

off our backs

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front cover

by etana finkler

back cover

by etana finkler

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The First U.S. Conference on Trafficking in Women Internationally

Feminism cannot succeed without taking on the issue of trafficking in women, Kathleen Barry asserted, for not only is prostitution central to the domination of every whore, the good girl/bad girl division alienates women from each other, and ultimately keeps each woman other to herself. The struggle over which strategy, which direction, and which country (or countries) to tackle female sex slavery both enlivened and fractured the discussions of the conference on Trafficking in Women Internationally, held on October 22-23, 1988 by The Coalition on Trafficking in Women, and Women Against Pornography.

Women activists from the USA, West Germany, France, the Philippines, India, Japan, Peru, Korea, Switzerland, Zimbabwe, England, Lebanon, Norway and Sweden met in New York City to discuss issues such as the military and corporate trafficking in women, surrogate motherhood, and the MacKinnon/Dworkin Civil Rights Antipornography Ordinance, among others; and to ponder the insights of women such as Phyllis Chesler, Mary Daly, Andrea Dworkin, Yayori Matsui, Diana Russell, and Sarah Wynter, who shared their experiences and knowledge.

Approximately four hundred women (primarily white but including Asian and Black women), and a handful of men attended the conference (which originally was to be held at Hunter College, but wasn't when the Director of Women's Studies at Hunter refused the school's facilities because she 'didn't like the topic'). After Kathleen Barry's powerful and insightful opening address, the conference's agenda included a series of speakers discussing Trafficking in Women-- A Global Perspective, two lunchtime workshops on child custody, incest and adoption abuse and on the changing image of women in Israeli and American media. The afternoon offered a series of panel discussions on a multiplicity of sub-issues considered briefly during the morning sessions. Additional addresses on Sunday (The Politics of Prostitution in Scandinavia -- Hanna Olsson; First and Third World Women Unite! -- Lisa Go; Human Dignity -- Andrea Dworkin; and Reclaiming the Righteous Rage of Women -- Mary Daly), and a Speakout by Survivors were followed by a rally at the United Nations.

by lisa granik

Wassyla Tamazali

Wassyla Tamazali is a lawyer from Algeria who heads the Women's Program at UNESCO. In the opening address she declared that prostitution is an extreme form of discrimination, a form of slavery, surrounded by a wall of silence. She sounded a theme which was repeated throughout the conference, that women "choose" prostitution because society as a whole renders young girls vulnerable to the abuse and commercialization of women. Prostitution is a consequence of a

social system in which women are dehumanized and objectified by a patriarchal society. It is society's perceptions of women that creates and maintains prostitution.

by eileen shields

Yayori Matsui

Yayori Matsui, a journalist for Asahi Shinbun (in Japan) and founder of the Asian Women's Association to eliminate the international traffic in Asian women, delivered another opening address which was echoed by other Asian and Third World women for the duration of the conference. The consumer culture facilitates the trafficking in women, evidenced by the increase in surrogacy, since women appear little different when everything is seen as a commodity. Matsui pointed to women's sex-role assignment as a breeding machine, the acceptance of prostitution through socialization, and the links to the military and tourism industry as factors which promote and entrench the "Night Industry." The American Government has promoted the trafficking in women to serve the GIs in South Korea, the Philippines, Japan and Vietnam, combining racism and sexism with consumerism, commercialism and colonialism. The tourism industry also has fed demand by offering "deals" to male executives on business trips. Moreover, she noted, the increase in the value of the yen has made Japanese women more expensive; cheaper South Asian women have suffered an increase in demand. Because in times of economic expansion the demand for women grows and because periods of depression drive additional women into selling themselves, left unchecked and unchallenged, the market for women grows regardless of economic policy or growth. A shift is needed, Matsui argued, to condemn those who buy sex, not those who sell themselves; moreover, an international coalition is needed to change the international culture which commercializes and makes women commodities. We need to re-think new sex-role assumptions and assignments; a new human culture is needed to tackle the poverty and sexism which operate to continue the selling of women.

