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# **Sun, Sex, and Gold**

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**Tourism and Sex Work  
in the Caribbean**

edited by  
Kamala Kempadoo

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## Contents

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## “Givin’ Lil’ Bit fuh Lil’ Bit”

### *Women and Sex Work in Guyana*

#### RED THREAD WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The current period of global restructuring is reconfiguring the position of the Caribbean in relation to international flows of labor and capital. One outcome of this is the marketing of the region as a provider of services, of which tourism—and prostitution as an associated hospitality industry and foreign exchange earner—is a prime example. However, the situation in Guyana is different from that in the island states of the Caribbean. First, not only is tourism in Guyana much less developed, but the particular form that recent initiatives have taken is ecotourism. While this involves a clientele that participates in tourism as an item of conspicuous consumption, the consumption of the “Other” that takes place is more ethereal than corporeal. Secondly, while even in those Caribbean territories with a more traditional form of tourism, prostitution is not always linked to tourism, in Guyana it is even less so.

In Guyana the sex industry is not highly organized, there is little reliance on women from other countries (although this may be slowly changing as exotic dancers are recruited from abroad), and there are no organized brothels. If tourism and prostitution are not so clearly related in Guyana, sex work is linked to and profoundly affected by the restructuring of the Guyanese economy during the 1990s. The flurry of economic activities resulting from the implementation of structural adjustment policies in the 1980s has opened up the country to foreign investment (now slowed by the current political impasse<sup>1</sup>), which in turn has served to produce a relatively new clientele (businessmen) and business-related activities in a context of economic immiseration and highly restricted and low-paying jobs for women.

Even prior to structural adjustment, women traders engaged in prostitution as a means of procuring goods and evading customs restrictions.<sup>2</sup> Today, increasing numbers of women appear to be engaging in sex work (some more obviously than others), and some groups—Amerindians and schoolgirls—appear to be especially vulnerable to deception and coercion.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter attempts to provide a framework for discussing some aspects of sex work in Guyana. Our focus is on women engaging in heterosexual encounters for pay, largely because women are predominant workers and men clients.<sup>4</sup> Given the paucity of baseline data on sex workers in Guyana, this study is a preliminary one. Its aims are twofold: to examine the nature and context of sex work in Guyana; and to explore a number of themes that arose from our data. We commence by outlining the methodology and the legal framework, then go on to consider the factors behind the entry of women into sex work and the working conditions among the women interviewed. We move on to look at the blurring of boundaries between family life and sex work and the opportunities and barriers through which women negotiate their sexual agency. We close by considering strategies for change, as well as the implications for outsider involvement, based on a recognition of our own positionality as non-sex workers.

## METHODOLOGY

Our methods involved both primary and secondary data collection. Primary data were collected using nonprobability samples. While this makes it more difficult to generalize from the results of the study, we felt the need to address specific groups of women was best served by this approach. Additionally, given the level of social opprobrium attached to sex work, it may have been difficult to gain the consent of large numbers of women to being interviewed.

A workshop was held in July 1997 with Red Thread members who formed the research team.<sup>5</sup> The ideas and draft in-depth interview schedule that came out of these sessions were discussed and modified at the first meeting of researchers and coordinators of the overall project held in Trinidad and Tobago in August 1997. Formal interviewing did not, however, start until January 1998 because of the tensions and then violence leading up to and following the December 1997 national elections in Guyana (see endnote 1). A further set of workshops was conducted with the research team once the first interviews had been completed to discuss some of the problems and gaps in the responses. All interviews were completed between January and April 1998.

With our focus on qualitative data gained through interviews with small samples of women, and an emphasis on the diversity of forms of prostitution, we also focused on an ethnically diverse sample. The majority of the women were from the country's two major ethnic groups of Indo- and Afro-Guyanese (hence referred to as Indian and black), although a number were identified as mixed. Given the disproportionate representation of Amerindian women among sex workers (Danns 1996, Branche 1998) we also ensured their representation in the sample. Moreover, in light of recent concerns over the entry of schoolgirls into the sex trade (Danns 1996, Branche 1998), we specifically targeted them. The women were working in four different locations: clubs, hotels, and bars in the capital city, Georgetown; Georgetown streets; guest house-bars in settlements along the coast, including Georgetown; and mining camps in the country's interior. Some of the women had worked in neighboring Suriname, while a few also worked on the cargo ships docked at various wharves in Georgetown.<sup>6</sup>

Some of the women were interviewed during the day as well as at night at their places of work, which enabled the research team to acquire a glimpse into some of the conditions and the women and men involved. Women from the mining camps were interviewed at Bartica and Linden, two towns that serve as stopping points for persons coming out of the interior.<sup>7</sup> Interviews were also conducted at the Red Thread office. All interviews were carried out by groups of at least two Red Thread members.<sup>8</sup> In all we spoke with twenty-three sex workers.

Research team members also met with a number of other persons involved in organizations that directly or indirectly had a bearing on the issues with which we were concerned. These were: a project officer at the National AIDS Program Secretariat; a doctor from the Genito-Urinary Medicinal (GUM) clinic at the Georgetown Hospital, which treats sexually transmitted diseases (STDs); a lawyer working with Legal Aid and a board member of Help and Shelter, a service offering counseling and legal advice for women who have suffered domestic violence; a guest-house owner; and the Police Commissioner, in a telephone interview. Karen de Souza of Red Thread was interviewed about a trip she made in August 1997 to investigate allegations of young Amerindian girls working as prostitutes in liquor bars on the Essequibo Coast. A debriefing session was also held with the research team to discuss the interviews as well as other information relating to sex work in Guyana.

Finally, secondary data relating to sex work in Guyana were collected, including laws relating to prostitution; occasional newspaper articles; the results of a seroprevalence study among sex workers in Georgetown conducted in 1993 (Carter et al. 1997); an extended report on prostitution in a locally produced journal, the *Guyana Review*; and a recent study by George Danns (1996) on child prostitution in Guyana.

## PROSTITUTION AND THE LAW IN GUYANA

The law on prostitution in Guyana is antiquated. Dating from the colonial era, it has yet to be revised. Based on the Criminal Law (Offences) Act (Cap 8:01), a conviction for keeping a brothel results in two years' imprisonment. Prostitution-related activities are also indictable under the more recent Summary Jurisdiction (Offences) Act (Cap 8:02). This provides for offenses triable in a Magistrate's Court and makes it illegal for a man to keep a brothel (defined as a "common ill-governed or disorderly house") or to earn a livelihood off the earnings of prostitutes. Also illegal are soliciting in a public place and loitering or importuning others for the purpose of prostitution. The fines imposed by this legislation are not only minimal—up to G\$1,000 (approximately U.S.\$7) and six months' imprisonment in the case of brothel owners (increasing to a maximum of G\$2,000 or around U.S.\$14, and twelve months' imprisonment for subsequent convictions), and up to twelve months and whipping or flogging for other offenses—but are also rarely applied.

## WOMEN: THE WORKING SEX

Most girls run away from home because they don't want to do work home. They don't want wash they plate, they don't want make up the bed. Those are people who would want to go into prostitution.... They don't want to take on responsibility, they are going to end up in prostitution.

