

Global Sex Workers

Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition

edited by

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and

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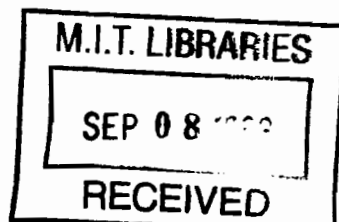
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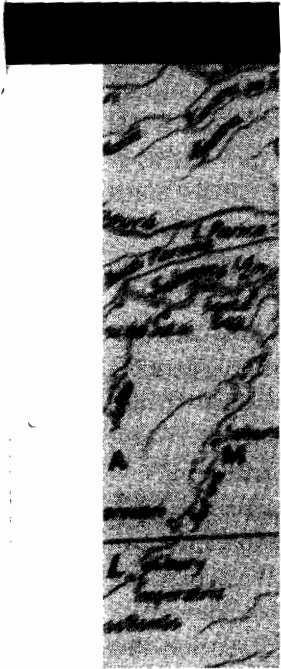
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Introduction Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights

Kamala Kempadoo

When I first heard about prostitutes organizing for their rights in Suriname in 1993, I was both excited and puzzled by the news. Was it a singular incident spurred by an outsider, or did it reflect a local movement? I wanted to know. Also, in this part of the world, were women serious about staying in the sex industry or anxious to have prostitution abolished? What were the aims of such an organization, and who were the activists? Was this an isolated group, and what was the response to this initiative from the rest of the women's movement in this corner of South America? Questions outweighed any answer I could find in libraries or books—I decided to travel to Suriname to find out more.

Curiosity opened my world to a movement not just in Suriname, but in other parts of the "Third World." I realized that sex workers' movements were no longer exclusive to the United States or Western Europe. Prostitutes and other sex workers were fighting to keep brothels open, challenging the various stigmas about prostitution, and exposing corruption within sex industries in many different countries—yet very few people had heard about these coura-

geous steps. The voices and activities of sex workers outside the industrialized North went unheard, nearly invisible to all but those in the immediate surroundings. As someone trained to think that a documentation of social history is absolutely vital for the construction of knowledge, I believed the one thing I could do was to facilitate the recording of this new international movement.

During a 1994 meeting in Amsterdam, Licia Brussa and I exchanged the initial ideas on compiling a book about these international initiatives. Jo Doezema soon joined the project. Within a year we had mapped out the terrain we needed to cover. Since then, Jo and I worked long distance to create a forum for those rarely heard outside of their own environment, yet who are at the forefront of sex workers' rights activism internationally. The result is a collection presenting a variety of voices and analyses by women and men who are organizing globally to change the exploitations and oppressions associated with prostitution and other forms of commercial sex work, a collection foregrounding Third World women at home and in migratory contexts.¹ Through interviews, reflective essays, research papers, reports, and critical writings from Asia, Australia, the Caribbean, North and South America, West and South Africa, and Western Europe, this collection challenges complacent knowledges and enduring misconceptions about prostitution. It explores various understandings of sexual labor and traces activities that are culturally specific as well as transnational in scope.

This collection testifies to the courage and determination of sex workers to tell their own stories. Since prostitution is a criminal and highly stigmatized activity in many countries, speaking out can be a dangerous act—exposing the individual sex worker, sex worker organization, or rights advocate to easy identification by the authorities, parents and the community, possibly giving rise to harassment. Furthermore, a book like this may provide leads for tabloid journalists, leaving contributors vulnerable to sensationalist press coverage. Still, all authors were eager to participate, and it was this commitment that made the volume not only possible, but an important contribution to the understanding of sex work and prostitution. And despite the differences in access to technology to communicate easily across the globe, we are grateful that so many sex workers and rights advocates trusted us and gave their full cooperation in this effort. In putting together this collection, we did not attempt to streamline the writings to conform to any particular writing style or format, thus it represents the heterogeneity and diversity that makes up the contemporary movement. Each piece appears with the full consent of the organization and sex workers involved, written with their own words and sentiments, and offering some of the flavor of the various languages and cultural contexts.

Ultimately, this book is not about the details of sexual acts themselves but instead about what some women and men who perform these acts and sell sex

for a living consider to be important in their everyday lives. It does not offer much for the reader who is seeking titillation and cheap thrills, or for those who wish to confirm their ideas about the exotic sexuality of brown or black women. However, it does give us a glimpse into the priorities, hardships and resistances of people who are marginalized and outcast in many societies today—of those women and men who service vast sections of the worlds' male populations and render what many consider vital to the well-being of manhood yet who are often despised, criminalized and rejected for doing so.

Global Sex Workers is about the politics of a worldwide sex workers movement, about how ordinary women and men in prostitution define and shape their struggles for social change and justice. We hope it will cast some light on knowledges, actions, and transformations that pertain to sex work on a global scale, at the end of the twentieth century.

Sex Worker, Prostitute or Whore?

Identity, rights, working conditions, decriminalization, and legitimacy have been central issues collectively addressed by prostitutes for many years. Through these struggles the notion of the sex worker has emerged as a counterpoint to traditionally derogatory names, under the broad banner of a prostitutes' rights movement, with some parts recovering and valorizing the name and identity of "whore." In this book we have chosen the term "sex worker" to reflect the current use throughout the world, although in many of the essays "sex worker" and "prostitute" are used interchangeably. It is a term that suggests we view prostitution not as an identity—a social or a psychological characteristic of women, often indicated by "whore"—but as an income-generating activity or form of labor for women and men. The definition stresses the social location of those engaged in sex industries as working people.

The idea of the sex worker is inextricably related to struggles for the recognition of women's work, for basic human rights and for decent working conditions. The definition emphasizes flexibility and variability of sexual labor as well as its similarities with other dimensions of working people's lives. In particular, the writings here illustrate the ways in which sex work is experienced as an integral part of many women's and men's lives around the world, and not necessarily as the sole defining activity around which their sense of self or identity is shaped. Moreover, commercial sex work in these accounts is not always a steady activity, but may occur simultaneously with other forms of income-generating work such as domestic service, informal commercial trading, market-vending, shoeshining or office work. Sex work can also be quite short-lived or be a part of an annual cycle of work—in few cases are women and men engaged full-time

or as professionals. Consequently, in one person's lifetime, sex work is commonly just one of the multiple activities employed for generating income, and very few stay in prostitution for their entire adulthood. In most cases, sex work is not for individual wealth but for family well-being or survival; for working class women to clothe, feed and educate their children; and for young women and men to sustain themselves when the family income is inadequate. For many, sex work means migration away from their hometown or country. For others, it is associated with drug use, indentureship or debt-bondage. For the majority, participation in sex work entails a life in the margins.

The concept of sex work emerged in the 1970s through the prostitutes' rights movement in the United States and Western Europe and has been discussed in various publications.² Than-Dam Troung's study of prostitution and tourism in Southeast Asia produced one of the first extensive theoretical elaborations on the subject (1989). Defining human activity or work as the way in which basic needs are met and human life produced and reproduced, she argues that activities involving purely sexual elements of the body and sexual energy should also be considered vital to the fulfillment of basic human needs: for both procreation and bodily pleasure. Troung thus introduces the concept of sexual labor to capture the notion of the utilization of sexual elements of the body and as a way of understanding a productive life force that is employed by women and men. In this respect she proposes that sexual labor be considered similar to other forms of labor that humankind performs to sustain itself—such as mental and manual labor, all of which involve specific parts of the body and particular types of energy and skills. Furthermore, she points out, the social organization of sexual labor has taken a variety of forms in different historical contexts and political economies, whereby there is no universal form or appearance of either prostitution or sex work. Instead, she proposes, analyses of prostitution need to address and take into account the specific ways in which sexual subjectivity, sexual needs and desires are constructed in specific contexts. Wet-nursing, temple prostitution, "breeding" under slavery, surrogate child-bearing, donor sex, commercial sex and biological reproduction can thus be seen as illustrations of historical and contemporary ways in which sexual labor has been organized for the re-creation and replenishment of human and social life.

