

# Human Rights and Bodies: Sex, Race and Sexuality

**Susanne Thorbek  
Aalborg University**

This paper is concerned with one of the silences in development discourse.

Development discourse, development studies and theories seem to be mostly concerned with the effects of policies or the goals of policies. Similar to the focus on policies is the focus on countries in the third world as somehow isolated from the rest of the world - links and connections are not much mentioned nowadays. What happens in the real world, but what was never intended by anyone, is hardly discussed. Thus urbanization was hardly discussed until it was so pervasive that it was impossible to avoid; trade in weapons or narcotics is hardly discussed nor are the often ingenious ways people live their daily lives - unless in the context of a project or programme. Faced with these kinds of silences, the grand old ladies of development theory such as C. Moser (Habitat II) or Marja Liisa Swantz simply argue that we have to study just what is actually happening.

In this paper I will focus on one of the silences in development discourse, the issue of global prostitution. Prostitution is hardly mentioned in development discourse though themes like tourism and migration are. As globalization intensifies so does the global sex business in its two main forms: women from poorer countries going to richer countries (Europe, USA, Japan and others) as sex-workers and secondly tourists, military personnel and men employed by big corporations going to poorer countries in search of sexual gratification.

Prostitution is said to be women's oldest profession. But it is hardly possible to define prostitution because it depends on the context. Thus some have regarded all sexual behaviour which is structured differently from Western monogamous or serial relationships, as prostitution. Some have claimed that women who go into the public sphere are per definition prostitutes (in accordance with the original meaning of the word which was the exhibition of private behaviour in public).

Historical studies of change are very pertinent. One of these is White's study of Nairobi where she shows a shift from prostitution as women doing domestic labour to more "western" prostitution.

"In addition to sexual intercourse prostitutes sold domestic tasks, or set of tasks, that literally reproduced male labour power. For a portion of a man's wage prostitutes routinely provided bed space....cleaning, cooking, bath water, companionship, hot meals, cold meals and tea, and adhered to an ideology of sexual relations in which women were unfailingly deferential and polite."(White 1986, p. 250).

White shows how this form of "prostitution" changed as military personnel became more important in Nairobi.

Walkowitch discusses changes in England at the turn of the century where the combination of the law on contagious diseases and a movement for social improvement drew the prostitutes from their working class neighbourhoods:

"Prostitutes uprooted from their neighbourhoods.....had to find lodging in other areas of the city and the periphery. Their activity became more covert. Cut off from other sustaining relationships, they were increasingly forced to rely on pimps for emotional security and for protection against legal authorities." (Walkowitz 1996, p. 291).

One of the old and persistent assumptions about prostitution is that it is caused by women's sexuality: that the prostitutes' lust and desire trigger the trade. This is hardly the case. Joan Nestle (1987) tells of her own life as a prostitute and a lesbian, and shows that this combination has not been uncommon, as Oldenburg (1990) shows in studies of lesbianism among Lucknow

prostitutes. The needs of prostitutes for emotional relationships - sexual or not - to people other than the customer are shown in studies and reports of American prostitutes by Delacoste and Alexander (1987). Yet another example is reports of lesbian prostitutes, and of the deep meaning of family for Thai prostitutes (P. Pongpichit, 1982, Seabrooke, 1996).

The emotional involvement of prostitutes in the customers seems, in most cases, highly questionable. Freud's analysis of fetishism, Foucault's analysis in "The History of Sexuality" of doing and undoing very different kinds of sexually aroused emotions, and the practical experience of women in monogamous marriages (more than half of which were considered "frigid" even in the early 50's in the USA and England (Ehrenreich et al., 1986)) all seem to point to the conclusion that emotional feelings and identity have little relationship to the bodily parts, including the genitals. Zatz puts it this way:

"There is no more reason to think that sex workers cannot separate their work from their sex life, than there is to assume that therapists cannot separate their work from their emotional life." (Zatz, 1997, p. 298).

Sex workers should then be considered performers, perhaps entertainers. As one bitter customer from Bangkok describes the women who sell images of sex and love:

"Some of the blokes are repulsive, old, fat and ugly. Yet these women gaze into their eyes, pat their pot bellies, caress their baldness, as though this is what they really want." (Seabrooke 1996, p. 21).

In transnational or global prostitution we find all kinds of prostitution from the neighbour based women, the relatively independent entrepreneurs as in Pat Pong in Bangkok, the young girls forced or tricked into the business to the close control of both these and more experienced prostitutes in the sex trade of Europe. Siriporn Skrobaneck summarizes research which shows how:

"Patterns of trafficking from Thailand to Europe and Japan developed from a "two step" to a "one-step" pattern. In the "two step" pattern women who already work in the sex-

industry in Thailand go abroad to earn more...In the "one step" pattern women are recruited directly from the villages or urban centres...and fall immediately into the hands of traffickers." (Skrobanek, 1994, p. 10).

Thus there is great variation: from forced and deceived women living in something close to slavery to the women who choose more or less freely and manage somehow both in what Månsson (1996) calls "brothel Europe" and in tourist prostitution around the world.

Development has everything to do with the increase in international prostitution which is fundamentally a question of the international and sexual divisions of the labour market, of expansion of the market into what was formerly subsistence, non-marketed work, which is to a high degree women's work. Women's migration, (which often ends up in either domestic or sex work), follows the male pattern and the motives are similar: poverty and consumerism in their homelands often aggravated or combined with war, ecological breakdown and the like on the level of nation or, on the personal level, illness and family crisis.

