

# Child Prostitution and Sex Tourism

## SOUTH AFRICA

A research paper prepared for ECPAT  
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## INTRODUCTION

The South African Tourist Authority makes use of the phrase 'a world in one country' to conjure up images of the many and diverse pleasures to be consumed by affluent visitors to the country. More sanguine observers describe the country as a mixture of 'first' and 'third' world, however, and this is pertinent to understanding the many and diverse ways in which children are sexually exploited in South Africa.

There is what might be described as a first world commercial sex 'trade' in South Africa and the individuals who are prostituted in this context are often below the age of 18 years. But this is not the only economic context in which children are sexually exploited.

Many children live in communities which are, in effect, excluded from South Africa's free market economy (in some peri-urban areas, more than half the adult population is unemployed and those in employment are often earning below-subsistence wages) or else they live on the streets. In these settings, children's bodies are traded not for commercial gain or even always for cash but in exchange for basic survival.

This report, which is based on nine days and nights of fieldwork in Cape Town and Durban, is divided into three main sections. The first is concerned with the commercial sex trade, the second with varieties of 'survival sex' and the third with the identity, motivations and attitudes of child sex exploiters in South Africa. We will begin with a brief note on methodology.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Fieldwork in Cape Town and Durban was carried out by the authors between 31 May and 9 June, 1996. We conducted observational work in red light areas, nightclubs, bars and hostess clubs, as well as in depth interviews with 12 prostitute users and briefer interviews (half an hour or less) with a further 20 such men.

We also interviewed 25 people working in the sex 'industry' (hostess club and escort agency managers, doormen, pimps and prostitutes) seven street children and a number of local people.

We were helped by two police officers and by individuals working for the following organisations: Childline, Durban; Tennyson House, Durban; SWEAT (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce), Cape Town and Rapcan, Cape Town.

### **A Note on Terminology**

Although we reject the idea of 'race' as a biological fact, in this report, the terms 'black', 'white' and 'coloured' are used to describe individual's racialised identities since these are the social categories used in South Africa to structure inequalities and organise social relations.

## **SEXUAL COMMERCE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN**

In most countries of the world, prostitution takes a number of different organisational forms and the conditions endured by prostitutes (in terms of payment, throughput of clients, health and safety, their risk of violence and harassment, the degree of control they exercise and so on) vary according to the setting from which they work. There is often a very distinct hierarchy within prostitution, with higher priced 'call girls' and 'escorts' securing (relatively) greater financial rewards and being exposed to (relatively) less risk, violence and intimidation, and street workers and prostitutes in cheaper brothels being more intensively exploited and abused.

In the past, apartheid geographically segregated the strata of this hierarchy in Southern Africa. The regime honed both the rhetoric and hypocrisy of racism and moral conservatism to their ultimate conclusions, resulting in a situation in which, despite prostitution and 'interracial' sex being outlawed, white men had limited access to an 'elite' of white and coloured prostitutes in cities and ports and more or less unlimited access to extremely vulnerable and abused black prostitutes if they crossed the border into Swaziland or Bophuthatswana.

Although the activities associated with prostitution (soliciting, procuring, brothel keeping, etc.) are still illegal in South Africa, the policing of prostitution has been dramatically relaxed in recent years and all the tiers of the sex industry's characteristic hierarchy can now be found alongside each other in major cities such as Cape Town and Durban. These tiers are described below.

### **Entrepreneurial Prostitution**

In both Cape Town and Durban, there is a small elite of women and men who prostitute themselves entrepreneurially, making relatively good money from their 'businesses'. These are people who own or rent the property from which they work and solicit by placing advertisements in the "massage" columns of the small advertisement sections in local papers. They often cater to very specific 'markets' (for example, offering to provide domination and other specialist services), and their businesses operate in much the same way as those of entrepreneurial prostitutes in the west (see O'Connell Davidson, 1995 for an account of such businesses in Britain).

Entrepreneurial prostitutes need a certain amount of capital to set up in business independently (they need to pay rent in advance, buy clothing, props, install a telephone, pay for advertising) and this means that they are relatively economically privileged.

In South Africa, it follows from this that such prostitutes are typically over the age of 18 and that they are generally white. They charge 'first world' prices (upwards of 350 Rand per session) and cater to a clientele made up primarily of locals and foreign and domestic businessmen.

### **Independent Bar/Club Based Prostitution**

There are a number of bars and nightclubs in Cape Town and Durban which serve a clientele of seamen, domestic and foreign businessmen, locals and tourists. The owners of such bars/clubs benefit financially from prostitution by charging the clients (sometimes also the prostitutes) an entrance fee and by selling extremely high priced drinks. They do not involve themselves in the details of prostitute-client transactions, though some do employ women on a casual basis to perform striptease acts during the course of the evening.

The prostitutes who solicit from such settings are usually independently working women and teenagers who do not have the capital to set up the kind of business described above and/or who do not rely upon prostitution as their sole source of income. However, some are being 'worked' by pimps who send them into clubs/bars to solicit custom. Because the clientele of such clubs and bars is predominantly comprised of seamen, the women and girls who work from them are referred to as 'dockrats'.

We visited seven such nightclubs in Cape Town and Durban. Some were reasonably smart, some were very shabby, but all were highly functional. No passing visitor would be in any doubt as to the purpose of these establishments and every female who enters them is assumed to be sexually available, for a price.

Groups of men, often seamen, sit drinking heavily together at tables surrounding a dance floor. Women and girls display themselves on this dance floor until they are approached and invited to join a man or group of men at a table.

They may have a couple of dances with the man before leaving with him, either for 'short time' or to spend the whole night with him.

Some of the women and teenagers we interviewed in these settings took a businesslike approach to their work, negotiating prices up front and setting limits to the amount of access to their person exchanged for a set sum.

Others took a more informal approach and did not fully self-identify as prostitutes. They spoke of hoping to find 'boyfriends' or husbands amongst the seamen and foreign businessmen and did not always negotiate a clear contract (x sum for x sexual service) in advance but hoped instead the man who picked them up would 'treat them nicely'.

As always, the degree of control exercised by women/teenagers who self-identify as prostitutes as well as the prices they are able to charge fluctuate according to laws of supply and demand. On a 'good' night, when several ships are in the port, 'attractive' independently working prostitutes can earn as much as \$US150 for short time. When fewer clients are around, the prostitutes' bargaining power drops.

Meanwhile, older women (and there are many women aged between 35 and 50 still working in dock-related prostitution) are forced to offer more for less in order to compete with younger prostitutes. They are often sought out by clients who wish to perform extremely abusive acts and who know that older women are often desperate enough to submit to such practices.

We interviewed three men who managed this type of nightclub and each of them claimed that they would not permit or tolerate girls under the age of 18 working from their premises, stating that it was not worth risking the legal consequences. However, girls entering these clubs are not required to produce any identification or proof of age and no-one we spoke to had any memory of a police raid on such establishments over the past two years.

It is not surprising, therefore, that three of the prostitutes we spoke to in such settings were under the age of 17 and that particular nightclubs in both Cape Town and Durban are commonly identified as places where girls of 14, 15 and 16 go to solicit seamen's trade.

It is also worth noting that while the owners of such establishments do not operate them as brothels, their managers, doormen and bar staff do appear to become involved in various opportunistic forms of pimping and procuring.

### **Massage Parlours, Escort Agencies, Hostess Clubs and Brothels**

It is now possible to openly advertise and supply sexual services without much risk of prosecution in South Africa, which means that third party involvement in prostitution can take more visible and direct forms. As a consequence, there are a growing number of massage parlours, escort agencies, hostess clubs and brothels which profit from directly organising prostitute-client transactions.

