

Peace for Women: Swedish Feminism and the Pornotopia

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Abstract

In 1999, Sweden became the first to adopt the abolitionist approach to prostitution, meaning it is legal to sell sex but illegal to purchase. The result of a sustained and strong social movement, the legislation is extremely popular with the Swedish public. This thesis looks at a) how this social movement achieved this legislation, and b) the context facilitating its widespread popularity. Through interviews conducted with activists, politicians, academics, and members of the feminist media, I construct a retrospective history of how the organization at the core of this movement, Riksorganisationen för Kvinnojourer och Tjejjourer i Sverige (ROKS), worked with feminist identities to create a group unified enough to lobby at a high level. I then investigate some of the socio political events happening around the movement that can explain the legislation's popularity. I argue that ROKS gathered its strength first by conforming to mainstream expectations of organizational structure and then by building strong solidarity as an identity group. The popularity of this law can be attributed to neoliberalism forcing people to rethink their own national identity and who belongs within the nation.

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Feminism utan gränser.

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Introduction

In May 2011, twelve years after passing the Kvinnofrid (“Peace for Women”)¹ Acts, Swedish parliamentarians returned to the floor to discuss it. This legislation was originally groundbreaking in that it was the first in the world to contain the abolitionist approach to prostitution. Abolition aims to eliminate prostitution entirely by eradicating the demand, making it illegal to purchase sex but completely decriminalized to sell.² When enacted in 1999, it was to much to the surprise of the international community (Subrahmanian 2008). But even more of a shock is that these debates in May were never about reforming or repealing the law. In fact, abolition has been extremely popular in Sweden since its passage (Waltman 2010:24). Instead, these discussions were about increasing the penalties for purchasing prostituted sex, a measure which goes into effect in July 2011.³

The literature agrees that the original 1999 legislation was the result of a “women’s movement” in Sweden (Subrahmanian 2008; Olsson 2006; Ekberg 2004). What this “women’s movement” was, exactly, and how it achieved this radical reform is not clear. The most well known anthropological work on this topic, Kulick 2003, mentions the women’s movement only briefly. Instead, he argues that

The identification of prostitution as a major social problem (despite the small numbers of prostitutes actually known to work in the country) and legislation against it that runs counter to trends in other EU member states is a channel for Swedish anxieties about its role in the EU; a way of symbolically distancing itself from an EU that offers it rewards but threatens to exploit it (211).

¹ “Kvinnofrid, which is officially translated as ‘Violence Against Women’, actually means something like ‘Peace or Serenity for Women’, or ‘Women Left Alone’ (Kvinnofrid, 1997)” (Kulick 2003:201).

² The law is translated as: “A person who obtains casual sexual relations in exchange for payment shall be sentenced—unless the act is punishable under the Swedish Penal Code—for the purchase of sexual services to a fine or imprisonment for at most six months. Attempt to purchase sexual services is punishable under Chapter 23 of the Swedish Penal Code” (Ekberg 2004:3).

³ See: <http://www.thelocal.se/31680/20110127/#> accessed June 5 2011

His argument is that “prostitutes and prostitution may be the focus of so much attention in Sweden partly because they are portrayed as embodying the very qualities that Swedish politicians and policymakers fear might characterize Sweden in relation to the EU” (211). In other words, imminent membership in the European Union frightened Swedes, making them feel vulnerable and endangered. The solution was a strong assertion of intolerance towards prostitution both to claim a moral high ground among European countries, and combat a feeling of helplessness brought by EU membership.

Though theoretically compelling, Kulick’s analysis fails to do justice to the women’s movement he barely mentions. For them, this is a success story on multiple fronts. These women exerted enough power to pass legislation they wanted. As a policy, it had many of the intended effects and none of the feared failures, and is now in a position of indelibility as it is too popular for most politicians to risk challenging. Kulick is correct, however, in suggesting a context which may have facilitated the unexpectedly high popularity of abolitionist legislation.

The goal of this thesis is to tell this success story. Much space will be devoted to constructing a narrative of what happened in this “women’s movement” to make abolition a reality. I will pay particular attention to the process of identity building within the movement, focusing on what constituted this identity and the events that shaped it. My last section will, somewhat briefly, point out a few events in the larger socio-political context (including membership in the EU, as Kulick suggests) which likely contributed to the strength and durability of this legislation.

Chapter 1: Background and Literature

Modernity, Neoliberalism and the Sex Industry

This thesis sees “modernity” as the rise of neoliberal globalization based on the Enlightenment concepts of the self. According to Hall (1992:275),

The Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of the human person as fully centered, unified and individual, endowed with the capabilities of reason, consciousness and action, whose ‘centre’ consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same - continuous or ‘identical’ with itself - throughout the individual’s existence. The essential centre of the self was a person’s identity.

Neoliberalism sees each person as a complete “individual” acting in accordance with who they are at their “core.” Because all are viewed as unique and autonomous, any hierarchy that emerges can only be based on merit. Social theorists, however, have noticed that this is not always the case. Instead, the globalization of modern neoliberalism and the rise of the free market has resulted in uneven development, poverty-related migration, and destructive reactions by in response to perceived threats to cultural sovereignty. This crisis is systemic (Wallerstein 2004) and linked to a global process that encompasses all nation states, leading to a range of reactions which may include morality panics and declarations of a unified, homogeneous identity as a way to fulfill a need for national reassertion in an increasingly confusing global context. “National reassertion” in response to neoliberal globalization or “modernity” is nearly always a rejection of what its participants consider “modern” in favor of what they view as tradition. This is because “traditionalism, the most common reaction to modernism, is pro culture in the sense of traditional authority and order, established codes of meaning, and values, and is anti-nature, understood as the lack of control, as a world of anarchic self-indulgence, as a ‘pornotopia’” (Friedman 2008: 247). By individualizing all people, modern neoliberalism requires the rejection of groupings which, Friedman argues, promotes a “lack of

control.” It is ironic that Friedman chooses the term ‘pornotopia’ to describe the uncontrolled world people are afraid of. The sex industry is benefits greatly from neoliberal modernity. This can be attributed to a combination of permeable borders, communication technology, concepts of individual agency and free expression, and increasing gaps between rich and poor countries. Inclusive is sex work and human trafficking for sexual exploitation which, in addition, particularly benefits from changes in who does what sort of labor and where.

Davis (2006) observes a process of “slumification” in which cities pull labor towards them but offer increasingly appalling living conditions that make up an increasing percent of available urban life. He also notices that this process an increased burden on women, a point described by Sassen (2003).

As Third World economies on the periphery of the global system struggle against debt and poverty, they increasingly build survival circuits on the backs of women - whether these be trafficked low-wage workers and prostitutes or migrant workers sending remittances back home. Through their work and remittances, these women contribute to the revenue of deeply indebted countries (23).

When Friedman contrasts authority, order, established codes of values and meanings with the “pornotopia” that lacks control, he means it symbolically. The sex industry, however, is directly kindled by these chaotic forces. Uneven development in which capital moves towards the core (Wallerstein 2004) means countries experiencing a loss in capital must “build survival circuits on the backs of women” who, in many places, were a previously untapped labor source. The resulting “pornotopia” is not only characterized symbolically by individuals unsure of the social order, but also literally, with a vibrant pornography and sex industry.

Controlling the Pornotopia in Sweden

The “authority and order” described by Friedman is pursued by groups and nation-states in an effort to cleanse society of the dirty and nonsensical. This can be seen in obvious displays of violence under dictatorships, but also includes the demands of the majority in a democracy because “no international police or army can substitute for a combination of well-ordered markets and states that have legitimized themselves in the eyes of their populaces” (Ghani 2008:23). Sweden, a country stereotyped with order and equality, has been no exception.

