

Canada's Failure to Protect Victims of Sexual Exploitation

Inequities within the global political and economic hegemony have opened up the marketplace for trafficking in women as a commodity for sexual exploitation. The nature of the industry is so clandestine that it is difficult to distinguish migrants who have been trafficked from other irregular migrants (Four-Year analysis), but according to UN estimates, 1 to 4 million women and girls are victims of global trafficking every year (Bill C-11). One of the outcomes of trafficking is that women who are working in Canada's sex trade illegally under exploitative conditions are denied human rights and access to resources due to their lack of status. This reality is ill-aligned with Canada's formally articulated commitment to the advancement of human rights and suggests that this commitment is a travesty.

It is instructive to frame the question of how such a travesty can occur within a within a political geographical perspective. Essentially, a reconfiguration of spatial boundaries within global relations has manifest in a subjugation and displacement of women that constitutes an abrogation of their rights according to official Canadian and international mandates. This reflects a shift within the binary constructions of licit/illicit and legal/illegal wherein the criminal site of the underworld conjoins with the judicial site of the nation-state to defend the licit territory of sexual exploitation.

This paper will use the trafficking of Eastern European women into the Canadian sex trade and Canada's treatment of them to illustrate the validity of this perspective. Therein, it will deconstruct the power relations of trafficking in women in demonstrating that global transactions in women are predicated upon asymmetrical male/female relations. Canada's policy regarding trafficked women will be shown to maintain rather than rectify this asymmetry, particularly in its repositioning of victims as criminals, and to thereby tacitly support the industry. It will be argued that this undermines Canada's commitment to human rights and advertently perpetuates the abuse and marginalization of women.