

Current Events

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—JEFFREY WEEKS, *Times Higher Education Supplement*

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The New Commercialization of Sex: From Forced Prostitution to Cybersex

The previous chapter discussed the reconceptualization of prostitution as sex work, and the attempt to create a political movement based on this shift. Here I am more concerned with the dynamics of the commercialization of sex itself, and how this reflects the larger sociopolitical order. Prostitution is only the most dramatic aspect of a sex industry which is increasingly inter-related with the global economy. In part this is associated with the huge increase in tourism since the development of the jumbo jet,¹ but often young women are recruited into sex work through migration, often under conditions which are virtual enslavement. This has now become so commonplace that it is the central theme of the best-selling German thriller *One Man, One Murder*.²

PROSTITURISMO

The national bourgeoisie will be greatly helped on its way towards decadence by the Western bourgeoisies, who come to it as tourists avid for the exotic, for big-game hunting and for casinos . . . The casinos of Havana and of Mexico, the beaches of Rio, the little Brazilian and Mexican girls, the half-breed thirteen year-olds, the ports of Acapulco and Copacabana—all these are the stigma of this deprivation of the national middle class . . . [which] will in practice set up its country as the brothel of Europe.

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961

Since Fanon wrote those words, tourism has become the most significant and visible arena of global sexual inequality. As Jeremy Seabrook writes: "It is a savage irony that sex tourism should be one symptom of globalization, the 'integration' of the whole world into a single economy, when both the workers in the industry and the clients from abroad are themselves the product

of disintegration—of local communities, the dissolution of rootedness and belonging, the breaking of old patterns of labour and traditional livelihoods; and the psychic disintegration of so many people caught up in great epic changes, of which they have little understanding and over which they have less control."³ Tourism is, of course, a significant factor in globalization, both economic and cultural, and it has become on some measures the largest single employer in the world. In many places it is closely linked to commercial sex, in what Brazilians term "prostiturismo."⁴

The media is full of references to new centers of international prostitution, with cities like Tokyo, Dubai, and Istanbul often identified as centers of a new internationalization of both workers and customers. The net site Club Paradise offers "love trips" to once enemy territory in St. Petersburg, Kiev, and Minsk; Planet Love offers links to sites such as Cuban Affairs and From Russia with Wife.⁵ I've already discussed the case of Bangkok, which is often portrayed as more exceptional than is probably the case. Despite the undoubted boom in sex tourism to places such as Bangkok, Pataya, and Phuket, most prostitution in Thailand depends upon local customers. It is conceivable that widespread cross-national prostitution will change both behaviors and emotions. One author has speculated that sexual tourism might lead to greater use of kissing and oral sex in some countries,⁶ just as it is claimed that the availability of western pornography has created a demand for (heterosexual) anal sex in China. In many parts of the world it is claimed that the threat of AIDS has increased the demand for underage prostitutes.

Prostitution is hardly new, and it is difficult to distinguish between an actual increase in commercial sex and an increasing openness in acknowledging it. Indeed it is possible that there is far *less* commercial sex in many parts of the rich world now than a century ago, though this has probably been more than compensated for by increases in other parts of the world. Internationally prostitution appears to be increasing rapidly due to the spread of travel, migration, and liberal economic "development" across the globe. Never underestimate the impact of the 747 on rapid population movements; European tourists who once saw the Mediterranean as a distant luxury now holiday in the Seychelles and Phuket, while women and men from Nigeria and Brazil sell themselves on the streets of Rome and Dusseldorf, and many migrants find their jobs as entertainers, maids, and nannies carry with them the expectation of sexual services. In my visits to Europe over the past ten years I have noticed a marked growth in commercial sex in gay saunas, with

young men from across the world using saunas as bases for illegal sex work, in the process changing the ground rules on which such saunas have previously rested, namely as sites for casual but noncommercial sex.

It is important to remember that tourism makes up only one part of a vast movement between and within countries as a result of global flows of people which involve the most and the least privileged. Such movements—involving “guest” workers, refugees, immigrants, soldiers, fishermen, and so forth—can have considerable impact on cultural and socioeconomic structures. Neoliberalist policies, by hastening economic “growth” and the destruction of traditional supports, also force more people into what is in effect indentured service (e.g., Filipina or Bangladeshi workers in the Gulf) and prostitution.⁷ Thus the economic collapse in Indonesia in 1997/98 was reflected in reports of a growth of commercial sex in Jakarta, where there is some official attempt at regulation through compounds for prostitutes.⁸ These compounds are made up of small rooms, big enough only for a bed and wardrobe, where women both sleep and see clients; they are still preferable—and safer—than working the sides of roads (as do *waria* prostitutes in Jakarta) or the old Dutch cemetery in Surabaya.⁹

The collapse of Communism in Soviet/Eastern Europe has opened up huge growth in sex work (as it has in injecting drug use): one estimate in mid-1998 was that half a million women had been brought from the former Soviet states into western Europe for prostitution in the past three years. The same story spoke of huge increase of syphilis in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus, and drug use has similarly increased.¹⁰ But these figures may be an underestimate: the Ukrainian government believes 400,000 Ukrainian women alone have moved west into various forms of prostitution since the collapse of the Soviet Union.¹¹ Within Russia itself there is a marked growth of the visibility of prostitution, and, as Lynne Attwood observed, “more than a hint of respect for these self-proclaimed independent businesswomen.”¹² In the last couple of years observers claim that prostitution has reappeared in Cuba, partly to cater for tourists.¹³ In the same way relaxation of China’s restrictions on emigration have led to a flood of young Chinese women, known as *dalumei*, who move to Taiwan in search of a better life: “Popularized by sensational stories of sexual exploitation in newspapers, the *dalumei* is a woman who in most cases serves as a prostitute, willingly or otherwise, and who in some cases successfully disguises herself as a native and makes money as a singer, waitress, bar hostess or beautician.”¹⁴

The growing commercialization of sex is often the unintended consequence of opening up an economy to the larger world. Critics of free-market economics might observe this is the logical consequence of increasing commodification—this overlaps with the feminist critique of prostitution as reducing all of human interaction to a commodity. In a satirical piece calling for “sustainable prostitution” Thai writer Anita Pleumarom wrote: “We should no longer worry about the commercialisation and commodification of all aspects of life . . . since unfettered capitalism and consumerism are part of the inevitable reality.”¹⁵ American attitudes to commercial sex are particularly schizophrenic; it is ironic that the country most committed to the rule of the market is also one of the more ensorious about including sexual services. There are of course some notable exceptions, such as the acceptance of brothels in some parts of the country, as the musical and film *The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* reminds us.

Despite the current emphasis on “sex tourism” it is worth remembering that the military has a long connection with various forms of prostitution, often forced, and that the ready availability of prostitutes has long been a major concern of military commanders as a way of both maintaining the morale of their troops and restricting possible homosexuality among their troops. As Cynthia Enloe asks: “Without sexualized rest and recreation, would the U.S. military command be able to send young men off on long, often tedious sea voyages and ground manoeuvres? Without myths of Asian or Latina women’s compliant sexuality, would many American men be able to sustain their own identities, their visions of themselves as manly enough to act as soldiers?”¹⁶ The provision of “rest and recreation” was one of the central features in creating the image of Bangkok discussed in the beginning of this book.

One aspect of the contemporary world is the apparent globalization of what would have once been localized conflicts, with the growing use of foreign troops, often as peacekeeping forces. One factor in the rapid growth of a sex trade in Cambodia during the 1990s was the presence of UNTAC soldiers in that country, and Prime Minister Hun Sen has said that AIDS will be the lasting legacy of the UN peacekeeping operation.¹⁷ Even under the Taliban there are reports of underground prostitution in Afghanistan, echoing Rabi Alameddine’s comments about Lebanon under civil war, when “[p]oor Shiite girls can make money in two ways, either by becoming prostitutes or by diapering themselves . . . A diapered woman is one who covers

her whole body except for her hands and face."¹⁸ (Alameddine claims that Iran paid Lebanese women to wear traditional head covers.)

