



Globalization's Siren Call: Perpetuating Sex Trafficking of Women in the Third World

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A poster for Human Trafficking Awareness Day

(<http://www.taintedcanvas.com/human-trafficking-awareness-day/>)

Introduction

As the oldest profession known to human kind, the sex trade has evolved throughout the ages. It has maintained a market in the past and continues to thrive as a commodity across the globe. Like this ancient occupation, globalization has been present throughout history, although today like the sex trade it has rapidly morphed into something far more powerful. It has dawned many faces and acts as a force felt in the world today. The trafficking of women as sex workers has become a key element in present day globalization, where women are increasingly being forced into the contemporary slavery of human trafficking. This current wave of globalization is perpetuating the sex trade in the form of human trafficking by providing new, cheaper and easier methods for enabling the movement of humans across borders and markets. It is this recent wave of globalization that is responsible for the growth in the trafficking of women in developing nations as sex workers. In this essay, I will examine the causes and consequences of human trafficking as well as the specific movements that have taken action against this ever-growing and changing market.

Transcontinental Movement

One reason for this is the gluttonous expansion of the global market and the intensifying worldwide desire for money. All throughout the globe, sex trafficking is no longer limited to one specific geographical location. It was believed to be centered in Asia before the 1990's, but it is now "increasingly transnational and fluid in character" (Hodge, 2007, pg. 165), allowing individuals to be drafted in one area, trained in another, then sent off to work in a completely new continent. Though any region can be a site of recruitment, transfer or the ultimate destination, it is the wealthy industrialized nations

that are commonly the desired end, due to their prominent sex markets and consumers. Poorer nations, on the other hand, are usually the sites of origin, as those who require the most need are victimized and exploited.

Scarcity of Resources

Poverty is an important aspect that aids globalization in creating sex workers. In terms of targets, the women in developing nations are those who are hit the hardest, as can be demonstrated by numerous studies. The prospect of a better life can lead women in areas of poverty and instability to search for jobs when they are experiencing economic disparity. Traffickers especially prey upon vulnerable individuals, such as Latin Americans and increasingly Eastern Europeans, due to the hardships these women face if they are left jobless, emphasizing a “feminization of poverty” (Robinson, 2006). Victims are lured into debt bondage and, through globalization, criminal groups form alliances with one another to create global human trafficking institutions, like the Chinese Triads allegiance with the Russian Mob (Cao, 2004). Furthermore, the displacement and subsequent poverty that follows many natural and economic disasters results in trafficking of the women in Third World countries because they are unable to provide themselves with a means to survive, creating a helplessness that results in their trafficking (Popli, 2008). When men become unemployed, women become segregated from agricultural work. This leads to women, who already feeling the strain of scarce resources, to believe it is necessary for them to provide economic support for their families. They look for employment in any way possible because of the threat of poverty. The sex trade can appear as their only option with its promise of fast cash (Robinson 2006).

Gender Dichotomies

Men are provided with more opportunities for jobs because of the belief that they do not face the same issues that may hinder a women's work, such as going on maternity leave or bearing the "economic burden of caring for children" (Popli 2008). This is another way in which globalization creates an opening for sex traffickers to exploit women in the Third World. Women in areas where the traditional societal structures have broken down will take greater risks. An increased feeling of agency will cause them to migrate and will be left vulnerable in areas they are unfamiliar with. Others migrate due to the need to support their families because "trafficking in women is a result of women's unequal economic status" (Popli 2008). This structural gender discrimination forces women to seek employment wherever they can since gender based educational biases often make them the "last hired and first fired" (Popli 2008).

Due to the interconnected nature of our world, a gender imbalance has arisen where the desires of a first world, male dominated working class has overshadowed those of women in the Third World. Globalization has aided in making this an international perspective through the transfer of ideas and the imposition of the Western ideology portraying men as the breadwinners and woman as the obedient homemakers. This is further applied to the exploitation of women as sex workers in the sex tourist industry where men actively seek out these 'obedient foreigners' whose job it is to make men happy (Pettman, 1997). A man's job is seen as holding more importance in the economy, while women are seen as nothing more then bodies of flesh, even though they may have entered the industry with the promise of a steady income and were only later shown the true colors of their employment. The great movement of people that has been encouraged

by globalization, and recent developments in technology, also perpetuates this exploitation. Sexual services are made more accessible, allowing wealthy businessmen to receive cheap labor such as from women exported from the Middle East or South Asia as domestic workers within the sex trade. They are objectified as 'exotic experiences', continuing and promoting sex tourism (Pettman, 1997), furthering the notion that it is a man's world.

