Third World Quarterly, Vol 18, No 1, pp. 93–108, 1997

Body politics: international sex tourism

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This article explores some puzzles in international politics, in particular about what it might mean to write 'the body', taking account of embodied materiality and sexual difference. I pursue this puzzle through a focus on sex tourism, which means asking questions about relations between sex and power, men and women, first and third worlds, and sexual relations across state, national, racialised and culturalised boundaries.

Prelude

My earlier work as a feminist in International Relations (IR) pursued the question 'Where are women in international politics?',[1] interrogating different constructions of masculinity and femininity in international politics, and using early feminist IR understandings of gender relations as power relations.[2] This meant teasing out connections between the category woman and actual women; between women and feminism; between different feminisms or feminists. It meant attending to gender constructed relationally, implicating women *and* men; and attending to differences among women, too. It led, also, to a reversal—to ask what 'the international' does to women's lives, and to gender relations; and to interrogate the international politics of feminism—something that 'Third World' and minority feminists demand of white, settler state feminists like myself.[3]

I was reading, teaching, writing as a materialist feminist, and a gender feminist.[4] I took on board early second wave feminist distinctions between (biological) sex and (social/cultural) gender, to deny that biology is women's destiny, to make room for a feminist political project. Seeing gender, along with race and ethnicity, as socially constructed, I tended to assume bodies were simply there: natural, neutral, surfaces on which the social/symbolic was written. What had been constructed could, with difficulty and struggle, be changed.

In recent writing for *Worlding Women*,[5] I was surprised to detect the eruption of bodies—sexed bodies—into my text. One reader took the presence of these bodies in my manuscript as emphasising the physicality of people's, particularly women's, experiences of the international. Bodies figured, she suggested, as 'the site in which the international and the personal most painfully converge…it is

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0143-6597/97/010093-16 $7.00

only through a resistance to hegemonic ways of mapping, controlling and silencing that we can unearth the real bodies that the nation-state and traditional IR have buried'.[6]

Bodies emerged inscribed with differences that matter; bodies were gendered, racialised, culturalised, classed—and sexualised. Sex—as desire, danger, eroticised bodies, transgressions, violations—came through my writing too, including women's experiences in identity conflicts, as boundary markers or community possessions, as women warriors, as commodified cheap labour on the global assembly line, as labour migrants, 'foreign' domestic workers, and international sex workers.

Made curious,[7] I began to address the growing literature referred to as the philosophy of the body, associated in Australia especially with Moira Gatens, who asserted early on that mapping onto the body is affected by what kinds of bodies meanings are mapped onto,[8] and Elizabeth Grosz, writing on the sexed body, and female embodiment.[9] So too I took up Gillian Young's question: 'how can we address the issue of the body in investigating social and global power and the interconnections between them?'[10]

Missing the body, and the 'Third World'

IR has largely 'forgotten' women and gender relations. The citizen, soldier, leader, worker was presumed to be male—if persons were visible at all. Feminist political theory and feminist IR deconstructed dichotomies and hierarchised oppositions encapsulated in mind–body, culture–nature, public–private, so often translated as masculine–feminine, and politics–sex, too.[11] The public/political was revealed as male, with women relegated away from it and from the discipline, into the private, domestic, family. This smoothed the move from male to universal, a move that normalised masculinity and erased women. On closer examination, though, 'men' turned out to be certain kinds of men, whose experiences, interests and fears became the stuff of theorising. This saw an alignment of public space and power with dominant group men, and with particular constructions of masculinity. Other/othered men—working class, minority, racialised—might for certain purposes be aligned with women, associated with physicality, dangerous sexuality, emotions, more of nature and less of reason, for example.

If public space and citizenship entitlements are dominant male places, these are disrupted by 'other' men, and by women of all kinds, who might be seen as out of place, and whose rights claims could endanger them.[12] These body politics were not available for critique in disciplines practised as dis-embodied, in the absence of bodies, both of the writers and their subjects. Political Science and IR grew largely safe from the mess, pain, pleasure and desire of actual bodies—though at times in language which suggested pleasure and danger were just a word away.[13]

There are contradictions and complications here. While largely disembodied, or in the process of 'missing' the body, the discipline colluded with the displacement of both body and sex onto women.[14] Enlightenment's man is

abstract, individual, centred on the mind, autonomous. Woman, on the other hand, is sexed, and there for (heterosexual) men's sex and service. Men are subjects, women dependents, a 'body-for-others'.[15]

However, men's bodies are both there and denied in much social science writing. In other constructions, men's bodies are active, women's the object of desire or repulsion. Men's bodies are often aligned with technology, use—body as instrument or weapon; while the female body aligns with nature, receptivity, the maternal or sexual.

