

## **Red Lighted: Media Globalization and the Scapes of the Global Sex Trade Market**

### **Introduction**

This paper explores the role of media globalization, the pervasiveness of media markets linked to American capitalism and democratic states as generators of globalized economic systems and within them, the growing market for the global sex trade. The following article “Emma And Elena, Exposing The Sex Trade” published on NPR’s website on October 31, 2009 describes the crisis of human trafficking for sex trade as it is addressed by Academy Award Winner Emma Thompson who wants to tell the story of a young girl, Elena, who was forced into the global sex industry. Thompson’s unconventional way to focus attention on this troubling issue was to champion an art installation called “Journey,” which tells the story of a victim of human traffic inspired by Elena's story.<sup>1</sup> “Journey” informs of the violence associated with the sex trade and helps the viewers to understand the realities surrounding it in hope to become an inspiration for changes in the reluctance of the international community to address the causes rather than the consequences of sex trafficking in order to arrive at a change in international laws.

### **American Capitalism and Global Democratic States**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, American capitalism opened the doors to global democracies that operated in the modern sense of nation-states to ideas that inspired the replacement of authoritarian regimes and the traditional social order. The United States brought the extension of its capitalist prosperity to countries that democratized their rule, helping them to become proficient in their economic plans, military capabilities, and political influence providing that they support American interests. Economic embargoes and removal of financial aid would

follow any opposition to American power; consequently, these nations and the United States came to constitute a gigantic economic unit pursuing profit making and capital accumulation. This American thrust on nations worldwide facilitated the rise in incomes, and ushered the institution of capitalist infrastructure, dependency on American products, pursuing American style education. Moreover, it led to the decline of the traditional societies and their social identities and eventually the disorganization of economic and political systems. An example of applied American capitalist infrastructure is Greece; this nation's pursue of a life-style in the "American" fashion is leading this country to a financial crisis and a disorganization of their government, so, within the current global economy there is a certain level of disjuncture that seems associated with interactions between economy, culture and politics.<sup>2</sup>

### **Media Globalization and Global Media Markets**

In the article, "Global Media, Neoliberalism, and Imperialism," published by Monthly Review, March 2001, Robert McChesney says:

"Economic and cultural globalization arguably would be impossible without a global commercial media system to promote global markets and to encourage consumer values. The very essence of the technological revolution is the radical development in digital communication and computing.<sup>3</sup> This global oligopoly means that the dominant firms—nearly all U.S. based—are moving across the planet at breakneck speed. The point is to capitalize on the potential for growth abroad—and not get outflanked by competitors—since the U.S. market is already well developed; it only permits incremental expansion.<sup>4</sup>"

The liberalization of the world trade in the 20<sup>th</sup> century opened the doors to the media markets becoming an incentive for the consumption of media (para.).<sup>5</sup> American media: films, TV programs, music, news, entertainment, theme parks, shopping malls set the standard for worldwide export and imitation. "American cultural domination remains forceful in a rapidly

changing international power scene (Schiller Pg. 254).”<sup>6</sup> American films are among the most dominant forms of cultural works of art and social communication anywhere in the world. “In places like Russia, although the prerevolutionary domestic film industry that had catered to the Russian taste was gone after the end of the cold war, they eagerly sought its replacement in foreign film, and especially American movies that featured the same themes for the commercialized audiences of another society (McReynolds).”<sup>7</sup>

### **Sex Trade in Relation to Deterritorialization**

Economy and communication are interrelated in relation to the sex trade, and what anthropologist Arjun Appadurai calls “deterritorialization.” In the article “Archeology of the Global Era: Constructing a Belief” Armand Mattelart discusses communication networks in relation to the society as follows:

“Communication networks not only link people together, but often widen the gap between economies, societies, and cultures along the lines taken by development. The gap becomes a gulf when the potential for information technology development is used as a veneer for an economic model that many countries and social groups today correctly perceive as unchecked (Mattelart pg. 325).<sup>8</sup> The new social networks on a worldwide scale proclaimed the arrival of a ‘global civil society,’ which can be understood as a global equitable world to achieve what anyone wants using the vehicle of communication as a tool people can shape as a governing force.(Mattelart pg. 326)<sup>9</sup>”

Mattelart’s explanation fits the post modern idea that people design what they like and they do not have to answer to any reasons because the way people form their lives is up to them.