While prostitution is almost always portrayed in terms of women it also involves a significant number of young men, although the dynamics of male prostitution tend to be somewhat different. As Patrick Larvie commented in respect to Brazil: "For many males the act of prostitution may actually be more akin to a ritualized form of sexual transgression than the kind of sex-for-money transaction which occurs commonly among female and transvestite sex workers."¹⁹ It is not a new observation that many young men will prostitute themselves as a way of enjoying homosexual sex while retaining the illusion that they are not, themselves, "queer." Whereas women are stigmatized by being known as prostitutes, young men will often insist they are really hustlers to avoid being thought of as homosexual.²⁰

Culturally, too, the images associated with male and female prostitution are rather different. While the female is seen as either a victim or as glamorous but amoral (and therefore, ultimately, as in *Traviata*, a tragic figure), the male hustler is often depicted as predatory or violent, as in the novels of Genet or the real-life morality tales of famous men (Sal Mineo, Pasolini, Versace) who have been slain by hustlers. Once again the redeemed (female) prostitute has become a media stereotype, as in the film *Pretty Woman* or the character of Megan in the television series *Melrose Place*. Against this there is a tendency to portray male prostitution in poorer countries as involving a certain level of reciprocal "fun," even when the underlying inequalities are recognized.²¹

Male prostitution is probably more widespread than is often recognized. One attempt by government officials in the early stages of the AIDS epidemic to estimate the numbers of male commercial sex workers concluded there were "none" in China or Zambia; of the governments who responded only France, Colombia, and the Czech Republic acknowledged men might make up 10% or more of "commercial workers."²² This latter figure is likely to be widely duplicated in both rich and poor countries. There is less acknowledgment of men who provide paid services to women, although this is not uncommon in certain tourist destinations such as Bali, Sri Lanka, the Dominican Republic, and the Gambia, where sexual liaisons are often accompanied by expensive presents rather than direct payment. In some cases casual liaisons lead to continuing relationships, possibly to the emigration of the new boyfriend to his partner's country. It is usually as-

sumed that such relationships must end disastrously, but financial advantage is not always a bad reason for embarking upon a relationship.

While there is now a considerable body of relevant research on sex work this is rarely incorporated into wider theories of global political economy. Indeed, despite its economic significance, prostitution remains largely unanalyzed as a business rather than a moral phenomenon, though in those countries in western Europe and Australasia which have decriminalized certain forms of commercial sex the sheer amounts of money involved are changing attitudes. Thus a front-page article in late 1998 in the Melbourne *Age's* business section reported the growth of the sex industry as "more acceptable and respectable"—and stressed the flow of benefits to hotels, taxis, and condom manufacturers.²³ The article estimated Australia to have 23,000 people employed in the sex industry, with almost a billion-dollar turnover in the 800 legal and 350 illegal brothels, escort agencies, and massage parlors. Britons are estimated to spend roughly three times as much, which is roughly the same on a per capita basis—if only one-eighth of their expenditure on illegal drugs.²⁴

In many poor countries the sex industry is proportionately more important. The largest brothel in Bangladesh, in the port city of Narayanganj outside Dhaka, is said to have 1,600 workers who live there with their families.²⁵ In 1998 the International Labour Organisation published a study of prostitution in four Southeast Asian countries, estimating that in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand:

the number of workers earning a living directly or indirectly from prostitution would be several millions . . . The sex sector in the four countries is estimated to account for anywhere from 2 to 14 per cent of Gross Domestic Product, and the revenues it generates are crucial to the livelihoods and earnings potential of millions of workers beyond the prostitutes themselves. Government authorities also collect substantial revenues in areas where prostitution thrives, illegally from bribes and corruption, but legally from licensing fees and taxes on the many hotels, bars, restaurants and game rooms that flourish in its wake.²⁶

This report was very significant in that it suggested a move within the UN system toward recognizing sex work as an industry to be regulated, rather than a scourge to be eliminated. (Even so, the report carefully avoids any recommendations on the legal status of prostitution.) Not surprisingly, the

report created acrimonious debate with some governments, particularly from Catholic Latin America, expressing considerable hostility to this shift.

In both rich and poor countries the rapidity of economic change is increasing the sex trade. From the copious literature available take this example from Nepal: "To the dismay of activists and citizens' groups, brothels have proliferated in the capital and other urban areas, keeping pace with the sudden demand of [sic] sex-workers in Nepal. Says NGO activist Rana: 'Sex has begun to play a major role in Nepal's tourism earnings, which is unfortunate.' Another facet of the sex trade is trafficking in women and girls, a huge business in Nepal . . . According to a recent estimate by UNICEF, more than 300,000 Nepali women are reported to have been sold to Indian brothels."²⁷ On a smaller scale there is now a similar trade in young women from Mozambique into the brothels of Cape Town and Johannesburg. The collapse of downtown Johannesburg has seen sex work along with drugs become a major industry in the inner-city area of Hillbrow, once a chic bohemian quarter of the city.²⁸

Even in rich countries, sex work is often the most available means of survival for those who are marginalized because of deindustrialization, migration, family breakdowns, the collapse of welfare, and so forth, although there are more middle-class sex workers, often working as "masseurs" and "escorts" out of private apartments in the ritzy areas of large cities, than is sometimes acknowledged. (There have been a number of high-class call girls in movies, and the murder of the fashion designer Versace by Andrew Cunanan led to a flurry of media stories about "gay gigolos.")²⁹ Indeed the class divide is very obvious in sex work, with a growing gap between the legitimate and luxurious brothels now operating in many western cities and the realities of street work in most cities, rich or poor. Because of globalization the class divide often overlaps with a racial one, with migrant workers from poor countries heavily overrepresented among the most marginalized parts of the industry. One of the arguments often made against sex-work organizations is that they heavily overestimate the element of choice available to most of those who work in prostitution.

Prostitution is central to any analysis of the sexual order—as is more generally the relationship of money and sex. There is a need for some exploration of the erotic charge of paying and being paid, suggested in the common term "to spend" for male orgasm. Edmund White has written that "[j]ohns [customers] resent having to pay. Even if the idea of paying (and

controlling) someone excites them in advance, after they come they feel insulted."³⁰ Some "johns" like to believe that sex work involves mutual exploitation and reciprocity, claiming that the workers either "really" enjoy the sex, or alternatively complaining that they are always ready to "rip off" the client—or indeed both at once. In general it is one of the deepest illusions of the client that he is special, and one which any successful worker will encourage. Yes, clients and workers may fall in love, but less often than the myths would suggest.

I do not wish to avoid the moral issues raised by prostitution: while some feminist analyses seem to conflate all forms of sex for money in ways which deny any agency on the part of the worker, it also seems likely that most of those who "choose" prostitution do so under conditions of considerable constraint. At the same time we should avoid stereotypes which see prostitution as the refuge of the most marginalized and self-hating: "To sell oneself implies one has a value (sexual in nature) and often a considerable value . . . Through the view of morality the young prostitute finds himself valued sexually and devalued socially."³¹ This is not to deny the very real abuses and exploitation which surround the sex industry; it is to recognize that moral indignation is inadequate when people are forced into selling their bodies to survive and uncalled for when people enjoy a real choice. In affluent societies there are not inconsiderable numbers of porn actors and prostitutes who have chosen the business as a rational way of doing well in the world; in most parts of the world those who sell their bodies do so for survival, and often under appalling conditions. As Shivananda Khan wrote: "For the vast majority of people, sex work or whatever name you give it, is a survival strategy . . . The term sex work appears to imply some form of equality in economic and negotiating power, a labor contract between the customer and the provider. But can this be true in a city like Calcutta, Mumbai or Dhaka, or in any city in a developing country where poverty, hunger, homelessness and family deprivation are rife, and where significant numbers of such 'workers' below the age of 14 are primary wage-earners for their family?"³²

Prostitution is regulated very differently across the globe, with the only common element seeming to be hypocrisy, except perhaps in the case of Sweden, which has now legislated to make the purchase of sexual services illegal, a welcome change from the usual tendency to blame the worker and ignore the customer. Many jurisdictions do of course criminalize procurement and pimping, the most famous example being the American Mann Act (1910),

which prohibits the "knowing transportation or enticement or coercion to go from one place to another of a female for the purpose of prostitution in interstate or foreign commerce." Since the first international conference on the prevention of trafficking in women in Paris in 1885 there have been international moves to restrict the trading of women for sexual purposes, and both the League of Nations and the United Nations addressed the issue. Arguments around trafficking (and not least the meaning of the word) continue today.³³ Thailand retains the legal fiction that prostitution is illegal but generally tolerates it;³⁴ on the other hand in many countries where there are limited legal restrictions sex workers are consistently harassed. In Turkey, for example, the state licenses brothels, and places considerable restrictions on women registered to work in them. Brothel owners are not required to pay social security contributions for their employees, as are other employers, and the children of registered sex workers are debarred from certain ranks in the military or police.³⁵ Many women now work outside the legal system, but face considerable police harassment.

The one generalization that is probably true is that prohibition—as in the case of alcohol and drugs—does not work. More than that, prohibition increases the risks to the health and security of workers, and benefits organized crime. When the mayor of Manila closed down the city's brothels a few years ago he succeeded only in pushing the trade into adjoining cities—or farther underground. The criminalization of prostitution—and the denial of basic civil rights to sex workers—is a significant factor in the perpetuation of a whole set of practices which amount to sexual slavery. In view of some of the extreme statements from feminist antiprostitution campaigners it is important to note that sex-work organizations are active in campaigning against these abuses, which include forcible imprisonment, rape, beatings, and denial of earnings.