Two rather different positions—men's bodies absent, with bodies displaced onto women, who are in turn displaced from public space and disciplinary concern; or men's bodies associated with doing, action, and women's bodies there for men's gaze or use. How then to grapple with representations of 'the' body as male? 'Whenever the body is abstractly thought of, it so often assumes masculine characteristics—despite the fact that the body is aligned metaphorically with the feminine.' This is another effect of the ubiquitous public/private divide. 'When the body is located in the public domain…then both materially and practically it is assumed to be male'.[16]

Another contradiction. Into the usual and presumed Political Science/IR world of disembodied public space, or world of disembodied men with women contained elsewhere, male heterosexual bodies do break through from time to time, in very physical ways. This is especially so in war and militarism, and the dangerous connections between (certain kinds of?) masculinity and violence; in nationalist passions and ethnic cleansing; in the sexualisation of the language of power politics and the eroticisation of masculinist power. Men's bodies frequently become weapons, in power plays or sexual attacks, against 'other' men, and against women. The language and images here do not fit with notions of either disembodied IR or abstract, rational political man.

But much IR writing remains disembodied. The writers and their subjects do not have (visible) bodies. Yet the body you are/are in clearly makes an enormous difference—it places you, or me, on one side or the other of boundaries that mark both power relations and entitlements. It is read to locate us on the inside or the outside of borders that, in international politics, can cost you your life.

IR frequently 'misses' the Third World, too: a site in which the body is increasingly used as a form of international currency. The dominance of Anglo–North American scholarship, and until recently a focus on the Cold War bipolar world, saw a routine evacuation of the Third World from the field, which was then left for development studies or regional studies to consider. Critical International Political Economy (IPE) and globalisation literature, especially those tracking the changing global division of labour, subverts the binary First World–Third World. At times, it has overcome women's invisibility too, for example in studies that reveal the feminisation of the global assembly line, the 'export of women' as domestic workers from poorer South and Southeast Asian states to richer states in the region and in the Middle East, and rich states' men moving across state borders for racialised sex tourism. So we can trace the marks of changing international power relations on the bodies of women.[17]

International sex tourism

International sex tourism brings together political economy and culture, material relations and representations, which I have explored elsewhere in terms of an international political economy of sex.[18] The growth of military-base sex and of international air travel and tourism has increased the demand for paid hospitality, and for paid sex. At the same time, poorer states have promoted tourism as a development strategy, seeking foreign exchange in the face of growing indebtedness, trade liberalisation and pressure from the World Bank and IMF to 'open up the economy'.

The wealth generated by international tourism returns mainly to the rich states and First World transnational corporations. And it is the rich states which mainly send tourists, including to Third World states. In the latter, development policies, current restructuring, and often wars and state violence too, have dislocated local economies and set many people on the move, in search of jobs. The contemporary global political economy has feminised migrant labour, from rural to urban areas and export processing zones within states, and across state borders. Young women's labour is commodified as cheap labour, and as docile and less trouble-prone in political terms.[19] These workers are rarely unionised or rights-protected, and may be subject to exploitation and abuse. Sexual vulnerability seems especially likely in occupations that already confuse work with servicing men, including domestic labour and hospitality work.

In her ground breaking study *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia* Thanh-Dam Truong puts together a political economy of women's labour with issues to do with sexuality.

> The intersection of prostitution and tourism cannot be understood as a patchwork of discontinuous events resulting from individual behaviour, or simply as a synchronic expression of sexism and racism. Instead, it must be placed in the context of the operations of relations of power and production in the field of air travel which preceded its development. The emergence of tourism and sex-related entertainment is an articulation of a series of unequal social relations including North–South relations, relations between capital and labour, male and female, production and reproduction.[20]

Truong explores how the sexual division of labour incorporates the role of sexual labour. Prostitutes contribute sexual services, mainly for men, but they also contribute to the global production of the tourism industry, and to the wealth of businesses, state agents and states which are engaged in this enormous and lucrative trade. She also asks how different states become integrated into the international division of labour through the provision of leisure services, which crucially include sexual services, through (mainly) women's sexual labour.

Some Western European states, the USA, Australia and Japan have a reputation for sending the sex tourists; other states, notably Thailand and the Philippines, are reputed sex tourist destinations. (Not coincidentally, they were significant sites for militarised prostitution, too). In turn, sex tourist destinations are represented in terms of culturalised and sexualised difference—as exotic and erotic.