Perhaps one of the most confounding dimensions in the conceptualization of prostitution as labor concerns the relation that exists in many people's minds between sexual acts and "love," and with prevailing ideas that without love, sexual acts are harmful and abusive. After all, isn't sex supposed to be about consensual sharing of our "most personal, private, erotic, sensitive parts of our physical and psychic being," as some would argue?³ And aren't women in particular harmed or violated by sexual acts that are not intimate? In such perspec-

tives, the sale of one's sexual energies is confused with a particular morality about sexual relations and essentialist cultural interpretations are imposed upon the subject. This conflation of sex with the highest form of intimacy presupposes a universal meaning of sex, and ignores changing perceptions and values as well as the variety of meanings that women and men hold about their sexual lives. In *Live Sex Acts*, Wendy Chapkis proposes that if we are able to understand how women experience and define their sexual acts in commercial transactions, then it is possible to move beyond a universalistic moralizing position and to develop some knowledge of the complex realities of women's experiences of sexual labor. Through extensive interviews with sex workers in the Netherlands and the United States, Chapkis concludes that prostitution can be likened to the sociological category of "emotional labor," activities and jobs for which care and feeling are required, commodified and commercialized, such as airline service work, acting, psychotherapy, massage work, or child-care (1997). The objectification of emotion that occurs in the process of this kind of work, including sex work, is not inherently destructive or harmful, she points out, rather the worker is able to "summon and contain emotion within the commercial transaction," to erect and maintain boundaries that protect the worker from abuse, and to develop a professionalism toward the job (76). Sex workers are thus able to distinguish intimacy and love from the sexual act itself, much in the same way that an actor or therapist is able to separate their work from private life, preserving a sense of integrity and distance from emotionally demanding work. Similarly, contributor Heather Montgomery describes perceptions and experiences for children in the Thai sex industry. She explains that the children are able to form a distinct ethical system that allows them to sell sex while preserving a sense of humanity and virtue.

While our approach suggests that social relations involving sexual labor are not inherently tied to specific gendered roles or bodies, there is a persistent pattern through much of history that positions the social gendered category "women" as the sellers or providers of sexual labor and "men" as the group deriving profits and power from the interactions. The subordination of the female and the feminine is the overriding factor for this arrangement in a variety of cultural, national and economic contexts, producing stigmas and social condemnation of persons who defy the socially defined boundaries of womanhood. Categories of "good" and "bad" women (virgin/whore, madonna/prostitute, chaste/licentious women) exist in most patriarchal societies, where the "bad" girl becomes the trope for female sexuality that threatens male control and domination. Female sexual acts that serve women's sexual or economic interests are, within the context of masculinist hegemony, dangerous, immoral, perverted, irresponsible and indecent. Construed in this fashion, the

image of the whore disciplines and divides women, forcing some to conform to virginity, domesticity and monogamy and demonizing those who transgress these boundaries. Sex work positions women in dominant discourse as social deviants and outcasts. Today the majority of the world's sex workers are women, working within male-dominated businesses and industries, yet while the social definition of the provider of sexual labor is often closely associated with specific cultural constructions of femininity, and "the prostitute" rendered virtually synonymous with "woman," these gendered relations are clearly also being contested and redefined in different ways throughout the world. Various trends acutely challenge the tendency to essentialize the sex worker with biological notions of gender. In the Caribbean for example, so-called romance tourism is based on the sale by men of "love" to North American and European women, and "rent-a-dreads" and beach boys dominate the sex trade in the tourism industry in some islands (Press 1978, Pruitt and Lafont, 1995). In essays in this volume, Thai sex workers in Japan report to sometimes buy sex for their own pleasure from male strippers, Brazilian "miches"—young male hustlers—get by through selling sex to other men, and in Europe and Malaysia male-to-female transgender sex workers also service men. Across the globe, "genetic" men and boys engage in sex work, selling sex to both men and women in homosexual and heterosexual relations, as feminine and masculine subjects.

Nevertheless, even with the increasing visibility of genetic men and boys in sex work, gender inequality and discrimination remain evident. Julian Marlowe argues that if we compare beliefs about male and female sex workers, two prominent yet very different sets of assumptions emerge with men commanding a more liberated and independent position in the discourse than their female counterparts (1997). In this volume Dawn Passar and Johanna Breyer discuss a setting in the U.S. where even though men are entering stripping and exotic dancing in greater numbers than before, they are paid different—and better—kinds of wages than women in clubs under the same management. In an attempt to address such gender inequalities, the women filed a case of sexual harassment and discrimination with the California Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. For Brazil, contributor Paulo Longo describes a situation where young men and boys resist inferiorization that is associated with being defined and viewed as "feminine" by asserting a "macho" identity, and for Malaysia, Khartini Slamah contends that transgendered persons are female, either through self-definition, medical operations or definition by others. As Gail Pheterson notes, "male homosexuals and transvestites also provide sexual service in a minority of cases, but this does not change the gender pattern because like women, they service men and their role is often feminine" (1996:

27). Within the sex industry, a gendered hierarchy and systematic privileging of the male and the masculine continues to be prevalent.

Children, both boys and girls, are also increasingly evident in prostitution, particularly in Third World settings, making the picture of gendered relations even more complex. However, child participation in sex industries invariably raises other questions and problems than those to do with gender, and it is within the international debates on "child prostitution" that a discourse of sexual labor and sex work is also apparent. While some attribute the rise of adolescents and pre-pubescent children in prostitution to the insatiable sexual appetites of depraved western men, or to cultural preferences in Third World countries for sex with virgins, a highly compelling explanation involves an analysis of the global political economy and processes of development and underdevelopment. Studies by the International Labor Organization (ILO) show that the proliferation of earning activity by children is associated with the development process "with its intrinsic features of population and social mobility, urbanization, and progressive monetization of all forms of human activity," and the growth of the modern tourist industry based on the accumulation of wealth and disposable incomes in the industrialized world (Black 1995). The disruption that such development brings to the organization of production in developing countries, draws children into marginal and servile occupations sometimes requiring parents to deploy the income-generating capacity of their children in order to ensure that the household survives. The research suggests we include child prostitution in the context of the global exploitation of child labor in order to effectively address the problem. Such understandings of child labor undergirds various child worker movements around the world, some of which were represented at the 1997 Amsterdam Conference on Child Labor.⁴ The organization of young male hustlers in Brazil described in this volume is also premised on the articulation of child prostitution as work.

Sex work, as we understand it here, is not a universal or ahistorical category, but is subject to change and redefinition. It is clearly not limited to prostitution or to women, but certainly encompasses what is generally understood to fall into these two categories. However, even though human sexual and emotional resources have been organized and managed in different ways and acquired different meanings, capital accumulation, liberal free market politics and the commodification of waged labor has transformed various social arrangements in a consistent fashion. Louise White notes in her study of prostitution in colonial Nairobi, Kenya, "prostitution is a capitalist social relationship not because capitalism causes prostitution by commoditizing sexual relations but because wage labor is a unique feature of capitalism: capitalism commoditized labor" (1990:11). White's study proposes that capitalism shapes sex work into commoditized

forms of labor rather than causing sex work as a category of social activity. She understands prostitution as another form of domestic labor. Both White and Troung point out that the exploitation of sexual labor is intensified under systemic capitalism, leaving it open to similar kinds of pressures and manipulations that any other waged labor faces. Sexual labor today forms a primary source for profit and wealth, and it is a constituent part of national economies and transnational industries within the global capitalist economy.