There are several tiers to this type of organised prostitution. At the 'classy' end of the range are expensive establishments replete with plush furnishing, soft lighting and as many as ten or fifteen 'glamorous' adult hostesses on offer.

At the seamy end are squalid apartments in dilapidated tenement blocks in which two or three girls as young as 11 and 12 years of age are held.

We interviewed a number of people involved in the more expensive end of the trade who described the massage/escort/hostess sector as operating in the following ways. Some agencies provide a 'call girl' service, sending women to service clients in hotels, but clients can also visit parlours or clubs where it is possible to select a woman/girl from those on display and take them to a cubicle on the premises for 'short time'.

In either case, the client makes his payment to the agency rather than to the prostitute, who is paid later by the agency. For example, one hostess club charged clients 300 Rand for a one-hour 'session' in a cubicle. The prostitutes working in this club received only half of this sum.

These agencies/clubs attract custom in a number of ways. As well as hotel staff a commission of 50 Band for every client they supply. In one case in Cape Town, the owner of a hostess club also owned a guest house and encouraged male tourists staying in it to make use of 'his' hostesses.

Another escort agency owner told us that he was considering advertising over the Internet in the hope of attracting more foreign businessmen and tourists.

Finally, this type of business often relies heavily on establishing regular clients. Agency owners build up client lists and/or steal them by enticing managers of other clubs to come and work for them, bringing their competitor's client list with them.

These agencies/clubs are, on the whole, fairly small scale businesses, competing hard for a share of what is a fairly limited market (the throughput of clients in one of Cape Town's more successful hostess clubs is only eight to 10 men per day on average; 26 clients on one day was the most its manager had ever known). They therefore rely largely upon a floating population of prostitutes who turn up looking for work on an *ad hoc* basis.

With such small 'turnover', hostess club owners have no incentive to provide regular, direct employment to women/girls, especially since new clients do not care who is working there and regular clients value 'variety'.

However, these clubs and agencies do need to exercise some control over labour recruitment and retention because they operate in a context within which demand rockets whenever a ship docks and their 'employees' can make better money by working independently in the nightclubs and bars described above.

They do not wish to find themselves in a situation where no girls turn up for work on nights when there is good money to be made elsewhere. For this reason, owners will seek to lock a certain number of women/girls into a relationship of obligation and dependency upon them.

One hostess club manager showed us an advertisement he had recently placed in *The Herald*, a newspaper which covers the whole of the Eastern Cape Province.

It read as follows:

Earn big money. Escorts and strippers needed for very upmarket and only internationally recognised. hostess club in Cape Town. Transport and accommodation provided.

The idea of this, he explained, was to lure girls from outside Cape Town, who would be placed in very expensive accommodation on arrival and then told that they owed the club owner the money for their fares to Cape Town and for rent. The 'debt' then bonds them to the owner and their isolation in a new town makes it unlikely that they will be confident enough to go to other nightclubs and work independently in order to pay off the money they 'owe' him.

It is also the case that many of the prostitutes working in Cape Town and Durban are drug dependent and agency/club owners can further exercise control over them by supplying them with drugs.

The owners, managers and doormen we interviewed in hostess clubs/ agencies all insisted that few, if any, girls under the age of 18 work in such settings. Quite apart from the fact that their business is formally illegal, most of these clubs break liquor licensing laws as well and they do not wish to attract the attention of the police, they told us.

There is, no doubt, some discrepancy between theory and practice, for as prostitutes who work in such settings told us, there are no checks upon the age of women applying for work other than asking 'How old are you?', which means that providing an under-age prostitute looks over 18 she would be able to find work in these places.

We were also told by a number of informants that managers and owners of the more 'classy' agencies and clubs are sometimes involved in the prostitution of much younger girls, in the sense that they will arrange 'anything a regular asks for', although not necessarily on their premises.

On the whole, however, the smarter escort agencies and hostess clubs are not the first port of call for clients in search of very young teenagers and prepubertal children, for child prostitutes are more typically found in the cheaper end of the organised prostitution sector.

The brothels in which children are prostituted are not only cheaper and less 'glossy' but also less visible.

In Durban, for example, children are often prostituted from rooms in cheap hotels and tenement blocks and there can be several layers of third party involvement in their abuse. At its most simple, this type of child prostitution involves a Madam/pimp who works two or three children from a rented flat in a tenement block.

The children may be sent out onto the street to solicit custom or the Madam may rely on word of mouth and/or connections with taxi drivers, hotel staff and escort agency owners (who pass on customers with a sexual preference for children) to obtain custom.

The children are typically runaways or street children and though some may be kept as prisoners in such brothels, many are so damaged by the long-term, repeated physical and sexual abuse to which they have been subjected that they remain with their Madam 'voluntarily'.

We interviewed a Durban police officer who had just found a missing child in a brothel operated from a private flat in a tenement block. This brothel was run by a woman known to regularly prostitute girls aged between eight and 14 and the police officer explained that even when children are removed from her custody and put into 'places of safety', they often run away again and return to this Madam who provides them with pocket money, items of clothing and drugs.

A former police officer from Durban's Child Protection Unit told us of another Madam who is renowned amongst runaway girls for the 'help' she will offer them and thus does not need to entice or entrap children in order to commercially sexually exploit them.

They approach her in the hope of securing the paltry material rewards that are otherwise entirely beyond their reach.

Child prostitution is also organised in more complex ways. For example, there are agencies which sublet hotel rooms or flats in tenements to adult prostitutes and/or Madams who control very young prostitutes.

The hotel desk clerk or the tenement's doorman then acts as the agency owner's agent. He charges clients a fee to enter the building (this is his own 'cut', usually about 10 Rand) and a fee for the use of the room/flat (this is the agency's 'cut', usually about 20 Rand). He then directs the client to a given prostitute or Madam, who negotiates the best price she can for the sexual 'service' itself.

Again, clients are solicited in a number of ways. Some discover these brothels by word of mouth, some are 'cruising' the red light area and are attracted by the sight of prostituted women and children at the windows of these hotels and flats, some are responding to the advertisements for 'massage' placed by agency owners in local papers.

### **Street Prostitution**

Street prostitution is another context in which sexual access to women, children and men's bodies is commercially traded in South Africa. This form of prostitution is organised in much the same way as it is arranged in the west and like brothel prostitution it encompasses its own hierarchy in terms of how intensively prostitutes are exploited.

At the 'top' end of street prostitution are the independently working adult women and transvestite men. They work after dark in areas known to be cruising grounds for prostitute-users and some earn relatively good money.

At the bottom of the hierarchy are adult women and teenage girls who are worked by pimps or gangs, men who take some or all of the money earned by the women/children in exchange for 'protection' and, in many cases, drugs.

Street workers all over the world are constantly under the threat of violence from clients, pimps and the police. This is also the case in South Africa where those involved in providing support services for street prostitutes report that street workers are frequently picked up by corrupt police officers who extort money from them and rape them and that many are subject to repeated violence and intimidation from pimps, gang members and clients.



Furthermore, in Cape Town, a serial killer has murdered twenty street working women over the past two years.

It is impossible to obtain reliable information about the exact numbers of children who are being commercially sexually exploited in this way but police officers, people conducting outreach work with street prostitutes, street prostitutes and others involved in the sex industry all claim that there are a growing number of girls aged between 12 and 16 soliciting on the streets and dock areas in Cape Town and Durban.

According to one of SWEAT's (Sex Worker Education and Advocacy Taskforce) counsellors, the girls in Cape Town have typically run away from abuse and poverty in the squatter camps and peri-urban areas surrounding Cape Town. Often they have friends or a boyfriend who are gang members (gang members usually come from the same area, for instance, members of the 'Hard Living Gang' which operates one Cape Town suburb all come from Cape Flats) and so they seek protection from the gang. They are then drawn into drug use and street prostitution and are often closely controlled by older gang members.