Sexual fantasies

Often, prostitution thrives on provision of paid sex across racialised boundaries. This is seen in the importation of 'exotic' Third World sex workers into first world brothels, in the international trade in 'mail-order brides' and in sex tourism.

'Asian women' circulate globally in representations which resonate with and reproduce colonial romances and ongoing domination relations.[21] These representations are familiar in other sex across the race lines. Dominant group men's access to the bodies of subordinated, colonised or slave women was part of the privilege of power. These women were frequently constructed as sexual, available, promiscuous, or alternatively as passive, or already abused: excusing the using men from responsibility towards the women or their children. The children usually inherited the mother's status, thus keeping the (white) race pure. Any sex across the race boundary between white women and subordinate men, on the other hand, betrayed the complexities of power, and threatened both racialised hierarchies and dominant group men's control of 'their' women and their paternal lines.[22]

Now tourist brochures, airline advertisements, and hosting states' enticements regularly feature a new Orientalism in constructing both tourist destination states and their women. Receiving states are feminised, and along with women are aligned with nature, receptivity, and sexual allure and danger.[23] These images collude provocatively with colonial representations, though this time they may be called up and sold by ex-colonised or Third World men and states, too.

Tourism offers adventure, escape, something different. Tourist sites specialise in staged authenticity, and appeal to tourist, often presumed male, fantasies.[24] In the process, particular kinds of bodies are represented, constructed, circulated, sold. The Southeast Asian woman becomes a body, not a voice; not a subject, but subjected, available for men's gaze or purchase. She is sexualised, and perhaps a comfort too; more skilled in pleasuring men than the tourist's own group women are. The latter may be seen as feminist infected, and therefore difficult.

'Culture' is deployed to justify the use made of 'other' women's bodies, to excuse abuses, including flouting any notion of age of consent and using child prostitutes. Poverty, too, is used in a functional explanation of the sale or purchase, helping out those who have no other option, and whose earnings are presumed (rightly, often) to be providing a modicum of income for impoverished families. In the process, bodies are displayed and put into performance. The bodies of the sex tourist are not so evident, though when they are made visible, it is often also in stereotypic form, as the aging, ugly white male predator, as en-masse besuited Japanese businessmen, as the macho US military man.

Materialising the body

In sex tourism, then, women's—and children's, and young men's—bodies become part of the trade, as do buyers' bodies. But surprisingly tourism studies seem to have shared social sciences' reluctance to engage with the body. The

Introduction to the 'Gender in Tourism' special issue of the *Annals of Tourism Research* notes that gender has only recently interested tourism researchers, and argues for 'thinking about tourism issues as gendered relationships between individuals, groups, social categories, types of tourism, and nations in First/Third Worlds'. Articles included 'explore gender ideology in consumption practices, gender perceptions of tourism development, gender identity, sexuality and nationalism, gender in the political economy of tourism, gender relations between tourism consumers and providers, and the reframing of gender ideology using tourism leisure practice'. In the process it becomes clear that 'the sexed body and social sexuality are significant dimensions of gender in tourism'.[25]

Soile Veijola and Eeva Jokinen write on the absence of the body in sociological studies in tourism.

> So far the tourist has lacked a body because the analyses have tended to concentrate on the *gaze* and/or structures and dynamics of waged labour societies. Furthermore, judged by the discursive postures given to the writing subject of most of the analyses, the analyst himself has, likewise, lacked a body. Only the pure mind, free from bodily and social subjectivity, is presented as having been at work when analysing field experiences, which has taken place from the distance required by the so-called scientific objectivity, from the position-in-general.[26]

They rewrite several influential tourist studies, and themselves, 'into the duration of time and sexed body, into being and writing *there*, in the temporal space of tourism'.

In different disciplines' literature, we can trace the usual absence, and now in some the new presence, of the body. Explaining why the body was absented, we return to the exclusion of women, in particular the association of male with mind, public, political, and the female with body, private, natural. Bodies are associated with fluids, blood, are polluting, sinful or sexual; distracting and possibly dangerous to men, including to thinking/writing men.

Why then has the body recently become visible in some disciplines formerly missing it?