The opinion above, expressed by a guest-house owner in Georgetown, echoes popular stereotypes regarding women's involvement in prostitution in Guyana. Yet, far from the image of the feckless young woman portrayed in these depictions, economic hardship was the single most important reason given for entering the sex trade among the vast majority of the women interviewed in our survey. Crisis and structural adjustment over the last two and a half decades have resulted in a dramatic rise in the number of women seeking work, but this increase has not been matched by a growth in female labor market opportunities (twenty-one of the women had been born and raised outside of Georgetown, where the bulk of the formal and informal service sector jobs for women are concentrated; see Peake and Troitz 1999). Becoming a sex worker, then, is for most a decision made against a backdrop of limited, highly exploitative, and poorly paid employment:

I was comin' from wuk one day and a friend know me, she is from the West Bank too, but [she] move out and come to Georgetown, [she seh] wha' you doin' guard wuk in dis hot sun, girl, yuh ent see me, I does go in the bush. Hear

she, how much money yuh does wuk fuh? I seh twelve thousand a month, sometimes when I wuk overtime I does reach a lil fourteen, but the wuk on the overtime is very hard.... [She seh] suh hear wha' ah tellin' yuh, ah have a shop in the bush, is not my shop is my boy shop at Fourteen Mile.... She seh you could get a pennyweight [in gold] a short-time and two pennyweight a sleep [long-time].... She seh wha' would happen, you bring yuh gold to me and I will burn it and mek sure is gold and not bronze—you will tell me, well you goin' and do a business and how long you spend in dat room, so that within a certain time I ent see you, I'll come rap at the room or send my gentleman to rap up the room. She seh I'll give you X amount of advance right... like to carry you up in the bush.

Just over a quarter of the women cited sex work as their first income-earning activity. The remainder had previously worked as domestics, waitresses, petty vendors, craft makers and security guards. One woman had been a junior officer in the army. Another, who had previously earned G\$6,000 a month as a domestic, was making G\$2,000 per client as a sex worker in an out-of-town guest house. Faced with restricted income-earning opportunities, the women in our survey are further disadvantaged in their search for a livelihood by their limited formal qualifications. While many had gone on to secondary or community school, none had been able to finish, only three had received any additional training (typing and in the military), and two women had received no formal education. Sex work, notwithstanding the immense stigma attached to it and the dangers for unprotected workers, easily remains among the most economically viable options for poor women with limited education. The vast majority of the women had been introduced to the trade through friends and informal contacts, some taking them as far as Paramaribo (Surname) to work. In one case the woman's partner was the instigating factor.

At the same time, economic factors cannot be divorced from other considerations. The gendered obligation of women to provide for their children against a backdrop of unremitting hardship has led to more women entering the labor force, as well as the increasing visibility of women in nontraditional sectors of the economy (Peake and Troitz 1999, Troitz 1998). The importance and responsibilities of motherhood clearly emerged as well from the interviews with sex workers. Just under 80 percent of the women had started sex work in the last six years, and only two women had started over twelve years ago. The average age was twenty years, ranging from sixteen to thirty-eight years (the high numbers of recent entrants might also be suggestive of the fact that women largely tend not to remain in the trade beyond a certain age range). Fifteen of the women had children (of whom three, at the most, had children only *after* they started working). In all cases, some—if not all—were preschoolers or in primary school. As one woman stated simply, "I did it for the sake of my children."

Sex work additionally served as an escape route from physical or sexual abuse by a partner or family member, for other women, it was abandonment by a partner or migration of family members that was the precipitating factor. Routine police harassment had contributed to one trader's decision to find another job. For some, migration to Suriname had provided the introduction to sex work (although it was not always their original intention). In five instances women had not initially realized what was expected of them—three had applied for jobs as waitresses, one woman had been taken into the interior by her boyfriend, while another said simply that she had been "tricked" into the business:

[A woman] seh she want a girl fuh wuk with her and when I reach up in the bush right, now it was a Friday afternoon when I reach up with her, the Saturday she tell me look a room and mek heights [organize oneself to go about one's business]. Dey get some people does carry yuh in the bush and dey don't tell yuh the truth why dey carrying yuh in the bush.... So I go to dem girls and I ask, what is dis mek heights? What yuh got fuh do in dis room? And dem girls start explaining to me, I start to collect lunderstandi.

For some of the younger women, sex work appeared to be a lifestyle: one sixteen-year-old Indian girl only worked Saturday and Sunday evenings, giving a regular G\$2,000 per week to her aunt to bank for her, the rest going on fancy clothes and alcohol.

The wide range of responses from this small sample demonstrates that not only do different women offer varying reasons, but a number of factors (including coercion) may influence each woman. Economic factors are thus mediated by multiple issues, all of which must be taken into account in any attempt to fully understand the specific contexts that frame women's entry into the sex trade.

### WORKING THE DAY AND NIGHT SHIFT: THE WOMEN'S WORKING CONDITIONS

One of the most important distinctions was the geographical location in which the women were working, one differentiation being between working in the densely populated coastal zone versus the interior (variously referred to as the bush or rainforest), where the mining camps are located. A further distinction on the coast relates to working in the city of Georgetown versus the small villages dotted along the coast. Perhaps the most visible sex workers are women who work on the streets in Georgetown. They begin in the evening and continue through the night in downtown business areas, on certain streets and around the main—Stabroek—market, where there are a

number of small liquor stores and restaurants. The clientele is diverse, but these women, the oldest of the general sample, are least paid (see later discussion).

There are also guest house-bars well known for their reliance on sex workers to attract paying customers who will patronize the bar and pay for a short-time room. At one establishment, only alcohol was served. The majority of the men who frequent the guest houses are locals, and in Georgetown they include those who live elsewhere but come to the city to conduct business. Men come for a drink and to meet women during the day or straight after work. Guest house workers meet clients during the day, starting around nine or ten o'clock in the morning and finishing around midday or mid-afternoon. Some may also be long-term boarders whose living quarters double as their workplace.

At the other end of the spectrum are the women who work at popular nightclubs and upscale hotels and bars (Palm Court, Pegasus, Tower, Woodbine), as well as on a strip of road known locally as "the boulevard," a popular entertainment spot dotted with small Chinese restaurants, sound systems blaring the latest tunes, and drinking and karaoke bars that open from late afternoon until the early hours of the morning. Clients take women—or are taken—to a nearby hotel or guest house. Sex workers are predominantly young women, and it was here that the research team noticed a lot of teenagers. They dress "in the latest fashion, these close-fitted dresses like halter backs, short pants in the latest style you can think about" (research team interview). Many of the clients are gold miners (commonly referred to as porkknockers) flush with money and out for a night of "fun." There are also foreigners and middle-class men. The cargo ships (carrying imported goods or bauxite) that line the harbors and also lie out in the Atlantic Ocean house men that are almost entirely foreigners. Women meet them in local clubs or go to the wharves and gain permission (or bribe an officer or wharf guard) to board the freighters where they spend the night with one of the sailors.

Gold and diamond mining in Guyana's interior have in turn given rise to a number of support industries such as shops, bars, and airstrips. Prostitution is a critical feature of the interior mining economy; mining is a male-dominated activity and coastlanders leave their families at home. Sex workers come primarily from the coast as well, often recruited by shop proprietors to work in their bars and attract business. Everyone—sex workers included—hopes to profit from the spin-offs generated by mining. One study noted that a windfall find (referred to as a "lash" or a "shout") generated expensive outlays of money. One such shout yielding around fifty carats of diamonds led to a celebration that cost around U.S.\$400, U.S.\$80 of which was spent on procuring the services of prostitutes (Roopnaraine 1997). Women try to "mek heights" in good times and may try to move to

other base camps around the area during the slack periods. Clients include Amerindians but are predominantly black and Indian coastlanders as well as Brazilians from across the border. (Brazilian sex workers are also present in some of the camps close to the border.)

In terms of ethnicity, we did not discern any differences insofar as reasons for entering sex work were concerned (although job options do vary, with Amerindian women experiencing the highest rates of unemployment). However, there were some variations in terms of location. One study has noted that Amerindian sex workers in the hinterland are rare (and they certainly do not operate within their home communities) and that women instead tend to establish long-term relationships, primarily with non-Guyanese gold and diamond seekers (Roopnaraine 1997). Amerindian women, then, work mainly in the city and in bars and guest houses on the coast. Many are recruited to work as waitresses and domestics and are informed only when they arrive at their place of employment that they are expected to provide sexual services. The four Amerindian women in our survey worked in guest houses and on the ships, with one woman working at various mining camps outside of her community of origin; none worked at the upscale end of the market. The Indian women we interviewed worked in all locations except the mining camps and in general seem to have a less visible presence in the interior. Only the black and mixed women worked across all categories. Most women were unconcerned about the ethnicity of the men they slept with. Some, however, expressed a distinct preference. In one case an Indian woman's partner permitted her to have only Indian and white, but not black, clients.