Deterritorialization is at the heart of most economic interests of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Gil-Manuel Hernández i Martí, a Sociology lecturer at the University of Valencia says the following about the how globalized economics can transform the culture in a territory of a nation-state:

“Deterritorialization, considered a central feature of globalization, implies the growing presence of social forms of contact and involvement, which goes beyond the limits of a specific territory, takes us to a closer involvement with the external, which generates closeness in distance, and to a relative distancing from what is close (Hernández i Martí, pg. 91).<sup>10</sup> The extension of the forms of deterritorialized social relation tends cause a profound transformation in the status of local environments, ever more conditioned by global dynamics (Hernández i Martí, pg. 92).<sup>11</sup> The manifestations of cultural deterritorialization are basically two: cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. Homogenization can be understood as an Americanization, Westernization or absolute marketization of world culture. As far as heterogenization is concerned, the differentiation appears as much in the different reception of standardized cultural products as in the assertion of people’s own cultural identity (Hernández i Martí, pg. 94).<sup>12</sup>”

The technology of globalization is transformational and it is the key of globalized industries. The free trade among nations has liberated economic activities from protectionist rules and has helped them achieve their goals of economic flexibility. However, the dark side of globalization is that there are other types of illegal activities that can be easily promoted; one of these is the sex trade. “Technology has served as a primary vehicle in making local crimes national, national crimes transnational and transnational crimes global phenomena, due to the window of opportunity it presents for instant mass communication (Dona).”<sup>13</sup>

### **Global Disjunctures: The Five Dimensions of Cultural Flow in Sex Trade**

Globalization has produced flows of people, goods, and ideas across frontiers. These flows of *ethnoscapes*, landscape of persons in a shifting globe, *technoscapes*, technologies of transport, *finanscapes*, the flow of money that accompanies commodities, *mediascapes*, technologies of transmission of messages, and *ideoscapes*, the production of images narratives, and signifiers. These flows build the ground of deterritorialization in which money commodities,

and persons are involved in a ceaselessly chasing each other around the world, that the mediascapes and ideoscapes of the modern world and find their fragmented and fractured counterpart. Anything goes as long as it finds a way to pay for itself.

The ethnoscape of sex trade is the flows young women to be sold in a sort in sex markets and “transported” where they forcefully become prostitutes in massage parlors, escort services, strip clubs, or the regular street walker. In this era of images and floating signifiers foreign girls of Asian, Eastern Europeans, or Latin American origin have been objectified and exoticized. Economic meltdowns in countries in Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America and even the United States, and wars in the Middle East and Asia Minor have brought out the reappearance of sex tourism, sexual services to the military, sexual exploitation, prostitution, and human trafficking. The mediascapes and ideoscapes publishing images and narratives of the affluent places where the replication of American products as a template of how to live their lives, along with the advertisements for good jobs in foreign countries at wages they could never make in their country of origin, which lures them into their demise.

Finally, the finanscape, prostitution is not illegal in many places and there is a great demand for sexual services. “In Milan, Italy, the police broke up a ring that was holding auctions in which women abducted from the countries of the former Soviet Union were put on blocks, partially naked, and sold at an average price of just under \$1,000 (Bertone—pg. 10).”<sup>14</sup> A New York Times article titled “In Oakland, Redefining Sex Trade Workers as Abuse Victims” published in May 2011 reports that the Polaris Project, a national advocacy organization, estimates that a stable of four girls earns over \$600,000 a year in tax-free income for the pimp. Drug dealers here are increasingly switching to prostitution, inspired by the bottom line and fewer risks.<sup>15</sup> In a post on “Impact,” the news blog of the Huffington Post, Emma Thompson

herself remarks that in many ways, human trafficking is much easier to commit than dealing with drugs or weapons: “You can make \$150,000 from one girl in a year because moving people around the place is easier than moving guns around.”<sup>16</sup>

“MSNBC Undercover: Sex in America” a special report about the sex trade that aired on April 2008 reported:

“a tragic but all too familiar tale is young women in Eastern Europe chasing dreams of a better life outside of their country enticed by fake employment ads, with slick brokers promising good jobs with decent salaries are abducted instead and turned into sexual slaves on roadside brothels on an isolated country road near the Czech Republic and German border as just a small part of a worldwide marketplace.<sup>17</sup> Another tale is one where two university students signed up to study English abroad in a program that involved waitressing in Virginia Beach, USA, but the girls would never reach Virginia, and they would never be waitresses. After being abducted, if these women refuse to work as sex slaves and make money for their pimps, they can be sold to any country, to any person, at any time.”<sup>18</sup>

In an era of sophisticated technology, human trade can be done instantaneously with a click of a Smartphone button or a mouse.

