

Globalising Prostitution in the Middle East

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this essay is to critically analyse the globalisation of prostitution with particular reference to the cultural Middle East, the traditional Middle East and the Maghreb. Although the Middle East was traditionally seen as a conservative region, the forces of globalisation influenced the phenomenon of prostitution. The essay is divided into three parts.

The first part will analyse the concept of prostitution and its relationship to globalisation. What are the theoretical approaches when analysing trans-national prostitution?

The second part will focus on the sources and predisposing factors for prostitution in Middle East. How do culture, history, and religion influence the rise of prostitution? Are influences, such as colonialism, orientalism, and politics important in the rise of trans-national prostitution in the region?

The third part will analyse the relationship between the effects of globalisation and prostitution in the Middle East. The essay will show that in spite of the fact that traditional Middle Eastern values restrict the growth of prostitution, globalisation encourages this phenomenon. Do economical problems, trans-national migration, sex tourism, militarism, technology, and westernisation promote the rise of prostitution in the region?

This essay concludes that in spite of the traditional culture in the Middle East trans-national prostitution is a growing phenomenon in the region. Globalisation brought a regional economic gap and hardships, westernisation and rapid development in oil rich countries but in the same time created the fertile grounds for the appearance of trans-national prostitution, a relatively new phenomenon for the Middle East.

The globalisation process influenced not only the economics, politics and cultures of many countries but also created certain global trends in every field, including prostitution. The objective of this essay is to critically analyse the globalisation of prostitution with particular reference to the Middle East. In this essay both the *Mashek* and the *Maghreb* will be considered as part of the Middle East since they share the same cultural heritage. Also the main focus of the essay will be globalisation of heterosexual prostitution in the region. This essay will show that in spite of the fact that traditional Middle Eastern values restrict the growth of prostitution, globalisation encourages this phenomenon.

In order to show this, the essay is divided into three parts. The first part will analyse the concept of prostitution and its relationship to globalisation. To explore this relationship it is important to look into the different theoretical approaches of trans-national prostitution. The second part will search for the sources and predisposing factors for prostitution in Middle East and will examine how culture, history, and religion influence the rise of prostitution. Also influences, such as colonialism, orientalism, and politics will be explored. The third part will analyse the relationship between the effects of globalisation and prostitution in the Middle East. In this context, factors such as economical problems, trans-national migration, sex tourism, militarism, technology, and westernisation will be examined.

I. Global Prostitution

In order to analyse the globalisation of prostitution a theoretical framework must be used. Such a theoretical framework is difficult to develop as a positive theory because of the strong normative views held. Attitudes towards prostitution are never neutral and prostitution is always seen as a problem for developing countries.¹ Most people see prostitution as a moral issue and do not link it to the wider political economy. The prostitutes are considered as “depraved individuals in a functioning society or oppressed characters in a base world.”²

The reasons for becoming a prostitute often have social and personal basis. Working in an illegal and immoral market pushes many women into prostitution simply because it makes economic sense.³ Many times consumerism is the main reason for prostitutes to choose this profession.⁴

Thorbeck argues that it is important to see prostitution from a feminist⁵ perspective and to understand its socio-economical and political context while equally considering the power relations involved.⁶

¹ Heather Montgomery, ‘Children, Prostitution and Identity: A Case Study from a Tourist Resort in Thailand’ in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.140.

² Ibid. p.141.

³ Martin Oppermann, ‘Introduction’ in Martin Oppermann eds., *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.7.

⁴ Ibid.p.8.

⁵ Montgomery considers that there is a war of words between scholars that study prostitution and certain elements of academic feminism do not accept prostitution under any circumstances, unless is set in context of male exploitation of women. On one hand there are women who write from a sex-workers perspective and other women who claim to speak for them. This war of words creates a moral bias that is hard to escape from. (Montgomery,1998:141)

The prostitutes⁷ may be classified into three categories: high-class prostitutes, tourism prostitutes and poverty prostitutes. The first category caters to the domestic elite and foreign businessmen, is generally well-educated with well-established careers and practices prostitution as a sideline. The second category of prostitutes is often independent and attached to bars or hotels. The last category, the poverty prostitutes, is the worst off since they are always abused and receive low payment.⁸

According to Truong, tourism sexual services appeared in the hotel business as an attempt of small hotels to compete with larger ones.⁹ In spite of this fact, recently there was an increase in prostitution in the luxury hotels where highly educated prostitutes of diverse backgrounds and national origins work as escorts. Even in developing countries one can find in these first-class hotels European or American prostitutes.¹⁰

Prostitution is not a trait but a response to apparent needs and constraints while sex work is not an orientation but an occupation engaged in by choice, perceived necessity¹¹ or even forced into as in the case of trafficked women. In terms of monetary exchange, prostitution can go further and the 'customer' may provide

⁶ Susanne Thorbek, 'Introduction' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 6.

⁷ Sittrak observes that prostitution can be disguised in many different ways, places and contexts. The places include hotels, teahouses, discotheques, beauty salons, barber shops, truck stops and the jobs could be under the guise of bar hostesses, waitresses, masseuses, hair-dresser assistants, and escorts. Other places where one can encounter prostitutes are streets, parks, shopping malls, or even exclusive member's clubs, for the richer customers. (Sittrak, 1998:82)

⁸ Martin Oppermann, 'Introduction' in Martin Oppermann eds., *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.7.

⁹ Thanh-Dam Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in South East Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 170.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.171.