Douglas (1966) introduced the idea that cultures purify themselves by purging whatever defies classification. The ideal of purity is achieved by identifying the unclassified and assigning a class to it, or attempting to rid the culture of it completely. Like Douglas, Frykman (1987) sees the separation of clean and dirty as a cultural universal, arguing that this notion became unusually strong among Swedes through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Frykman describes early nineteenth century Swedish peasants as living in a world without strict requirements for classification. Families, for example, were easily designated by their working relationships on the farms. When life shifted towards urban consumerism, however, other explanations for these relationships became necessary. Thus began a “cautious prudery” characterized by “well-controlled lifestyles” with emphasis on the nuclear family. Classism and rules for sexual behavior were strict. “Male sexuality was ever present” (249) and, to the frustration of men, delicate urban women needed protection from it. “Whores allowed men to relieve their frustrations at regular intervals with no untoward social consequences” (Frykman 1987:253) because adultery was tolerated so long as the woman was of a lower class than the man. In the twentieth century, this view of life developed by urban Swedes spread through the rural areas as the ideal Swedish family universally became a consumer unit in which a male wage earner and a child-rearing female were held together by romantic love.

The sex industry was not exempt from this process of reorganization. In 1859, Sweden established a police force mandated to identify and register women in prostitution (Svanström 2000). These “registrations” occurred when undercover police got a woman to offer sexual services at which point she was taken to a police station, subjected to a medical examination, and registered as a prostitute.⁴ Despite these attempts to bring order to the sex industry, it expanded rapidly through the next century stimulating, as Douglas (1966) would predict, new international debates on how to control it.

These discussions resulted in a range of approaches. In 1984, the Australian state of Victoria became the first jurisdiction to fully and officially legalize prostitution. New South Wales, Queensland, and the Australian Capital Territories followed through the 1990s. As will be discussed in more detail, this period also saw perpetual defeats of anti-sex industry legislation in the United States. Jeffreys (2009) wrote of this time that “the notion of women as part of a collective which requires rights is being overwhelmed by the idea that each woman should be able to work out an individual contract as an ‘agent’ in the global sex industry” (199). Though the idea of agents with “individual contracts” rather than groups of people represents the neoliberal attitude towards sex work, it should not be taken as acceptance of the neoliberal pornotopia. To the contrary, legalization gives permission to the State to organize, regulate, and (supposedly) control the sex industry, qualifying it as part of the trend towards creating order.

Though prostitution had been a debate in Sweden for quite some time, the sudden shift at the end of the 20th century related to what in prostitution required elimination or regulation. Leading up to this time, “the Swedish State reorganized much of social and economic life in striving to create the ‘good society’ in the name of the people” (Friedman and Friedman 2008

⁴ This was not an uncommon model as it only minimally preceded the infamous Contagious Diseases Act that would be passed in Britain in 1964.

303). This thesis will show that the ideal “good society” in Sweden came to mean, for some, one that was free of institutions promoting gender inequality. For others, it was a society which did not blatantly display vulnerable or victimized people, particularly women. It will demonstrate that, for Swedes, equality had become the “holy” ideal described by Douglas and whatever violated it could be subject to scrutiny, prostitution included. The concept of special police forces sent to minimize diseases among women in prostitution would come to seem silly or at least old fashioned. Rather than cleanse the genitals of prostitutes in Sweden so that men could continue to use them, Sweden had to be cleansed of prostitution itself.

Social Movements: Theoretical Frame

Abolition in Sweden was one moment in a longer story of feminist activism. The moment represented an instance in which the hidden lives of women were successfully translated into organized and articulate claim making based on a clearly defined collective identity. Understanding the frame for this transition requires both a historical perspective and a theoretical understanding of the present.

In the early 1950s, “labor force participation of married women Sweden was among the lowest in Europe” (Huber 2001:25). Swedish women living inside the home and away from public life did not have the same opportunities for civic participation as men. As such, they maintained what Scott (1990) calls the “hidden transcript,” a set of thoughts and actions hidden from the public, especially the public containing the oppressor. A servant, for example, who does not display any evidence of ill will towards her employer does not mean she is not critical of him in private, with her “private” thoughts making up the hidden transcript.

Those who operate with hidden transcripts have a range of tactics at their disposal. The notion of tactics v. strategies as introduced by Certeau (1984) holds that those with power are able to strategize towards goals while the comparably powerless must resort to tactics of resistance. This does not mean that tactics are futile, rather that long-term strategy assumes a significant amount of social power. One is a resource for the subaltern while the other is at the disposal of the oppressor, with little or no cross-over between the two. The case of abolition represents an instance in which a subaltern group with a hidden transcript transitioned from using tactics to resist into a solidified group capable of strategizing at high levels of legislative power.

Gamson (1996) argues that “collective identities, although they are not organized inventions, are continually filtered and reproduced through organizational bodies... identity boundaries are shaped by and shift through organizational activity” (235). When considering abolition as a result of a strategizing and public movement in Sweden, it is necessary to understand how the driving organization, ROKS, worked with identities to facilitate it. As the main organizational body, a major part of ROKS’ activity is “filtering identity formations” (Gamson. 258). As I will show, the choices made in this organization led to a particular kind of identity that remained unified long enough to achieve this legislative end.

When making the case the ROKS was the center of this social movement, I define “movement” along the lines of Tarrow (1998).

When [people’s] actions are based on dense social networks and connective structures and draw on consensual and action oriented cultural frames, they can sustain these actions in conflict with powerful opponents. In such cases - and only in such cases - we are in the presence of a social movement” (10).

Tarrow is describing a particular kind of movement that is possible only for public persons with strategizing ability. Movements who make use of tactics or lack (sometimes by choice) “connective structures”, such as most queer or anarchist groups, would not qualify under this

definition. This does not make them irrelevant. However, the case discussed in this thesis is a movement whose success at least partially depended on previous efforts to fall into Tarrow's definition. Through benefiting from activism performed by earlier feminists, ROKS became a group of closely connected actors with the ability to offer sustained resistance against a group who understood their actions. It is fitting to utilize a definition, such as Tarrow's, that makes all three of these characteristics clear.

In addition to showing how identity building as executed by ROKS lent itself to strategies for changing Swedish legislation, this thesis is interested in how that change became so popular when, as I will show, it was based on a narrow feminist identity. Paramount to understanding this is attention to context, which Tilly (2006) describes as "pieces of a puzzle" that help "us get a grip on some puzzling phenomena" (20). Tilly also explains how some political scientists view context as "noise" that obfuscates understanding. He rejects this perspective arguing that "attention to context does not clutter the description and explanation of political processes, but, on the contrary, promotes systematic knowledge (6)."

Tilly outlines approaches to explaining social phenomenon in context, acknowledging that most social scientists mix explanatory strategies into suitable combinations. This thesis will make use of both *propensity accounts* which analyze organizations and *systemic explanations* which "consist of specifying a place for some event, structure, or process within a larger self-maintaining set of interdependent elements, showing how the event, structure, or process in question serves and/or results from interactions among the larger set of elements" (22). The "event" I will describe is the first international conference organized by ROKS and its value to the identity of the organization. When it comes to the unexpected popularity of abolition, I will rely on an analysis of context to complete the "pieces of the puzzle."

Research Methods

Field research for this thesis was carried out over a one month period in Stockholm, Sweden 2011. The bulk of my data comes from fourteen interviews of varying lengths with politicians, academics and activists from both the shelter movement and anarchist feminist movements, chosen first from personal networks and then by snowball sampling. The interviews were unstructured, allowing the person to speak for as long as possible.

There are limits inherent in retrospective narration including inaccurate memory and the desire to position oneself in a certain place historically or politically. My purpose with these interviews, however, is not to get at a hidden or oppressed interpretation of a social movement as these are not always accessible and certainly not in the time allotted. These interviews were conducted to build the basic story, aware that “personal memories are not easily separable from the structures of representation of official history” (Sarkar 2006:140), and in hopes of contributing to that “official history.”