### **Challenging the “Flows” of Sex Trade**

The news and investigative journalism stories regarding sex trade have been played on the news ad infinitum and people might be desensitized to the subject. Putting Emma Thompson’s “Journey” art exhibit straight in the eyes of the public who might have heard about the sex trade on a news channel special one night might bring it to life in front to everyone for them to really see what it is like to be trafficked as a sex slave.

Thompson designed this exhibit in shipping containers because “they resonate so strongly; they’re such powerful, huge objects, and we associate them with the movement of

goods, sex films,” which is essentially how the woman she is featuring, Elena, was treated<sup>19</sup>, she was objectified into goods for sale. This deconstructs the ethnoscape, technoscape, and mediascape into its parts and how each one fit into the life of the woman enslaved. Dealing with the ideoscape, “viewers who look through the portholes in the containers see their own faces superimposed on the bodies of woman wearing “prostitutes' weeds” — tattered lingerie tattered underwear and stockings that had been worn by other women, old used stuff”<sup>20</sup>. Putting the viewers in the place of the victim breaks the images of a far away crime that cannot happen to the girl next door. It questions the legitimacy of countries who do not institute stiffer laws to protect women against human trafficking and judges those who use the services of a prostitute.

Fighting against this crime in countries of globalized economic trade blocks is difficult, especially if the recruitment and business deals are conducted via the Internet. Therefore, recruitments of NGOs and other global organizations to help out with the fight against this crime are necessary to make illegal the traffickers and the users' *legal* stance, which can eventually lead to the reduction or even disappearance of this crime.

## **Conclusion**

Globalization has created huge gaps in the economies of the world, and there are more desperate economic refugees today than ever before. Sex trade is part of the tragedies of population displacements, could be replayed in a more detailed analysis of relations between the Japanese and German sex tours to Thailand and the tragedies of sex trade in Bangkok, and in other similar loops tie together fantasies about the other, the conveniences and seductions of travel, the economics of global trade and the brutal mobility fantasies that dominate gender politics in many parts of Asia and the world at large (Appadurai pg. 388)<sup>21</sup>. We can see the multiple loops of this fractured deterritorialization (Appadurai pg. 388)<sup>22</sup>.

The exhibit put together by Emma Thompson should get the governments speaking about how to combat this crime. Andrea Marie Bertone writes in her paper titled “Sexual Trafficking in Women: International Political Economy and the Politics of Sex:

“Japanese authorities have been aware that many Filipina women who enter Japan by Japanese airports will become part of the prostitution rings in the large cities and the officials do not question the women or deny their entry. They are inadvertently supporting the trade (Bertone—pg 11).<sup>23</sup> Canada on the other hand, passed a new law in 1997, which makes women who seek to enter the country as “entertainers” prove their profession in order to prevent women from being trafficked into the country as prostitutes. This is one of the only laws of its kind and has been highly criticized by businesses in Canada (Bertone—pgs 11-12).<sup>24</sup>”

In an interview with the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), Thompson said: “If you're someone who buys sex you can go to the madam or whoever is taking the money and say, ‘where are your girls from, have they got passports?’ You can also report any incidences you see of suburban households that have a great slew of young girls walking in and out for no apparent reason. If you're a shop keeper and some girl comes to you for condoms and tissues and doesn't speak English, you can enquire whether she is alright. You can get involved, you can open your eyes, because this is something that is happening on the street and it might be right round the corner from you. So, it is time for the public to be involved, no one can close their eyes to this, just inform yourself and get active. As for lobbying, you can lobby any number of governments to actually do something about this. It's time for everybody to look at this and say the buying and selling of human beings for whatever reason is not appropriate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and should never be allowed again.”<sup>25</sup>.

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