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## Men, middlemen, and migrants

*The demand side of "sex trafficking"*

The debate about prostitution is conducted between two poles. Abolitionists hold that prostitution exploits women per se and call for the prosecution of the pimps and even customers as a measure against sex slavery and trafficking in human beings. Liberals hold that sex is a commodity like any other and call for the social recognition and official regulation of prostitution in order to improve prostitutes' working conditions. Both positions are simplifications, writes Julia O'Connell Davidson. Any policy genuinely aiming at improving the lives of migrant sex workers must focus on reducing poverty in the countries of origin.

Penalize the buyers. The least discussed part of the prostitution and trafficking chain has been the men who buy women for sexual exploitation in prostitution, pornography, sex tourism and mail order bride marketing... our responsibility is to make men change their behaviour by all means available -- educational, cultural, and through legislation that penalizes men for the crime of sexual exploitation<sup>1</sup>

Both feminist and religiously inspired abolitionists have long viewed, and continue to view, male demand for commercial sex as a root cause of prostitution and the abuses that can accompany it (child sexual exploitation, violence, "trafficking", abusive and slavery-like employment practices). Until recently, calls to criminalise and reform men who buy sex have often fallen on deaf ears. Now suddenly, it seems that policy makers are beginning to listen. Over the past decade, "John Schools" to re-educate men caught kerb-crawling have sprung up in the United States, Canada and the UK. In 1998, Sweden introduced legislation that criminalizes the buying of sex. More particularly, growing international concern about the phenomena of "human trafficking" has encouraged a shift in attitudes and policy responses towards prostitution. Here too, there is increasing receptivity to the idea that those who consume commercial sex may represent a social problem, for it is frequently asserted that it is the demand for young and foreign prostitutes that makes trafficking into a profitable activity.

So, for example, the Swedish Ombudsman for gender equality, Claes Borgström, called for a boycott of the World Cup in Germany on grounds that it would stimulate demand for prostitution, and therefore lead to an increase in trafficking and sexual slavery; while the UN Special Rapporteur, Sigma Huda, remarked in her latest report that "regular" prostitution falls within the category of trafficking, and stated that the most efficient means to reduce the demand for trafficking is to criminalize the purchase of sexual services. More generally, in international policy circles, it is increasingly common to hear talk

of the need to address "the demand-side of trafficking", and a number of research studies on this phenomenon have recently been commissioned. Though the idea that "sex trafficking" is stimulated by the demand for commercial sexual services has a certain commonsense appeal, this paper argues that questions about the relationship between exploitative and abusive labour practices in the sex sector and the demand for commercial sexual services are rather more complicated than is allowed in dominant anti-trafficking discourse.

### **What is the demand side of "sex trafficking"?**

Until recently, there was no international agreement as to the proper legal definition of the term "trafficking". Following much debate between those with a political stake in the issue, in November 2000, the UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime was adopted by the UN General Assembly, and with it two new protocols, one on smuggling of migrants and one on trafficking in persons — the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. In the latter, trafficking is defined as:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

The Trafficking Protocol entered into force in December 2003. By 2004, it had been signed by 117 countries and it is often assumed to have successfully laid the definitional problems and political divisions associated with the term "trafficking" to rest. It did not. Critics point out that, framed within the Convention on Transnational Organised Crime, and packaged with a Protocol on smuggling, the Trafficking Protocol reflects a preoccupation with "illegal immigration" as part and parcel of a supposed security threat posed by transnational organised crime as opposed to a concern with the human rights of migrants.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, though it provides a definition of "trafficking", the protocol leaves undefined many of the constituent elements of what is described as "trafficking". So, for example, the terms "sexual exploitation" and "exploitation of the prostitution of others" are not defined. The absence of clarity on these issues meant that the protocol could be adopted "without prejudice to how States Parties address prostitution in their respective laws" (Interpretative note 64 to the Protocol), but it also makes it virtually impossible to discuss the demand side of "trafficking" in the commercial sex trade without becoming embroiled in the more general debate about the rights and wrongs of prostitution, a debate which is both highly polarised and hugely emotive.