I was also looking for what kinds of information did not come out in interviews. Several of my informants were at the core of this movement, connected to both grassroots activism and powerful politicians. In most cases, this also meant that they were personally quite strongly associated with the identity or image constructed by the organization. They were educated, had non-minority ethnic status, they were not wealthy but none were poor either, all of which may have limited their perspective. Some of what they were unable to tell me forms the foundation of my last section.

I further embedded myself in the story of this movement by seeking out current young feminist activists. I shared a flat with two volunteers for SKR⁵ and my third flatmate was elected to the board of the Feminist Initiative during my stay. Many of my conversations with them helped shape my lines of inquiry.

Finally, I spent several days in the National Archive reviewing literature but primarily focusing on material archived by ROKS before and after abolition. This material, photographs, informal conversations, and fourteen semi-structured interviews formed an understanding of this legislation as a social movement connected to other events in the globalized world.

⁵ SKR is the shelter organization that split from ROKS shortly before abolition passed. (I will explain why in a later section.)

Chapter Two: Mobilized Identity

Tradition of Swedish Feminism

The fact that feminism as a theory or concept does not always exist outside the academy can explain why academics struggle to define what it is and how subgroups relate to each other. I say it “does not exist” because, as Stephen (1995) points out, women’s groups are often classified as feminist or not by outsiders who may have difficulty representing what is actually happening. This includes feminist movements in both the US and Sweden where organizations varied in how “feminist” they considered themselves to be.

This thesis will demonstrate that a particular strain of US American feminism had a considerable impact on abolition in Sweden. Though different in their approaches, the basic ideology between the two is similar in that they attempt to bring the hidden lives of women into public debate.⁶ It is with some hesitation that I suggest this is the unifying factor beneath all “feminist” movements. Even if we consider two drastically different approaches, for example, Rich’s lesbian feminism (1980) and Shiva’s ecofeminism (1989), this is a point of commonality. Rich, an American, sees compulsory heterosexuality as an oppressive force that can be lifted by women changing their lives to serve the interests of other women. Her separatist strategy differs from Shiva’s who advocates for increased appreciation of women’s natural connection to the earth. Rich represents a second wave US American approach and Shiva is part of the Third World women’s critique that considers other factors (such as poverty, race, or caste) in addition to gender as mechanisms of oppression. Still, both are attempting to draw attention to the lives

⁶ Much of feminism is about accurately defining the private sphere. For example, a man in his house is not in “privacy” if his wife and children are there. “Privacy” means what happens in one’s own head when one is actually alone.

of women. One is to alter it, the other is to appreciate it, but the goal is still to stimulate debate or action that makes the “personal” into the “political.”

Sweden and the US have divergent histories when it comes to politicizing the personal. The US federal system means many of the issues important to women fell into the jurisdiction of individual states rather than the central government. Changes in one place would not be accepted in another, giving top-down efforts at altering laws and policies a low return for time invested. This is in contrast to Sweden, a unitary state, in which advocacy that targeted governmental laws and policy was well worth the effort. I will briefly describe some of these efforts so as to place Swedish feminism’s encounter with US American feminism in context.

In the 1950s, “labor force participation of married women Sweden was among the lowest in Europe” (Huber 2001:25) and they tended to align with conservative politics. However, as the Swedish government increased social programming, they created jobs in sectors which were primarily taken by women. Women’s employment was further developed by limitations on guest worker programs and a commitment from the Social Democrat party to encourage dual-earner households (Huber 2001). Huber summarizes this period by arguing that there was a “feedback cycle between left-union strength, women’s labor force participation, women’s mobilization, and public service employment that continued to the late 1980s when the employment crisis hit Sweden” (2001:126).

Another result of the push for social welfare and productivity on behalf of the governing Social Democrat party resulted in huge numbers of women holding university degrees. Not only did the demographics of university-educated Swedes change, but attitudes did as well. A woman who found her way to feminism through this tract describes how she became involved:

In the 70s I had my first child and, of course, I wanted to work so that became my main focus. To have a good childcare, give women the right to work full time, to be able to live without men...We wanted everything.

The government was often willing to participate in this pursuit of “everything.” For example, Hanna Olsson was, between 1977 and 1980, principal secretary of the State inquiry into prostitution. This investigation relied heavily on interviews and testimony from women currently and formerly in prostitution. According to Olsson (2006.12), the chair, Inger Lindqvist, was uncomfortable with the content of the report.

She did not want the analyses of prostitution based on the interviews with the women to be published ... The experts and secretaries had to complete the work on their own, while the chair acquired a new secretary to complete the official commission of inquiry. The report, just over 600 pages long, was handed over to the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs and it might have remained there forever.” (Olsson. 2006. 12).

Olsson confirms recollections shared by an activist and a former member of parliament when she says that womens’ groups pressured the ministry to release the report which was also later duplicated as a book. Though information about the nature of prostitution became available at this time, it was ROKS who would process and translate it into an abolitionist feminist movement.

At approximately the same time, pornography became a contentious issue for some groups of women, including those active in People’s Organization Against Pornography (POAP) . An activist remembers that “in the past, we had a law against pornography. It was cancelled in the beginning of the 70s. Suddenly “it was everywhere. In every shop... There was very hard pornography and it was easy for people to get it. There was a reaction to that.”

Though People’s Organization Against Pornography would later become a close ally to the shelter movement, other women active against pornography would become more closely

associated with anarchist feminism. These women were doing what one called “the important work” (meaning more “important” than lobbying politicians). Actions by these women included “throwing eggs” and protesting outside of sex clubs.



Anarchist feminists blocking entrance to a film festival, Stockholm, 1999
Photo Credit: ROKS Newsletter: *Kvinnotryck*, December 1999

The anarchist feminists would ultimately occupy a crucial role in passing abolition, not necessarily for their actions but for their image. A woman associated with feminist media described the anarchist feminists saying:

They were anarchist, those kinds of groups. Anarchist feminists. They don't have any kind of real organization, in that sense. They have other ways of organizing and other ideas of organizing things. They just do activist things. Anybody can do anything in the name of that activist group so you never know really.

The anarchist feminists did not seem to “have any kind of real organization.” This, as will be described, was in opposition to a sustained and well-organized effort by the shelters against political leaders. In comparison, the shelters appeared more moderate than they actually were,

perhaps allowing abolition to pass without everyone noticing what a radical piece of feminist legislation it was.

The Shelter Movement in Sweden

Riksorganisationen för Kvinnojourer och Tjejjourer i Sverige (ROKS) is the umbrella organization governing women's shelters in Sweden started in 1984 with a second, Sveriges Kvinnojourers Riksförbund (SKR) branching off in 1996. "The idea of establishing women's shelters, separate gathering places for women, developed during 1976. The women's center in Gothenburg was the first women's group in Sweden to ask the municipal authorities to give them a location for a women's house" which opened in February of 1978 (Eduards. 1997:121) and others followed soon after. According to an informant, municipalities were especially quick to open shelters where there was "a group of women politicians" who "made it go through to get money for a shelter." These groups were "usually Social Democrat women."

Beginning with the first shelters, there was internal dissent over what to prioritize as well as external confusion about what role these independent houses should play in a welfare state. The shelter in Umea, for example, established in May 1980, adopted a decidedly activist agenda (Eduards 1997:134) while others remained rigidly committed to service provision only. Some houses depended completely on volunteer work, aiming to create an egalitarian dynamic between staff and residents. The house in Örebro, however, had an employee at the shelter on the municipal payroll beginning in the end of 1981 (Eduards 1997:138). This was part of their criticism that the government could "get a cheap, that is to say volunteer, solution to the problem of assaults against women (Eduards 1997:128)" and release itself from responsibility.