Many girls are effectively under continuous surveillance by gang members while they work. Although this affords them some protection from violent clients (the street workers who have been murdered were all working independently, for example), it also means that these young girls are isolated from older street prostitutes from whom they could otherwise obtain some support and advice and it is difficult for outreach workers from SWEAT to speak to them or supply them with condoms.

### **Some General Observations on the Commercial Sex Trade in South Africa**

Everywhere in the world, the commercial sex trade is parasitic upon human misery. Quite apart from the fact that the vast majority of sex workers in both economically developed and underdeveloped countries have been forced into prostitution by some combination of economic desperation and or abuse' prostitution is, at best, a job which is tedious as well as intrusive and demeaning and, at worst, involves the repeated experience of personal violation, pain and degradation.

South Africa's sex industry is made still more unpleasant by the fact that the misery upon which it feeds is in large part a legacy of the apartheid regime. As well as exploiting poverty and the absence of alternative economic opportunities for women and girls, the sex trade in South Africa feeds on the human suffering caused by the old regime's particularly brutal distillation of racism, sexism and homophobia.

To begin with, South Africa's sex industry is 'racialised' to an extraordinary degree. It is visibly *segregated* by 'racialised' barriers. The women working in the least oppressive settings are almost exclusively white or coloured.

We found no evidence of entrepreneurial prostitution by black women and one of our informants (a man who worked as an agent for such women as well as managing hostess clubs) told us that the only entrepreneurial black prostitute he had known throughout his five years working in the industry had had to advertise herself as an 'American Negress' in order to counteract white and coloured South African men's racism towards those they *deem* 'African' blacks (they associate 'African' women with poverty, dirt and disease, whereas 'American Negresses' are fantasised as blacks of the type appearing on the Bill Cosby show).

In the hostess clubs and escort agencies we visited, there were no black women. The majority were white, with a smaller proportion being coloured. The recruiting advertisement placed in *The Herald*, which was cited above, attracted 50 responses. Of the women who responded to this advertisement 46 were black and coloured, while four were white. Only the white women were invited for interview and offered 'work'.

Likewise, in the bars and nightclubs *where independent* prostitutes solicit, the women *employed* to perform striptease acts are invariably white and the vast majority, sometimes 100%, of the women and teenagers soliciting in such clubs (women and girls who can earn up to \$US150 for 'short time') are white and coloured.

At the seamier end of the prostitution market, and particularly when we turn to child prostitution, the composition of the 'workforce' in terms of racialised identity is almost *precisely reversed*. The young street prostitutes worked by gangs are almost exclusively black and coloured. The children in the dilapidated brothels described above are rarely white.

*There are* other ways in which the South African sex industry is marked by the legacy of apartheid. The Dutch Reformed churches, bulwarks of apartheid, promoted (and still do promote) a deeply conservative gender ideology which pivots upon notions of 'natural' difference and inequality between the sexes.

The church and state were also publicly committed to an extremely repressive sexual ideology, one which sanctified heterosexual intercourse within marriage. The stigma attached to prostitution in such a society is very great indeed and this probably accounts, at least in part, for the fact that even at the most 'privileged' end of the market, the prostitutes we interviewed were extremely damaged individuals.

Alcohol and barbiturate abuse appeared to be ubiquitous, even amongst adult white women who earned relatively good money from prostitution. The intensity of the stigma is well captured in a quote from a reasonably financially successful 22 year old white male prostitute:

Sex work takes your dignity and your self respect, but it's like an addiction. You can't get out of the life, even if you try. There's nothing else I can do. I haven't got qualifications, this is the only thing I know... It's a cruel life, it scars you, you're scarred for the rest of your life... I'll never be loved. How could I ever have a relationship with anyone after this? How could anyone love me if I told them? I'm not going to lie to anyone, I don't want to lie.

So I'll always be alone...

I don't ever have sex now, nothing turns me on. I've seen everything. There's nothing that gets me excited. About once every six months I have sex, just for a release. But I'm not interested. Sometimes I dream of being romantic.

You know what I'd really like? Just to sit with a girl in a nice restaurant, with a view of the sea, just talking and being romantic, someone who loved me. But that's never going to happen.

The manager of one hostess club, a well travelled man who had worked in the commercial sex trade for 16 years, described South Africa's sex industry as 'pathetic and amateurish'. He argued that years of Calvinist sexual repression, strict censorship laws and isolation from the debates about sexuality and sex work that have influenced the sex trade in Europe and North America has meant that:

No-one knows what they're doing here. You never get what's advertised, it's all very small scale, very amateur. The girls are unprofessional, they don't use prostitution for their own ends, they don't save money and then get out. They do it for drugs and drink, they're all fuck ups and they never get out.

Though this man's view of sex workers in countries like the Netherlands and the U.S.A. is hugely idealised, to some extent we shared his impression that there was something vaguely amateurish and anachronistic about the commercial sex trade in Cape Town and Durban by comparison with that which takes place in 'first' world cities.

This was especially the case so far as independent prostitution in the nightclubs and bars was concerned. Most of the women and teenagers who solicit in them dress in clothing that is not only outmoded but very modest given the business they are in. One older prostitute woman told us that she had taken a 15 year old girl who was soliciting in a nightclub aside and said to her, 'You don't have to dress so vulgar just because you're working. You should have some self respect and cover yourself up'.

This modesty extends to the way in which they dance and generally deport themselves and, through western eyes, these so called 'dockrats' resemble a group of rather conservative clerical workers on a night out, rather than visibly signalling that they are sex workers.

All this was appealing to a number of the western businessmen and sailors we interviewed in these settings. It made it easier for them to tell themselves that the women/girls they sexually exploit are not really prostitutes and therefore that they themselves are not really prostitute-users.

## SURVIVAL SEX

The kind of commercial sexual exploitation that has been described in the section above is constructed as a form of commodity exchange. Sexual access to prostitutes' bodies and/or particular sexual services are bought and sold across a market - a cash value is attached to them just as a cash value is attached to a person's labour power or to certain objects.

But not all sexual exploitation takes place in this kind of 'free-market' context. As this section will show, sexual access to children's bodies is also traded for mere subsistence or for simple survival, rather than for commercial gain or for a 'wage'?

The children forced into 'survival sex' are predominantly black and 'coloured' children who live either on city streets or else in poverty stricken peri-urban or rural areas. In South Africa there is no income support for single parent and poor families and this fact makes these children especially vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

It is important to understand that survival sex takes place not just in the context of very extreme poverty and privation, but also in settings in which very extreme forms of violence are commonplace. Violence in South Africa is most frequent and most intense in the poorest areas (rich people can protect themselves in fortress-style suburban homes and pay for 24 hour armed response security services).

In the run-down, red light area of Durban, virtually everyone we spoke to reported having witnessed attacks with guns, knives or machetes. Although we only spent four days in the city, we ourselves witnessed one man threatening others with a gun and two men fighting with machetes. Habituation to and fear of violence is an all-pervasive and brutalising aspect of life for many South Africans.

Perhaps as a consequence of apartheid's extraordinary and barbaric focus on the body, a great deal of this violence is highly sexualised. As ever, it is women and children (and more particularly, it is black and 'coloured' women and children), who are the prime focus of this sexual violence. The statistics are staggeringly horrible.

The number of reported rapes of *children* under 18 years of age rose from just under 5,000 in 1993 to 10,037 in 1995 and in the first month of 1996 there were 2,321 reported child rapes (SAPS, 1996). These figures are unlikely to represent anything more than the tip of the iceberg, since rape victims are hugely stigmatised and thus have a strong incentive not to report sexual crimes perpetrated against them.

