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Sex tourism: do women do it too?

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This article examines a recent tendency amongst researchers of sex tourism to include women within the ranks of sex tourists in destinations such as the Caribbean and Indonesia. It argues that a careful attention to the power relations, context, meanings and effects of the behaviours of male and female tourists who engage in sexual relations with local people, makes it clear that the differences are profound. The similarities and differences are analysed here with the conclusion that it is the different positions of men and women in the sex class hierarchy that create such differences. The political ideas that influence the major protagonists in this debate to include or exclude women will be examined. The article ends with a consideration of the problematic implications of arguing that *women do it too*.

Introduction

Until recently sex tourism has been most commonly understood to be a leisure activity of men who visit tourism destinations to engage in commercial sex (Enloe, 1989). Since the mid-1990s, however, there has been a developing interest in the issue of ‘female sex tourism’ amongst researchers of tourism and prostitution. Two important articles in the *Annals of Tourism Research* looked at the behaviour of women tourists to Jamaica and Indonesia (Pruitt and Lafont, 1995; Dahles and Bras, 1999). Many of these women tourists engaged in sexual relationships with local men and could be seen as taking advantage of their superior class and race status. However, these writers argued that the women were not doing ‘sex tourism’ as men did, but something different, which they preferred to call ‘romance tourism’.

Another group of writers, however, though acknowledging that there are some differences between the behaviour of male and female sex tourists, none the less consider that women’s behaviour should be included within the category ‘sex tourism’ (Sanchez Taylor, 2001; Kempadoo, 1999a, 1999b, 2001). These writers use the existence of ‘female sex tourism’ to argue that women can be just as exploitative as men or even that there is nothing necessarily gendered about prostitution, i.e., that were it not for the restrictions on the construction of sexuality created by patriarchy, women would be as likely to use men and women in prostitution as men. This approach degenders prostitution. It shall be argued here that the differences between what has been called ‘female sex tourism’ and the behaviour of male sex tourists are in fact profound and that women should not simply be included in sex tourism. The author shall seek to explore what motivates those tourism and prostitution researchers who do want to include women in their analysis and the problems that can arise from doing so.

Though 'sex tourism' has generally been applied to the behaviour of tourists whose purpose is to engage in commercial sex with local women in tourist destinations, it can have a wider application. The term does not necessarily imply prostitution and can potentially be used to apply to the behaviour of tourists who expect sexual interaction with fellow tourists in resorts, or non-commercial sex with locals in Western destinations as a routine part of their holiday experience. Thus the second half of the volume *Tourism and Sex* (Clift and Carter, 2000) focuses on the behaviour of tourists who engage in sexual activity with strangers on their holidays. Some travel with the expectation of sexual activity, but not the commercial kind, such as gay men going to gay resorts in Florida or Ibiza (Clift and Forrest, 2000). Women, too, may travel with the expectation of sexual excitement with fellow tourists on package tours (Khan *et al.*, 2000). Some women, though they might not have been averse to a holiday romance, may find themselves engaging in sex they did not expect and which they did not positively want but felt unable to refuse (Thomas, 2000). There may, then, need to be a greater variety of terms used to describe holiday sex which can cover this range of experiences. It has been suggested elsewhere that the term 'prostitution tourism' might be more appropriate for the behaviour in which men travel specifically to engage in commercial sex (Jeffreys, 2000a). The term 'sex tourism' can be seen as a euphemism for this latter activity and might conceal the harm involved to prostituted local people and communities by representing the behaviour as fun and entertainment. Sex tourism might then more properly be limited in usage to the variety of tourism in which men and women travel expecting to engage in sex, but of a distinctly non-commercial kind.

The term 'romance tourism' may be much more suited to the behaviour of women tourists. Pruitt and Lafont explain that they use the term 'romance tourism' to distinguish the sexual relationships of women tourists with local men from sex tourism because 'these liaisons are constructed through a discourse of romance and long-term relationship, an emotional involvement usually not present in sex tourism' (Pruitt and Lafont, 1995, p. 423). Dahles and Bras say that the 'concept of prostitution does not adequately convey the meanings of the relationships' between women tourists and local men in Indonesia, but love is 'not the right concept either' (Dahles and Bras, 1999, p. 286). They suggest that the local men should be called 'romantic entrepreneurs' (*Ibid*, p. 281).

