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THE SEX TRADE, GLOBALISATION AND ISSUES OF SURVIVAL IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

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Introduction

The process of globalisation, that is the extensive political and economic restructuring that is taking place in the world in which national boundaries no longer limit the activities of institutions, involves large movements of wealth, but also of people, across the globe. The pace of this process is largely being set by Supranational corporations and international financial institutions, as well as organized crime syndicates, most of whom have more wealth than the entire GNPs of most Third World countries.¹ Within this context sex has become an international commodity in high demand, being exchanged (and I will argue, often stolen) not only within countries, but also across borders. Tourists, military personnel, state officials, expatriates, itinerant traders and truck drivers, traffickers, pimps, refugees, children, parents are all involved in this process. In a global market in which females continue to be disadvantaged, it is not surprising that women and children are the first victims of this process of global sexual exchange, often becoming slaves to powerful brokers even within their own countries. Pino Arlaccki, who heads the UN effort to fight organized crime says, "Slavery is one of the most undesirable consequences of globalization. . . we regret that it is not considered as a priority by any country at the moment" (as cited in Hughes 1999).

The subject of sex and the way it is "exchanged", has long interested anthropologists, sociologists, theologians and bio-medical researchers. While in some societies in historical times the practice (of sexual intercourse) has been elevated to the level of religious ritual, in others, today, it has been so commodified as to deprive it of any apparent sanctity. The social organization of sexual exchange takes a variety of forms in different historical and cultural contexts and political economies so that we cannot speak of any universal form. The sexual market place of buyers, sellers, and "products" involves women and men as old as 60, or even 70 and older, and children as young as 7 or 8. It includes adults who make a conscious choice to *sell* sex as a means of earning a livelihood, as well as individuals whose decisions to enter a sexual relationship and whose choice of partner are predicated on the receipt of material resources, what is often referred to as "casual sex".² It involves children who are forced into sex work through becoming refugees in wars, those sold to dealers or brothel owners by poor parents, as well as those who are downright stolen. While most of the people who exchange, sell, or are offered for sex are female, increasingly men (and boys) are offering themselves (or being offered) for sex. Involved in the sex industry are small time pimps and brokers, brothel owners, local people sex tourists from developed countries, organized crime rings, but also parents, spouses and other family members who knowingly or unknowingly push their daughters and sons into the enterprise.

In this paper I turn to an examination of the phenomenon of the commodification of sex as it applies, generally, to sub-Saharan Africa. I begin by providing a brief conceptualisation of the demand for, and supply of commercial sex. I then go on to discuss the "commodification" of sex, and here I also present references to some historical incidences among women, who Akyeampong refers to as "conscripted public servants" (1997:149). Next I proceed to analyse the diversity of contemporary forms of sexual exchange—including the different categories of prostitutes, the

traffic in women and children, and "internet sex". In the process of carrying out the above I hope that I will convey to the reader the extent to which sex has become a major global product, and the sale of sex a multi-billion dollar industry which feeds on the poverty and vulnerability of African women and children for its sustenance. I conclude by suggesting some implications of the political economy of (commodified) sex work for the survival of people living in sub-Saharan Africa, with special reference to the spread of HIV/AIDS and the care of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAS).³

The Sexual Market

Than-Dam Truong (1988) distinguishes four main schools of thought on sexual behaviour that can be applied to the commercial exchange of sex. The first is built upon the empiricist tradition and defines sexuality basically in biological terms. There are two main positions, the bio-social and the socio-cultural. The former view defines sexual behaviour patterns as natural outcomes of the sexual urge with that of the male being stronger and more expressive (Tiger and Fox 1974), hence males demand, and are willing to pay for sex if they cannot attain it through other social arrangements such as marriage or concubinage. The latter, influenced primarily by Freudian thought, argues that sexual behaviour and institutions such as, for example, prostitution, are products of the interaction between the sexual urge and specific socio-cultural systems, as we will see from the historical accounts of the *abrakree* whom I describe below⁴.

The second school of thought, based on Strauss' work (1969) defines sexuality as an expression of meanings and symbols surrounding biological sex/sexual practices. It rejects most explanations of promiscuity and argues that sexuality is an expression of male social power, and promiscuity a male creation. Thus men use sexual relations (and relationships) as symbols of their status relative to women and other men, but also to reinforce their super ordinate position over women. Women, on the other hand, cannot use sex as a symbol of power because when women have several sexual encounters they are defined as depraved and abnormal. These two approaches ascribe a lot of importance to gender relations. However, they fail to acknowledge the role of class and race/ethnicity, factors which, in the global sex industry, feed into racist and misogynist values and are important in the ways women are portrayed and sold. In other words, the ways in which these labels are constructed and applied has a lot to do with the race of the individuals or groups of individuals they are applied to.

The third approach, built on Engel's' work, takes an historical approach and emphasizes the role of economic relations in shaping sexual norms and traditions. Rather than arguing that sexual behaviour is a construct of cultural symbols and ideological assumptions, it relates these to socio-economic relations. Biological sex is considered as static and the social construction of gender is separated and considered to respond to changes in economic relations inside and outside the household. This approach is important in that it considers labour-related transformations, which are important for analysing the supply aspect of the sex industry, particularly given the deleterious effects of economic reforms on women's access to labour. However, the approach is limited in that it fails to acknowledge the relationship of labour-related transformations to the biological demand for sex, or at least cultural assumptions about this. If, for example, there was not a widely held view that men *need* to have sex (or a certain amount of sex) then there would be no need to legitimise prostitution so that men who are denied access to sex through so-called acceptable sexual relationships, can still have their (sexual) needs met.