In 1983, representatives from “forty or fifty” shelters met for a conference and returned to their localities with the question of whether to form an umbrella organization. An informant remembers that some “were afraid but a majority wanted” to organize. The fear this activist referred to was not only of losing individual autonomy, but also of being associated with an organization with the potential to become both fiercely activist and fiercely radical, characteristics that some shelters had been consciously avoiding. Never the less, the majority agreed and ROKS was formed in 1984.

Notably, ROKS decided not to have a president, preferring instead to operate with three spokespersons because they “were unwilling to adopt a male hierarchy” (Eduards. 1997;142). This flatly organized group with no permanent office confused municipalities, making them resistant to grant funding (Eduards 1997:135). After only a few years, ROKS decided to elect its first president, Ebon Kram. She reports that “we had three spokespersons but media and authorities didn’t understand that. So we decided to do it the regular way for associations in Sweden. There was to be a president and a board.” The effect of doing things the “regular way” was more money which, among other things, allowed the organization to open a permanent office in Stockholm.

The shelter movement had shifted from autonomous shelters in individual localities, to a large but alternative network, before settling as a well funded group with an office and a traditional hierarchical structure that made sense to the mainstream. They were also organized in such a way that was conducive to monolithic identity building. Women who came to these shelters as volunteers or survivors received training in feminist analysis because, as Kram put it, “ideology matters.” Women leaving a domestic partner needed a way to process what happened to them and a feminist perspective of power and inequality provided that. Living together

through a difficult period strengthened connections both to each other and to the ideology, making it easy for the women of ROKS to share a common identity.

By the 1990s, ROKS was poised to meet Tarrow's (1998) definition of a social movement because they were networked in clearly identifiable ways, consistent with expectations of organization in the social context, and prepared to sustain pressure on the political elite. To reiterate, this was in contrast to other feminist and women's organizations, particularly the anarchist feminists who refused to conform to these expectations of a social movement. Simply by conforming, ROKS appeared relatively moderate despite the radical politics it developed.

The Theory of Abolition and US American Radical Feminism

The abolitionist approach to prostitution, in which the buyer is criminalized and the seller is not, is associated with radical feminism and most closely with US American radical feminists Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. This section will briefly explain the logic behind the MacKinnon-Dworkin understanding of the sex industry. It will also provide a short summary of their work together and where it stood before connecting with the social movement responsible for this law in Sweden.

Especially in studies of modernity, "radical" is a term often associated with Marxism. The same is true here. MacKinnon wrote that "sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism: that which is one's own yet most taken away" (MacKinnon. 1982:1). Marx argues that the bourgeois exploit the proletariat by purchasing their labor and taking what they produce. The difference between these groups is who labors and who does not as well as who has material capital and who does not (Marx 1977). MacKinnon applies this to sexes with men representing the

bourgeois, women the proletariat, and sexuality the labor. “As the organized expropriation of the work of some for the benefit of others defines a class - workers - the organized expropriation of the sexuality of some for the use of others defines the sex, woman” (MacKinnon. 1982).

Women, therefore, constitute a class formed around sexuality which men are increasingly free to take at any time through any means, exactly the same as Marx’s bourgeois and the labor of the proletariat. Dworkin writes that “no rights to hold government office or other public positions of civil or professional power will change her status as long as she is exploited in sex” (Dworkin. 1987. 20) Similarly to how workers would have to overthrow capitalism under Marxism, women must reject the violence of sexual servitude.

The most controversial aspect of this kind of radical feminism is its inclusion of prostitution and pornography as sexual violence against women. In *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*, Dworkin (1979) argues that “male power is the *raison d’être* of pornography; the degradation of the female is the means of achieving this power” (84). Her analysis occurs on two levels. First is that pornography happens to real women. The physical pain endured is real and it is sexy to male audiences. Were it not, it would not sell. For many people, this depiction is not recognized as violence because pornography destroys our “ability to see that violence against women is violence and that women are human” (MacKinnon 1990:93). These images become normalized through pornography, with physical pain endured by women being a routine part of normal sex. The danger of this is realized on Dworkin’s second level of analysis: what the ubiquity of these images does to society in general and women in particular.

In pornography, the physical needs and aversions of women are overlooked in pursuit of images that suit men. What may be obvious but is often not is that, in doing so, human women become things which help men orgasm. This is literal objectification, which Dworkin writes is

the most “singularly destructive aspect of gender hierarchy, especially as it exists in relation to intercourse” (Dworkin. 1987:165). This objectification of women as inhuman sexual props is the center of sex inequality that this strain of radical feminism seeks to eradicate.

The connection between pornography and prostitution under radical feminism is simple for those who subscribe to it and confusing or erroneous to those who do not. For the former, there is no difference. One is prostitution with a camera sold to many anonymous buyers, the other is sold directly to one man (or group of men) without photographic documentation though, of course, many men make pornography of prostitutes. The two are but slightly different ways to extract the same thing, female sexuality, from the subordinate class of women.

Objections to this understanding of prostitution and pornography are strong. They are especially so in the US where academics (Weitzer 1991; Lucas 2003) join organizations such as Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE) in claiming that sex work is a job like any other. It should be legalized and protected, especially since the majority of people in prostitution are there by choice (Lucas 2003). These are the points of view that clashed in the US in the decade before abolitionists connected with Swedish feminists in the shelter movement.

The Application of Dworkin-MacKinnon Radical Feminism from US to Sweden

In 1980, Dworkin spoke at a conference at Yale University Law School, urging the audience to “defend prostitutes, but do not allow yourself to be used to defend prostitution as an inevitable social institution” (Dworkin. 1993:245). Since Catharine MacKinnon earned both her JD (1977) and PhD (1987) from this university, it seems reasonable to guess that she attended this conference. Whether or not they knew each other before, it was shortly after this that Dworkin and MacKinnon formed a team intent on refusal to accept prostitution as “inevitable.”

They would soon represent half of a debate so bitter it has become known as “The Sex Wars” in the United States⁷.

The “confrontation’s biggest flash point came with the introduction of anti-pornography legislation coauthored by Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon in Minneapolis and Indianapolis in 1984, followed by copycat versions in Cambridge, MA, Los Angeles, CA, Madison, WI, and Suffolk County, NY” (Duggan. 2006:6). MacKinnon was specific in her description of what these laws looked like.

We define pornography as sexually explicit materials that subordinate women through pictures or words, when the materials also include women being dehumanized as objects or things or commodities, being penetrated by objects or animals, presented in scenarios of torture or degradation or filth, being bruised, beaten, humiliated, raped, or enjoying incest and rape, and other particulars” (MacKinnon 2006: 95).

These laws did not make the materials she describes illegal. They established a civil claim against the materials mentioned, not a criminal one, meaning women who were made porn stars without their knowledge or consent could use the law to stop distribution and claim the money made from their rape (MacKinnon 2006). Women whose rapists presented them with pornography and demanded she perform the same act could claim damages from the producers of that material. Giving women the power to do this was intended to discourage production houses from creating the material and eventually stop them all together (MacKinnon 2006).

None of these efforts were ultimately successful in the United States⁸ and, by 1986, anti-porn activism in the US as imagined by MacKinnon and Dworkin was essentially dead (Duggan

⁷ These wars were, for the most part, over pornography but, as I have tried to make clear, the distinction between pornography and prostitution was negligible to MacKinnon and Dworkin.

⁸ In Minneapolis, the proposal passed before being vetoed by then governor Donal Fraser. The proposal in Suffolk County was defeated by one vote. In 1985, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors considered a version of the proposal but it was also struck down by one vote. A referendum in Cambridge, MA brought in 1985 was defeated in a 2:3 margin. The revised version in Indianapolis was passed and signed into law in 1984 before found unconstitutional by an Indianapolis court, the court of appeals, and ultimately the United States Supreme court in 1986 (Duggan 2006).