by lisa granik

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Trafficking in Women Internationally

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Kathleen Barry

Dr. Kathleen Barry, a professor of sociology at Brandies University and a pioneer in the field of international trafficking, questioned why the U.S. women's movement is not outraged at the accusation that feminism is the cause of American males buying mail-order brides. The brides are usually advertised as being more passive and docile than "liberated American women." Barry, who wrote *Female Sexual Slavery*, one of the first books about international trafficking in women, suggested the reason is that the American women's movement is not outraged about the domestic traffic in women and girls from Long Island to the Port Authority or to Eighth Avenue.

by eileen shields

Similarly, Barry contended, the colonization of sexuality is at the root of what creates the fissures in the women's movement: Sex is to feminism what work/labor is to marxism; sexual objectification keeps a woman an object to herself, split within herself; it then turns her against herself, and ultimately against other women. If we are separated from our sexuality, we lose. Additionally, because prostitution is central to the domination of women everywhere, we must reject the otherness of prostitution for the women's movement to prevail.

by lisa granik

Global Perspective

Sex tours are big business in Zimbabwe. Rudo Gaidzanwa is a professor of sociology at the University of Zimbabwe. She described the long-lasting effects of the war for independence in which women are often brutalized by both rape and prostitution for the military. They now have no support system and no economic means to earn a living. Sex tours are patronized by white men from South Africa, the United States, England, and Scandinavian countries.

Gaidzanwa pointed out that the economic dominance of the first world countries over third world countries becomes personal as well as economic by the sex tourism industry.

Mi Kung Lee of Korea spoke of the tremendous effect of military installations in creating a large demand for prostitutes. The U.S. has 46,000 soldiers in South Korea. Korean women and young girls who become prostitutes are considered outcasts from their communities, and often bear children who are similarly rejected. Similarly, in the Philippines there are some 30,000 children born of prostitutes and U.S. soldiers, according to Aurora Javate de Dios. She is the chair of an activist women's group working against trafficking of Filipinos as entertainers, mail-order brides, and domestic servants. Ads for mail-order brides are found in such mainstream publications as *The Village Voice* and *Mother Earth News*.

Lisa Go coordinates the Migrant Women's Programme of the Resource Center for Philippine Concerns in Tokyo, Japan. She explained why so many Filipino

women go to Japan: they need money. Agricultural production in the Philippines is very export oriented and, since the mid-1970's, this export orientation has extended to women. With increasing mechanization on farms, women have been "freed" from labor on farms but there is no other labor for them since there is no local consumer industrial production.

Prostitution

No one spoke in favor of legalizing prostitution as a way to control the exploitation. Jayme Ryan described her twelve years in a legal brothel in Nevada, starting when she was fourteen years old. To get a job in the house she had to have a pimp, paying him over \$200 to get into a house. She was allowed to keep 40% of her take. She

ence against believing that the sale of girls into prostitution happened only in third world countries, noting that she was sold to a pimp when she was 13 years of age.

by eileen shields

Surrogate Mothers

The panel discussions shifted the focus to other issues in the sex trade. Elizabeth Kane, the "first surrogate mother" in the United States, led an impassioned discussion with Phyllis Chesler, Janice Raymond, Kathleen Lahey and Pat Hynes on women in systems of surrogacy. Contrary to arguments made by advocates of surrogacy, the panelists concluded that surrogacy does not give a woman control over her body, that to do so equates

Indeed, although surrogacy has already spread to the Third World, the dangers to Third World women are increasing exponentially as these women are prey to Western middlemen seeking birth mothers at reduced wages. As technology proceeds to perfect the embryo transplants, Third World women will no longer be needed for their eggs, but exclusively for their uteri.