From one political perspective — which can loosely be termed "abolitionist" — prostitution represents a form of male sexual violence against women. A market in commercial sexual services is said to necessarily reduce women and girls to mere objects of trade, and thus no distinction can be made between "forced" and "voluntary" prostitution. A woman cannot *volunteer* to be dehumanised through prostitution any more than she could meaningfully

consent to sell herself into slavery. Viewed through this particular lens, to employ a woman to work as a prostitute is by definition to "exploit" her, and to pay for commercial sexual services is automatically to commit an act of "sexual exploitation". Lobby groups that adopt this political perspective therefore insist that the demand for commercial sexual services acts as a stimulus for trafficking — if there were no market for prostitution there would be no trafficking. They are adamant that States should penalise men who buy sex, as well as third parties who organise and/or financially benefit from prostitution.

Needless to say, this position is unacceptable to those at the other end of the political spectrum. For those who adopt a liberal or libertarian stance on sex commerce, viewing it as little different in moral and political terms from any other market in personal services, the idea that it is necessary to eradicate the entire commercial sex market in order to address the problem of trafficking for prostitution is as draconian and wrong-headed as the idea that it is necessary to eliminate demand for carpets in order to address the problem of forced and child labour in the carpet industry. Viewed through this lens, questions about the demand side of "trafficking" for prostitution are clearly questions about employer demand for forced labour rather than consumer demand.

Protagonists on both sides of the "sex slavery or sex work" debate often gloss over challenges to their position posed by the body of empirical evidence on prostitution in the contemporary world. What existing research actually reveals above all else is the immense diversity of prostitution in terms of its social organisation, the working practices and conditions and earnings associated with it, and the subjective meanings attached to it by those who sell and buy sex. There is variation in terms of the settings in which prostitute–client transactions are arranged and executed, and the extent and nature of third party involvement in prostitution (some prostitutes work independently, others are directly or indirectly employed by a third party, some enter into contracts of indenture, some are confined in brothels and forced to prostitute, and so on). Third party involvement does not map tidily onto the settings from which prostitutes work, and whether involved in "indoor" or "outdoor" prostitution, prostitutes may be controlled by an extremely abusive third party, or working completely independently, or somewhere between these two extremes. The degree of direct economic exploitation to which prostitutes are exposed thus spans a continuum from absolute (as when a third party appropriates all of the money garnered through an individual's prostitution) to entirely absent (as when a person who prostitutes independently keeps all of her or his earnings). Prostitutes' experience of violence, both at the hands of third parties and clients also varies, and though some of those who work in the sex trade — whether on a freelance or employed basis — are at very high risk of assault, others are not (Kempadoo and Doezema, 1998, O'Connell Davidson, 2005, Weitzer, 2000).<sup>3</sup>

The term "prostitution" does not refer to a uniform experience. To describe as "sex slavery" the condition of an adult woman who works independently as an escort partly because it satisfies her own personal interest in anonymous sex and partly because she can earn upwards of 2000 Euros per week from it is clearly unsatisfactory, just as it would be unsatisfactory to describe as a "sex worker" a teenager who has been kidnapped, imprisoned and physically forced to prostitute. But to insist, as many liberal and libertarian thinkers do, that we should therefore draw a sharp policy distinction between forced and child prostitution on the one hand, and voluntary prostitution by adults on the other, outlawing the former and regulating or tolerating the latter, does not entirely resolve this problem, for the precise point between these two extremes at

which prostitution becomes a "free choice" is not easily identified. Whether we are talking about sex work or any other form of labour, the line between coercion and consent is not and never has been clear-cut. In the absence of alternative opportunities, or where the inducements are great enough, people can and do volunteer to enter contracts that may harm them or that they would not otherwise choose to enter.

The tendency to focus analysis and debate on questions about whether prostitution is sex slavery *or* sex work also represents a very real barrier to serious discussion of the complex mix of factors, including demand, that make forced and other forms of unfree labour an issue in the sex sector. In the remainder of this paper, I want to briefly explore the ways in which three different types of demand might articulate with the phenomenon of forced/unfree prostitution.

