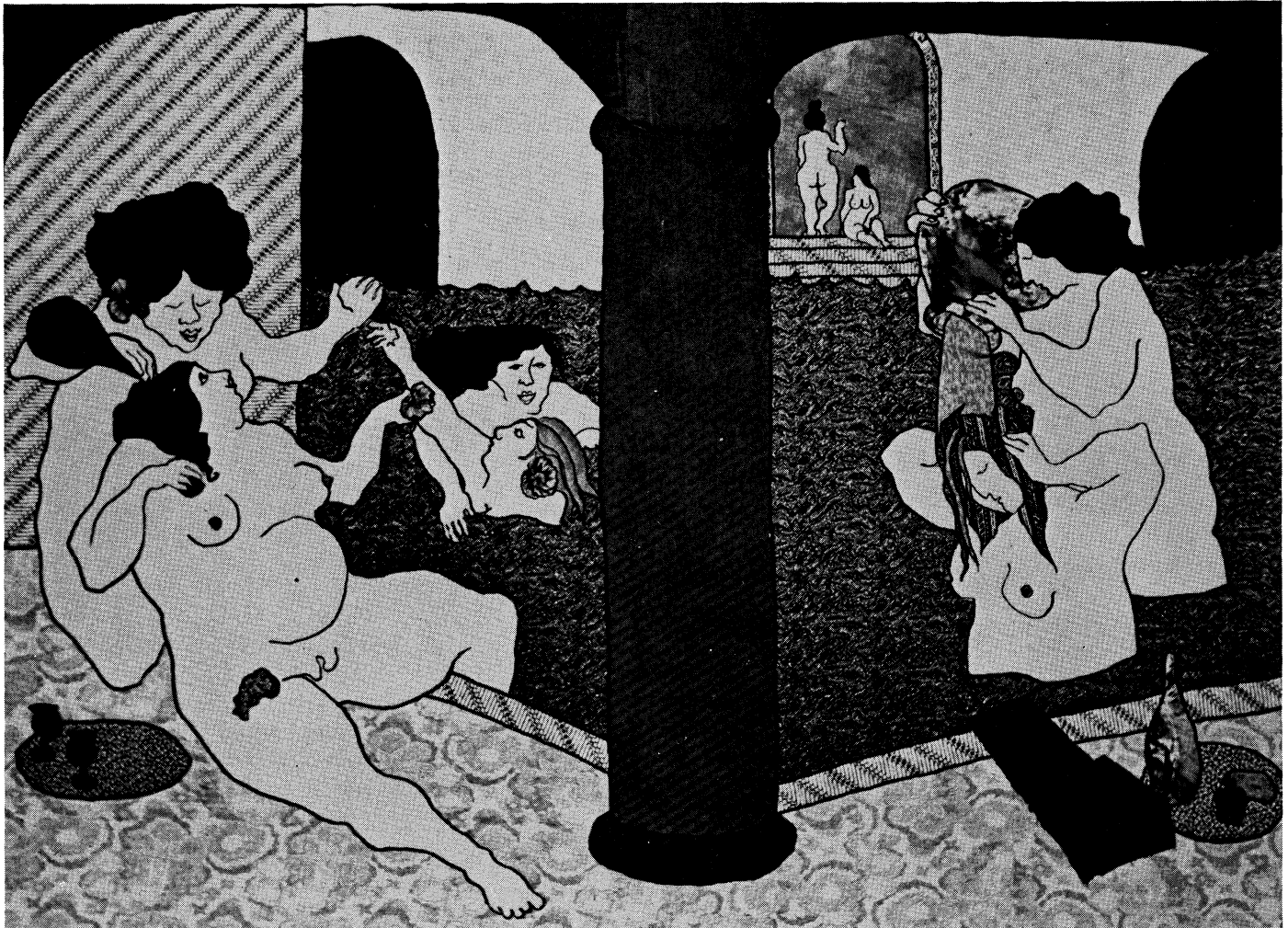


CONFRONTING PROSTITUTION TOURISM:



The Bathers by Jean Kamins

(Photo) Marion Barling

THE THIRD WORLD MOVEMENT AGAINST THE EXPLOITATION OF WOMEN

Sister Mary Soledad Perpiñan, R.G.S.