If sexual labor is seen to be subject to exploitation, as with any other labor, it can also be considered as a basis for mobilization in struggles for working conditions, rights and benefits and for broader resistances against the oppression of working peoples, paralleling situations in other informal and unregulated sectors. And by recognizing sexual labor in this fashion, it is possible to identify broader strategies for change. Jo Bindman, from Anti-Slavery International, explains that “we first need to identify prostitution as work, as an occupation susceptible like the others to exploitation. Then sex workers can be included and protected under the existing instruments which aim to protect all workers from exploitation, and women from discrimination.”⁵ Anne McClintock observes that “historically the international labor movement has argued for the radical *transformation* of labor, not its abolition” (1993:8). She thus marks the difference between a movement that advocates the eradication of prostitution and that which is premised on understandings of prostitution as a form of sexual labor, highlighting the need to address issues of social transformations that are linked to the political economy. Situating prostitution as *work* allows then, for a recognition of what Chandra Talpade Mohanty sees as concrete “common interests” based on a shared understanding of location and needs, creating “potential bases of cross-national solidarity” between women (1997:7). The conceptualization of prostitutes, whores, strippers, lap dancers, escorts, exotic dancers etc., as “sex workers” insists that working women’s common interests can be articulated within the context of broader (feminist) struggles against the devaluation of “women’s” work and gender exploitation within capitalism. Indeed, sex worker Carol Leigh, inventor of the term “sex worker,” recalls that she coined it out of a feminist priority to end divisions between women (1997).

Despite the marginality and vulnerability of sex workers internationally, the notion of sex workers as exclusively “victims” is rejected by the authors of this volume. Even in cases where women, men, boys and girls are clearly harmed within the sex industry or are caught in debt-bondage and indentureship situations, it is the respectful recognition of subjectivity and personal agency that creates continuity in this collection. Explorations of agency encountered in *Global Sex Workers* identify sites of transformative practices within the context of both structural constraints and dominant relations of power in the global sex

industry. By underlining agency, resistances to, and contestations of, oppressive and exploitative structures are uncovered, and the visions and ideologies inscribed in women’s practices made visible. Such analyses position sex workers as actors in the global arena, as persons capable of making choices and decisions that lead to transformations of consciousness and changes in everyday life.

The approach taken here, regarding agency, is embedded in social theory that is informed by a notion of *praxis* (human activity) as central to the construction and reconstruction of society and social knowledge.⁶ According to Judith Kegan Gardiner the recognition of agency is integral to feminist theories of social transformation, in “. . . that any theory that denies women ‘agency’ retards the changes in patriarchal social structure for which feminism strives, because it denies the existence of an entity to attack those structures” (1995: 9). Feminism, from this understanding, is grounded in a notion of the social category “women”—the dominated, oppressed social collectivity within patriarchal relations—as the primary and necessary agents in processes of change. Chapkis (1997) confirms this approach in relationship to sex workers. “Practices of prostitution,” she writes, “like other forms of commodification and consumption can be read in more complex ways than simply as a confirmation of male domination. They may also be seen as sites of ingenious resistance and cultural subversion . . . the prostitute cannot be reduced to one of a passive object used in male sexual practice, but instead it can be understood as a place of agency where the sex worker makes active use of the existing sexual order” (29–30). However, even with such general acknowledgement that agency is an integral part of feminism, the idea of women’s agency in prostitution is often vehemently rejected by feminists. Indeed, few are able to extend the theoretical position summarized by Gardiner and Chapkis to women’s praxis in the sex trade. Sex workers who fight for changes within sex industries, and not for its abolition, are often charged by feminists, as Cheryl Overs remarks in her interview here, with acting with a “false consciousness,” or as handmaidens to patriarchal capitalism. Clearly the “good girls” are privileged in much feminist theorizing, while sex workers remain relegated to the status of objects, seen to be violently manipulated and wrought into passivity and acquiescence. Prostitution appears to be one of the last sites of gender relations to be interrogated through a critical feminist lens that assumes that women are both active subjects and subjects of domination.

Sex Work and Racism

Besides the location of women in the sex trade as workers, migrants and agents we address the specificity of racism in positioning Third World sex work-

ers in international relations. Two distinct dimensions are discussed in this collection: racisms embedded in structures and desires within specific local industries, and cultural imperialism refracted through international discourses on prostitution.

The first is analyzed in the studies of prostitution in Australia, Curaçao and Cuba where various ideologies and stereotypes of particular racial-ethnic categories of sex workers are evident. In each place, images of “the exotic” are entwined with ideologies of racial and ethnic difference: the “prostitute” is defined as “other” in comparison to the racial or ethnic origin of the client. Such boundaries, between which women are defined as “good” and “bad,” or woman and whore, reinforce sexual relations intended for marriage and family and sets limits on national and ethnic membership. The brown or black woman is regarded as a desirable, tantalizing, erotic subject, suitable for temporary or non-marital sexual intercourse—the ideal “outside” woman—and rarely seen as a candidate for a long-term commitment, an equal partner, or as a future mother. She thus represents the unknown or forbidden yet is positioned in dominant discourse as the subordinated “other.” Trends presented in this collection echo those identified in other studies, where it is argued that the exoticization of the Third World “other” is as equally important as economic factors in positioning women in sex work.⁷ In other words, it is not simply grinding poverty that underpins a woman’s involvement in prostitution. Race and ethnicity are equally important factors for any understanding of contemporary sex industries. To some scholars, racial/ethnic structuring visible in the global sex industry highly resembles the exoticist movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which “labelling the anthropological Other as exotic legitimated treating the peoples of the ‘third world’ as fit to be despised—destroyed even . . . while concurrently also constituting them as projections of western fantasies” (Rousseau and Porter 1990:7). The movement valorized peoples and cultures that were different and remote while simultaneously imposing a status of inferiority upon them. The eroticization of women of Third World cultures was an integral part of the approach whereby female sexuality was defined as highly attractive and fascinating, yet related to the natural primitiveness and lower order of the other cultural group. According to Porter, it was the exotic lands and peoples which provided Europeans in past centuries with “paradigms of the erotic.” Away from the repressive mores of Western Europe, these strange cultures and particularly the women in them became sites where sex “was neither penalized, not pathologized nor exclusively procreative” (Porter 1990:118). Enslaved, indentured and colonized womanhood thus came to represent uninhibited and unrestricted sexual intercourse, a situation that in many ways is today reflected in the global sex industry. As the *New York Times* reports “Exotic

Imports Have Captured Italy’s Sex Market,” referring to the increased importance of African women in sex work in Rome, and simultaneously illuminating the connection that is still made between Third World women and the exotic (July 9, 1997). However, as several essays point out here, prostitution is a realm of contradictions. Thus, even with the heightened exoticization of the sexuality of Third World women and men, they are positioned within the global sex industry second to white women. White sex workers invariably work in safer, higher paid and more comfortable environments; brown women—Mulatas, Asians, Latinas—form a middle class; and Black women are still conspicuously overrepresented in the poorest and most dangerous sectors of the trade, particularly street work. Whiteness continues to represent the hegemonic ideal of physical and sexual attractiveness and desirability, and white sexual labor is most valued within the global sex industry.

The second dimension of racism is somewhat less obvious, yet concerns the neo-colonialism that is evinced in much recent feminist and pro-sex worker writings that have come out of the United States and Western Europe. Kathleen Barry’s work on the trafficking of women best illustrates this tendency (1984). Her definition has captured many a feminist imagination regarding Third World women and has produced an emphasis and fascination with the subject of sex slaves in developing countries. While Barry argues that “trafficking” could involve any woman in the world, and that any woman could become a sex slave, on closer reading of her work another meaning emerges. She constructs a hierarchy of stages of patriarchal and economic development, situating the trafficking of women in the first stage that “prevails in pre-industrial and feudal societies that are primarily agricultural and where women are excluded from the public sphere” and where women, she states, are the exclusive property of men (1995: 51). At the other end of the scale she places the “post-industrial, developed societies” where “women achieve the potential for economic independence” and where prostitution is normalized (1995:53). Quite simply and without shame, she evokes an image of non-western women, that various Third World feminists have identified as common to much western feminist theorizing. The Third World/non-western woman is positioned in this discourse as “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc” and is conceptualized as leading a “truncated” sexual life (Mohanty 1991: 56). She is not yet a “whole or developed” person, but instead resembles a minor needing guidance, assistance and help. The construct stands in opposition to that of the western woman who is believed to have (or at least has the potential to have) control over her income, body and sexuality: the emancipated, independent, post-modern woman.