Finally, the fourth approach is also historical but adopts an anti-essentialist notion of sexuality and brings the arguments beyond gender relations. It rejects the idea that sexuality can be defined as

constant, whether biologically or ideologically (Foucault 1980). Sexual behaviour is seen as an aggregation of social relations that are historically specific. This approach allows ideas about sex, and its regulations and practices, to be related to wider social changes. Although this approach stresses the more subjective elements, its usefulness is somewhat limited in that it minimises the importance of economic forces within these social dynamics.

Demand for Sex

Sexual behaviour within historically changing social relations, where these are increasingly influenced by ideas of material costs and rewards, are determined by forces of supply and demand. It is not the aim of this study to analyse what makes a person seek for sex from another; however, within the context of commercial sex, in brief, three broad categories of (typically male) "clients" can be distinguished in the sexual marketplace.

(1) Those for whom demand is created by personal circumstances. In this category are all wo/men who are "denied" legitimate sexual relationships - those who are willing to buy sex as a result of the absence of a regular partner or the lack of opportunity to establish a regular relationship. It includes those who spend prolonged periods away from home such as army personnel or expatriates. Muga (1980) adds to this that men who are unable to establish sexual relationships as a result of real or imagined personal shortcomings, those he refers to as the "abnormal or diseased". Included may be persons with specific physical or emotional/mental disabilities that make the establishment of a more "normal" relationship more challenging.

(2) The second category of persons includes those who lack satisfaction within established relationships. This may be caused by disparities between partners' sexual needs and desires or forced abstinence as a result of a partner's inability to engage in sexual intercourse. Personal codes of conduct and gender identities may also fuel a demand for a particular "type" of sex. Thus, individuals in these groups may feel that their only option to sexual satisfaction is to buy it in the open marketplace. Further, within the context of a power struggle between partners some men may feel the need to restore their feelings of being in control by subjugating a woman sexually. If they are unable to do this in an established relationship they may seek out a prostitute to have this need met. As the ensuing discussion will show, the Pornography (especially Sado-Masochism) industry fits in well with this area of sexual demand.

(3) Demand created by the double standard sexual code. In most societies men can maintain "sexual freedom" while stricter rules apply to women. The "Machismo" phenomenon where males prove their manhood through sexual exploitation falls within this category. Hence women are categorised to fit into either a "Madonna" or a "whore" image (Troung 1988), which, as Strauss (1969) argues, is a male creation designed to control women. Recent attempts in Northern Nigeria to have allegedly adulterous women stoned under Sharia law, while the male partners are able to escape for lack of witnesses fall in this category⁵.

Supply of Sex⁶

Psychoanalysts have explained the phenomenon of prostitution or "promiscuity" (among women) with reference to a "traumatic Oedipus complex" in which a female gives herself to anybody because she has been rejected by her father. Sociologists have resorted to deviance theories and explained that women have turned to prostitution because of sexual abuse. While these social-psychological positions may have some validity, my assessment of sexual exchange in Africa, both the formal forms (prostitution) as well as the informal ("casual sex") suggests to me that the underlying factors for commodified sex are primarily economic. In this sense, people engage in sexual exchange either to meet their financial obligations, or as a result of the direct financial exploitation of others. From the perspective on human agency, the survival strategies that wo/men use involve attempts to maximise

the resources they perceive they possess by manipulating the opportunities they perceive to be available in their environment. Assimeng (1981) has said that "the only economic capital some of them (female prostitutes) possess to trade with is their sex organs." As one female prostitute in Ghana put it, referring to an important income earner for that country, "my cocoa is between my legs" (Adomako Ampofo forthcoming). Even schoolgirls report exchanging sexual favours for monetary rewards simply so that they can pay their school fees (Akuffo, 1987; Adomako, 1991).

An Historical Perspective On Commodified Sex

Several writers have discussed prostitution as a phenomenon that reflects the collapse of "traditional morals" (cf. Acquah 1972; Busia 1950). On the other hand some Western researchers (Caldwell et al. 1989; Dinan 1983) have concluded that the exchange of sexual services for material gain has its roots in the traditional society. The institution of prostitution in traditional African societies, it would seem, existed basically to meet the (sexual) needs of unmarried men and was not generally considered socially acceptable; prostitutes were usually either slaves or outcasts. According to Jones in his study of European references to prostitution on the Western Gold Coast between 1660-1860, it would appear that the institution existed in historical times specifically times to meet the sexual needs of young unmarried men (Jones 1990). This form of institutionalised prostitution existed among the Southwest Akan of the Gold Coast and the Ivory Coast (Akyeampong 1997; Jones 1990). In this form the political elite acquired female slaves to meet the sexual needs of unmarried men. Essentially the women, known variously as *abrakree*, or *abelcre*, were public property, "coerced into what was definitely a social institution designed to alleviate sexual pressures among unmarried men" (Akyeampong 1997:146). Jones cites the French adventurer, Jean Gadot, who spent three months at Assinie in 1710, and who claimed that married men accused of "having dealings with these creatures are punished very severely and in addition pay a fine to the king." Jones (1990) goes so far as to speculate whether "institutionalized rape" would not be a more appropriate term to describe the practice than prostitution. These women were even initiated into, and confirmed for, this work by a series of religious rituals. As is increasingly becoming the case with contemporary forms of prostitution in Africa, the women's sexuality, as well as their earnings, were not controlled by them, but by their owners. The *abrakree*, according to Godot a French voyager reporting on a visit to Assini (Gold Coast) in 1701, were required to be distinguished from other women by wrapping their heads in white linen. Further, they were obliged to receive every bachelor or face severe punishments (as cited in Jones 1990). These "public women" were paid a nominal fee by their "clients", however, they were obliged to turn over these earnings to the king. In exchange, they were allowed to take food from people's homes, or the marketplace, for their sustenance for the rest of their lives. In other words, the institution did not provide for the accumulation of wealth among these women, but simply provided a service to unmarried men. The practice of prostitution by any woman in the community who had not been set apart for this work constituted an infraction of custom and was frowned upon. Such women were required to "purify" themselves from the malevolent spirits sure to inundate them, and others, as a result of their numerous contacts with strangers (Akyeampong 1997). When they became too old to work the *abrakree* received a pension from the king and were allowed to "live the rest of their lives in peace" (Jones 1990:132).⁷ Thus we see evidence of the conceptualisation of sex as a natural, biological male need that requires satisfaction in order to maintain social order. That the ideal location for sex is within marriage was also recognised; however there is also an apparently pragmatic recognition that not all men will be married, hence the need to provide for them. There is no evidence of any such socially sanctioned arrangement for females, presumably because women do not need sexual satisfaction to the extent that men do.