Au cours de la Décennie pour les femmes de l'ONU, le phénomène des voyages organisés "sexe", ainsi que d'autres formes d'exploitation sexuelle, ont augmenté à un rythme alarmant. Le mouvement Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women, siégeant à Manille, et coordonné par soeur Mary Soledad Perpinan, fut organisé en réaction contre la dégradation des femmes asiatiques. Dans cet article soeur Soledad esquisse les différentes stratégies entreprises par TWMAEW et elle examine les liens entre le néocolonialisme, le sexisme, le racisme et la prostitution au Tiers-Monde.

The United Nations Decade for Women corresponds with the years that saw the rise and fall of organized sex tours, as well as the reappearance in other guises of sexual exploitation. It was in the mid-seventies that development plans for Third World countries included promoting the tourist industry. The compelling factor was the desperate need for foreign exchange to save shaky economies from collapsing. For debt-ridden countries that clung to the life-line of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, such a dollar-earning scheme was a conditional of loans that could not be taken lightly.

Hand-in-hand with the promotion of

tourism came the mushrooming of support structures in the entertainment world – disco dens and bars, sauna baths and massage parlors, hotels and brothels in tourist areas. A natural consequence was the need for personnel who did more than smile and serve beer, more than just wiggle hips and swing to the disco beat: there was a corresponding increase in entertainers who submitted to check-ups for venereal disease. It was no secret. Travel brochures blatantly used sex as a come-on. There was no mistaking the fact that human commodities were for sale. Hundreds of thousands of women were recruited from the impoverished country-

side and given quick employment in the sex industry. In countries like the Philippines and Thailand, the lure of sex and age became translated into sadistic violence against the female gender and the very young. By 1980 the millionth mark of tourist arrivals was easily reached through the phenomenon of "sex tours." In Manila it was a common sight to see two hundred or more Japanese males alight from a plane, get whisked to a hotel, then brought to a brothel where they made their pick of a bedmate for their three-day sex stint.

This was the problem brought to our attention at an international workshop on tourism, a kind of alternative conference to the World Tourism Organization convention held in Manila that year. The story of the next four-and-a-half years covers a variety of actions taken to confront the problem of tourism for sex.

The problem of prostitution tourism is complex and multifaceted. Not all angles are clearly seen. Behind the facade of mass prostitution are the intricacies of economics, culture, and politics and the interface of Third World issues: neocolonialism, sexism, and racism. The structural nature of the problem demands a hard look at the various contexts.

● *Economic context:* On one hand, there is the push of poverty due largely to a backward and stunted agricultural development, the failure of agrarian reform, and the general effects of a nation-wide financial crisis and of a global economic recession. On the other hand, there is the pull of fast and easy money. In between the push and the pull is the not so visible but strong force of the vertical integration of airlines, hotels, agencies, foreign-managed and owned joints, syndicates, drug traffickers, local partners, procurers, and protectors.

● *Cultural context:* The reduction of women into sex objects has cultural underpinnings. The roots may be traced to the insidious effects of a patriarchal ideology deeply imbedded in a culture. Responsible for this may be the religious patrimony as well as the infusion of feudal values and attitudes by the colonizers. This colonial mentality also explains why a people tend to please the foreigners.

● *Political context:* It is important to look at the activities of political entities and see how policies, programs and development strategies affect the people adversely. Tourism is one case in point. Then, too,

there is the influence of the geopolitical reality of military bases and their rest-and-recreation centers that have institutionalized big scale prostitution.

Within each context are interfaced Third World issues involving problems of class, sex, and race.

● *Problems of Class:* Women, as well as men, in a Third World country like the Philippines suffer from the consequences of neocolonialism, underdevelopment, and poverty. For want of opportunities, they simply find it hard to insert themselves in the productive work of agriculture and industry. Moreover, where employment is available, neocolonial interests and the international division of labor have been exploitative of agricultural and factory workers. Because of these circumstances of unemployment and exploitation, thousands get drawn into the service sector and end up in the entertainment world where they themselves become the commodities for sale.