Sanchez Taylor, on the other hand, says that some commentators, such as the above, have difficulty including women amongst the ranks of sex tourists because they harbour 'traditional notions of essential gender identity' which 'inform an interpretation of the tourist women as passive innocents' (Sanchez Taylor, 2001, p. 750). It could be argued that studies which reject the easy inclusion of women amongst the ranks of 'sex tourists' are not guilty of essentialism so much as an awareness of the relations of power which construct women's relationships with 'beach boys' to be so very different from those of male sex tourists with women and men. Sanchez Taylor also accuses 'radical feminists' such as Enloe and Jeffreys of promoting misleading stereotypes of sex tourists. She says that we are wrong to portray sex tourists as men, rather than persons of both sexes, and wrong to 'treat sex tourism and prostitution as first and foremost an expression of male patriarchal power and female powerlessness' (*Ibid*, p. 749). Prostitution,

then, according to Sanchez Taylor is not necessarily gendered. ‘Female sex tourism’ proves that *women do it too*.

There are dangers involved in the assertion, in relation to varieties of men’s violent behaviour, that women do it too. In the case of wife beating, feminist theorists and activists have had to fight the muddying of the waters created by the idea that ‘women do it too’. Feminist researchers have sought to oppose the strong push to make the sexual politics of the practice disappear by labelling wife battering ‘spouse abuse’ as if it were gender neutral. Domestic violence researchers who argue that women do it too, using a family systems approach, are criticised by feminists because this approach ‘... overlooks important gendered variations in norms, legitimisation, and above all, power. A man’s striking a woman has different effects, consequences, and meanings than a woman’s striking a man’ (Brush, 1993, p. 241). In such gender neutral approaches ‘the context of violent acts goes unexplored, women’s actions are misinterpreted and misrepresented, and the dynamics of domestic violence are misunderstood’ (*Ibid*). Arguments that ‘women do it too’ obscure the power dynamics of male violence and prevent the development of effective remedies. There is no direct analogy here, since feminist domestic violence researchers show, in particular, that when women supposedly *do it too*, it is generally in self-defence, and women’s liaisons with local men in tourist resorts cannot be seen in this way. But a careful analysis of the differences between the ‘sex tourism’ of women and that of men does show variations in power, effects, consequences and meanings as a result of the different positions of the actors in the sex class hierarchy. In order to ascertain whether women can reasonably be included in the category of ‘prostitution tourists’ it is necessary to examine the behaviour that those women, labelled by some writers as ‘sex tourists’, engage in. Evidence about the behaviour of female ‘sex tourists’ provided by recent sex tourism research shall be used to establish the ways in which it is similar to or different from that of male prostitution tourists.

Similarities between female and male sex tourism

The similarities identified by those who seek to include women in this category are the economic and racial privileges of both male and female Western tourists in comparison with their local sexual partners. Western tourists are seen as being motivated by racist sexual stereotypes and using sex tourism to bolster their privileged race and class status. Kempadoo argues that both Caribbean men and women were ‘constructed in tourist imaginations as racialized-sexual subjects/objects – the hypersexual “Black male stud” and the “hot” Brown or Black woman’ (Kempadoo, 2001, p. 50). There is a good deal of evidence from interviews with male sex tourists in Thailand that their racial prejudice and stereotyped views of the local people they exploit play important roles in their behaviour. O’Connell Davidson explains that male tourists, through the ‘lens of their “racism”’, ‘interpret virtually everything that Thai women do as a mark of their desire to serve’ (O’Connell Davidson, 1995, p. 56). Female sex tourists, such researchers say, employ fantasies of Otherness too in their interaction with Black men in the Caribbean. The women are looking for ‘black men with good bodies, firm and

muscle-clad sex machines that they can control, and this element of control should not be overlooked' (O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1999, p. 51).

Sanchez Taylor (2000) gives examples from a questionnaire in which women were asked to describe their boyfriends, descriptions which she considers demonstrate racist sexual stereotyping. She says that 'most of the female sex tourists emphasized how for them Black Jamaican men possessed bodies of great sexual value. One woman described her lover as 'sweet, friendly, gorgeous-great body'; another woman summed up her boyfriend in this short sentence: 'dark skin-younger-small frame'; and another as 'Handsome, physically fit, 27-year-old, honest, proud, serious, family man, excellent lover' (Sanchez Taylor, 2000, p. 46). She argues that 'These comments objectify the men in much the same way that Black women are sexually objectified as 'Other' by male sex tourists' (*Ibid*, p. 47). It is not clear to me that that is the case. The women seem genuinely admiring and though arguably objectifying, such comments could conceivably be made about boyfriends in the West as easily as about Caribbean locals. She considers that the women construct stereotypes of the local men as 'aggressive and violent' but provides no evidence to support such a negative stereotype. They see tourist destinations, she argues, as safe places in which they can control this 'imagined masculinity' (*Ibid*, p. 47). The women tourists' statements about their local boyfriends do not suggest that they place them in any racial or sexual hierarchy, unlike the Western men who stereotype Thai women as servile.