Among sex workers there is short-time and long-time work, the former ranging in time from ten minutes to one and a half hours, while long-time involves a "sleepout." Prices for short-time sex ranged on average from G\$500 to \$5,000; a "sleep" could earn a woman up to G\$10,000.<sup>10</sup> These prices, however, are not independent of context or place: for street workers short-time prices ranged from G\$500 to \$1,000; in guest houses, prices ranged from G\$700 to \$2,000; in bars and hotels the range was G\$3,000 to \$5,000 and in the mining camps the average payment was one pennyweight of gold, i.e., G\$1,600. There were also differences among the women's prices, which might be increased if they had access to wealthy or foreign clients.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, street workers tend to earn the least, followed by women who live or work out of the guest houses that offer rooms for them and their clients. Women who worked in Georgetown on the ships or out of prominent hotels, bars, and nightclubs earned the highest amounts. Given their clientele, payments are often in foreign (U.S.) currency, and generous tips and gifts are an expected part of the trade.

Age was found to be an important differentiating factor in terms of earnings. For example, none of the schoolgirls we interviewed worked on the

street. (Their average earnings for a short-time ranged from G\$1,600 to \$5,000 or approximately U.S.\$11 to \$36). For all the women, the average age of the highest earners was twenty years, compared with twenty-four years for women in mining camps, thirty-one years for street workers, and thirty-two years for women working in guest houses.

To be sure, these divisions are neither clear-cut nor absolute, as most of the women had worked at more than one location (only three of the women had not worked at more than one place). This fluidity also extended across national borders. Three of the women had started working in Suriname (in bars and occasionally on ships) before shifting to Guyana, while one continued to move back and forth across the border. While our interviews focused only on Guyanese women, migration also works in the other direction. Sex workers from Brazil have had a long presence in the mining camps along the southern border (Roopnaraine 1996). Other reports indicate that an increasing demand from the local entertainment industry in recent years has given rise to the recruitment of women from Brazil, Trinidad, and elsewhere in the Caribbean as go-go dancers, lap dancers, and exotic dancers in bars and at private shows along the coast. These women work in the city during the week and out of town on weekends' (*Guyana Chronicle*, April 14, 1998; *Stabroek News*, April 18, 1998).

At the same time, not all women's sex work histories suggested easy movement from one sector to another. For example, women located in the higher ranks of sex work appeared to migrate only between locations that are similarly placed on the earnings scale. In response to the question "Where do you work?" one woman identified the ships, two nightclubs and four prominent hotels, depending on where business was best. On the other hand, very few of the women interviewed in the lowest earning categories worked in the more lucrative sectors of the business: significantly, one who did was relatively young—nineteen years old. More work is required to determine the extent to which a clear hierarchy exists and to analyze some of the barriers to entry into the higher paying sectors of sex work.

#### BLURRING BOUNDARIES (OR, THE GAINS OF MAINTAINING DIFFERENCE)

As long as you are exchanging sex for something material...you're doing sex work right.... You even play the sex workers with your own husband, because woman say she's all weak and you see he has some money and you need a new dress, so today you going to roast a piece of beef and some chicken and you put up candles and you got to be nice because you got your eyes on the man's money. You're being a sex worker, you're playing a sex worker, is sex work, and there's a lot of it, because of economic situation. I mean a lot of women in



Ministries, various places. Because people don't go to bed for nothing, but because they are out on the street and they go to South Central (one of the guest houses), they say well I'm on to the sex work. And I am more afraid of them or afraid for them where transmission of STDs or HIV or AIDS (is concerned) because I would think I am not a sex worker and this guy is working at the Ministry and I don't have to use a condom. The women on the street, they know what they are doing, so when a man come to them, they say you have to use a condom because they know to themselves that they wouldn't accept. OK (Dusilley Cannings, National AIDS Program Secretariat).

Guyana, as elsewhere in the Caribbean, operates on a double standard insofar as sexuality and sexual relations are concerned. From an early age it is young girls whose mobility is likely to be constrained and it is women who are always in danger of being labeled loose or slack, whereas similar activities are more likely to earn men the reputation of being a stud. Sex workers are "different" from other women in their obvious refusal of gendered interpretation of the spaces they should and should not be occupying. If their selling of (hetero) sexual labor confirms them as women, they resemble men in their occupation of public spaces at night and their engagement in a series of casual encounters. Through their transgressions, they show up the unnaturalness of taken-for-granted gendered divisions of spaces and activities. The disjuncture is "managed" by defining them as inferior, immoral, and lacking the values of family life.<sup>12</sup> Yet, as the quotation above clearly suggests, sex acts that involve material exchanges are the defining features of many marriages and relationships as well as prostitution. Moreover, as our interviews clearly showed, there is no clear boundary between prostitution and "normal" family life.

In the first place, the sex work of the women surveyed and family life are closely intertwined. As we have already noted, support of the family, and in particular younger children, is the most critical reason for women to enter the sex trade. Moreover, while they are careful to distinguish between "sexing for work" and "sexing with your man" (see later discussion), sex workers may enter into longer-term relationships with preferred clients. In fact, one-third of the women were currently in relationships at the time of the interviews, many with ex-clients whom they had met while working.

One case study vividly highlights this issue. Jennifer is a twenty-six-year-old woman who has been a sex worker for six years. She has worked primarily in the mining camps and has five children, all under ten years of age. The father of at least one was someone she met on the job. At present Jennifer has three "regulars" in addition to her other clients (most of whom tend to be married men). Expectations differ little from the way in which other women not involved in sex work describe their relationships with men (Peake and Troitz 1999). As she says,

Yuh wash dey clothes, sometime yuh prepare lil food fuh dem and so, and yuh tek it down to the work ground and so, and dem does seh ha, dis girl interested in me and so, and all like dar well I does get anything from dem and so.... All like if yuh know dey working late, yuh mek lil snack and yuh carry it fuh dem, yuh treat dem nice like if is yuh husband yuh living wid, right... because if yuh don't treat dem good, dey wouldn't treat you good.

In response Jennifer gets extra tips, occasional gold, clothes and transportation "fare" when she needs to go to the coast to see her children. On one or two occasions she stopped working after taking a "regular" but reentered the business when support was not forthcoming. (One man refused to acknowledge paternity of a child because he said Jennifer was "picking fare" [having sex with paying clients] and the father could be anyone.)

As Jennifer's experiences show us, while it is the regular payment of money for sex that is seen as degrading by outsiders, in fact the material exchanges that underwrite sexual relations are not confined to prostitution. In somewhat similar fashion and based on his research in Trinidad, Daniel Miller has argued that within the cultural logic of nonmarital unions in the Caribbean, money signifies and affirms the existence and value of a relationship. Miller specifically makes a distinction between marriage and other unions (common-law, visiting), although we would maintain that in fact such exchanges are crucial to all types of relationship in the Caribbean, despite representations to the contrary (Miller 1994:194-195).<sup>13</sup> The blurring of the lines is becoming even more apparent in the current economic climate, which is increasing the material imperative for women to enter into relationships with others who can become providers (or important contributors).<sup>14</sup> Perhaps the only significant difference between sex workers and "other" women is that the former are openly having multiple sexual relationships with men at one time, rather than subscribing (or pretending to subscribe) to monogamous unions or serial monogamy.

However, the discouragement of autonomous expressions of female sexuality as transgressing gender ideals in Guyanese society<sup>15</sup> results in the maintenance of a discursive distinction between prostitution and family life that denies any correspondence between the two realms.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, we should not underestimate the power of representation and the reality of its consequences for women defined as transgressing familial boundaries and labeled with what Gill Pheterson (1996) refers to as the "whore stigma."