In true colonial fashion, Barry’s mission is to rescue those whom she consid-

ers to be incapable of self-determination. And along with this mission, goes a particular cultural definition of sex itself. Subaltern understandings and lived realities of sexuality and sexual-economic relations, such as found in various African or Caribbean countries for example, where one can speak of a continuum of sexual relations from monogamy to multiple sexual partners and where sex may be considered as a valuable asset for a woman to trade with, are ignored in favor of specific western ideologies and moralities regarding sexual relations.⁸ Likewise the meanings young women and men have about their own sexuality, such as described in two essays here on Brazil and Thailand, are denied legitimacy and validity. Barry's work has informed a plethora of activities and inquiries by women's organizations into the subject of prostitution and has helped form an international consciousness and discourse about the sex trade that is solely informed by western, non-sex working women's definitions of sexual relations and prostitution.

The neo-colonialism that surfaces in such representations of the lives and situations of Third World women across the globe does not, however, end with radical feminists or the anti-trafficking lobby. Some prostitute's rights advocates assume that western development, capitalist modernization and industrialization will enable women in developing countries to exercise choice and attain "freedom."⁹ Seen to be trapped in underdeveloped states, Third World prostitutes continue to be positioned in this discourse as incapable of making decisions about their own lives, forced by overwhelming external powers completely beyond their control into submission and slavery. Western women's experience is thus made synonymous with assumptions about the inherent superiority of industrialized capitalist development and Third World women placed in categories of pre-technological "backwardness," inferiority, dependency and ignorance. Jo Doezema demonstrates in her chapter that this distortion has crept into even some of the more progressive prostitutes' rights debates concerning "forced" and "voluntary" prostitution, resulting in a negation of Third World sex workers' rights to self-determination.

The surge of writing about the position and identity of prostitutes, the redefinitions that have occurred, the various subject positions that are evident in the present discourse, and the struggles for recognition and rights have also contributed, albeit indirectly, to the creation of an hegemonic western script about prostitution. Shannon Bell's *Rewriting the Prostitute Body* presents an example. In her reading, the categorization and othering of the prostitute is located unequivocally in dichotomies that lie "at the heart of Western thought"—in short, a western concern (1994:40). Bell recovers and celebrates prostitute knowledge through a re-reading of western philosophy and U.S. prostitute performance art, validating distinctly culture-bound practices and knowledges. In

so doing, she produces notions of a "new prostitute identity" that trace back to the sacred prostitute in Ancient Greece. Thus, while she argues for a feminist postmodern reading of the subject position that allows for a recognition of differences within the category women represented by class, race, language, national boundaries, sexual orientation and age, and for a theorizing that creates space for new marginal political subjects, her work results in an essentialist definition of the prostitute. Through an homogenization of the origins of prostitution and an erasure of contextual differences, she not only fails to validate histories and subjectivities that lie beyond her purview but subtly infers that the West defines the rest.¹⁰

The "canon" in prostitution studies reinforces this script.¹¹ For the most part, contemporary writers on sex work construct the prostitute/sex worker from testimonies and analyses that are derived from struggles of "First World" women in the United States and Western Europe. While all these writings are important in uncovering prostitute politics and identities in some parts of the world, and certainly contribute to a fuller apprehension of sex work, without historicization and geo-political contextualization, they run the risk of universalizing the subject from bounded locations and experiences. Lacking an analysis of international relations and notions of differing cultural constructions and meaning of sexuality and gender, this body of literature appropriates the "non-western" woman's experience without any investigation into the matter. Little research or theorizing to date is, for example, grounded in the lives, experiences, definitions and perspectives of Third World people in sex work, allowing western categories and subjects to be privileged in the international discourse on sex work. The distortion of relations between the First and Third Worlds, and privileging of the western prostitute subject thus places some prostitutes' rights activists and allies in danger of a political alignment with movements that consolidate western hegemony.

Third World and anti-racist feminisms have over the past two decades intensely critiqued the universalism and totalizing effect of unnuanced western (feminist) theorizing—modernist and postmodernist—arguing that many of the concepts and theories produced about women's oppression are, and have been for many years, grounded in struggles of middle-class white women and may be quite antithetical to other women's experiences, if not representative of imperialist feminist thought.¹² Nevertheless the need for feminist theory to engage with racialized sexual subjectivities in tandem with the historical weight of imperialism, colonialism and racist constructions of power has only been raised recently in the context of this feminist theorizing on prostitution.¹³ In view of histories of the oversexualization of non-western women in western cultures and the colonial legacies of the rape and sexual abuse of indigenous,

and other Third World women, a hesitancy to explore topics of Third World women's sexual agency and subjectivity in prostitution is quite understandable. Yet in an era when women can no longer be defined exclusively as victims, where Third World women speak for themselves in various forums, where increasingly analyses have shifted focus from simple hierarchies and dichotomies to the problematization of multiple spaces, seemingly contradictory social locations and plural sites of power, it would seem that experiences, identities and struggles of women in the global sex industry cannot be neglected. This book has taken shape in direct counterpoint to a North American-Western European hegemony within contemporary feminist and prostitute writings about the sex trade.

Transnational Sex Work and the Global Economy

Sex work across national boundaries is not new to the world. Donna Guy observes that "foreign prostitutes and pimps were already ensconced in Buenos Aires (Argentina) by 1860" and that between 1889 and 1901, seventy-five percent of the registered working women hailed from Europe and Russia (1990:14-16). Between 1865 and 1885, around one quarter of the registered prostitutes in Bologna, Italy, were migrants, and during the 1880s young British women worked in Belgium and other parts of Europe (Gibson 1986, Walkowitz 1980). In India, a number of European women worked as prostitutes in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the majority of whom originated from Central and Eastern Europe, but also among them were English women (Levine 1994). In Russia, in the late 1880s, "non-Russian and foreign prostitutes" comprised around one-sixth of the registered prostitute population (Bernstein 1995: 97). During World War II, "haole" (white) women were the majority in brothels in Hawaii. Korean and Thai women were forced to "comfort" the Japanese military, and Cuban and Venezuelan women serviced the Dutch and American navies in Curacao (Bailey and Farber 1992, Hicks 1994, Kempadoo 1994). Specific political, economic and social events shaped the women's involvement in the sex trade at different times, in different places, within the context of a globalizing capitalist system, colonialism and masculinist hegemony.

In the late 1980s, Licia Brussa estimated that between thirty and sixty percent of the prostitutes in the Netherlands were from Third World countries, particularly Latin America and Asia (1989). Today, the migrant sex working population has been joined by women from Eastern Europe and West Africa. In 1991, around seventy percent of the sex workers in Japan were reported to be Filipino, and young Afghan and Bangladeshi women worked in prostitution in Pakistan (Korvinus 1992). In the same period, the red-light district in Bombay, India,

relied predominantly upon migrant female labor, much of which originated in Nepal. By the mid-1990s, Eastern European, Russian and Vietnamese prostitutes were reported to be working in China while Russian women appeared in the Egyptian sex industry, and Mexican women moved into sex work in Japan (*BBC World Service*, April 28, 1994, *New York Times*, June 9, 1995, Azize et al, 1996). Besides these trends, chapters in this volume point to Thai sex workers in Australia and Japan, Brazilians and Guyanese in Suriname, Dominicans and Colombians in Curaçao, Ghanaians in the Cote d'Ivoire and Austria, Nigerians in Senegal and Italy, Polish, Bulgarian, Czech and Ukrainian women in Germany and Austria and so forth.