Secondly and more directly, there is a crucial link between prostitution and tourism. Tourism has been a main strategy for development, advocated through the UN system from the first conference in 1963 and developed in close cooperation with governments. The demand for tourism, including package tours sold in the industrialized countries, stems from increasing leisure, and tourism is conceived of as play: sea, sun, sand and sex. Advertisements - not only for tourism - are often built around the picture of the beach, the sea and wonderful women. Some tourist agencies advertise and organize sex directly, others refer to the services on demand (Than-Dam Truong, 1990).

But in development discourse silence on the topic is, by and large, maintained.

The same silence prevails when other kinds of organized or semi-organized prostitution in the third world are at issue. In the late nineteenth century, the colonial powers, of which Britain is the best studied - created and maintained brothels - where 90% percent of the women were young widows (J. Liddle

and R. Joshi, 1985) - with the purpose of checking venereal diseases and making life more pleasant for the soldiers (Ware, 1992, Enloe, 1989). Similar practices have been followed since then by, among others, Japanese and American governments. But today, prostitutes are no longer provided by state-controlled brothels but by private enterprise. And this kind of enterprise is often combined with the drug trade (McCoy, 1971).

In international and national prostitution there are peculiar laws. Prostitution by women is prohibited. It may or may not be illegal for hotels, travel agencies, etc. to organize prostitution. But this makes little difference since police implementation everywhere is focussed on the women who work as sex workers (especially women of colour) and not on such organizations. Legislation governing prostitution seldom refers to the legal businesses in travel and entertainment which underpin it and costumers are not mentioned. Thus, in a situation where a service is traded, one part is made illegal, the other not. The organizers are seldomly searched, harassed or punished and certainly not if they belong to legal businesses.

The latest international document on the issue is a first draft of an EU declaration (Ministerial Conference, 1997). It is remarkable for two features: it is about trafficking in women, not as the 1949 declaration on persons, and it opens the possibility of permanent residence on humanitarian grounds for the women involved "if necessary". The aim of the declaration is to stop trafficking and the clauses relating to the women who are trafficked are all concerned with protecting them as witnesses: removing gender bias in judicial systems, support, no detention for illegal immigration as long as the trial lasts. (Women's groups, especially in Holland, seem to have influenced the formulations quite a bit). The actors mentioned in the declaration are - as usual - the traffickers and the women. The demand, the male costumers, are not mentioned with a single word. Thus in situations where a service is traded, one part is illegalized, the other not mentioned. The organizers are sometimes sanctioned, mostly not.

Thus development policies are implicated in the sex business in the sense that they create, advocate, or fail to change the conditions under which the sex business can occur. If this is the indirect form, then the direct form is to be found in tourism-

Susanne Thorbek

related prostitution where governments, donors as well as international and national business profit from prostitution. But the development discourse is silent on the issue; it is treated as either a question of reforming women or of illegal immigration.

A persistent feature of the discourse and the institutional arrangements is that women in the sex business - whether seen as victims or as depraved, amoral or cheating - are those who create the problems, the only agents mentioned in law and in more day to day discourse. The women are those whom reform programmes and law enforcement are aimed at. Somehow, as has been briefly discussed above, the notion that the sexuality of the prostitutes (or of women) is the problem, seems to persist. And the "silence" around the whole business entails that the process of institutionalization of prostitution is invisible.

## **Discourses, Narratives, Myths**

In the following I present two discourses from Western scientific history. I take discourse to mean, in a broad sense, scientific discussion on how to understand a theme, not in the narrow sense of a focus on the institutionalization involved in producing and implementing knowledge and power.

I have chosen to focus on Western discourses on race, sex and sexuality because I find the influence from the West quite pervasive when the topic is global prostitution. Obviously, this is insufficient for a full study of global prostitution but it is, I think, thought provoking to study the debates in Western countries on the subject.

The first is the discourse on the social contract. The social contract, the idea that our societies, civilized society, are built on contract between free and equal individuals pervades current thought. Social contracts are here viewed as the mark of civilization: social contracts between individuals in society - such as the marriage contract - the labour contract, the contracts made in trade as well as contracts between state and citizens, and human rights.

In "The Sexual Contract", Carole Pateman treats the origins, the myths, the discourses of the social contract and argues that behind the social contract a hidden, sexual contract exists. Pateman ends by arguing that the strong focus on the social contracts may be a problem because society exists on the basis of something else; the rhythms and customs of social life, agreements and debates among people.

Human rights, of course, have a somewhat special status since they are rights which should protect the individual citizen against the misuse of state power. But at the same time human rights are agreed upon by governments at international conferences and implemented by states/governments.

The second discourse I refer to on race, sex and sexuality is about some of the underlying notions, myths, and theories. This discourse has been dominant in Western thinking (especially in Vienna, Paris, and partly the USA) at the turn of the century. They were created at the time when some of the most important idioms of social science were created and may have been influential in creating the pervasiveness of the social categories of race, sex (gender) and sexuality in Europe and the USA against a blackcloth of imperialism and the institutionalization of slavery.

Both the discourses are fairly old and there has been much change in the last hundred years. They may, however, still influence ways of thinking and acting (it is hard to know when history is really only about the past). Indeed the reasons to work with history and the ongoing debates are that one can never be sure that the past is really past. In Said's words:

"There is always the uncertainty as to whether the past is really past, over and concluded or whether it continues, albeit in different forms perhaps."(Said, 1993, p. 1).

## Human Rights: The Social Contract and the Sexual Contract

Human rights, government through law and individuals who make and (are forced to?) keep social contracts is the main story of modern as well as older times in Europe and the USA. It tells how people living in a state of nature (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) or a state of status society (Maine), or patriarchy (Freud) by acts of accord or force created a new form of society, a civil order where liberty, equality and fraternity reigned. The sovereign or today the government rules on the basis of consent and enacts laws which protect property including property in persons, and the inalienable rights of individuals. The stories or myths are about how civilization was created, what it is, and how it is distinguished from former, (other?) forms of society.