Feminism is a diverse politics, and theorising the body is associated with particular tendencies. However, women's bodies are often the given explanation for discrimination, and women frequently experience oppression and subordination bodily. Key feminist campaigns include organising against violence against women, rape, and sexual harassment. These reveal transnational similarities and national forms, for example in India against dowry murders and female foeticide. Everywhere, many feminist claims concern women's bodies, for example for choice concerning whether or not to marry, have sex, have children, or an abortion. Against such claims, women's rights and mobility are under attack in right-wing and fundamentalist politics. Their bodies become political battlegrounds for different kinds of projects, especially those against the secular state, and in reactive state-legitimising politics.[27]

Michel Foucault's writings, especially *History of Sexuality*, Volume 1, have been enormously influential, and generated productive insights and ways into body politics which have entranced or seduced many feminists too.[28] Foucault wrote the body as effects of power, produced through discourses of sexuality,

medical knowledge, legal and moral ideas. Bodies are disciplined, subject to surveillance to produce docile bodies. Bodies are produced through practices, which mark the materiality of power in discourses and other disciplinary effects. But the body of Foucaultian writing is often, remarkably, not a gendered body. Women's bodies figure infrequently, in references for example to the maternal body. 'Women live with the physicality of bodily encounters, and often with physical violence, in ways which Foucault did not examine.'[29] (So in some ways do minority, including sexual minority, men).

Other writings reveal other bodies: the citizen body, the military body, presumed, apparently, to be male; however, the connections between these bodies and 'the body politic' remain problematic.[30] Men's bodies have also become visible in sociology, which writes of the production of different bodies, and in new sexuality writings that explore masculinities, and 'deviant' sexualities.[31] Cultural studies and feminist film studies have explored fashion, advertisements, politics of the gaze and body image, for example where women's, and some men's, bodies are most obviously constructed as sexual or erotic bodies, for others' consumption. Bodies circulate in different ways as ideals and as saleable items. Writing these bodies engages a politics of sex, and not only of gender in the sense of social relations between men and women. They identify the production of sexual identities which include the homosexual and the prostitute. They help us move from the body to bodies, to different kinds of bodies and to sexualities.

While taking different forms within and between different disciplines, writing the body disrupts the old sex/gender distinction. It can move beyond a gender constructionist understanding,[32] to refigure notions of materiality, corporeality, embodiment, subjectivity and identity. So, for example, Rosi Braidotti moves beyond the sex/gender distinction to the social construction of both sexuality and the body—or, rather, different kinds of bodies. She writes in search of a materialist theory of feminist subjectivity, that develops the notion of corporeal materiality by emphasising the embodied and *therefore* sexually differentiated structure of the speaking subject. Braidotti locates 'corporal and consequently sexed beings', asserting the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience. This is an important strategic move that makes it impossible to disregard gender and sexual difference in the way so much social science still does. She advocates a corporeal politics of location, which assumes embodiment and the situated nature of subjectivity.

> In the feminist framework, the primary site of location is the body. The subject is not an abstract entity, but rather a material embodied one. The body is not a natural thing; on the contrary, it is a culturally coded socialised entity. Far from being an essentialist notion, it is the site of intersection between the biological, the social, and the linguistic.[33]

Writing of the mutually constituting, fluid and mobile making of bodies and sexual difference, Elizabeth Grosz introduces her project:

> I will deny that there is the 'real', material body on the one hand and its various cultural and historical representations on the other…these representations and

> cultural inscriptions quite literally constitute bodies and help produce them as such. The bodies… are culturally, sexually, racially specific bodies, the mobile and changeable terms of cultural production.

She argues:

> The body must be regarded as the site of social, political, cultural and geographic inscriptions, production, or constitution. The body is not opposed to culture, a resistant throw-back to a natural past; it is itself cultural, *the* cultural, product.[34]

Moving beyond the sex/gender distinction, Grosz identifies the social body. The body is social and discursive object,

> bound up in the order of desire, signification and power.… That may help explain the enormous investment in definitions of the female body in struggles between patriarchs and feminists: what is at stake is the activity and agency, the mobility and social space, accorded to women. Far from being an inert, passive, noncultural and ahistorical term, the body may be seen as the crucial term, the site of contestation, in a series of economic, political, sexual and intellectual struggles.[35]

These struggles impact directly on the actual bodies of women, seen so dramatically in the use of mass rape as a war strategy in Bosnia and elsewhere, and in the expulsion of women from public employment and visibility in Kabul with the victorious arrival of the Taliban in war-torn Afghanistan.

Feminist insistence on the sexed body and sexual difference disrupts male-as-norm and male bodies passing as 'the' body or as gender-neutral. It brings into representation sexual difference, and other/othered bodies which are treated differently in terms of entitlements and the possibility of belonging. These differences are crucial to understanding key concepts and sites in international politics, in citizenship and relation to state, in nationalism and other identity politics, in wars and other forms of boundary transgression and defence, and in the global sexual division of labour.

