

Introduction

My name is Agnete Strøm, and I'm elected international coordinator in the Women's Front of Norway. I'm very happy to take part in this interesting and important conference, the III Latin American Congress on Human Trafficking.

The Women's Front is an independent member based women's organisation, founded in 1972. It is a radical feminist organisation, working against all forms of oppression experienced by women and girls in a society dominated by men; economical, social, political, legal and cultural oppression. The organization has been active in the struggle against prostitution for thirty years. When the new law criminalizing the buying of a sexual act came into effect January 2009, an important goal was reached – criminalizing the johns. This paper draws from the well of experiences collected during the thirty years that led up to the passing of the law.

I called my abstract: "*The construction of the consumers in a Nordic setting 1980 – 2010 and the "deconstruction" of the consumers after the law that criminalize the buying of a sexual act were passed in Sweden in 1999 and in Norway and in Island, both 2009.*" My way of using the word "deconstruction" here is not how it is used in academia; so out of respect for the conference I have renamed my paper, the title is:

The Construction of johns - and what to do about it.

The three Nordic countries: Sweden, Norway and Island are in many ways very similar and when I give you facts and findings from one country it also "covers" the two other countries.

Until the end of the 19th century, there was a law in Norway regulating women in prostitution. The women were forced to report regularly to the police, and undergo regular gynaecological and health check-ups. This law was finally dropped in 1899 and the public brothels were all closed down. To sum up: In all three countries prostituted women have since the turn of the twentieth century, not been penalized, prosecuted, controlled, checked, instead brothels and pimping have been criminalized.

I can give you a little story here:

At the turn of the twentieth century 120 years ago, there was an exodus from European countries to escape poverty. This was also the golden time for the traffickers, for the quests for work made young European women, also Norwegian women, to seek employment in neighbouring countries or to emigrate to North America. The young women travelling alone were easy targets for traffickers. The so-called "good jobs" were in fact brothels. The city Genova in Italy was a shipping out port, and each year 1200 young European women all lured by agents or traffickers, were shipped out to different destinations in South-America, to Middle East and China. This was correctly called "the white slave trade". An English organisation operating internationally to rescue trafficked women from the brothels, managed during 1903 – 1906 to rescue 1.230 Norwegian young women.

The First World War put an end to traveling from Europe, and afterwards came a period with complete silence around the phenomenon; prostitution, trafficking, johns. But today all three countries have passed a law, called the Nordic model, which criminalizes the buyers/the purchasers.

When we started the Women's Front we did not have any opinion on this, but after thirty years of experience with the global sex industry we have developed an abolitionist view of prostitution and of the male demand:

- Prostitution is abuse – paid sexual abuse,
- Prostitution is commercialisation of sexual abuse
- The male demand for commercial sex – completely unrestricted sexual access to most female bodies – is the most immediate root cause of prostitution and sexual trafficking.
- The male demand is protected through male privilege.
- Ending demand cannot be achieved without the eradication of male privilege.

The porn-industry expanded considerably in the 1970ties, but late 1970ties there was no clear sign that a feminist campaign against pornography was imminent. In the early 1970's, we in the Women's Front worked primarily for women's economic independence. In the mid-seventy we campaigned for women's right to legal, safe and free abortion and the law was passed in 1978. But through this struggle we took on board all the aspect regarding women's bodies and sexuality.

We demonstrated against the opening up of several new sex clubs and massage parlours in Oslo in 1977.

Same year two women refused to do their work; selling tram tickets, when they saw that the tram was filled with posters advertising for a porn magazine.

They were fired, and the women's movement exploded in support.

The women got their jobs back, and pornography was suddenly on the agenda. None of us knew much about what pornography contained, porn was a hidden world, and the porn industry was an unknown topic. Where did all the magazines and films come from? Who was behind it? What do you see when you look at pornography through radical women's eyes? Who are the buyers? Why do they buy porn? We entered the world where porn was made, and looked around. We saw the gigantic porn industry, the porn mafia, with a profit that could compare with the weapon industry. At that time porn was the symbol of the capitalistic exploitation of the female body:

- An industry where women are treated as if we are not human beings and are seen as mere commodities by the producers of pornography and the male buyers.
- An industry built on serious sexual violence of women by men where we are presented as 'the other'.
- The men do not have or want to relate to who the women really are;
- The women are there to fulfil the buyers' sexual wishes, which are their only wish.

