

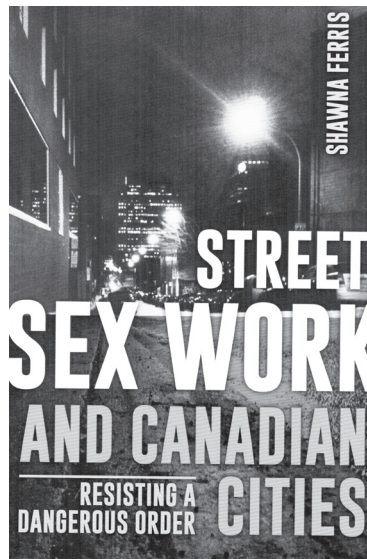
STREET SEX WORK AND CANADIAN CITIES: RESISTING A DANGEROUS ORDER

Shawna Ferris
Edmonton: University of Alberta
Press, 2015

REVIEWED BY ELIZABETH
D'ANGELO

In a recent meeting of Amnesty International in Dublin, Ireland, it has been decided that the selling and buying of sex should be decriminalized. Certainly a very contentious decision indeed, but more importantly, the question must be: who will benefit from this proposed legislation? While many countries around the world, including Canada, are steering towards or have already adopted the Nordic Model, which looks to decriminalize the selling of sex and rather goes after those who purchase or otherwise exploit sex workers, Amnesty International has taken a rather provocative stance. As is aptly discussed in Ferris' book, the Nordic Model and Canadian laws in general, are paternalistic and only create an environment in which it is at times even more dangerous for a sex worker to carry out her/his employment.

Shawna Ferris begins her book *Street Sex Work and Canadian Cities: Resisting a Dangerous Order* with an introduction that perfectly describes the climate around discussions of sex work. The forward is written by Amy Lebovitch who says: "I live in a world that either victimizes or vilifies me." Often the research that is conducted on sex work and sex workers erases the fact that there are real people behind the data and that there is no universal experience. There is no such thing as a valid or invalid reason for selling sex, just as there should not be voices that are silenced for



not being the "socially acceptable" prostitute. In part, this is what irks those who veil their feelings of moral superiority in a desire to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves. Ferris does not speak over or for sex workers. Rather she includes and discusses real-life experiences. The book discusses Canadian laws surrounding the buying and selling of sex and how this affects sex workers—not as victims or as statistics, but as individuals with varying lives and experiences.

Ferris provides an in depth analysis of what have come to be known as urban cleanup projects in major cities across Canada. The sanitization comes in the form of eliminating or at least diminishing prostitution and street sex work. The author delves into the key elements of understanding sex work as legitimate work and humanizing the individuals behind it. The author juxtaposes moral and cultural attitudes around sex work and the socio-economic realities of marginalized groups living in Canada.

The timeline regarding Canadian legislation that is provided, as an appendix to the text, is very informative and a quick reference guide for students and instructors. This helps to and encourages further re-

search. In addition to this, it would be wonderful to see an appendix of sorts that provides current organizations with web links in order to further one's research or even provide safe-space information for those who want it. *Maggie's* (Toronto Sex Workers Action Project), for example, has a great site that is easily accessible and provides valuable resources. The author does dedicate an entire section to resistance and cyber communities in "Technologies of Resistance: Canadian Sex Worker Activism Online," but for students, a condensed version with actual URLs would be even better.

I am very happy to read Ferris' engagement with the colonial aspects of sex work and the social realities of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Section 4 of the book, "Agency and Aboriginality," deconstructs the intersected realities of Aboriginal women to provide the reader with a more complex understanding of the issues involved and what activism needs to look like.

The Canadian content of the book makes this an excellent text for university students and researchers alike. This is an excellent companion book for upper year Women's and Gender Studies, Sociology and even Labour Studies courses. Many texts are dedicated to global sex work and trafficking, but few deal with Canadian content the way that Ferris does. I highly recommend her book for students and instructors who are new to the topic as well as to the seasoned academic who desires a street-smart analytical perspective on the realities of street sex work in Canada.

Elizabeth D'Angelo is a doctoral candidate at York University in the department of English Literature. She has worked in the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies at Brock University for several years.