In Soweto, there are believed to be some 400 rapes a month, many of which involve school age girls who are dragged from school rooms or their own homes by gangs of youths and gang raped -a practice referred to as 'jackrolling':

Sexual violence is also endemic in South Africa's penal institutions and although currently the government is taking steps to reform this situation it has long been the practice (and still is in some prisons and police stations) to place juveniles in holding cells with adult prisoners. Many of the juveniles so imprisoned are street children, children who are essentially guilty only of poverty.

We interviewed one young man who, at the age of 18, had spent a year in Polsmor Prison, Cape Town between 1993 and 1994. He described to us details of the extremely vicious rapes perpetrated by older prisoners against children as young as 10 years old, as well as against teenagers such as himself in prison. These rapes are not usually simply random, arbitrary expressions of brute violence but constitute an initiation into a relationship of dependency upon an adult or group of adults for protection and survival within the prison.

The knowledge that many street children have, at some point in their lives, been incarcerated, subjected to what amounts to sexual torture and then drawn into a relationship in which sex is traded for immediate survival, may perhaps help to explain the frequent reports of older street children replicating this kind of abusive relationship with younger street children, as well as becoming involved in gang rapes of older women.

The real point is that the concept of 'child prostitution' inadequately describes the nature of a great deal of child sexual exploitation in South Africa today. As well as children who are exploited for commercial gain and who prostitute themselves independently as a means of making a living, there are many children whose moment by moment survival is secured through submission to acts of sexual abuse and violence.

## **Survival Sex in Townships, Peri-Urban and Rural Areas**

In South Africa as a whole, black unemployment is running at an official rate of around 38 percent and 70 percent of South Africans earn less than \$US80 per month (Beresford, 1996). The economic situation and living conditions in the townships and peri-urban areas surrounding major cities such as Cape Town and Durban are desperate. Thousands of people live in shacks constructed from beer cartons, card-board, mud, wood and other debris, there is often no supply of clean water, no sanitation, no electricity and every month thousands more people from still poorer rural areas arrive as migrants to swell these squatter camps. In many of these areas, more than half the adult population is unemployed and those who do have paid work earn a wage well below subsistence level.

In other words, these are settings in which the majority of the population is effectively excluded from South Africa's formal, free-market economy and yet, at the same time, they lack access to land and a more informal subsistence. In such a context, people will exchange almost anything they can for the basic necessities of survival and often the only thing they can trade is sexual access to their children's bodies.

There are numerous reports of teenage schoolgirls going 'voluntarily' to the shebeens where local men and migrant workers drink in order to prostitute themselves for small sums of money, and of girls aged between 14 and 18 becoming 'taxi queens' (which involves being chosen for 'adoption' by a taxi driver who then both prostitutes the child and sexually abuses her himself), as well as reports of gang involvement in the prostitution of children.

There are also reports of both pre- and postpubertal girls being sent to shebeens by parents or grandparents on the understanding that the men who rape them there or on their way home will pay for them in cash, drink or goods.

In parts of KwaZulu Natal, where political instability makes the economic situation even worse than that in other regions of South Africa, and where around 20% of the population is known to be HIV positive, Joan Van Niekerk of Childline reports that it is not uncommon to find a working male economically supporting a woman and her children in exchange for sexual access to a prepubertal or teenage child or children.

The AIDS epidemic is believed to be linked to a growing incidence of child sexual abuse in two main ways. First, some people believe that venereal disease can be cured by sexual intercourse with a partner presumed to be uncontaminated and there are men who, knowing that they are infected with AIDS, seek out children as sexual partners in the hope that this will 'cleanse' them.

Second, men who are not infected, or who are at the asymptomatic stage of HIV infection and so do not realise that they are infected, often believe that the risk of infection is lower if they select young children, rather than adult women, as their sexual partners. There has been a massive increase in the rate of pre-adolescent HIV infection in KwaZulu Natal. In one district, there are 200 cases of children aged between four and 14 who are HIV positive as a result of sexual abuse and this figure only represents the fate of those children who have been tested.

Childline has recently dealt with one case in which a two year old child is HIV infected as a consequence of sexual abuse.

In rural areas, the sexual exploitation and abuse of children may also take the following forms:

- 1) The taking of temporary 'wives' by migrant workers. For instance, in one coastal community in Western Cape Province there were 133 births to teenage mothers in a 12 month period. The children were impregnated by fishermen who formed 'relationships' with them whilst staying in the district during the abalone season.
- 2) Opportunistic exploitation by farmers. For example, there are reports of white farmers 'paying' for sexual access to young girls with items of toiletry such as deodorant, shampoo and skin cream when they visit rural towns.
- 3) Systematic exploitation and abuse by farmers and employers of domestic labourers. South Africa's agricultural sector is profoundly exploitative and heavily dependent on child labour - an estimated 10% of the commercial agricultural sector's workforce are children - and farmers wield almost feudal power over their farm labourers (NACL, 1996).

There are reports of the children of farm labourers being sexually abused by farmers upon whom the family is entirely dependent for both wages and accommodation.

Large numbers of children also work in domestic service and there are reports of such children being sexually abused by their employers (see also Sexwale, 1995, for a detailed account of violence against domestic workers in South Africa).

### **Survival Sex on the Streets**

There are large numbers of children living on the streets of South Africa's major cities. They come to the cities because they are orphaned, abandoned or have run away (either from abuse or from the unendurable poverty and privation described above).

Once in the city, they roam the streets and they sleep on pavements and in doorways. A few are to be seen with blankets. Most have only their ragged T-shirts to pull over their heads while they sleep.

Life on the streets is violent as well as hard and other street dwellers (adults and children) in particular are a constant physical threat. One of the street children we interviewed was a boy of about nine or 10 years old (he was unsure of his own age).

We had observed him being beaten up by some other street children a few minutes before we spoke to him and his face was still tear-stained.

He told us that he had come to Durban from Pietermaritzburg to look for his mother who had disappeared from the shanty town in which they lived.

Because of the dangers of life on the street, most newly arrived street children (male and female) attempt to join a group of older street children for protection as well as for some kind of kinship.

Obtaining such protection generally involves allowing themselves to be sexually abused by older street boys. But without this protection, they will most probably be beaten as well as raped anyway.<sup>3</sup>

To obtain the things necessary for bare survival on the streets (food, items of clothing, sometimes glue to dull the misery), children steal, beg and offer up their bodies for sexual abuse. Some adult men 'cruise' in cars, pick up street children who are begging at traffic lights, and drive them to a backstreet where, in exchange for a few Rand, they will vaginally or anally penetrate the child or get the child to fellate them.

Some pick up children who are begging or 'hanging out' on the streets or beach front and take them somewhere to abuse them, sometimes taking the child home with them and abusing them over a period of days or weeks in exchange for food and shelter.

Even children of four and five years old endure such violations in order to survive. We spoke to two women in Durban who had recently witnessed a man being fellated by a child of five in some bushes on the beach front. They had shouted abuse at the man and called for the police. The man ran away and the police picked up the child. This story was corroborated by a police officer.

The child, like other children picked up in similar circumstances, was sent to a 'place of safety', one of the temporary shelters provided for street children. This is hardly likely to have meant an end to his sexual abuse.

A number of different informants told us that children in these temporary shelters are frequently raped by older children there. It is small wonder, then, if many of the street children who end up prostituted in the shabby brothels described above view their Madams as benefactors.

### **THE IDENTITY, ATTITUDES AND MOTIVATIONS OF SEX EXPLOITERS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Sex exploiters in South Africa, as elsewhere in the world, are a heterogeneous group. Included amongst their ranks are domestic and foreign businessmen, domestic and foreign tourists, seamen, migrant workers, expatriates and locals.