¹¹ Heather Montgomery, 'Children, Prostitution and Identity: A Case Study from a Tourist Resort in Thailand' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.144.

also accommodation, clothing, travel and may even spend days with the prostitute. Therefore nobody labels this relationship 'prostitution' but rather courtship¹² or friendship. Many times the direct monetary exchange could be replaced with support for education or paying for healthcare.¹³

This essay will use a theoretical framework that breaks prostitution down into three main categories: high class prostitutes, tourism prostitutes and poverty prostitutes. The last two categories are the most exposed to globalisation because of sex tourism and trans-national migration.

Nowadays globalisation influences prostitution at many levels. In theory globalisation creates a market that operates from similar principles. Nevertheless the reality is that there is an economic gap between the North and South where development exists in uneven stages that are distinctively contextualized in different cultures.

Globalisation brought a new neoliberal push that is seen through the decreasing support for welfare services while international investors are protected. In many societies governments work on economic liberalisation but also on persistent repression. The results are not always the expected ones since these policies create inequalities and lawlessness.¹⁴

Using a global structural analysis Truong argues that internationalisation of capital and the simultaneous incorporation of leisure into the international division of

¹² Martin Oppermann, 'Introduction' in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), pp.11-13.

¹³ Martin Oppermann, 'Introduction' in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.13.

¹⁴ Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.27.

labour promoted the rise of prostitution. At the same time the emergence of collective sex tourism indicates a process direct of capital accumulation.¹⁵

Most scholars attribute the rise of prostitution on the growing poverty of developing countries. In spite of this factor, poverty is not only a local problem but one that exceeds national borders and profiteers of sex industry are from all over the globe. Therefore the problem of prostitution is not anymore a local problem but a global one that responds to the trends of globalisation.¹⁶

The increased prostitution around the world is a global phenomenon that was even supported as a way of development by World Bank, the IMF and USAID. In the same time governments from poorer Third World countries act like 'global pimps' to offer their women to foreign men. Therefore foreign influence such as militarism and tourism increased the rate of prostitution in many developing countries.¹⁷

Pettman argues that intensified globalisation and contemporary restructuring of the international political economy make women feel 'out of place', thus vulnerable to 'sexploitation'.¹⁸

The export-oriented economic policies of many developing countries undermined the subsistence farming and thus destroyed the sources of income in many rural areas.¹⁹ The development process damaged the self-sufficiency of the rural

¹⁵ Joan Philip and Graham Dann, 'Bar Girls in Central Bangkok: Prostitution as Entrepreneurship' in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p. 60.

¹⁶ Thanh-Dam Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in South East Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 190.

¹⁷ Sinith Sittrak, *The Doughters of Development: Women in a Changing Environment* (London: Zed books, 1998), pp. 83-84.

¹⁸ Jan Jinay Pettman, *Worldning Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.185.

¹⁹Ibid. pp.198-199.

economy, therefore pushing many young girls into prostitution.²⁰ As a result many women from poorer rural areas left their families and started to prostitute themselves in urban areas. Here they were exposed to violence and dangerous health risks, such as HIV/AIDS.

It is necessary to examine the recent global economical developments in order to find out why many women are pushed into prostitution in the Middle East. The neoliberal policies promoted by international institutions created mass unemployment in countries such as Ukraine or Egypt, thus forcing many women into poverty and sometimes even into prostitution.

The globalisation of prostitution is influenced by two crucial factors: sex tourism and migration. These two globalisation factors encouraged the trans-national movement of capital and culture.

Defining sex tourism is more complex and hard. In any case it requires a person to be more than 24 hours away from home and sex needs to be a motive for the journey.²¹ Pettman argues that sex-tourism recreates the colonial, racial and gendered power relations.²²

According to Oppermann “a sex tourist is someone who engages in sex with a prostitute”.²³ Looking from the intention-opportunity spectrum many tourists

²⁰ Sinith Sittrak, *The Daughters of Development: Women in a Changing Environment* (London: Zed books, 1998), p. 110.

²¹ Martin Oppermann, ‘Introduction’ in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.2.

²² Jan Jinay Pettman, *Worldning Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.196.

²³ Martin Oppermann, ‘Introduction’ in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.5.

experience sexual encounters simply because they feel lonely or are sexually deprived or just because the opportunity arises and they meet like-minded individuals.²⁴

Sex tourism²⁵ is commonly seen as an economic (return) flow from the developed countries to the developing²⁶ ones. In spite of the common believe that sex tourism is the same with prostitution, the reality is that they just share a lot of commonalities. Prostitution is the exchange of sexual activity for payment or financial and other benefits²⁷ while sex tourism involves also leisure and sometimes emotional attachment.²⁸

The forces of globalisation also brought a tremendous development in technology and communications. Nowadays virtual sex tourism opens new opportunities for many and prostitution could be accessed online.²⁹

Migration is another factor that encourages the globalisation of prostitution. The late twentieth century as well as the beginning of the twenty first century is

²⁴ Ibid. p.7.

²⁵ In regards to sex tourism Enloe asks herself” Why do some countries, richer and more powerful in the international political economy, ‘send’ the men, and why poorer countries and regions ‘sell’ women, young men, and children to these men? Why do some states become sex-tourist destinations and others supply those tourists?”(Pettman 1996: 196)

²⁶ In countries like Thailand the government is directly involved in promoting sexual tourism and prostitution. In a 1980 local tourism development strategy, the Thai government ministers were encouraging local governors to create more sexual establishments in order to attract tourists and capital. (Truong, 1990: 179)

²⁷ Martin Oppermann, ‘Introduction’ in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.1.