2006). There was, however, an uneasy alliance that formed where these proposals passed or had minor successes. This was between MacKinnon-Dworkin and very conservative, often religious, politicians who were far from notorious as supporters of women's rights. The awkward common ground found between these two groups would show up again in Sweden though, ultimately, to a much different end.

Theory to Action in Sweden

When Kram became president in 1987, she says she “hadn’t read particularly feminist books” and credits two people with introducing her to international feminist theory, both of whom came to the ROKS office once it was established in Stockholm. The first was “radical activist” Katinka Strom and second was Amy Elman, a US American student working at Stockholm University between 1988 and 1991 who speaks highly of Strom: “Katinka was always the most modest one in the room...Her English was impeccable and she had read all the feminist work from the UK and US... So many roads lead back to her.”

If Strom's contribution was to be the most aware of international feminisms, Elman's was to connect her, Kram, and ROKS to it directly. She had been an activist and student of Kathleen Barry's at Brandeis University in Boston, US where, among other things, she “had come up with the idea of a voter-initiated referendum to pass [MacKinnon and Dworkin's] legislative civil rights based approach to pornography in 1983.” This connection was critical because, by the time Kram undertook preparations for ROKS' first international conference, Kram says it had become “so clear that violence against women included prostitution.” She decided she “wanted all shelter women in Sweden to know about what other women did in other parts of the world” and that “we had to have Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin.”



Dworkin, Kram, and MacKinnon at Pornografi - verklighet eller fantasi? 1990
 Photo Credit: ROKS: NR 1 February 1991 by Grun Englund

ROKS held its first international conference, which involved between three to four hundred women from all over Sweden, in Stockholm from November 5-6 1990. Titled “Pornografi - verklighet eller fantasi?” (Pornography - Reality or Fantasy?), it included lectures from Kram, MacKinnon, Dworkin, Elman, and, from the organization People’s Action Against Pornography (PAAP) started a few years earlier, Bettan Andersson. MacKinnon’s speech in particular did several important things. Though focused on pornography, it was framed along with prostitution as an issue that mattered to all women.

The degradation of women in pornography, this sexualized lowering and dehumanization of women, reflects and reinforces and reproduces and reifies the lower status of women throughout society. The women who are in those materials, who become women in general, are not the people who become authorities: powerful, legitimate, respected. In pornography, women become cunts. Would you want one operating on your brain or heading your government? Pornography creates bigotry, hostility, and contempt towards women, as well as aggression. It engenders the sense you cannot seem to break through that you are not real to the men around you, no matter what you say or do. It engenders resentment of your presence when your voice registers in the larger society, the sense that you do not belong, a sense made visceral hence felt as natural when sexualized through pornography. Whether or not any of its

other violations hit individual women, these larger attitudinal and ideological dynamics affect all women to varying degrees (98).

This was an audience of women from shelters, many of whom had physical injuries as evidence they were not “real to the men” around them and therefore permissible to abuse. But MacKinnon was arguing that it was not just the abused women who were injured. Rather the existence of abuse in general produced “larger attitudinal and ideological dynamics” damaging to all women, meaning one did not have to be a prostitute herself to be hurt by prostitution.

The second thing MacKinnon did in her speech was introduce the abolitionist legal model for prostitution, providing a possible solution to the dark picture painted above.

Men’s demand creates prostitution. If men did not buy prostitutes, there would be no prostitution, and if there was no prostitution, there would be no pornography. Women have to sell sex because men want to buy it. Because this is not a symmetrical world, it does not call for a symmetrical legal solution. It is an unequal world and calls for a law against the men using the women, not against the women being used (100).⁹

The third and final thing MacKinnon did in her speech that mattered was simple: she was an engaging and passionate speaker. Unafraid of presenting graphic details of violence, especially to an audience that was, for the most part, already conscious of its existence, MacKinnon concluded by encouraging the women to act.

The Swedish state, the beacon of affirmative governmental concern in the western world, hopefully does not intend to turn its back on Swedish women in this respect. Perhaps it is time for the Swedish example to the world to bear the marks of the pain of Swedish women, and of their solidarity with women here and throughout the world, with the battered women who are those shadows walking

⁹ Whether this can be considered the “invention” of abolition in Sweden is debatable. In the field, I heard that the Swedish Social Workers National Association may have made a comment of this nature in the beginning of the 1980s. If so, I would not credit them with “invention” if only because this rumored comment had nothing to do with the model’s eventual execution. The “invention” that mattered was the above, presented by MacKinnon to hundreds of women.

past the windows in the Women's House, where we have only to see the pornography to imagine the electric shocks, the dogs, and the beatings that put them there. Solidarity with the woman raped in the subway while a hundred people watched, as they watch in the pornography, and solidarity with Catrine de Costa, who was prostituted and dismembered, whose life was pornography. You can stand with these women. We hope you will. (104)

They did.

The Reality Riots: November 5 1990

When MacKinnon mentioned "the woman raped in the subway while a hundred people watched," she was referring to a sexual assault that happened only a few days prior in the Odenplan metro station. Kram recalls that "After Andrea and Kitty had their speeches here, women were so upset and so angry... most of us went down to the underground where this rape had been. We had flowers and we sang and we were there hindering people saying 'there was a rape' because nobody helped her."

After bringing flowers to Odenplan, some of the women moved to a sex club called Tabu where men could sit in individual booths behind a closed door and masturbate to pornography. The women went down the stairs and into the club to chase the men out.

There was only a couple men because it was so early in the evening or afternoon. They just ran up the stairs and away. Then there was some building outside and there was wood and bags with the trash and things like that. Some of these women took those bags and threw them down the stairs into this club.

Though Kram had been with the women up to this point, she could not continue. "I decided that since I was the president I couldn't go with them because they were really angry. I had to take some efficient stand that I am not involved in it because they vandalized. So I went home."

Many women joined her. One who stayed, however, had participated in actions against pornography outside these places before, but those had involved only “ten to twenty people.” She described this evening’s events as “one of the most successful demonstrations” with “fifty or sixty people” continuing to demonstrate forcefully, perhaps with more anger than any of them had utilized before. For example, these women later came across a taxi driver reading pornography inside his car. People opened the doors of his taxi, lit the pornography on fire, and threw it back at him. They continued to demonstrate, moving towards a nearby pornography vendor where they discovered child pornography among the stacks. Men shopping inside ran away “quick quick quick so as not to show their faces.” Some appeared “afraid,” others were “aggressive.” Screaming and yelling, the women sealed the door with the employees inside and called the police, telling them they had found child pornography. By the time the police arrived, however, the vendors had snuck out a back entrance.

Perhaps due to the presence of the police, the demonstrations trickled to an end. Remarkably, media did not seem to notice. “They didn’t know,” one participant said. “We weren’t interesting enough at the time.” For lack of an existing title, I will refer to these demonstrations as the reality riots. “Reality” was part of the conference title “Pornography: Reality or Fantasy?” but was also the intention of these actions. Almost fifty years earlier, feminist movements in Sweden, Europe, and elsewhere were driven by the publication of women’s private lives. In these demonstrations, participants were adding pornography to this group of publicized actions affecting women. Women stood in the subway to draw retroactive attention to an assault that people should have noticed when it occurred. They opened the doors on booths where men masturbated in private, and pulled open the doors of a taxi to take the pornography away from the man inside. This was about moving pornography from the private

world of fantasy and into public where it could be observed and analyzed as a part of reality, not unlike how the public became aware of domestic violence and the need for shelters from it only a few decades earlier.

After the riots, the women appeared for the second day of the conference. Kram, who had participated only in the first events, noticed a change in the women. “They were so excited and they were so happy. There was a very old woman who went and she said ‘Now I have something to tell my grandchildren!’” The idea that, even as an old woman, this was the event that she wanted to tell her grandchildren points to the significance of the riots. They were a component of a new identity solidified and affirmed by the conference and riots. This identity was as a group of women united by their collective experience of violence at the hands of men. MacKinnon’s analysis gave them a way to extrapolate this identity to include all women who experience male violence socially if not directly with pornography and prostitution considered part of this “violence.”

