

## BOOK REVIEW

***Reluctant Bedfellows: Feminism, Activism and Prostitution in the Philippines.*** Meredith Ralston and Edna Keeble. Sterling, Virginia: Kumarian Press, 2009; v +229 pages; ISBN 978-1-56549-269-1; \$27.95 (paper).

Meredith Ralston and Edna Keeble open their text by arguing for the importance of engaged scholarship that "gives back" to the community it studies. They challenge feminist academics to "do something" about global inequalities and call for "a renewed commitment to public service" where communities are involved in the production of knowledge (p. 3-4). However, as they more fully explain the history and development of the multi-year, million-dollar Philippines research study that their text revolves around, we come to understand that the project itself was not designed in collaboration with the intended beneficiaries, Filipino sex workers. Instead, it was designed with the Philippine National Police and Supreme Court, the Angeles University Foundation, and two women's organizations whose goals are to eradicate prostitution.

While the authors strive for an equitable project that brings together community and academy, they do not adequately engage with the members of the community they claim to support. Sex workers themselves are all but erased from the introductory chapters as well as the design of the study. Indeed, it is troubling when four of five research partners are working towards eliminating the industry that economically sustains many Filipino women. How are claims of engaged scholarship to ring true when the strong arm of the state responsible for the criminalization of sex work is involved in the study? While the authors note that there is no sex workers' rights organization in the Philippines to partner with, in other international contexts, sex workers often refuse participation in Western research studies involving local police services and courts; a telling point that seems to be lost on the authors.

According to Ralston and Keeble, one of the key challenges within feminist praxis is the ambivalence about "doing something." Coined "analysis paralysis," they identify the current deadlock in feminist theorizing and action as "a hesitation in individual women and women's groups in Western countries to act politically for fear of being labeled ethnocentric, neo-imperialist, or worse" (pg. 10). Perhaps a different way to conceptualize this hesitation towards political action is to consider it a thoughtful and necessary moment of realization and self-reflexivity that can lead to more egalitarian, equitable, and anti-oppressive social change.

The most compelling sections of the text focus specifically on the Filipino case study. An

under-investigated country within research on the global sex trade, the authors explicate the ways in which the complex specificities of the Philippines' colonial history, and more recent American military involvement, creates a particular context that sets the country apart from other sex tourist locations, including others in Southeast Asia.

The text as a whole is accessible for a diverse audience of both academics and non-academics. Students new to studies on the global sex trade will no doubt find their discussion of the ways in which feminists have theorized prostitution to be educational. And while this reviewer took issue with the research project itself, Ralston and Keeble's call for engaged scholarship, increased civic participation, and the importance of "doing something" is both noble and innovative.

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