### **Demand for commercial sexual experience**

One of the most visible developments in the sex industry over the past two decades has been its rapid expansion and massive diversification:

The scope of sexual commerce has [...] grown to encompass: live sex shows; all variety of pornographic texts, videos, and images, both in print and on line; fetish clubs; sexual "emporiums" featuring lap-dancing and wall-dancing; escort agencies; telephone sex and cyber-sex contacts; "drive through" striptease venues; and organized sex tours of developing countries<sup>4</sup>

In Europe today, opportunities to buy sexual experience across a market are greater and more varied, commercial sexual experience can be consumed legally as well as illegally, and the boundaries between commercial sex and other forms of consumption (leisure, tourism, entertainment, etc.) are more blurred. Does the expansion of this market fuel "trafficking"? There is no automatic relationship between consumer demand and any specific form of employment relation in the sex industry. In theory, demand for any given commercial sexual service can just as well be met by someone working independently in good conditions as by someone subject to abusive and slavery-like practices. And yet there are some fairly obvious reasons to expect that the rapid expansion of a market that is poorly regulated, widely stigmatised and partially criminalized will be associated with an increased incidence of abusive labour practices. In this sense, growing consumer demand is undoubtedly one of the factors contributing to the phenomenon of forced labour in the sex industry. Though it does not follow that all demand is now met by unfree labour (indeed, viewed as a whole, it is almost certainly the case that the vast bulk of those working in Europe's sex sector are formally free wage workers or self-employed individuals), I believe this does give us legitimate reasons to feel concern about the expansion of demand for commercial sex.

What explains demand? Demand for commercial sex is, like all forms of consumer demand, very much a socially, culturally and historically determined matter. It is also intimately related to questions about supply, availability, and affordability. Indeed, we could almost say that supply generates demand rather than the other way about. There is no absolute or given level of demand for the services of lap-dancers in any society, for example, and before the relatively recent advent of lap dance clubs, no one bemoaned their absence. However,

though supply may be a necessary condition for demand, it is not always a sufficient condition. Demand must also be socially constructed in the sense that people have to be taught to imagine that they want or need a given product or service. Consumption is, as many sociologists and historians have observed, a form of display both in the sense that it is a marker of identity and social status, and also in the sense that it is used to punctuate time, to ritualistically and publicly mark off our passage through the day, the week, the year, our life. Human beings are not born wishing to buy commercial sexual services or to visit lap dance clubs, for instance, any more than they are born with specific desires to play the lottery or drink coca-cola. They have to *learn* to imagine that it would be pleasurable to pay a stranger touch to dance naked before them, they have to be taught that consuming such services is a signifier of the fact that they are "having fun", a marker of their social identity and status as "real man", "adult", "not-gay" or whatever.

Markets are socially constructed and historically contingent. As Spillman puts it, the creation of a market involves "the cultural construction of objects of market exchange, the cultural construction of the parties to market exchange, and the cultural construction of norms of exchange".<sup>5</sup> This insight is just as relevant in relation to the market for prostitution as it is to any other market. However, each of the three elements of construction are contested in relation to the prostitution market. To begin with, the idea that the capacity to bring sexual pleasure to another human being can be treated as an alienable object of market exchange is disputed.

Feminist abolitionists, who view prostitution as a form of male sexual violence akin to rape, vigorously reject the idea that sexual services can be detached from the person and sold across a market without harm to the female prostitute. But it is not just feminist abolitionists who have trouble imagining sexual services as straightforward objects of market exchange, and prostitutes as market actors like any other. Although prostitution is popularly understood to be a market (indeed, it is commonly naturalised as such — people speak of it as "the world's oldest profession", and say that it is inevitable), most people remain either ambivalent about or disapproving of this market.