It is clear that Western women tourists do possess very considerable economic privilege. But the role of this privilege in the sexual liaisons that take place is not so clear. Studies of 'female sex tourism' all show that the women identified as sex tourists do not consider that they are engaging in prostitution behaviour even though, as in the Sanchez Taylor study, the majority acknowledge some economic element such as helping boyfriends with cash, gifts or meals. In Sanchez Taylor's research in Jamaica she distributed 240 questionnaires to women on the beach who spoke English, were single or travelling without their partner/spouse. Of the women in her study 35% did not help economically in any way so it is hard to see them as being related to the most usual definition of sex tourism, i.e., prostitution tourism. Only 3% of the women in the study said their relations were 'purely physical' and more than half considered them to be about 'romance' or 'real love'. The beach boys often did not receive any financial reward until after the women had returned home, but this later reward could be considerable such as money to allow the beach boy to set up his own business. Sometimes the beach boys were receiving such rewards from several women at the same time, but they did not consider this to be prostitution either.

Research on male sex tourists suggests that some men who visit destinations such as Thailand with the expectation that they will pay prostituted men and women for sex, are naïve enough to believe that they are not engaging in prostitution behaviour (O'Connell Davidson, 1995). The women they engage with are reported to be skilled at not making their financial demands clear so that such men can remain deluded as to the nature of the relationships (Seabrook, 2001). Those researchers who seek to include women in the ranks of sex tourists use this naïvety about the financial motives of local sexual partners as a prime point of similarity between male and female sex tourists. It is surprising that the

male tourists are so naïve considering that men are aware that a prostitution script exists for relations between men and women. The prostitution and pornography industry, as well as the tales of their peers, exist to make them aware of this. For women there is no such script. The purchase of sex from men plays no part in the culture that women inhabit and there is no reason that they should be aware of this possibility. But naivety and the search for romance in the unlikely environs of a tropical holiday resort may constitute a similarity between a fraction of the male tourists and their female counterparts. The behaviour that the male tourists engage in is likely, as we shall see below, to have very different effects and meanings from that engaged in by women.

Differences between female and male ‘sex tourism’

The differences between the behaviour of male and female sex tourists are much more numerous and profound. They are clearest in the forms of sexual and romantic interaction which take place between women tourists and Caribbean men. The scale of ‘female sex tourism’ is rather different from that of male sex tourism. Even those researchers who argue that women should be included in the ranks of sex tourists recognize that the numbers involved are tiny in comparison with male sex tourists. O’Connell Davidson says that ‘heterosexual female sex tourism is, in numerical terms, a far, far smaller phenomenon than male sex tourism, and that it is unusual – though not unknown – for Western lesbians to practice sex tourism’ (O’Connell Davidson, 1998, p. 81). The percentage of women tourists who engage in any form of sexual relationships with local men is small too. One third of the respondents in the study conducted by Sanchez Taylor, i.e., a minority, had engaged in one or more sexual relationships with local men during their holiday. She does not supply figures for the percentage of similarly situated (i.e., travelling without partners) male tourists who engage sexually with local women though it does seem likely that it would be higher. The women, who were mostly 30–40-years-old, were most likely to have only one such relationship, with only 27% reporting entering into sexual relations with two or more partners.

Phillips, in her study of female ‘sex tourists’ in Barbados, is another researcher who places women tourists who relate sexually to local men, not just in the ranks of sex tourists but in the category of prostitute users. She says that female sex tourism liaisons start off as ‘a combination of sex and economic services’ none the less ‘they can easily be fitted under the umbrella of prostitution’ (Phillips, 1999). However she says there is little information available on the category of women tourists who are closest in their behaviour to male sex tourists, i.e., accessing men for one-night stands. Joan Phillips says she was ‘unable to access’ those she called One Nighters, i.e., those ‘content with anonymous sexual encounters’, though ‘its existence was quite apparent in the details provided by male and female key informers’ (Phillips, 1999, p. 191). It does seem to me, however, that in an article that seeks to include women in the ranks of sex tourists, accepting the existence of this category on hearsay is problematic.

Most of the differences arise from the different positions in the sex-class hierarchy that the women and men tourists occupy. The sexuality of men under

male dominance is constructed to confirm their masculinity through practices of objectification and aggression (Jeffreys, 1997). The clearest expression of this sexuality of dominance lies in the existence of the sex industry which both reflects and helps to shape it. Women's sexuality, constructed out of a position of powerlessness, tends to be expressed in very different ways. Systems of prostitution exist to service men which do not exist for women. Thus there is a 'formally organized female prostitution sector' in the countries that Sanchez Taylor studied, Jamaica and the Dominican Republic, as well as in all other sex tourism destinations (Sanchez Taylor, 2001, p. 760). There is no street or brothel prostitution of men and boys for women to access in any sex tourist destinations. This might suggest that whilst men's sex tourism is simply the extension of already existing systems of prostitution that exist for men to access prostituted others, women's 'sex tourism' is an altogether different phenomenon, with little relationship to prostitution.