²⁸ Compared with developed countries where prostitution is a simple exchange of money on an emotionally neutral basis, in developing countries there is a structural prostitution relationship between the tourist and the natives. In this case every non-economic definition (love, flirtation, friendship, attraction) of the relationship is likely to be undermined by the native’s strong economic interest in long-term personal relationship with the tourist. (Gunther,1998:74)

²⁹ According to Kohm and Selwood there are three main kinds of virtual Internet sex tourism destinations. The first kind is the authentic destinations conform to the sexually oriented locations of conventional tourism. The second kind are the fantasy locations that have suggestive names of real places while the third type of locations are the website that do not have a precise location and tend to identify themselves by known personalities or institutions in the sex industry. (Kohm and Selwood, 1998:127)

marked by trans-national movements for work, business and leisure.³⁰ In this globalised picture the migration of women for sex work is a complex issue determined by economic developments and poverty.

In many countries there are very few job opportunities for migrant women that have no education or skills. The few women that find unskilled work realise that the long hours and back breaking activities are tiresome and thus many opt for prostitution, a more leisurely and financially rewarding activity. Many women enter this activity also because of the fact that older sex workers came back to their country of origin with success stories, rich clothes, jewellery and well-kept appearance.³¹

The migration of women prostitutes is circulatory because they keep in touch with family and friends, they send remittances and eventually return home. Also according to John Anarfi, prostitution is for many women a temporary occupation since many women enter this occupation only to support themselves and their family or to gain capital³² to start a business. Therefore economic independence and female agency are the main reasons for practicing prostitution.³³

Although most migrant prostitutes work independently, many become indebted and thus depended on middle-men, criminal organisations and sometimes even authorities.³⁴

³⁰ Kamala Kempadoo , 'Migration and Tourism' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds. , *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 99.

³¹ John K. Anarfi, 'Ghanian Women and Prostitution in Cote d'Ivoire' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.110.

³² Remittances are a crucial factor in trans-national migration of sex workers because they are seen as a link between migrant and the home community. The money most often goes into saving, renovating or building a house or investing in profit making ventures.

³³ Kamala Kempadoo , 'Migration and Tourism' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds. , *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 100.

³⁴ Ibid. p.100.

Globalised prostitution has also an inherent link with abuse because generally the male dominated society sees women as sexual objects, providing sexual and domestic labour, which is believed to be a labour of love.³⁵ Behind prostitution lies a world of violence and exploitation. Many prostitutes are murdered and abused not by their clients but also many times by the police. For many prostitutes cruelty, violence, psychological traumas are part of their everyday job.³⁶

Most researchers of prostitution realize that this profession is a story of torture, degradation with little traces of hope. In this business the women are humiliated and narcotised to accept abuse on a daily basis.³⁷ Often in a country where prostitution heavily relies on foreign sex workers³⁸, the government and the locals have a very tight control over the migrant women, most of the times denying to them many rights and protections.³⁹

An integral part of the globalisation of prostitution is also racism. In the international movement of persons race plays a major role, in prostitution as well as in domestic service. Pettman argues that domestic service is highly internationalised in the construction of various racial stereotypes. For example in Jordan there is a

³⁵ Jan Jinay Pettman, *Worldning Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.188.

³⁶ Thanh-Dam Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in South East Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 189.

³⁷ Heather Montgomery, 'Children, Prostitution and Identity: A Case Study from a Tourist Resort in Thailand' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.141.

³⁸ In general migrant sex workers have a great deal of control over their migration although they arrive in the host country with a strict contract and large debts. Although many women work on the streets, in hotels and in restaurants most of them have to have 'security fees' for protections, and are always heavily supervised and live in a perpetual fear of police raids. (Kempadoo, 1998:100-101)

³⁹ Kamala Kempadoo, 'Migration and Tourism' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.99.

preference for the lighter- skinned and English speaking Filipinas over Sri Lankan maids. The domestic workers are stereotyped as passive, submissive, and sexual.⁴⁰

In terms of prostitution even in countries⁴¹ like the Caribbean island of Curacao, sex work among migrant women is racialised. For example lighter skinned Latinas are considered to be more sensual and erotic, thus they were in grand demand and over-represented in the local sex industry.⁴²

In order to understand global prostitution it is absolutely necessary to see not only the reasons but also the effects of it. In our globalised world, economic development, sex tourism and trans-national migration of prostitutes are three important elements that establish an analytical framework for the globalisation of prostitution. In this context, racism and the abuse of women are many times part of this trans-national business.

II. Cultural and Historical Patterns Of Prostitution in the Middle East

In the Middle East and especially in the Arab world sexual behaviour is a social taboo. As a consequence the Arab culture accommodates discrete incidents such as prostitution in order to sustain the traditional sexual behaviour, patriarchal

⁴⁰ Jan Jinay Pettman, *Worldning Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.192.