Indeed, transnational sex work has continued over the past hundred years, but the question arises about whether it has intensified, as many will argue, during the twentieth century and particularly over the last two decades. Given the lack of figures and documentation of what in most countries is an outlawed and underground activity, and the multiplicity of activities worldwide that constitute "sex work," it is virtually impossible to state with certainty that numbers have increased. Also, as with any activity in the informal sector, information on populations involved, income, types of activities, and international migration or trafficking routes is imprecise. A glaringly obvious example of the inaccuracies that exist is related to the number of prostitutes in Asia. Figures for the city of Bombay in India range from 100,000 (*Asia Watch* 1993) to 600,000 (Barry 1995)—a difference of half a million. In the case of Thailand, figures for "child prostitutes" range between 2, 500 and 800,000, with the age range being equally as imprecise (Black 1995). To any conscientious social scientist, such discrepancies should be cause for extreme suspicion of the reliability of the research, yet when it comes to sex work and prostitution, few eyebrows are raised and the figures are easily bandied about without question.¹⁴

Nonetheless, since the 1970s a global restructuring of capitalist production and investment has taken place and this can be seen to have wide-scale gendered implications and, by association, an impact on sex industries and sex work internationally. New corporate strategies to increase profit have developed, involving the movement of capital from industrial centers to countries with cheap labor, the circumvention of unionized labor, and so-called flexible employment policies. Unemployment and temporary work plagues the industrialized centers as well as "developing" countries. The ILO estimated that in January 1994, around thirty percent of the world's labor force was unemployed and unable to sustain a minimum standard of living (Chomsky 1994:188). The power and influence of transnational institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and various corporations has superseded that of national governments and national businesses.¹⁵ Measures imposed by the International Mone-

tary Fund (IMF) for national debt-repayment, such as Structural Adjustment programs, and international trade agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) squeeze national economies, creating displacement from rural agricultural communities, rising unemployment in urban centers, drops in real wages, and increasing poverty. Free Trade and Special Economic Zones for export-oriented production, cuts by governments in national expenditures in the social sector and the removal of trade restrictions, local food subsidies and price controls accompany these measures and agreements and impose even further hardships on working people.¹⁶ The corporate drive to increase consumption, and hence profit margins, has also led to a proliferation of new products, goods and services and the cultivation of new desires and needs. Alongside apparel, automobile, electronic, computer and luxury good industries, sex industries have grown since the mid-1970s to fully encompass live sex shows, sex shops, massage parlors, escort services, phone sex, sex tours, image clubs, and exotic dancing, and to creating, as Edward Herman states, "one of the booming markets in the New World Order—a multi-billion dollar industry with finders, brokers, syndicate operations and pimp 'managers' at the scene of action" (1995:5). Sex tourism has become a new industry. Recruitment agencies and impresarios link the local sites and sex industries in various parts of the world, indicating a parallel with transnational corporations in the formal global economy. "The 'success' of the sex industry," write James Petras and Tienchai Wongchaisuwan about Thailand, "is based on a 'special relation' of shared interests among a complex network of military leaders, police officials, business tourist promoters, godfathers and pimps. At the international level, airline and hotel chains have worked closely with the local business-military elite to promote the sex tourist industry. The World Bank's support for the open economy and export oriented development strategy results in financial support of tourism" (1993: 36). In Thailand, the authors estimate, direct and indirect earnings from sex enterprises is about \$5 billion a year. Elsewhere, as in Cuba and the Dominican Republic, the specter of sex tourism has become embedded in the economy. The sexual labor of young brown women in these playgrounds of the West has become increasingly important to the national economies, while prostitution remains condemned as degrading and destructive. In Cuba's case, it is viewed as a counterrevolutionary engagement. Nevertheless, State support or tolerance of this form of tourism is evident. Sex work fills the coffers of countries whose economic survival is increasingly dependent on global corporate capitalist interests.

The emerging global economic order has already wreaked havoc on women's lives. Recent studies document an increasing need of women to con-

tribute to the household economy through waged labor, yet having to deal with declining real wages, lower wage structures than men and longer working hours.¹⁷ Seasonal or flexible employment is the norm for women all over the world. Skilled and unskilled female workers constitute the main labor force in the new export-oriented industries—for shoe, toy, textile and garment production, in agribusinesses and electronic factories—where they are faced with poor working conditions, are continually threatened with unemployment due to automation and experience mass dismissals due to relocations of whole sectors of the industry. In many instances, minimum wage, health and safety laws are overridden by the transnational corporations in these new production zones, leaving women workers in particularly hazardous situations. Furthermore, with disruptions to traditional household and family structures, women are increasingly becoming heads of households, providing and nurturing the family. With dwindling family resources and the western emphasis on the independent nuclear family, women must also increasingly rely on the state for provisions such as maternity leave and child-care, yet fewer funds are allocated by governments for social welfare and programs.¹⁸ Informal sector work and "moonlighting" is growing and engagement in the booming sex industries fills a gap created by globalization.

Migration is a road many take to seek other opportunities and to break away from oppressive local conditions caused by globalization. A 1996 ILO report describes the "feminization" of international labor migration as "one of the most striking economic and social phenomena of recent times" (1). This "phenomenon" according to the authors of the report, is most pronounced in Asian countries where women are migrating as "autonomous, economic agents" in their own right, "trying to seize economic opportunities overseas" (1). The Philippines has put more women onto the overseas labor market than any other country in the world (Rosca 1995). Within all this dislocation and movement, some migrant women become involved in sex work. However, laws prohibiting or regulating prostitution and migration, particularly from the South, combine to create highly complex and oppressive situations for women if they become involved in sex work once abroad. The illegal movement of persons for work elsewhere, commonly known as "trafficking" also becomes a very real issue for those who are being squeezed on all sides and have few options other than work in underground and informal sectors. Traffickers take advantage of the illegality of commercial sex work and migration, and are able to exert an undue amount of power and control over those seeking political or economic refuge or security. In such cases, it is the laws that prevent legal commercial sex work and immigration that form the major obstacles.

A related dimension to globalization with the expansion of sex industries, a

heightened necessity for transnational migration for work, and increasing immiseration of women worldwide, is the spread of AIDS. Paul Farmer links the pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa to the social realities of the migrant labor system, rapid urbanization, high levels of war with military mobilization, landlessness and poverty that have been exacerbated by an economic crises caused by "poor terms of trade, the contradictions of post-colonial economies which generate class disparities and burdensome debt service" since the mid 1970s (1996:71). These factors, he contends, are intricately intertwined with pervasive gender inequality and specific socially constructed meanings of gender and sex, creating a very complex situation regarding the epidemiology and, consequently, the prevention of AIDS. Around eighty-two percent of AIDS cases worldwide in 1996, he points out, were found in Africa, with women and children bearing the brunt of the epidemic. A similarly complex interrelationship between changing agriculture systems to meet New World Order demands, fueled by gendered traditions and inequalities, inadequate subsistence, a felt lack of desired consumption, goods, tourism and the drug trade enables the spread of AIDS in Asia (Farmer 1996:82–88). For the Americas, Bond et al. note that labor migration between the Caribbean and the United States has been an important factor in the spread of HIV and AIDS, and that "the development of tourist industries, frequently based on U.S. capital as a replacement for the decline in profits from older colonially established sources such as sugar cane, has also traced the routes for HIV to follow" (1997:7). With only an estimated four percent of the world's AIDS cases being registered in North America and Western Europe, it is particularly evident that it is the rest of the world that is at greatest risk (Farmer 1997).