With colonialism came the proliferation of urban centres and the extension of a cash economy, both of which significantly disrupted power and gender relations in Africa. Colonialism brought men into towns as migrant labour while in many colonies wives were not allowed to move to cities. A sexual imbalance was thus created; for example the Gold Coast census of 1901 shows there were 3,469 men and 626 women in Sekondi, a harbour town, and a 1911 census of Kenya shows a sex ratio of six adult men to each adult woman in Nairobi. As colonial rule instituted land "titles" (to men) many rural women lost access to, or control over land. Many of such disenfranchised women, as well as some who sought freedom from unacceptable marriages, sought refuge in urban centres and began selling sex to men (White 1990). Prostitution did not require start-up capital as did trading, for example, and women were able to accumulate considerable assets over which they had sole control. However, often this income was not merely used to enhance a woman's personal well being but also to support, or save, her family. White reports on how, in Tanganyika in the 1940s women were able to save a generation of indebted cash crop producers through their earnings from prostitution (White 1990). Many early accounts of the "African prostitute" present an alluring image. One reason may have been that the women were accumulating independent wealth at a time when this was mainly a male privilege. They were also attractively dressed and became trendsetters for other women. One Gold Coast account describes how the absence of social barriers between "prostitutes" and "respectable women" in working class leisure activities facilitated the exchange of beliefs and mannerisms, especially in dress (Akyeampong 1997).

Nonetheless, prostitution retained its stigma and many women sought to work in locations as far away from their homes as possible. Kouassi (1986), an Ivorian police officer argues that prostitution in the then Ivory Coast was predominantly plied by "foreign women", a finding supported by Painter (1992). Clearly, even if Ivorians were engaged in sex work they were identifying themselves as non-natives. A survey among sex workers in the Gambia found that the majority came from neighbouring Senegal, followed by Nigeria, Guinea Bissau and Guinea (Loun 2000). Many societies had taboos, rituals, and practices to ensure that eligible women got married rather than engage in prostitution. Several communities would ostracise or banish a woman caught in pre-marital sex of any kind (Sarpomg 1977). According to Kouassi (1986) in the Ivory Coast, as soon as the village council noticed that the number of women in the community was higher than the number of men, they summoned all the people to the public square. Each single woman was then required to choose a partner from among the men and he then became her husband without further formality. Roberts (1987) notes a similar practice among the Akan of Sefwi-Wiawso of Ghana in the early part of the twentieth century. Further, prostitutes did not necessarily earn substantial incomes. The name *two-two* comes from the two shillings and sixpence which was the price charged by prostitutes in Anglophone West Africa in the early to mid 1900s. The amount could feed a two-person family for two to three days⁸.

Workers In The Sex Industry: Contemporary Africa

With few exceptions, prostitution in Africa remains a predominantly female phenomenon in terms of its supply. Along with many aspects of women's work in Africa, prostitution has either been obscured or misrepresented. Much of the anthropological work has focussed on the urban "call girl"—as represented, for example, in Cyprian Ekwensi's novel *Jagua Nana* (1961)—and has sought to emphasize women's agency. However, these accounts, while fairly accurate, obscure the variety of forms, as well as the artificial nature of the boundaries across categories of sex work. Further, as already stated, the reality is that for most commercial sex workers prostitution is an economic strategy in the face of limited options. Some feminists (see for example Gardiner in Kempadoo 1998) argue that failure to recognize women's agency when it

comes to sex work retards changes in patriarchal societies. It can be argued that while it is true that African women appear as innocent victims in many accounts when in fact they have chosen these paths, and while such conceptualisations of sex workers as victims may reinforce neo-colonialist conceptualisations of women in Africa as exploited and defenceless, the globalisation of sex, and the fact that it is increasingly controlled by powerful organizations, does not really provide women with true options. Most importantly, the business in sex has become extremely abusive, humiliating, and downright dangerous.

Most women in Africa work in the informal sector, usually as farmers or traders, two unstable sectors of most African economies. The failure of a business, debt, non-support from husbands or family members, and especially frustration over their inability to care (adequately) for their children, can precipitate women's entry into prostitution (Adomako Ampofo 1995). The modern economic order of structural reform puts women at an even greater disadvantage as small-scale informal work is increasingly marginalized. Indeed many accounts agree that the Structural Adjustment Programs initiated by the World Bank over the last few decades have severely worsened the economic situation for women in Africa (Clark and Manuh 1992; Elson 1991; Razavi 2000). One client of a prostitute commented matter-of-factly, "you know, most of these our sisters are traders, and when they are trading and their things are scattered ... she will say, 'if all this is happening it is better to put [trading] aside and use myself'" (Adomako Ampofo 1994).