⁴¹ Coco Fusco argues that prostitution in countries like Cuba also plays out in a racialised arena where the Mulata woman is seen as a sex object. This stereotype is a colonial legacy and it is deeply rooted in the attitudes about sex between black women and white man. In this context the image of the erotic Mulata becomes an adopted identity among women in order to boost their position in the sex industry. (Kempadoo , 1998:102-103)

⁴² Kamala Kempadoo , 'Migration and Tourism' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds. , *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.101.

family values, and to legitimise some patterns of sexual violence.⁴³ Arab women's lives are determined by their sexuality and men consider their sexuality disturbing, thus they feel the need to control it. This control is translated through a mobility control and regulation of the physical sphere where family serves to create political and social margins.⁴⁴ In most Islamic countries there is a continuous sex-segregation. . Dating is forbidden and lost chastity is regarded as a catastrophe.⁴⁵

In Arab countries like Morocco, there is a personal status code, *Moudawana*, which regulates marriage, divorce, inheritance and duties for men and women. This code reduces women to a minor and unequal status since they have to depend all their lives on their fathers, husbands, brothers or sons.⁴⁶ In the colonial and post-colonial period, secular legal codes have been adopted in many Mediterranean Arab countries but in matters of family or personal status laws they deferred to religious authority. The ideals of Islamic authority and cultural traditionalism were invoked by many nationalists and Islamists in order to gain a greater political control.⁴⁷

For many centuries Middle Eastern Muslim societies tolerated, regulated and repressed prostitution in the same way as Christian Europe.⁴⁸ Historically, Arab state

⁴³ Latefa Imane, 'Un programme de sensibilisation et de soutien auprès de prostitués masculins,' *Le Journal du SIDA* 92-93 (December 1996-January 1997), p. 55.

⁴⁴ Ana Lopez Lindstrom, 'Il y a 50.000 prostituées marocaines de luxe dans la cote espagnole: A Necessary Myth' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p.161

⁴⁵ M. El-Behairy, 'Islam: sexual relations in the Muslim world' in Bullough, V. L. & Bullough, B. (Eds.) *Human Sexuality: An Encyclopedia*. (New York & London: Garland Publ. Inc., 1994), p.12.

⁴⁶ Ana Lopez Lindstrom, 'Il y a 50.000 prostituées marocaines de luxe dans la cote espagnole: A Necessary Myth' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p.161

⁴⁷ Judith Tucker, *Gender and Islamic History* (Washington, DC: American Historical Association, 1993), pp. 19-33.

authorities always considered prostitution as a practical alternative to male sexual violence and a good source of tax revenues. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba argues that "institutional prostitution forms part of the secret equilibrium of Arab-Muslim societies."⁴⁹ During the Arab and Ottoman empires, government efforts to contain prostitution and promote social-sexual norms by closing down brothels were short-lived and usually determined by political circumstances and to augment authority of the state.⁵⁰

Colonialism brought to many Third World countries an orientalist and racist perspective of native women. From an orientalist perspective the prostitute is a sexualised and racialised woman, part of the colonial domain and the working class.⁵¹ The colonial discourse brought in Europe the concept of orientalism centred on an eroticised image of the Arab women and the harem.⁵² Belly dancing and the symbols of the harem such as the sheesha, the costumes, rituals, jewellery, the postures and disrobing of the body created the image of the oriental women as an exotic and erotic object. The Arabian Nights stories and the writings of 19th century travellers such as Flaubert, portray the Arab women as a 'femme fatale' and submissive.⁵³

⁴⁸ As'ad AbuKhalil, 'A Note on the Study of Homosexuality in the Arab/Islamic Civilization,' *Arab Studies Journal* 1/2 (Fall, 1993), pp. 32-34.

⁴⁹ Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *Sexuality in Islam* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 193.

⁵⁰ Hassanein Rabie, *The Financial System of Egypt: A.H. 564-641/A.D. 1169-1341* (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), op.cit. p. 119.

⁵¹ Susanne Thorbeck, 'The European Inheritance: Male Perspectives' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 29.

⁵² Malika Mehdid, 'A Western Invention of Arab Womanhood: The Oriental Female' in Halef Afshar eds., *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggle for Liberation* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1993), pp. 21-22.

⁵³ Ibid. pp.23-26.

The same images have been portrayed to our days by the global media but the conservative culture of the region and Islam blocked the development of mass sex tourism as it is the case of countries like Thailand. In spite of this sex tourism still exists in the Middle East although the demand for local women is much less, with a few notable exceptions such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Turkey and Israel.

Peretz argues that in the 1980s traditional secular policies were replaced by politicised Islam. In countries such as Egypt, Syria, Iraq and among the Palestinians, new Islamic political movements started to become more influential and challenged the traditional political establishment.⁵⁴ In this case there was a return to traditional values in regards to women, thus many women started to wear again the *hijab* and the political establishment became more conservative.

As a result of this new of traditionalism, nowadays women in Muslim societies are seen in two ways: either decent or prostitutes. Lindstrom argues that in Islamic countries “a woman who laughs too much, smokes, talks with men to who she is not related, goes out of the house often, has sexual relations before marriage, is considered to be a prostitute”.⁵⁵

In the Muslim world there are very harsh punishments for prostitution. In Jordan for example there are very long jail terms or even death penalty if a girl is Moslem. In Egypt the punishment is jail time while in Lebanon the anti-pimp law is not well enforced, but active sex traders can be killed by Islamic fundamentalists, if they hire Muslim girls. The traditions, politics, culture and Islamic values of the Middle East hindered the mass development of prostitution and created a relatively

⁵⁴ Don Peretz, *The Middle East Today* (Westport, Connecticut and London: Praeger Publishers, 1994), p.150.

⁵⁵ Ana Lopez Lindstrom, ‘Il y a 50.000 prostituees marocaines de luxe dans la cote espagnole: A Necessary Myth’ in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 164.

conservative establishment. In spite of the Middle Eastern traditionalism, the current globalisation forces are a continuous challenge to this establishment and thus to the rise of 'immoral' professions such as prostitution.