The porn industry has not produced a new message. It uses the effective production means of capitalism to spread more effectively than ever before. Misogyny, men's rightful access to women, women's obligation to comply and to serve, the shame and the fault, all well known characteristics in our culture, and when concentrated and glorified in porn and then distributed through the news stands and supermarkets and bought and read by hundred thousands of ordinary men.

Lesson learned:

- The porn industry depicted women a commodity for men, and
- Depicted men a consumer of women.

What we found made us angry and ready for fight. How should we act so people could see what we had seen? We decided to use a drastic method that would make it clear for everybody that porn was not about pictures of naked women.

We went into the shops, served ourselves, took the magazines to a public place nearby, set fire to them and told people gathering what porn was about. This spread over the whole of Norway; I was responsible for the first action in my hometown Bergen, October 1978.

In 1977, thirty women's organisations in Norway joined forces around the slogan "A Woman's Body is not for Sale" and formed the network *Joint Action against Pornography and Prostitution*.

In the mid-80ties the Norwegian porn magazines started to promote actively the new so called marriage agencies promising Norwegian men more willing and submissive wives if they travelled to the Philippines. The pornographic magazines included articles promoting prostitution in Thailand and other poor countries, warmly recommending Norwegian men to take special charter tours and to buy "prostitutes". This was a new and growing trend.

We linked up with international network and partnered up with feminists in the Philippines and Thailand and exchanged information. We described the organizer of the charter tours as "sex tour agencies", and described their operations as "trafficking in women" and "racist activities".

We targeted the Norwegian sex tourist agencies organizing trips to the Philippines and had joint actions with feminists in the Philippines. We demonstrated when the plane took off from Oslo's airport, and feminists in the Philippines would demonstrate when the men arrived at their hotel in Manila. These actions made big headlines in Norwegian and Philippine newspapers.

We also picketed the airport and exposed the organizers in our rallies when the charter flights took off to Thailand. They sued us for libel, and it ended in the Norwegian Supreme Court, but we won. Our descriptions of their activities as "sex tourism", "racist activities" and "trafficking in women" were valid.

The verdict was not good for business, and the agency later closed down. But this did not stop sex tourism from the Nordic countries to South East Asia; on the contrary it grew and grew to unimaginable proportions.

Asia experienced huge economic crises, and the governments let sex tourism expand without restrictions. Poor young women and children left their rural villages on an exodus towards the tourist spots. But the offers of a clean job in a restaurant, turned out differently; the women were turned into a commodity for men, also for Nordic men. Men from the Nordic countries bought prostituted women for their first time when abroad.

Lesson learned: economic crises are the gate opener for traffickers; they swarm to the destitute areas in South East Asia and offered jobs. The sex industry grew so important that it became a survival tool for the inhabitants of the countries. And the sex industry started lobbying the Asian governments to legalize prostitution as sex work.

August 1998 the International Labour Organization, ILO, in Geneva, Switzerland, sent out a press statement: '*Sex industry assuming massive proportions in Southeast Asia*'. The UN office had published the report *The Sex Sector: The Economic and Social Bases of Prostitution in Southeast Asia*, a report based on studies in four Asian countries – Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines and Thailand.

The report concluded that those Asian countries with large prostitution industries would benefit from the legalization of prostitution as sex work.

The collapse of the economy triggered the growing of sex tourism in South East Asia and made ILO to propose that prostitution should be legalised as work and taxed.

A proposal that was attacked the next day by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions, their statement was:

“All forms of buying of sex and prostitution are violence against women’s human rights.” And this made headlines in Norway.