The Female Sex Worker

Very broadly, three categories of the contemporary female sex worker can be discussed, each with its own social form, rate of accumulation, areas of operation, and organization of labour time. Rates vary by category and type of service, ranging from whether a client seeks a "short" service, a twenty-minute stint, or even a form of "temporary" marriage where domestic services are also provided. The three broad categories are:

1) Streetwalkers (known as *watembizi* in East Africa, from the Swahili verb, *kutemba*, to walk, or *roamers* in Ghana) move from place to place in search of clients - hotels and night clubs, lorry parks, street corners, usually for "short time" (20-30 minutes). In Nairobi streetwalkers have been associated with high earnings over short periods, and with control over their clients; however, streetwalkers are generally young, poor, and frequently homeless girls who are obliged to take even those clients who refuse to use condoms—because they need the money, often just enough for a meal. Girls in this group are especially vulnerable to HIV-infection and police harassment and abuse (Adomako Ampofo 1994; Loum 2000). In many large cities the correct thing is to talk about *street families* because for every girl there is a boy, who assigns himself the role of "husband" or "father". If there is no food the "husband" orders the "wife" to go and sell herself so the "family" can have food.

2) High-class prostitutes, or call girls, differ from other groups in that they tend to be slightly better educated, and appear to be more sophisticated. These women usually have wealthier, often foreign, clients, and operate from hotels or tourist spots such as beaches. High-class women will often live with a man (especially foreign visitors) for longer periods of time and perform all manner of domestic and social tasks. They are the most likely to accept payment in non-monetary terms, such as clothes, jewellery, cosmetics, even property. Often the most preferred client is the long-term one who is difficult to distinguish from a boyfriend, and may eventually become a husband. Women in this category are often foreign women who then face the loneliness and anxiety that comes from being away from kith and kin and are more vulnerable to abuse because they have fewer support structures to rely on. Because they try to maintain a sophisticated appearance high-class women engage in a number of risky lifestyle practices such as the abuse of recreational and prescription drugs, and alcohol, skin bleaching, and poor diets.

3) While streetwalkers and high-class prostitutes are often not "full time" and may be students, apprentices, or traders, the third group of women can be considered as professional prostitutes. Seaters, known as *tuutu* in Ghana, or, *wazi wazi* in Nairobi (from the Swahili word for open or exposed) generally, sit in front of their homes to receive clients much like in the "Red Light" districts in Western cities such as Amsterdam. In Africa they tend to be older women who are widowed or divorced, and they will not allow young unmarried girls to work with them. As one woman in Ghana put it, "we don't allow young girls here... unless the woman has been married before and has had all her children, or wives who have been abandoned by their husbands and don't have anyone to look after them" (Adomako Ampofo 1994). While streetwalkers and high-class prostitutes are often not "full time", seaters can be considered professional prostitutes in the sense that they rarely engage in any other form of work. Seaters, because they operate from their own premises sometimes provide clients with meals, bath water, and even a place to stay. In Northern Nigeria, these generally divorced women were frequently sought in marriage because they "know how to look after a man." Social support among seaters is strong, and studies in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, have shown that this contributes to making them the most likely to use condoms (Adomako Ampofo 1999).

The Male Sex Worker

While the social definition of provider of sex is closely associated with "woman" or "female", these gendered definitions are also contested and redefined in different ways so that increasingly biological "males" engage in sex work by selling sex to both women and men in homosexual and heterosexual relations as feminine and masculine subjects (1998). The burgeoning tourist industry in Africa has contributed to the emerging phenomenon of the male sex worker. I return to this discussion below, but suffice it to note here that as Africa's economies continue to suffer, many governments see the tourist industry as the new lifeline. This sector seeks to attract foreign guests by promising exotic features not available in the home country, and while governments never explicitly promote sex tourism, it is promoted by various tour promoters either overtly via internet sites, or covertly in veiled references to special types of "Ghanaian hospitality". Thus travellers from North America and Europe who want a little sexual fun, or sex that is different from what they normally engage in, are beckoned. While sex tourism is applicable to female as well as male sex workers, sex tourism has been especially influential in the promotion of the male prostitute.

Unlike women who typically serve only male clients, male prostitutes have both female and male clients. The "Beach boys" or "Bumsters" as they are referred to in the Gambia, or the "Rasta boys" in Ghana, have responded to the demand for sex by gay travellers from the North, as well as the opportunities provided by the increasing numbers of single women who travel to Africa for (sexual) adventures. The main criteria for eligibility is a handsome face and a well-sculpted body, hence, not surprisingly, the beach is the favoured market place. However, poverty can no less be linked with male prostitution than it is with female prostitution. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the inability of young men to provide for their parents and older family members in the deteriorating economies of Africa have led many a young man into an area that suggests an easy ticket to money, and perhaps a ticket to Europe or America where, supposedly, unlimited opportunities abound.

More worrying, increasingly paedophiles in North America and Europe are finding Africa a fertile ground for their sexual exploits. Recent discussions on radio stations in Ghana indicate that one of the regions in the country famed for its concentration of secondary schools has become a target for paedophiles who entice deprived boys with financial incentives. I take up the situation again in the discussions of child prostitutes later in this paper.

Pimps and Brokers and Other Dealers

One characteristic of prostitution in Africa, until recently, has been the relative absence of pimps. However, even in times past women have sometimes relied on male "intermediaries" (or "brokers") to bring potential clients to them, especially foreign tourists and expatriates, for a mutually agreed upon fee. Akyeampong (1997) refers to the "pilot boys" of the twin towns of Sekondi-Takoradi in Ghana in the 1940s. For bringing potential clients to women they were paid a small commission. The work of these "pilot boys" attained an important level during World War II with the presence of foreign soldiers and pilots (Akyeampong 1997). Today many of the streetwalkers or roamers, and especially the high-class sex workers who operate from hotels and nightclubs, rely on such intermediaries to bring them clients. However, both the "pilot boys" and their contemporary counterparts frequently lack the control that characterizes the relationship between pimp and prostitute in many (Western) societies. Indeed, frequently the broker and sex worker develop a close relationship with the former protecting the latter from abusive or non-paying clients.