Certainly, the parties to the market exchange of prostitution are not culturally constructed in the same way that parties to other market exchanges are constructed. The immense stigma that has traditionally been attached to female prostitution means that women who trade sex are not typically viewed merely as market actors — they are instead widely imagined and represented as sinful, sexually and morally depraved, or as vectors of disease, or as fallen or lost women, damaged victims. Many also view those who buy sex as deviant, and there is a growing tendency to pathologise "the client" as an individual suffering from "sexual addiction" or some other psychological problem or personality disorder.<sup>6</sup>

All of these discourses about prostitution persist alongside an increasing sexualisation, even pornogrification, of consumer culture more generally, with very explicit sexual images used in the marketing of all manner of products. They also co-exist with more traditional boundary-blurrings, for it has long been accepted that an economic value attaches to female sexuality and that this value can and should be realised through marriage to economically successful men. Women's sexuality is thus understood, whether implicitly or explicitly, to have an exchange value, and yet it is still not generally regarded as something that can be separated from the person and traded as a commodity in prostitution without moral harm. As Margaret Radin comments: "Perhaps the

best way to characterize the present situation is to say that women's sexuality is incompletely commodified".<sup>7</sup>

This incomplete commodification clearly has some very negative consequences for many women who trade sex. It means that the stigma associated with prostitution continues, and along with it not just a risk of rejection, hostility, even violence from family and community, but also often an inability to access basic rights, including the right to protection and justice. In many countries, incomplete commodification further means that there is no regulatory regime in place to enforce contracts or protect those who sell sexual services from poor working conditions and exploitative employment relations. And even in countries where prostitution is legal and regulated, the fact that prostitution is not regarded as a commodity exchange like any other, and that prostitutes are not viewed in the same way as other market actors means that the regulatory regime often imposes constraints and unfreedoms on sex workers that would not be imposed on other groups of workers or citizens.

In effect, incomplete commodification means that even where what they do is not actually illegal, prostitutes are excluded from "civil society" understood as "a social, cultural and ethical system made up of the market, the legal system and voluntary associations to promote the welfare of the community"<sup>8</sup> and this has very serious consequences for their social status and well being.

One response to this is to argue for the complete commodification of prostitution, in the sense of struggling to ensure that the objects, parties and norms of this market are reframed and understood in the same way as in other "respectable" markets, on grounds that this would make it possible for sex workers to be ethically incorporated into civil society, and so to benefit from full community inclusion. This is the strategy pursued by many sex worker rights' activists, who call both for the de-stigmatization and decriminalization of prostitution and the application of labour law to the sex sector, arguing that if prostitution were regarded as a respectable, normal market like any other, the norms of exchange would fall into line with those in other legal and socially accepted markets.

It strikes me that this position is overly optimistic about the possibilities for, and potential consequences of, establishing sexual services as socially valued, or even morally neutral, objects of market exchange. Consumer markets — whether in sex, other personal services, or goods — are sites in which a society's status hierarchies are reproduced, and this means that inequalities along lines of class, race, nation, age and gender do get played out symbolically and reinforced in practices of consumption. It is not necessary to be morally conservative, abolitionist, anti-pleasure or sex negative in order to feel uneasy about, say, the emergence of a sizeable market involving West African street workers and white clients in Spain, a country where there are no black female politicians, only a handful of black female professionals, few representations of black women as anything other than domestic workers or prostitutes on television and other media, and where anti-African racism is routinely voiced.

However, the abolitionist response to the problem appears still more dangerous. Measures to prevent men buying sex from street prostitutes and/or to suppress the most visible forms of prostitution are increasingly presented and justified as "anti-trafficking" measures. Leaving aside the many objections to such policies that are made by many groups concerned with the safety, human rights and civil liberties of women who work in street prostitution, it is

clear that they are an inadequate response to links between consumer demand and the problem of forced labour in the sector as a whole. Clamping down on demand for street prostitution does nothing to address — and may even strengthen — demand in other segments of the market, both legal and illegal, where forced/unfree labour can also be an issue (pornography, escort agency prostitution, lap and table dance clubs, internet web–cam sex, and so on). Of course, it would be possible to extend the logic of the "penalise the buyer" approach to all forms of sex commerce: a total ban on all forms of sexualised entertainment and pornography involving actors/models; raids on private homes and monitoring of private bank accounts to ensure that people are not using the internet to access sex workers; phone taps to ensure that telephone sex is not being consumed. But most would balk at the civil liberties implications of such an approach. Given the political and moral problems posed by a policy of legal suppression, those who wish to see the commercial sex market shrink rather than continue to expand perhaps need to come up with more creative, less punitive and longer term strategies.

