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Globalizing sexual exploitation: sex tourism and the traffic in women

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Introduction

Today there are many forces at work in the normalization of the international sex industry (Jeffreys, 1997). The sex industry has become immensely profitable, providing considerable resources, not just to individuals and networks involved in trafficking women but to governments who have come to depend on sex industry revenue. One aspect of the industry in particular that governments have come to depend upon for revenue is sex tourism (Bishop and Robinson, 1998). It is the concern of this paper to present a critical analysis of the arguments of the normalizers, whether sex industrialists or their spokespersons, that sex tourism or other forms of prostitution should come to be seen as a legitimate leisure industry, one in which women and children are literally 'men's leisure'.

Whilst child sex tourism has come to be seen as a major concern within the tourism industry and the human rights community since the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adult sex tourism has not been regarded as unacceptable in the same way. In late November 1998 I was invited to speak at a conference organized by the European Commission entitled *First European Meeting of the Main Partners in the Fight Against Child Sex Tourism*. It was a conference embedded in the Brussels Travel Fair and aimed at the tourism industry. The centrepiece of the conference was a video clip made by the Non-government organization (NGO) Terre des Hommes with funding from Lufthansa. The clip was meant to educate potential child sex abusers on longhaul flights against abusive behaviour. The video clip showed children's toys and gave ages of 4 and 7 for the victims. This representation of child sex tourism as the abuse of very young children will limit its effectiveness. As Julia O'Connell Davidson, co-author of the ECPAT (End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking) regional reports on child sex tourism (Davidson and Taylor, 1996), pointed out the vast majority of the 'children' abused in child sex tourism are young teenage girls who are integrated into the bars and brothels of destination countries and used by situational abusers i.e. men who neither know nor care how young the girls are. Davidson and I argued that child sex tourism cannot, therefore, reasonably be effectively tackled as if it were a discrete phenomenon. It is but one aspect of adult sex tourism, which is but one form of the international prostitution industry and only a challenge to this prostitution industry would be effective in fighting child sex tourism. Other

speakers at the conference did not make these connections and this could suggest that there is a belief that adult sex tourism is too established to challenge, or even a desire by some to protect the profits that accrue to tourism operators who service sex tourists.

Melissa Farley, co-author of an important paper on the damaging effects of prostitution on prostituted women (Farley and Hotaling, 1995), has recently suggested to me that the expression 'sex tourism' is a euphemism. This makes sense. The term 'prostitution tourism' is more accurate because it does not suggest fun and entertainment so much as the abuse of women, and this term will be used henceforth.

In this paper the arguments are rehearsed of feminist antiviolence theorists and prostitution survivor organizations who make the case that men's prostitution behaviour should be seen as sexual violence and a violation of women's human rights and compare them with the arguments of those who consider that prostitution should be considered legitimate work for women. The increasing internationalization of the sex industry and the way in which prostitution tourism fits into this will be described. The Philippines will be used as an example of how prostitution tourism is organized and conducted. Then the strategies towards trafficking, prostitution tourism and prostitution proposed by groups of feminists in the human rights community who take quite opposed positions are considered. In a concluding section it is argued that prostitution tourism needs to be countered through human rights mechanisms which challenge all forms of men's prostitution behaviour towards women and children as sexual violence.

Prostitution is commercial sexual violence

From the nineteenth century to the 1970s feminist ideas on prostitution were consistent. Prostitution was seen by feminists from Josephine Butler to Kate Millett as arising from women's subordination and as constituting the violation of women (see Jeffreys, 1985, 1997). In the late 1980s and 1990s some feminist thinkers adopted the views promoted by some prostitutes' rights organizations and industry representatives that prostitution should be seen simply as legitimate work, as 'choice' for women or even as just 'sex'. The pro-prostitution lobby group, COYOTE (Cast Off Your Old Tired Ethics), in the USA has been promoting these ideas since the early 1980s (Jeness, 1993). Feminist theorists who have taken up these ideas in recent years include Wendy Chapkis (1997) and Jill Nagle, editor of the 1997 *Whores and Other Feminists*, who explains in her introduction that she includes only contributions that are positive about prostitution because she considers prostitution to constitute 'feminism in action.'

The justifications of prostitution on the grounds that it is women's 'choice', legitimate 'work' and just 'sex' are hugely problematic (these ideas are further discussed in Jeffreys, 1997). Women's 'choice' of prostitution is socially and politically constructed out of poverty, child sexual abuse, homelessness, family obligation. Arguments as to women's 'choice' are victim-blaming, like the arguments as to why women 'stay' in violent relationships. Such

arguments remove responsibility from the perpetrators and obscure the unequal power relationships involved. Arguments that prostitution is legitimate 'work', or even skilled work (Perkins and Bennett, 1985), ignore what distinguishes prostitution and other forms of direct exploitation of women's bodies so significantly from other forms of work. Prostitution and reproductive surrogacy are the only kinds of 'work' that require only that a woman's body be present: she does not have to be able to move or even be conscious. To say that prostitution is just sex is to accept that the use of the body of a woman who is dissociating to survive, with no concern for her personhood or pleasure, is what sex can reasonably be expected to be. In fact it is precisely the 'sex' of male supremacy that feminists have been seeking for 100 years to overthrow in favour of egalitarian sexual practice.