III. Globalising Prostitution in the Middle East

The coming of globalisation in the Middle East affected the status of prostitution in the region. In spite of the fact that traditional Middle Eastern values restrict the growth of prostitution, globalisation encouraged this phenomenon. The theoretical framework previously stated needs to explore three other categories besides economic development, trans-national migration and sex tourism. The particular socio-political situation of the Middle East makes it necessary to also examine militarism, technology, and westernisation in relation to globalised prostitution. These three categories are important because they are in direct connection with the local political and religious establishment.

Globalisation brought in the Middle East an uneven economic development, which increased the gap between men and women, thus forcing some women into prostitution.

Although the Middle East region benefited enormously from the wealth created by the oil boom of the 1970s not all the countries in the region benefited. The Gulf States benefited the most and experienced gross capital formation, a strong increase in growth rates of GDP and a vast improvement in living standards. In the

past 20 years the growth weakened thus aggravating the economic situation of developing countries in the region. This economic decline put pressure for reforms to promote economic efficiency and stimulate free trade, investment, and liberalisation. In countries like Egypt, Tunisia or Morocco the move to open up the market and currency devaluation created a gap between the rich and the poor.⁵⁶

With the exception of Israel and Turkey, the total labour force of women as a proportion of the population in the Middle East is considerably low with a participation rate ranging between 20 percent and 30 percent of the total population in the late 1980s.⁵⁷ Having no alternatives many women became prostitutes in order to survive.

The global economic changes force many women to move in search for new opportunities. Domestic service is an important part of this international labour migration and it is estimated that between 1 million and 1.7 million Asian women are involved in this business. The 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was the main factor that drew media attention to the plight of domestic workers, especially in countries such as Jordan, Syria or Saudi Arabia.⁵⁸

In order to understand the level of migration of women from South Asia to the Arab states from the Persian Gulf it is enough to look into the migration trends and numbers. Most of these migrant women are 'domestic workers' such as nannies or maids but many are also sex workers, or pushed into prostitution by abusive employers. It is estimated that over 230,000 left Indonesia to work in Saudi Arabia

⁵⁶ George T.Abed and Hamid R.Davoodi, Challenges of Growth and Globalisation in the Middle East and North Africa, IMF 2003, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/med/2003/eng/abed.htm>. Accessed 27/04/2004

⁵⁷ Nadia Hijab, *Womenpower: The Arab debate on women at work*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

⁵⁸ Jan Jinay Pettman, *Worldning Women* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.189.

between 1983 and 1990 while more than 640,000 left Sri Lanka in order to come to work in the Middle East.⁵⁹ The countries of origin for most domestic workers are Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Thailand and India while the host countries are usually Saudi Arabia, Kuwait or the United Arab Emirates.

The people who organize, travel, papers and jobs for Asian women to go to work in the Middle East as domestic labourers charge very high prices⁶⁰ thus forcing them into prostitution. Many poor and powerless people do not see prostitution as an ultimate horror but a hard choice among many. For them alternatives such as scavenging or collecting garbage are less attractive because this way they can not earn much money.⁶¹ Many of these women are treated like simple commodities and often are obliged to offer the maximum benefit their masters through prostitution.⁶²

The trafficking of women is in direct correlation with trans-national migration. The traffickers are seen by the prostitutes in two antagonistic ways: exploiters and helpers,⁶³ thus making it harder for the police to find and destroy the prostitution rings.

Thorbeck argues that it is very hard to distinguish between the women who are trafficked and the ones who are not. Trafficked women could be the ones who are

⁵⁹ Robert Espinosa, 'Migration Trends: Maps and Chart' in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild eds, *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (London: Granta Books, 2002), p. 276.

⁶⁰ Susanne Thorbeck, 'Introduction' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 5.

⁶¹ Heather Montgomery, 'Children, Prostitution and Identity: A Case Study from a Tourist Resort in Thailand' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds., *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.149.

⁶² Sinith Sittrak, *The Daughters of Development: Women in a Changing Environment* (London: Zed books, 1998), p. 88.

⁶³ Susanne Thorbeck, 'Introduction' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 5.

deceived by their foreign employers and forced into prostitution but also prostitutes that are cheated by their employers being forced to pay high debts and interest rates.⁶⁴

Kuwait is a destination country for women from Asia who are put into forced labour. The traffickers usually withheld their passports, alter their contracts and do not pay their salaries. Often foreign male workers kidnap runaway maids and force them into prostitution. In 2002 Kuwait City police arrested a Bangladeshi pimp for running several brothels. These brothels were supplied with kidnapped Asian women, mostly runaway maids, and that were forced into prostitution. Many times women that are victims of trafficking are treated as criminals and are detained, jailed, or deported.⁶⁵

Saudi Arabia is also a major receiver of women and children trafficked for purposes of commercial sexual exploitation. The women and children usually come from countries like Indonesia, Bangladesh and Pakistan and are forced to do domestic labour but also to prostitute themselves.⁶⁶ The girls are usually sexually abused and maimed by their employers and often they return to their country of origin as “dead bodies”.⁶⁷ Many of the women that arrive in Saudi Arabia are deceived by their employers and forced afterwards into prostitution. In 1998 the police uncovered a prostitution ring in which Thai women had been promised jobs in restaurants and afterwards they were forced into prostitution.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ U.S. Department of State, Trafficking in Persons Report 2003: Kuwait

⁶⁶ M. Hughes, Laura Joy Sporcic, Nadine Z. Mendelsohn, and Vanessa Chirgwin, *Factbook on Global Sexual Exploitation*, Coalition against Trafficking in Women, 1999, <http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw/saudia.htm>
Accessed 26/04/2004