### **Demand for labour**

Third parties who employ sex workers in brothels, nightclubs, escort agencies, lap dance clubs and pimps who organise and financially benefit from another person's prostitution do not make decisions about employment practices, labour control and work organisation in a vacuum. Like all employers, they decide on strategies that are feasible and profitable in the particular social, legal and institutional context in which they operate. The presence or absence of clear national employment conditions standards in settings such as lap–dance establishments and, where legal, brothels, as well as of regular and effective monitoring and inspection in legal and "irregular" workplaces, clearly impacts on such decisions. It is also important to recognise that whilst pimps and other third parties in the sex trade are often viewed as vile and immoral "flesh peddlers", those who recruit labour for, and/or employ workers in the sex trade are not a socially, morally or politically homogeneous category of persons, and do not all adopt the same approach to their economic activity. A few may be crazed sociopaths, and at the other extreme, a few are committed to extremely ethical business practices. Between are many ordinary people who, as human and social beings, need to tell themselves that their practices are normal, natural, necessary and/or inevitable, and so justified.

Prevailing social norms thus play an important role in shaping people's behaviour as "employers" in both legal and illegal segments of the commercial sex market. Third parties' understanding of these norms is largely acquired by watching what others do and what the state allows them to get away with. Indeed, it is depressing to observe how malleable most people are in terms of their morality in any market and how quickly they can adjust themselves to practices that they would previously have considered exploitative, providing no one stops them and others appear to be doing the same thing. Thus, for example, in our research on employer demand for migrant domestic workers, we interviewed European expatriates in Thailand who, back home in Europe, would never have dreamt of asking a domestic worker to work a 14 or 15 hour day, six or seven days a week, for a pittance, but who were quite happy to impose these employment conditions on domestic workers in Bangkok on grounds that local employers do so, and the authorities do not intervene to prevent it.<sup>9</sup> Most third party employers of sex workers are no different.

And so far as "trafficking" is concerned, it is also important to recognise that racism, xenophobia and prejudice against minority ethnic groups makes it

much easier for employers, whether in the sex industry or any other sector, to tell themselves that exploitative labour practices are justified. The racially/ethnically "Other" worker does not count as fully human, and so can be used and abused in ways that same race/ethnicity workers cannot be. The migrant worker comes from an impoverished, "uncivilised", "backward" country, and so does not expect or deserve the rights, freedoms and respect that are due to local workers. Women and girls who belong to groups that are in general socially devalued, and socially, politically and economically marginalized are also devalued by both employers and clients, and thus socially constructed as the "natural" or "ideal" occupants of the lowliest positions in the sex industry.

As with consumer demand, no single or clear-cut policy implications follow. To the extent that the lack of application and enforcement of labour standards in the sex industry helps to create an environment in which it is possible and profitable to use unfree labour, I agree with the case for bringing the sex sector above ground and regulating it like any other industry. But I also think it important to recognise that, for a number of reasons, the gains from this would be quite limited. There are features of the sex sector that make it very difficult and very expensive to regulate effectively (small units of employment, low start up costs, rapid turnover of labour and business establishments, geographical fluidity etc.). And whether we are talking about the sex sector or any other "difficult to regulate" sector, governments are rarely willing to invest the level of resources that would be required to ensure that workers are all adequately protected.