Since the late 1980s an international movement has developed which maintains a more traditional feminist understanding of prostitution and seeks to combat attempts to normalize prostitution. This movement is composed of survivors of prostitution such as those who have set up organizations in the US to help women exit prostitution and to re-educate the male abusers, such as WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt), and SAGE (Standing Against Global Exploitation). These survivors have been working with feminist activists such as Kathleen Barry and others in the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women to develop an international network aimed at ending men's abuse of women in prostitution. This movement considers men's abuse of women in prostitution to constitute a form of men's sexual violence against women.

The integral links between prostitution and violence against women have been recognized by feminist researchers for many years. In the last decade, as well as pointing out that very large percentages of prostituted women were seasoned by being sexually abused in childhood, that prostituted women suffer a great amount of rape and violence that is not paid for, including death from the men who abuse them, some feminists are asserting that prostitution constitutes sexual violence against women in and of itself. Cecilie Hoigard and Liv Finstad concluded from their research in Oslo that prostitution constituted a 'gross form of violence'. 'The impoverishment and destruction of the women's emotional lives makes it reasonable, in our eyes, to say that customers practice gross violence against prostitutes' (Hoigard and Finstad, 1992, p. 115). Fractured jaws would heal, they said, but 'Regaining self-respect and recreating an emotional life is far more difficult.' This discovery was a surprise to them. It was '*new* knowledge' and the 'most important discovery' they made in their research.

This argument is put forward very effectively in the work of Evelina Giobbe in 'Prostitution: buying the right to rape' (Giobbe, 1991). In prostitution, she argues, 'crimes against women and children become a commercial enterprise'. These crimes include child sexual abuse when a man uses a juvenile prostitute, battery when a prostituted woman is used in sadomasochistic sex scenes, and sexual harassment and rape 'When a john compels a woman to submit to his sexual demands as a condition of

“employment”.’ According to Giobbe’s analysis the exchange of money does not transform the violence of the acts involved into something else.

The fact that a john gives money to a woman or a child for submitting to these acts does not alter the fact that he is committing child sexual abuse, rape, and battery; it merely redefines these crimes as prostitution. (Giobbe, 1991, p. 146)

She concludes that prostitution is the commerce of sexual abuse and inequality. Kathleen Barry identifies the sex that men buy in prostitution as the ‘same sex they take in rape – sex that is disembodied, enacted on the bodies of women who, for the men, do not exist as human beings, and the men are always in control’ (Barry, 1995, p. 36).

The male sexual behaviour involved in using women in prostitution includes several forms of male sexual violence. The basic male sexual practice carried out upon prostituted women is what can be called ‘unwanted sexual intercourse’. In heterosexual relationships this term can be used to describe those experiences of sexual intercourse in which a woman complies with a man’s demands without being willing but also without acknowledging to herself a lack of consent. She will not call what is done to her rape because this would signify lack of consent, though she may bitterly resent it. This experience correlates well with prostitution in which women have their bodies used in ways they cannot refuse since their livelihoods depend upon it, but which they would never tolerate otherwise. In both practices the male perpetrators inflict sexual acts upon a woman with no respect for her personhood or her pleasure.

The other most common form of sexual violence to be paid for in prostitution is sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is one of those forms of abuse that has only been given a name and recognizable form through feminism. Catharine MacKinnon has been particularly influential in turning what feminists were beginning to define as sexual harassment into something that was actionable at law in situations, such as work or education, where it could be defined as an issue of sex discrimination (MacKinnon, 1987, p. 104). The British antiviolence feminist theorist, Liz Kelly, defines sexual harassment as including ‘a variable combination of visual, verbal and physical forms of abuse’. Kelly found that the work situations in which women were most likely to experience harassment were those which were most sexualized. A woman survivor of stripping describes the abusive behaviour of the audience, ‘I wish I had a pound for every time I got called a slag . . . some of the things they would say were *really disgusting*. They’d do things like grab hold of a girl and try and push a bottle up her’ (Kelly, 1989, p. 105).

Through different areas of the sex industry a variety of forms of sexual harassment which cause distress to women are normalized by being paid for. Prostituted women have to accept a certain amount of hands on sexual harassment as part of the job. They have to accept visual harassment too, in which they are reduced to sexual objects by the dominant male stare as men select the women they will use in brothels and on the street. A French prostituted woman, explaining what it felt like to be chosen in this way in a

brothel said it was 'revolting, it's sickening, it's terrible for the women' (Jaget, 1980, p. 75). Visual harassment is what is purchased by men through stripping and tabletop dancing. Verbal harassment can also be bought through the sex industry's provision of phone sex lines. These sex lines institutionalize the practice of 'obscene phone calls.'