I am sympathetic to the views of Hoigard and Finstad who argue: "One should, in every way possible, try to make it as easy as possible for the women while they are in prostitution. One should simultaneously work to provide them with better alternatives to prostitution."³⁶ I remain deeply skeptical that the latter is realistic without changes in the socioeconomic structures of almost all societies which go beyond even my utopian hopes for a radical politics. In one of the best overviews of this debate Ryan Bishop and Lillian Robinson suggest that only major global social and economic

restructuring could remove the exploitation implicit in most sex work.³⁷ Unfortunately—as is true of much feminist theorizing—they are almost totally ignorant of gay male theory, though they suggest there may be some significant differences between heterosexual and homosexual prostitution without saying what these may be.

Are there different moral traditions which view prostitution differently across societies? Certainly there appear to be different attitudes, ranging from religious practices where young women enter into something equivalent to prostitution under the control of priests, to societies which brand any woman who has sex outside marriage as a whore. But we need to be skeptical of claims such as this from one development report: "Prostitution is accepted as a traditional way of life among women of many of Rajasthan's tribal communities . . . with the income derived from sex work supporting entire communities."³⁸ (The very reference to "income" suggests we might read the word "traditional" with some skepticism.) Sex work can be both oppressive and liberating. But it is hard to argue that for most of those involved the latter outweighs the former.

The contradictions of the globalized sexual order are caught in the phenomenon of "mail-order brides," so common a term that a Singapore writer used the phrase for a play exploring the phenomenon.³⁹ There is a portrayal of one such woman in *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, which many Australians criticized as unnecessarily racist. Unfortunately this is not an isolated phenomenon; by 1998 there were almost 50,000 Filipina women in Australia, many of whom had moved there to marry Australians. Many such marriages pair older and uneducated white Australians with young women desperate to emigrate, and research suggests that violence and in extreme cases murder can result from these marriages.⁴⁰ There are, of course, many other examples of successful and happy marriages, but too many of them are the product of structural inequalities which set up unfortunate expectations from the beginning. I recall meeting a young man outside a gay bar in Manila—he was too poor to afford the drink which would allow him to go inside—who told me his sister had married an Australian and he wanted to follow her by finding a rich man who would take him away from the Philippines. His counterparts are found in the many ads from young men in developing countries looking for friendship that one finds in western gay newspapers, a surprising number from Ghana. (Why Ghana I am not sure but I have no-

ticed the phenomenon in both Australian and Swiss papers.) In the economic collapse of Russia in the late 1990s many women signed up with marriage agencies, hoping to find a way of escape to the west.⁴¹

THE NEW RESPECTABILITY OF PORNOGRAPHY

[He] controlled a maze of one hundred and fifty corporations which numbered among their activities and holdings a chain of bookstores, strip joints and peep movies coast to coast; massage parlors and nude-encounter studios in southwest U.S. and western Canada; outlets for leather goods and mechanical devices west of the Mississippi; sex boutiques, topless bars, topless billiard parlors across the Sunbelt; a New Orleans car rental firm with topless chauffeurs.

—Don DeLillo, *Running Dog*, 1978

Over the past two decades there has been an explosion in the open discussion and depiction of sex, so that what was once pornographic is now commonplace. This is most obvious in the case of the United States, where the existence of the First Amendment proscribing any restrictions on “freedom of expression” means the courts have struggled to keep up with changes in publishing, film, and video (as we are reminded in the film *The People versus Larry Flynt*), but changes in open depiction of sexuality have affected most of the world. From the perspective of the 1990s, with its adult videos in hotels and near naked advertisements, the battles of the 1960s over *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* and Henry Miller seem extraordinarily old-fashioned; in today’s far more visual culture the Disney studios produce films which would have been inconceivable in the days when courts and governments struggled to preserve decency. As late as 1969 I was involved in a court case in Australia over importing the unexpurgated version of Gore Vidal’s *Myra Breckenridge*;⁴² today Australian governments are seen as unnecessarily conservative when they seek to enforce restrictions on “adult movies.”

This is not the place for a long discussion of the debate on pornography and its various definitions—as with prostitution I am more concerned here with the economics than the morality of the industry.⁴³ It is clear that one person’s pornography is another’s erotica—I personally find the average Hollywood movie depiction of violence far more offensive than much restricted “pornography,” while what is commonplace in most western countries is totally banned (that is, forced underground) in other parts of the world. The famous comment of one U.S. Supreme Court Justice that he

knew pornography when he saw it, hardly covers the emergence of explicit sex from under the counter to smart bookshops, and publishers such as X-listed (owned by Little, Brown) and Black Lace (owned by Virgin).⁴⁴ There are increasing moves to both mainstream and glamorize commercial sex. Laurence O’Toole describes what he calls “the future of adult retail,” the Fairvilla Megastore in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

A 14,000 square-foot, two storey, one-stop shopping experience, tapping into the still underexploited single women and couples market for sex in America. Here people come and buy videos, sex toys, magazines, T-shirts, lingerie, greeting cards—the whole range. Owned and operated by husband-and-wife team Bill and Shari Murphy, Fairville provides a new kind of up-scale porn-buying experience, more like shopping at Gap or Virgin than the traditional adult bookshop, with hardwood floors, a forty foot domed ceiling with a galleried mezzanine floor and an adjoining open-air palm court with waterfalls and a coffee shop.⁴⁵

It is interesting to compare his hype with the reaction of the journalist Andrew Masterson to Sexpo, a sex-trade industry fair in Melbourne: “For all of its purported democratisation and openness, much of the sex industry present at Sexpo still evinces the values of a 19th-century circus freak show. It’s not about sexuality, much less sensuality, but about the profitable objectification of women and the exploitation of men. It offers, not freedom, but commercial exchange, and in the ribbed, knobbed, rotating, vibrating, expanding, brutally penetrative apparatus of sex ‘play,’ a sadism all the more deceitful because of its guise of pleasure-giving.”⁴⁶

With little attention from economists or the business press, pornography has become big business. One 1997 estimate for the United States claimed, “At \$4.2 billion it’s a business twice as large as major league baseball, three times as large as Disney’s theme park division, eight times as large as Broadway.”⁴⁷ It is estimated that 8,000 to 9,000 porno films are made each year in the States.⁴⁸ Most of the U.S. pornography industry is centered in Los Angeles’s San Fernando Valley north of Hollywood, so much so that one area is known locally as Silicone Valley. There is less material available on the development of the porn industry outside the United States. It is clearly significant in Europe: in respectable hotels, in the Calvinist city of Geneva, I have watched twenty-four-hour television channels advertising both pornography and escort services featuring anatomically improbable young women with call-back numbers across Europe and the Middle East.

There is clearly a huge market for pornography in east Asia and a large Japanese industry, which one estimate claims generates perhaps \$10 billion a year⁴⁹—which if accurate is more than twice the U.S. figure.

Certainly pornography is very widely available in Japan, which Ian Buruma sought to explain by reference to the particular repressions of Japanese society, though with uncharacteristically sufficient rigor in his analysis to be fully convincing.⁵⁰ Japan also appears to place fewer restrictions on child pornography (more accurately teenage pornography) than almost anywhere else—one estimate claimed that Japan produces four-fifths of all child pornography.⁵¹ Active porn industries emerged in Hungary and Slovakia after the fall of the Wall—according to one German film producer eastern European actors “cost less and do more.”⁵² And, as if to illustrate the sometimes bizarre circuits of globalization, a Russian television channel, TB-6, is allegedly a significant source for “adult” movies in Bangladesh.⁵³

A study by Hebditch and Anning in 1988 spoke of the international nature of the porn business and claimed there were a dozen or so “porn barons” who dominated the industry, controlling more than 50% of the trade.⁵⁴ While they appear to equate “international” with transatlantic (no mention in their book of the Japanese industry), they do offer some insight into the increasingly legitimate business of pornography, and the existence of firms which produce multiple magazines and videos. Among their “barons” is the German Beate Uhse, who when Hebditch and Anning wrote ran a large business involving sex shops across Germany, with 550 staff and an annual turnover of DM90 million: “Set in spacious grounds”—clearly writers about the porn business are keen observers of architecture—“the Uhse building is more like a combination of a modern theatre and an art gallery than an office.”⁵⁵ There are now Beate Uhse shops across Germany, including a very large one at Frankfurt Airport, and in 1999 the company was floated, with 8 million shares being offered on Frankfurt’s secondary stock exchange.