Difference inscribed on and read from bodies include sexual difference *and* racialised and other (power) differences. Visibilising the body enables us to ask which bodies? How are they being represented? And how are they experienced by those who are/are in those bodies?

International sex wars

Bodies are troubling enough; sexuality is even more threatening, a source of much anxiety and conflict.

Elizabeth Grosz suggests four rather different meanings of 'sex'—as sex drive, attended to in psychoanalysis; as sexual act/s; as identity, in the sexed body as male or female; and as a set of orientations, practices, desires in seeking out pleasure.[36] Sex is clearly a lot more than being male or female, and there are many possibilities in its performance. Sex and sexuality are not natural (despite naturalising discourses to sanction some sexualities and penalise others), but cultural and political, and fought over.

There are many different positions on sex.[37] Absolutists, including religious fundamentalists and the new Right, see sex as danger—bodies are polluting,

tourism.[45] This is a reminder of the problems inherent in attempting to write a more inclusive international politics which accounts for 'other' bodies.

Renaming is a signal to a changed or new political project. So the Japanese Association of Women rewrote the character for the prostitute from 'women selling bodies' to 'men buying bodies'.[46] But the bodies in focus are still women's, or children's, bodies, the bodies of sex workers, not the bodies of the buyers. Note, too, the objection of sex workers who reply that they are not selling their bodies, but in the short term renting them, or providing sexual services; not so different from other forms of bodily labour for sale.

Many sex workers believe themselves to be more or other than prostitutes. Prostitution is what they *do* (often for reasons of poverty, lack of other employment or a calculation of comparative returns), not what they are. Naming them as prostitutes might collude with seeing them as fallen, fatally done, sealing their fate. But many Thai women, including very young women and those still legally girls, construct themselves as good and dutiful daughters, as hard workers whose sacrifice and generosity enable choices and chances for family members, though often in difficult or dreadful circumstances.[47] The tendency of some campaign and media literature to reduce them to 'the prostitute' suggests that is all they are, not that prostitution is what they do for money (for now).

There is also the question of different cultures' constructions of sex and sex work, which requires analysis of indigenous and colonial forms of prostitution, and of contemporary local demand for paid sex, too. So some commentators remark on many Thai men's widely accepted use of prostitutes, and debates rage over 'Buddhalogical' explanations concerning gender roles, women's status, sex and Buddhist culture in Thailand.[48]

Transnational campaigns

Women's non-governmental organisations and organised sex workers participate in contests over representations of sex tourism, including on the world stage. I will pursue this politics briefly with reference to a transnational campaign as it materialised in Australia.

In May 1995, a coalition of Australian women's and human rights' NGOs launched a campaign against trafficking of Burmese women and girls into prostitution in Thailand. The campaign included a speaking tour by the writers of the Asia Watch report, *A Modern Form of Slavery*.[49] The report documents violence, rape, intimidation and virtual imprisonment, aggravated by the women and girls' illegal migration status and the illegality of the brothels in which they work. It documents, too, a high level of official involvement in the traffic at the border, and in transportation, organisation, and 'protection'. Here the border functions not to keep people out, but to exploit and control those who enter illegally.

An international political economy is evident in the forces propelling the trade, including civil war, state repression and violence against minorities in Burma, poverty and lack of employment opportunities, and the low status of girls, seen often as a burden on their families or with obligations to them. Agents

women need to be kept under control. Liberals attempt to remove state and other institutions from sex, to revert to individual rights and private matters. Libertarians see sexual repression as a key to social oppression. The last two positions are shared by some feminists, who see attempts to control or deny women's sexuality as preserving male domination, or who comment on the irony of feminists looking to a masculinist state to protect them against male violence or sexual exploitation. They in turn are strongly opposed by those who see male sexual demands and compulsory heterosexuality as key to the ongoing exploitation of women. These debates are most fiercely contested around women's body rights or wrongs, in sex wars waged both against and within feminism.[38] They are especially evident in bitter arguments over prostitution, pornography and abortion.

'Prostitution occupies a significant position in the intersection of feminist debates about the relationship between power, sex, sexuality and work.'[39] Arguments have long raged over whether the prostitute—or the institution of prostitution—is immoral; whether prostitution is an example, or emblematic, of women's oppression; whether it is a form of economic exploitation, or necessity, or opportunity; whether the state should criminalise, regulate or remove itself from prostitution.[40] These debates also figure as theories about gender relations, sex and sexuality, and the nature of women's work.