Effects of prostitution and sexual violence

Feminist scholars and activists are also starting to define prostitution as men's sexual violence because its effects upon prostituted women replicate the documented effects found in feminist work on forms of sexual violence such as rape, incest, sexual harassment and marital rape. Evelina Giobbe argues that prostitution resembles rape in the shocking similarity of its effects, as revealed in the WHISPER Oral History Project. These effects included feelings of humiliation, degradation, defilement and dirtiness. The prostituted women experienced similar difficulties in establishing intimate relationships with men. They experienced disdain and hatred towards men. They suffered negative effects on their sexuality, flashbacks and nightmares as well as lingering fears and deep emotional pain that often resembled grieving (Giobbe, 1991, p. 155). Another effect she identifies is suicide. She reports that figures from public hospitals show that 15% of all suicide victims are prostitutes and one survey of call girls revealed that 75% had attempted suicide. These effects of prostitution, she points out, do not support the idea that prostitution is a victimless crime.

Prostituted women in her study blamed themselves for the damage they suffered, assuming that they were 'not doing it right' just as battered wives routinely blame themselves for the violence they suffer. Their sense of their own valuelessness was reinforced in prostitution because of the way the men treated them. The male abusers were so determined to treat the prostituted women they were using as nonpersons that they did not even notice when women were crying as they performed their tricks. The only parallel to this trauma, she suggests, is that found in victims of serious sexual abuse, rape and battery.

Feminist psychoanalysts and psychologists, such as Judith Herman, have applied the concept of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), accepted by mainstream psychologists as resulting from other forms of torture and imprisonment, to incest and domestic violence (Herman, 1994). One way in which feminists are currently seeking to show that men's use of women in prostitution constitutes sexual violence is in identifying the resulting damage of long term prostitution abuse as PTSD. Melissa Farley and Norma Hotaling gave a paper on this topic at the NGO Forum of the Fourth World Conference on Women at Beijing in 1995. They explain that their objective is to provide evidence for the harm intrinsic to prostitution (Farley and Hotaling, 1995, p. 1). They consider that prostituted women, like the victims of hostage situations and torture, suffer the multiple stressors that cause post-traumatic stress disorder. They found that overall 41% of the 130 prostituted persons they surveyed met the criteria for diagnosis of PTSD. This compares

with an incidence among battered women in shelters of from 45% to 84% and amongst Vietnam veterans of 15%.

The practice of dissociation which prostituted women employ to protect their sense of self from violation is so similar to the dissociation employed by sexually abused children that Judith Herman (1994) describes, that it provides good evidence that the two experiences are similarly abusive. Hoigard and Finstad asked their interviewees in some detail about the defence mechanisms they used. They wanted to know 'How do you avoid prostituting yourself when you prostitute yourself' and considered this to be the 'fundamental question for prostitutes around the world' (Hoigard and Finstad, 1992, p. 64). Prostituted women, they explain, have worked out an ingenious, complex system to protect 'the real me, the self, the personality from being invaded and destroyed by customers' (Ibid, p. 64). As they point out, literature on prostitution which has considered these mechanisms reports remarkably similar techniques (Jaget, 1980; McLeod, 1982). The women use different methods to cut off, such as thinking about something else, using alcohol, Valium or other drugs. A young woman who phoned and had a conversation with the author in a New Zealand radio station studio, whilst being interviewed about prostitution, explained that a psychiatric nurse also employed in her brothel had taught her to form a different personality with a new name to go into and out of at will (personal communication, Sarah, April 1998). Thus she was able to see the abuse as happening to this other person and not to her. For survivors of childhood sexual abuse and for prostitution survivors the effects of this practice are to damage women's relationships with their bodies and with others.

Norwegian researchers Cecilie Hoigard and Liv Finstad are able to describe the damage done to prostituted women in Oslo in considerable detail because of the in-depth interviews they conducted with women over a number of years. Their respondents reported destruction of their sex lives. One woman described her experience of seeking a sexual relationship whilst in prostitution, 'You're a piece of shit, and you make yourself sick . . . I've thrown up during sex, just started throwing up without thinking that it's been awful. It's just happened' (Hoigard and Finstad, 1992, p. 109). Others speak of losing the ability to orgasm and having to fake it, they talk of feeling they have become hard and cold. One said 'I'm only the genitals that they use' (Ibid, p. 112). They spoke of the inability to feel anything, not necessarily because of the unpaid 'violence' they experienced but because of the 'regular, daily tricks' (Ibid, p. 112).