The different constructions of male and female sexuality are particularly clear in relation to the 'sex' of 'female sex tourism'. The way in which the sexual relations between tourist women and beach boys begin and continue relates to a male dominant construction of sexuality. The women tourists receive a barrage of what is probably construed by many as sexual harassment, i.e., men hassling them on the beach, saying how beautiful they are and trying to pick them up. Mullings reports that in Jamaica in 1997 '55.8 per cent of tourists to the island reported during a visitor satisfaction survey that they had felt harassed during their holiday' (Mullings, 1999, p. 65).

The romances that women tourists conduct in the Caribbean with beach boys may mean much the same to them as holiday romances would if they were taking a holiday in Ibiza with their mates. An informant interviewed by Khan *et al.* about behaviour on such European holidays describes an experience which does not seem very different from much of the behaviour that writers such as Sanchez Taylor and Kempadoo want to include in sex tourism. She says:

... it is important to meet someone new and keep them for most of the holiday. I like romantic holidays, yeah. Yeah, well I was with two people and one was a mistake ... I think with women ... if you're smashed, and the guy moves on you, and you're in the mood, you very rarely knock them back (Khan *et al.*, 2000, p. 228).

If what is taking place in the women's heads is very similar then it is not so obvious that what happens in Ibiza is a 'holiday romance' and that what happens in Jamaica is 'sex tourism'.

Some tourist women succumb to continuous seduction or harassment, according to the point of view of the objects of this behaviour, and come to believe that the local men do admire them. Thomas's sensitive research on the sexual behaviour of women tourists in Europe who related to fellow travellers rather than impoverished locals, found that many wanted to engage in romance rather than sexual intercourse, but succumbed reluctantly to the pressure that the men applied (Thomas, 2000). It does seem likely that women tourists to the Caribbean would come under similar pressure. The women tourists in the Caribbean do not recognize that the men are interested in monetary reward and consider that they are being genuinely wooed for a short-term romance or something more serious.

One principle that distinguishes the sexuality of prostitution is that the prostituted women service men sexually without any sexual pleasure on their part. In the case of women 'sex tourists' the sex is very different. One Barbadian beach boy interviewed for Phillips' study explained his sexual enthusiasm for women tourists thus 'Bajan women can't fuck, and they doan even wanna suck you. You got to beg she to do it, and still she might not do it, and if she do it she acting like if she doin you a favor. Now a white woman, you gotta beg she to stop!' (Phillips, 1999, p. 192). In this case the 'sex tourist' is servicing the local man rather than the other way around. The power dynamics of male dominance seem well preserved. This sexual practice is not one meant for women's sexual satisfaction but for that of men. It is indeed the practice men have traditionally visited prostituted women to engage in (McLeod, 1982) because of their wives' reluctance. The sex that takes place in such relationships seems not to resemble the sex of prostitution at all. The local men remain in control of the sexual interaction as they would in sexual relations with any women, tourist or not, by virtue of male privilege and the construction of male dominant sexuality.

Another very significant difference between 'female' and 'male' sex tourism lies in the degree of harm caused by the behaviour. In relation to male sex tourism the harms created are the regular harms that result to women from men's prostitution behaviour whether in the West or in tourist destinations (Farley *et al.*, 1998). Self-mutilation is strongly related to the experience of sexual violence, in childhood, in rape and in prostitution (Jeffreys, 2000b). One British sex tourist to Thailand who spoke to O'Connell Davidson found the self-mutilation engaged in by the women he was prostituting difficult to stomach.

... they cut themselves with a knife. They get drunk and just slash themselves. I find that terrible. When I see a girl, when I'm looking to buy her, I always look at her arms to see what she's been doing to herself. (O'Connell Davidson, 1995, p. 42).

In the case of 'female sex tourism' there does not seem to be evidence of the traumatic harm of repeated sexual violation. Indeed researchers agree that because men gain superior masculine status in Caribbean societies amongst their peers according to the number of their sexual conquests, and white women count for more points, beach boys can gain socially from sexual engagement with women tourists (Kempadoo, 1999b). The sex taking place, after all, is the traditional sex of male supremacy, i.e., the men do the penetrating and are not having to dissociate to survive whilst their bodies are used as objects.