Black Market Connections

Criminal networks, as the manipulators of adverse circumstances, use the unfortunate results of war and poverty to gain profits (Hodge, 2007, pg. 16). They are able to develop deeper connections and expand their organizations globally as a result of the interrelated makeup of present day globalization. These networks play a crucial role in perpetuating human trafficking because of the sheer reality of the low risk, high reward situation involved with the sale of sex. Women are either abducted, recruited or purchased and then used as objects, who, unlike drugs which have a one time use, can continually earn their 'pimps' money, while keeping little for themselves (Hodge, 2007, pg. 166). These organized sectors of crime target the vulnerable, yet receive little punishment for their actions. Women in the Third World are often in the unfortunate situation of having little representation because of their lower social status in some communities, which places them in an exposed and, at times, defenseless predicament. In areas where the marketing of women as sex workers is legal, criminals have free reign to exploit their prostitutes, making it difficult to penalize their actions. In other situations where it is illegal, reprimand is soft. In these cases, due to the severe fear of retaliation,

many victims will try to remain hidden and silent, presenting a grave challenge in charging the exploiters.

Conflict

The chaos of war creates economic and social disruption, resulting in ample opportunity for traffickers to seek new victims. The provocation of violence and disparity by war also creates a population that is susceptible to the alluring promises of wealth presented by sexual trafficking. Conflicts greatly increase the trafficking of women in the third world because “[t]he trafficking in and sexual exploitation of human beings, particularly of women, tends to increase in conflict situations...[where] [m]any women engage in prostitution to survive conflict...[with] sex becom[ing] a form of bargaining power” (Bannon et al, 2005). An area prevalent in violence can create situations where there is a demand for sex workers. This is shown in conflicts such as the Vietnam War. The sex trade increased in this area because of the number of U.S. troops present in the country who desired the opportunity to engage in lascivious actions, while women were tempted by the promise of foreign wallets (Hughes, 2000). The presence of UN peacekeeping troops in Cambodia in the 1990s also created a resurgence of human trading as prostitution and sex trafficking through sexual tourism, which became some women’s only source of income (Hughes, 2000). This global impact of war is a result of the interconnected chains of trafficking, which reach between and within all areas of conflict and despair due to “globalization’s fluid markets and open borders [increasing] the trafficking of human beings” (Bannon et al, 2005).

Movements Against Trafficking

Just as globalization has been responsible for perpetuating human trafficking, a strong variety of resistance against such actions has been felt around the globe. Intergovernmental agencies, such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), have responded with a series of brochures, documentaries, and radio and TV broadcasts to battle trafficking through awareness directed at potential victims, the general public as well as law, policy and public officials (Andrijasevic, 2007). The disturbingly truthful images their campaign provides focuses on the migration element of trafficking and how those getting accustomed to a new place are more at risk for forced victimization. Although this form of reaction is necessary and crucial in providing a greater public awareness, it is needed as the first stage in a series of steps that will provide a physical response to actively end human trafficking.

This urgency to create action has been felt by the UN due to the drastic growth in human trafficking (Hodge, 2007). The UN introduced the Palermo Protocol and Convention as a supplement to their Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime to attack trafficking, which they strictly define in terms of exploitation (Danna, 2007). It intends to uphold the protection of victims by making each state responsible for enforcing legal actions against perpetrators (UN, 2000). It furthers this aggressive movement by implementing a section within the convention that finds even conceptual actions irrelevant, especially when tactics like deception are used, exclusively narrowing in on the traffickers actions upon the victims (Hodge, 2007). By making governments accountable, the need to stop human trafficking and the abuse against women is stressed. It is this kind of agreement that presents a severe consequence that needs to be enacted to ensure the perpetrators are thoroughly punished and not the victims. The intent of action

is clear when it is written in ink, but this does not guarantee that action will truly be taken. Difficulty arises concerning the actual ability of governments to catch the criminals, which becomes even more complicated when prostitution is a legitimate action in some areas of the world.