This relatively new sexually transmitted disease and identification by world health authorities of a concentration of the epidemic in developing countries has led to government interventions. The attention has produced contradictions for sex workers around the world. As in the past, with state concern for public health matters, prostitutes are placed under scrutiny, subject to intense campaigning and roped into projects that define them as the vectors and transmitters of disease (Zalduondo 1991, Murray and Robinson 1996). Sex workers are continually blamed for the spread of the disease, with Eurocentric racist notions of cultural difference compounding the effect for Third World populations. Consequently, inappropriate methods of intervention have been introduced and sex workers burdened with having to take responsibility for the prevention and control of the disease. Farmer points out that "... while public health campaigns target sex workers, many African women take a different view of AIDS epidemiology and prevention. In their view, the epidemiology of HIV and Africa's economic crises suggest that HIV spreads not because of the "exotic sex-

ual practices" of Africans but because of the daily life within which women struggle to survive" (1996:74). Bond et al, in their studies of AIDS in Africa and the Caribbean apply a similar analysis. Arguing that there is "more to AIDS than 'truck drivers' and 'prostitutes'" the authors consider it of vital importance to examine relations of political and economic power in relationship to the spread of AIDS, with specific attention to the disempowered such as women and children (1997:xi). Placing the focus and blame on sex workers does not necessarily address the root of the problem, but serves to push them further into marginality and social isolation. On the other hand, some AIDS-prevention work has contributed to the formation of new sex worker organizations, inadvertently empowering sex workers in other areas than just in health matters. Some of these initiatives are described in this collection.

The Global Movement

Since the 1970s sex work has been an organizing basis for women, men, and transgenders in different parts of the world. But while the emergence of prostitutes' rights groups and organizations in Western Europe and North America up to the early 1990s has been well documented, there is little written on the global movement. Over the past ten years, the main recorders of the prostitutes' rights movement, Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (1987), Laurie Bell (1987) Gail Pheterson (1989), Nicky Roberts (1992), Valerie Jenness (1993), Shannon Bell (1994), Wendy Chapkis (1997) and Jill Nagle (1997), describe the beginning of a self-identified prostitutes movement with the establishment of the prostitute organization, (COYOTE) Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics, in San Francisco in 1973 and sister or similar kinds of groups in various part of the United States around the same time. They locate the emergence of a highly politicized prostitute rights advocacy movement in Europe, starting with the strike by French prostitutes in 1975 which led to the creation of the French Collective of Prostitutes and which in turn inspired the formation of such groups as the English Collective of Prostitutes in England (1975), the New York Prostitutes Collective (1979), that later became USPROS, the Australian Prostitutes Collective (1981), which is now known as the Prostitutes Collective of Victoria (PCV) and the Italian Committee for the Civil Rights of Prostitutes (1982). CORP—the Canadian Organization for the Rights of Prostitutes—the Dutch Red Thread and HYDRA in Germany also assume a significant place in the history of the sex workers rights movement as chronicled by these authors. The writings also signal the formation of the International Committee for Prostitutes Rights (ICPR) in 1985, the two World Whores Congresses held respectively in Amsterdam, the Netherlands in 1985 and Brussels, Belgium in 1986, and the creation of the World

Charter of Prostitutes Rights through these two congresses, as epitomizing a worldwide prostitutes' rights movement and politics. Nonetheless, the international character of the movement has been more wishful thinking than political reality. As Pheterson, rapporteur on the two congresses and co-director of ICPR, notes about the first congress, Third World sex workers did not formally participate and prostitute advocates represented sex workers for three countries, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam (1989). At the second congress, a similar dominance of the West was evident. Pheterson further points out in her reflection on the ICPR's work at the end of the 1980s, "the numerous nationalities not represented point to work yet to be done in building a truly world movement of whores." Thus, much of what was laid out in the Charter and discussed at the congresses was defined by (white) western sex workers and advocates. Third World prostitutes' rights organizations, such as the Ecuadorian Association of Autonomous Women Workers, established in 1982, or the Uruguayan, Association of Public Prostitutes (AMEPU), founded in 1985, were at this point not an integral part of the "international" movement, although Pheterson attempted to correct this omission by including "new voices" in her report on the prostitutes' rights movement (1989). And despite Pheterson's awareness of the problem and her insistence that the movement needed to truly "internationalize," many writings in the 1990s have continued to reproduce a skewed representation of the prostitutes rights movement and to ignore sex workers' rights groups in developing countries.

Despite this lack of recognition, sex workers in Third World and other non-western countries have been busy, taking action, demonstrating against injustices they face, and demanding human, civil, political and social rights. Thus not only was an Ecuadorian association formed in 1982, but they held a sex workers' strike in 1988. In Brazil, a national prostitutes conference took place in 1987, giving rise to the establishment of the National Network of Prostitutes, *Da Vida*. In Montevideo, Uruguay, AMEPU inaugurated its childcare center and new headquarters after making its first public appearance in the annual May Day march in 1988. The Network of Sex Work Projects, founded in 1991, began to make links with sex workers' rights and health care projects in the Asian and Pacific region, slowly creating a truly international network that today includes at least forty different projects and groups in as many different countries around the world. 1992 witnessed the founding of the Venezuelan Association of Women for Welfare and Mutual Support (AMBAR), with the Chilean group Association for the Rights of Women, "Angela Lina" (APRODEM) and the Mexican Unión Única following suit in 1993. Two national congresses were held by the Ecuadorian sex workers' rights association in 1993 and 1994. The Maxi Linder Association in Suriname, the Indian Mahila Samanwaya Committee, and the Colombian Associa-

tion of Women (Cormujer), were also all established by 1994. In the same year, around 400 prostitutes staged a protest against the closing of a brothel in Lima, Peru, with the slogan "We Want to Work, We Want to Work" and in Paramaribo, Suriname, sex workers made a first mass public appearance on AIDS Day, marching through the city with the banner "No Condom, No Pussy," drawing attention to their demands for safe sex. Also, 1994 witnessed the founding of The Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce (SWEAT) in South Africa. In 1996, groups in Japan and the Dominican Republic—Sex Workers! Encourage, Empower, Trust and Love Yourself! (SWEETLY) and Movement of United Women (MODEMU)—were formed, and in the same year the Indian organization held its first congress in Calcutta, as well as organizing several protests and demonstrations against harassment and brutality. In 1997, with the help of AMBAR in Venezuela, the Association for Women in Solidarity (AMAS) became the first Nicaraguan group, comprised mainly of street workers. Other sex worker organizations have been reported to exist in Indonesia, Tasmania, Taiwan, and Turkey. Several of these hitherto unrecognized or new groups and activities are described in this volume, through the eyes and words of the leading activists.

While this list of organizations is not exhaustive, and keeps growing, we must keep in mind that each group has a history that pre-dates its formal founding date. Sex workers as individuals and in informal groups have battled against stigmas and discriminatory laws, denounced social and political injustices, and fought for their basic human rights in non-western settings for many years and there are often several years of organized activity before a formal organization appears on the map. Furthermore, in some instances the seeds of a contemporary organization are much older. The present Uruguayan organization, for example, claims a history lodged in the struggle of Polish sex workers during the nineteenth century in that country. Everyday resistances have also been documented for the mid-nineteenth century in Lucknow, India (Oldenburg 1990) and Guatemala (McCreery 1986), and in colonial Kenya in the 1920s–30s (White 1990). Sex workers' struggles are thus neither a creation of a western prostitutes' rights movement or the privilege of the past three decades.

The lack of Third World sex worker representation in the international arena began to be redressed in the 1990s, as the international AIDS conferences provided a new opportunity for sex workers to get together. Jo Doezema writes, "AIDS was an issue that gave new impetus to the flagging international movement by providing an issue around which to organize much needed funds and new alliances with gay organizations. Under-funded sex worker organizations in both the First and Third Worlds who would have been hard pressed to persuade their funders of the necessity of sending a representative to a 'whores con-

ference' found it easier to get money when public health was, supposedly, at stake."¹⁹ Thus, the AIDS conferences provided a platform for a revitalization of the international movement, and, for the first time, signaled the presence of Third World sex workers as equal participants on the international scene. A notable instance, as Doezema further notes, was the AIDS Conference in Yokohama, Japan, in 1994, when the Network of Sex work Projects organized its first Asia-Pacific regional conference, parallel to the AIDS Conference. Sex worker delegates from around the world put together an action plan for activism during the AIDS Conference itself and beyond. During the Conference, delegates were addressed by a panel of sex workers from countries including Brazil, Mexico and Malaysia, who presented their own analysis and strategies of AIDS prevention in the context of sex workers rights. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China, in 1995 also drew various international sex workers' rights activists—many of whom formed a united delegation, spearheaded by the NWSP.²⁰

In 1997, an international prostitution conference took place in California, U.S., divided into a sex worker-only pre-conference organized by NWSP and COYOTE and a conference for sex workers, academics, activists and others working with or for sex workers, organized by COYOTE and the University of California at Northridge. Sex workers representing organizations from countries including Mexico, Guatemala, Venezuela, Brazil, Nicaragua, India, Thailand, Japan, and Malaysia helped insure that the pre-conference worked to an agenda that reflected a truly international perspective.