Pornography

At a subsequent discussion on the civil rights antipornography ordinance, Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin, John Stoltenberg, Therese Stanton and Julie Vosoba related their experiences in agitating and advocating for the Ordinance. MacKinnon cogently and persuasively explained the theory and practice behind the Ordinance, which defines pornography not as a freedom of speech question, but as a violation of civil liberties; and which would offer money damages to those injured by pornography, and would permit courts to order injunctions against pornography that has caused social and sexual harm to women, children, men and transsexuals. The uniqueness and strength of the Ordinance, MacKinnon argued, lies in several factors. First, the Ordinance has ordinary words; instead of using legalese, the words in the Ordinance have the meaning in law that they have in life. (And the law is "pathetically polite," she added.) Second, the Ordinance tells the truth; it takes a problem and calls it what it is: pornography is a problem of inequality, a violation of civil liberties. Moreover, the law defines the problem in the language of those injured or affected by the pornography; the law is neither vague nor abstract nor overbroad: it specifically defines what the pornographers do. Consequently, the law is sex-specific rather than sex-neutral, MacKinnon added, because pornography is sex-specific -- there is no gender-neutral pornography. Dworkin and MacKinnon drafted the Ordinance in such a way that would allow the legal system to address the problem, in that it recognizes the injury that pornography causes (indeed, it implicitly recognizes pornography itself as the harm), and provides a remedy to all those who can prove that they have been injured by pornography. By placing the law in women's hands, by allowing the law to be used only by those who can prove injury from pornography, they minimized the possibility of the law being used against women.

MacKinnon also pointed out the peculiarity of equality law: law traditionally operates to maintain, not to change, the status quo. Equality law is an anomaly in that it promises something (equality) which simply does not exist. She acknowledged that sex inequality is total, while all equality law -- including the Ordinance -- is partial. (The Civil Rights Act of 1964 applies only to education and the workplace.) But nothing like this Ordinance has ever been done before, MacKinnon concluded, appealing passionately to those skeptical of the ability of any law to help women; "nobody's ever fucking tried!"

Therese Stanton, Julie Vosoba, and John Stoltenberg spoke on

Continued on page 3.



was on call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and had to be ready for a customer on a half-hour's notice. She could not leave the premises except to go to the doctor or to go on an "out" date. She had to have her hair done, make-up on, and be dressed at all times. She was allowed one 2-minute phone call per week. Everything needed was brought to the house. When a customer came, all the women were lined up and were not to make a sound while they were "picked."

Ryan is now a member of an organization called WHISPER (Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt). Sarah Wynter founded this group to help women who have left prostitution. She pointed out (as did numerous other speakers at this conference) that prostitution replicated the control by men over women that was also present in incest, rape, battering, assault, and pornography. Wynter said that her organization has conducted interviews of ex-prostitutes which showed that 74% were sexually abused in their families between the ages of three and fourteen. 79% ran away from home.

Wynter was one of the few speakers who advocated a specific legal approach to prostitution. She said that WHISPER wants the buyers, the "johns," to be sent to jail rather than the women. The demand for prostitutes is what keeps the highly lucrative business going. Wynter cautioned the audi-

equality and liberation with slavery: Surrogacy reinforces the idea that a woman is simply a reproductive object, an instrument, a tool -- a uterus for rent. Women need both the right to an abortion and its opposite, Chesler argued: the right to give birth on our own terms. Just as Americans can't sell votes or parental rights, she continued, neither men nor women should be able to sell their bodies. The right to one's body should be an inalienable right. (For a review of Chesler's book on surrogacy, *Sacred Bond*, see page 14). Further, Pat Hynes continued, the language of surrogacy arrangements reinforces the primacy of the father: the biological father remains the father, but the biological mother -- really the birth mother -- is reduced to the "surrogate."