More economic crises II:

In 1993 the former Soviet Union fell apart and the former Yugoslavia was ravaged by several civil wars. The new Eastern European countries, with their strong political and economical ties to the Soviet Union, found themselves in a very difficult economic situation

Norway shares border to Russia and from one day to another Russian women were trafficked by Russian pimps across the border to the North of Norway. Camping trailers were set up in the outskirts of the small communities in the north of Norway, including those inhabited by the indigenous people, the Sami. The men in the small hamlets were targeted as consumers of women and began to purchase Russian women for sexual purposes. The local Sami women in these communities responded by linking up with the women’s movement and highlighted the exploitation of women in prostitution and focused on the demand. Their actions targeted their own men.

Meanwhile the countries bordering the Baltic Sea were “turned into a “huge brothel” for Swedish and Finnish men and many under aged girls were trafficked to Sweden and Finland. In the larger cities in Norway, women trafficked from the Baltic countries and from Eastern European countries such as Albania, Romania and Moldova, were visible in street prostitution.

To sum up I:

By the end of the 1990s and starting the year 2000,

- the majority of women in prostitution in Norway were no longer Norwegian drug-addicted women, but women from East-Europe.
- the buyers, however, remained mostly local Norwegian men, and the number had inclined.

Today the majority of women in prostitution in Norway are Nigerian women. This shift started 2005. Due to the economic crises in Nigeria the last 15 years Nigerian young girls were trafficked to Italy and Spain. But the present financial crises in South Europe, has caused the Nigerian women to be trafficked further to Northern Europe and to Norway.

To sum up II:

Financial crises in certain parts of the world and civil wars creating poverty and unstable situations affect women the most. Traffickers swarming all over to get hold of destitute women. Pornography on paper and internet targeting men to turn them into johns by building up an image of women as a commodity. .

To sum up III:

The financial crises in South East Asia and in East-Europe made many women enter prostitution out of desperation and destitution, likewise when a financial crises hit Nigeria.

At the same time the men in the Nordic countries were targeted to become johns, through sex tourism abroad, or through a growing prostitution market at home established by criminal organisation through trafficking of East-European and Nigerian women. Pornography also plays a major role in accustoming men to join the growing trend of male demand for commercial sex.

Little has been investigated, or written, about those who trigger the demand – the “johns”. They tend to protect their anonymity. Mr. Hubert Dubois has made a

documentary about French johns, titled “The clients”, and in this documentary no one showed their face, except one during the one hour-long film.

International studies estimate that from 10 % up to 75 % males use prostitutes. This varies from country to country Europe: 10 % in Britain, 18 % in Germany, 17 % in Italy, In Thailand and Cambodia the estimate is 60 – 75 % of the males.

An estimate is that 40 million women and girls are consumed in prostitution globally. Prostitution is about men’s sexuality, not about women’s. If men the world over did not demand paid sex, there would be no need to corral, break, and submit millions of women and children to this dehumanizing existence.

There are specific cultural and historical circumstances that surround men’s sexuality. These circumstances might change, and so can also male sexuality and men’s demand for prostitutes change.

But social scientists tell us that unlearning is actually more challenging than learning. It is time for men to reject pornographic sex, sex premised on domination, and envision a world defined by social justice built on equality between sexes.

In all three Nordic countries feminist organisations formed broad based networks against trafficking and prostitution. ROKS, Stigamot and the Women’s Front all allied with the national women’s movement, trade unions and political parties. International partners from South East Asia and CATW Int. played an important part to lobby for a law that criminalized the buying of sex, now called the Nordic Model.

Internationally there are two trends:

Legalization: prostitution is “inevitable, inescapable, and necessary”, “something that will always exist and therefore should be accepted, because men need it, and women choose it, or because prostitution is the “oldest profession”.” This is a vision that “calls for women to be licensed as “sex workers””. And as we have seen recommended by ILO to curb financial crises, and last year recommended by UN to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The other vision is the Nordic Model to work toward eliminating prostitution and creating a society based on gender equality, a society in which prostitution is seen as incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human being and the equal rights of women and men.