MacKinnon and Dworkin had a significant impact on the passage of abolitionist legislation in Sweden. This involvement, however, was not as legal experts or advisers. According to MacKinnon, neither she nor Andrea were involved at all in the movement, drafting, or passage of abolition in Sweden following this conference.¹⁰ Instead, the speeches made and arguments presented spurred hundreds of women into angry actions that both released this anger and provided a shared experience. MacKinnon reframed violence against women, allowing ROKS to expand its claims based on a deeper solidarity. From here, ROKS shifted again in their approach to service and advocacy. Their “repertoire of contention” (Tarrow 1998) changed to one that was radical, direct, and prepared to lobby at the highest levels.

¹⁰ From correspondence

Abolition Passes

ROKS moved towards the end of the twentieth century as an organization with a clear identity and a well-defined idea of what to do with it. Emboldened by grassroots support, the leadership of ROKS began to press for legislative changes. This was conveniently timed with shifts in the government that facilitated their success.

In the 1980s, weakened capital controls gave firms in Sweden an exit option which they wielded to drop their taxes from 85 to 50 percent (Mishra 1999:75). Suffering from a drop in revenue, the government was forced to pass an austerity package in February 1990 that included both a pay freeze and a strike ban (Huber 2010:126). Unsurprisingly, the governing Social Democrats were badly defeated in the following election. With this defeat in 1991, came an almost 6% drop in the number of women represented, drawing concern those who remained. They initiated Stödstrumporna (“the support stockings”) as a network interested in increasing women’s participation in government. Though not always, it was often members of this group who held meetings with ROKS. Kram says that the organization “made a list for these parliamentarians of things we wanted them to do and they appreciated that list very much.”

During this period, the conservative government was enacting further cuts but still saw the unemployment rate rise (Mishra 1999). Women also continued to move out of the political right and into the left. “By the early 1990s, the reverse gender gap had emerged in Scandinavia, with women more likely to vote for the parties of the left and more likely to support expansion of the welfare state than men” (Huber 2001:127). This meant that, in the next election, Social Democrats anticipated increased support both

from those disillusioned with conservative policies, and women interested in moving away from them, some for the first time.

The Social Democrats went to conference in August 1993 where a “feminist program” was officially adopted (Olsson. 2006:15).” Around this time, a municipal politician named Ingrid Segelström came into the narrative and would later become the one most strongly associated with abolitionist legislation. Kram remembers Segelström as very critical of the shelter movement at first, and especially skeptical of their approach to prostitution. “She said that ROKS was too radical. Too man-hating. Too feminist.” What caused this shift for Segelström cannot be known but there were several events happening quickly that affected the politicians in general, Segelström not excluded.

As anticipated, Sweden voted Social Democrats back to power in 1994. They also elected more women, including Segelström, than any other country (Subrahmanian 2008:117). With 40% representation, many of whom were in the ruling party, women were in a position to issue demands, including the criminalization of sex purchase. The Social Democratic party leadership was initially against this idea that Segelström now strongly supported.

Until this point, ROKS presented itself as a unified front with simmering internal dissent only becoming visible when Angela Beausang was elected chair over Elisabeth Marxstrom. Marxstrom, a politician in the Social Democrat party, then split from ROKS to form Sveriges Kvinnojourers Riksförbund (SKR), taking several of the shelters with her. Though the reasons for the split are multiple, Kram says it was “mostly me” that divided the group. She points to her refusal to include men in the movement, something SKR has done from the beginning. This split, however, had little effect on the pending

legislation. Marxstrom was still undoubtably in favor of it and, according to Kram, “the battle had already been won.” She was quite confident that the Social Democrat women would be able to push abolition through the rest of the party and into law.

A motion to criminalize the purchase of sexual services was submitted at the Social Democrat party conference in Sundsvall, 1997. Leading up to the conference, Social Democrat women “lobbied the men in the party and contacted a man who they thought would be receptive to their arguments in each party district. Intensive lobbying also took place throughout the week of the conference” (Olsson 2006:18). Some lobbyists argued that this was not an issue affecting the daughters of families the Social Democrats represented, not upper class right wing daughters. Others simply asked if these men would like their “wife or daughter to prostitute.” A politician elected in 1995 remembers that persuading the men was relatively easy, given that “nobody wants relatives in this business.” These efforts were successful, and an abolitionist position became the official Social Democratic party line (Olsson 2006:18).

The Violence Against Women Act, including the provision for the abolition of prostitution, was introduced in 1998 and debated on the floor through the month of May. The Act was approved shortly after and implemented on January 1, 1999 (Ekberg 2004:5). “The parties that voted for the law were those on the Left – Social Democrats (Socialdemokraterna), the Swedish Left (Vänsterpartiet, formerly the Communist party), the Greens (Miljöpartiet) – and a centrist party with a largely rural constituency (Centern). The three liberal/rightist parties (Moderaterna, Folkpartiet, and Kristdemokraterna) either opposed it or abstained from voting” (Kulick 2003:202).

Chapter 3: Noting the Context

The Mystery of High Popularity

As noted in the introduction, this legislation is a victory for ROKS' brand of feminism. The vast popularity of the law, however, was unexpected and this is what I will attempt to explain in this third and final section.¹¹ I will put the phenomenon in context as a way to complete the "puzzle" as Tilly (2006) describes. This analysis is inherently speculative, with no real way to prove that an aspect of this context was actually irrelevant. Never the less, it is worth discussion, especially as other women's groups and governments consider importing the Swedish abolition model.

Initially, police were reluctant to prioritize enforcement of this legislation, prompting the government to initiate trainings. "One year after the program began in 2003, there was a 300% increase in arrests" (Ekberg 2004:10) and "buyers found purchasing victims of trafficking and those who are discovered through brothel investigations have been the easiest to prosecute" (Ekberg 2004:9). Activists now consider the police some of the biggest supporters of abolition. "Everything they were afraid of didn't happen. Prostitution wasn't going underground. There weren't more women being killed. Prostitution can't go underground because they need customers. Men would be able to find them and if men can find them so can the police." Methods for finding these brothels and buyers did require changes but were not impossible. The internet, for example, has been wielded as a tool for enforcement of which Ekberg provides the following example:

¹¹ Though the law itself is considered a success, I will only briefly mention reports explaining why because, even if it were a disaster, the phenomenon of high popularity would need to be explained. Much information (in both Swedish and English) on this topic is available through the Swedish government. See, for example, Government Offices of Sweden. 2009. "Against prostitution and human trafficking for sexual purposes." <http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/laws/000288.html>. Last accessed June 2 2011

In one trafficking-related case, which was investigated during the latter half of 2002 and prosecuted during the spring of 2003, the pimp who operated his business solely on the Internet, received approximately 25,000 e-mail inquiries about women advertised on his Web sites from men around Sweden and elsewhere. The pimp kept a customer registry with the names of more than 1,500 buyers. In 571 cases, the men were suspected of having bought sexual services under the Law. Of these, 40 men have been prosecuted for purchasing sexual services (9).