Another category of broker includes the landladies and lords, brothel, and bar owners, who, while they play no formal role in a prostitute's work, often socially control the types of clients a woman brings to the premises. They also sometimes provide social support such as a listening ear and advice, baby-sitting services, or even short-term loans. Many propertied Nairobi prostitutes adopted younger women whom they eventually designated their heirs (White 1990). In Banjul, bar owners have been used to provide sex workers with education on STDs and HIV/AIDS (Loum 2000). Loum also notes that bar owners are influential in settling disputes among sex workers as well as between sex workers and their clients.

The Traffic In Women And Children And Globalising The Sex Trade

A worrying recent feature of prostitution is the sex trade in which young girls (and boys) especially are trafficked⁹ to cater to the very specific demands of particular clients. The UN supplementary convention on the Abolition of slavery, the slave trade and practices similar to slavery, 1956, defines a trafficker (in persons) as somebody who "forces, entices, or leads away, for the purposes of prostitution another person *even with the consent of that person* Traffickers are highly organised and human cargo is easier to transport than guns, arms, drugs or diamonds.

The UN estimates that there are 200 million people around the world forced to live as sexual or economic slaves (Hughes 1999). According to a 2001 UNICEF report about a million children worldwide are sold into sex every year with the majority coming from less industrialised countries (Coulter 2001).

The process of globalisation, and the resultant economic and political restructuring has come with a complex set of processes that is freeing those with power from local and even international regulation and control. Supranational corporations and organised crime syndicates are setting the pace. Women and children increasingly becoming commodities to be bought and sold, consumed, and shipped around. This is a global phenomenon and activities are carried out trans-nationally. Currently the global sex industry is estimated to make \$52 billion a year (Botsford 2000). To keep the industry active women and children are trafficked around the world. According to a delegate, Donna Hughes, at the International Conference on Violence Against Women held in Valencia, Spain, in 2001, the value of the global trade in women is estimated to be about \$12 billion/year (Botsford 2000). War and poverty are principal culprits creating conditions of extreme vulnerability so that trafficked children often come from war-ravaged countries such as

Sierra Leone, Mozambique, Rwanda, Congo, and increasingly end up in more affluent African countries such as South Africa, or, Europe and the Middle East.¹⁰ Other *at risk* countries are those where structural adjustment programs have ruined local industries, accelerated deforestation, and forced families to move to cities where the feminisation of poverty is more evident.

Where "willing" victims are not found, youngsters are simply abducted. In 2001 it was reported that organised gangs routinely take African teenagers seeking asylum in the UK and sell them as prostitutes in Italy (BBC 2001b).¹¹ The typical scenario is that children or their families are approached in their home countries and offered a lot of money as baby sitters, domestic servants, or hair braiders in Europe. The local agent then pays for the journey abroad as well as the bribes and false documents needed for the trip. Or they are simply abducted. Then the children, usually females, are smuggled through a number of African countries, and eventually end up in Europe where they seek asylum. Because the children are under 18 they are taken into the care of Social Services and placed in children's homes or foster care from where they "disappear" (BBC 2001a). The traffickers eventually track them down, or act in connivance with the foster families to retrieve them. A BBC documentary revealed that more than 40 girls, some as young as 14, disappeared from children's homes in Sussex alone between 1999-2001 (BBC 2001b). In order to ensure compliance the traffickers frequently use African traditional ritual practices to frighten the girls so that many leave quietly with their abductors; however, others are abducted at gunpoint (BBC 2001a). In any case even girls who come "willingly" in anticipation of work in Europe have debts of as high as \$50,000 hanging over them which can take them two to three years to pay off (BBC 2001a).

While war and poverty may be blamed for supplying sexual labour, the promotion of tourism as a development strategy has also contributed to the sale of women and children by encouraging sex tourism and fuelling a global demand for "exotic" prostitutes¹². Growing numbers of tourists from industrialized countries now travel to Africa for the express purpose of sexually exploiting women and children. Eighty percent of the world's international travellers are nationals of just 20 countries from North America and Europe, thus it is largely the affluent tourist-generating countries that determine the scale and nature of tourism generally and sex tourism in particular. Increasingly, these sex tourists are looking for younger girls (and boys). Today, in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, girls aged between 13 and 17 parade and invite prospective clients to, "touch my breasts and see how firm they are, I am still young." Girls as young as nine have been found in the sex industry in Arusha, Tanzania (Mayomb 1998). Each year for the past decade the age of females involved in the sex industry in Africa has declined, especially where men demand young girls out of the mistaken belief that they are free of AIDS, or that sex with a virgin will cleanse them from the disease. In some countries it is said that some older prostitutes will wear school uniforms to enhance the perception that they are young girls.

During the 2000 Olympic Games held in Australia, sex tourism played an important part of the country's turnover from the event¹³. Brothels engaged in an advertising blitz in newspapers and on the internet, some built new premises or extended their facilities. Many organisations involved in the provision of sex services recruited workers from overseas, often Third World countries, to help meet the expected surge in demand (Mercer 2000). This kind of global demand usually finds recruiters turning to Third World countries because poverty makes people here more vulnerable to offers of a job abroad, and because the absence of legislation covering traffic in persons means that if children are bought or abducted the perpetrators are much more likely to escape.

A major problem for trafficked persons is the fact that receiving countries consider them as illegal immigrants, placing them in constant fear of being imprisoned or deported, rather than being assisted with repatriation, while their recruiters work with impunity. Nonetheless clients are increasingly becoming liable. At a meeting held near Stuttgart in 1993, German politicians were convinced to press for new laws allowing for the prosecution of any German national who was caught using child prostitutes abroad; France, the US and Australia followed suit. Further, *Interpol's* Standing Working Party on Offences against Minors shares information between police forces on known paedophiles (Adomako Ampofo 2001). Most African countries have not made significant efforts to combat the trafficking in persons; while at least 50 countries have enacted legislation to combat child prostitution, most of these are not African countries (Burundi being a notable exception). Law enforcement agents are themselves often culpable. Until the phenomenon is recognised as a crime and treated as such with great seriousness, women and children will continue to be transported across borders as human cargo meant for the sex industry.