The strongest resistance has been presented by the NGO community rather than from the trafficked women themselves. It is often the case that the victims are too frightened to form an active body of resistance and instead opt for others to speak in place of the voices they have lost. NGOs in the West and the Third World are increasingly advocating sex trafficking as a concern of women's rights (Bertone, 2004). They are pressuring governments with campaigns of transnational activism to implement anti-trafficking laws that will see to the protection and reformation of trafficking victims (Bertone, 2004). Organizations like the Netherlands based Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) (Sharma, 2005) are working internationally to stop the trafficking of women and by attempting to guarantee that the rights of victims are honored and protected by governments and authorities, while also encouraging a sense of empowerment instead of victimization (Bertone, 2004).

Issues like human and sex trafficking are increasingly becoming concerns of feminists groups who are selecting to choose a woman based perspective when portraying their anti-trafficking campaigns (Sharma, 2005). The feminist led neo-abolitionists like the US Founded CATW (Coalition Against Trafficking in Women) focus on bringing to light the criminal actions of the consumers of sex trafficking. Their argument centers around how women hold agency as individuals and should not just be singled within the category of 'women and children' (Danna, 2007). The emphasis of these movements is to

place more responsibility in the hands of the governments to counteract trafficking, as well as focus on a limitation of the migration of women as a means of prevention.

In Thailand, NGOs like EMPOWER and ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism) attempt to reach all individuals by pinpointing issues like economic disparity and class divisions as causes of trafficking, while focusing on the receiving and sending side of the trade. They argue that the states involved with the sending aspects should be liable for the actions of the tourists exploiting the victims. However, when Thai officials attempted this, they were forced to hand over the tourists because of an inability to arrest them. This created a movement to build treaties between countries and enabled Thai authorities to arrest tourists and send them back to their home states where they could be tried (Arnold and Bertone, 2002). Although there has been success in raising awareness and interstate relations, the failure in this situation arose from the lack of monitoring that led to most perpetrators skipping bail when it needed to ensure that they were actually prosecuted for their actions.

To put a halt to sex trafficking in Nigeria, many NGOs joined together to form a large coalition under the name NACATIP (National Coalition Against Trafficking in Persons) (Olujuwon, 2008). They collectively seek to provide skills, rehabilitation, counseling, education and awareness throughout the community and to victims of trafficking. Other NGOs presently working within Nigeria include the World Bank, ECOWAS, and UNICEF. This movement turns its focus towards media coverage and it not only monitors but also explores the consequences and results of human and sex trafficking. Although actively driving to ensure that the safety and rights of the victims are met, one downfall present within this resistance movement is the issue regarding the

exploiters themselves. It is necessary for the victims to receive adequate support and help for dealing with the heinous acts that were taken against them. However, there should be an equal response against those who perpetrated the criminal movements. There needs to be a strong system that actively seeks out and places exploiters in the hands of the law. But in regards to the many issues that Third World countries face, this is easier said than done.

Recommendations

“Human trafficking is the third largest criminal activity in the world” (Olujuwon, 2008), and although many of the reasons behind its expansion and continuation are known, not all of them are being addressed equally or with enough force to stifle its progress. More forceful actions and consequences need to be applied to the exploiters. Additionally, underlying issues, such as poverty and gender discrimination, must be adequately countered in the Third World if there is any hope in removing the human and sex trafficking of individuals off the market. Stricter measures need to be implemented on the consumer side of the industry. By placing restrictions and limiting large market areas, for example within the United States and its demand for sexual entertainment, instances of objectification towards women that can occur as a result of prolonged exposure promoting exploitation will decrease. Furthermore, there is a need for greater emphasis to be placed on the ‘victimization’ and racist elements that appear within trafficking. Women, especially those underprivileged from the Third World, can be seen as inferior in some areas of the globe, leading an elitist view to arise from ‘privileged’ individuals where abusive actions against a ‘foreigner’ are not seen to be equivalent to those taken against someone from a ‘developed’ nation.

Conclusion

There has been great success achieved by movements in the form of creating awareness in domestic communities and the global population, but more needs to be done as the contemporary slavery of human and sex trafficking is only continuing to grow. It is still the case within the current system fighting against trafficking that the rights of those trafficked come in second when compared to the necessities of those imposing the laws (Bertone, 2004). The desire and need for money drives individuals to take extreme measures, resulting in the victimization of some and the mass accumulation of wealth for others and “it is generally agreed that globalization has increased trafficking” (Bertone, 2004). The impact of globalization has perpetuated human and sex trafficking by furthering the underlying issues that continue to provoke such exploitation and “as long as there is widespread poverty, war, social malaise, gender discrimination and global economic inequality, there will always be a supply of women...for the sex trade” (Jhappan, 2005).

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