The moves to mainstream pornography can be traced back to Hugh Hefner’s launch of *Playboy* magazine in 1953 with its combination of soft-core images of naked women and its appeal to upwardly mobile male consumerism, a sort of under-the-counter version of the *New Yorker*.⁵⁶ As Bernard Arcand has remarked: “*Playboy* is without question a product of American society . . . it is enough to draw attention to the typically modern character of Hugh Hefner.”⁵⁷ *Playboy* was followed by a slew of imitations, including

Penthouse and *Hustler*, and an attempt to create similar magazines for women (whose main readership is probably homosexual men). By the following decade standards of censorship were beginning to be relaxed across the western world, making acceptable words and images which had previously been banned. Almost too symbolically the deputy chief film censor in Australia resigned in 1994 to become the country’s first X-rated moviemaker.⁵⁸ Nonetheless, *Playboy* remained in business at the turn of the century, though with declining readership.⁵⁹ Perhaps its publishers should take heart from reports that the Dutch government provided copies of the magazine to its peacekeepers in the former Yugoslavia.⁶⁰

Among its other effects pornography helps spread certain sexual assumptions—note the particular narrowness of U.S. gay porn which fetishizes muscular and tanned bodies to the exclusion of any other type. To look back at the gay porn films of the 1970s is to recognize how gyms have literally reshaped the male body in the past two decades. Note too the nostalgia for the 1970s as the “golden age” of porn—as depicted in films like *Boogie Nights* and *The People versus Larry Flynt*⁶¹—a period which probably began with the film *Deep Throat* (1972), the first porn movie to reach a mass audience. (It is claimed that it grossed \$100 million worldwide, and made its main actors, Linda Lovelace and Harry Reems, the first widely recognized porn stars.)⁶² Films became more sophisticated with plot lines and recognized stars, and there developed both an academic interest in and a bitter feminist debate about pornography, which caused deep rifts in the women’s movement, particularly in the United States.

Increasingly the line between pornography and mainstream entertainment has collapsed. “Over the past decade,” Barbara Creed has written, “the cinema’s life-long flirtation with sexuality and eroticism reached a high point when Sharon Stone uncrossed her legs in *Basic Instinct*, revealing a brief glimpse of skin and pubic hair. With the first above-ground beaver shot the dividing line between mainstream and pornographic cinema collapsed.”⁶³ In the late 1980s a number of European television channels started broadcasting soft-core pornography, leading to attempts by British authorities to restrict them in the name of “good taste and decency.”⁶⁴ But increasingly pornography was establishing itself as a semilegitimate (and significant) industry, with its main outlets through cable television and suburban video stores (more than a quarter of the American home video industry’s revenue was estimated to come from pornography).⁶⁵ However, these outlets in turn

were under threat from the possibilities of using the Internet to deliver pornography, and there is currently a continuing race between the technology, which is increasing the speed and accuracy with which one can download images, and those who would control the content of the net.⁶⁶

New technologies, especially video, have transformed pornography by reducing the cost of production and making movies available for home use. Most video stores feature an "adult section," and increasingly hotels and motels offer pornography as part of "in-room entertainment" (with sometimes elaborate precautions against use by minors). In the same way the development of chatrooms and porn sites on the Internet means that sexual desires can be globalized despite attempts to control them by governments and families. In 1998 joint police action in a number of countries closed down an Internet group known as wOnderland which facilitated the exchange of sexual images of children, claimed to have members in over forty countries, and was protected by codes which allegedly came from the former Soviet KGB,⁶⁷ and the FBI has been increasing its hunt for "travellers, people who troll the net for impressionable children, trying to persuade them to meet for sex in the real world."⁶⁸ In this light the attempts of Canadian customs to prevent the import of pornography from the States or the censorship of "western decadence" by paternalistic governments seems oddly old-fashioned. The Singapore government, for example, banned the films *The First Wives Club* and *Eyes Wide Shut*, allegedly because of lesbian references. But the Singapore authorities have also been leaders in trying to limit access of children to "undesirable" sites on the web. "Your child could be a victim on the net," proclaimed a full-page advertisement for the major Singapore Internet service provider: "The World Wide Web has been a safety haven for social deviants of the world—flesh-traders, hate-mongers, advocates [*sic*] of dissent have all gathered there to give volume to their voices."⁶⁹

Not only pornography seems to be ubiquitous, but there has been a marked increase in the spread of live sex shows to places like downtown Melbourne and Toronto.⁷⁰ Phone sex is now an international business which the *Economist* claims "has been a boon of midget countries such as Moldova, Guyana and the Netherlands Antilles. Their short dialling codes mean that the punter may think he is dialling a domestic long-distance number rather than making an expensive international call. In 1993 Guyana's revenue from telecommunications traffic came to a startling 40% of national GNP."⁷¹ The hero of the novel *Tokyo Vanilla* first explores his homosexuality through the

phone: "More and more of the advertisements . . . were being devoted to the new telephone services: sex tapes, message banks, dial Q2's, and telephone clubs."⁷²

Note as ever the ambiguities of globalization: the west is simultaneously the source of moral strictures and of the commodification which undoes them. Many of the "traditional" taboos invoked as needing defending against globalization are in fact the product of earlier imported ideologies, whether they be Christianity in the Pacific and Africa or Communism in China and Cuba. The attempts by governments such as the Chinese to foster economic growth without the corresponding "freedoms" of the west are unlikely to prevent a growth in sexual consumerism, whether because of the sorts of economic inequality fostered by neoliberal economics, the impact of new styles and tastes brought about through affluence, the influx of tourists, or the greater mobility and access to western ideas through travel and electronic communications.

Squaring the Circle: The Battle for "Traditional" Morality

Frantic orthodoxy is never rooted in faith but in doubt. It is when we are not sure that we are doubly sure.

—Reinhold Niebuhr

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos at the beginning of 1999, the senior minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, spoke of his concerns that travel and new technologies threatened to destroy the cohesion of Singapore society. "Once you abandon the responsibility that comes with bringing children into the world," he said, "we become as feckless as some societies elsewhere."¹

Meanwhile halfway across the world the Republican prosecutors who were beseeching the Senate to impeach President Clinton were struggling with the same paradox that bothered Lee. The social changes wrought by globalization have fundamentally changed the norms around sexual behavior, and in dissolving the divide between "private" and "public" have introduced new issues and tensions into everyday political life. We are constantly struggling to make sense of a shifting global order, in which it is gradually becoming apparent that international capitalism is both capable of unsettling almost all areas of life and of generating huge movements of resistance, the most potent of which are likely to appeal to a yearning to return to an imagined past in which the "traditional" sex/gender order symbolized a society in which the social order was widely understood and slow to change.

When I began this book in 1998 one read stories of women being forced into compulsory segregation by the new fundamentalist Taliban regime in Afghanistan,² while in the United States the lynching of a young gay man, Matthew Shepard, came to symbolize the extent to which hatred of homosexuals could go. While almost every country could offer its own stories

of sexual hysteria and the politicization of issues around sexual morality, there did seem to be a common element in the concerns expressed about the rapidity of social change and its impact on morality and sexual behavior. Sometimes such politicization has taken the form of explicitly antiwestern attacks, as in criticisms in Russia of sex education as leading to "a violation of the ecology of the soul"³ or the mob attacks in late 1998 on Indian cinemas showing Deepa Mehta's film *Fire*, about a love affair between two sisters-in-law, led by the Hindu group Shiv Sena, which claimed the film was an affront to national morality. Meanwhile rising divorce rates in China—nationally 13% but over 25% in some of the largest cities—provoked a national debate about whether to criminalize adultery, as increasing numbers of women were abandoned by their husbands.