In one study of the experience of the women prostituted by male sex tourists in Jamaica (Campbell *et al.*, 1999), the graphic description of the violence and danger they are exposed to creates a stark contrast with what happens to beach boys, but fits well with accounts of prostitution from the West (Hoigard and Finstadt, 1992). Women in the Jamaica study describe as their best experiences those in which they can avoid actually being penetrated, such as being asked to urinate on the client or walk on him in high heels. The worst experiences 'ranged from a client attacking a worker with a machete because of dissatisfaction with the job, to agreeing to have sex with a client who then turned up with six men in a hotel room' (Campbell *et al.*, 1999, p. 140). The women said they never knew whether a client would be dangerous and as one put it she was 'full of fear because

you don't know what can happen. You always have some fear because you don't know who bad and who good' (p. 142). Women spoke of having to drink tequila or get stoned on ganja so that they did not have to see the man who was using them. As one woman puts it 'I love my job but I hate it for the sex. We are talking to a guy, he makes me feel sick but he is paying the price. You have sex with him. It really hurts. It makes your heart get sick too, you know . . . He is real ugly, he is real white, he is so soft and you just want to scream' (p. 150).

The male power which results in the abuse of prostituted women can lead to violence by beach boys against their tourist partners if the relationships progress beyond the duration of the holiday, as many do. In order to include the women within the ranks of sex tourists researchers such as Kempadoo and Sanchez Taylor describe them as having economic power over local men. But this economic power does seem to be the only power they have and may not necessarily trump the power that the beach boys have over them as a result of their superior position in the gender hierarchy. Sanchez Taylor (2001) says that a number of women in her study who had migrated to marry or live with their local boyfriends found themselves in 'extremely abusive relationships' and that when they reported this to the police no action was taken (p. 761). Thus, as she points out, 'white privilege can be jeopardised by entry into permanent or semi-permanent' relationships with black men (*Ibid*). The women's economic and race privilege were only able to hold the men's sex class privilege at bay temporarily and in quite specialized settings. There do not seem, therefore, to be women 'sexpatriates' (Seabrook, 2001) i.e., female equivalents of those Western men who live in tourist destinations permanently because of the availability of women and the privilege that first world pensions give these men to purchase them. White privilege and economic privilege prove to be less durable than the privilege of sex class status.

The creation of superior masculine status is a benefit that both male sex tourists and the beach boys who relate to tourist women gain from their sexual relations. Women do not have superior social status confirmed by their holiday sexual experiences. They may, as some commentators suggest (Kempadoo, 1999b), have their 'femininity' enhanced by their experience, but femininity does not give women high social status. O'Connell Davidson's work on male sex tourists to Thailand demonstrates that they were all strongly motivated by the opportunity to 'live like kings' or 'playboys' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995, p. 45). The men experienced pleasures ranging from the acquisition of mail order brides through 'the mere pleasure of looking at sexually available women (and men and children), at one pole to the satisfaction of complete sexual possession at the other' (p. 46). These pleasures do seem to be gendered since there is no evidence of a trade in 'mail order husbands' and the 'sexual possession' is illustrated by the bar in Pattaya called the 'No Hands Bar' 'where prostitutes crawl under the tables in order to fellate the customers' (*Ibid*). Bars where men crawl under tables to give oral sex to women who request it in public do not exist. Women are not making such demands and it is hard to imagine the proudly masculine beach boys of the Caribbean being expected to engage in such humiliating servitude.

The men O'Connell Davidson interviewed were not just angry at European prostitutes but had what she calls a 'misogynistic rage' at Western women in

general for acting as though they are men's equals and not worshipping them as kings:

In short, sex tourists express a kind of misogynistic rage against women who have the power to demand anything at all, whether it is the right to have a say over who they have sex with and when, or the right to maintenance payments for their children. (*Ibid*, p. 53).

There is no evidence to suggest that women tourists engage in sexual relationships out of rage at Western men. 'Sex tourism,' says O'Connell Davidson 'helps British men to reinforce and construct a powerful and positive image of themselves as a particular kind of white heterosexual man' (p. 52).

Researchers who have delved into the motives of male sex tourists have commonly found that the men go to tourist destinations to find women who will service them more enthusiastically and openendedly than the prostituted women they are familiar with in the West (Kruhse-MountBurton, 1995; Seabrook, 2001). They see European prostitutes as being too impersonal in their approach; as setting up contracts whereby they seek to protect themselves by regulating what men are allowed to do to them and what they are prepared to do. In Thailand, for instance, prostituted women will stay with men for an indefinite length of time, without negotiating a price and can even allow the men to think that they are not really prostitutes but really like them. There is an obvious difference here between female and male 'sex tourists' inasmuch as the females will not have experience of male prostitutes in the West to make a comparison. There is no prostitution market for women.

The male sex tourists gain enhanced masculine status from demonstrating their sexual use of local women to their mates. O'Connell Davidson explains one motivation for male sex tourists in the Dominican Republic to make sexual use of local women is that it 'provides the basis for recognition and acknowledgement between men' (O'Connell Davidson, 2001, p. 16). She quotes a male sex tourist saying that in his hotel which is '95% single men' they achieved 'great comradery' by discussing their sexual use of local women. She comments that 'women serve to reproduce social links between the male members of the community' (*Ibid*, p. 19). This function of male sex tourism distinguishes it markedly from any behaviour of women. There is no evidence to suggest that women use their sexual relationships to flaunt their 'femininity' in front of and in order to bond with other women. Sex tourism for men helps to cement their male dominance. It can have no similar function for women.