Furthermore, there are features of custom and practice in many countries that make effective regulation difficult to implement, such as the practice whereby third parties who benefit from organising and controlling prostitution do not acknowledge themselves as direct employers, but instead treat prostitutes as self-employed entrepreneurs who supposedly buy various services and/or rent facilities from the third party. This is an arrangement that often conceals the imposition of very poor working conditions and a highly exploitative employment relation. But at the same time, we cannot assume that those who sell sex always oppose it and would prefer a more regular, direct employment relation — they would not. Many of those who prostitute do so on an irregular basis, using sex work as a means to pay off debts or save up for specific items, and would not wish to be subject to the discipline of a more permanent, visible and direct employment relation.

Indeed, visibility — something that is so central and necessary to the enforcement of basic minimum labour standards and employment protections — poses other dilemmas with regard to prostitution. Again, as with domestic work in private households, employers in the sex sector are often interested in migrants because their precarious position resulting from "insecure legal status in the host country" makes them less demanding and more flexible concerning working hours.<sup>10</sup> But for many migrants who trade sex, becoming visible in the sense of their employment situation being subject to closer state regulation is more likely to mean being deported than it is to mean securing rights and protections as workers. (Equally, where nationals work in prostitution to supplement poverty level benefits, visibility would more likely mean being prosecuted for benefit fraud than protection.)

And this highlights a broader dilemma. Those who trade sex are not a homogeneous group, and they position themselves in many different, complex and variable ways in relation to "prostitution". At present, much sex commerce

takes place in an unregulated underground, or an "economy of makeshifts" that stands outside civil society as defined above. This remains the case even where a well-regulated formal sector is established, as the existence of a legal sector does not mean that illegal or informal market segments automatically or necessarily disappear. The fact that prostitution is incompletely commodified is certainly one of the reasons why those who prostitute are still stigmatised and vulnerable to certain forms of abuse and exploitation, and there are some people who regard prostitution as a career and who would welcome the complete commodification of the commercial sex market. But its incomplete commodification is also a reason why those who are already excluded from civil society (eg, the very poor, runaway teenagers, drug addicts, undocumented migrants) can turn to it as a means of survival. If prostitution were professionalised and incorporated into the "moral economy" as a legitimate and "respectable" form of work along the lines envisaged by some sex workers' rights activists, it would not be open to these groups. When they sold sex, they would still have to do so in a shadowy, illegal, and unprotected realm. Moreover, many of those who turn to prostitution because they are dislocated, propertyless, and rightless do not approach prostitution as an occupation or a job as such, but merely as a strategy to get by. It is by no means clear that they would wish to be incorporated into civil society as a "sex worker", even if this option was open to them. Not everyone who sells sex thinks of themselves as a "sex worker", or wishes to be recognised as such.

Finally, regulation of the commercial sex industry does nothing, in itself, to counteract racism, xenophobia and prejudice against migrants and minority ethnic groups. Indeed, the desire to apply and enforce labour standards in the sex industry can co-exist with the wish to drive migrant women out of the sector. Unless governments do something to address the social devaluation of migrants, and their social, political and economic marginalisation, regulation may merely serve to reinforce existing racial, ethnic, and national hierarchies in the sex industry.

Again, however, abolitionism does not provide a solution to any of these problems, for attempts to suppress the prostitution market, whether focused on sex workers or their clients, necessarily implies subjecting those who sell sex to what Radin describes as "the degradation and danger of the black market" or forcing them "into other methods of earning money that seem to them less desirable than selling their bodies"<sup>11</sup>

### **Demand for opportunities to migrate**

There are strong political pressures to divorce debate on "trafficking" from debates on the more general phenomenon of migration. However, if the primary concern is to locate, explain and combat the demand for forced labour, slavery, servitude and so on, then there is no moral or analytical reason to distinguish between forced labour involving "illegal immigrants", "smuggled persons" and "victims of trafficking". Certainly, the prostitute who has been trafficked according to the definition provided in the Palermo protocol is attractive to the unscrupulous and abusive employer because s/he is isolated, unable to quit, unable to seek redress for non-payment of wages or any other form of abuse. But "smuggled persons" and undocumented migrants can be equally vulnerable to abuse and exploitation within prostitution (or indeed any other sector). In other words, there is no demand for *trafficked* persons' labour/services as such, only demand for cheap and unprotected labour.