● *Sexism:* The gender question makes the lot of Third World women doubly oppressive. Precisely because they are females, they are given sex-stereotyped jobs. They are forced to assume roles that are alienating, such as perpetuating colonial images of docility and servitude. The male ego of the chauvinist Caucasian, Japanese or Arabian demands this – perhaps to give him a sense of power in the rat-race of a highly competitive world.

● *Racism:* What cannot be done to the liberated women of their home countries, the tourists and military men do to Asians. Sad to say, race is stronger than gender. For instance, upper and middle class Australian women whose husbands work in the Philippines, at one meeting in Metro Manila took the side of the men of their country rather than that of Filipinas drawn into the marriage market, many of whom ended up in misery. Another instance is the apathy of American women towards prostitution as it is proliferated by U.S. military bases which projects an attitude of "As long as the sexually exploited are Asians, who cares?"

With this complex background, it is crucial for strategies to flow from a holistic and analytic understanding of the problem. The general objective is to confront prostitution tourism effectively, tackling not only the symptoms but the root causes as well. In doing so, it is hoped that women in the Philippines and the rest of the Third World will be treated as human

beings with innate worth and dignity, worthy of respect by all in a society on the road to justice, equality and peace.

Aiming at this, the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women (TW-MAE-W) has engaged in the following activities:

- *networking and solidarity work*, linking and mobilizing individuals and groups for concerted action and synchronized protests, exerting pressure in the international arena;
- *consciousness-raising and education work* through the use of media, workshops, seminars, conferences, womens' studies and talks;
- *research and publications*, conducting surveys and monitoring primary research, writing background papers for meetings of experts and international conventions, working on annotated bibliographies, manuals, action bulletins, and disseminating information through popular forms;
- *organizing marginalized women and forming support groups* for their empowerment.

A chain of militants and a spiral of activities are behind TW-MAE-W. Before the Philippine group was mobilized there were protests by South Korean women against the Kisaeng sex tours involving Japanese men, and by Japanese women themselves who were in solidarity with their South Korean and Taiwanese sisters. The first action in the Philippines was a letter of protest addressed to the Japanese Ambassador. It was written by this writer in response to the proddings of a Japanese delegation of mainly media people. After soliciting hundreds of signatures, representatives of all classes in society from the urban poor in Tondo to the rich of Makati presented the letter at the Japanese Embassy. It was Human Rights Day 1980 and, at a celebration of the theme, the letter was read and subsequently supported by the assembly of students, workers and church personnel of the ecumenical circle. Neither daunted nor disheartened by the futile dialogue with the First Secretary of the Japanese Embassy, the group decided to pursue the protest on an international level. By providential arrangement, there were women workers from the Asian capitals in town: together we planned to stage a series of protests during the January 1981 visit of Prime Minister Suzuki to the region. The women

workers flew back home and did their own mobilization and organization of groups like the Friends of Women in Thailand.

Meanwhile a second letter was written, this time addressed to the Japanese Prime Minister. A public forum was held on the day of his arrival in Manila on 8 January 1981. From then on protests escalated, taking various forms – like the street play and picket of the Japanese Embassy in Bangkok. This was the birthing of the Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women. A month later another letter was written expanding the issue of sex tourism to include military prostitution, specifically the whoredoms created by the presence of the U.S. Naval Base in Subic and the Clark Air Base in Angeles City. The letter was handed to Pope John Paul II during his visit to Manila and copies were given to the heads of the United States, Japan, and the Philippines.

A working team of TW-MAE-W, based in Manila, had to carry on the activities that snowballed, one leading to the next. Various aspects of sex tourism were brought to our attention – the mail order brides, international beauty contests, nudist resorts, child prostitution, pornography. The task on hand was either specified or we had to put our heads together to decide the most effective action in each situation. Since we had carefully analyzed the basic problem and all of its nuances, whatever action was taken clearly fell within the conceptual framework and was not at all sporadic.