Indeed, all of the women agreed that they were seen as lesser persons by virtue of being sex workers: "Guyanese people are most disrespectful, dey don't really look at prostitutes, dey would say dey is whores and dey would look at dem, yuh know, try to keep far and don't even want talk to dem, even like dey are in the way too." Interestingly, those who had worked in Suriname were of the view that there was a far less moralistic attitude to sex

work—at least where foreigners were concerned—that made it easier to work.<sup>17</sup>

[People] view it bad because they curse people, tell yuh how you is a whore and yuh does pick fare on the street.... But in foreign country, nobody looks, nobody cares what yuh do, what yuh do dat's your business, nobody has no say-ing in yuh life, but in Guyana people always look to see what yuh do, when yuh go in, when yuh come out, and in foreign yuh don't get none of those problems, yuh stand up in the streets, the boys dem would pass, dey wouldn't even tell yuh nothing, just the men dat coming to like do business wid you would come....

Families could also be condemnatory (although far less than we had expected). For some of the women, family members, including current partners, knew how they were earning an income and there appeared to be no negative consequences, especially where financial support was forthcoming. (One woman, for instance, had built a house for her mother and siblings on the proceeds from sex work.) Others experienced regular verbal abuse. In a number of instances family members believed that the women were doing other things (such as being unemployed, working as traders and waitresses, or visiting friends in the city). Some women chose work in the interior or in Suriname, not simply on account of prospective earnings, but also out of a desire to keep their source of livelihood hidden from their family (One woman had a small cigarette and sweet stall in Guyana that was financed through the money she continued to make as an occasional sex worker in Suriname). A few believed that their families would have nothing to do with them if they found out. However, the majority of the women pointed out that what they did was their own business and they did not care what their families or communities thought, once they were able to earn a living and support their children (although this may well have been a defensive stance, taken for the benefit of the interviewers): "[The community] see me as a whore, but I tell meself me ent no whore, is just survival fuh my children, [they call me] satan, the big whore, the big pokey bitch...." Women were also highly scathing of what they described as hypocritical mores:

When dey go fuh stone da woman down, she was a prostitute, yuh hear what God turn and tell dem, who don't have no sin cast the first stone, none a dem coulda cast the stone because all a dem had sin, so nobody can't cast no stone on me out here, all a dem got sin.

Other women also came in for specific criticism. Sex workers insisted that by acknowledging what they did, they were far better off than women who condemned them while engaging in unsafe sex with unfaithful partners:

When me and dem get story, the first ting dey say is you are a prostitute, you are a whore bugger [engaging in anal sex for money], you do dis, you do dat.... Dat don't bother me 'cause dey get nuff women living in dey house and dey don't know what dey man going and do behind dey back, and...dem is the one that does deid wid AIDS, 'cause a man does go wid other woman and dey does carry it home.. but yuh see the prostitute out deh does protect dem self wid a condom, yuh does hardly find prostitute dying wid AIDS.

As one woman summed up:

No, no listen, I am not doing anything wrong to my body, if yuh deh living home, yuh ent coming on the street and yuh living with a man, the first ting he don't have money to give you or he got other women wid you. So I come out here, use a condom, get my money, go home and sleep, the only thing is that I losing me night sleep, and it don't bother me.

The implicit contrast in this statement is striking indeed; it is the prostitute, who openly acknowledges her work and the unreliability of men and takes steps to protect herself and not be fooled, who is most comfortable and whose losses are least.

### CREATING SPACES: MORAL ECONOMIES OF SEX WORK IN GUYANA

Stereotypical representations of sex workers not only deny the blurring of boundaries that exist in Guyanese society, but by denying sex work any legitimacy (in common parlance it is seen as "slackness" or "wuteness," implying an absence of or disregard for rules), they also overlook the social mores through which sex work is given meaning for those involved. The moral economy (Scott 1976) of sex work elaborated in the interviews differentiated with the group of women we spoke with as well as set out certain codes of conduct for sex work itself.<sup>18</sup> Nor was this found to be exactly the same for all women. In the following paragraph one woman explains the protocol involved in getting business in a bar in the interior:

Where dey does sit down and drink, yuh does go up there and have game which we does play, dominoes and draught; sometimes yuh sit down playing there, somebody choose you, whichin it have some girls does run up to men, I don't like dat run up way because dey does seh, she too brazen with she self.... But you see when you sit down, play yuh little domino and ting...hear what does happen now, you sit down playing and somebody choose you, they don't come and say well a choose you, dey does bring a juice, cause remember dey don't know what you drinking, and they now speak to you, they does say goodnight, they point to you, you say goodnight, how are you, you answer

back, at least me. I answer back in a courteous way.... Some of them say take this, and I would say thanks, from the time I get that juice I done know what it is, that I get, I get pick, whichin sometimes a man would come and give you a juice, and he don't have no intention, but he spirit go out for you, he ent got no intention because he ent got no gold, but he would leave you for a next night, and he would return.

The excerpt above shows us how some women may use dominant notions in Guyanese society in order to distinguish themselves from and situate themselves above other sex workers. In the previous example, the sex worker differentiated herself from more "bräzen" and less "respectable" advances. Other women also talked about dressing appropriately as important to ensure respect from clients ("If yuh dress loose off, den yuh ent looking good"). That sex workers are not and do not see themselves as a homogeneous group has critical implications for organizational strategies, a point to which we return later.

Far from being passive women who men can simply pick up and have their way with, the sex workers we spoke with were actively involved in negotiating the terms of the exchange and some rules of the game. Money is handed over in advance. In the interior if payment is to be made in gold, the metal is burned to test its authenticity and then weighed to guarantee against short-changing. It is bad practice to provide services with the promise of future payment, unless the client is a regular and is known for being reliable. In addition to probably never getting paid, the sex worker could stand to lose respect among clients:

It would bring problem, like yuh know they would get disrespect fuh you, it would bring eye pass. Now let we say...you trust [credit] somebody tonight night, [and] he ent turn up to pay [later], you keep yuh mouth shut 'cause you goin' [be] shame. He gone tell he friend den and he gone mek laugh off of you. I see it happen to people, so I wouldn't do that.

Another would not have sex with any of the men from her community, only with "dead stranger," because as she said, "I want when I walk pon de road, nobody mustn't diss [insult] me, dey mustn't get disrespectful."

Women charge for straight sex, and should they agree to anything more, a higher price is usually demanded: "[I have] straight sex, no position if yuh didn't pay me fuh dat, yuh pay me fuh break [ejaculate]." A number of the women said they would only undress or vary their routine with established clients. A short-time session ends with the sexual release of the client, but if he is taking too long, women may ask for more money. Several sex workers had strategies to "speed up" a session, and women also did not like clients to become inebriated ("You won't make a man drink too much, so you will get him to break fast, but if he drinks a lot then he won't"). Significantly all

the women, with one exception, initially denied performing oral or anal sex (in two cases women were forced), although they said these services were frequently asked for.<sup>19</sup> In Guyana such subjects are highly taboo and not readily (if at all) admitted to or discussed openly. In fact the easiest way to "shame" a woman in public is to accuse her of engaging in oral or anal sex. Indeed all the women said that these were things that foreigners, homosexuals, or dirty women engaged in. In this respect distancing is important in Guyanese society and possibly even more so for the sex workers being interviewed by outsiders, all too aware of their reputations as being sexually loose.

In conducting business, it is also important to create emotional spaces of one's own: "Is just the money yuh want mek yuh see, yuh doing this business, is not really yuh desire to do it." Several of the women were very clear that the selling of one's body did not imply that one was selling one's self: "I will say is a job I doing.... I don't go fuh feelings, I does just go fuh me money." Another reiterated: "Like when yuh going picking fare...like yuh mustn't kiss, yuh mustn't romance and den thing dat." Several of the women did not undress fully, some taking off only their shoes and underwear. Nor were clients given complete access to women's bodies. Some women, for example, did not kiss, and we repeatedly found that women's breasts were off-limits ("Some a dem [men] does want suck yuh bubby: some does want you kiss dem, I does tell dem no, no I ent deh suh, you not me husband, yuh come fuh have an affair and we finish wid dat"). Occasional exceptions were made for regular clients. In short, as one woman succinctly noted, "When I have sex with a client I be like a log."