Max Waltman, an academic closely following the legislation, confirms that police use the internet to look for pimps and traffickers. Other methods of include surveying apartments where prostitution is thought to take place and having policewomen pose as women in prostitution. Often these apartments are identified through the internet, but sometimes neighbors will report their suspicions that an apartment is being used for prostitution.¹²

The Swedish government's official investigation into the abolitionist legislation released in 2010,¹³ reported several effects. The first was that, between 1998 and 2008, the number of prostitutes working in the streets has been cut in half. Second, there is both increased public support for a ban and, finally, a declining number of men who admit to having purchased sex (Bucken-Knapp 2010). The general understanding presented by the principal investigator Anna Skarhed and shared by activists and academics is that abolition in Sweden has halted an increase in the sex industry apparent in surrounding countries, significantly reduced street prostitution, discouraged trafficking, and affected normative attitudes.¹⁴ The law shows approval ratings between 70 and 80% with women representing only a small percent of those who do not approve (Waltman. 2010:24).¹⁵ Even if the radical ideology behind abolition it makes sense to the women of ROKS, it unlikely that such a high percent of Swedes would be interested in the

¹² Personal conversation with Waltman

¹³ English summary taken from <http://nppr.se/2010/07/02/evaluating-the-swedish-ban-on-the-purchase-of-sexual-services-the-anna-skarhed-report> accessed June 3 2011. Original here: <http://regeringen.se/content/1/c6/14/91/42/ed1c91ad.pdf>

¹⁴ Based on Skarhed's presentation and following discussions at Grosse Freiheit Conference, 2011, Copenhagen, Denmark

¹⁵ Also see Waltman 2010 for discussion of methodology and limitations.

philosophy, take the time to understand it, and consequently support it. In fact, it was quite obvious this wasn't the case in the way the national museum advertised its exhibit, *Lust and Last*, through the spring of 2011. Women's groups protested the exhibit saying the "lust" on display was a very specific kind. It was one in which men do the looking and lusting and women's bodies provide the objects to look at, much the way women provide bodies for prostituted sex. Objections formed over the government's sponsorship of the exhibit, especially a government that outwardly supported abolition. The museum responded by altering its advertisements:



Author's own photos of flags near Odenplan.

Problems with the idea and sponsorship of *Lust and Last* were not solved by pixelating genitalia. That the government would finance the exhibit and misunderstand women's objections to it suggest there is something behind abolition's popularity other than comprehension and agreement with its philosophy. The final section of this thesis will present an explanation of how a law based on a specific identity built around a radical feminist politics could be met with approval of nearly 80% of the population.

The Descent of ROKS

The first possibility is that ROKS expanded their lobbying efforts to connect with more women's groups and the general public, resulting in high approval. However, according to current activists both in ROKS and outside of it, the organization lost much of its radical organizing power shortly after abolition passed. Part of this was the split to form SKR, meaning that shelters with a less radical agenda had an exit option which did not exist before. It also meant that volunteers and outsiders (and men in particular) who had been prohibited from participating in ROKS, had a place to go as activists, and an opportunity to generate a competing identity.

When ROKS began lobbying for abolition, there was no viable opposition to this interpretation of prostitution. Instead, it was the law itself that drew out perspectives critical of what the government had accepted. For example, the feminist magazine run by students at Stockholm University, *Bang*, ran its first issue in 1991 but did not tackle the theme of sexuality until 1998. It devoted an issue entirely to prostitution one year later. The debates around that article and elsewhere between critics and supporters of abolition were bitter, leaving at least one informant reluctant to revisit the debate all together. These combined in the late 1990s combined with the presence of SKR to represent an identity alternative to what was created by ROKS. Its very existence, if only through dilution of resources and attention, weakened ROKS and the dominance of its philosophy.

Concurrently, ROKS became a target of critique aimed to discredit. Kram remembers that "these men who didn't like our work were more and more frustrated so they looked for things to make us look less credible." One attack came in the form of a documentary, *The Gender Wars*, which aired on Swedish television in 2005. In this film, then president of ROKS Irene Von Wachenfeldt, infamously stated that men were "animals," forcing her to resign in an

effort to preserve the organization's image. Though my informants insist she was coerced into saying this, the details of why or how are less important than the fact that it was heard widely throughout Sweden. Yet, even as ROKS faced public attacks and challenges brought by a growing field of critics, the swing of abolition's popularity continued to swing upwards.

If the Reality Riots symbolized a solidification of an identity unleashed to push abolition into law, then either the sectioning of SKR or the resignation of Von Wachenfeldt could adequately serve as the symbolic end to this campaign. Though ROKS remains, they are no longer on the defensive as the law is considered unchangeable for the present. An abolitionist activist who came later to this debate stated that "the tactic is to avoid discussions. The television programs wouldn't dare to be seen promoting prostitution," meaning that, if all abolitionist decline to participate in public debate, the debate will not happen because no one is willing to broadcast only criticism. In a way, the debate no longer belongs to ROKS. It belongs to a constituency outside the radical feminist movement who, for several possible reasons, are willing to support the work these women achieved.

Strange Support from Strange Angles

In reflecting on how the law was passed, an informant said that "people wanted a well-ordered society." According to Douglas, this "order" includes removing that which threatens it, specifically the "unclean" elements that make daily life confusing. Kulick (2003) writes that the total number of street prostitutes in all of Sweden has never numbered more than "about 1000" (200). In a country of over nine million, it is unlikely that just 1,000 could generate wide-spread outrage since many people would never see someone in prostitution. Therefore, though possible,

it would be a stretch to argue that these women themselves were the unclean element in need of removal.

Wallerstein (2004) and others see social equality as part of the modern neoliberal ideal. Free to create their own selves, there should be no reason for hierarchy and, if it exists, it is because those who work hardest are at its top. Anything that convincingly threatens this arrangement is supposedly un-modern. As I attempted to show earlier, the theory of abolition depends heavily on the idea that all women benefit from the elimination of prostitution. Rather than focus on the thousand prostituted women in Sweden, it attacks the social acceptability of men purchasing female bodies for sexual gratification, which is an entitlement not assumed by women. It considers itself an equality law, progressive and in step with the ideals of modernity.

A young woman, barely a teenager when abolition passed but now active in Swedish feminist politics, described an incident occurring in the last year:

I was walking downtown in the middle of the day and saw two posters for strip clubs. I thought ‘This doesn’t happen in Sweden! There’s porn in the middle of the street. What is this?’ [The idea that] there were people, men, going to strip clubs in the middle of the day or discussing their evening plans and settling on the strip club seemed old fashioned or not modern.

For this person, signs of the sex industry were, specifically, “not modern.” When pressed further, it was the idea that women should be available to service men at any moment which seemed outdated, rather than commercial sex itself. This notion of who deserved to be serviced and who was expected to serve did not belong in this person’s understanding of contemporary Sweden. It stood out to her much the way Douglas’ example of shoes on the kitchen table did in *Purity and Danger* (1966). This interpretation of prostitution surfaced in many discussions including “Ulrika Messing, then Minister for Gender Equality, who declared in 1997 that ‘Prostitution doesn’t belong in our country’ (Prostitution hör inte hemma i vårt land)” (Kulick.

2003. 205). The “dirt” which needed cleaning from Sweden may have been any number of things for the 80% of people approving the law. But for at least some, it was about doing away with that which was incompatible with the modern ideal of equality.

The final factor which may be responsible for the high popularity of abolition in Sweden is the effect the law has had on trafficking. Wire tapping has revealed that pimps and traffickers find Sweden increasingly inhospitable to business, preferring to market women in places such as Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands where buyers do not risk arrest (Waltman 2010; Ekberg 2004). This is the characteristic which likely captured the approval of the majority of people unimpressed with a feminist analysis of the sex industry but were, for various reasons, interested in reducing human trafficking.

There is ample evidence that trafficking, rather than gender equality or the personal and social harms of prostitution, was the platform on which the law was presented to the public. “In May 2002, the Swedish campaign against prostitution and trafficking was launched at the Solvalla Racetrack in Stockholm” (Raymond 2003:328). The first race of the evening was dedicated to the campaign against prostitution and trafficking and included an address by then Vice-Prime Minister and Minister for Gender Equality, Margareta Winberg (Raymond 2003:328). The campaign included a number of posters to be displayed around Sweden.



Credit: Informant's own photo of government's campaign poster.