Internet Sex

The discussion on the globalisation of the sex trade would be incomplete without reference to Internet sex. Accompanying and facilitating globalisation is a revolution in communication and technology. With the advent of the Internet it became possible to send text images, audio and video files around the world in milliseconds. The sex industry quickly took advantage of the technological opportunities and by late 1997 it was estimated that there were 72,000 pornographic sites on the Internet (Hughes 1999). Video conferencing arrived in 1995 thus providing an opportunity for the merger of pornography and prostitution to create a multi-million dollar industry. The Internet is now within the reach of almost everyone in the industrialised world, and, with almost no regulation, it has become a major site for the sex industry.¹⁴ In 1999 the revenue from pornographic and Internet live sex shows was US\$ 1 billion and comprised 69 percent of Internet sales. The vendors use unethical means to trap the unsuspecting surfer. Some remove the standard navigation bar so that it is difficult to leave the site. Others disable the browser commands such as "back", "exit", or "close" so that whenever the viewer clicks on one escape command another pornographic site opens leading to an endless number of browser windows with no way to close them except to shut down the computer. A sampling by Hughes (1999) of 35 sites found 34 difficult to leave. This way people who had not planned to engage in Internet sex frequently find themselves attracted, and, eventually, hooked.

Over the Internet one can plan Sex tours, seek for Mail order brides from Third World countries, participate in Live Sex shows and exchange information on places and people engaged in the sex trade. Tourists who have had successful sexual holidays publicize their information and post reports of their trips for other would-be travellers, complete with city and hotel names and phone numbers, and tips on how to circumvent laws and norms. Quips one traveller, "It's great, during my 5 days in ... I had the pleasure to be xxxed by three hot black beauties" (expletive reference deleted by author; see also Appendix 1).

The sophisticated search engines on Internet sites allow the visitor to search for whatever tickles his or her fancy by sex of the actor(s), sexual act, number of people in the scene, race, or even hair colour. Sites frequently advertise women and girls in great detail, with clear, explicit photos, and because of the intense competition between vendors, they seek to attract buyers with more and more extreme images including bondage, bestiality, torture, and child pornography.¹⁵ One site advertises, "the best selection of big black butts... hottest African girls for FREE!" Many of these sites and travelogues, such as the one in the Appendix I, reveal and perpetrate racist and misogynist attitudes that increase the demand for African women and children on the Internet, and hence increase their vulnerability to sexual exploitation and abduction into the sex industry.

The author of the account describes African women as property to be bought and bargained for, he indicates the superiority of the white male in accounts of the willingness of black women to queue for his favours, all the time making disparaging comparisons to Asian women.

While there have been attempts by various watchdog organisations to take child sex off the Internet they have had only limited success as they are unable to keep up with the rate at which new sites develop.¹⁶

Implications For Survival And Care

Even though human sexual resources have been organized in a variety of ways across the globe, and in Africa, and they have acquired different meanings, globalisation and the free market economy has transformed social and sexual relations in specific ways. Commodified sexual labour, as White (1990) notes, forms a primary source within the capitalist economy for exploitation and wealth creation. Further, the subordination of women or the "female" gender is the overriding factor for this arrangement in all the contexts (Kempadoo 1998). There is no dignity in sex work because in one way or another it is based on abuse and degradation and frequently is associated with mental and physical ill health. Many countries do not have specific laws against prostitution, though some have laws against soliciting, yet the police carry out regular "clean up" campaigns, especially of the more obvious forms, seeking to sweep women who work off the streets. Further, no matter how people get in to the sex industry it is generally difficult to get out.

However, sub-Saharan Africa has a special problem when it comes to the sex industry. Apart from the emotional threat to children, there is the ever pervasive threat of AIDS. In West Africa women are still predominantly the major victims, while in East Africa female: male rates are about 1:1. Incidence peaks about age 30-39, but increasingly more children are affected. The use of condoms remains a major problem as many clients still refuse to use them, and insistence on using a condom can lose a woman her client or affect her income. According to the World Bank, AIDS has eradicated a half-century of development in most affected countries. The impact on life expectancy of adults is frightening, and 1 in 10 children in Africa are said to be orphans. The U.S now considers AIDS a national security issue. Below are a few statistics:

It is estimated that 10 percent of the sexually active population in Cote d'Ivoire are HIV+.

It is also estimated that the rates of HIV-infection have reached 10 percent in Point-Noire, Congo Brazzaville, and 13 percent in Bangui, Central African Republic (Public Agenda 2001).

Botswana, though it has the highest per capita GDP in sub-Saharan Africa, also has the highest estimated infection rate of 36%; 24,000 die annually from AIDS and 66,000 children have lost a mother or both parents to AIDS.

One quarter of the adult population in Zimbabwe is infected with the HIV virus. In 1999 160,000 adults and 900,000 children died of AIDS-related causes; 900,000 children have been orphaned in Zimbabwe and the life expectancy is 43 years.

In Zambia 20% of the adult population is HIV-infected; 650,000 children have been orphaned.

South Africa has the largest number of People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs) – about 20% of the adult population; 420,000 children have been orphaned and 250,000 people die annually.

AIDS kills people at the height of their reproductive and productive years, often leaving women enough time to bear children but not enough time to raise them. The impact of this is hardest for females as they – whether grandmothers, or young girls – become the caregivers (UNIFEM 2001). In Southern Africa, where AIDS has hit various population groups the hardest,

girls frequently drop out of school to look after families, and not only the sick and dying, but they also fend for the living. For example, research carried out by UNIFEM (2001) in five provinces in Zimbabwe found that at least 76 percent of children who had been taken out of school to care of the sick were female. The study also found that female children were more likely to be providing for the family even where there was an older male sibling.