The background characteristics of the prostitute users we interviewed in Cape Town and Durban are shown in Table 1 (see following page).

This section considers their attitudes and motivations for prostitute use. It also offers tentative hypotheses about the men who abuse street children and the child sex abusers who are, themselves, sexually abused children.

Table 1:

Background Characteristics of the Sample of Prostitute Using Men Interviewed

ID	Nationality	Racialised Identity	Age	Employment	Travel status	Marital status
1	British	white	73	retired	expatriate	divorced
2	British	white	56	skilled manual	expatriate	single
3	British	white	53	skilled manual	expatriate	divorced
4	German	white	62	self employed	expatriate	divorced
5	German	white	50s	managerial	expatriate	married
6	S.African	white	47	managerial	local	divorced
7	S.African	white	42	skilled manual	local	divorced
8	S.African	white	70s	self employed	local	widower
9	American	white	35	oil rig worker	business	married
10	American	white	30s	oil rig worker	business	single
11	American	white	38	oil rig worker	business	single
12	American	white	30s	oil rig worker	business	divorced
13	American	white	30s	oil rig worker	business	divorced
14	Dutch	white	33	service engineer	business	divorced
15	German	white	40s	engineering consultant	business	divorced
16	S.African	white	34	engineer	domestic businessman	married
17	S.African	white	38	export manager	domestic businessman	married
18	S.African	white	47	sales manager	domestic businessman	married
19	S.African	Indian	28	quality controller	domestic tourist	single
20	British	white	50s	self employed	tourist	divorced
21	British	white	28	scaffolder	tourist	single
22	Canadian	white	21	student	tourist	single
23	German	white	30s	engineer	tourist	single
24	German	white	42	managerial	tourist	single
25	British	white	30s	self employed	tourist	single
26	Taiwanese	Chinese	20s	navy	seaman	single
27	Croatian	white	52	merchant navy	seaman	married
28	Spanish	white	27	fisherman	seaman	single
29	Spanish	white	26	fisherman	seaman	single
30	Greek	white	40s	merchant navy	seaman	married
31	Greek	white	40s	merchant navy	seaman	married
32	Greek	white	36	merchant navy	seaman	married

The attitudes, the behaviour and the motivations of key groups of prostitute users are examined below.

### Seamen

One substantial group of prostitute users in Cape Town and Durban are seamen. These men appear to favour the nightclubs and bars where independent prostitutes solicit. In those that we visited the vast majority of clients were Filipino, Japanese, Taiwanese and European sailors, whereas hostess club workers and managers reported a more mixed clientele.

The attitudes towards gender and sexuality expressed by the seamen we interviewed were similar to those expressed by many prostitute users we have interviewed elsewhere in the world - that is, they strongly adhered to a view of male sexuality as biological need and considered their own prostitute use to be 'natural'.

For the European sailors we interviewed (two Spanish fishermen, three Greek and one Croatian merchant seaman), the appeal of the nightclub/ bars was the rather more informal nature of the prostitution there.

They preferred not to negotiate with a third party - one Greek described the hostess clubs as 'too clinical' and one of the Spaniards boasted of having "picked up a girl the previous night who fucked me in exchange for a meal and a night in a hotel" rather than for cash. These men were indifferent as to questions about the age of the prostitutes they exploited. As one put it, "If she's old enough to be in here, then she's old enough".

White prostitutes are especially prized by South East Asian seamen. This is an observable phenomenon in the clubs and bars, as well as common knowledge amongst those working in the sex industry. We witnessed a group of Japanese sailors going from one hostess bar to the next in a Durban street asking at the door "Are there white girls?"

Those working in the sex industry further claimed that Japanese and Filipino seamen attach a particular sexual value to youth and this was borne out by the heavy presence of Japanese and Filipino seamen in the bars popular with the youngest prostitutes, as well as by interviews with under-age prostitutes in these settings who stated that most of their customers are Japanese sailors.

### **Domestic and Foreign Business Travellers**

In both Cape Town and Durban there are large numbers of domestic and foreign business travellers. Some stay only for a night or two, others for several months. Not all of the men who travel on business can be assumed to be prostitute users but a large number of men do sexually exploit women and teenagers while travelling for business purposes.

Some of the men who are away from home for long periods of time rationalise and justify their prostitute use in the same way that sailors do.

For example, we interviewed a group of Texan oil rig workers who were spending several months working from a ship anchored in Cape Town. All were in their mid to late 30s, two were divorcees, one married and two single. They described themselves as being 'cooped up' on the ship all day and 'needing' to come into Cape Town at night to 'relax and have some fun'.

This 'fun' consisted chiefly in heavy drinking and the sexual exploitation of prostitute women, activities which they saw as 'natural' ways for real men to behave.

Judging by the homophobic remarks they felt the need to throw into our conversation, being a 'real man' was a matter of some importance to them. Though none of these men admitted to sexually exploiting minors, all of them knew exactly where to go in order to find young teenagers in Cape Town.

An interview with two domestic businessmen is worth examining in some depth, partly because it highlights the contradictions in prostitute users' attitudes towards prostitution and the role that racism plays in disinhibiting white men around child sexual exploitation, and partly because it illustrates a painful irony about the situation in the new South Africa.

While the majority of black and coloured people have yet to enjoy the fruits of the freedom for which they struggled, privileged white men are already delighting in the so-called sexual glasnost associated with the end of church-inspired legal controls over sexual behaviour.

Mark is the sales manager of a fairly large and successful export business. He is 37 years old, married with two children. His colleague, Jim, is also married but has no children. Both of them live in a very conservative 'red neck' town some two and a half hours drive from Durban and make fairly frequent short trips to the city, during which they sexually exploit prostitutes as well as conducting business.

Mark commented on how the sex industry in Durban has expanded and become more visible over the past three years. "It used to be underground, getting a girl into your hotel room was, well, it took a lot of effort", he explained. He had visited Amsterdam and Frankfurt on business in the 1980s and told us that he was astonished to see prostitution so open and accessible, for in South Africa at that time:

Sex was something very dirty and shameful. People were prosecuted for possessing pornography and if you were caught with a prostitute it was a real scandal. You could lose everything. It was ridiculous. This is a good thing about the changes. It's all changing now. We're going to have to start thinking about this from a business point of view.. perhaps we should be providing hospitality for visiting business colleagues; they do in Japan and Germany.

Speaking unselfconsciously from the position of a 'consumer', Mark argued that there is nothing wrong with prostitution or pornography - it is a matter of 'personal choice'. It should not be forced on anyone but if an individual chooses to buy pornography or to use a prostitute then that is up to that individual:

You shouldn't have anyone telling adults what they can and can't do sexually. In fact, it's a bad thing for governments to try to tell people what to do, because if you repress them, then they'll find a way. They'll go out and rape someone. It's the same as telling children they can't have chocolate, it's bad for their teeth. What do children do? They want it all the more and you find them stealing it. People always want what they can't have. It's human nature.

We asked him whether his libertarianism extended to adults who choose to sexually exploit children. After all, according to his model, to legislate against the sexual abuse of children would not only infringe on adults' freedom of choice but also encourage them to rape children.

No, no, he quickly insisted. Paedophilia is different. It is 'unnatural'.

What about men who sexually exploit girls aged 15 or so, we asked - is that also unnatural?

He told us that he himself was only attracted to women over 25 but he has colleagues and friends as old as 50 or 60 who want 14 year old girls. Although he did not consider these men to be paedophiles, he said that he thought it was wrong.

At this point, Jim intervened to say that questions as to the morality of sexually exploiting children were culturally relative:

It's wrong in our culture, but not for Africans. African girls are all married by the time they're 14. Girls grow up very young, they're often having sex when they're 12. So can you say that's wrong when it's their tradition?