New Directions

Building upon the definition of sex work, prostitutes in the state of New South Wales in Australia became the first to gain acceptance as an official sex workers' union in 1996, under the umbrella of the Australian Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers' Union. Exotic dancers working at the "Lust Lady" in San Francisco in the United States followed suit. In April 1997, they entered into an agreement with the management of the theater and labor union, Local 790, the Service Employees International Union of the AFL-CIO which includes provisions on discrimination, sexual harassment, family and personal leave, pay, job evaluation, breaks and lunches, and dismissals. The notion of "sex worker" has then enabled prostitutes and others in the sex trade to not only articulate their needs as working peoples, but has brought a legitimacy hitherto unknown, and these examples may provide models for other groups in the future.

And while participation by Third World sex workers in the international movement is on the rise generally, not all regions participate equally. Central

and South American, and increasingly, Asian sex workers' organizations are becoming a major voice in the international movement. In the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Africa, and in the majority of Asian countries, however, independent organizing by sex workers is not yet visible. Here, as elsewhere, the AIDS pandemic has meant an upsurge in interest in sex workers as vectors of disease. While this has led, in some cases, to repressive measures against sex workers, it has also provided an opportunity for possible sex worker organizing. The projects such as Bliss without Risk in the Czech Republic, SYNVEV in Senegal, EMPOWER in Thailand, ZiTeng in Hong Kong, and others included in this volume, while not run by sex workers, are committed to the empowerment of sex workers. It is from groups such as these that autonomous sex worker organizations have begun. Continued AIDS prevention work of the type described here could thus lead to a strengthening of the movement, and to many more sex workers' rights groups worldwide.

Finally, in the global movement, struggles against western imperialism and racism within prostitutes' rights activism continues. The 1997 international conference provides a example of this struggle. Early Internet discussions between sex workers about the conference planning was dominated by those with access in the U.S., and focused almost exclusively on western, especially United States issues. This focus was later challenged by other sex workers, and resulted in fierce debate on the nature of an international conference.²¹ Sex workers from Chile also frustratedly pointed out prior to the conference, that the organizers claim to internationalism was empty, given that there was an absence of travel funds and facilities for translation to enable Third World sex workers to participate in the conference. From Australia, Alison Murray withdrew from the conference, noting, among other things, that the conference was overly "North America centered."²² The main conference reflected deep-seated ignorance of the importance, and even the existence, of sex worker organizations outside the United States and Europe. Third World and non-western sex workers felt marginalized, hurt and angry as promised interpretation facilities never materialized and as sessions highlighting the activities and issues of importance to Third World sex workers were relegated to difficult time-slots or even canceled when, due to scheduling problems, they threatened to conflict with "more important" sessions. This led to a storming of the podium during the final plenary session by Central and South American sex worker delegates, who, with full support from other sex workers and activists, denounced the academic organizers for the ill treatment they received. The conference thus ended in a strong anti-imperialist, anti-racist demonstration with the uproar forcing western sex workers to recognize and deal with these dimensions of power and inequality. Such consciousness within the movement can only continue to grow.

This collection, then, remains a sketch of activities and definitions that shape a global sex workers movement, and posits some clear directions that such a movement could take in the coming years. While clearly there is a need for autonomous organizing and consolidation of each group's position, within its own political, economic and cultural context, it is evident that sex workers do not view the struggle as isolated from that of other members of society. As prostitutes, migrant workers, transgenders, family breadwinners, single parents, HIV-positives, or teenagers, many recognize the multiple arenas in which their lives play, and consequently the multiple facets of social life that must be addressed. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender organizations, legal and human rights activists, health care workers, labor unions, and other sex industry workers are potential allies in the struggle to transform sexual labor into work that is associated with dignity, respect and decent working conditions. The coalitions that are taking shape through everyday resistances of sex workers also brings new meanings to the women's movement and feminism. It is hopefully from this matrix of resistance and coalitions that sex workers' rights will be embraced in the decades to come.

Notes

1. "Third World Women" is used here in keeping with the definition proposed by various "Third-World feminists," which captures the notion of a collectivity whose lives are conditioned and shaped by the struggles against neo-colonialism and imperialism, capitalism and gender subordination. See for example, the writings by Chandra Telpade, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," in C. T. Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) and "Women Workers and Capitalist Scripts: Ideologies of Domination, Common Interest and the Politics of Solidarity," in M. Jaqui Alexander and C. T. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 3–29; Chela Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," *Genders*, vol. 10 (Spring 1994) 1–24; Uma Narayan, "Contesting Cultures: 'Westernization,' Respect for Cultures and Third-World Feminists," in Linda Nicholason, ed., *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1996) 396–414; Geraldine Heng, "'A Great Way to Fly': Nationalism, the State and Varieties of Third-World Feminism," in M. Jaqui Alexander and C. T. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997) 30–45.
2. See Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry* (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1987); Laurie Bell, ed., *Good Girls: Feminist and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face* (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1987); Gail Pheterson, ed., *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Washington: Seal Press, 1989); Nickie Roberts, *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (London: Harper Collins, 1992); Valerie Jenness, *Making It Work: The Prostitutes' Rights Movement in Perspective* (Hawthorne, NY: Aldine de Gruyter, 1993); Anne McClintock, "Sex Workers and

- Sex Work: Introduction," *Social Text*, vol. 37 (Winter 1993) 1–10; Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labor* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Jill Nagle, ed., *Whores and Other Feminists* (New York: Routledge, 1997).
3. A position argued by Kathleen Barry, *The Prostitution of Sexuality: The Global Exploitation of Women* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).
 4. Antony Swift reporting on the conference for the *New Internationalist*, describes perspectives and demands of child worker organizations from South and Central America, West Africa, and Asia. The entire issue of the magazine documents the emergence of vocal and articulate organized struggles for the rights of working children.
 5. This perspective also underpins the Anti-Slavery International examination of existing international human rights and labor standards and instruments in relation to prostitution. See Jo Bindman and Jo Doezema, *Redefining Prostitution as Sex Work on the International Agenda* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1997) and NSWP: The Network of Sex Work Projects.
 6. Antony Giddens' *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu's *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 1977) are of particular interest here. Both stress the interwovenness of human agency and social structure whenever, according to the Marxian idea, humans "make their own history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing" stressing the ways in which humans produce and reproduce social, economic and political life. Sherry Ortner notes in her elaboration of practice theory, in *Making Gender: The Politics and Erotics of Culture*: "The challenge is to picture indissoluble formations of structurally embedded agency and intention-filled structures, to recognize the way in which the subject is part of larger social and cultural webs, and in which social and cultural 'systems' are predicated upon human desires and projects" (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996:12).
 7. See Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1990); Than-Dam Troung, *Sex, Money and Morality: The Political Economy of Prostitution and Tourism in South East Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1990), James A. Tyner, "Constructions of Filipina Migrant Entertainers," *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 3:1 (1996), 77–93; Anne McClintock, "Screwing the System: Sexwork, Race and the Law," *Boundary 2* vol. 19, (Summer 1992), 70–95.
 8. See Paola Tabet, "I'm the Meat, I'm the Knife": Sexual Service, Migration and Repression in Some African Societies," in Gail Pheterson, ed., *Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Washington: Seal Press, 1989) 204–226; Gloria Wekker, "I am Gold Money" (I Pass Through All Hands, But I Do Not Lose My Value): The Construction of Selves, Gender and Sexualities in a Female Working-Class, Afro-Surinamese Setting." Dissertation, University of California, 1992; Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Barbara de Zalduonda and Jean Maxius Bernard, "Meanings and Consequences of Sexual-Economic Exchange: Gender, Poverty and Sexual Risk Behavior in Urban Haiti," in *Conceiving Sexuality: Approaches to Sex Research in a Postmodern World*, ed. Richard G. Parker and John M. Gagnon (New York: Routledge, 1995): 157–80. These are studies of culturally specific "sexual-economic" relationships, in which women's bodies are not regarded as sacred sites, but rather sexuality is experienced as a resource that is strategically employed. See Lyn Sharon Chancer, "Prostitution, Feminist Theory and Ambivalence: Notes from the Sociological