Proponents of the normalization of prostitution proclaim that prostitution can be made safe for women once the 'stigma' of prostitution is removed and it is made respectable and accepted (Pheterson, 1996). The state of Victoria in Australia has gone well down the road to the normalization of prostitution through a policy of legalization of licensed brothels. Brothel prostitution, however, does not provide a solution to the violence of prostitution. A prostitution survivor in the Melbourne branch of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women demonstrated just how violating the ordinary acts of brothel prostitution are, whilst describing the events of a half hour booking.

She explains that the challenge is to isolate the most violating act, penetration, to the last five minutes. Thus she seeks to delay penetration through the gift of the gab, at which she is skilled, and through prolonging the massage stage. Nonetheless, the massage is a problem in itself. As she sits astride a client he will seek to swing his arms back to grab at her breasts. To avoid this she will get down and seek to conduct the massage from a suitable distance. The best sort of booking, she explains, is the one in which the man is drunk and can be persuaded to fall asleep in the spa so that no violating behaviour ensues (personal communication, October 1997). It is hard to imagine another form of occupation so violating that the practitioner seeks at all costs not to be subjected to it. Hairdressers are unlikely to behave in this way.

Causes and extent of the internationalization of prostitution

It is a matter of considerable concern to feminist commentators such as Kathleen Barry, that prostitution is presently being industrialized and internationalized (Barry, 1995). In the industrialization of prostitution women who once had a limited ability to fix their own hours and have some control over their exploitation when not under the direct control of pimps, are now becoming subject to the exploitation of big business interests. In Melbourne, for example, since the legalization of brothel prostitution in the mid-1980s, big business has moved into the sex industry. The largest Melbourne brothel, The Daily Planet, has been quoted on the Stock Exchange. Also in Melbourne, as part of the new big business prostitution, a new brothel was opened to serve the new large scale casino, called The Boardroom to indicate its respectable and corporate status and to appeal to corporate man, the brothel provides male, female and trans-sexual 'service providers'. In Asian economies, prostitution is playing a more and more significant part. A 1998 International Labour Organization report estimated that prostitution accounted for between 2 and 14% of the economy in four Asian countries, Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines (Lim, 1998). In the burgeoning trade of international trafficking in women, large-scale crime networks have evolved which find it profitable to traffic women into destinations worldwide (De Stoop, 1992). These developments indicate the extent to which the individual women and boys used in prostitution are now subject to the exploitation of international capitalism.

The internationalization of prostitution is being effected through a greatly increased trafficking in women. Trafficking for prostitution is becoming a major concern of human rights organizations and feminist activists as the size of the problem and its grievous effects on the lives of women and children are becoming better known. The shape of the traffic in women differs in significant ways from the situation discovered by the League of Nations in its reports between the two world wars (League of Nations, 1927, 1933). In this period the issue of trafficking in women for prostitution had its own committee at the League through which feminists worked to outlaw men's abuse of women in prostitution in general (Jeffreys, 1997). The Report on

trafficking in the East found that the traffic consisted of 'a certain movement of occidental prostitutes to the Orient' but 'hardly any in the other direction' (League of Nations, 1933, p. 21). The most serious problem of occidental women concerned Russian refugee women in North China and Manchuria. Most of the traffic was from one Asian country to another, the largest group being Chinese women, then Japanese, Koreans, Siamese, Filipinos, Indians, Iraqis, Persians and Syrians. The industrialization and internationalization of prostitution are linked to several developments since World War Two, including prostitution tourism, which have affected both the supply of women vulnerable to being trafficked into prostitution and the degree of demand from men to use such women.

The supply of women is greatly increased by mass migration resulting from destabilizing economic development. Nelleke van der Vleuten explains that the world-wide traffic in women 'must be analysed in terms of the structural inequality between Third World and industrialized countries' (van der Vleuten, 1991, p. 5). It is a result, she says, of the increasing internationalization of the world economy in which local communities in the Third World become an integral part of the industrialized world, becoming dependent on social change in industrialized countries. People in the Third World lose traditional resources such as land, paid labour or other means of income and a permanent subproletariat is created with the growth of slums on the outskirts of towns and an increase in child labour. The consequences are greatest for women and girls who have to take care of children and family because of tradition or the disappearance of male support. Women are very vulnerable because of their position in the labour market. Migration from rural areas to the cities seems one of the few possible ways for these girls and women to survive.

Another force creating the supply is warfare. Civil wars have become endemic in countries released from the rule of colonialism. In Burma, for instance, Karen refugee women and girls are vulnerable to being trafficked into prostitution in Thailand (Foundation for Women, 1994). Another is the development of new market economies in socialist and formerly socialist countries. This has led to a dramatic expansion in prostitution as poverty has increased and old ways of life have been disrupted. Well-organized networks have developed to traffic women and girls into prostitution in Vietnam after the introduction of economic reforms there (Foundation for Women, 1994). The number of prostituted women in Ho Chi Minh City, for instance, has risen from 10 000 to 50 000 (Santos, 1995). In Europe too, the breakdown of communism has led to 'professional criminal organizations' trafficking in women from Russia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, the former Yugoslavia and the Czech and Slovak Republics (Foundation for Women, 1994). All of these forces creating the supply of women depend upon the low status of women. In countries such as Bangladesh, where the status of women is in decline, the problem is invariably heightened (Kendar, 1994, p. 8)