⁶⁷ Michael Zielenziger, “Selling Girls from Poor, Rural Families Is an Old Custom in Nepal,” *Knight Ridder Washington Bureau*, 3 January 2001

⁶⁸ Adnan Malik, “Three Thai Women Forced into Prostitution in Saudi Arabia,” *Associated Press*, 25 June 1998

In the global sex trade, traffickers charge prices that depend on the anticipated dangers and difficulties.⁶⁹ In Israel for example, Eastern European women are traded by local pimps for prices ranging from US\$5,000 to \$20,000.⁷⁰ Therefore the market created is huge and traffickers could earn between US\$50,000 and 100,000 a year from each woman, resulting in a US\$450 million sex industry⁷¹. As part of this industry small ten women brothels could make up to 750,000 shekels per month (US \$215,000).⁷² Tel Aviv is one of the most famous cosmopolitan centres of prostitution and trafficking in the Isreal and places such as the Tropicana are famous brothels. Here there are about twenty women from former Soviet republics that work in shifts. The customers are Israeli soldiers, businessmen, tourists, and foreign workers. Foreign workers are predisposed customers since they are young, unable to have their wives with them. Also Orthodox Jews and Arabs are two other groups that create the need for prostitution.⁷³ The need for European prostitutes is not specific only to Israel but also to the neighbouring Arab countries.

Even since the colonial times many men from the colonies viewed European women as both desirable and unattainable. Therefore after the economic boom in certain developed countries such as the United Arab Emirates, the demand for European women became very high. In the oil rich emirate of Dubai women from

⁶⁹ Susanne Thorbeck, 'Introduction' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 5.

⁷⁰ Martina Vandenberg, "'Invisible' Women Shown In Russia's Demographics," *St. Petersburg Times*, 13 October 1997, p.4

⁷¹ Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, "A modern form of slavery," *The Jerusalem Post*, 13 January 1998,
<http://www.uri.edu/artsci/wms/hughes/catw/catw.htm>
Accessed on 26/04/2004

⁷² Michael Specter, "Traffickers' New Cargo: Naive Slavic Women," *New York Times*, 11 January 1998

⁷³ Elisabeth Eaves, "Israel not the promised land for Russian sex slaves", *Reuters*, 23 August 1998

Eastern Europe are in high demand.⁷⁴ The same is the case of Egypt where globalisation, prostitution and belly dancing form an interesting conundrum.

In Egypt, globalisation touched the ancient art of belly dancing. Nowadays belly dancing is used by many women from developing countries as a first step towards prostitution in Middle Eastern countries, usually oil rich states. Of course the phenomenon is not general but many times, girls from poorer countries enter belly dancing and then prostitution in order to make quick money in a society where respectable local women do not enter this profession.

For example, today there are only 372 belly dancers in Egypt because Islamic fundamentalism has forced many local performers to retire and take the veil.⁷⁵ In spite of this, the demand from package tours and some locals is still great and therefore the market is open to foreign belly dancers. There are many Russian, Argentinean, Brazilian and French belly-dancers in Cairo. They work in dinner cruise boats, hotels and a string of sordid nightclubs along the Pyramids Road.

For many foreign belly dancers coming from developing countries, performing in 'ballet' troupes was many times the first step towards prostitution. In 2003 the Egyptian government decided to ban foreign belly-dancers to perform in the country. Besides protecting the local belly-dancers the main aim which remains tacit was to remove foreign prostitution, which began with the invasion of foreign dance troupes performing at nightclubs. These troops mainly came from former Soviet Union. Banning foreign belly dancers was a morally correct action because this action was aimed to stop the exploitation of under-aged and or poorly paid dancers, who were

⁷⁴ Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 41.

⁷⁵ Susan Hack, 'Tummy talk', <http://dir.salon.com/sex/feature/2000/07/19/bellydance/index.html>
Accessed on 28/04/2004

taken advantage of by both Egyptian hotel owners as well as deceitful local and foreign agents. It was easy for these people to exploit them since the money they make in Egypt is generally better than what they would make back in Ukraine or Belarus. Only in 2002, thirty eight under-aged foreign belly-dancer prostitutes between the ages of 16 and 18 were 'arrested' within a two week crackdown. In spite the policy crackdown the real problem in Egypt is the high demand that comes from the Gulf visitors, especially Kuwaiti and Saudi, who are well-known for treating Cairo like a 'gentlemen's playground'.⁷⁶

The globalisation of prostitution touched also the Maghreb where the pattern is somehow different. For example Morocco is more liberal than other Arab countries and because of its proximity to Europe the kingdom became also an exporter of prostitutes for Spain, thus reversing the traditional trans-Mediterranean route.⁷⁷ The situation is rather interesting since most other Arab countries receive but do not send prostitutes across the Mediterranean. Globalisation also brought in Spain a change of taste thus increasing the demand for the erotic 'other'.

The high number of prostitutes in Spain is also influenced by the high numbers of Gulf Arabs that live in the Malaga region and the demand for Moroccan domestic servants is very high.⁷⁸ In spite of this, the number of Moroccan prostitutes in Spain is highly exaggerated by Moroccans for several reasons. Firstly there is a tendency to control female mobility by threatening women liable to emigrate with the social stigma of the slave trade. Secondly Moroccans want to prove that Moroccan

⁷⁶ Susan Hack, 'Tummy talk', <http://dir.salon.com/sex/feature/2000/07/19/bellydance/index.html>
Accessed on 28/04/2004

⁷⁷ Ana Lopez Lindstrom, 'Il y a 50.000 prostituees marocaines de luxe dans la cote espagnole: A Necessary Myth' in Susanne Thorbeck and Bandana Pattanaik eds., *Transnational prostitution: Changing Global Patterns* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 158.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

women are beautiful since they are so much in demand in Europe. These exaggerations⁷⁹ want to prove that Muslim Moroccans are superior to the decadent Spaniards who are responsible for the increasing sex trade across the strait of Gibraltar.