The process of strategy development also involved another chain of events. At the mid-decade UN Conference for Women in Copenhagen in 1980, a handful of women took up the issue of prostitution. The matter was pursued and two years later a Philippine consultation was arranged, followed by an Asian meeting. Since TW-MAE-W had gained renown for its involvement in the field, its coordinator was invited to present the country paper and later was chosen to represent the Philippines at the global meeting of the International Feminist Network which was held in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in 1983. There she worked with other participants, representing twenty-four countries, to pull together several strategies to combat forced prostitution and violence against women. Back in the Philippines, the TW-MAE-W coordinator shared



Credit: Womenews/Gabriela (Philippines)

the global strategies with the local organizations. A few months later through her initiative, STOP (Stop Trafficking of Pilipinas) was launched on 25 November 1983, designated at the Rotterdam Meeting as the International Day Against the Exploitation of Women. The TW-MAE-W head formulated the STOP strategies.

The STOP program, which has been implemented nation-wide during the past year and a half, is directed primarily against the pimps, protectors, agents, recruiters, managers and brothel owners – all actors in the trafficking in women, girls and boys, both locally and internationally. The yellow, red, and green traffic signals of the campaign symbolize the following:

- **WARNING/Yellow:** (1) Give educational talks to girls/parents in the rural areas and warn them about the pitfalls of migrating to the city and of working abroad. (2) Find out who the recruiters are and warn the people about them. (3) Warn about questionable penpals, marriage bureaus, and offers abroad. (4) Conduct seminars to groups/organizations and get them involved with a definite commitment to a specific campaign activity.

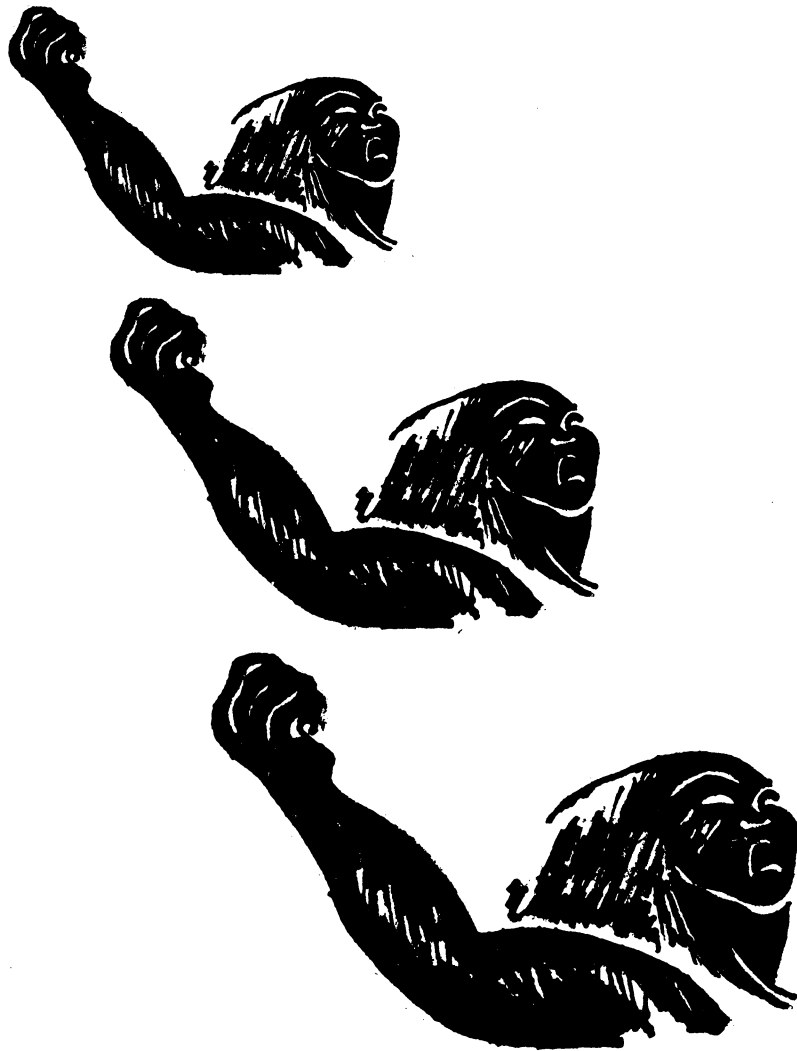
- **STOP/Redlight:** (1) Stop girls from falling into the hands of the recruiters at the place of origin or at the pier or bus terminal of their destination. (2) Stop operations of pimps, brothel owners, and managers who encourage sexual abuse. (3) Stop rape and sexual assault by the military in hamletted areas or places of detention. (4) Stop foreigners – U.S. military and tourists – from sexually exploiting our