Finally, sex work was identified by all the women as a job, but not all of the women saw their work as a permanent occupation. Those who did were predominantly older women, for whom sex work is perhaps best described as a survival strategy. For younger women and those at the higher end of the market, it was hopefully a means to an end. Among this group, a successful sex worker was not someone who could get the best clients and call the highest prices (for it is understood that this situation will not last forever and that one's "sexual capital" is likely to decrease the older one gets) but someone with a good business head, who would have something to show for her involvement in sex work. Over three-quarters of the women we interviewed tried to save.<sup>20</sup> Women used both formal (bank) as well as informal (penny bank, boxhand, puzzle box, burying money) saving and credit mechanisms. Not surprisingly, women working in the higher-paying areas, who charged more and were often paid in foreign (U.S.) currency, had been able to accumulate quite large sums of money in the bank (for example, G\$90,000, G\$350,000, and U.S.\$1,600). Two younger girls had an older family member open a bank account for them. Among the plans outlined were to purchase a minibus or truck; to start a fish business; to build a house and open a shop;

and to run a cigarette stand. A few women also articulated their desire to finish school or take private lessons (mainly to acquire secretarial skills). Not surprisingly, making a better life for one's children was a paramount concern in women's plans for the future. As one woman explained:

I'll try to advise younger women dan meself, also older ones who discontinue, 'cause I would say like dey don't know what dey doing, you do dis thing, because you lna! need and when yuh get the money yuh switch, yuh try to do something else, yuh don't do dis thing all the days of yuh life, try to finish, yuh have children. Whilst dey small yuh do it, when dey get big yuh stop. That's why yuh save, yuh get 50 U.S. a night yuh try to save, yuh spend half yuh save half, yuh try to save, if I never use to save a coulda never get me house in one year and I build a house, a two-bedroom house.

She continued:

I'll advise that you would get dis money yuh must save it, put it to uses so when yuh get older yuh won't have to still doing this, because it have old people still on the street doing prostitution, and I feel they doing prostitution fuh like 20 years and still dey have nothing.... Some of dem have children land! dey have nothing to show dey children; well dey children find out dey doing prostitution and still dey have nothing to say, "Well when a was doing prostitution dis is what I did."

The interviews were a testimony to the aspirations and hopes of sex workers and further showed the potential of sex work to provide an avenue for personal financial savings. Its importance is further underscored in a context in which women generally have far less access to capital and credit and are less likely or able than men to obtain loans to set up small businesses (Mondesire and Dunn 1995).

### CONSTRAINTS AND LIMITS

Undoubtedly, foregrounding the spaces that sex workers create for themselves enables us to avoid a perspective, however well-meaning, that depicts such women as victims. At the same time, an emphasis on the sexual agency of women should not lead to a prematurely romanticized portrayal of resistance and in the process foreclose a discussion of the very real constraints that sex workers face in their daily lives, both on as well as off the job. It is important to explore how women negotiate limits and challenge their ongoing marginalization in Guyanese society and to acknowledge that many simply may not succeed.

For a start, the plans women outlined to save regularly, invest in businesses, return to school, or migrate are frequently thwarted by the high cost

of living, particularly where the woman is a major or single contributor to her household, as the following description starkly reveals:

Sometime yuh want lil sugar, yuh might not even got lil milk fuh yuh children and yuh ent got money fuh cook fuh yuh children, and yuh go wid dis person, accepting so yuh will get the money fuh come and give yuh children something next morning, [but next morning yuh children just watchin' yuh and you watchin' dem, eye water [tears] come to my eyes, yuh talkin' but yuh ent got nothin' to give dem and yuh go wid persons to get a raise to give them ting or to buy tings fuh dem.

Income fluctuations are a common occurrence. Some women may be on the road for the greater part of the night, but not every day or night is likely to produce business. A number of the women worked seven days a week, the length of time depending on whether they were able to get any business: "Sometimes me ent get money, me does stay till dayclean [daybreak]." Women frequently buy "rations" (bulk buy) to tide them over. Sex workers living permanently in guest houses may also face high daily rents, while those working in mining camps must not only provide childcare on the coast while they are away but additionally worry about the debts they owe and face prohibitive prices for food, clothing, housing, transportation, and beverages. In one case a worker in a mining camp was charged G\$1,000 a day for the room if she did not have a client and G\$500 if she used the room for sex.<sup>21</sup> In the interior as well, men are always on the lookout for a "fresh" (a new arrival), which can threaten business prospects for already established workers, particularly if they are older:

Like when yuh deh too long in a shop and dem lmen! ent reach [meet] yuh, yuh know dem meet fresh dey call it fresh, like people heard a boatload full a girls come in, so yuh have to mek heights fast, soon as yuh go in the bush yuh have to start mekin' yuh heights and come out so dar yuh wouldn't be too long at the shop, or else dey back yuh out and collect the fresh.

Even one sixteen-year-old complained of men in the bush moving onto new partners.

Like other self-employed women (and indeed several in the private sector), sex workers have no right to pensions (although current pensions are patently inadequate even for those entitled to them) and no source of income if they get pregnant, and only one woman contributed to the National Insurance Scheme. Getting out is difficult in the absence of viable employment alternatives. We have no information on ex-sex workers, but the example of two women—one in the business for nineteen years and another for eleven years and both working at the lower ends of the market—suggests that women may exit the trade as a result of age, health, or if they are

able to depend on older children for financial support, as job opportunities for older women are even more precarious (Peake and Troz 1999). In the dream to eventually open a business may remain just that for most. It is also important to note that where one works may differentiate one's chances of accumulating enough capital to leave, and in this regard the women working out of hotels and bars in Georgetown and those on ships are likely to have the greatest chances.

Moreover, the nature of women's involvement in the sex trade is akin to their secondary position in other sectors of the labor market and their subordination to men. None of the women we interviewed admitted to giving money to a "pimp," but as we have seen, several women who were supporting households were in relationships with men who knew exactly what they were doing. Given the stigma attached to a woman who is known to "mind a man" in Guyanese culture, denial on the part of sex workers who faced with such a question by outsiders is perhaps to be expected ("I don't have no pimps, I don't wuk wid no pimps, I ent fucking my soul case case fuh go and pay no man, dat is bare nonsense, is best I mind a man dan per a pimp"), although it was acknowledged that for other women (never those interviewed), paying relationships with men other than clients do exist. Duslley Cannings, of the National AIDS Program Secretariat in Guyana, also noted the presence of men. Unlike pimps elsewhere who actively recruit women and control their earnings and movement, in Guyana men are more likely to be paid to "protect" sex workers from possible violence by clients. In clubs and guest houses the "chucker outers" [bouncers] are employed by managers, but along the boulevard they are paid by the women and also have a sex worker to get clients in exchange for a fee of G\$500.

The absence of regulation in the sex trade industry in Guyana combines with an apparently growing demand for commercial sexual services to create exploitative working conditions for sex workers with no avenue for redress. We have already referred to the growing entertainment industry, its control by men, and the use of schoolgirls in the making of videos for distribution locally and overseas. Guest-house, bar, and club owners are also predominantly men who exert considerable control over sex workers. Perhaps the most vulnerable in this regard are younger and Amerindian women in rural and hinterland areas who are frequently enticed—and often coerced—into the sex trade through the promise of a well-paying waitressing or domestic job, who never receive their payment directly from the clients, and who are paid poor wages, which are more often than not withheld. There appears to be an organized ring involved in procuring young Amerindian women seeking employment (unemployment rates are highest in hinterland areas, where the vast majority of the Amerindian population resides). While there is widespread knowledge on the coast of this state of affairs, very little is done to protect the women. Gaining their trust and over-

coming their fear and suspicion is a difficult if critical task, made even more daunting by the paucity of viable employment alternatives for Amerindian women. One investigation into working conditions in the Barima-Waini and Pomeroon-Supenaam Region in Essequibo, found that Amerindian women—many under eighteen years old—were being hired as waitresses, cleaners and domestics, but none would admit to providing sexual services for men (interview with Karen de Souza; see also Branche 1998).

