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Toward a Vision of Sexual and Economic Justice  
Thought Paper

Sexual and Economic Justice Preparatory Questions Response

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Given my own work on sex work and migration in Mumbai, and on the ways in which issues that impact debates on sex work in the Global South also intersect with questions surrounding the deployment and expansion of neoliberalism, I address myself here to four of the questions raised for discussion prior to our meeting.

What are the possibilities for collaboration between and among social movements with respect to global economic and sexual justice?

The possibilities for collaboration between and among social movements with respect to struggles for justice globally are endless, and, yet, bounded by the analytical frameworks which theorize synergies and points of connection between movements, issues, and struggle. The most successful intermovement collaborations are those which pay particular attention to the specific histories, strengths, and emphases that inhere in an intersectional approach for building social movements. An intersectional approach, such as those elaborated by feminists of color in the US in the 1990s, is proving to be critical for contemporary social movements that address sexuality in any way. Sexuality based movements that have chosen not to work intersectionally have tended to reiterate identitarian paradigms for sexuality, and, often, normative paradigms of morality and social organization as well. Those that have worked intersectionally with other movements have done so through a range of collaborations, including working with key individuals, organizations, theoretical frameworks, campaigns that have required collaboration, or in support or capacity building roles when actual inter-organizational or intermovement collaborations were either not possible, or not warranted. Successful sexuality based movements and campaigns have been mindful of the importance of working with other movements for social change, including labor movements, the so-called 'mainstream' left, women's movements, and movements for racial justice, which, some have argued, include movements working to overturn caste based discrimination, as well. These sexuality-based, collaborative movements, embodied in the work of funded and non-funded organizations and networks that are both national and transnational, have intermittently managed to move beyond the politics of a single sexual minority group or issue, while retaining their core goals and political priorities. I would argue that these movements represent a shift from 'LGBTQ' or 'sex workers' movements to expanding category of 'sexuality rights' or 'sexual justice' movements.

There seems to be a resurgence of interest in intersectionality, from funders, non-governmental organizations, and other representatives of civil society. The success of the

Intermovement Dialogue at the World Social Forum meetings in 2004 and 2005 speaks to this interest. The Intermovement Dialogue, organized by a Mumbai-based women's movement organization, included representatives of trade union, women's, racial justice/anti-caste, and sexuality based movements in one conversation about their potential for collaborating with and supporting one another more proactively. These kinds of conversations entail examining obstacles that prevent sexual and economic justice from being seen as co-constituted, and what the theoretical and political consequences of keeping these apart might be. For sex workers, the consequences of keeping economic justice out of the central frame of discourses on prostitution have included constructing a discursive focus on morality and the question agency, read as individual choice, in an individual's engagement with sexual commerce, rather than maintaining a perspective of agency as linked with, and constituted by, the structuring contexts of class, race, ethnicity, caste, and/or migration. With respect to potential collaborations and alliances between sexuality justice movements themselves, I argue elsewhere that holding economic and sexual justice apart has consequences for these as well. For lesbian/gay/bisexual/trans/queer movements, for example, the consequences of holding sexuality and class apart have included a) barriers to forming meaningful alliances with sex workers rights movements, b) reliance on an ethnicization model of sexuality, one which precludes agency or choice in the origins of non-normative sexualities, and which rationalizes same sex sexual preference as biologically determined or inflected, c) conflicts between lesbian/gay struggles for inclusion into normative forms state-level recognition and struggles undertaken by both trans communities and queer communities of color to address class based inequalities and differential marginalities deployed and maintained by the state.

What initiatives can we invoke that consider sex work from the interlinked perspectives of sexual and economic justice, and how can these help us re-think the broader debate between global markets and intimacies, love and sex?

One node of the contemporary debate on prostitution centers on whether the issue relates to questions of class based oppression, or whether sexual commerce is primarily a discourse of violence against, primarily, women. Proponents of a frame which accounts for economic justice as central to developing critical understandings of the ways in which sexual commerce operates socially and politically must necessarily account for the growing intellectual and political contexts being formed through critical engagements with neoliberalism. Centering neoliberalism in framing sexual commerce, particularly in the Global South, has meant centering the key critique of neoliberalism as constituting lowered barriers to the migration of capital, while increasing barriers to legal migration for poor migrants who have a shrinking range of options for economic survival in their places of origin.