Kruhse-Mountburton describes behaviour by male sex tourists in Bangkok which serves to firm up male bonds. In a Bangkok bar she describes how 'employees of a bar called the Kangaroo Club offer oral sexual services to clients at the table, so that the men are free to continue to chat and drink with their friends' (*Ibid*, p. 196). In a Manila bar catering to Australians, where there is a central stage, 'Intoxicated men are thrust in one at a time by their friends, to be titillated by up to half a dozen nubile naked girls, while onlookers shout encouragement' (Kruhse-Mountburton, 1995, p. 195). These too are male bonding behaviours through the abuse of women for which there is no equivalent in 'female sex tourism'.

The local men who engage in sex with women tourists gain an elevated masculine status in a similar way to the male sex tourists because sexual acting out is so valued as a symbol of masculinity in the Caribbean. As Kempadoo points out: 'Local discourses privilege men through valuing "hyperactive virility" and male sexual prowess such as womanizing, maintaining a sexual relationship with an outside woman while married, or fathering children with different women . . .' (Kempadoo, 1999b, p. 25). Thus there are some similarities between the payoffs male sex tourists and beach boys gain from sexual activity with prostituted and tourist women.

The differences between the behaviour of male and female sex tourists in terms of its context, meanings and effects are considerable and result from the different positions of men and women under male dominance. Why then do some commentators determinedly place women within the ranks of sex tourists? The author shall seek to show that researchers considered above such as Kempadoo and O'Connell Davidson are prepared to include women because their theoretical approaches to prostitution privilege class over gender.

Why are women being included?

Feminist theorists such as myself, who seek to distinguish male and female holiday sex and to stress the differences, are likely to take a radical feminist perspective on prostitution. In this perspective, prostitution arises from the oppression of women and represents the exchange of women between men for sexual use that underlies the historical oppression of women. It is, as Millett has argued, a living fossil, i.e., an example of ancient slave relationships still existing in a different economic system which should remind us in the present that men have traded in women throughout history (Millett, 1975). More recently radical feminist scholars have argued that prostitution should be seen as a form of sexual violence which is concealed, through the act of payment, as consensual sex (Jeffreys, 1997). Men's prostitution behaviour is defined as sexual violence because it is unwanted by the prostituted women, who have to dissociate emotionally to survive it, and causes traumatic harm to women both physically and emotionally as other forms of sexual violence do (Farley *et al.*, 1998). Radical feminist theorists recognize the ways in which racism and class oppression shape the sexual exploitation of prostitution. Barry's *The Prostitution of Sexuality* (1995), for instance, shows a keen awareness of the racism involved in practices such as sex tourism and the trafficking in women, and the economic imperatives which force women into them. But prostitution is seen as overwhelmingly a practice of men's violence and women's subordination.

Those theorists and campaigners who seek to include women are likely to be more sympathetic to what can be identified as a pro-sex work position. The pro-sex work position seeks to get prostitution recognized as legitimate work (Bindman 1998; Jeness 1993; Chapkis, 1997; Nagle, 1997). The gendered nature of prostitution, i.e., the fact that it is overwhelmingly men who use both women and girls, men and boys in prostitution, has proved something of a stumbling block for those who seek to get prostitution recognized as legitimate work. If prostitution is ordinary work it is hard to explain why there are not brothels full

of men and boys for women to use. It is hard to explain why there is not a pornography of men portrayed as objects for women's use, or to be (as in some men's pornography) urinated or defecated upon. In response to the absence of women sex industry consumers, some apologists for prostitution argue that in the 'glorious' future of equal opportunities yet to come, women will use men and boys and other women as commonly and in the same ways in which men now do (McClintock, 1992). In this view it is only sexist attitudes that hold women back from indulging in sexual exploitation. It seems, from some recent writings, that the issue of 'female sex tourism' is being seized upon by the pro-sex work lobby in order to prove that radical feminist analyses of prostitution are incorrect and that prostitution can be an ungendered phenomenon.