In the mining camps, shopkeepers are important persons in a sex worker's life, often responsible for her being there in the first place. Figures of protection against clients who are violent or refusing to pay, they may also themselves exploit women in the interior: "Some people would go in the interior to pick fare, they would get malaria, sometime if dem ent really get somebody to tek care [of dem], like certain shop people to tek care of dem, certain shop people would just left dem pon dey own and dey will just pine away till dey dead, and just bury in the bush."<sup>22</sup> Sex workers may hand over part or all their earnings to the shopkeeper for safekeeping (a few experienced workers dig a hole in the ground and bury the money or gold at night), but many are often given back "short money." To complain or to allege dishonesty is to risk being put off the landing and having one's debts called in. Less experienced and particularly younger women may also be forced to give a dredge owner or other "big man" (a person in authority) a "piece," i.e., sex, by a shopkeeper, who is not unknown to request sexual favors himself. Women sometimes—but far less frequently—procure workers for prospective clients. Instances of women running bars in rural areas and in the interior and exploiting and physically abusing younger (and, in the interior, frequently Amerindian) women have also been noted (Branche 1998). One example cited in the interviews concerned a former sex worker who had opened her own bar in the interior but whose practices differed little from the male proprietors.

The marginalization of sex workers, and the proscribed nature of the work they engage in, make it extremely difficult for them to seek protection from physically abusive clients, pimps, and guest-house owners. Moreover, where women are ostensibly being hired as waitresses, cleaners, and domestics, there may be reluctance, shame or fear to come forward and disclose the actual nature of their work. There exists no agency that can deal specifically with sexual and physical abuse of sex workers, like Help and Shelter, which was set up to provide counseling, legal, and other services for women who have experienced domestic violence from partners.<sup>23</sup> The Domestic Violence Act did not envisage a situation of abuse of a sex worker by her client, where the relationship is one of "employer-employee or prostitute-client" (unless the offender is a pimp who may also be in a relationship with the woman). The only available recourse at the moment, then, is to make a report at the police station and to seek normal remedies under the

law for assault and battery (interview with lawyer, Legal Aid). Here, however, sex workers are likely to encounter extreme discrimination and disrespect: they are not credible because they are, by virtue of their occupation, immoral and untrustworthy; it is impossible to rape a woman who offers her sexual services for sale; and in any case such women not only ask for but fully deserve what they get. In this regard, even violence from a partner which is dealt with under the Domestic Violence Act, becomes difficult to report when the victim is a sex worker. As one woman commented, "If a man bully me, don't give me money and dey [the police] get to hear that I am a prostitute, do you think dey goin' to look into dat? I can't go and say he try to rape me, dey wouldn't look into it, that is the police force." Another noted wryly that if a client said that he had been robbed, the sex worker would be the first to be picked up.

The general distrust of the police is also related to the experiences (and expectations) of the sex workers. It is widely believed that the police force is often inclined to "turn a blind eye" to prostitution. Greater tolerance, however, is less likely to be official or unofficial policy than it is a matter of the prerogative of individual officers in a context in which the sex worker is always in a position of subordination to the law. None of the women we interviewed had ever been formally charged or fined, but the general tendency to "stay out of police way" indicates that law enforcement officials are by no means absent from the lives and minds of sex workers.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, it appears to be the women working on city streets who are most vulnerable to being stopped and picked up for loitering by the authorities: "The other night a police vehicle pass and the police say don't let him pass back and see us there lining, and I explain that a have children and I got to hustle a dollar fuh dem and he seh he ent business wid dat, we gat to come off the road." Women could be picked up and locked up overnight for loitering, and the demand of sexual favors did occur. One woman had been given a choice of sex or payment of a G\$1,000 bribe, while another from a mining camp had been told by a police officer that unless she had sex with him, she would be put off the landing. Women working in Suriname also alleged harassment from police (Scouties); in one case a sex worker had been robbed at gunpoint. It is important to investigate the implications of women working overseas without relevant documents and in constant fear of being caught without papers and deported. Are these women likely to be targeted more?

Marginalized by the stigma attached to sex work that leaves women potentially open to verbal and physical abuse by clients and in the absence of adequate protection from the police (who may themselves be perpetrators of crimes against sex workers), a number of the women arm themselves with knives. On the boulevard some recalled an incident in which a sex worker was taken out of town, beaten, robbed, and raped before being

camped, as proof that they were all potential victims and needed to protect themselves. All the women also preferred to conduct their business in hotels where they could call for help if needed, as cars, alleyways, and the seawall were dangerous places. One or two—who worked the more profitable areas—also had designated taxi drivers whom they would rely on to collect them after they had finished. These measures are not always sufficient. Eight of the women had been robbed or had experienced some form of violence (in two cases women were forced to have anal and oral sex), and we have reason to believe that the figure is much higher.<sup>25</sup>

Health issues are another critical factor for sex workers (and although there are a number of other occupation-related health concerns—malaria in mining camps, for example—that warrant consideration, we confine our discussion here to STDs). Over 70 percent of the women visited the government health clinic, while two women utilized the services of private doctors.<sup>26</sup> However, women working out of Georgetown—in the mining camps—were less likely to have regular access to health provision (at present there are only two GUM clinics that deal specifically with STDs, and both are located in urban centers—in Georgetown and New Amsterdam), and only one Amerindian woman visited a clinic. One schoolgirl was also ashamed to go for checkups, while another claimed to have malaria yet was hospitalized shortly after the interview with AIDS. Over-the-counter drugs—including antibiotics—are used (interview with Dussiley Cannings, National AIDS Center). One woman stated, for example, that "if yuh don't have a condom, yuh would tek a try and then drink two antibiotic [procured from a friend] after."

Condom use in Guyana continues to be seen as largely a woman's responsibility. Although clients engaging in multiple sexual encounters without using condoms place sex workers at considerable risk, it is the prostitute who in fact ends up taking the rap for the spread of STDs, as popular representations depict them as engaging indiscriminately and willfully in unsafe sex (also see Kempadoo 1996). In fact one report noted that among sex workers, "safe sex is the first law of survival" (Branche 1998:9). In our survey as well, all but three of the women said that they used condoms and never had sex "bareback." Most bought condoms, as women claimed that the ones that are provided free of charge from health clinics are expired or ineffective.<sup>27</sup> Given that a study in 1993 found very little knowledge of HIV transmission among sex workers in Georgetown (Carter et al. 1997), these findings are positive evidence of heightened awareness relating to bodily practices and health and sexually transmitted diseases. In large part this is due to workshops sponsored by the National AIDS Program Secretariat and the efforts of individuals like Cannings to engage the concerns of sex workers. At the same time, we must consider the extent to which women feel comfortable talking openly about such issues with others whom they have

just met and who are not involved in the trade, especially in a climate in which the words prostitute and AIDS go hand-in-hand in the popular imagination (we have already seen in the previous section how women distanced themselves from engaging in sexual acts that in Guyana are associated with "dirtiness"). "Slippages" in the interview transcripts led us to this conclusion, as a few of the women had become pregnant and had abortions on the job, while some had contracted STDs. Moreover, a seroprevalence study conducted in Georgetown by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) in 1993 found that 25 percent of a sample of 108 sex workers was HIV positive (Carter et al. 1997) and it is possible that this estimate is on the conservative side (especially given that Guyana is now estimated to have the highest rate of HIV infection in the region after Haiti). Cannings recalled that in one session on STDs, seven out of twelve sex workers had contracted syphilis. While sex workers are self-aware and conscious of the risks involved (and this came across clearly in the interviews), whether they were always able to enforce condom use or safe sex practices was another matter. There are no programs targeted at clients, and men prefer not to use condoms. In a difficult economic situation one of the problems is that refusing to have "bareback" sex may result in the loss of a client, where there are other women who will agree to forsake a condom for more money. Sexual violence is another problem that women may encounter. These factors highlight the need for organizing initiatives that come from sex workers themselves; a point to which we return in the final section of this chapter.