Thanh-Dam Truong asks how Western debates about prostitution fit in relation to Third World prostitutes in informal sector work, in the tourist industry and in work as migrant prostitutes in industrialised countries. Her own work on prostitution as sexual labour suggests that debates about sex tourism cannot be contained within the usual women's rights/human rights discourses. In campaigns against sex tourism 'many more complex issues have been revealed, including racial discrimination, business ethics, economic policy, and international relations (cultural, economic, social and political)'.[41]

Sexual panics and liberal/libertarian resistances, feminist or otherwise, have been played out on international stages earlier over white slavery, sexual trafficking, and the reputed promiscuity of and threatened pollution by 'other' bodies.[42] Contemporary moral panics which have claimed international attention include child prostitution and pornography, international trafficking of women into prostitution, international sex tourism, and AIDS. Each comes in representations of racialised difference and sexual danger. Globalising discourses around sexuality and danger connect with other kinds of global flows of people/bodies, in, for example, labour migrations, transnational foreign troops and military bases, and sex tourism.[43]

Sex tourism at its most crass or romanticised is literally a classic moment in international relations. Pleasure and danger come together with transgressions across the borders of power along First World–Third World, Rich–Poor, male–female (often), old–young (often) in 'a peculiar and unstable combination of sexuality, nationalism and economic power'.[44]

In the process the Asian woman or Thai woman or Filipina is reduced to a particular body, associated with sexual availability, or else with passivity and victimhood. Here there can be a strange convergence between the anti-feminist, sexist representations of sex tourism, and some feminist campaigns against sex

pay the relinquishing family member a sum which forms the basis of a debt which the women and girls must work off. The debt climbs steeply with each transaction, in border crossing, transport, re-selling, and to cover the girls' own expenses, including protection. Most have no idea what the debt is, or how far they have progressed in paying it off. Police crackdowns often see them arrested, fined, and handed back to agents with the fines added to the debt. Alternatively, forced repatriation on grounds of illegal entry dispatches them to largely unknown fates.

The international campaign against trafficking utilises UN conventions and international NGO linkages. It focuses in particular on child prostitution and on the slavery-like conditions in which trafficked women work. It also connects with campaigns against international sex tourism, and puts pressure on sending state governments to act against their citizens' involvement in this trade, especially where child prostitution is concerned. This campaign has heightened awareness and attention, and won some victories. Australia, Sweden and Germany have legislated to enable prosecution of their nationals on their return from abuse of children overseas. The World Congress against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, held in Sweden in August 1996, documented this extensive trade, asserted the rights of children, and called on states, NGOs and the international community to act against child sex, whether paid for by foreigners or locals.

Some Australian feminist researchers and organised sex worker groups including the Prostitute Rights Organisation for Sex Workers (PROS) and Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP), have mobilised against the anti-trafficking and anti-sex tourism campaigns. They challenge the campaigns' representations of 'Asian' sex workers as mainly poor, young, uneducated, coerced, responsible for family dependents, and probably HIV positive. PROS faults the 'moral outrage' of groups like End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT.)[50] It rightly points out that most of the sex industry in Thailand involves local trade. It challenges popular distinctions between free and forced prostitution, arguing that Asian sex workers are motivated, as Australian sex workers are, by rational choices and the possibility of earning considerably more than in other occupations. They suggest that a racist contrast is drawn in the campaigns between presumed free-choosing and competent Australian sex workers and passive and coerced Asian sex workers.

Almost all Australian sex workers now insist on condom use, and there is evidence that Asian, mainly Thai, sex workers are currently used in some Sydney brothels to cater for men who refuse to use a condom.[51] They form an underclass, aggravated by their uncertain or illegal immigrant status (often coming in on temporary visitor visas), and by the large debt of $20 000 to $30 000 which they incur as part of their work contract. In these situations, while it is clear that the women come in the hope and promise of large financial rewards once they have worked off the debt, they are vulnerable to exploitation and unlikely to have access to support from other women.

Australian sex worker groups call for decriminalising all sex work and for treating sex work as a job like any other. They assert that the anti-trafficking campaigns perpetuate stereotypes of the Asian prostitute, and invite racism

against them, while also further stigmatising all sex workers and encouraging harassment and intimidation more generally. In these situations, it is harder to provide support and health services to illegal workers in particular. They argue that child prostitution is better dealt with in terms of violations against labour laws and child rights, and not in terms of prostitution.

> It is important for western and Asian sex workers to form links in order to lobby for social change and move away from the sterile distinction between free and forced prostitution which is used by anti-pornography feminists to stereotype Asian sex workers as victims. Their focus on sex tourism and 'trafficking' is reinforcing stigma towards all prostitutes and a distorted view of sex industries and their power dynamics.[52]

They conclude: in a world of globalising business, entertainment and communications, why shouldn't Thai women come to Australia on work permits to do sex work, and why shouldn't Australian men cross state borders for sex?