Mark agreed that 'Africans' attach very different meanings to sexual behaviour, describing 'their' culture as 'very primitive'. He illustrated this for us by explaining that Zulu chiefs 'like lots of cows and big, fat women to prove they're wealthy'.

We asked him whether the fact that white South African men like to be seen with BMWs and thin women to prove that they are wealthy meant that they too are 'primitive'.

He assured us that the objectification of women as status symbols in white culture is an entirely different social phenomenon. Both men then went on to comment on the changing nature of the sex industry in terms of the number of black prostitutes now 'available'.

We asked about the age of these black prostitutes. "Some of them are very young," Mark replied, "but it's a lot of money to them, so you can't blame them."

Tourists



South Africa's tourist industry is not at present geared towards low budget tourism. Its tourist authority appears to be attempting to attract foreign tourists by selling the country as an 'upmarket' destination and although the phrase 'a world in one country' is frequently employed in tourist advertising material, on the whole it is the 'sameness' of that world rather than its 'Otherness' which is marketed.

The destination video shown on British Airways flights to Cape Town, for instance, represents South Africa as some cross between the French riviera (wine tasting, good food, European architecture, wealth and luxury are emphasised) and a zoo (tourists are depicted watching wild animals close up but in complete safety).

Where 'Otherness' is marketed, it is unambiguously packaged and sold as a discreet 'experience', a commodity to be 'consumed' by the tourist in the same way he or she would pay for a day's scuba diving or an evening's entertainment.

Groups of Japanese, French and German tourists pay around \$US150 per person per night to stay in a luxurious 'retreat' on a former game reserve and take daily excursions to observe the remnants of a 'tribe' of people virtually wiped out by genocide living a carefully staged 'authentic' lifestyle.

The tourists photograph bushmen dressed in skins as they sharpen arrows, watch displays of 'traditional' dancing put on by children and buy handicraft souvenirs to take home. Around \$US1.50 per tourist goes to the 'tribes people' who perform for them.

Meanwhile, the stage set for the television series, *Shako Zulu*, is now a tourist attraction combining sumptuous accommodation with the performance of 'primitive' culture (Crowe, 1996).

This is not the stuff of mass sex tourism. The commercialisation of 'primitive' culture described above is not primarily an *eroticisation* of the 'Other', and so would not appeal greatly to the average sex tourist.

It has been observed elsewhere (O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor, 1996) that most sex tourists like to be surrounded by the 'exotic' (palm trees, white sands, 'beautiful' dark skinned girls) *and* by the familiar (the 'beautiful' girls should dress and behave exactly as western girls do but be a great deal more flattering and accessible).

Sex tourists can and do find this blend of the 'exotic' and the familiar in the formal sex trade of cities like Durban and Cape Town but, and this is important in terms of levels of demand, South Africa is not an especially inexpensive holiday destination.

There are very few low-cost flights from Europe, North America and Australia and although the rapidly falling value of the Rand may change this, at the moment the independent western tourist will not find hotel accommodation, meals, drink or entertainment in major cities particularly cheap.

Unless they venture outside the cities, westerners will not enjoy the kind of economic power which encourages large numbers of sex tourists to descend on countries such as Thailand or the Dominican Republic.

None of the tourists we interviewed made the classic 'Here, I live like a king /playboy' which is so central to sex tourists' pleasures elsewhere in the world. For these reasons, South Africa does not yet attract large numbers of 'Macho Lad' or 'Mr. Average' type sex tourists. The only gangs of men we observed swaggering around the red light areas of Cape Town and Durban were seamen or domestic tourists (and the latter were few in number).

This could be partly because we visited during the tourist low season but all of our informants in the sex industry stated that it is seamen, locals and businessmen, and not tourists, who form the nucleus of demand for commercial sex the whole year round.

On the basis of interviews with tourists and with workers in the sex industry, we would suggest that those sex tourists who do currently visit South Africa fall into three main categories:

1) relatively affluent western men who combine 'luxury' holidays (smart hotels, watersports, wine tasting, helicopter trips etc.) with the sexual exploitation of women and teenagers working as 'escorts', 'hostesses' and independent prostitutes.

2) less affluent men who combine 'adventure'/backpacking holidays with the sexual exploitation of local people in more informal settings.

3) paedophiles who spend their holidays in South Africa because they know that they will be able to satisfy their sexual interest in children.

The affluent British and German sex tourists we observed and spoke to were indulging racialised-sexual fantasies, showing a marked preference for black or coloured women and girls and having no interest whatever in white prostitutes.

Workers in the sex industry all commented on this feature of foreign demand, with one hostess club manager saying that he was going to have to recruit some 'African' girls as they are so popular with German, French and British tourists in particular - 'they want the really black black girls'.

As is the case in other sex tourist destinations, western sex tourists often request 'shows' and 'parties' involving racialised 'Others' in performances designed to reveal them as 'animalistic' so that their sexual degradation is simultaneously a 'racial' degradation.

The foreign tourists we interviewed were uniformly racist and their racisms play a central role in the construction of a moral justification for their acts of sexual exploitation.

For example, a British scaffolder who was travelling around Africa for four months explained to us that South African girls are 'more forward' than British girls:

They're the ones in control. They use the men for sex, they're very straightforward, they just get on with it, if you know what I mean... They like white men, the coloured girls and the black girls, they're all over you.

Other tourists described black and coloured South African women/girls as 'dominant', 'sensuous', 'uninhibited' and 'natural' - that is, they drew upon classic white racisms about black women's sexuality to construct a fiction in which the prostitutes they sexually exploit actively desire them, actively want and seek sexual congress, rather than being forced to trade their bodies for economic reasons.

As usual, such men's racism is highly gendered and while black women are exoticised and eroticised, black men are denigrated, feared and despised. We were informed that black South African men are all violent, criminal, lazy ('they' do not want to work, only want 'handouts') and malevolent ('they' laugh when 'they' see whites getting mugged) and so on.

For the adventure /backpacking sex tourist, the tragedy of black on black violence in poor areas and the high crime rate adds excitement to their holiday. With evident pleasure, one such tourist recounted the following tale:

Dave [a man who runs a bed and breakfast hostel for backpackers] took us to Zululand for the day... I'd always wanted to see Zulus, ever since I saw that film with Michael Cane in it, it was great. On the way back, it was dark and we come round this corner and the road was blocked, this big lorry parked right in the middle of the road and this African was waving us down. So Dave just gets a gun out and opens the window and starts shooting in the air. I was, like, 'What the fuck? He's got a gun' but Dave says that's what they do. There'll be 10 or 15 Africans hiding under the lorry and as soon as you stop they're going to rob you and they're all armed. You have to carry a gun here.

The affluent tourists and adventure/backpacker tourists we interviewed and observed did not appear to have a specific or focused sexual interest in children but they may become situational child sex exploiters since they 'pick up' in settings where minors solicit.

These are men who are essentially indifferent as to the age of the girls they exploit -the main criteria for selection are body type and racialised identity, so that females anywhere between the ages of 14 and 30 can be attractive to them.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that there are also tourists whose main reason for holidaying in South Africa is to indulge their paedophilia. Informants who work in the sex trade reported having been approached by tourists looking for prepubertal girls and told stories about British and German paedophiles returning regularly to rented apartments in Cape Town and Durban because it is possible for them to obtain sexual access to children there.

It was not possible for us to corroborate these stories but the kind of arrangement described would not be difficult to make in either of these cities.

Finally, the street children we interviewed stated that some of their clients are foreigners. These men may be in South Africa on business but some may be tourists.

### **Expatriates and Locals**

Both prostitutes and street children report that a good deal of their 'business' comes from local men, some of whom are expatriates. Given that younger children are generally prostituted in the cheaper and less visible brothels, it is highly likely that the bulk of demand for their 'services' comes from such men, for unless seamen, visiting businessmen or tourists have a specific and focused interest in sexually abusing children they are unlikely to find their way to such establishments.