Another—somewhat related—issue is the use of alcohol and drugs. Nineteen of the women used alcohol with clients, with several women saying that it was easier to go with a client when they drank. Drug use has been identified as an increasing problem among younger sex workers in particular, in a country where there are few treatment and counseling programs. While all of the women denied using drugs (given the illegal nature of such activities, affirmation would be highly surprising!), many knew someone who was addicted, and further pointed out that clients frequently tried to get them to share cocaine or cocaine-based drugs with them. Guyana is now a major transshipment point for drugs coming out of Latin America and this has contributed greatly to the easier availability of street drugs, including for sex workers, putting paid to several of the women's aspirations to save and get out of the business with their savings going instead to purchase cocaine. A Cannings of the National AIDS Program Secretariat noted:

I think women before in the sex work had one aim...to save and invest.... I think now what the cocaine has done is...the first smoke you smoke, the high to you experience, you never get it again. That is the reason why they have to keep smoking, as to try to get the first high. Okay. How we know that [is] because it get them broke, it get them sick.

Drug dependency places sex workers in a particularly vulnerable position, as an addict in need of a regular fix is in danger of "agreeing" to unprotected sex and is less likely to be able to set the financial terms of the sexual exchange. In one workshop organized by the National AIDS Program Secretariat for instance, role-playing involving a client and a drug-dependent sex worker ended with the latter agreeing to unprotected oral sex.

### ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

We close by reflecting on some of the implications of our findings for articulating and implementing strategies for change.<sup>28</sup> The diversity that we have seen militates against any approach that sees sex workers as a homogeneous category. While sex workers share a number of experiences, there are also differences—of age, ethnicity, and location—which must be taken into consideration. In some areas questions of coercion are clearly paramount and require steps to be taken to prevent deception and exploitation of Amerindian women. The issue of schoolgirls also requires separate consideration, and here it is, moreover, a question of accessibility and disclosure.<sup>29</sup>

At present the only initiative with and for sex workers in Guyana started in the early 1990s and involved a PAHO-sponsored seroprevalence survey among Georgetown sex workers. Out of this has come a sex workers' project under the auspices of the National AIDS Program Secretariat, sponsored by CAREC (Caribbean Epidemiology Centre), and located in the Ministry of Health. Its resources are limited. The office is open during the week only during the daytime and there are only two persons on the project, the program manager and the project officer (Cannings). A third person was recently hired to train voluntary counselors in the various regions of the country. Workshops have been held with sex workers to discuss such issues as STDs, condom use and safer sex, and alcohol and drug abuse (interview with Cannings).<sup>30</sup> Steps are now being taken to train sex workers as peer educators, and plans are also afoot to organize (with the GUM clinic) regular health checks and (with the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association) PAP smears for women (interview with Cannings). Although the program office is based in Georgetown, visits have been made to Linden, Mahdia, and other communities in the Essequibo.

Most of the women agreed that there should be an organization for sex workers. Some proffered the view that sex workers should be helped to find alternative opportunities to earn a living: "OK, like I would say...like form something that prostitutes I would say could like do something else, even like do some trading like yuh know, learn something or make something and dey could even sell or something, and mek their own business." Others

saw the need for organizing in order to legalize sex work and end the discrimination women currently faced: "If it was legal we woulda got to get some paper or something. I glad if dey could get serious and leh we get some kind of paper, so we could go in dem disco and hussle, not pun the street, like yuh know, police can come and raid we off, I glad if dey can do dem ting." The protection of sex workers was also identified as a possible role: "[The organization could] just to look into our problems, well like if we go wid a guy and he don't want to pay us, just look into the matter for us...that they won't bully yuh know, nuff young men like to bully." One woman from the mining camps made a similar observation: "Like get an out-station right, like is somebody let we say sex you and dey don't want to pay, dey would got somebody to arrest dem and say no man, yuh have to pay dis girl and so." The diversity of responses underscores the need not only for flexibility and openness, but most importantly for the initiative and the driving and organizing force to come from sex workers themselves: "Well, yes, it all depends like if they come together and say they want something to be done, then I think that something should be done."<sup>31</sup>

This brings us, finally, to the role Red Thread (and similar "sister outsiders" [Lorde 1984]) can play in this regard, based on our involvement in the research process over the past year. Certainly our access to information was somewhat limited by the fact of our noninvolvement in sex work and thus our implication in the wider societal norms that would stereotype prostitutes as deviant. However, this situation was ameliorated by the research team members, who were able to talk to the sex workers because of their commonality of trying to make a living in a tough economic climate. Nor would we want to suggest that barriers between women are permanent, or that relationships based on trust and mutual respect are impossible. They are not, but they take a great deal of work and time. We do believe, however, that Red Thread's role can only be supportive (for example, providing spaces for women to meet, helping to break down barriers between sex workers and non-sex workers, helping with the organization of workshops) and that the agenda must be defined primarily (although not necessarily exclusively) by sex workers themselves. Where Red Thread can possibly take a more proactive role is in challenging the silences around sexuality that exist in Guyanese society and institutions (in our schools, our places of worship, our homes) and the discriminations upon which they are based, which result, yet again, in the devaluation of women and women's labor.

## NOTES

1. The nonacceptance by the major opposition party—the People's National Congress (PNC)—of the December 1997 election results, in which the People's Progress

sive Party (PPP)/Civic was reelected, led to a tense situation in which the PNC refused to take their seats in parliament. Street demonstrations in January and again in June led to Caricom intervention in an attempt to shore up the political crisis, which had spilled over into the economic arena and was severely affecting any gains made under structural adjustment.

2. Having sex with customs officers was an activity that was engaged in as a form of bribery, allowing women traders to avoid paying taxes on goods they were importing.

3. There are reports of schoolgirls involved in the making of pornographic videos (frequently without their knowledge or consent) for distribution locally and overseas (see Danns 1996), and also entering into sexual relations with minibus drivers for money. The minibus drivers pick the girls up from school and take them to places where they can have sex, for which the girls are given gifts or cash (interview with Red Thread research team).

4. Given the taboo nature of homosexuality, discussing such matters would also have been difficult in light of the short timescale of our research.

5. These included Cora Belle, Shirley Goodman, Halima Khan, Linda Peake, Chandra Persaud, Vanessa Ross, Karen de Souza, and Alissa Trotz.

6. The general breakdown of all interviews was as follows: seven worked in hotels, clubs, and bars; six worked in mining camps; four worked on the streets; and six worked in guest houses. Amerindian women were represented in all categories except the street and clubs (one woman worked exclusively on ships), while the schoolgirls worked in the first two categories. In all, four of the women were Amerindian, six Indian, five black, and six mixed.

7. Linden is located on the upper Demerara River, about sixty miles inland, while Baritta is positioned at the confluence of three rivers, the Essequibo, Cuyuni, and Mazaruni Rivers, approximately 40 miles inland.

8. The interviews lasted one hour on average and were taped, transcribed, and checked. Follow-up interviews were carried out where questions were missed or clarification was needed. Generally, one woman was approached, who then acted as the contact person, finding other sex workers who were willing to talk with us about their experiences and perceptions. Interviewees were paid G\$2,000 for their time (at the time of the interviews U.S.\$1 = G\$140). There were no refusals, the result, we believe, of the financial incentive (especially among those at the lower-paying ends of the business) combined with the fact that sex workers themselves mediated our initial meetings with other women.