Military prostitution and sex tourism have increased the global demand to use women in prostitution. Massive prostitution industries have developed in response to the large US military presence in Saigon, Thailand and the

Philippines (Enloe, 1983, Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, 1992). This has led to increased local prostitution and a new phenomenon has developed, which did not exist in earlier times, prostitution tourism. Prostitution tourism is a recent phenomenon. Asian women caught up in the traffic in women in the east in the interwar period did not service occidental tourists as might happen in today's sex tourism, but went to foreign countries 'in search of clients among their own countrymen abroad' (League of Nations, 1933, p. 22). Nowhere were there found 'attempts to provide exotic novelty to brothel clients by offering them women of alien races' (Ibid, p. 22).

Affluence and leisure, the ease of communications and foreign travel, the construction of foreign prostituted women as exotic and desirable in pornography and the deliberate policies of the governments of poor countries to develop prostitution tourism as a means to gain foreign exchange, have contributed to this phenomenon (Truong, 1990). The contribution of prostitution tourism to the economies of destination countries can be considerable. Ryan Bishop and Lillian Robinson, in their new book on sex tourism in Thailand, do not seek to estimate what proportion of the worth of the tourism industry is attributable specifically to prostitution tourism, but clearly consider it significant when they say that 'A \$4 billion per year tourist industry is the linchpin of the modernization process called the "Thai Economic Miracle". And the linchpin of that industry is sex' (Bishop and Robinson, 1998). Prostitution tourism can be identified in rich countries too, however. It is a part of the prostitution industry in all those areas where tourists or visiting businessmen are offered women. For example, tabletop clubs are advertised at the baggage carousels in some airport.

It is possible that the outrage of western men confronted with changes in the status of women resulting from the women's liberation movement in their countries, has exacerbated the desire to use foreign women in prostitution and as mail order brides. In her interviews with British sex tourists, Julia O'Connell Davidson found, 'Almost all the sex tourists interviewed spoke with great bitterness about white women's power to deny them sexual access' (Davidson, 1994, p. 12). Currently the international organization of prostitution tourism is facilitated by the internet.

Some internet sites are dedicated to the trade in male order brides. This trade is mainly in women from Asia, particularly the Philippines, Thailand, Korea, and Sri Lanka. In the Philippines in 1988-89 there was a 94% increase in the number of Filipino women migrating as fiancées or spouses to Japanese, Australian, German, Taiwanese, British, and US destinations. In the late 1980s and 1990s there has been a growing dissemination and diversification of pornography through cable television, dial-a-porn, home video and computers. Trafficking in women on the Internet in the form of the World Sex Guide, introducing johns to where and how to purchase women and girls worldwide, conversations between johns about using women and young girls, interactive pornography where men can instruct live women through the Internet to strip and perform sexual acts, and websites devoted to buying mail-order brides and to prostitution tourism have aided the organization and global scope of the sex industry (Hughes, 1996).

Russian women are vulnerable to trafficking because of the economic destruction of Russia following the introduction of rogue capitalism. The variety of destinations and uses to which these Russian women are being put illustrates the breadth and brutality of the international sex industry. One group of Russian women are being exploited in pornography videos sold through internet outlets, usually in the USA, to users all over the world. Some appear, for instance, on bestiality pornography sites. On one such site several Russian speaking women are sexually abused in a video entitled *Gorilla Wives* (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (Australia) Newsletter, No 2, 1998, p. 2). The description explains that these women are sexually penetrated by a gorilla and a chimpanzee. The only English word they use, which is 'daddy', is addressed to the gorilla. The video portrays, then, incest/bestiality pornography. The extreme form of sexual violence involved in such videos indicates the extreme circumstances in which impoverished Russian women can now find themselves.

Trafficking in women for prostitution is a problem in all regions of the world. Both Europe and Asia have considerable industries based upon the traffic in women for prostitution. The Netherlands is one of the main destinations within Europe for the traffic, as well as being a destination for European prostitution tourism. Nelleke van der Vleuten explains that more and more non-European women are coming to work in brothels and sex-clubs in The Netherlands (van der Vleuten, 1991, p. 3). In the Netherlands the percentage of non-Europeans among prostituted women is usually 30–40% and in some places at least 60%. The estimated total of Dutch and foreign prostituted women is 20 000. Fifty per cent of windows in Amsterdam are rented out to non-European women and there are 3000 Latin-American prostituted women in Amsterdam. Prostitution, van der Vleuten, says, has changed and taken on an international dimension. It is large-scale and highly industrialized.