“Nu gar torsken till runt östersjön” is a Swedish phrase that the informant translated to mean “the johns are at play in the Baltics.” “Att köpa sex är ett brott” means “buying sex is a crime.” This particular poster highlights two characteristics of the campaign often mentioned by informants. One is that the focus was often on trafficking rather than purchase of sex within Sweden and second that it was very difficult to find men willing to be photographed and associated with this campaign. Perhaps they were already repulsed by the idea of purchasing sex prior to the law, or maybe they did not want what had, until then, been something men were entitled to in private, to be displayed so publicly.

A second film having a different focus and effect from *Gender Wars* was *Lilya 4-ever* directed by Lukas Moodysson and released to high acclaim in 2002. Loosely based on the true story of a Slovakian girl, Lilya is trafficked to Sweden from an unidentified former Soviet country and sold in prostitution. The film ends with her suicide when she

escapes her pimp and jumps from a bridge. “I think that changed a lot of peoples' minds,” recounts an activist. “It's a pity that the man who did this film was not explicit that this was a real story of a Slovakian girl coming here to Sweden..I think many people thought this was a thing he made up for the film but many also knew... She was so young. I think the film had a great impact.”

Why did the government focus on promoting the law's impact on trafficking and, more importantly, why did it work? To answer this question, we have to look at what was happening around Sweden which could have drawn concern from politicians and their constituents about incoming victims of trafficking. The source of this anxiety may have come from a combination of joining the EU, a perceived threat from the Baltics, and the creation of the Öresund Bridge.

While walking towards a metro stop in downtown Stockholm, an informant gestured to a couple sitting on the concrete steps who appeared to be Romani. “This is the result of the EU,” she said. “They are trafficked.” The connection between trafficking and EU goes beyond this recognition that more permeable borders bring more people. There is also a symbolic connection that views the state as increasingly susceptible to dirty dangers outside. Kulick's (2003) presents a compelling analysis of how Sweden saw this connection in the period leading up to joining the EU:

Prostitution may provide Swedish politicians, policy makers and journalists with a metaphor for Sweden's relationship to the EU... As a small, weak, innocent victim threatened with exploitation by a dirty masculinized foreigner like the EU, Sweden suddenly begins to look very much like a prostitute” (211).

“Prostitute” in this case means “vulnerable,” a feeling not eliminated by the inevitability of EU membership. Seizing the opportunity to reduce the inflow of vulnerable trafficking victims may have provided Swedes, whether conscious or not, with an increased sense of their own security.

In considering where this swarm of trafficked women were likely to come from, two places in particular would have stood out.

In 1995, construction began on the Öresund Bridge that would connect Copenhagen, Denmark and Malmö, Sweden. Work was completed in 2000, just one year after abolition went into effect. Lofgren (2004) suggests that this transnational structure was a source of anxiety for many Swedes. They were specifically worried about the “loose morals” of Denmark and, in particular, the infiltration of alcohol and prostitution (Lofgren 2004). In the field, it was surprising how many informants mentioned Denmark in conversation. This was a place where people do “lots of drugs” and there are “so many prostitutes.” Travel between these two countries was greatly simplified by gradual implementation of the Nordic Passport Union through the 1950s, allowing people to pass through without documentation. Though legally simple, there had not been a physical structure connecting Denmark and Sweden until 2000. As Lofgren (2004) shows, this generated some anxiety, potentially related to how easily alcohol and prostitutes could reach Swedish communities.

The second location from which trafficked women were and are feared to originate is demonstrated in the earlier campaign poster: the Baltic states. Through the 1990s, most of these countries continued to suffer the economic effects of the US’ Cold War, making migration for labor an attractive option and trafficking of humans a chilling possibility. In Sweden’s response to this, Kulick (2003) observes:

In November 1994, numerous articles were published in Swedish newspapers asserting that Sweden would be overrun with foreign prostitutes if the country entered the EU. I have already mentioned reports like the one that claimed that 100,000 ‘Eastern bloc’ women were gathering like storm clouds on the horizon, waiting to get into Sweden and spread HIV. The same year that that article appeared, the theme of threat was explicitly enunciated by Karin Starrin, then the President of the Center party’s League of Women. In a public speech, Starrin announced that ‘The biggest threat is the outpouring of prostitution from the former

communist countries. A Russian woman can earn half a yearly salary from a couple of acts of intercourse in Sweden. There are those who think that it's OK to come here and sell themselves' (Expressen, 93-06-18)" (205).

Starrin was president of League which ultimately supported abolition. Yet, going by this quotation, she was concerned about "those who think that it's OK to come here and sell themselves." Abolitionist feminist theory rejects the idea that individual women autonomously choose prostitution of their own free will. From this quotation, Starrin either does not understand this or does not agree. Her support was earned for reasons other than the ideology behind feminist lobbying efforts.

"The Baltics" repeatedly materialized in conversations with informants. One described a series of conferences held in these countries, the purpose of which was "to enlighten the countries around there." These places were described saying "I have been in these Baltic countries and women work and there is a lot of alcohol and things." In these quotes, it becomes apparent that "The Baltics" are threatening. Fears that EU membership, the Nordic Passport Union, and easy access to Sweden by ferry from Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, matched with ongoing poverty in those places would increase the vulnerability of girls and women to traffickers and place Sweden in the unacceptable position of being a prime destination. Discouraging this influx of non-Swedes, especially embarrassingly vulnerable ones, would have appealed to politicians representing a wider range of people other than radical feminists.

When Skarhed spoke at the Grosse Freiheit conference in Copenhagen, May 2011, an attendee from France asked for advice on how to campaign for similar legislation in France. Skarhed told her to focus on trafficking and "avoid a feminist discussion" all together. Even in Sweden, a country open to legal controls on behavior,

highly ordered, and with a lengthy history of strong state feminism, trafficking turned out to be the issue that generated the most support for abolition. Though there are many paths to endorsement for both politicians and the public, acknowledging and promoting the laws effects on trafficking is one way to ensure the law remains long after lobbying efforts have subsided.

Conclusion

Neoliberal globalization can create a need for order. If organizations are willing to conform to that order, they may be granted influence to law and policy at a high level. ROKS was especially poised to do so because of a deep, unified, and personal identity carefully constructed by their work as an organization. Following the passage of abolition, the issue ceased to be the exclusive territory of women's groups and shifted to a wider audience.

As I have attempted to show, the realities of neoliberal globalization have a significant impact on identity-based movements in that they are able to manipulate the constituency. Even though ROKS and the core of the feminist movement remained consistent in their ideology, the audience they appealed to was chosen by the forces of socio political context. Some of these forces drew Swedes to connect with a wish for national reassertion as a developed and modern nation that cares about equality. Others were interested in the legislation's power to control human trafficking. Even though many Swedes must have good intentions in their opposition to trafficking, meaning true concern for the victims, it is unavoidable that this would also appeal to xenophobic outlooks. An increasingly well-connected world means increased access to other parts of it and more potential for encounters with outsiders. These meetings will not always be

well received and, if there is a way to reduce them through legislation, it would be welcomed by many.

Knowing that neoliberal globalization may expand the scope of contemporary identity based movements, the question should be whether and how to use these large audiences. As other countries such as France¹⁶ and Denmark¹⁷ consider abolition, should feminist groups refuse to align themselves with xenophobic interests? Is this even something they can control? Understanding how abolition evolved in Sweden hopefully gives activists an opportunity to prepare for these kinds of questions.

In Sweden, a tradition of social ordering coalesced with the movements of a highly unified organization. ROKS successfully pressured the Swedish government to accept their recommendations on how to treat prostitution. Though based on a specific ideological understanding, the government and public found their own ways of connecting with the legislation. Replicating this process may require activists and governments to consider how they will relate to these other ways of reaching the same, abolitionist, conclusion.

¹⁶ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/apr/13/france-illegal-pay-sex>

¹⁷ <http://www.grossefreiheit.dk/9294/Organizers>

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