Underground," *Social Text*, vol. 37 (Winter 1993) 143–181. Chancer suggests that we can speak of "bodily" or "sexual capital" to distinguish the type of human resources that women and men draw upon for sex work.

9. See Hazel Carby, "White Woman Listen! Black Feminism and the Boundaries of Sisterhood," in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies' *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982). Carby writing about this general trend in 1982, notes that "too often concepts of historical progress are invoked by the left and feminists alike, to create a sliding scale of 'civilized liberties'. When barbarous sexual practices are to be described, the 'Third World' is on display and compared to the 'First World' which is seen to be more 'enlightened' and 'progressive' (216). In a similar vein, Marchand argues that "the implicit assumption is, of course, that when non-Western women have reached our level of modernization, they will subscribe to western feminist ideals. As a result the western feminist agenda can be presented (and defended) as embodying universal feminist values. . . ." See Marianne H. Marchand, "Latin American Women Speak on Development: Are We Listening Yet?," in M. H. Marchand and Jane L. Parpart, eds., *Feminism, Postmodernism, Development* (London: Routledge, 1995) 59.
10. Similarly, McClintock, while stating that "sex workers do not speak with a univocal voice: there is not a single, authoritative narrative of prostitution . . ." nevertheless manages successfully to make generalizations about "the prostitute" that are drawn exclusively from Western European and North American contexts (1993). See also Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour, Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle* (London: Routledge, 1992). Anthias and Yuval-Davis urge caution about such theorizing under the name of postmodernism, concluding that "there is a danger that 'the specificity of a particular experience' may itself become an expression of essentialism. To posit diversity therefore does not necessarily imply the abandonment of static and a-historical categories but may merely proliferate them" (99).
11. Apart from McClintock see also Jenness (1993), Gail Pheterson (1989), and Delacoste and Alexander (1987) as examples where the assumed reference point for developing generalized claims about "the" prostitutes' rights movement derive primarily from Western European and Euro-American contexts and experiences. In contrast, analyses of the sex industries and sex work in non-western and Third World countries are highly contextualized in terms of history, culture, gender relations, and location in the global economy. See for example, Troung Sex, *Money and Morality* (London: Zed Books, 1990); Saundra Pollock Sturdevant and Brenda Stoltzfus, *Let the Good Times Roll: Prostitution and the U.S. Military in Asia* (New York: The New Press, 1992); Anne Allison, *Nightwork: Sexuality, Pleasure, and Corporate Masculinity in a Tokyo Hostess Club* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Cleo Odzer, *Patpong Sisters: An American Woman's View of the Bangkok Sex World* (New York: Arcade Publishing, 1994); and Carolyn Sleightholme and Indrani Sinha, *Guilty Without Trial: Women in the Sex Trade in Calcutta* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1996).
12. Within this argument is also the notion that what may be defined for one race/ethnic, class or gendered group as oppressive could under conditions of racial domination or colonialism, be a site of resistance and potential liberation or at least a site of multiple meanings and contradictions. The construct of the family as singularly oppressive for women has thus been

challenged. Likewise concepts of "the erotic," "patriarchy" and "womanhood" have been rescued from white feminist theory and redefined from Third-World/Black/anti-imperialist feminist perspectives to reflect the history and experiences of "the other."

13. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 1990); and Laurie Shrage, *Moral Dilemmas of Feminism: Prostitution, Adultery, and Abortion* (New York: Routledge, 1994). In the U.S., Collins notes "Perhaps the most curious omission has been the virtual silence of the Black feminist community concerning the participation of far too many Black women in prostitution. Ironically, while the image of African-American women as prostitutes has been aggressively challenged, the reality of African-American women who work as prostitutes remain unexplored" (164). Taking her cue from Collins, Shrage insists that "few researchers have explored how race and gender together condition one's participation in prostitution" (142). Sadly, even with these sharp observations neither author is able to get any further. In Collins's brief coverage of the subject, Black women in prostitution are situated as "victim and pet," with the force of her analysis attacking the relations of dominance that historically constructed this position. She gives no consideration to notions of Black female sexual agency but rather positions Black women as objects that have been formed by purely external forces and conditions. Shrage on the other hand, remains safely within an examination of representations and images. Both, in the end, manage to leave the void they signalled, unfilled.
14. As an example of this careless use, see Robert I. Friedman, "India's Shame," *The Nation* (April 8, 1996) 11–20.
15. See Sarah Anderson and John Cavanagh, *The Top 200: The Rise of Global Corporate Power* (Washington, DC: Institute for Policy Studies, 1996). In this survey of the world's largest corporations, Anderson and Cavanagh, found that "of the top 100 largest economies in the world, 51 are now global corporations, only 49 are countries" with Wal-Mart, bigger than 161 countries, Mitsubishi "larger than the fourth most populous nation on earth: Indonesia" and Ford's economy larger than that of South Africa.
16. See Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, *Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction, From the Bottom Up* (Boston: South End Press, 1994); see also, Kevin Danaher, ed., *Fifty Years is Enough: The Case Against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund* (Boston: South End Press, 1994).
17. For details on gender inequalities worldwide see the United Nation publications: *Human Development Report 1995* and *The World's Women 1995: Trends and Statistics*.
18. Among the many who have written specifically on women in the New World Order, see Carmen Diana Deer, et. al., *In the Shadows of the Sun: Caribbean Development Alternatives and U.S. Policy* (Boulder: Westview, 1990); Sheila Rowbotham and Swasti Mitter, eds., *Dignity and Daily Bread: New Forms of Economic Organizing Among Poor Women in the Third World and The First* (London: Routledge, 1994); M. Jaqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Edna Bonachich, et. al., eds., *Global Production: The Apparel Industry in the Pacific Rim* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Annie Phizacklea and Carol Wolkowitz, *Homeworking Women: Gender, Racism and Class at Work* (London: Sage Publications, 1995).
19. Doezema, E-mail correspondence, July 25, 1997.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. In an E-mail correspondence sent in January 1997 to James Elias, co-organizer of the conference.



Part One

Rethinking Sex Work

Introduction

Trafficking, slavery and pathology have defined prostitution since the mid-nineteenth century. In the past two decades, however, ideas about forced and voluntary prostitution, female migration and sex workers' rights have entered the discourse, shifting and changing the terms of debate and conceptualizations of prostitution. In this section, various sex workers' rights activists and feminists review and discuss the old and new definitions in policies, laws and theory, examining the implications for sex workers in the global sex industry. Each essay signals an urgency for a liberated and informed discourse by and about women and men in the contemporary sex industry.

In the first chapter "Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary v. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy," Jo Doezema argues that the distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution needs to be rethought, as it produces a framework that implicitly supports an abolitionist agenda and serves to deny sex workers their human rights. She analyzes assumptions embedded in UN conventions and international campaigns on prostitution, showing that from the late nineteenth century to the mid-1980s an abolitionist per-