Perhaps the best way of understanding the links between, say, the Moral Majority in the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan, is to see them as both reactions to rapid social and economic change—in other words to globalization itself. Both cases represent a retreat from and attack upon secularism and rationality, and a determination to break down the divide between the religious and the political. Fundamentalism is itself generated, and while it may be backed by some women it usually displays itself as a form of masculine assertion in the face of discomfort due to social change. Discussing the tendency of fundamentalists to concentrate on the control of women's bodies, Karen Brown argues that "fundamentalism is born in times and places where, for a variety of reasons, the world suddenly seems too complex to comprehend" and often arises "where social, cultural and economic power is up for grabs."⁵ Under such conditions, appealing to sexual fears and insecurities is a likely response from both government and non-governmental sectors, as breakdowns in the old gender/sexual order, often a direct product of globalization, become a target for both Right and Left. This is most obvious in fundamentalist movements, whether in Algeria or in North America, but huge confusion around these issues is reflected almost everywhere. There is a rich symbolism to the story about the first-ever beauty contest in Rabat, Morocco, where opposition from fundamentalists led, not to the canceling of the event, but to contestants parading in ankle-length caftans, their hoods serving as veils.⁶

This sort of fundamentalism is often expressed as a desire to exclude the rest of the world, and reaches its apogee in the horrific killings of the Khmer Rouge or today's Algerian terrorist attacks on anyone who disagrees

with them. The juxtaposition of these two examples reminds us that fundamentalism need not rest upon religious beliefs; the political fundamentalism of Pol Pot or the Nazis shared with religious fundamentalism the desire to exterminate, quite literally, all divergence within society. As the world becomes more and more subject to the influence and images of consumer capitalism the attempts to reject globalization may well become more savage, whether in the name of religion, tradition, or national sovereignty (as in Burma and North Korea). V. S. Naipaul suggested that the strengthening of Islam in Malaysia is in part to create a bulwark against the forces of globalization,⁷ and ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel warn against the Internet because of its links to the outside world.⁸

There seems to be a remarkably widespread belief that we are living through a period of collapsing moral values. In terms which would apply equally to many rich countries, Carol Jenkins wrote of Papua New Guinea: "The myth of the golden age of sexual restraint circulates among Papua New Guinea's elders (as elsewhere) and almost every man and woman in an opportunistic sample of over 400 persons interviewed throughout the nation in 1991 believed that sexual behavior had increased in licentiousness."⁹ In Laos government officials bemoan the declining morality of "youth," ignoring the fact that it is largely a consequence of their own economic policies. Similar beliefs and contradictions seem to underlie calls for a return to moral conservatism in the United States from the Christian right and movements such as True Love Waits, which since 1993 has sought to pledge teenagers to abstain from premarital sex.

Central to all these forms of fundamentalism is a view of the world in which there is no room for uncertainty or ambiguity, and a hostility to what is seen as foreign and cosmopolitan threats to an imagined national or ethnic identity. As Lynn Freedman put it: "While the fundamentalist's own community is reinvented with a righteous and glorious past, the Other is demonised and vilified, thus lending an apocalyptic quality to the battle that is looming."¹⁰ Often national and religious identities are linked to a particular view of women, who are both venerated as the defenders of moral purity and feared for their sexuality, which risks escaping total male control. While this sort of analysis is common to the western perception of fundamentalist Islam, very similar factors existed in the creation of the myth of white Southern womanhood, or in the contemporary rhetoric of the "profamily" religious

right. This is most apparent when we consider the role of organized religion, probably the most powerful force in opposing the changes in morality and the sex/gender order brought about by global markets and neoliberal economics. (Pope John Paul II, for all his anti-Communism, has been also critical of what he regards as the excesses of capitalism.) After the Clinton administration reversed the hard line against abortion adopted by the United States under Reagan and Bush, the Vatican became the leading international exponent of this position, and lobbied strenuously at the 1994 Cairo conference to prevent any acceptance of abortion in the final document, with support from some Islamic countries.¹¹

Through the century movements for equality for women have often been depicted by their opponents in exclusively sexual terms, with feminism often equated with promiscuity and lesbianism in an attempt to discredit it. Thus the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was attacked as leading to unisex toilets, the use of women in combat, and the legalization of gay marriage, and was defeated after a failure to win ratification in enough state legislatures.¹² Equally fear of pregnancy and venereal disease were major factors used in winning women's support for "traditional" morality until biomedical developments made them less persuasive arguments. There were both Left and Right versions of this, with Communists blaming capitalism for prostitution and the degradation of women, and the Right speaking of radical leftists undermining morality with subversive ideas of female equality and free love.

It is hardly surprising that sexual panics are so central to many of the angry reactions against social change, for even non-Freudians can recognize the extent to which fear of change is often based on unconscious fears of rampant sexuality. Think of the sexual scripts underlying the Ku Klux Klan's hatred of blacks or the "redneck" reaction to hippies in the sixties, depicted in the film *Easy Rider*. Only those over fifty can remember the extraordinary fury which greeted the fashion for young men in the 1960s to grow their hair long, a reaction which seemed born of a whole set of sexual and gender anxieties, although for some years immigration officials in some east Asian countries would order instant haircuts for young men whose locks were too long. Despite the largely unconscious homoerotic undertones to much extremist politics, these tend to coexist with passionate hostility toward any acknowledgment of homosexuality, as among contemporary European skin-

heads or American right-wing groups. Thus crazies like the Phineas Priesthood oppose the banking system and interracial marriage and "want to root sodomites from the land."¹³

That there is a sexual element to racism is now widely acknowledged, and fears of the exotic "other" are fueled by the increase in migration and population movements which now are an indispensable part of the global economy. In both the pre-Civil Rights South and apartheid South Africa there was an obsession with "racial purity," reflected in stringent laws against "miscegenation." It is hardly surprising that one observer claims that since the end of apartheid "[i]nter-racial and gay sex . . . crop up more frequently in South Africa's advertising than they do in that of most western countries."¹⁴ More recently there have been echoes of fear of sexual mixing across race and religious lines in virulent anti-immigrant feelings in many parts of Europe, while the Ku Klux Klan has added hatred of homosexuals and abortionists to its earlier fears of racial mixing.

Scapegoating around sex has a long history, with prostitution and venereal disease commonly blamed on foreigners—syphilis was commonly associated with any nationality but the speaker's own. Equally, sexual fears and fantasies have often played a significant role in persecutions, whether it be the medieval crusades against the Albigensians, feared for their vows of chastity, or the stereotypes of predatory sexual monsters deployed against the Chinese in nineteenth-century America, or the Jews in Nazi Germany. Such persecutions result from what Stanley Cohen called "moral panics," a condition where "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests."¹⁵ In his overview of the concept Kenneth Thompson links the apparent frequency of "moral panics" in the contemporary world to the sorts of structural, technological, cultural, and discursive changes which constitute what is generally regarded as constituting "globalization," though he does not use this term.¹⁶ "Moral panics" need not center on issues of sexuality, though they will usually have some sexual overtones.

In his discussion of the reaction to the growth of pornography and free discussion of sexuality in post-*perestroika* Russia Igor Kon uses the term "moral panic,"¹⁷ and recurring panics over race, drugs, and youth, though often expressed in terms of threats to "law and order," tend to conjure up images of wild and uncontrolled teenage sexuality. The arguments around "trafficking in women," already discussed, can be related to "moral panics" in a number

of countries revolving around both fear of sexuality and dislike of the ways in which migration is changing the social order. Interestingly there are examples of such panics both in countries which are the source and in those which are the recipients of immigrant sex workers. Doezenia cites mission workers and police in Nigeria and Romania appealing to traditional values and national pride as justifications for denying women permission to leave the country.¹⁸

"Moral panics" can be understood both as specific populist reactions, and as calculated appeals by political and economic elites to these reactions as ways of winning popular support for other policy shifts. Both Reagan and Thatcher were skillful in combining neoliberal economics with social conservatism, using the rhetoric of "family values" and "traditional morality" to disguise the extent to which their own policies were undermining the social fabric. Thus Reagan adopted a very hard line against abortion, and Thatcher introduced restrictions on the discussion of homosexuality—the infamous section 28, which banned local governments from "intentionally promoting homosexuality,"¹⁹ which was reversed by the Blair government (not without opposition) in 2000. Such measures were calculated to win support from conservative working-class workers who might not be enchanted by the attacks on unions and the dismantling of welfare problems which were central to both leaders' programs.²⁰

Both Reagan and Thatcher understood the possibility of displacing the very real fears and anxieties brought about through rapid economic change onto the alleged social disintegration represented by rising divorce, single mothers, lesbian and gay assertion, and other symbols of a changing sex/gender order. Both also understood the need for the Right at the end of the Cold War to replace the external enemy of Communism with one closer to home. (Of course other sorts of issues and groups, most notably immigrants and ethnic minorities, have been seized on as scapegoats in many industrialized countries to explain the casualties of neoliberal economics.) And both probably believed the arguments of such capitalist triumphalists as George Gilder and Charles Murray, who argued that reducing welfare and strengthening the free market would enhance family stability, despite the considerable evidence around them to the contrary.²¹

One of the justifications of conservative politicians in the United States for "getting tough on welfare" was quite explicitly to link new welfare restrictions to fears of the alleged sexual degeneracy of the poor, as in attacks on

women who, it was claimed, sought to become pregnant in order to qualify for single-parent benefits. Weighing in on the side of the welfare "reform" espoused by conservative Republicans in the 1990s, Murray declared that "[i]llegitimacy is the most important social problem of our time . . . because it drives everything else."²² Symbolically the welfare reforms finally enacted in 1996 were known as the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which stated in its preamble that the Congress finds "1: marriage is the foundation of a successful society; 2: marriage is an essential institution of a successful society which promotes the interests of children." Similarly, highly publicized campaigns to close brothels have been a frequent device of politicians seeking, as Ian Buruma wrote of one such campaign in Taipei, to establish "public probity and private virtue."²³

