stress it; that was our goal”. (Marieke van Doorninck)

Against the attempt to differentiate sex workers' agency on the basis of their nationality, the Brussels conference stressed, as the previous Whores Congresses had done, that the real problem was the restriction of mobility:

“Already the 1986 conference, they had discussions on trafficking and already then had a good analysis saying that the problem was actually a difficulty of migrating from poorer to richer countries. The change with this conference was that migration and mobility became THE issue”. (Giulia Garofalo)

By giving primacy to the issue of mobility, the mobilisation works against the delimitation of European citizenship to citizens of EU member states. By broadening the category of who is defined as a sex worker the mobilization challenges the formation of citizenship through a institutionalised regime of rights and representation which works by separating various social groups via classification and then allocating rights to participate in each group. Any given regime of rights and representation functions as a mode of governing and producing of a particular type of subjects that can become active citizens by enacting associated rights. The mobilization of sex workers is interesting as a political challenge to the European citizenship regime, because it uses the rights framework in order to hold various subjectivities together across different genders and types of sex work:

“The other things I thought the Declaration did, from my understanding of recent work, what it tried to do was to hold together the tensions along and across diversity within sex workers, in terms of all the different structures and organising forms as well as migrants and citizens and across genders. And that was very, very hard, the effort to put those in, because the human rights system as a formal matter tends to divide rights according to categories, not exactly divide the rights, but divide the structures that apply them, which in some cases divides the rights. It was incredibly interesting and I thought innovative and difficult for the Declaration to hold out to that diversity while using the rights claims” (Alice Miller)

In doing so, the sex workers' mobilisation of 2005 enacted a right to hold rights by coming together as a new political subject constituted through explicitly mobilizing breaks with existing hierarchical scripts of European citizenship. It organised the mobilisation in terms that bring people together across borders without discrimination and levelled institutionalised social categorisations based on gender, nationality, east/west divide.

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All interviews were carried out by P.G. Maciotti

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