The Politics of (Ambiguous) Universality

Political events that unmake the security dispositif of governing human trafficking are informed by the principles of equality and universality, and connected with the excessive elements of a situation, the anomalous presence of those who should not be there, who are represented as not belonging to the situation. An evental politics harnessed to the excessive subjects of a situation is radically different from the formulation of politics in security studies and IR. Practices of security instantiate and reproduce social order. Analyses of security are harnessed to ‘what is’, to actors, audiences, representations and interventions. Even Butler’s interpretation of speech acts as performatively constitutive of spaces of abjection that could become spaces of resistance does not account for emancipatory politics as radically heterogeneous to practices of security. An evental politics of equality, formulated from the standpoint of excess, suspends differential forms of subjectivity and reconfigures the relationality between excrescent, normal and excessive elements in a situation.

Following Badiou, the collective subjectification of those who are excessive can open the space for a disruption of the security dispositif. Illegal migrant sex workers reshape the situation of trafficking from the assignation of risk groups and victimhood to the subjectivity of the worker. Those who were not supposed to be there due to illegality and were not workers due to involvement in prostitution enter the situation of trafficking as equal workers. We have seen that trafficked women are not dangerous as ‘victims’, as coerced, abused or exploited migrants. They are dangerous inasmuch as they embody the permanent risk of the illegal migrant prostitute, inasmuch as they reactivate the category from which they have been extracted and from which they should dis-identify. Victims of trafficking are other-than-illegal-migrant prostitutes, while simultaneously dangerously close to the latter.
Analyses which attempt to think alternative possibilities of subjectification do so by reducing it to private strategies of resistance that can be incorporated within the *dispositif* of security. Moreover, most attempts to unmake security practices do not consider how to unmake the exclusionary effects of security. If ethical approaches are acutely aware of the need for radical principles of politics, the link between radical principles and existing practices remains unclear.

I have shown that the predicate of ‘work’ and the collective subjectification of ‘worker’ – when claimed by prostitutes and trafficked women – introduces a radical claim of equality within the governmental practices of security. The claim of equality turns trafficked women from illegitimate intruders into visible speakers and equal partakers of the community of workers. Through the body and voice of sex workers, the migrant other becomes a sharer in the community as a worker. Rather than radical alterity, the foreign sex worker becomes collectively subjectified, together with all other sex workers. They are the subjects of their own emancipation, contesting the situation which divides them into antagonistic categories.

The claim to work introduces an unexpected and, in this sense, evental claim within the state of the situation. The dangerous or risky trafficked women are migrants crossing borders and risking their lives in search of work, who might return even if deported to their countries of origin, rehabilitated and reintegrated within the normal. Rather than the predicate of inequality between high-skilled and low-skilled migrants, legal and illegal, work becomes the signifier of equality, the possibility of collective subjectivation beyond governmental categorizations into risk groups.

According to Badiou, this politics is enacted through forms of collective organization at a distance from the state. The distance from the state is not a form of anti-statism, but politics enacted at a distance from state institutions. As Badiou has summarized the stakes of the situation of the *sans-papiers*:

> Considering the fate of the *sans-papiers* in this country, a first orientation might have been: they should revolt against the state. Today we would say that the singular form of their struggle is, rather, to create the conditions in which the state is led to change this or that thing concerning them, to repeal the laws that should be repealed, to take the measures of naturalization (*régularisation*) that should be taken, and so on.

(Badiou, 2002b: 98, emphasis in original)