- women. (5) Stop businessmen – foreign and local – from being financiers and profiteers of the sex industry. (6) Stop sexual harassment in factories and offices. (7) Stop media from exploiting women's bodies, particularly in girlie magazines, pornography, and ads.

- **GO/Green:** (1) Set up alternative economic opportunities. (2) Work out a tuition, loan or scholarship fund. (3) Promulgate and enforce stricter laws to indict the offenders and exploiters of women as well as the protectors of such businesses (Note: existing laws subtly aim to make prostitution safe and clean for the customers, for example, by imposing V.D. check-ups for the hospitality girl). (4) Network with groups locally and internationally.

The focal point for the STOP plan of action is education work. There is a great need for consciousness-raising and for deepening people's awareness of the problem. Only through this means can there be a holistic and radical approach to the matter. Education is basic to the prevention and rehabilitation aspects, as well as to research and legal action. TW-MAE-W, which operates on the international level, focuses on networking and solidarity work through the dissemination of its action-bulletin, visits, and other activities. The rationale is this: a problem like prostitution tourism is international in nature and by necessity, the solution also has to be international in scope. Working with groups in other countries is crucial.

TW-MAE-W has used international law to give us clout in our struggle. A case in point was the protest against the publication of *Tengoku Hyoryu (Drifting in Paradise)*, subtitled "Guide for the Night Life of Nymphomaniac Filipinas," published by Sanwa Publishing Co. Ltd. and printed by Toppan Printing Co. Ltd. At the confrontation in the company office in Tokyo, the TW-MAE-W coordinator handed Mr. Goto, the Sanwa president, a copy of the letter from the movement addressed to the heads of Japan and the Philippines. The letter cited the UN Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others which was ratified by both countries in 1949. By virtue of this international law, we firmly demanded that our governments should take strong, concrete immediate measures which included: (1) definitive stop to trafficking in persons; (2) closure of tour and



The Filipino Women's Liberation Movement

Credit: Womenews/Gabriela (Philippines)

travel agencies using the lure of sex as a tourism come-on; (3) closure of places where sex abuse is practised; (4) prosecution if syndicates that make money from trafficking in persons and sex tourism; and (5) the imposition of penalties upon the parties behind pornography.

In the Philippines, a Legal Committee of STOP was formed to study: (1) Presidential Decree 603 which gives authority to prosecute any person caught in the act of abusing a child; (2) City Ordinance 842 – curfew time for minors; (3) Bill 4311 – an act to prosecute anyone caught exploiting

a child; (4) adoption law. Currently at the Philippine Parliament a revision of Parliamentary Bill No. 4311 has been introduced to provide a stronger deterrent against child prostitution by providing stiffer penalties and by amending for this purpose Articles 340 and 341 of the Revised Penal Code.

The latest development is a historic event – the first time in Philippine history that prostitutes ever got organized. On 3 May 1985, after a half-day seminar (the second of a series), 100 prostitutes from 17 entertainment joints in Poro

Point, La Union (where Wallace Air Base, a U.S. communications center, is located), agreed to form an association called Junction Club – Junction being the name of the strip where most joints are and J.C. being the initials of Jesus Christ. A Council of Representatives (one per joint) was formed and the officers were elected. Simultaneously the TW-MAE-W team organized a support group among the citizens of San Fernando, La Union. A dialogue between the two groups was scheduled so that the entertainers themselves could tell their story and voice their needs.