“The most famous and influential political story of modern times is found in the writings of social contract theorists. The story of contractual history, tells how a new civil society and a new form of political right is created through original contract.” (Pateman, 1988, p. 1).

However Pateman claims, as we have seen, that behind the social contracts lies the sexual contract, a hidden contract and very much a contract about bodies.

The original authors of the accounts of the social contract (Rousseau, Locke, Hobbes and later Sir Henry Maine and Freud) were quite explicit about the prior sexual contract. Except for Hobbes they assumed that marriage and the subjection of women were already there in “society” before the new civil society.

Freud, of course, stresses the sexual contract as a contract about men’s access to women’s bodies. He also clearly points out the difference between the old patriarchy and the new one (which should more properly be called fraternity). The old patriarchy in Freud’s story is the father’s rule over his wife and children, not least his sons. He thus controls not only their labour but also their access to women and hence they band together and kill him and thus get access to women themselves.

Human Rights and Bodies...



The other stories have somewhat different narratives but the distinction between the old patriarchy sometimes claimed to be built on men's control of their children (but then why not mother's). Others include the slaves and servants in the house under the father's jurisdiction and this is generalised to justify the rule of the king, the sovereign, as a father. The French Revolution, too, was a revolt against patriarchal rule. The main slogan of the revolution expresses this and the fraternité or brotherhood must be taken quite literally. In the new patriarchy men are born free and equal but women are born subjugated to men: not men as fathers but men as husbands with conjugal rights.

Pateman follows two lines of argument. She goes back to historical discourses and follows the modern theoretical debates. Secondly, she analyses three case studies: Australia, the USA and England. One of the most interesting points is her discussion of old and new theoretical debates on the intricate question: How can an individual be free and equal to others (and this is of course a pre-condition of any contract) and then accept a contract which makes the individual a slave or a wife (a minor in fact with no rights to property, earnings, vote) for a lifetime?

One may add to this the western-dominated human rights campaigns which defend the right of women not to have children but do not criticize forced family planning which donors have indeed been eager to implement in India (Greer, 1984), Indonesia, and partly Sri Lanka (Thorbek, 1994). Family planning in the form of sterilization is often accompanied by force and pressure on women and not a voice has been raised in protest. Here women's bodies are obviously at stake and so far few voices have been raised against the practice.

In China, the one child campaign has been criticised by the NGO meeting at the Human Rights Conference in Vienna. But even if the forced or pressured abortions in China are perhaps the human rights violations which have affected most people, this is not an international issue.

Feminists have mostly chosen to argue against the idea that differences between men's and women's bodies matter, or even exist. Thus the term gender has been devised to refer to the sexes

Susanne Thorbek

without making associations to men's and women's bodies. This is understandable because biology has been a main argument against women who enter into the public sphere and for their subordination to men. But it is built on misunderstandings, because:

1. biology itself is differently interpreted in different periods of time;
2. biology itself obviously cannot render political accounts; and
3. it is assumed that equality is only for those who are similar - whereas in fact equality is not needed for those who are similar but for those who are different.

This disembodiment may work in fields where women can function as, or nearly as, men. However, the thinking and structuring of the labour movement, of most political movements and of nationalist movements have been very much in terms of masculinity. But in the areas where women's bodies are at stake, neither the disembodied individual or the human rights-language seem to work. Pateman argues:

"For feminists to argue for the elimination of nature, biology, sex in favour of the individual is to play the modern patriarchal game and to join in a much wider slaughter on nature within and beyond the boundaries of civil society. Nature is represented not only by women but also for example by land, indigenous people, the descendants of slaves." (Pateman, 1988, p. 226).

## **Bodies, Sex, Sexuality and Race**

The narratives of social contracts are very visible today, transformed into institutions and structures which well adapt to capitalist society and dominate in mainstream but also most critical discourses. By contrast, the sexual contract is hidden and denied. The discourses on race, sex and sexuality and especially the intersection between sexuality, sex and race are totally forgotten.

Human Rights and Bodies...

Gilman has analysed stereotypes of sexuality, race and madness, and I will focus here on his work on sexuality, sex and race in late nineteenth century Europe (Vienna mainly) and in the USA. The period in question is also the period when psychoanalysis, scientific racism and medical science as science was created. The "paper" as the idiom for science with empirical data, a form of objectivity and a form of writing which denies the person behind the text, the passive form or the plural "we". As Lindqvist remarks:

"I have never created a more fictitious gestalt than the researching "I" in my doctoral dissertation, never been as anonymous as in my doctoral dissertation." (My translation, 1992, p. 119).

Stepan and Gilman (1993) have analysed the critique of racism within the scientific sphere and shown how the grounds of racist arguments had to be changed, all moral and ethical consideration left out, empirical material collected and any "I" erased from the text in order to create "objectivity". They show that the criticism came from Jews and blacks, ie. those described as inferior. But criticism did not come from whites and it seems women were hardly mentioned except for a Jew (Weiniger) and a black scientist who projected the features ascribed to their race onto women. The critical voices from non-white scientists were seldomly published or taken seriously and it was only in the 30s' that the first authoritative scientific rejections of racism were published (Stolcke, 1993, p. 24).

In psychoanalysis, much debate ensued in the last 100 years with interpretation of every sentence of Freud's and medical science changed too, not least after the discovery of bacteria. Today, however, the international projects on exploring genes from different races and thus scientifically analyse such differences have begun with "The Human Genome Diversity Project" (Jeanette Armstrong, 1997) and thus a renewed interest in biological race-differences. The intersection between race, sex and sexuality in Western (European American) science has, however, been forgotten.

