

'No Minors Allowed': Outsider Bar-girls and Trafficking in a Philippines Sex Tourism Industry

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Abstract

This paper considers the political traction that claims to human trafficking are making in the sex tourism industry in the Philippines. The year 2000 saw the first global, legally binding instrument on trafficking produced – the United Nation's *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children* (The Palermo Protocol). The Protocol penalises the non-consensual movement of people for the purpose of 'exploitation'. In 2003 the Philippines implemented its own legislation, the *Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act* (Republic Act 9208). In particular, anti-trafficking legislation represents the codification of highly contested feminist politics on prostitution as exploitation within international legal conventions.

While prostitution is illegal in the Philippines, in Apalya, Puerto Galera, the sex tourism industry provides commercial sex between non-local Filipinas and foreign men. This paper examines the conditions in the industry such as the accruing of debt, bar regulations, and significantly, the involvement of minor girls, conditions which all generate situations where a trafficking case can be made. Until recently the term trafficking was literally unheard of; however in 2008 a conviction for trafficking in relation to minor girls occurred. The paper investigates the interaction between a coalition of local NGOs, national bodies and international agencies primarily US-funded, anti-trafficking groups which instigated this intervention.