These critiques are a reminder of the politics at stake, and of the different investments in sex and the sex industry, including among women. In its international forms, whether the sex worker or the client, or both, are outside their own state, we need disentangle particular constructions of gender relations, alongside and infusing national and racialised identities and boundaries. Sexual images and the exotic/erotic are packaged and purchased in the international sex trade, and racialised gender images are generated and utilised in international anti-sex tourism and anti-trafficking campaigns, too.

Writing transnational sex and power

How then can we represent the bodies entangled in that form of international relations that is sex tourism? And in sex associated with bodies which are not only sexualised but nationalised, racialised and culturalised? How can we move women and children in the sex trade from a bodily presence to a voice/voices, in circumstances where power relations are so often loaded against them? How should we attend to particular bodies in a now globalised sex trade?

Paying attention to the specific locations of work and the international political economy of representations might help. What are the specifics of bodies, and embodied experiences? What of gender, nationality, age, class on both sides? What is the role of the state and its different agents, for example in criminalising, harassing or protecting sex workers? Are those workers self-employed, or embedded in business and other relations with, for example, bar, brothel or pimp?

Differences that matter include whether the sex workers are citizens in the state they work in; if not, whether they are there legally or illegally, with access or not to support networks and resources. Other presumed differences need interrogating. The voluntary–coerced dichotomy is much deployed, but notions of choice or consent in unequal sexual relations of any kind are hard to think through. So too are gendered power and pressure in families or relationships, and poverty or lack of any other means to survive. The adult–child distinction is also complicated on the ground. Transnational campaigns often focus on child

prostitution as children cannot be seen to have consented, and because it is illegal in the sending states. The use of child prostitutes extends well beyond self-identified paedophiles, and AIDS seems to have prompted a macabre search for younger and newer sex. Local or national cultures concerning the legal and other statuses of children compound the problems. In some states child marriages are also an issue. At the same time, literally millions of children labour in hard, exploited and dangerous work in other sectors; and for some, sex is the cost of keeping the job. The child or young woman worker may be the only income earner for the family.

It is necessary then to look at family, local, national and transnational configurations of power. What is the difference between sex purchased by an Australian man in Bangkok and sex purchased by him from a Thai sex worker in Sydney? What difference does it make if the sex purchased is from young men or boys? What if the buyer is female and the provider male? This shifts the focus and terms of cross-race sex, and of national location. So in 'economies of pleasure' in Bali, for example, or in Barbados, white women seek boyfriends in an inversion of the gender but not the race or class politics of sex tourism encounters.[53] The woman buying defies or confuses the usual articulations of international sex-power. And there are other transgressions marking the race lines, when young Japanese women for example seek sex with white men, for adventure rather than for payment.[54]

It is difficult to write now globalised sexual politics, marked with power relations of gender, nation, state, race, culture, class and age. There is currently considerable political debate about and mobilisation against sex tourism transnationally and in international fora, evident for example at the 1993 Vienna Human Rights and the 1995 Beijing Women's conferences. Sex tourism and women's vulnerability as labour migrants were particular concerns, especially for delegates from Southeast Asia.

How then do we make productive use of, or connect, two rather different discourses, the body in feminist theory and feminist IR? How might we trace the effects of the objectification of women and racialised difference in constructions of femininity and sexuality in the international? Sex and the body are not readily admitted to the study of international politics (despite the profusion of sexual and eroticised metaphors that describe its main business). But it should be possible to write the body into a discipline that tracks power relations and practices which impact so directly and often so devastatingly on actual bodies.[55] This devastation is caught more often on television screens and in newspapers than in academic writings. The challenge, then, is to write a materialist, embodied international politics that is curious about women, gender relations, sexuality, identity and the body.

Notes

This article builds on conference presentations to the second Pan-European conference on International Relations in Paris, September 1995, and the International Studies Association Congress in San Diego in April 1996. My thanks to those who contributed to the discussions, and to Tasha Sudan and Helen Meekosha for their rather different perspectives on 'the body'.