Three discourses will be shortly presented here: firstly on sexuality, especially women's and children's sexuality and,

Susanne Thorbek

related to this, secondly, the discourse of prostitution and, thirdly, of race, black women and sexuality.

## Women's and Girls' Sexuality

Sigmund Freud wrote the following about the intersection of children and female sexuality and class in "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality":

"In this respect the children behave in the same way as an average uncultivated woman in whom the same polymorphous perverse disposition persists. Under ordinary conditions she may remain normal sexually, but if she is led on by a clever seducer, she will find every sort of perversion to her taste, and will retain them as part of her own sexual activities. Prostitutes exploit the same polymorphous, that is, infantile disposition for the purposes of their profession; and considering the immense number of women who are prostitutes or who must be supposed to have an aptitude for prostitution without being engaged in it, it becomes impossible not to recognize that this disposition to perversions of every kind is a general and fundamental human characteristic." (Freud, quoted from Gilman, p. 38).

Although Freud talks about children and adults, Gilman shows that he is thinking of girls and women and that this is in accordance with the times, too. Earlier notions about childhood sexuality and especially girls' were double in nature. The romantic picture of almost disembodied children was one perspective, another was the "war against onanism, which in the West lasted nearly two centuries" (Foucault, 1984, p. 104) which was on the decline at the time Freud wrote. However, child masturbation, especially girls', was still seen as leading to immoral and depraved sex lives.

The romantic notions, of course, construed all sexuality in girls as somewhat perverse, but this idea was strengthened by the facts of prostitution and not least girl prostitution in Vienna as in other big European cities (Edinburgh, Liverpool). Walkowitz remarks that most working class women were engaged on and off in "prostitution". It is hard to know who was registered but, for

instance, in Vienna half the registered prostitutes were less than 14 years old (1876-83).

There was, according to Gilman, general agreement in the medical and legal fields of prostitution that it "derived from the vices of women" (William Acton, 1865 quoted from Gilman, p. 42). The causes of girls' deviant behaviour were summarized by F. Hügel (1865) as follows:

"Bad education of the girls in general, but especially those from the lowest classes...Girls are exposed to "immoral speech and act", the poverty of their parents make them long for luxurious living, the lodgers in their home or their fathers initiate them in an early age. Fathers and daughters living in concubinage - fathers living off the ill-gotten gains of their daughters." (Hügel in Gilman, 1985).

So poverty, poor living conditions, depravation and the physically weaker girls are, under the circumstances, more:

"Given to coquetry, love of pleasure, dislike of work, desire for luxury and ostentation, love of ornament, alcoholism, avarice, immorality etc." (From Gilman, 1985).

Freud elsewhere describes the girl child as a woman with a sexuality but since it is not aroused she lacks, like many women, the inhibiting factors of "shame, disgust, and morality". She is thus fascinating for the adult male. In a private letter he refers to his own dreams and childhood experiences and sees the servant girls in the home as the seducer of the adult males, as "worthless, female material", but also points out that such experiences make girls, who identify with the female servant, feel shame and disgust often leading to hysteria.

Freud, however, disagreed with some of his contemporaries in finding the aptitude for prostitution, the perverse sexuality (potentially) in all women, whereas for instance Cesare Lombroso (1893) drew a sharp line between the abnormal prostitute woman and the virgin-mother, the normal woman without these sexual drives. (Brude - Firnau, 1979 referred to by Gilman, 1985).

Susanne Thorbek

## The Icon of Black Women

The icon of black women as seen by male eyes in the last century was still on display in the Musée de l'Homme in Paris until a few years ago. This is the sexual parts of Sarah Bartman, a young Hottentot woman who was exhibited in the major cities of Europe from 1810 to her death in 1815. She was shown nearly naked with her protruding buttocks on show, her prolonged labia minoria, which was dissected at her death, was regarded as the essence of black females. The essence of black women was their sexuality: a primitive all-encompassing lust, perverse and uninhibited like a child's, lascivious and depraved. At that time, in the nineteenth century, slavery and its abolition was discussed in Europe, but not a single voice pointed out the obvious, that Sarah Bartman was a human being who was enslaved.

George Cuviers (1817, reprinted twice) dissected her after her death and was one of those scientists who analysed her sexual parts and wrote about them with the intention of showing how the anomalies of the organ of generation in the lowest female being had traits similar to the orangutan, the highest animal in the chain of evolution. Other physical traits in the black female were found. The hymen was not the entrance to the vagina, an American from the Southern States argued. Dissection on black men was performed too, but without mention of their sexual parts.

"The genitalia and buttocks of the black female attracted so much interest in part because they were seen as evidence of an anomalous sexuality not only in black women but in all women." (Gilman, 1988, p. 89).

The "overdevelopment" of the clitoris was linked to prostitution and lesbianism (a myth which persisted into the 1950's (Nestle, 1987)). The Hottentot and the deformation of her labia was incorporated into a disease model, a model of degeneracy which was congenital (as Ibsen conceived syphilis in "Ghosts"). At the turn of the century, the disease of black women's sexuality was further stressed by Havelock Ellis' study of beauty as an objective, scientific measure, (quoted from Gilman, 1988, p. 91).