In the contemporary world AIDS has become a central focus around which all sorts of sex panics can be generated.²⁴ Rather like syphilis the initial stages of AIDS are frequently blamed on foreigners. Early in the epidemic Japanese officials claimed they would avoid AIDS because they had "no homos," and gay bars banned foreigners on the grounds that they might carry infection.²⁵ In his remarkable study of Japanese denial of HIV, John Treat suggests that it was fueled by both fear of the foreign and a particular sort of voyeurism, allowing for a displacement onto others, especially Americans.²⁶

An Egyptian film, *Love in Tabia*, shown on television in 1992, tells of the seduction of three Egyptian men by western women, who leave them a note saying "Welcome to the world of AIDS"²⁷ (in other versions of this story the women are explicitly Israeli). As late as 1998, reports from Pakistan suggested that HIV was being still linked with "the impact of western society."²⁸ In one sense, as the argument of this book illustrates, there is some truth to this, but one fears the stereotyping of western decadence is being used as an excuse to avoid honesty about both sexual behavior and needle use in Pakistan. In the same way I have met Vietnamese officials who claim their prostitutes come from Cambodia and their drug users from China. In all these cases the metaphor of contamination is clear: fear of HIV merges with a larger and more amorphous fear of being infected by foreigners.

Many of these panics are about creating AIDS as the domain of "the other," through the demonization of "foreigners," of the bisexual man, of the promiscuous black stud, of the sex worker, and so forth. Examples of all of these abound in the twenty-year history of the epidemic, when it has been common for particular individuals who could be defined as "AIDS carriers"

to become convenient scapegoats for a whole set of unexamined fears and phobias. In western countries such scapegoating has not infrequently been linked to racial stereotyping, with particular hysteria around positive African men which plays on existing myths about hypersexuality and fears of AIDS as particularly linked to Africa.²⁹ Fear of infection has become a new urban myth, as in stories of people holding up banks by threatening to use infected needles on the tellers. Other cases are more serious; there is at least one apparently accurate report of a man being burned to death in a village in India because he was suspected of "spreading AIDS through a syringe needle and . . . molesting women."³⁰

Beyond the stereotyping of AIDS as "a foreign disease," the implementation of prevention programs leads to larger moral arguments about sexual (and injecting) behavior. Thus after at least ten years of HIV-prevention work in the Philippines a spokesman for the Catholic Bishops' Conference could say that "[t]he solution is that husbands should remain faithful to their wives and then there is no AIDS."³¹ Monsignor Quitorio's statement ignored one of the real dilemmas in HIV work, namely that those at risk are often themselves monogamous and yet, as is true for women in most cultures, not in a position to demand monogamy from their partners. The larger point is that the epidemic has created a series of issues around which defenders of "traditional morality" have been forced to make painful choices, involving a recognition that public health measures to prevent transmission of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections often conflict with dominant religious codes. Many countries have seen bitter battles over moves to advertise condoms, to develop sex-education programs in schools, or to openly discuss homosexuality.

Since the 1990s sex tourism/pedophilia scares have served as moral panics which displace real issues of social justice and development. Genuine indignation at horror stories of children being sold into the sex industry are easily inflated, so that absurd claims show up in pamphlets and on the Internet, such as the assertion that "in Thailand 12% of the GDP comes from child prostitution."³² Partly due to the work of End Child Prostitution, Pornography, and Trafficking (ECPAT) there has been an increase in arrests for pedophilia in Southeast Asia as western nations legislated to criminalize pedophilia, even when it occurs outside national borders. (ECPAT was established in Bangkok in 1990 by a group of NGO workers, and now has chapters in almost thirty countries, both rich and poor. It joined with UNICEF

and the Swedish government to organize the first World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in 1996, which was attended by 122 governments.)

Thailand itself has proscribed paid sex with anyone under the age of eighteen, although it took a long struggle to pass the legislation. One MP who sponsored the 1996 bill said that some had criticized moves to punish those who sold their children into prostitution "as running contrary to norms requiring children to respect, obey and be grateful to their parents."³³ Japan followed suit in 1999, setting the age for paid sex at eighteen, both at home and abroad. While there have already been occasional much-publicized trials of tourists for purchasing the services of underage prostitution in several Asian countries, it is hard to believe that this legislation has more than symbolic importance.

While there is a great deal written about the growth of child prostitution, above all in Southeast Asia, it is extremely difficult to get accurate figures. Part of the problem is definitional: no one would dispute that someone of eight is a child, but what about a girl or boy of fourteen? In 1995 UNICEF published figures defining anyone under the age of eighteen as "a child"; on their estimates India (with 450,000) and the United States (with 300,000) were far ahead of Thailand, the Philippines, and Cambodia in the numbers of children working as prostitutes.³⁴ Yet given the realities of life in cities such as Calcutta and Manila—or Elizabeth, New Jersey—is it meaningful to include sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds as "children" for these purposes? When the London *Sunday Mirror* ran allegations against science fiction author Arthur Clarke for having sex with boys in Sri Lanka, one of the "boys" whose testimony they quoted was seventeen at the time³⁵—in a country where far younger children have been conscripted as soldiers into the ongoing civil war. Moreover how reliable can such figures be, when the very definition of prostitution is vague and often law enforcement authorities have a stake in existing arrangements?

It becomes convenient for both local governments and western morals campaigners to portray pedophilia as the product of an expanding international sex trade, even though evidence suggests the foreign pedophile, prowling the beaches and bars of Sri Lanka or the Dominican Republic, is only a minor figure either in maintaining prostitution or in child abuse. (A 1998 UNICEF study in the Philippines suggested 80% of child sexual abuse was by locals.)³⁶ There are growing reports of police uncovering "international

rings" of child pornography and prostitution, and such reports commonly blur such vital distinctions as that between six- and fifteen-year-olds. The pedophile is almost always cast as male, but ECPAT has also claimed that some western women are sexually abusing "boys" at the Vietnamese coastal city of Hoi An.³⁷

In some ways the panic about sex with children is a displacement of earlier panics about homosexuality, revealed in the emphasis on protecting children in antihomosexual campaigns and the disproportionate emphasis on homosexual pederasty, even though it makes up only a minority of "sex abuse" of children.³⁸ It appears that the hostility which could be displayed in attacks on homosexuals in the recent past, but which is now both ideologically politically incorrect and likely to upset significant interest groups, is increasingly displaced into a new mythology of the omnipresent figure of the child molester, who can be painted as unproblematically evil and often protected by powerful friends. This was a feature of the hysteria around pedophilia which accompanied a highly publicized series of investigations in the Australian state of New South Wales in the late 1990s,³⁹ which led to several suicides of people named as pedophiles.

Equivalent panics can be found in the past, but globalization allows for their internationalization, so that stories of pederasty around public figures like Michael Jackson spark off panics across the world. Michael Jackson's prominence from the mid-1980s on as a global superstar—100,000 concert tickets were sold when he appeared in Bangkok in 1993, a record for Thailand—meant global media attention to the allegations of child sexual molestation that same year.⁴⁰ Such allegations allow a display of self-righteous indignation which appears to transcend any divisions of nation, class, or race, and permit the media and politicians in both rich and poor countries to avoid facing up to far more difficult issues like the systemic abuse and exploitation of children as a result of structural adjustment and global economics.

The question of pedophilia is a particular problem for gay men, who are often caught between two conflicting pressures. On the one hand there is a constant tendency in the media to conflate pederasty with homosexuality, despite the fact that the most common form of child molestation is of girls by older men; on the other many gay men know from their own experience that teenage boys are often the initiators of sexual contact with adult men, and are aware of the hypocrisy which often sets the age of legal consent at a higher level for homosexual sex. Some of the most interesting contemporary

gay literature grows out of these conflicts—in recent years I think of Scott Heim's *Mysterious Skin*, Neal Drinnan's *Glove Puppet*, and Matthew Stadler's *Allan Stein*, all of which can be read as somewhat ambivalent about the issue of sex between adults and "children"⁴¹ but nonetheless concerned to interrogate the issues seriously. More common of course are sensationalist novels such as Andrew Vachss's *Batman: The Ultimate Evil*, whose cover speaks of "the most vicious and remorseless enemies he has ever faced . . . those who traffic in the flesh of children."⁴² The novel is set in a disguised version of Thailand, and Vachss subsequently called for a total boycott of Thai products in protest at alleged government encouragement for "the sexual exploitation of children as a tourist attraction."⁴³ There is at least one recent literary exploration of female pedophilia, in A. M. Homes's tour de force *The End of Alice*, which is far more ghoulish than the gay writings mentioned.⁴⁴

IN THE HEART OF THE GLOBAL: THE PARADOX OF THE UNITED STATES

Sex. In America an obsession. In other parts of the world a fact.