One example of writers holding the pro-sex work position who include women in sex tourism is a book by two male professors of tourism, authors of *Sex Tourism* (Ryan and Hall, 2001). They specifically reject feminist criticism of sex tourism and prostitution in scathing tones. They say that 'much of the debate on sex tourism . . . has been hijacked by a feminist rhetoric within which the client is the male and the prostitute female . . . It also implies that the prostitute is the victim' (Ryan and Hall, 2001, p. 37). They say that their theoretical perspective is that of seeing both sex tourists and the prostituted women and men as 'liminal' as in 'The act of sex tourism can therefore be explained as an interaction between two sets of liminal people – but with a difference' (1) and 'Liminal people are threshold people existing betwixt and between' (3). It is this postmodern perspective which allows them to say there is no truth that can be recognized in prostitution. Thus they argue that ' . . . each story from the repertoire that every sex worker has for a client is a truth of and for that moment' (p. xiv). With postmodern adjectival extravagance they say that ' . . . of necessity, sex tourism is pluralistic, multivocal and multi-dimensional in its forms' (p. 50). They are positive about the job of prostitution: 'To deny the concept of sex work as being a professional service, as having like other jobs its good or bad days, is to continue to marginalise and stigmatise' (p. 147). They do, however, admit that on a bad day the prostituted woman may end up dead: 'Unfortunately, as is known from past murders, the bad day might mean the loss of life' (p. 49). That is definitely unusual compared to other 'professional services'.

Interestingly these authors are so oblivious to the significance of gender difference that in the discussions of methodology in the book they do not mention the fact that they are men. Yet they several times mention the difficulties they face because of the 'voyeurism' involved in researching sex tourism. 'Voyeurism' in relation to the sex industry is a well recognised form of male behaviour (Hoigard and Finstadt, 1992) in which men can take so much pleasure from simply looking at women who can be purchased, that they do not need in the end to spend money to gain sexual satisfaction. This kind of 'voyeurism' is not a problem that women researchers have to face. These male professors include women in the ranks of sex tourists because they have an ungendered approach to sex tourism and prostitution. Prostitution is simply a form of 'professional service' that men or women might provide for either women or men.

The women researchers considered in this chapter who include women do not take a crude pro-sex work position. They are not as politically naïve as the male

professors. They tend to be Marxist feminists who privilege the oppressions of class and race over that of gender in their analyses. They are sharply critical of Western sex tourists for exercising their class and race privilege to exploit local women and men, but they do not see prostitution as arising from the oppression of women and constituting harm to women. One of the main female protagonists who takes this position is Kempadoo (2001). Her main concerns are about inequalities of class and race and so far as they extend to women, concern the greater economic inequality suffered by Third World women. The issues of women's oppression that are made more clearly visible by a radical feminist perspective, i.e., violence and sexual exploitation, do not figure in her analysis. She sees both the prostituted women and the men used in sex tourism as being empowered by the experience. The women only gain economically (though the men gain in terms of affirmed masculinity) but the differences are evened out so that 'male and female sex tourists, on the one hand, and male and female sex workers on the other, shared many commonalities with each other in their position and location within the global racialized, economic order' (Kempadoo, 2001, p. 51).

Kempadoo uses the inclusion of women as sex tourists to argue that feminist understandings of prostitution as resulting from male dominance are invalid. She explains that the existence of both male and female sex tourists in the Caribbean 'underscores the point that feminist accounts that focus exclusively on the operations of the masculine hegemony to explain prostitution and sex work may not be entirely appropriate' (*Ibid*, p. 57). 'Female sex tourism' allows her to move beyond 'essentialist notions of "the prostitute" and "the client"' to remind us that these categories are not fixed, universal, or transhistorical, but are subject to transformation and change in particular ways' (*Ibid*). Prostitution, then, does not necessarily need to be tied to male dominance and could potentially be about women and men using both women and men in the future.

Doezema (Kempadoo and Doezeema, 1998), Kempadoo's co-editor of the 1998 pro-sex work collection *Global Sex Workers*, goes further by arguing that the concern that Western feminists have for the prostituted women of the Third World, including those used in sex tourism, is corrupt and baseless. Doezeema, who has worked in the brothels of Amsterdam (see Chapkis, 1997, p. 8), is a spokesperson for the Network of Sex Work Projects. She says that the position of the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women and its first Director, Barry (1995), on 'third world prostitutes' is 'part of a wider western feminist impulse to construct a damaged "other" as justification for its own interventionist impulses' (Doezema, 2001, p. 16). Feminists such as Barry, she argues, use the 'injured body' of the 'third world trafficking victim' as a 'powerful metaphor for advancing certain feminist interests, which cannot be assumed to be those of third world sex workers themselves' (*Ibid*). Western feminists are, in her view, colonialist, and orientalist, using Third World prostitution for their own ends.