## The White Prostitute is Black

Prostitutes were likewise studied and a whole range of physiological signs, expressions of their deviant, degenerated and congenital sexuality studied: from "Darwins" ear (without lobe), feet, facial features to fatness such as women in asylums and Hottentots, and protruding buttocks (Lombroso, 1893). Tumours and abscesses in the labia makes this thicker (Parent-Duchatelet, 1936, from Gilman, 1988, p. 95) like the Hottentot's. Thus the Hottentot, the prostitute and potentially all women were primitive with an uncontrolled diseased sexuality which was expressed in the physical characteristics of their genitals, buttocks and other features. They were thus a threat to men but also fascinating and easily accessible.

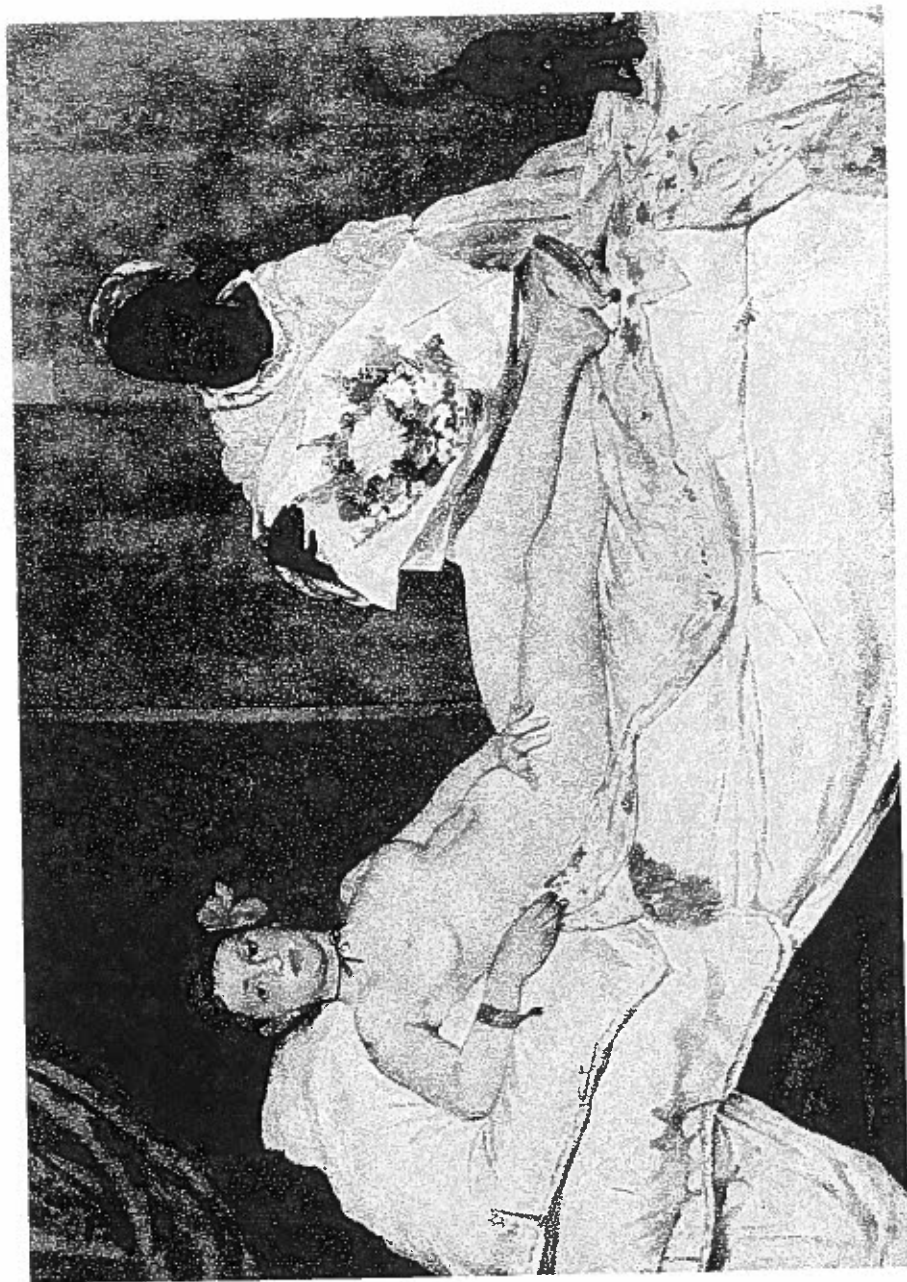
It was commonplace to see primitive society as containing unbridled sexuality or even "universal prostitution". Bachhofen postulated this, as did Hegel and Schopenhauer. Not surprisingly proposals for the regulation of prostitutes followed those implemented on slaves. Such views were commonplace and expressed in writings, "pornography", novels, paintings and popular culture. Intermarriage or mixing of races was seen as a great problem which would, according to this logic, lead to degeneracy, barrenness, illness. In sum:

"And indeed Sarah Bartmann's sexual parts serve as the central image for the Black female throughout the nineteenth century." (Gilman, 1985, p. 88).

And it seems that the Black female serves as a central icon for the prostitute and potentially all women. The uninhibited sexuality of black women was an illness but it was also childish and it was fascinating. One current in European discourse viewed the uninhibited childish "natural" sexuality of blacks as positive, as an ideal from epochs before civilization started to degenerate. For some, working class women and prostitutes had the same attraction.

The discourses of science reveal the evaluations and sometimes disgust that modern white men felt vis-à-vis blacks and other races, about women and especially working class women and prostitutes. However the scientific discourse does not show the fascination, the projections of inner feelings of lust and desire for the other which, Hall argues, have been and must logically be a factor in defining "the other" (Hall, 1991).