The distinction between trafficking and smuggling may be clear to those who give political priority to issues of border control and national sovereignty, but it is far from obvious to those who are primarily concerned to promote and protect migrant workers' rights. And as many analysts have observed, policies designed to control and restrict immigration can actually fuel markets for "trafficking" and "smuggling" and contribute to the construction of irregular migrants ("trafficked", "smuggled" or otherwise) as cheap and unprotected labour (Gallagher 2002, Morrison 2000, ILO 2002).<sup>12</sup> This should alert us to the existence of demand not just for cheap labour/services in destination countries, but also for opportunities to migrate in sending countries.

"Trafficking" is often described as modern-day slave trade, and for most people, this invokes images of women and children snatched from their homelands and forcibly transported to another land. And yet research generally points to the conclusion that "trafficking" is in the vast majority of cases a corrupted mode of migration, one that turns very specific migratory projects (the desire to accumulate savings or support one's dependants by migrating to work in domestic work, or agriculture, or the restaurant trade, or the sex industry; the dream of securing a better future for one's children by sending them to be raised and educated abroad; the desire to transform one's life by marrying "well", and so on) into nightmares.<sup>13</sup> The vast majority of eastern European, African, Latin American and Southeast Asian women and girls who end up in forced labour in prostitution in Western European countries *wanted* to migrate (though not always to work in prostitution, and obviously never to be subject to forced labour in prostitution).

Furthermore, they invariably had good reason to want to migrate, which is why publicity about, and even personal experience of, the dangers associated with undocumented migration is rarely enough to stop people from taking the risk (and also why some commentators refer to the repatriation of "smuggled persons" and "victims of trafficking" as "reverse trafficking", i.e., being moved against one's will across a border). So for example, a report based on analysis of a sample of 256 Albanian children repatriated from Italy to Albania between 1998 and 2000 found that by 2001, "only 98 of the repatriated children were still in Albania, while 155 had emigrated again". These children were not necessarily involved in prostitution in Italy, though some may have been, but the report provides a good insight into why even those children who have worked in the poorest conditions in prostitution might resist repatriation. Of the 256 children repatriated, only 6 found a job in Albania.<sup>14</sup>

Similarly, interviews with 60 Moldovan adolescents who had been returned to Moldova found that almost all, including those who had been involved in prostitution abroad, wished to leave again (indeed, some had been "trafficked" more than twice before).<sup>15</sup> This should not surprise us, given that more than 50 per cent of the Moldovan population lives beneath a poverty threshold set at US\$ 11.50 per month and that 30 per cent of Moldova's population is aged under 18, and of them around 17 000 live (or rather are held) in grim and inadequately funded institutions for "social orphans" (i.e., children whose families are simply unable to support them). In Moldova, for children and adults alike, labour migration is viewed as the only viable way to improve one's life-chances, and remittances from migrants amount to 50 percent of Moldova's state budget.<sup>16</sup> Small wonder that Moldovan and Albanian are the top two nationalities of "trafficking" victims identified by law enforcement officials and NGOs in the Balkan sex trade, and probably amongst sex workers in EU states as well.<sup>17</sup>

Given that the conditions many migrants are seeking to escape are so bleak, violent and degrading, it is also hard to see why anyone genuinely concerned with protecting and promoting human rights would place measures to tackle consumer demand for commercial sex at the top of their policy agenda. Measures to address poverty, global disparities of income, unemployment, gender inequalities, ethnic/racial conflict, political instability, etc. in countries of origin, and to devise more humane, non-discriminatory, and rights-based migration policies in countries of destination seem rather more urgent priorities.

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- <sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Bernstein, "The meaning of the purchase: Desire, demand and the commerce of sex", *Ethnography*, 2–3/2001, 389–420
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- <sup>10</sup> ILO, *A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour*, Geneva: International Labour Office 2005, 50–51.
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