Janice Raymond, a founder of the National Coalition Against Surrogacy, noted that surrogacy is not just the selling of babies, it is the selling of women. The focus has been on the babies, not on the women who have given birth to those babies; Raymond presented the dangers present and future to women should surrogacy continue: surrogacy offers the opportunity for one (subordinated) class of women to serve as the uterus of another (elite) class of women and men.

Empowering Thai Women

In October, three women from Thailand visited England to make contact with Thai people and feminists working on the issues involved in the traffic in women. Aporn Supahechochai is a member of Empower, a Thai women's group organising women in the sex industry. Mayuree Phakadurong specialises in women's employment issues at a human rights law practice. Suchinda Asavachai reports on women's issues for the daily newspaper Siam Rath. They met with Kalpana, who works at WHIRIC (Women's Health and Reproductive Rights Information Centre) and is a member of the South Asia Solidarity Group, Mavis Williams, who works at London Women and Manual Trades, and Alice Henry, from off our backs.

Contraceptive profiteering

Kalpana told us that Norplant, a contraceptive which is implanted under the skin, got a license for export by being registered in Finland, although it is not used there. In third world countries, doctors tell women that Norplant can remain implanted for up to five years, but actually, scar tissue

often grows around it and it needs surgical removal which can be painful. A woman has to ask a doctor to remove it; she can beg, but is at the mercy of the doctor. Mayuree said that Norplant is recommended at family planning centres in Thailand; it is a fairly well-known contraceptive. Kalpana pointed out that it is important to exchange information like this. She said,

"We are starting a campaign in Britain because we know it is not enough for you to fight from the third world. We are putting out a 50 page information booklet on implants and injectables, but we need more information from Thailand and other countries."

Mayuree said she knows of a case of abuse of drug registration. A pharmaceutical firm experimented on women in the U.S., found dangerous side effects, but still registered it in Thailand. Women campaigned in Thailand against use of this contraception, but the company tried to sue the Thai committee for libel. Kalpana noted that drug companies have to pay large amounts for insurance if they conduct trials in the U.S. - but they can avoid that cost if they test drugs in third world countries.

Empower

Aporn said that Empower tries to give women in Patporn services so

they can better their lot. Patporn is a district near Bangkok that first began to provide sexual "R&R" (rest and recreation) for U.S. soldiers in Viet Nam. It has since grown as a centre of sex tourism, and provides the Thai economy with valued foreign currency, so the Thai government does nothing to discourage it.

Empower now has a full floor of a building where they teach literacy, give advice, especially on health, and hold events. In August, they put on a very successful play written and performed by Patporn bar workers and a male bartender, relating their hardships. Empower puts out a newsletter with articles on health issues, English lessons, and what is going on in Patporn. They have found that women want a meeting place to exchange their views, to talk about every day and work related problems. Empower gets information on health and sexually transmitted disease information from a Bangkok hospital which they rewrite to make it understandable to prostitutes.

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Trafficking Conference

Continued from page 2.

different means and problems of getting anti-pornography campaigns active in different localities. Stanton and Vosoba related their experiences organizing and lobbying for the Ordinance in Minneapolis and Bellingham, Washington (where the Ordinance won on a referendum in the November election-- see oob dec. 1988). John Stoltenberg delineated the four general "types" of men who become active in anti-pornography campaigns. First, there are the men loyal to a particular woman who herself is passionately against pornography. (There appears to be a certain "spillover effect.") Other men themselves have been victims of sexual oppression, violence and/or incest; they tend to identify with victims of abuse. A third group includes men who have been alienated from pornography as they have been alienated from the model of the "macho man" that society says they were supposed to become, and which pornography glorifies. Other men become active due to an innate sense of justice and equality -- men with a certain type of politics, Stoltenberg explained, for whom anti-pornography activity is but a logical extension of their political beliefs and principles.