Susanne Thorbek



Eduard Manet, *Olympia* (1862-63) (Louvre, Paris) in John Richardson:  
Manet, Phaidon, Oxford





Eduard Manet, *Nana* (1877) (Kunsthalle, Hamburg) in John Richardson:  
Manet, Phaidon, Oxford

It is interesting to take a look at literature and art. Eduard Manet was a modernist painter, in fact a provokingly modernist painter. One of his pictures, the *Olympia* (1862-63), was especially debated and criticised at the time. Older models for the picture existed but in these the *Olympia* was depicted as beautiful and somewhat shy. What Manet did was to show nakedness and the lack of demure posture in the naked woman. She is staring directly at the viewer. In fact, her eyes follow the spectator when he moves and she is not just naked but the "jewellery" and shoes reveal her to be on display.

The suspicion that Manet depicts a prostitute or concubine is obvious and, for the contemporary viewer, this is confirmed by the black servant. Black servants were generally interpreted as a sign of illegitimate and depraved sexuality and the somewhat plump face of the black woman stresses the commonly held assumptions of illness, the primitivity connected to lust in contemporary thinking.

Picasso's paraphrase or caricature brings this into the open: the assumed prostitute women are painted black. In Picasso's parody, of course, the illegitimate sexual lust is located in the male servant and the painter himself is brought into the picture.

Eduard Manet belonged to a circle of painters and writers who were very modern, and critical of their time. Zola belonged to the same circle and in 1876 he wrote a novel where a minor figure was a prostitute called *Nana*. Manet painted a picture, *Nana*, depicting this figure. The model was a well known mistress, the symbols (for instance the Japanese crane in the background) indicated her status as the picture itself does. She is half naked, the male flanoer in the background, she has "Darwin's ear" and not least the protruding buttocks and the fatness of the Hottentot. Thus here a black servant is not needed, she is herself black underneath her white skin.

Zola was inspired by his friend's painting and a year later he published the novel *Nana*. The novel is a story about an actress come prostitute and the main message is the corruption of high society which she evokes. The symbolism of the black servant is used in the beginning of the story when people gossip about a

party Nana gives and where it is whispered that six naked black males will serve the food.

In the last part of the book Nana's influence is explained as follows:

"Her devilish destruction was fulfilled. The fly, which flew up from the garbage of the suburb carrying the contamination from society's rottenness had poisoned all this men...While her sex increased in radiance and was shining on the victims who lay prostrate for her feet, like a rising sun lightening a battlefield, she retained ignorance of her deeds, her unique, amiable lack of conscience."

and on the individual level:

"...little by little she had with her solid body and laughter drawn this poor and honorable descendent of an old family into her web." (my translation).

Logically she dies of smallpox.

Nana is described as childish and whimsical, following all kinds of impulses without consideration for money, honour, rules and norms or compassion. Her sexuality is the cause of the exploitation of men as well as their depravation and destruction. Her motives mainly lust and greed. Zola's novel is very interesting. It expresses nearly all the notions about prostitutes to be found in contemporary science. But it also describes this woman in a way which makes clear the fascination which men feel, all kinds of men, actually, and not a few women, too.

Manet's and Zola's work are thus built around the notions of race, sex, and sexuality which are expressed in the sciences of the time and the pervasiveness of their ideas seems thus clear. It is worth stressing that Manet and Zola (like Freud) are among the best, the most modern and critical thinkers of their time and have had a lasting influence. Zola and Manet articulate the fascination with the prostitute, with women's unreserved but dangerous not to say irresistible sexuality in the eyes of men and they may help us understand how the notions of sex and sexuality and maybe race have had such influence.

Susanne Thorbek

The dominating discourses of science, literature and the fine arts were not immune to society. The abolition of slavery led to a change from interest in the skin colour of blacks - which was explained as congenital leprosy - to a focus on syphilis as a congenital illness emanating from Africa. But there were other voices at the margins of society.

## Dissenting Voices

One of the dissenting voices which questioned the dominant notions of sexuality and race came not from science but from social movements. After the abolition of slavery a white counter revolution in the Southern states of America emerged wherein public authorities in cooperation with the white community created a reign of terror in order to keep the Negroes in "their place". In the legitimization of this, and especially in the lynchings, the sexuality, or rather sexuality as revenge and power in black males combined with a-sexuality and passivity in white females, were deployed as arguments.

It was a former slave woman, now teacher and editor, who questioned this legitimation of the terror. Her analysis created great turmoil in Britain and the USA where the women's movement (temperance movement) dismissed her, dismissed the right to vote for blacks and accepted the lynchings.

Ida B. Wells wrote:

"You see, the white man has never allowed his women to hold the sentiment "black but comely", on which he has so freely acted himself. Libertinism apart, white men constantly express an open preference for the society of black women. But it is a sacred convention that white women can never feel passion of any sort, high or low, for a black man. Unfortunately facts don't always square with convention; and then, if the guilty pair are caught in the act, it is christened an outrage at once and the women is practically forced to join in hounding down the partner of her shame." (Ida B. Wells, 1894, quoted from Ware, 1992, p. 169).

Her arguments have become widespread, they are repeated in Spike Lee's "Jungle fever" for instance, but they never reached any scientific writings of course.

Another example is the Englishwoman Josephine Butler. She agitated, together with a circle of friends, against the contagious disease act. This was an act passed mainly with the colonies (India) in mind. The problem of Britain was that their soldiers could not marry. The ideal of the English Lady, who behaved and dressed well and did not work was an important sign of the civilizing mission of the white man. But British soldiers did not get wages which allowed them to marry English women. And with the ideas current at that time on the disadvantages of mixing the races, they were not allowed to marry Indian women either. Venereal diseases were a problem and the soldiers found medical check-ups humiliating. So the Colonial Administration created brothels where Indian women could be checked for contagious diseases and the purpose of the law was to legalize these brothels.

