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Toward a Vision of Sexual and Economic Justice
Thought Paper

**Barnard Center for Research on Women
Sexual and Economic Justice Conference**

Preparatory Questions

As both a professor of gender and sexuality studies at NYU, and a long time feminist queer activist, I'm one of four co-editors of an anthology in progress: *A New Queer Agenda: A Practical Guide for How to Turn the Gay Rights Movement Into A Progressive Fight for Social Justice (and Succeed!)*. The collection will include essays and interviews by activists associated with Queers for Economic Justice, a New York City based organization focused on the intersection of sexual and economic justice. The primary goal of the book is to challenge and displace the economically and socially conservative agendas of the U.S. national "gay rights" organizations with a transformed vision of what issues are most pressing for most queer folks. Rather than inclusion in the institutions of marriage and the military, we are arguing for attention to homelessness, health care, retirement, dis/ability, sex work, immigration, HIV/AIDS, and the direction of left, feminist,

anti-racist and queer politics in a global frame. The book proposal is attached to this document.

QEJ is a local organization, as are most of the left/progressive social justice organizations attending to issues of sexuality, race and class in the U.S. today. The challenge for all of us is how to build networks across borders, beyond the frame of the nation state. Solid local organizing can form the basis for broader associations that might challenge the "national" organizations driving the "gay rights" agenda of most national and many international organizations.

Right now, "gay rights" rhetoric is being deployed in anti-Muslim politics across Europe and North America. Proponents of conservative forms of sexual citizenship compare "progressive" European nation states (including the U.S. and Israel) to "backward" Islamic and/or Arab nation states and migrant or refugee populations. Adding on to Laura Bush feminism, the reactionary implications of this move are especially dangerous right now, especially in relation to growing U.S. aggression toward Iran. The relationship between sexual and economic justice could not be clearer than it is within this context. Anti-imperialist and anti-corporate globalization politics must intersect with issues of gender, racial and sexual justice in

order to be effective against the rhetoric of progressive modernity vs. reactionary tradition that is being mobilized **as** advocacy for gender and sexual justice.

At the same time, the presumably feminist international politics of anti-trafficking promote repressive state action across the globe. Anti-trafficking activists aspire further to international legal action to suppress sex work. Activists for economic and sexual justice, who support the organization and support of local and migrant sex workers also desperately need expanded and new forms of networked association to effectively counter the repressive agenda of anti-trafficking "feminists."

One of the difficulties for generating new forms of association are the constraints of the NGO, non-profit corporation form—a form that produces "staff" and "volunteers," and sets limits on the ways funds may be raised and spent. From within our academic and activist locations, the need to think through ways to innovate organizationally and financially, on multiple geographical scales, seems especially pressing now.

Right now, we have no choice but to act at the intersections of sexual and economic justice—the question is **how** we will do so. Reactionary political forces are rapidly

forging new links between neocolonial projects and "modern" sexual politics, and between law-and-order state repression of marginal and dissenting populations and the pursuit of sexual justice. The barriers to an intersectional politics of sexual and economic justice exist only on the left. How will we build upon the connections we have now, represented at this conference, and find new forms and means to expand our analyses, our organizations, and our resources?