None of the three local prostitute users we interviewed admitted to sexually exploiting children. These men adopted a benignly paternalistic attitude towards white and 'coloured' prostitute women (they are 'nice' and basically 'decent' girls who have fallen on hard times) and an extremely harsh attitude towards black street children (they are lazy, criminal, violent, drug addicted, etc.).

While we were interviewing one local prostitute user in a bar, a white prostitute joined us and began to hold forth on the subject of street children, telling us that 'African' kids stream into the city, more of them every day. "There's overpopulation," she told us. "There's going to be a culling, they'll have to be culled, do you know what I mean? It can't go on." The local man agreed with this sentiment.

The locals exploiters we interviewed explained their own (and other men's) prostitute use in terms of a biologically rooted need for sex, claiming that South African men are 'hot blooded' and driven to prostitute use by the fact that their wives cannot accommodate their sexual 'needs'.

The expatriates we interviewed had lived in South Africa for twenty years or more, and since they were white Europeans who had chosen to emigrate to a country in which an especially virulent form of racism was institutionalised, it was unsurprising to discover that they themselves adhered to a profoundly racist ideology and were unhappy with recent changes to the political system.

Two interviewees were particularly useful in terms of understanding attitudes and motivations of child sex exploiters, and they are therefore profiled below.

### **Scott**

Scott is a 56 year old Briton, a skilled manual worker who emigrated to South Africa in the 1960s. He would be well described as an 'authoritarian personality', holding rigid and extreme-right political views on economic and 'racial' matters and highly traditional views on gender. He also has a serious drink problem.

He is unmarried, but has had a number of long-term sexual relationships as well as sexually exploiting prostitutes during his time in South Africa. These relationships have all been with what he describes as 'coloured girls'. He is currently living with a girl of 17 and explains the benefits of this relationship as follows:

The coloureds are lovely people. Me, I'm not prejudiced, my girlfriend's coloured. That's the only good thing about the changes here, it used to be stupid...

The coloured girls like white men. White men are their ticket to a better life. I can take Ann anywhere, she's OK if she's with me. I can take her into the best restaurants, I can take her anywhere and no-one'll say a thing. They can upgrade themselves with a white man...

I tell her she doesn't have to act like a servant. I tell her she's not inferior, just because she's a coloured. She's been brought up to jump to attention when a white person snaps his fingers, they're brought up to serve the whites, but I say to her, 'You don't have to jump to attention'.

We met Ann and her account of her relationship with Scott painted a rather different picture. Not only does she perform all the duties for Scott that a domestic servant would perform, including getting up at 5 a.m. in order to make him sandwiches to take to work because they would go stale if she made them the evening before, but she also endures frequent outbursts of drunken racist abuse, which sometimes involves being thrown out of the apartment she shares with him.

His power over her in this relationship is gendered and economic and also aged and racialised. Given the power Scott exercises over her, it is small wonder that she, like other 'coloured girls' he has known, treats him, as he puts it, 'like a God'.

Why does he wish to enter into such unequal relationships? His depiction of adult white women perhaps answers this question. He told us that in his view:

[white] South African women are the most beautiful women in the world, but they're useless in bed... They're just not interested. They're always worried about mussing up their hair, or they're wearing a face mask, or they've got a headache... They're beautiful women but they're pampered. They're spoilt. They want you to run round after them.

In other words, women who are (almost) his equals in terms of their social and economic power are able to refuse him sexual access. For Scott, who considers females to be genetically inferior to males, it is intolerable that a woman should exercise such power. He wants to be the centre of attention, he wants to be admired, he wants his sexual partners to reflect back to him an image of himself as the powerful and important man he considers himself to be and this means that he wants a sexual partner who is powerless and dependent.

He wants someone who will be grateful to him, someone over whom *he* has the power either to harm or to help at his own whim. This means selecting sexual partners who are poor, young or 'coloured', or better still, all three.

### **Hans**

Hans is a 62 year old German who emigrated to Africa in 1961 and has lived in Rhodesia, Kenya and South Africa. He worked for mining companies in Rhodesia but currently runs his own security company which specialises in investigating fraud and embezzlement.

Like Scott, his political views are of the extreme right. He holds black people responsible for South Africa's current economic problems. 'They' are lazy and criminal; 'they' are feckless and irresponsible; 'they' breed like rabbits, this is why there are all these children on the street committing crimes 'because this is the only way they will eat'.

He told us that some people he knows say that the street children are all gangsters and should be rounded up and shot but he says to them, 'No, they must be *punished*'.

Hans was brought up in Dusseldorf and suffered greatly as a child during the war. He never had enough to eat, never had a toy and he saw the city he lived in destroyed. During the postwar years as a teenager he made money out of 'black' market trading.

He had American friends who supplied him with cigarettes and chewing gum to sell and because he was very clever (like other abusers we have interviewed, Hans narrated his life story in an extremely narcissistic way) he made a great deal of money. He married a German girl, they had a child and this, according to Hans, ruined their relationship:

Let me tell you, this is what destroys marriages. People say that children hold a marriage together, it's quite wrong. When a woman has a child, she gives 90% of her attention to the child, only 10% to the husband. So what does he become? Nothing. Just a bank account. It destroys the marriage.

Hans and his wife divorced, Hans making what he described as a 'very generous' financial settlement. In the late 1950s Hans went to Ireland to work and here he embarked on a truly Nabokovian episode.

In 1959 he met a woman, a widow, who had a 14 year old daughter. Hans moved in to live with them as a lodger. He introduced the mother to an old schoolfriend of his and she married him. Hans, meanwhile, entered into an abusive relationship with the daughter, Anna.

According to him, the 14 year old child initiated the relationship with him (then aged 25). She 'flirted' with him constantly. Then, one night, Anna came into his bedroom and tried to get into bed with him. She would not leave him alone, he told us.

Later in the conversation, however, Hans said that he had to give the girl several drinks 'to get her to relax sexually. I knew exactly how much to give her to get her to loosen up and then we could really communicate in bed'. When he got a job in Rhodesia in 1961 he married Anna, then aged 16, and took her with him. In Rhodesia, Anna helped him with his business affairs and he 'helped her to blossom'; he encouraged her to 'find out about herself', he 'taught her everything'.

They spent 14 happy years together and then one day Hans and Anna were driving through the bush and their car was ambushed. Anna was killed, Hans shot dead 12 men. He described getting out of the car after all the men were dead, reloading his revolver and firing bullets into their corpses.

Hans' worldview was familiar to us from interviews with other child sex exploiters in other 'Third World' countries. He was obsessed by his own economic power (he constantly juxtaposed comments about other people's poverty with remarks about his own opulent lifestyle), obsessed by the idea of his own stealth, courage and savoir faire in this 'uncivilised', lawless and corrupt environment ('You couldn't survive on the streets here. I know exactly how to manage these people, I can smell danger'), and obsessed by issues surrounding authority and the law.

He had chosen a profession in which he was the law (tracking down white collar criminals) and in which he saw himself as outwitting wrong-doers.

"They think they're very clever, they think they'll get away with it," he told us, "but there's always someone cleverer than you are. This you should never forget."

Hans explained to us that after Anna's death, he has never wanted a 'proper' relationship with a woman. He is 'too hardened' and, besides, he hates white South African women (who all want to be treated like Goddesses, they think that they are superior, they want to be worshipped, they're self obsessed, they use men and throw them away) and he is suspicious of the coloured women. They are all out for themselves and not to be trusted.