Josephine Butler and her friends worked against this law and they never fell into the trap of arguing for state control of prostitution. She wrote then:

"Even if we lack the sympathy which makes us feel the chains which bind our enslaved sisters are pressing on us also, we cannot escape the fact that we are one womanhood, who cannot be wholly and truly free." (quoted from Ware, 1992).

The one womanhood idea has and can be used for purposes of domination when white, mostly middle class women, speak for everybody. In this case, however, it was the background for a protest against exploitation and suppression of Indian women.

## **The Past in the Present**

The most outspoken critique of the persistence of the sex, race, and sexuality connection has come from black feminists in the USA. bell hooks argues in an article called "continued devaluation of black womanhood" (1996):

Susanne Thorbek

"In the case of black women and white men, inter-racial sex was both encouraged and condoned as long as it did not lead to marriage. By perpetuating the myth that all black women were incapable of fidelity and sexually loose, whites hoped to devalue them so that no white man would marry a black woman." (bell hooks, 1996, p. 220).

As the images of sex and race are presented continually through media and the culture more generally they influence all, both white men and women as well as black men and women, and , bell hooks argues, lead to greater control of black women.

Patricia Hill Collins, too, finds traces of the turn of the century discourse on race, sex and sexuality in modern America and has analysed the commodification of sexuality in prostitution and pornography:

"Prostitution under European-American capitalism thus exists within a complex web of political and economic relationships, whereby sexuality is conceptualized along intersecting axes of race and gender....Black "whores" make white "virgins" possible. This race gender nexus fostered a situation whereby white men could then differentiate between the sexualized woman-as-body who is dominated and screwed and the a-sexual woman as pure-spirit who is idealized and brought home to mother...Moreover the whole situation was profitable." (Hill Collins, 1996, p. 312).

In science, concepts have changed, race is turned into ethnicity or culture, usually as determining as race ever was. Sex is turned into gender, any impact of bodily differences between men and women erased, sexuality is turned into a specialized discipline as is psychoanalysis.

The old nexus with its racialization of males and females of non-European heritage and the sexualization of women and races is still around. Banal, maybe, but certainly efficient as is the consistent focus on women in the business of the sex industry. The consumers, the men and the institutions, the travel agencies, hotels, entertainment establishment and the governments and donors who support the tourist industry are not mentioned. It still seems that prostitution is a problem for women only. They

Human Rights and Bodies...

have to be caught, reformed even "protected" by outlawing their work.

Racialized notions seem also to be at play behind the very different treatment of women around army bases, tourism and other big workplaces for men in Europe and in third world countries. The organization and visibility of prostitution and/or intermixing between foreign men and local women are different and the profits from the trade in women seems to be siphoned off into governments and big business much more easily for instance in Thailand and the Phillipines than in Europe or, say, Iceland. Behind this - and the public outcry in some third world countries - seems to be notions of the availability of women of colour and maybe, too, of their greed or "love of pleasure, dislike of work, desire for luxury and ostentation, etc. etc".

If we look at the individuals involved in prostitution as costumers and as sex-workers variations between individual costumers and between individual women in prostitution are obvious. The costumers range from the racist man who is out to find a second wife, who can work for him at the streets of Hamburg, to the old man who finds real and true love: "Loy is the best that ever happened to me" (Seabrooke, 1996, p. 20). And among the women working as prostitutes, from those who hope for a future love, to the pure business woman. But generally among the men there is the idea that Thai women - they have only met prostitutes! - cheat them for money, and the prostitutes all claim they contribute to their families (as most unmarried Thai women do).

As to the question of human rights, of laws on prostitution, it seems that male sex rights, the sexual contract still works. It is at least difficult to understand the discrepancy of illegality for the women engaged in the transaction and the legality of the men who buy their sexual satisfaction or power, love or whatever from the women who work as prostitutes, without a hidden sexual contract. The implementation of laws on prostitution with a blind eye to the businesses involved and an open eye on the women, and the legal profits which the tourist industry, national governments and banks which give loans to the tourist industry reap are likewise hard to understand without the hidden sexual contract.

Susanne Thorbek

I think the narratives of the intersection between race, sex and sexuality is present in another form, too. Even if images of sexuality in non white women may have changed, and they are different for different "races" (Jews and Blacks, Gilman, 1988, Indians and Blacks, Jay Gould, 1993, Asians and Blacks, Hill Collins, 1996) the availability, the easy access to women for white men may be a common feature. The childishness, the naturalness, the instincts may be savoured - but build on similar constructions of race, sex and sexuality.

I think, however, that what is most telling in the old narratives is the persistent assumption of the sexuality of the prostitute, and especially the sexuality of the non-white prostitute as the real culprit. It does not make much difference whether she is seen as a helpless, passive victim or an active actor as long as she is the only visible part in the story of prostitution. It follows logically that she, and probably her sexuality, is the important focus, and this fits disgustingly well with the actual actions of governments, judicial systems to daily police harassment which have consistently focused on the women in the transaction.

Prostitution and especially global or international prostitution - that is migrating women and brothels or half-brothels related to tourism, military and big male work-sites in third world countries - are without human rights, in most cases, without any rights. Their work and trade are in most places non-legal and those working in Europe and Japan, sometimes in USA, are seen as illegal or potentially illegal immigrants.

The sexual contract which Carole Pateman shows to exist, may have some influence on this situation. The special focus on the women in prostitution and the lack of focus on the costumers point in this direction as does the blind eye on the legal businesses who reap profits from the trade. (The interest in the traffickers which the EU has shown in their draft declaration is visibly concerned with illegal immigration, and only with the women who are the victims as witnesses).