Globalisation accentuated the sex trade throughout the Middle East. Nowadays the region is both an exporter and importer of sex trade. On one hand, many rich Gulf Arabs, especially Saudis, travel further away from the Middle East in order to find sex. In places like Thailand they are known to be generous but also violent.⁸⁰ On the other hand, the Middle East has many centres of international prostitution such as Dubai, Istanbul or Marrakech. Because of increased tourism, the media often identifies these places as centres of new internationalisation of both workers and customers.⁸¹

In spite of the fact that it is illegal, Dubai is an international prostitution hub since its economy is based on tourism and trading. Ever since the oil boom, the emirate is thriving economically and became a truly cosmopolitan society with residents from the West, native Emirates Arabs and poor labourers from developing countries.

The prostitution networks here are also very cosmopolitan with prostitutes from Russia, Ethiopia, Uganda, Philippines, Pakistan, India, Morocco and even the UK. According the World Sex Guide⁸², a website that caters to sex tourists, the Russians and Ethiopians are the most frequent prostitutes and the Indian prostitutes

⁷⁹ Ibid.,pp.166-167.

⁸⁰ Joan Philip and Graham Dann, 'Bar Girls in Central Bangkok: Prostitution as Entrepreneurship' in Martin Oppermann eds. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p.67.

⁸¹ Dennis Altman, *Global Sex* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p.107.

⁸² World Sex Guide, Dubai-United Arab Emirates, <http://www.worldsexguide.org/dubai.txt.html>
Accessed 26/04/2004

are part of a well organised trans-Oceanic prostitution network. According to the same source⁸³ the Moroccans are the most expensive and cater only to rich Arab businessmen while the Ugandans are the cheapest ones. The British are less frequent and many times find European customers.

Poorer Arab countries such as Egypt are also attractive for international sex tourism. For many Gulf Arabs, Cairo is a favourite sex tourism destination. Over a million Gulf Arabs, mostly Saudi and Kuwaitis, come to Egypt every year to have fun and spend their money in expensive clubs, hotels or prostitutes. After midnight the clientele in Nile-view restaurants, switches from dining families to Gulf men and provocatively dressed single women. The prostitutes are usually from low class backgrounds and have no higher education but are willing to enter this profession because they can make in a day as much as they would make in a month in the poorly paid public sector. They are the ones who revitalize the prostitution business in Cairo. Officially illegal, the Gulf hard currency brings huge profits to the crumbling Egyptian economy. In a country where the inflation is rampant and recent economic liberalisation broadened the economic gap, foreign hard currency is always welcomed.⁸⁴

The small Egyptian coastal town of Dahab is also an interesting example of the power dynamics involved in sex tourism. In the small secluded Red Sea resort there is a widespread prevalence of intimate relations between Egyptian men and foreign women. The police harass these couples because the Egyptians involved in sex tourism in Dahab are men, and the effect is a worrying emasculation which strikes

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Karim el-Gawhary, 'Sex Tourism in Cairo' in *Middle East Report*, Vol. 25, no. 5, September-October, 1995, p.26.

a national chord. Scholars such as Behbehanian argue that the sexual policing of Egyptian-foreign couples in Dahab is a negative effect of globalisation. Harassing these couples helps “powerful multinational sectors of Egypt's tourism industry that continue to profit from exclusionary developments, such as those in Sharm al-Shaykh.” Pretending to defend moral and national values, the government directs tourist revenue away from small businesses and independent operators, towards big multinational companies and resorts such as Sharm or Hurghada. Also, compared to the rich Gulf Arabs that come to Cairo, the young "budget" traveller women of Dahab do not bring too much hard currency hence they are not a real asset for the Egyptian economy.⁸⁵

Sittrak argues that there are three forms of sex tourism worth emphasising: mail-order brides, traffic in women and international migration of Third World Women to First World countries.⁸⁶ Marriage is sometimes related to sex tourism since many women in developing countries wish to marry foreigners from developed countries in order to achieve economic security and help their families back home.⁸⁷

For many Gulf Arabs, Egypt is also a popular location for finding wives, especially in villages around the Delta town of Mansura, where it is believed that Napoleon's soldiers began mixing with the locals and the descendants are "dream women" with fair complexions and fine hair. This reputation has attracted many Gulf

⁸⁵ Laleh Behbehanian, Policing the Illicit Peripheries of Egypt's Tourism Industry, *Middle East Report*, 216, Fall 2000, http://www.merip.org/mer/mer216/216_behbehanian.html. Accessed 27/04/2004

⁸⁶ Sinith Sittrak, *The Daughters of Development: Women in a Changing Environment* (London: Zed books, 1998), p. 87.

⁸⁷ Thanh-Dam Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in South East Asia* (London: Zed Books, 1990), p. 187.