There is still no anti-HIV vaccine and the effective and specific combination therapies that can prevent persons with HIV from developing full-blown AIDS, at approximately \$15,000 a year, are still out of reach of most African sufferers.¹⁷ Thus, preventing sexual transmission remains the best way for curtailing the spread of the disease, and yet, the conditions of war and poverty make this unlikely; AIDS remains a socially constructed phenomenon. Farmer (1997) asks whether the major factors promoting/depressing the spread of HIV-infection can be measured and differentially weighted. Can we assess the contributions of local "sexualities", gender identities, wars and conflict, migration, poverty, and, as Farmer asks, Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) on HIV-pertinent behaviour? If, for example, SAPs in Africa fuel women (and men's) entry into sexual exchange relationships, should they not be held culpable for the spread of the epidemic and be forced to reconsider issues of debt cancellation? Given the continuing dominance of neo-liberal economic policies in sub-Saharan Africa these are questions that must be answered. What about the effects of HIV/AIDS on production systems and the structure of households? How have states and communities responded in terms of care, information, discrimination and legislation? What about the role of those who support armed conflicts from which they benefit by way of access to diamonds that cause millions of woman and men to be displaced? We also have to hold accountable governments who are ever ready to spend on armaments while health budgets continue to shrink. These are all questions that call for further research.

The reality of people's lives notwithstanding, reliance on "use condom" or practice "safe(r) sex" approaches which overstate the agency of the target population continue, thereby allowing governments and powerful international institutions to be let off the hook. Information-Education and Information (IEC) messages aimed at changing sexual behaviour have generally taken a standard approach, without considering the unique socio-cultural conditions in which individual sexual relations are grounded. Implicit in these messages is the assumption that people have personal control over their sexual health. Yet the preceding discussion has shown that for many women and children in sub-Saharan Africa, even assuming they have access to accurate information, this is not enough to bring about "safe" behaviour since they do not necessarily have control over their sexual lives. Indeed, concepts of health and health care need to be revolutionised. Women and children are the major victims of the sex trade, HIV-infection, death from AIDS, and they are also the ones most likely to provide care and support for PLWHAs and AIDS orphans. Yet, governments fail to acknowledge this double vulnerability and the implications for policy. If, along the lines of U.S Senator Daniel Moynihan's 1973 observations about welfare payments to women in the US (as noted in Waring 1999) societies recognised "home-making and childrearing" as productive work to be included in national economic accounts, one might consider payments to women providing home care to PLWHAs as a very logical process. We might then begin to question *how* this could be most efficiently achieved.

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APPENDIX 1:

Accra Travel Report Dated (sic) Added: 1999-05-18 Submitted by: Joe - WEST AFRICA:

This next will not contain a great deal of news regarding prostitution per se but I believe readers may be interested and where there are so many hot women available free, surely it is relevant. So where to find another partner? At my 63 [at the time] but still horny years the only local contemporaries were obsessed not with xxxing but either with reciting blood-curdling descriptions of operations on themselves or relatives; or with their grandchildren. Having been severely burned by marriage to a Filipino I didn't want to go that way again. Research revealed a formerly unknown vast pool of very comely ladies. Where? In Ghana in far off West Africa.

GHANA

Very little is known here in Australia about West Africa. There are squillions of Asian migrants here and of course we white ozzies mostly came from northern Europe, but you can walk the streets of Sydney (pop. 3.5 million, no mean city) for weeks and not see a really black

face, other than an occasional view of one of our own distinctive aborigines, but Africans about nil. So I wrote a few letters to advertisers from Ghana in a lonely hearts mag [yeah, snail mail] and was stunned by their style of ad and the responses. Filipinos (of course) make the greatest contribution to them with ads typically couched in words such as "'I am a devout catholic [yeah sure, mine prayed for an hour each day!], honest (?), home-loving, family-oriented'" etc. etc, some even mentioning their alleged "'virginity'" at age 36!

By contrast the Ghanaian babes are uninhibited, e.g., some openly seeking "broad-minded, sexy men; I am interested in erotic pictures, masturbation and making love". Strangely 70% of such ads. emanated from just one town with a double name: Agona/Swedru. Well, after a \$2500 [round-trip] 38 hour flight by Egyptair and changing planes in Cairo, I arrived in Accra the capital. Used to be the British Colony of the Gold Coast until 1957 and English as in the Philippines, is the lingua franca. It's a typical hot, bit scruffy tropical city, on the Atlantic Coast and with a bearable climate. There ain't any iiiii hotels, the best being the four-star \$120 a night Novotel. I found and recommend the 'Korkdam' at \$12 -15 a night: clean, very friendly, restaurant, bar, air.cond, refig. and private shower & toilet. This isn't meant to be a travel piece but so little is known that a few words should appear. Anyway, get the 'Lonely Planet' guide to West Africa, it's very accurate. All I'll add is that Ghana is NOT South Africa [where I was mugged in Jo'burg and robbed of \$4000 + everything else! BE WARNED - KEEP AWAY from same, it's a sad, brooding, unhappy land at the moment] By contrast Ghana is a stable, law-abiding, calm, orderly, peaceful and exceptionally friendly place, very religious in a late 19th Century London Missionary Society sense. Even other Africans acknowledge that. In three months there, even during presidential elections, I went everywhere, day and night, with never an unpleasant incident!

