

Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik (eds). *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*. London: Zed Press, 2003. ISBN 1-84277-030-6 (hbk), 1-84277-031-4 (pbk).

The book edited by Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik is a collection of academic and non-academic pieces on prostitution. The main themes of this edited volume are: men in prostitution (as customers, and as male prostitutes serving female clients); migrant women in prostitution; trafficking and migration; and prostitution policies. Most chapters are case studies and an important proportion of them are on Thailand or Thai prostitutes working in other countries. Variety characterizes the chapters comprised in this collection regarding the topics treated, the theoretical perspectives (if any) embraced by authors and the main questions addressed.

At least three strengths make this book an interesting addition to any collection on prostitution. First, this edited volume is on an important topic. The phenomenon of prostitution has changed enormously in the last decades. For instance, in contrast with past times, in western countries a significant proportion of individuals who currently work as prostitutes are of foreign origin. This raises questions about trafficking and international migration, among others. These and other sea changes in the phenomenon of prostitution call for in-depth analysis. Second, this book makes a serious attempt to refute some of the clichés present in the literature and public discussion on prostitution, including the following propositions: that most foreign prostitutes working in western countries did not know that they would work as prostitutes before coming to the developed world; or that any individual who contributes to the fact that a person travels abroad to work as a prostitute is a trafficker independently of whether the prostitute wants to travel or not (pp. 4-5). The refutation of clichés is peremptory, aimed not only at satisfying scholars' intellectual desire to understand the phenomenon of prostitution, but also at providing prostitutes with the services, policies and support that they truly need. Third, this book contains some excellent chapters, including chapter 7 (by Anders Lisborg) on prostitution-related migration from Thailand to Denmark. Lisborg skillfully succeeds at a double challenge: to conceptualize prostitutes as active actors (instead of passive victims), and at the same time to denounce the terrible conditions in which many individuals work as prostitutes. Another outstanding contribution is chapter 13 (by Arthur Gould) that explains why Sweden has taken an extreme abolitionist position in order to penalize clients.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned strengths, this book has some serious problems. First, the heterogeneity of the quality of the chapters is marked. This book contains excellent chapters but also others that are not so, to say the least. Since I am a scholar, let me illustrate this weakness by pointing to the shortcomings of some chapters written by academics (instead of chapters written by activists of NGOs working with prostitutes). For example, chapter 1

is on texts written and posted on the Web by sex tourists on their trips to Thailand. The authors of this chapter do not explain how they have chosen the texts that they analyse. Therefore, the reader does not know whether the texts comprise a representative sample or not. In addition, the authors do not explain their methodology for analysing the texts.

Second, the 'Conclusion' is not really a conclusion, but an additional chapter that contains another case study. This lack of a real concluding chapter is especially grave when a collection is as heterogeneous as this one, in which chapter authors treat different topics, write from academic and non-academic perspectives, ask different questions and use different theoretical frameworks and methodologies (if any).

Third, the title of the book (*Transnational Prostitution: Changing Patterns in a Global Context*) is misleading because it promises more than what the book as a whole actually delivers. On the one hand, in spite of the reference to the 'changing patterns' in the title, many chapters are case studies. These are very interesting in themselves, but they mainly describe very specific contexts rather than identifying and studying 'patterns' in or beyond the cases. On the other hand, in spite of the mention of the 'global context' in the title, there is little effort in several chapters to analyse the impact of globalization on the phenomenon of prostitution.

This book, like many others on the topic, contains chapters written clearly from the (political) position that conceptualizes prostitution as sex work. No chapter author explicitly defends abolitionism or prohibition. However, abolitionism and prohibition are the main principles guiding state policies on prostitution in some countries. Therefore, it would be interesting to study in the future why there seems to be such a gulf between what appears to be the dominant position in the academic and activist literature and that in state policy.

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