However, there is much more to the situation of women who work as prostitutes than the question of rights. Half-hearted attempts at legislation, red light districts in a few cities show that the women may be as harshly exploited and their freedom



and room of manoeuvre even more circumscribed under such conditions. The social relations, the notions and ideas in people's heads, the culture of Western countries (except maybe Holland) seem as important and thus the ideas of prostitution, the naturalization of the ideas of race and the sexualization of women and of races which were developed at the turn of the century seem still alive. As has been shown, male costumers in Thailand echo the description of prostitutes by Zola, and black feminists in the USA point to the same continuity in thinking. So, the past seems not really past in Western thinking.

## References

Acton, W. (1857): *Prostitution considered in it's Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects*, J.Churcill, London, quoted from Gilman, 1985.

Armstrong, Jeanette (1997): *Deep Ecology: The Plateau Cultures of the North West of Canada*, Workshop, Aalborg University.

Christensen, A.-D et al., ed. (1997): *Det kønnede samfund*, Aalborg Universitetsforlag, Aalborg.

Collins, Patricia Hill (1996): *Black Women and the Sex/Gender Hierarchy*, in Jackson et al., ed.

Delacoste, F. and P. Alexander, ed. (1987): *Sex Work*, Cleis Press, USA.

Ehrenreich, B., E. Hess, G. Jacobs (1986): *Re-making Love, The Feminization of Sex*, Anchor Press/Doubleday, New York.

Enloe, C. (1989): *Bananas, Beaches and Bases*. Pandora Press, London.

Foucault, M. (1984): *The History of Sexuality, an Introduction*, Peregrine Books, Great Britain.

Freud, S. (1953-74): *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Hogarth, London.

Susanne Thorbek

Gilman, Sander L. (1985): *Difference and Pathology*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London.

Gramsci, A. (1971): *Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart, London.

Gould, S. Jay (1993): *American Polygeny and Craniometry before Darwin: Blacks and Indians as Separate, Inferior Species*, in Harding.

Greer, G. (1985): *Sex as Destiny*, Picadore, London.

Hügel, F. (1865): *Zur Geschichte, Statistik und Regelung der Prostitution*, Zamarski and Dittmarsch, Vienna, quoted from Gilman, 1985.

Harding, S. (1993): *The "Racial" Economy of Science*, Indiana University Press, USA.

hooks, bell (1996): *Continued Devaluation of Black Womanhood*, in Jackson et al.

Jackson, S. and S. Scott, ed. (1996): *Feminism and sexuality*, Colombia University Press, USA.

Lindqvist, S. (1992): *Udryd de sataner*, Gyldendal, København.

P. McCoy: *The Political Economy of Heroin*, in New York 1971.

Ministerial Conference (1997): First Draft Version "The Hague Ministerial Declaration on European Guidelines for Effective Measures to Prevent and Combat Trafficking" in Women for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation, The Hague.

Mohanty, S.P. (1993): "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On Beloved and the Postcolonial Condition", in *Cultural Critique*, vol. 24, spring. New York.

Månsson, H. (1991): *Brothel Europe*, Seminar, Strasbourg.

Nestle, Joan (1987): *Lesbians and Prostitutes: A Historical Sisterhood*, in Delacoste and Alexander ed.

Oldenburg, V.T. (1990): "Lifestyle as Resistance: The Case of the Courtesans of Lucknow", India, in *Feminist Studies*, vol. 16, no. 2.

Parent-Duchatelet, A. J. B. (1836): *De la prostitution dans la ville Paris*, J. P. Bailliere, Paris, quoted from Gilman, 1985.

Pateman, Carole (1988): *The Sexual Contract*, Polity Press, Great Britain.

Pongpaichit, P. (1982): *From Peasant Girl to Bangkok Masseuses*, Geneva.

Rubin, G. (1984): *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*, in C. S.Vance.

Said, Edward W. (1993): *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage, Great Britain.

Seabrook, J. (1996): *Travels in the Skin Trade*, Pluto Press, London and Chicago.

Skrobanek, Siriporn (1994): The Initial Results of the Research and Action project on Traffic in Women (RATW) in International Migration and Traffic in Women, International Workshop, Chiangmai.

Stepan, Nancy Leys and Sander L. Gilman (1993): *Appropriating the Idioms of Science: The Rejection of Scientific Racism*, in Harding.

Stolcke, V. (1993): *Is sex to gender as race is to ethnicity?*, in del Valle.

Truong, Than-Dam (1990): *Sex, Money and Morality*, Zed Press, London and New Jersey.

Thorbek, S. (1997): *Ud over ligestilling. Teorier og myter*, in Ann-Dorte Christensen et al., ed.

Thorbek, S. (1994): *Gender and Slum Culture in Urban Asia*, Vistar Publications, Zed Books Ltd., New Delhi and London.

Susanne Thorbek

- Thorbek, S. (1987): *Voices from the City-Women of Bangkok*, Zed Press, London.
- Valle, T. del, ed. (1993): *Gendered Anthropology*, Routledge, London and New York.
- Vance, C. S. (1984): *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, Boston.
- Ware, Vron (1992): *Beyond the Pale*, Verso, London and New York.
- White, L. (1986): 'Prostitution, Identity and Class Consciousness in Nairobi During World War II', in *Signs*, vol. 11, no. 2.
- Weininger, O. (1905): *Kjøn og Karakter*, A. Christiansens Forlag, København.
- Walkowitz, J. (1996): *The Politics of Prostitution*, in Jackson et al., ed.
- Zatz, N. D. (1997): "Sex Work/Sex Act: Law, Labor and Desire in Constructions of Prostitution", in *Signs*, vol. 22, no. 2.