Steps contributing to the empowerment of women have been taken. Special efforts have been directed toward the prostitutes themselves. The purpose of the TW-MAE-W survey in 1981-1983 was to provide a venue for the prostitutes to express their own perceptions, images of their personhood and how society sees them, and their attitude to change (whether or not they desire a different occupation and lifestyle). The responses of 614 prostitutes from five major centers of prostitution (Metro Manila, Angeles City, Olongapo City, Batangas City, and Cebu City) and 100 more from Poro Point, San Fernando City, resulted in the setting up of two direct services – one for rehabilitation another for prevention work. From this survey emerged a baseline for other studies. The Poro Point connection has resulted in the organization of the prostitutes themselves, a milestone in the empowerment of our marginalized women.

The emancipation of all women, especially those in the Third World, is a strong undercurrent in TW-MAE-W sponsored education campaigns. It aims to bring to the fore the gender question and the latent discriminatory attitudes to females from childbirth through all stages of growth. It is hoped that the realization of a common bondage among all women will prevent upper and middle class women from engaging in anti-trafficking activities in a patronizing, pharasaic manner – as if they were exempted from any taint of male oppression, unlike “those women.”

It is very difficult to outwit the forces of evil. After a successful protest against sex tours, the genuises behind prostitution tourism contrived new forms of sexual exploitation. They changed venues. For instance, instead of landing in Manila, male tourists from Japan go directly to

Cebu. When package tours became obnoxious, the importation of Asians to serve as prostitutes in Japan took place. Then there was the added exploitation of age: child prostitutes became the fad in the 1980's, with Australians and Europeans taking the lead. Meanwhile, the Americans continue to enjoy R and R prostitution. The roots of the problem are in the linkage between prostitution tourism and all forms of imperialism – political, economic, cultural. It is like fighting a many-tentacled ogre.

Precisely because of our powerlessness, it is most important to stress the collective and creative effort behind each action. The collective aspect ranges from group work to mass mobilization. It involves getting the cooperation of as many organizations as possible, cutting across ages and classes, extending from villages to cross-continental cities. The creative aspect covers a combination of factors: finding the Achilles' heel of the target, figuring out what would be appropriate and effective, doing it at the right time with proper media coverage. This indeed is the power of solidarity when grains of sand glued together become a stumbling block of concrete; the power of creativity when innovative ways of doing things become disarming; the power of a cause when voices get heard because of unflinching persistence in pursuing a goal, of keeping up the momentum, and of communicating with a sense of urgency that cannot be ignored.

A Third World feminist perspective on confronting prostitution tourism offers another major lesson. Empowering all women – the victims, the activists, the support group – is a dynamic challenge. Doing so within the Third World context of a neocolonial world of unjust structures gives birth to a Third World feminism that dares to tackle problems of class, sex and race in a holistic and radical manner. Only then can women, in partnership with men of conscience, have true equality, genuine development, and lasting peace.

Sister Mary Soledad Perpiñan, R.G.S., is co-ordinator of the Manila-based Third World Movement Against the Exploitation of Women (TW-MAE-W). She is active both within the Philippines and internationally in the struggle against the sex trade, and edits the development journal Balai. A longer version of this paper was presented at the Nairobi Third World Forum on Women, Law and Development.



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THE GRASS IS LIKE ME

The grass is like me.
It learns to love life
Only after feet have crushed it.
By becoming wet
Does it mean to show
Modesty's warmth, or
Passion's heat?

The grass is like me.
As it lifts its head
The mower
Promising to turn it to velvet
Levels its lifting top.

You really labour
To put women down.
But the desire to grow
Dies neither in the earth
Nor in the woman.
Hear me.
The old idea to make a track was good.
Those who shy from the heat of courage
Will still be trampled
To make tracks for authority.
But they are straw,
Not grass.
The grass is like me.

Kishwar Naheed
Lahore, Pakistan