Human Dignity

But why do men love pornography?, Andrea Dworkin asked rhetorically during her talk entitled "Human Dignity." Both men on the right and on the left love porno-

graphy -- it is the heartbeat of male supremacy; it is all over the world. Perhaps because pornography is a question of power; pornography is the power of each man over each woman, power in the abuse of human dignity. As such, the photographs make the women dead, two-dimensional; the pimps can use technology to sell these women millions and millions of times. Pornography convinces men that the women in pornography are all women, that this is what women are for. Pornography is the great leveler -- men see all women as wanting to be used and treated in this way -- not just women in pornography, but their sisters, prostitutes, and girlfriends.

There is a utility value to pornography, but part of the pleasure men experience comes from the romance of the brave man dealing with the woman/devil, Dworkin continued. Prostitution has many of the elements of gang rape for men: male bonding, walking -- with boots or penis -- on top of someone. Prostitution is both slave trafficking and organized sadism, and is the institutionalization of male dominance.

But why does a woman become a prostitute? Incest, poverty, rape, force and pain make a woman a prostitute -- but the "first reason is because she is a daughter of a woman." A prostitute is a human life. Men create this creature, who must submit and survive...the question is how to survive better...to avoid, not incur (read: provoke) pain, to go inside and die as best you can. Split yourself into two parts...divide your head and heart from your body...Part of survival is feeling superior to the john -- if you don't have human dignity, you create it for yourself -- part of human dignity is just outlasting them, outliving them.

Some women create a pride in being used and exploited, but this is not Human Dignity, Dworkin stressed. "Human Dignity is the 'NO' when he is fucking you. 'I am not this woman,' 'I want to be somewhere else,' 'this isn't happening to me,' -- these are acts of resistance." Moreover, hating the person who hurts you is important

-- it is a bridge to the future; indeed, it may keep you alive, she noted.

But apart from the reality of Human Dignity, Dworkin concluded, there is another reality: You can't stop people fighting for justice. We need to have the courage to remember and mind what we remember, and use it. We -- the women's movement, women generally, she reminded her audience -- we don't show enough respect for the women who kill the men who have hurt them, for all the women who have survived and are surviving the reality of prostitution and pornography.

by lisa granik

Speakout & Rally

Other speakers participated in a speakout, describing their experiences in various forms of sexual exploitation, ranging from posing for photos in Penthouse, to being subjected to a pornographic film during a business meeting for her job, to being a fashion model. Each woman described her efforts to separate herself from what she was doing, to dull her feelings, to divide herself from the part of her that was being used.

The last hours of the conference were spent in small groups where women from the international groups met and devised strategies for attacking the international trafficking in women.

Finally, participants held a rally at the United Nations Headquarters to ask that governments be held accountable for their failure to abide by the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights which guarantees individual human dignity.

by eileen shields

Tension

More apparent and more openly divisive than the split between the "good girls" and "other women" (who have been involved in the sex trade) was the developing tension between First and Third World women at the Conference. A considerable



amount of time and discussion during the two days was devoted expressly to the experience of Third World women, and their call to action on the part of First World women -- especially American women -- to join with them in fighting the continued and growing exploitative trafficking of women of the less developed nations. During the speakout and increasingly toward the end of the Conference, Third World women arose and lamented the lack of strategizing, even the lack of discussion on the part of all those present to consider means by which we all could act to combat the sex trade.

Although there were no specific workshops on this issue, there were workshops on anti-pornography activism worldwide and international legal strategies against trafficking. Moreover, unofficially there were membership lists being passed around and networking going on in the aisles and corridors as many participants sought means for individual action.

From the incisive wit of Mary Daly's "Re-Claiming the Righteous Rage of Women," to the brilliance of Barry, Dworkin, and MacKinnon, to the power of the truths related by all the women participants, the Conference was extraordinary in its consciousness-raising and its education and exploration of the multiplicity of practical and theoretical issues of the international trafficking in women.

by lisa granik

Eileen Shield's coverage is excerpted from *The Commentator*, the student newspaper of the New York University School of Law.



from la vie en rose