There is an inspired human-rights-based legal approach that recognizes the connection between prostitution and human trafficking, and puts the political focus where it belongs: on ending the demand. Sweden is the architect of ground breaking legislation in 2009. The Palermo Protocol, the global instrument that addresses human trafficking, contains language in article 9.5 that encourages signatories to pass legislation that discourages the demand for commercial sex.

The head of the Swedish police says: “if the authorities joint intervention against trafficking is not comprehensive, criminal groups can grow bigger and stronger. The intervention is comprehensive first when actions targets:

- the traffickers,
- the pimps,
- the johns.

All of these actors are important to ensure that this commerce shall function and be profitable.

Sweden’s Sex Purchase Law doesn’t mince words. The preamble clearly states, that *“In Sweden prostitution is regarded as an aspect of male violence against women*

*and children. It is officially acknowledged as a form of exploitation of women and children and constitutes a significant social problem.... **Gender equality will remain unattainable so long as men buy, sell, and exploit women and children by prostituting them.***

The Norwegian justice minister said, *"We want to send a clear message to men that buying sex is unacceptable. Men who do it are taking part in an international crime involving human beings who are trafficked for sex." "People are not merchandise". "By criminalizing the purchase of sexual favours, Norway will become less attractive in the eye of human traffickers." "Our goal is to change attitudes, reduce the demand and thus reduce the potential market for the traffickers."*

Swedish studies of the johns have identified two categories of sex buyers.

- the accidental buyers, someone who happen to buy sex a couple of times during his life time. These men are most susceptible to repressive intervention, and the reduction of street prostitution in Swedish cities is a result of the law.
- the regular buyer, 1/5 of all the johns, are men who for a shorter or longer period during his life time regularly buy women in prostitution. They are by number few, but their consume of prostitutes is on the other hand massive. The studies describe their relationship to women as "sexualised" and "very problematic", here we also find those men who project their own psychological problems onto the women, by using more or less massive violence to debase and degrade them. These men are not susceptible to repressive actions; neither fines nor prison will stop them. To work with and to treat these men is a challenge.

It is a paradigm shift when we now are focusing on the sex buyers in research/academia, in social relations and in the penal laws. It is a fact that the sex buyer's part/role in commercial sex seldom has been challenged. The "hooker" is linked to the dark side of men's image of women, she is linked to desire, but also to scorn and repulse. She is defined only by her sexuality, which can be bought for money. Around the man as a buyer there has never been any emotional charged images. He can be anonymous or invisible.

The Nordic Model, the new law in Norway¹ (pdf)

"Any person who a) engages in or aids and abets another person to engage in sexual activity or commit a sexual act on making or agreeing payment, b) engages in sexual activity or a sexual act on such payment being agreed or made by another person, or c) in the manner described in (a) or (b) causes someone to carry out with herself or himself acts corresponding to sexual activity, shall be liable to fines or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to both. If the sexual activity or sexual act is carried out in a particularly offensive manner and no penalty may be imposed pursuant to other provisions, the penalty shall be imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year."

The new law, effective from January 2009, states that it is prohibited to purchase a sexual act, and the punishment will be fines (2.500 USD – 4.000 USD) or imprisonment up to six months. Importantly, this law criminalizes the purchase of a sexual act in Norway as well as outside the country.

The current minister of Justice Knut Storberget said when the law finally passed, that:

"Human beings are not a commodity and criminalizing the purchasing of a sexual act will make Norway less attractive for the traffickers. Our goal is to change attitudes, reduce the demand and thus reduce the potential market for the traffickers. Criminalizing shall not make the situation for women in prostitution worse; therefore

the government will develop other alternatives of livelihood for women than prostitution.”

The Swedish police was very negative when the law was put in place in 1999, but after massive education of cops, prosecutors and judges about prostitution, the victims, the rationale behind the legislation, and how to implement the law, the Swedish police force became an effective tool. And three polls conducted between 1999 and 2002 found that approximately 80 % of the population support the law.

The present situation:

The Norwegian police states clearly that the number of men buying sex has gone down. It is the number of younger men that has declined; the behaviour and attitude in the peer group have changed.

At the same time the number of women in street prostitution is back to same level, and they are younger and more tightly controlled by their traffickers. This is due to the financial crises in South-Europe and the aggressive traffickers.