—Rabih Alameddine, *Koolhaas*, 1998

While Communists and fundamentalists alike in nonwestern countries can blame the rapid shifts in the gender/sexual order on foreign influences, it is more difficult for those who share their fears within the United States, itself the source of many of the globalizing changes responsible for these shifts. Yet moral panics seem particularly apparent in the United States, which is characterized by the constant tension between highly successful consumerism and deeply entrenched puritan values—the contrast which so bewildered foreigners when it was played out in the Clinton trials. As Steven Seidman put it: "Americans are divided between a romantic and a libertarian sexual ethic, two constructions which serve as master frameworks through which Americans think about sexuality."⁴⁵ This is symbolized by the dual myths of America's foundation, as a place for individual freedom and as a refuge for those whose religious beliefs were so strong they were unable to find a peaceful home in Europe. Needless to say neither myth has much to say to the indigenous population who were displaced in the name of "freedom," nor to the descendants of those brought to America as slaves.

The United States has always been caught between its dual heritage of

religious puritanism and liberal capitalism. As Richard Hofstadter pointed out in his classic essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics":

The sexual freedom often attributed to [the enemy], his lack of moral inhibition, his possession of especially effective techniques for fulfilling his desires, give exponents of the paranoid style an opportunity to project and freely express unacceptable aspects of their own minds. Priests and Mormon patriarchs were commonly thought to have especial attraction for women, and hence licentious privilege. Thus Catholics and Mormons—later Negroes and Jews—lent themselves to a preoccupation with illicit sex. Very often the fantasies of true believers serve as strong sado-masochistic outlets, vividly expressed, for example, in the concern of anti-Masons with the alleged cruelty of Masonic punishments.⁴⁶

This was written in 1963, but the contradictions have never been as sharp as in the past twenty years.⁴⁷ Changes in the nature of the economy, the emergence of a society dependent on mass consumption, and the relentless colonization of almost all areas of life by huge corporations make it increasingly difficult to maintain simultaneously the market economy and the puritan ethos. Thus religious conservatives have boycotted the Walt Disney Company (owner of the ABC network) over several of its shows, such as the television series *Ellen*, and Republican House leader Newt Gingrich pointed to what he saw as the "degeneracy" of contemporary popular culture: "Look at the sick signals we are now sending through the entertainment industry and popular culture. Is it any wonder that society is so confused if not downright degenerate?"⁴⁸

Gilbert Herdt has argued that certain economic and political changes, caused by globalization, are helping produce new anxieties and responses around sexuality in the United States.⁴⁹ The question is why do similar anxieties in other rich western countries not produce the same fixation on sexuality, and the same polarization around issues of sex and gender? While some issues of sexual regulation have produced great anxieties in other western countries—abortion in Germany, Ireland, and Poland; homosexuality in Britain—there is far less evidence of the passions which have produced bombings of abortion clinics and lynchings of gay men in the United States.⁵⁰ Even Ireland, with its deeply Catholic culture, has considerably relaxed prescriptions against abortion, though not without very bitter debates which have stressed the identification between Catholic doctrines and "Irishness."⁵¹ The reason for the passions around sexuality in America would seem

to lie in the peculiar emphasis on sexual morality in American history, combined with the absence of the more disciplined class-based politics found in Europe. Yet Canada, which shares at least the latter with the United States, has experienced less of a mobilization around a right-wing moral agenda in recent years. The most significant variable is probably the high degree of religious belief in the United States (almost all studies find a much higher degree of fundamentalist beliefs in the United States than in any other liberal democracy) and the political mobilization around religious beliefs over the past several decades.⁵²

Soon after the liberationist movements of the 1960s people began speaking of a moral "backlash," largely in relation to race, feminism, and sexuality in the United States, so that opposition to issues such as school desegregation, abortion, and the Equal Rights Amendment was depicted as the reaction of those who supported the status quo to rapid change. The breakdown of the distinctions between "public" and "private" for the past thirty years has involved bitter debates about the balance between "liberation" and "responsibility," as part of which increasing areas of social life have become arenas for political contestation. Susan Faludi quotes Dr. Jean Baker Miller as saying "A backlash may be an indication that women really have had an effect, but backlashes occur when advances have been small, before changes are sufficient to help many people . . . It is almost as if the leaders of backlashes use the fear of change as a threat before major change has occurred."⁵³ Yet the danger of using the term "backlash" is that it underestimates the extent to which moral conservatism is itself a social movement, with its own vision for change and a desirable future.⁵⁴

The first contemporary examples of such sexually motivated "backlash" are found in the reactions to the feminist and gay movements of the 1960s and the broader shifts around gender and sexuality, often fought over issues like abortion, divorce, homosexuality, and pornography.⁵⁵ Richard Nixon campaigned for the presidency in 1972 as a champion of traditional values, painting George McGovern as the candidate of "acid, amnesty and abortion," and his vice president Spiro Agnew was fond of attacking his opponents as "effete intellectuals," echoing the implicit homophobia of McCarthyism. After the 1973 Supreme Court decision (*Roe versus Wade*) that abortion was a constitutional right, debate over abortion became central to mainstream American politics. Traditionally fundamentalist Christians had kept away from mainstream politics, but there was a significant change as

increasing numbers of "born again" Christians became political activists, symbolized by the Moral Majority, which was founded by the Reverend Jerry Falwell in 1979.⁵⁶ In abortion they found an issue which allowed for alliances with their traditional enemy, the Catholic Church, and which became pivotal to the religious right's growing influence within the Republican party.

By the time of Reagan's presidency abortion had become a touchstone against which all national Republican candidates were judged, and Reagan vowed to appoint only known anti-abortionists as federal judges. The 1984 election saw a common front between Catholic and evangelical Protestant leaders in attacking the Democratic vice-presidential nominee, Geraldine Ferraro, a pro-choice Catholic, particularly vulnerable because she was a woman. Under pressure from the Right, George Bush abandoned his somewhat more liberal attitudes, and had he won the 1992 election it is conceivable that his appointments to the Supreme Court could have led to the overturning of *Roe versus Wade*. As it was, the Court did impose a number of restrictions on abortion during the late 1980s, in practice limiting the availability of abortion to poor women.⁵⁷ Political passion about abortion far exceeded that in other western countries other than those, such as Ireland or post-Communist Poland, with a particularly strong Catholic Church. At the same time the charged language around "illegitimacy" and "births out of wedlock" has largely disappeared in the richer countries of Europe, a language which combines appeals to "traditional" mortality and fear of the (largely nonwhite) "underclass." Ironically that side of American conservatism which prevents effective sex education in schools and the provision of contraceptives to teenagers is responsible in large part for the illegitimate mothers whom conservatives condemn.

In the 1990s abortion was less clearly a vote winner for the Right. In 1996 Bob Dole won the Republican nomination despite being lukewarm about much of the religious right's agenda, and pro-choice Mary Landrieu was elected to the Senate from Louisiana, a state which might be expected to combine strong Catholic and fundamentalist Protestant voters. Yet despite this, the Right has sought to use other issues—pornography, homosexuality, creationism—to rally support from groups whose economic interests might lead them away from the Republican party. The hatred of the Right toward Clinton, so apparent in the determination of the Republicans to remove him from office despite his popular support, is a reflection of the rise of politics built around the rhetoric of "traditional morality." That Clinton adopted

much of the conservative rhetoric about issues such as welfare reform and a balanced budget just increased right-wing passions about his positions on issues such as abortion rights and allowing homosexuals to serve in the military. That he was forced into an uncomfortable compromise on the latter—the “don’t ask, don’t tell” formula, which still allowed the military to discharge personnel for homosexuality⁵⁸—once again set the United States aside from most other western countries. Even Israel, where the military is a central institution and where Orthodox pressure is significant, lifted most such restrictions in 1993.

From the late 1970s, when Anita Bryant led a very well publicized campaign to repeal an antidiscrimination ordinance in Dade County, Florida, using the name Save Our Children, homophobia was central in American political debate. Again, the United States is a peculiar anomaly. Despite other rulings implying a constitutional right to privacy, the Supreme Court in 1986 in *Hardwick versus Bowers* refused to overturn state antisodomy laws, which still remain in a number of states, the last such examples in the western world. At the same time the United States has by far the largest and best-organized gay/lesbian movement in the world, and one which has become a significant donor to many liberal political campaigns.⁵⁹ Despite the Supreme Court’s ruling, many U.S. states and cities have enacted antidiscrimination ordinances on the basis of sexuality, and in a few cases have recognized domestic partnerships. Perhaps in the Court’s ruling on sodomy there is a parallel to the American commitment to capital punishment, also outlawed in most other western democracies, and also linked to a peculiar religiosity which sees no contradiction between preaching respect for life and executing large numbers of criminals. It is not accidental that capital punishment and gun ownership are heaviest in those areas, mainly in the South and West, where fundamentalist Protestantism most thrives.