Her argument is undermined by the fact that non-western women are very much involved, not only in the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, but in the forefront of action against sex tourism, trafficking and men's prostitution abuse generally. Doezeema is aware of this hole in her argument. She says that non-Western feminists are deluded too in having concern for the prostituted women in

their countries and need to understand their ulterior motives. For them the 'third world prostitute' serves 'as a metaphor for a number of fears, anxieties, and relations of domination . . . For example, the figure of the "suffering third world prostitute" serves well to symbolize the excesses of the global march of capital, and its negative effects on women' (p. 18). Interestingly, though Doezeema accuses Western feminists of portraying prostitution in an unreasonably negative light, she does admit that she chooses to portray it in an unreasonably positive one: 'I make it . . . more positive than it is, because everybody has such a negative idea about it already. So you tend to talk about only the good things or the funny things' (Chapkis, 1997, p. 8).

The most detailed and prolific work on men's sex tourism to be written in the 1990s is that of O'Connell Davidson. The interviews she has conducted with male sex tourists, which have been employed above, have provided rich information about their motivations, particularly their misogyny and desires to compensate for the losses to male dominance in Western countries that have resulted from women's emancipation (O'Connell Davidson, 1995). She recognizes the importance of gender in constructing the behaviour of such men. It is surprising, therefore, that she should be one of those who seeks to include women in sex tourism. Her inclusion of women is based upon a Marxist perspective which is similar in many respects to that of Kempadoo. For her the most problematic variety of sex tourism is that in which privileged Western tourists visit poor countries. She explains that, 'Feminists, socialists and policy makers' may not be 'entirely happy' about tourists who visit Amsterdam to use prostituted women but this does not 'excite the same moral and political repugnance' as sex tourism in underdeveloped countries because 'the power relations and economics involved here are of a very different order' (O'Connell Davidson, 1995, p. 45).

O'Connell Davidson states that she rejects feminist analyses that 'give primacy to the concept of patriarchy in discussions of sex tourism and prostitution' (*Ibid*, p. 60). She uses the phenomenon of female sex tourists to prove that patriarchy is not primary. She says the men's power in sex tourism, though it confirms masculinity, is not 'simply or even primarily patriarchal' but 'also "racialized" and its currency is economic' and 'it is only if we recognize this that we can develop analyses of sex tourism that can accommodate the unpalatable fact that not all sex tourists are heterosexual and not all sex tourists are men' (*Idem*). O'Connell Davidson stresses the role of sex tourism in the international economy rather than its role in male dominance, saying that it contributes to 'an on going process of primitive accumulation' (*Idem*). She says that feminist arguments about prostitution constituting 'patriarchal rights of access to women's bodies' and a 'form of sexual oppression' (*Ibid*, p. 61) deflect attention from other 'economic and social relations'. She makes distinctions between what she calls 'free' prostitution and problematic forms of prostitution which should be met with outrage, i.e., those that involve severe racial and economic inequality.

In her 1998 book *Prostitution, Power and Freedom*, O'Connell Davidson chooses a definition of prostitution which is ungendered: 'Prostitution is an institution that allows clients to secure temporarily certain powers of sexual command over prostitutes' (1998, p. 3). The issues of what is done in prostitution to the bodies of women and how that relates to violence and sex are not

mentioned in the book. Her definition allows prostitution to be fitted into an understanding of service work and into socialist analysis. She is critical of prostitution but determined not to take a position on prostitution which understands it primarily as an expression of male dominance, 'Although I am firmly of the opinion that prostitute use is an oppressive act, I am troubled by analyses in which clients and other heterosexual men are melded together as one homogeneous class of penis-wielding colonizers and in which distinctions between prostitute use and acts of male violence against women such as rape or wife beating, are blurred' (*Ibid*, p. 121). Prostitution is different from 'rape or battery' because of what she calls the 'veil of consent', but I have to wonder, as one of those who would be seen as favouring a 'penis-wielding colonizer' perspective, what difference this consent makes to the experience of the woman used. The man may feel it is not rape but the woman dissociating to survive may not see the difference so clearly.

Most recently, O'Connell Davidson has written, with Laura Brace, a strongly critical analysis of radical feminist approaches to prostitution (Brace and O'Connell Davidson, 2000). They say that theorists such as MacKinnon and Pateman, who understand prostitution to involve a master/servant relationship, are simplistic. What is needed to analyse prostitution, they say, is a 'more complex, nuanced, and relational vision of gendered power' (*Ibid*, p. 1046). Unfortunately they do not apply this nuanced vision to seeing the differences between male and female sex tourism.

The question of whether *women do it too* is an important one. It bears on whether it is possible to indict prostitution as an expression of male domination which can be ended, rather than as an inevitable form of human behaviour or just a variety of leisure activity. The insistence that women should be included within the ranks of sex tourists is more than an academic matter. It is one that touches on the whole way in which international systems of prostitution should be understood and addressed. I have argued here that the differences between male 'prostitution' tourism and women's holiday sexual relationships are considerable and need to be understood as arising from the different sex-class positions of men and women. The argument that *women do it too* in relation to sex tourism does not withstand careful attention to the relations of power, the effects, the meanings and the contexts of the behaviour.

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