I found my way the 80 [rough African bus] km to Swedru and the pleasant Hotel [name deleted], modern, pool, around \$25 a night. Yes I met Rita there who promised everything in her letters but wouldn't leave her big brother's side when the chips were down. No matter, the word soon got around town that an eligible 'obroni' [white man] had arrived; visitors soon came and my room phone ran hot. Jeez I had to schedule them: Caroline, Gifty, Spendy, Doris, Agnes etc. [yes, such classic names are common]. Each was gorgeous, like the best coffee: hot, strong, black and full of flavour! Aged 20 - 30, voluptuous, beautiful big African butt, fantastic breasts and hot and wild, do anything, suck you dry, cum in their mouth, some offered anal sex if you want [I don't], screw all night, love being on top, do all the work, and again, who ever heard of condoms. I must be a tough old bastard to have survived that week. No payment asked, but a few thousand Cedis [C1800 = >US\$1.00] would be welcomed and you should take some gifts, Raybans, a Walkman or similar will make you like a king. Don't short change them, they are SO poor but so pleasant-natured, not a devious Asian-style bone in any body there. WYSIWYG. It's the ambition of every one to snare a white man and one succeeded. In short, I married one with a little difference, she's a Liberian, refugee from a nasty civil war, lots of them in Ghana. Cost \$2000 visa fees plus fares, much paperwork, HIV-free certificate required, then a 12 months wait and a personal visit by me to the Oz embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, (expensive, violent, unattractive women - forget it) 6000km away for her visa [no Aust Embassies in W. Africa]. You've never been to a wedding if you haven't attended a West African one, such happy musical people. Now she's been here two years - wonderful, always happy and laughing, no PMT, loving, hard-working, bright, reliable, and so naturally good-natured, genuinely religiously devout thus faithful yet humorous. Wifewise forget Asians - black is beautiful.

And yes for those who wanna pay, visit any disco or 'joint' near Kwame Nkrumah Square in Accra - lots of happy chicks @ \$15-20 all night with the above attractions. Finally, I spent a few

days in Abidjan, capital of the francophone Ivory Coast or Cote d'Ivoire. Much bigger and more sophisticated western style city, but wild, violent, corrupt out of downtown Plateau. Costs much higher there, had only one chick, a woman of 22 from the neighbouring Republic of Burkina Faso [ex Upper Volta]. Very ordinary and at \$18 for a half hour, no bargain. Be adventurous and try Ghana. I'm told the little nearby Republic of Gambia is similar and the Wolof women are said to be the most attractive in West Africa. (Review # 203).

Notes

¹ I use the term "Third world" to refer to those countries and societies that have overtly experienced, or covertly continue to experience colonization. I do not use the term to denote a hierarchy (the sense in which it is used in the 1970s development literature) relative to a "first" world, but rather to reflect the cultural, political and economic dominance that has divided the world.

² Casual sex is itself difficult to define. The general idea, however, is that it takes place in a context devoid of any long-term expectations or commitments.

³ Although I provide examples of specific cases, given the continent's diversity this account can, of necessity, only be an overview.

⁴ For example one could argue that a more "repressive" sexual culture existed among the Ashanti in which pre-marital sexual intercourse among girls and boys bore heavy sanctions (Sarpong 1977), in comparison to more "permissive" norms among the Masai where non-penetrative sex was allowed among young people. Clearly, neither of these can be used to provide statements on the "morality" of either group of people, since this depends on how these types of sexuality are constructed.

⁵ Safiyati Hussaini a Nigerian woman, was convicted of adultery, and sentenced to death by stoning on October 9 2001 in the Islamic city of Sokoto in Northern Nigeria. She appealed her sentence, and, following massive international pressure won her appeal on 25 March 2002. However, Amina Lawal, from the small village of Kurami in Katsina, has since been sentenced to the same punishment (source: BBC Radio 26 March 2002) and while pressure for her acquittal is mounting globally, her sentence has still not been removed.

⁶ I do not believe that prostitution is the oldest profession in the world – several accounts such as, for example, those in religious texts such as the Bible refer to the professions of the first children of Adam and Eve: Abel was a shepherd and Cain a farmer. I do believe, however, that prostitution is probably the oldest form of male exploitation of the female.

⁷ For a fuller discussion of these "public women" see Akyempong, "Sexuality and prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast 1650-1950" (1997); and Jones "Prostitution, polyandry oder Vergewaltigung..." (1990) which literally translated reads, "prostitution, polyandry or rape..."

⁸ At the time a teacher would earn about £7 to £8 a month; personal communication Wilhelmina Ampofo.

⁹ Trafficking in women is defined as "all acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of women within and across national borders for work or services, by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion".

¹⁰ Nonetheless, poverty is not always a factor in prostitution. In 2000, twin teenage daughters of a high-ranking government official in Burundi were among a group of 20 under-age prostitutes arrested during a police raid on a pub in Bujumbura (BBC 2000).

¹¹ According to a BBC report there are 2,500 African prostitutes working on the streets of Turin alone (BBC 2001a).

¹² Tourism is likely to be the world's largest global industry by the year 2000/2001 according to the World Tourism report.

¹³ According to Mercer (2000) there are 900 legal brothels in Australia, and industry watchers estimate

¹⁴ According to the Internet Entertainment group, in 1997 90% of the buyers for live strip shows were male, and 70% were living in the US.

¹⁵ One American in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, set up a live video chat site to broadcast pay-per-view rape and torture of women (Hughes 1999).

¹⁶ While the work of Internet watchdogs such as the UK based Internet Watch Foundation are able to result

in the removal of images of child sex, they acknowledge that the removals represent only a small proportion of total images available on the internet (BBC 1998). The Chairman of Internet Watch also suggested that while 6 percent of such illegal material originates from Britain, 63% originates from the US.

¹⁷ The President of Pfizer compared purchasing drugs from renowned companies, with a given track record (such as Pfizer) to buying the latest model of a car from Europe or America, and buying generic anti-retroviral drugs from, say India, to buying a 20-year old car. By this he was justifying the purchase of drugs from renowned companies (like Pfizer) over local Pharmaceutical companies (CNN; June 26, 2001). Even if we overlook the sheer arrogance of such an assertion, the fact still remains that the cost of a day's worth of AIDS medication is \$6/day in Kenya (courtesy Pfizer) and only 20c a day in Thailand (courtesy local pharmaceutical companies).