The Dutch sex industry is part of the European sex market. The majority of women travel between brothels and sexclubs in different European countries. Foreign women are the lowest in the hierarchy of prostitution. They work in insanitary conditions and are isolated both culturally and socially. They are often illegal immigrants and have no freedom of movement. Health services cannot reach them and many work without condoms for financial reasons. A Dutch government report says many women are in a 'criminal climate, where false pretexts are used to seduce women' who are 'forced into prostitution and kept there' (van der Vleuten, 1991, p. 4).

The western human rights organization, Human Rights Watch/Asia, has published two studies of the traffic in women which describe in detail aspects of the traffic in Asia (Human Rights Watch/Asia, 1994 and 1995). *A Modern Form of Slavery* looks at the traffic of Burmese women into Thailand and *Rape for Profit* at the traffic of Nepali women into India. Nongovernment organizations estimate Bombay's prostituted women at 100 000 of whom up to half are Nepali. Twenty per cent of Bombay's brothel population is thought to be girls under 18 and half that population may be infected with the HIV virus (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 1). The demand for Nepali girls,

especially those with fair skin and Mongolian features, continues to increase. The Indian Council of Medical Research estimates the total number of prostituted women in India at about one million, of whom 200 000 are likely to be Nepali. But a voluntary organization that serves the country's prostituted women estimates that there were more than eight million brothel workers and 7.5 million call girls in 1992 (Ibid, p. 1). The age of Nepali girls is dropping partly because fear of the HIV virus causes men to demand 'clean' women. The average age of recruitment is now 10–14, which means that some are younger than 10. The estimated number of prostituted women in Thailand is 800 000 to two million of whom 20 000 are Burmese.

The Human Rights Watch reports explain that men's use of women in prostitution is often a death sentence for the women because the male abusers pass on the HIV virus. Far from prostituted women being a source of AIDS they are the recipients of it. Medical researchers have hypothesized that the thinner mucous membrane of the genital tract in girls is a less efficient barrier to viruses, and that young women may produce less of the mucus which has an immune function (Human Rights Watch, 1995, p. 66). The men's abuse of the trafficked women causes them to develop friction sores of the vagina. The rate of infection is related to the number of johns via the rate of associated vaginal abrasion. The women are not usually permitted time off for the injuries to heal. The injuries themselves make HIV transmission easier. Condom usage makes the friction problem worse. The majority of Burmese women in closed Thai brothels who started out as young, 'clean' virgins, become infected about six months after entry (Human Rights Watch, 1994, p. 128). Of the 19 Burmese women and girls interviewed by Human Rights Watch who had been tested for HIV, fourteen were found to be infected with the virus. The rate of infection was roughly three times higher than among non-trafficked prostituted women in Thailand.

Trafficked women in India and Thailand are imprisoned mainly through debt bondage, which is understood to be a human rights abuse and a practice akin to slavery, even in customary international law. Debt bondage is incurred when the victim's family members, 'friends' or other persons who demand to be repaid for transport costs, receive payment from traffickers or brothel owners. The victim is told she must work to pay off the debt but usually has no idea how much the debt is, how much she earns or how long she must work to pay it off. A sum which might have been paid off in a few months' work is usually, through this ruse, employed to keep a victim in brothels for years. Sometimes the women and girls are simply kidnapped and sold.

Sex tourism in the Philippines

The Philippines is an important destination for sex tourists and the situation in this country will be used to illustrate some of the dynamics of prostitution tourism. In 1995 I was fortunate enough to take part in an Exposure/Study Tour of sex tourism in the Philippines organized through the Centres for Philippine Concerns in Australia and women's NGOs in the Philippines, particularly Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research

Organizations (WEDPRO) and Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). The object of the fortnight's tour was to expose Australian women to the behaviour of Australian men in the organization of and participation in prostitution tourism. As the introduction to the report on the tour explains:

. . . the sex tourism industry matters. It is big, it is wealthy, and it is damaging. It thrives on the poverty of the Philippines, and on the racism and sexism that exist in Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines. It exposes women and girls to violence and humiliation, and leaves them in it, day after day, year after year, until it has no further use for them. It paints a picture of the Philippines as a nation of available, submissive women, who can be fucked, beaten, married, discarded, divorced, killed. (Distor and Hunt (eds) 1996)

Prostitution tourism in the Philippines originated in the construction of a massive sex industry to service the American military bases. This military prostitution has spawned a considerable domestic prostitution and prostitution tourism industry. The practices are perceived as chilling in their brutality. Filipino women describe what they understand as the abuse by their American johns such as the favourite practice of 'three holes' in *Let the Good Times Roll* (Sturdevant and Stoltzfus, 1992). This latter practice connotes the use of a woman as an object with three convenient orifices which can all be used sexually. Women and bars were advertised to Americans as threeholers. The cruelty of this practice is described by Madelin who explains that she went with an American because she was pregnant and needed money, ' "He wanted to do things to me that I didn't like, such as three holes." She fought. . . "He was choking me . . . I was getting weak. I was having difficulty breathing" ' (Ibid, p. 61–2). This woman was rescued because hotel employees heard the noise of the struggle. Another American behaved in a similar way: 'He turned me over and was entering my ass. I lost it then. I fought. . . I had taken part in the wrestling in the bar before' (Ibid, p. 62). The Americans demanded the institution of the practice of boxing and wrestling between women in the bars. They found the spectacle of women hurting each other exciting.