The hypocrisies of the American approach to sex is a perennial punching bag, and it is nowhere clearer than around adolescent sex. When the PLWHA magazine *Poz* included three condoms in a special issue on youth and HIV in 1998, a number of distributors, including the big bookstore chain Barnes and Noble, refused to carry the issue. While the sexual attraction of adolescents is assiduously promoted by media and advertising, in real life it is either criminalized or medicalized. Note the case of the American school teacher and her thirteen-year-old lover, which was treated as both, with the teacher sentenced to jail after pleading guilty to second-degree rape,

then rearrested after seeking out the boy on her release—while the media, having acknowledged that the boy “looked and acted older than his years,” explained her acts as the product of “bipolar disorder, also known as manic-depressive illness.”⁶⁰ Note, too, the difficulties in finding an American distributor for the 1997 film *Lolita*, finally released in the States a year later after various cuts. Here the film followed the path of the novel, which was rejected by four American publishers before being accepted by Olympia Press in Paris. That, however, was in 1955 and three years later Putnam published it in the United States.⁶¹ There were similar problems in Australia, where a decision to release the film for restricted viewing led to a storm of protest, orchestrated by right-wing parliamentarians, but in much of Europe the film was released without protest. Presumably what was most disturbing to its critics was the depiction of a fourteen-year-old girl as knowingly seeking the attention of an older man, thus unsettling the image of the passive victim which is central to the conventional way of understanding pedophilia.

In 1994 legislation known as Megan’s Law (after a particularly notorious case of child molestation), requiring the compulsory—and public—registration of pedophiles even after their release from prison, was introduced in New Jersey. Subsequently similar laws were adopted across the country, a requirement for federal crime-fighting funds. The status of these laws is now in doubt after a ruling by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in July 1999 finding its state’s law “constitutionally repugnant,” but this has not prevented arguments for similar laws in other countries.⁶² And it was largely pressure from the United States which led to the ILGA’s losing its observer status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations because some of its member organizations refused to condemn “man-boy love.”⁶³

The peculiarly American combination of free-market economics with restrictive sexual morality means that sex panics are not always easily internationalized. Indeed the U.S. moral right, despite considerable efforts, has had at best a patchy influence on the rest of the world, despite their intervention in disputes such as the New Zealand debates around the decriminalization of homosexuality in the mid-1980s (when American evangelists linked the alleged “soft” line of the government on moral issues to their prohibition of visiting nuclear warships). In the late 1990s there were reports of U.S.-based groups funding campaigns against moves in Britain to lower the age of consent for homosexual acts and more general antihomosexual campaigns in both Australia and New Zealand. Since the end of apartheid several

avowed Christian parties have emerged in South Africa, whose rhetoric echoes closely that of the American religious right, combining appeals to "traditional" morality with support for capital punishment and "the free market" (justified by appropriate biblical quotes).⁶⁴ Considerable American money has flowed into various overseas antiabortion campaigns.

Reagan's position on abortion had a global impact as it came to be imposed as a condition of American assistance to reproductive health programs abroad, and at times his administration went beyond this to question support for any type of family planning. At the 1984 International Population Conference in Mexico City the U.S. delegation, headed by right-wing Republican Senator James Buckley, not only opposed any mention of abortion but questioned the assumption that rapid population growth was necessarily a problem.⁶⁵ While the Clinton administration reversed this stance and returned to the earlier American position of enthusiastic support for birth-control programs, the issue became enmeshed in conflict between Congress and President Clinton over payment of dues to the United Nations—and led to the decision of the United States in 1998 to cease all funding for the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

The problem which faces American moral conservatives wishing to export their values is that they are undermined by the very pleasures of consumption which represent the American way of life to much of the world—and often find themselves in an uneasy alliance with governments (such as those of China, Cuba, and Iran) they most detest. Similarly the internal arguments of American feminists and homosexuals often seem largely irrelevant outside the United States. By the 1990s gay communities in urban America were bitterly divided between those who argued for a culture of sexual adventure and those who saw in this a necessarily irresponsible attitude to HIV. In 1996 the group Sex Panic emerged in New York in protest at closures of various sex venues, claiming a major backlash against sexual freedoms. These claims were probably exaggerated, but they pointed to a particular form of moralism which was now coming from within the gay community and created extremely explosive divisions in which prominent writers and activists clashed over the extent to which the gay movement should promote particular forms of sexuality, rather as feminists still clash over pornography;⁶⁶ indeed Sex Panic included several women who had been prominent in the pornography debates of the 1980s. The clashes were complex, involving as they did radical differences about appropriate strategies for HIV prevention

and arguments about how far the gay/lesbian/queer movement should embrace the call for recognition of same-sex marriage. Both the proponents and opponents of the new morality showed that particular disinterest in either history or geography—other times, other places—which so characterizes New York intellectual provincialism.

But if Sex Panic was disinterested in the rest of the world this disinterest was not reciprocated, and it is the nature of the global media that millions of us outside the United States will know far more about you than you do about us. American influence helps export its anxieties to the rest of the world, as in the spread of American evangelism. (Billy Graham's crusade in the 1960s was an important influence on the best-known Australian Protestant crusader, Fred Nile, who since 1981 has held a seat in the upper house of New South Wales.) There are a few examples of evangelism coming from elsewhere, most notably Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church, which from its base in Korea has made some inroads into the United States, and supported right-wing political causes, in particular through control of the *Washington Star* newspaper. Its clout is suggested in the support of such influential Americans as former Nixon and Reagan adviser General Alexander Haig.⁶⁷ One might see some parallels in the influence of Indian gurus, such as Krishnamurti, in California since the 1920s, and more recently the spread of Buddhism in some western countries, but in neither case is the same sort of political mobilization involved.

Mormon missionaries, sent abroad in pairs to promote their particular version of the word of God, have been joined by a powerful evangelical Pentecostalism, which is important in South Korea and parts of Africa. (American televangelists are often seen on South African television.) In particular this sort of evangelism has been making significant converts in Catholic Latin America. In Guatemala up to 40% of the population are now Protestants, as are around 30% of the population of Chiapas state in Mexico, site of bitter protests against the central government. In Brazil the Protestant vote has become significant, and shares with the American right a preoccupation with defending traditional morality and the family, even while not necessarily more conservative on economic issues.⁶⁸ Yet while there are significant similarities with the American religious right on some issues, it would be misleading to see the growth of evangelical Protestantism in Latin America as simply another example of American imperialism, as David Martin hints at in questioning whether Latin American religion has been "americanized."

As he points out, it is also true that Protestantism is being "latin americanized."⁶⁹ Equally the rigid orthodoxy of some American Jews has had an enormous impact in Israel, and has been one of the largest stumbling block to any reconciliation with the Palestinians. Alongside Disney movies and American pop music the particular apocalyptic vein of American religiosity is being exported, with, I would argue, potentially far more serious consequences.

T E N

Conclusion: A Global Sexual Politics?

Suggestions that the sexual is political can be found in a range of nineteenth-century philosophical writings, but became central for a number of twentieth-century thinkers, whether like Reich and Marcuse they drew on the theories of Freud, or, as in the case of many second-wave feminists, they were consciously hostile to psychoanalysis. In a globalizing world there is a need to rethink these connections, both practically and theoretically.

A sexual politics for this century will need to draw on various theories of sexuality but also on recent developments in the study of international relations, and conceptualizations of both the state and the global. We badly need a political economy of sexuality, one which recognizes the interrelationship of political, economic, and cultural structures, and avoids the tendency to see sexuality as private and the political and economic as public. Such a political economy, as the term suggests, is more concerned with material conditions and political action than it is with theories of discourse and representation, but it is also concerned with the ways in which the state is being undermined by a combination of global economic forces and particularist political movements. Globalization implies the decline of state sovereignty and allows the rise of transnational social movements as political actors. Thus Manuel Castells argues:

The growing incapacity of states to tackle the global problems that make an impact on public opinion . . . leads civil society to increasingly take into their own hands the responsibilities of global citizenship. Thus Amnesty International, Greenpeace, *Medecins sans Frontieres*, Oxfam, and so many other humanitarian non-government organizations have become a major force in the international arena in the 1990s, often attracting more funding, performing more effectively, and receiving greater legitimacy than government-sponsored international efforts. The "privatization"