In doors prostitution is at the same level, but as hotel owners and house owners are regarded as pimps, the traffickers travel the women from city to city. The advertising at inter net has reached new proportions and the police wants a law adjustment that make it possible to close down on the websites, as with child pornography.

The pro-prostitution lobby tells that the law, the Nordic Model, has made prostitution go under ground, and thus being more dangerous for the women in prostitution, as they then are more exposed to violence from the buyers.

Prostitution has always been under ground, and the women have always been exposed to violence.

A Norwegian report “Dangerous Liaisons” 2012 on violence against women in prostitution concludes that such violence has increased in Norway after the law. One week later the authors had to admit that the statistical foundation of the report was very questionable and that the statistical material did not give any foundation for claiming that violence had increased; on the contrary it was possible that the opposite was correct; violence may have decreased.

In Sweden a survey from 1996 shows that 13 % of the asked men had bought sex. A following up survey in 2008 shows a marked decrease, 7,8 % of the men had bought sex.

The yearly mapping shows that fewer women are exploited in prostitution, fewer women are trafficked to Sweden. There is no sign of that prostitution has become more violent and dangerous and commercial sex has not gone under ground.

The Swedish law against buying of sex was evaluated after ten years 1999 – 2010, states that street prostitution has been halved and there is no sign that this reduction has made other forms of prostitution to increase, neither indoors, nor via Internet. Due to the law that criminalize the buying of sex for the traffickers Sweden has become an unattractive sex market for selling of women and children. Sweden is the country in Europe where prostitution has not increased during the last ten years. So far the Swedish evaluation from 2010. But I know that the Swedish pro-prostitution lobby is eagerly trying to negate the results.

In Norway an evaluation will be done in 2014, after five years with the law.

The two European countries, Germany and the Netherlands both opted for legalisation, thinking that

- legalization would lead to the decrease in sex trafficking,
- safer conditions for prostitutes, and

- removal of "some of the stigma from the industry."

But in reality,

- legalization not only increased sex trafficking of women and children but also
- failed to change the stigma attached to prostitution for the past few years.
- 11 years later only 3 % of the women had registered themselves,
- prostituted women had not got better conditions in prostitution,
- nor had more women been able to leave prostitution.

The driving force behind the legalization of prostitution was to decline criminality. The case in Germany shows otherwise.

Rather, the sex industry in Germany became a magnet for sex traffickers from Eastern Europe and African countries. Further, it became a source of exploitation of German as well as other foreign women rather than their emancipation to support their right to sell their bodies.

And the results from the Netherlands are similar bad.

The prostitution policy in countries as the Netherlands and Germany is slowly shifting focus. Even if they have a long way to go before they reach the same conclusions as Sweden, Norway and Island, it is an important shift of paradigm when these two countries.

Three weeks ago in Ireland the commission on law enforcements regarding prostitution and trafficking handed over to the Minister of Justice its recommendations, they recommended the Nordic Model.

In France the government will receive a similar proposal about the Nordic Model, and the law will be voted on in October in the government, where the majority of the delegates are in favour of the law.

The prostitution policy in Europe is shifting focus; the European legalization model has lost.

The women's movement has been the major lobbying and advocacy force behind the Nordic Model, and in the last years important voices have been speaking up and entered the scene. It is the loud voice from men speaking out for the criminalisation of the demand for prostitution. It is the proud voice from survivors of prostitution who give their faces and their names and their experiences. They must be in the forefront of the struggle to end demand. They are telling the johns and us that prostitution is sexual abuse.

Criminalizing the *purchase* of sexual activity

Section 202 a

Any person who

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- b) engages in sexual activity or a sexual act on such payment being agreed or made by another person, or
- c) in the manner described in (a) or (b) causes someone to carry out with herself or himself acts corresponding to sexual activity,

shall be liable to fines or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or to both.

If the sexual activity or sexual act is carried out in a particularly offensive manner and no penalty may be imposed pursuant to other provisions, the penalty shall be imprisonment for a term not exceeding one year.