9. One Amerindian woman stated that she did not have sex with Amerindian men because they insulted her. Another Indian woman preferred to sleep with black men only. The other women who had views on the subject expressed a preference for "their own kind." It would appear that "ethnic sameness" may lead to a situation in which the woman is treated derogatorily, but it may also be opted for given negative stereotypes of "ethnic others" (a few of the non-black women, for example, said that they did not sleep with black men because they had heard that they beat and robbed women). Undoubtedly clients also "desire" certain types of women more than others, based on stereotypes associating gender, ethnicity, and sexuality (Kempadoo 1996). Sometimes preferences may not run along any of these expected lines. One Indian woman was turned down by a "Negro boy" because, she reported, he said he



didn't deal with Civic (a reference to the current PPP/Civic Government, seen as representing the interests of Indians in Guyana). As we have not interviewed any of the men, we do not have any information to pursue these issues.

10. These prices are for "straight sex" only; if a woman agreed to "pose" in various positions, prices would be raised accordingly.

11. Our findings thus lead us to question a recent classification suggested in the *Guyana Review* (Vol. 63, 1998) that suggests zoning sex workers in Guyana into three categories, one of which is identified as "streetwalkers" located on the street, shops, and entertainment spots. The other two categories are mature call girls, with a clientele of rich men and foreigners, and "brothel girls" based at guest houses. As we have seen, there is a substantial difference in the anticipated earnings of street workers based on location.

12. We would thus expect a different set of questions to be raised by male sex workers in Guyana, who are largely street workers and appear predominantly to conduct their business with men. We did not find any evidence in the interviews that any of the prostitutes engaged in homosexual sex for pay, although a few of the women said that there were prostitutes who were lesbians outside of work. (The derogatory—terms used to describe homosexuality locally are *sodomite*, *cockson*, *buller*)

13. Miller also posits that the reaffirmation—through exchanges of money and services—has to be ongoing, which is what supposedly distinguishes it from prostitution. In Jennifer's case, though, the boundaries are even more blurred than this.

14. Some examples are schoolgirls having relationships with much older men—and sometimes with their parent's knowledge—in order to get money for uniforms, books, clothes, and other items that they could not otherwise afford, or women entering into relationships with men in the hope of getting a visa to "go outside" and do better, again with familial consent. At the same time, we do not want to suggest that sex work is an available option for low-income women only. It is, however, far more hidden and denied among middle and upper sections of society, making it more difficult to detect (see the quotation that opens this section).

15. At the same time, sex work in the context of Guyana does not necessarily signify female sexual autonomy or exist completely outside of the dominant sphere of sexual relations; witness the intense homophobia we encountered, for example, and the nature of women's interactions with men on the job.

16. This is not perhaps surprising, for Caribbean society continues to uphold marriage as the superior familial arrangement and consistently denies equal validity to common-law and visiting relationships. The distinction made between prostitution and family life is thus implicitly talking about a certain type of "normal" familial arrangement. As researchers have noted, this differentiation is an expression of class, gender, sexual, and racial power (Alexander 1997, Lazarus-Black 1994, Smith 1996).

17. In the interior as well, where almost all the women are prostitutes and virtually everyone except Amerindians is working away from home, there does not seem to be much in the way of moral reproach of the kind found on the coast.

18. This was found to be the case across all categories of sex workers interviewed, including the mining camps where one may argue that women are far less constrained than in their home communities.

19. These responses foreground the limits of disclosure when the interviewees are not sex workers themselves or have not been in the field for a sufficiently long time to build up a relationship of trust.

20. All the women who worked in guest houses and in hotels/bars/nightclubs tried to save; this was not the case for women working on the streets and in mining camps. Only one Amerindian woman was able to save.

21. In the interior it has been noted that the moral economy of gold and diamond mining requires coastlander men to engage in ostentatious displays and to demonstrate their generosity through profligate spending when they make a profitable finding (Roopnarain 1997). The question here is whether there is any gendered difference insofar as sex workers are concerned. Four of the women were mothers of young children living on the coast (in one case the child had migrated) and in three cases were their main sources of support. Only two of the women were able to save occasionally. The information we collected suggests that none of the women was making a windfall from their jobs. However, one of the women was unable to save due to the temptation to spend one's money out (on clothes, for example), suggesting a possible parallel in some respects with the way in which the miner's money is viewed (the money, like the "shout" which makes it possible, is here today and gone tomorrow). However, further research is needed on this issue.

22. Moreover, the identity of the dead woman may never be known, as many sex workers use false names and addresses while working in the interior and their families may not even know where they are located.

23. And at any rate most of these services are based in Georgetown.

24. Indeed, a seroprevalence study carried out among sex workers in 1993 noted that female sex workers in Georgetown had recently been the target of police efforts to "clean up the streets" (Carter et al. 1997:452).

25. The vast majority of the women knew someone who had been the victim of violence, but it was never themselves. Moreover, Karen de Souza, who made initial acquaintances with women in the boulevard, notes that the stories she was told were slightly different and included far more violence when tapes were not being used to record sex workers' conversations.

26. The guest-house manager we interviewed said that regular checkups at the hospital were a prerequisite for women who worked out of his location.

27. Nor are free condoms always available. During the survey, a local newspaper carried a report that the Ministry of Health had run out of condom supplies and was unsure when it would receive new stocks.

28. We note again that this is a small study and that not all groups of women and men involved in the sex trade in Guyana have been included. The paucity of information hinders efforts to understand the complexity of the sex trade. Further research is needed, for example, on clients as well as the involvement of schoolgirls and men as sex workers.

29. Schoolgirls are reluctant to be identified, knowing that they more than anyone else are not "supposed" to be involved in sex work. One workshop for sex workers was unable to attract any schoolgirls: "I don't think they had the nerves to come to the workshops" (interview with Cannings), most likely for the same reason.

30. The workshops had a snowball effect. Cannings noted that when they first started, twelve women came out, then thirty. By the time she organized a workshop for street workers, more than 100 women came.

31. Nor do we think that this is a straightforward task. While we did find examples of women relying on each other for support, cooperation was more the exception than the rule. Instead women spoke of competition from other women (including telling clients that other sex workers had AIDS or were dirty) or said they fended for themselves. As we have also seen, there is a hierarchy within sex work that suggests that interests may not be similar and that women may see themselves as different. These are all issues that have to be worked out in process; we raise them here only to draw attention to the factors that militate against any easy or simplistic conclusion.

# 13

## For the Children

### *Trends in International Policies and Law on Sex Tourism*

KAMALA KEMPADOO AND RANYA GHUMA

The long-standing relationship between sex, prostitution, and tourism have been widely recognized by scholars in Third World and tourism studies (Fanon 1963, Turner and Ash 1976, Press 1978, ECTWT 1983, Cohen 1984, Crick 1989, Hobson and Dietrich 1994, Harrison 1994). It was, however, due to feminist research and action around prostitution in Southeast Asia in the 1980s that "sex tourism" was identified as a concept to refer to practices structured in the tourism industry that involve the exchange of material goods or money for sexual labor (Matsui 1989, Mies 1989, Enloe 1989, Truong 1990, Ivis-wice 1990). The concept has since become common currency among academics and journalists to denote practices that range from highly organized tours for sexual pleasure to incidental "romantic" encounters between the tourist and "native," and which incorporate men and women as both tourists or clients and sex workers (Urry 1990, Hall 1992, el-Gawhary 1995, Leheny 1995, O'Connell Davidson 1996, Partullo 1996, Petman 1997, Oppermann 1998). There is, however, little formal recognition of sex tourism by international authorities and nothing to date that reviews current global policies on the issue. In this chapter we examine dominant trends in the international discourse on sex tourism, as refracted through policies and laws of international agencies, governments and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which aim to control and regulate the global tourism industry or seek to address the social impacts of tourism.

Attention to sex tourism by international agencies is of very recent origin, and thus the initiatives taken so far are still to unfold into clear policies and