Arabs to this region. This marriage quest is also much racialised since Arabs come here to look for European look-alike women.⁸⁸

Marrying their daughters to Gulf men is good business for poor Egyptian farmers. Most of the times is poverty that pushes them into such marriages but recently consumerism became also an important factor. Many times the new son-in-law and his family offers to the bride's family a new cement house, a new fridge or VCR, or even a job for the bride's brother in the Gulf.⁸⁹

An interesting phenomenon in the trans-national marriage business is the practice of *zawag al-'urfi*. Sometimes times in order to give prostitution an Islamic cover, some Egyptian women enter into secret marriage contracts with their summer Gulf visitors. In Egypt this contract is called *zawag al-'urfi*, and is made without witnesses and usually ends in divorce by summer's end. Although it is condemned by many Islamic scholars it is largely practiced.

The Indian sub-continent is also a huge provider of wife-sex slaves for Middle eastern countries like Saudi Arabia. Since the oil boom in the 1970 more than 10,000 girls from Hyderabad⁹⁰, India, have been sold into marriage and prostitution in the Persian Gulf states.

Enloe argues that military bases and prostitution go together.⁹¹ Many groups protesting against military bases in developing countries made prostitution a central

⁸⁸ Karim el-Gawhary, 'Sex Tourism in Cairo' in *Middle East Report*, Vol. 25, no. 5, September-October, 1995, p.27.

⁸⁹ Ibid. p.27.

⁹⁰ John Robson, "The Exploitation of India's Youth: Thousands of Children Have Been Sold to Arabs in Deals Arranged by Ruthless Agents," *Ottawa Citizen*, 15 September 1991

⁹¹ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (London: University of California Press, 1989), p.81.

issue in their discourse because of its threats to public health and morality.⁹² The most major concern is AIDS that is wide spread around prostitutes that cater for the US military bases around the world.⁹³

The large U.S. and British military presence in Saudi Arabia has contributed to the increase in the trafficking of foreign women, especially in the port cities of Jeddah and Dhahran where the major military bases are.⁹⁴ Although the military bases in the Gulf do not attract as much prostitutes like military bases elsewhere, the few prostitution incidents that happen create tension between the military and the locals.

The relationship of militarism and prostitution is extended also to military occupation of certain countries. After the US occupation in Iraq, prostitution increased all over the country. The harsh conditions of the post-war period forced many Iraqi women to become prostitutes, especially the many war widows. Since they have no work or unemployment allowance this is the only way many Iraqi women can feed their children. In spite of the fact that this is the way of surviving the police is always harassing them. Although most prostitutes have local clients, there have been instances where military personal used their services. In this situation militarism, through the harsh conditions created by war and occupation, contributed to the rise of prostitution. In the post-Saddam era, brothels and adult entertainment places appeared all over Baghdad. The latest entertainment are the adult cinemas but also there are plenty of brothels where one can by for \$1,50 about 15 minutes of pleasure with a prostitute.⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid. p.82.

⁹³ Ibid. pp.86-89.

⁹⁴ Michele Landsberg, "Sex, Drugs, and Booze Hit Saudi Warfront," *Toronto Star*, 7 February 1991

⁹⁵ Christian Caryl, 'Iraqi Vice', *Newsweek*, 14/12/2003

Globalisation also brings the expansion of westernisation and consumerism through mass media. The westernisation of the Middle East transforms the local socio-economic relationships and develops identities and lifestyles that go beyond the expectations of one's parents. Such factors also influenced the rise of prostitution in the region.

The development and globalisation of tourism brought to many developing countries new aspirations and dreams for the younger generation that is influenced by the national promotion of non-productive leisure and pleasurable consumerism.⁹⁶ Nowadays the poor Bedouins of Dahab or the young hotel workers in Marrakech see the affluence of Western or Gulf tourists and are ready to do anything to have just a piece of the pie.

Globalisation also brought an incredible development in technology and communications. Therefore the Internet now opens up a new world for 'virtual' sex tourists, a world where there is no hassle, inconvenience, and threat of disease or violence.⁹⁷

Nowadays the sex tourist can access many websites that provide information about prostitutes in the Middle Eastern countries or they can just directly contact them through e-mail or a mobile phone. Although in many Middle Eastern countries the government monitors or bans certain websites that are considered to be against the Islamic values, the sex trade industry always finds ways to escape the police controls. An example is the pan-Arab satellite channels where one can watch advertisement for 'escorts' in different countries around the region. With the help of the latest

⁹⁶ Kamala Kempadoo , 'Migration and Tourism' in Kamala Kempadoo and Joe Doezema eds. , *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition* (London: Routledge, 1998), p.103.

⁹⁷ Steven Kohm and John Selwood, 'The Virtual Tourist and Sex in Cyberspace' in Martin Opperma ed. , *Sex Tourism and Prostitution: Aspects of Leisure, Recreation, and Work* (New York: Cognizant Communication Offices, 1998), p. 123.

technology the Arab prostitutes are able to go global and escape in the same time from the control of the local authorities.

In the past decades the Middle East has been presented in the media as a traditionalist region where Islamic values are fanatically respected by millions of people. Prostitution was seen by many in the region as a serious sin punishable by death.

In spite of these facts the reality of globalisation brought many changes in the Middle East and implicitly changed the nature of prostitution itself. While economical problems and war pushed many local women into prostitution the phenomenon became truly global through trans-national migration, sex tourism, technology, and westernisation.

In spite of the traditional culture in the Middle East trans-national prostitution is a truly growing phenomenon from Iraq to Morocco. Globalisation brought a regional economic gap and hardships, westernisation and rapid development in oil rich countries but in the same time created the fertile grounds for the emergence of trans-national prostitution, a relatively new phenomenon for the Middle East. The new globalising prostitution of the Middle East is changing the nature of traditional social relations in the region and only a strong opposition from Islamic and political authorities could stop this trend.

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