Several Indian initiatives, especially the Calcutta-based Durbar Mahila Samanwaya Committee, and SANGRAM in Western India, have been lauded as exemplary for dealing with issues around sex work intersectionally. Both of these organizations have contributed unique perspectives to international debates on prostitution, maintaining, in general, that sex workers themselves should be central to any

interventions that are undertaken to impact, circumvent, or police the sex industries in which they work. While both of these organizations have been extremely successful in building Indian sex workers' rights movements in a collaborative mode with other movements, including labor, women's, and LGBT movements, their engagement with discourses of sex work and trafficking raise two issues that bear consideration: 1) How effective are these local initiatives in the face of international pressure for governments to conform to the abolitionist anti-trafficking/anti-prostitution agenda (exercised by the US government through various means, including the Trafficking in Persons Report and the anti-prostitution pledge enforced by USAID)? India's recent revision of its legal code to reflect the so-called 'Swedish model,' which criminalizes clients of sex workers, may have some relationship with abolishing prostitution, abstinence-only sex education, and other perspectives being promoted by the US government through its bilateral aid programs. Although the DMSC, SANGRAM, and a host of other progressive sexuality-related organizations in India lobbied parliament for months on this issue, they could not prevail over the extant power centers within the Ministry for Women and Child Development to change the existing law in a way that would not threaten sexual commerce as a livelihood option. 2) Can sex workers' rights movements truly 'globalize'? What happens when sex workers' rights movements in the Global South and Global North interact? While the points of connection between sex workers' rights organizations in various parts of the world are clear, and strategically critical, these relatively new collaborations raise questions around both the similarities and historical differences between movements in the South and the North. For example, movements in the Global South have tended to emphasize class and caste based marginalities that constitute an engagement with any form of paid work, especially for women, in both formal and informal economic sectors, in their critiques. Within the register of sexuality and morality, Southern sex workers' rights movements seem less to emphasize sex work as a disjuncture from sexual or gender based normativity than do their Northern counterparts. At the same time, Northern movements' focus on civil liberties as individual freedom recalls a familiar Occidentalism. Transnational collaborations and conversations within sex workers' movements must not only address the question of strategy and analysis, but also varying views on sexuality, normativity, modernity, affect, and intimacy.

What scale is helpful to you as you approach these questions? The national? The global? The regional? The local? The South-South? Something else? To whom do you look for responses that will secure sexual and economic justice? The state? Transnational social movements? Bretton Woods institutions? Civil society organizations?

Most campaigns for sexual justice have focused on changes to the law to decriminalize LGBTQ people, sex workers, and other sexually non-normative social groups. These campaigns have been successful both in changing laws, and in mobilizing campaigns for social justice, of which legal change is one aspect. The strategic focus on the law necessarily raises the question of the role of the State in maintaining sexual marginalities, and the consequences of focusing on the State in campaigns undertaken by movements that ultimately seek social change. The consequences of appealing to any set of actors, be they states, Bretton Woods organizations, or 'civil society,' are carefully

weighed by sexual justice movements. In the Global South, the context of bilateral and multilateral aid, and the so-called 'NGOization' of social services in certain regions inflect these decisions. Approaching these questions requires a clear analysis of what all of these factors mean in any given context, as well as strong links with, and assessments of, transnational social movements.

Finally, how do we develop effective rhetorics and practices of resistance in the present context, and how do we reimagine global justice as involving both sexual and economic components?

Rhetorics and practices of resistance are linked with refocusing global justice in terms of social movements in both their funded and non-funded aspects. Effective moments of resistance tend to be those in which resistance is historicized, precedents are examined, and contemporary forms of resistance are placed within economic, social, and regional contexts. Resistance is also inextricably linked with the production of knowledge about sexuality and social movements, which addresses social normativities. New modes of generating knowledge also produce new modes of generating resistance. The lessons of the US 'war on terror' is a case in point, as social and political movements aim to shore up civil liberties by countering hegemonic narratives of scarcity, fear, and imminent threat with historicized narratives on how, why, and to what end discourses of terror function. Deconstructing the 'imminent threat' of non-normative genders and sexualities has entailed re-framing normativity altogether, and showing the ways in which normativities function to maintain the status quo. The basis of resistance for sexual justice movements has been recasting epistemologies of sexuality through multidisciplinary practices of knowledge production.