Another woman, Lita, describes her first time in prostitution with an American when she was 14 and a virgin. 'I really didn't want to, but he forced me. It was very painful. He tried to undress me but I wouldn't get undressed. There was a lot of blood on my clothes' (Ibid, p. 80). Her third American behaved in the same way, 'He had already had sex with me. His penis couldn't enter because it was too large. I cried . . . He pushed my head into the pillow so I wouldn't be able to yell . . . He did all kinds of things to me. I cried' (Ibid, p. 80). Glenda, aged 30, reports of her experience in being used by Americans: 'I didn't know about blow jobs and three holes . . . It was anal sex that made me cry' (Ibid, p. 121). When another of her 'three holes' was used it was equally distressing: 'The first time I gave a blow job, I threw up outside. I didn't know that throwing up outside is banned. I carried a small towel with me after that' (Ibid, p. 122).

The American military abandoned their bases in 1991 as a result of local opposition and the Pinatubo explosion (Santos, 1992). The US government

has recently negotiated a new treaty with the Philippines which will allow for American troops to return, not to bases, but to privileged access to 22 areas for rest and recreation, and potentially prostitution. In the intervening period brutal prostitution practices were continued through an expansion in prostitution tourism.

Prostitution tourism has been promoted by the Government in the Philippines because of its profitability. Income generated from visitor arrivals in 1992 was US\$1.67 billion and in 1993 was US\$2.12 billion. The bulk of tourists are men (63.7%) and have a median age of 38 years (Distor and Hunt, 1996). Women and children are vulnerable to prostitution because of the extreme poverty in which they live. Seventy-five per cent of the population live below the poverty line. The minimum wage of 145 pesos a day (nearly US\$5 a day) contrasts with the daily cost of living for a family of six – 244.25 pesos. The combined unemployment and underemployment rate in the country is around 40–50%.

One of the areas we visited on the tour was Angeles City. The town owes its existence to the servicing, including through prostitution, of personnel stationed at Clark Air Force Base. When the Americans withdrew there was a hiatus in the sex industry in the city which was quickly filled by Australian entrepreneurs and Australian sex tourists. At least 80% of the 152 nightclubs and other entertainment spots are owned and operated by Australians. There are no beaches or views in Angeles City, only prostitution, and almost all hotels and bars are dedicated to that end. Australians formed the largest number out of the 120 000 tourists who visited the area in 1994 (Distor and Hunt, p. 72). Agencies in Australia arrange package tours for sex tourists to the city, amongst other destinations. Australian sex tourists are between the ages of 25 and 50 years old and are mostly working class.

As the study tour report points out, the majority of the women in the bars servicing sex tourists are very young, barely teenagers. In one bar a group of such young girls sat in a corner playing cats' cradle between sets on the dancing stage. Prostitution tourism in the Philippines works through the provision of a companion for the entire holiday or/and the buying of women and girls in bars through the payment of barfines. The bars service different socioeconomic segments of men. Those servicing Japanese and Taiwanese sex tourists are the most expensive and luxurious. The next layer services European and Australasian tourists. The lowest level of bar, with no sanitation, services working class Filipino men.

In the bars groups of young women sway slightly, it would be hard to call it dancing since it is performed with such reluctance and embarrassment, on a stage in underwear or bikinis. Such is the modesty of Filipino women that they are unlikely to go into the sea without a T-shirt. The distress of the undressed dancers must therefore be acute. The tourist selects a girl and asks to buy her a 'ladies drink' and she then sits with him at a table. Girls sitting with Australian and European men showed by their body language, leaning as far away as possible, how distasteful was the idea of physical contact with these men. Men who so desired could buy the woman for the night or for the day by paying a barfine to the bar cashier of which half would go to the girl.

Girls were seen exiting bars with the men, and walking on the beach or sitting in cafes with them still seeking to minimize physical contact. Women's NGOs in the Philippines, and Filipino expatriots in the countries which send prostitution tourists are determined to end the practice because it harms generations of Filipino women who are caught up in prostitution and because it harms the status of Filipino women in general. How might this be most effectively achieved?

How to end sex tourism?

Prostitution tourism is but one form of the international prostitution industry and can only be challenged by challenging men's right to use women in prostitution at all. But challenging prostitution is becoming more difficult as it becomes industrialized, and as governments and sex industrialists become more invested in its defence. Presently the issue of how to deal with the traffic in women and children internationally is the focus of heated debate in international fora.