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[3] J J Pettman, *Worlding Women: a feminist international politics*, London: Routledge and Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996.
[4] R Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
[5] Pettman, *Worlding Women*.
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[7] Enloe, *Bananas, Bases and Beaches*.
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[10] G Youngs, 'The body and global political economy: some Foucaultian thoughts', paper presented at the Second Pan-European Conference on International Relations, Paris, 1995, p 2.
[11] Peterson, *Gendered States*; J A Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1992; V S Peterson & A S Runyan, *Global Gender Issues*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993; Whitworth, 1994; and R Grant, 'The sources of gender bias in International Relations theory' in R Grant & K Newland (eds), *Gender and International Relations*, Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1989.
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[16] A Cranny-Francis, *The Body in the Text*, South Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1995.
[17] Pettman, 'Women on the move'.
[18] See especially Pettman *Worlding Women*, ch 9. Other aspects of international politics briefly alluded to in this article are pursued in this book.
[19] C Enloe, 'Silicon tricks and the two dollar woman', *New Internationalist*, January 1992, pp 12–14.
[20] T-D Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality: Prostitution and Tourism in Southeast Asia*, London: Zed, 1990, p 129.
[21] Enloe, *Bananas, Bases and Beaches*; and M B Swain, 'Gender in tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(2), 1995, pp 247–66.
[22] A Stoler 'Carnal knowledge and imperial power: gender, race and morality in colonial Asia', in M Di Leonardo (ed), *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991; M Jolly, 'Colonising women: the maternal body and empire' in S Gunew & A Yeatman, (eds), *Feminism and the Politics of Difference*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992; and J Pettman, *Living in the Margins: Racism, Sexism and Feminism in Australia*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992.
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[32] Such an understanding predominated early on within feminist IR, seeking to convince the discipline that women, and gender as an analytic category, are relevant to, and part of, IR. More recent writings suggest more mobile and contested constructions of sexual difference, for example Sylvester, *Feminist Theory and International Relations*; C Weber, 'Good girls, little girls and bad girls: male paranoia in Robert Keohane's critique of feminist International Relations', *Millennium*, 32(2), 1994, pp 337–50; and M Marchand & J Parpart (eds), *Feminism/Postmodernism/Development*, London: Routledge, 1995.

[33] Braidotti, *Nomadic subjects*, p 238.

[34] Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp x–xi.

[35] Ibid, pp 18–19.

[36] Ibid, p 23.

[37] Weeks, *Sexuality and its Discontents*.

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[39] B Sullivan, 'Rethinking prostitution', in B. Caine & R. Pringle (eds), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995, p 184.

[40] Truong, *Sex, Money and Morality*; and N Davis, *Prostitution: an International Handbook on Trends, Problems, and Policies*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1993.

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[43] A Appadurai, 'Disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy', *Public Culture*, 2(2), 1990, pp 1–24; J J Pettman 'Border crossings/shifting identities', in M Shapiro & H Alker (eds), *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows/Textual Identities*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; and Pettman, 'Women on the move'.

[44] D Leheny, 'A political economy of Asian sex tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(2), 1995, p 369.

[45] A similar convergence appears in anti-feminist and some maternalist feminist representations that associate women with peace. See for example M. di Leonardo, 'Morals, mothers and militarism: anti-militarism and feminist theory', *Feminist Studies*, 11(3), 1985, pp 599–617 which provides a critique of 'the moral mother' in much women and peace literature.

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[49] *A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*, New York: Human Rights Watch, 1993.

[50] A Murray & T Robinson, 'Minding your peers and queers: female sex workers in the AIDS discourse in Australia and Southeast Asia', *Gender, Place and Culture*, 2(2), 1995, pp 43–59.

[51] L Brockett & A Murray 'Sydney's Asian sex workers: AIDS and the geography of a new underclass', *Asian Geography*, 12, (1&2), 1993, pp 83–95.

[52] Murray & Robinson, 'Minding your peers and queers', p 57.

[53] M Jennaway, 'Strangers, sex and the state in paradise: Balinese tourism and its economy of pleasure', paper presented to The State, Sexuality and Reproduction in Asia and the Pacific conference, Canberra: Gender Relations Project, Australian National University, 1993.

[54] K Kelsky, 'Intimate ideologies: transnational theory and Japan's 'yellow cabs'', *Public Culture*, 6, 1994, pp 465–478.

[55] Seen for example in US military anxiety about potential numbers of their troops coming home in body bags from the Gulf War. There is a related question about the difference it might make to 'bag' women soldiers' bodies; and alarms expressed about women POWs, for fear of their rape by enemy soldiers: C Enloe, *The Morning After: Sexual Politics at the end of the Cold War*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993. While IR has tended to read sovereignty as granting states the monopoly of the legitimate use of force, and assumed it to be used against external threats, in the dichotomy inside-order versus outside anarchy, much state violence is directed against own-citizen bodies, including the systematic use of torture and terror.