In the international human rights arena the ideas of the normalizers, of prostitution lobby-groups which defend prostitution have been adopted by some Dutch feminist legal theorists who argue that the only way to address the traffic in women is to recognize prostitution as work and seek a United Nations convention that will outlaw the trafficking in any persons for any kind of work if carried out by force (Klap *et al.*, 1995). 'Free' prostitution is, in this analysis, to be separated from the issue of trafficking and seen as acceptable. This view is promoted by an organization called the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) whose views are well represented in Kempadoo and Doezma (1998). These views are positively represented in the 1998 International Labour Organisation report on prostitution in four Asian countries, *The Sex Sector*, which argues that prostitution is so important in regional economies that it should perhaps be recognized or legalized (Lim, 1998). The concentration on distinguishing between 'forced' and 'free' trafficking would be likely to make it very difficult to prosecute any trafficking in women because of the necessity to prove force (Raymond, 1995). This approach would leave prostitution tourism, and indeed the vast majority of trafficking and prostitution, untouched and lead to its more thorough integration into national and international prostitution industries.

Prostitution tourism can be effectively countered, however, by the approach put forward by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. This organization has drawn up, in conjunction with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, a proposed Convention Against Sexual Exploitation which defines prostitution as a violation of human rights and calls for the penalizing of the men who force any person into prostitution (see appendix to Barry, 1995).

Over the last ten years feminist human rights theorists have sought to challenge the conservative and male biased interpretation of what should be considered human rights violations so that violence against women can be

recognized as violating the human rights of women (Fitzpatrick, 1994; Copelon, 1994). Celina Romany describes such violence as ‘infringement of the core and basic notions of civility and citizenship’ and says that it ‘assaults life, dignity and personal integrity’ (Romany, 1994, p. 85). Such language lifts violence against women out of the ‘private’ realm in which it had been disregarded as a ‘domestic’ issue into terms which men had been accustomed to use to refer to injuries to themselves.

Catharine MacKinnon explains that torture and inequality on the basis of sex are largely recognized as core human rights violations and asks therefore why, when these violations are combined, as in rape, battering and pornography, no violation is recognized at all (MacKinnon, 1993). Torture is seen as taking place in the public world, and at the behest of the state. It fits the traditional understanding of human rights violations as abuses by the state of men’s privileges. ‘Torture is regarded as politically motivated not personal; the state is involved in it’ (Ibid, p. 25). MacKinnon points out that the state is implicated in husband violence because ‘the cover-up, the legitimization, and the legalization of the abuse is official’ (Ibid, p. 29). The state can be held responsible because it acquiesces in violence against women. This approach has enabled feminist theorists to demand that men’s violence against women be taken seriously and seen as actionable under human rights documents.

The results of such feminist efforts was that in October 1993 the General Assembly of the United Nations passed a resolution adopting the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (United Nations, 1996). The general definition of violence against women it contains fits prostitution very well:

any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. (United Nations, 1996, p. 475)

However, the list of the practices understood to constitute violence against women in this document specifically excludes ‘free’ prostitution. Only ‘trafficking in women and forced prostitution’ are included. Thus the forced/free distinction bedevils this important initiative.

The proposed ‘Convention Against Sexual Exploitation’ from the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and UNESCO, however, does not make this mistake. This convention would penalize violence against women and defines all of men’s prostitution behaviour as violence. Sexual exploitation is defined as:

a practice by which person(s) achieve sexual gratification or financial gain or advancement through the abuse of a person’s sexuality by abrogating that person’s human right to dignity, equality, autonomy, and physical and mental well-being. (Barry, 1995, p. 326)

Prostitution is defined as ‘the use of a woman’s body as a commodity to be bought, sold, exchanged not always for money’ and includes ‘casual

prostitution, street prostitution, prostitution sanctioned by sociocultural practices, brothels, military prostitution, development prostitution, pornography, sex tourism, and mail-order bride markets' (Ibid, p. 327).

The most controversial aspect of the convention is likely to be the penalizing of the male perpetrators or 'clients' of prostitution. There has been a very significant and promising development this year, 1998, in the international struggle against prostitution which makes the international call to penalize the men who abuse women in prostitution seem much more realizable. The Swedish government has passed legislation against the 'buying of sexual services' which will penalize all perpetrators. This is the result of many years of campaigning by women and men to gain recognition that prostitution is male sexual violence and that men must take responsibility for their abusive behaviour.

Sex or, more accurately, prostitution tourism, then, as one form of men's sexually violent behaviour in prostitution should not be seen as an acceptable leisure industry. Like all other forms of prostitution it is damaging to the women and children who are used, and damaging to the status of all women in the countries in which it takes place. Also, it conditions the male perpetrators in the practices of unwanted sexual intercourse and sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence by enabling them to pay to inflict that violence, and thus provides a major obstacle to the feminist struggle to end sexual violence against women. Prostitution tourism needs to be challenged as a violation of women's human rights within tourism research and the tourism industry.

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