Hans is not only wary of the power women exercise in non-commercial sexual relationships but also hostile towards adult prostitutes who appear to him to exercise too much control over themselves. They are able to set limits upon what he can and cannot do to them, they are able to act autonomously.

He described adult prostitute women as 'out for everything they can get', you go to see them and 'it's just business to them, you can do this, but not this, so much and no more, strictly business'. Child prostitutes, conversely, are completely powerless:

The little girls, 10 or 12 years old, I wouldn't describe them as innocent, they're not innocent, but they're fresh. They don't have the attitude of the older whores. The older whores have gone down hill. They use foul language. They drink. They're hardened. The little girls, they're not experienced. They're not hardened, they want to please you, they don't know what to expect, you get a better service from them.

Hans named for us a number of hotels and tenement blocks in which girls aged between eight and 14 are known to be prostituted and then continued to articulate the kind of cognitive distortions classically employed by child sex abusers. He told us that girls in hot places, such as Indonesia, Africa and India, grow up much younger than do girls in Europe. By 12, he assured us, they are women:

They're pregnant at 12. Their brothers are having sex with them, their fathers, their uncles, everyone. They're all sexually active by the age of 12. The African chiefs take young girls to be their wives, it's their way here, it's tradition. A girl becomes a woman at 12 and by 28 she's old and finished. It's like this from the days when they expected to die by the age of 35. This is the way in hot countries. The girl lives from seven to 27, then she's over the hill. Finished.

In other words, he is not really damaging the children he abuses for they have already been abused and the child not only benefits financially since she is a prostitute but is capable of giving meaningful consent since she is a sexual adult by the age of 12 (or perhaps by seven, as this was the lowest age he mentioned).

## **Sexual Exploitation**

### **Without the Fiction of Consent**

It was noted above that the concept of prostitution does not properly describe the experience of children whose moment by moment survival is secured through submission to acts of sexual abuse and violence. Prostitution is typically used to refer to some kind of implicit or explicit contract (x for x), which in turn implies that both parties to the contract recognise a set of boundaries (x for x but not y) and that both parties consent to the contract.

While we would argue that the notion of consent is hugely problematic in relation to adult prostitution and entirely fictional in relation to child prostitution, it is nonetheless central to participants in prostitution. Both clients and prostitutes (including children who are involved in independent prostitution) attach different meanings to rape and to commercial sexual acts and do not typically see them as one and the same thing, for example.

The notion of consent is therefore important to understanding the motivations and worldview of most child sex exploiters.

One of the most consistent findings of research with adults who sexually abuse children is that the vast majority need to deceive themselves into thinking that the child initiates, wants and/or benefits from sexual contact with adults.

Even men like Hans who deliberately seek out children of 10 or 12 years old to abuse generally want to tell themselves that the children are not harmed by sexual contact with them. This is why the institution of prostitution is so highly prized by many child sex abusers. Because prostitution is associated with notions of contract and consent, the abuser can tell himself that the child he exploits chose, wants and benefits from the abuse.

However, it should be clear from the section of this report which deals with 'survival sex' that not all child sex exploiters in South Africa need or want to construct this fiction of contractual consent.

To begin with, we would hypothesise that the adult men who take street children aged between five and 10 into bushes or alleyways and force them to fellate them or submit to vaginal or anal penetration do not need to tell themselves that the child actively wants to be violated in this fashion. Their behaviour is consistent with the pattern exhibited by sadistic offenders rather than that of more typical paedophiles who convince themselves that they 'love' and care for the children they abuse.

The age of the children involved, the nature and settings of the acts and the speed with which they are executed, all point to very extreme and conscious hostility on the part of the perpetrator. Although those who commit such crimes against street children are obviously in a small minority, the hostility towards street children to which they appear to be giving vent is actually widespread.

Street children are considered by many people (including some newspaper editors and people working in the criminal justice system) to be dangerous, criminal, dirty, diseased. They are frequently described in language which dehumanises them (they are a 'plague', they 'swarm' on the streets, like animals they need to be 'culled', etc.).

For adults seeking a target for their sexual hostility, street children are an obvious choice, not because they are seen as children but because they are seen as simultaneously threatening/ dangerous and powerless/ vulnerable.

White racist South Africans we interviewed further interpreted the increasing number of predominantly black children on the city streets as a visible symbol of black political equality, something they bitterly opposed.

They insisted that incompetent black people had been promoted to positions of power, and that this explains South Africa's economic decline, which in turn explains the growing number of black children living on the streets.

As one man put it, "Look around you, look at all these kids. It's the Africans that are worst affected, but this is what they wanted. They asked for it. Now they've got it."

Perhaps this provides some insight into the motivations of white men who sexually violate street children, especially if we take into account the fact that white racism often involves an intense and highly sexualised fear of the black body (hence the routine sexual mutilation of black men by lynch mobs in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the use of gang rape as an instrument of political terrorism by the Ku Klux Klan, etc. - see Davis, 1981).

It is also the case that one group of people involved in the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in South Africa are themselves sexually abused children or adult survivors of violent sexual abuse. Again, this kind of sexual exploitation does not involve the construction of any fiction of contractual consent.

It was not possible to explore the motivation to abuse in our interview work with street children but the interview we conducted with Larry, a white man aged 21, shed some light on the dynamics of the cycle whereby the victims of abuse go on to abuse others.

Larry was a third generation sex worker. Both his mother and grandmother had been involved in prostitution and his mother placed him in foster care at a young age. Her family maintained contact with him, however, and from the age of 12 he was sexually abused by his uncle during visits. He was constantly in trouble with the police as a young teenager and at the age of 15 he ran away to Cape Town where he became heavily involved in drug use and was forced to prostitute himself in order to survive.

At the age of 18, he was imprisoned in Polsmor, where he was further abused and witness to the violent sexual abuse of very young children. After his release, he managed to become involved in the more entrepreneurial forms of prostitution described in the first section of this report.

Although his 'business' ventures were not particularly successful (partly because of his drug abuse) he did build up a small client list and make contacts with female sex workers, which then put him in a position to get paid work managing hostess clubs and/or acting as an agent for them, as well as making money out of procuring for men on his client list. He had been involved in this type of hustling, rather than in selling sexual services, in Cape Town for the past year.

Larry admitted to us that he had financially benefited from the commercial sexual exploitation of girls and boys under the age of 18 but did not confess a direct personal interest in sexually abusing children. However, his attitudes towards the sexual exploitation of children do explain why he is able to tolerate and even promote their abuse by other men and may also provide some insight into the emotional world of those victims of abuse who go on to directly abuse vulnerable children.

Essentially, Larry felt himself to be not only dirtied by, but also responsible for, his own abuse. He described himself as a 'bad' child and a 'tearaway' and he also viewed himself as indelibly marked as 'sinful' by the homosexual acts he had performed in exchange for money.

He was also evidently deeply traumatised by the sexual violence he had been subjected to and had witnessed in prison (he recounted a series of quite horrific experiences at great length and speed but mechanically and without a trace of emotion).

This blend of victim-blaming and emotional distancing informed his view of others, as well as of himself, and he was only able to sympathise with the pain of people whom he viewed as quite unlike himself. He told us a long story about

two young women who had come to him looking for work in hostess clubs, describing them as 'innocent' and 'decent' and as coming from 'good, respectable families' and talked about how he wanted to protect them, how, though he never usually cries, he shed tears when he thought of them becoming involved in 'this life'.

When he spoke of street boys aged 12 and 13 he knew being picked up and anally penetrated by adult men, he expressed no sympathy for them at all. Nor did he have any desire to protect girls or boys who had already worked as prostitutes (and who were, like him, therefore 'dirty' and 'scarred'). In fact, he felt able to make profitable arrangements for their continued abuse.

It seems likely that the same basic dynamics underpin the much more extreme forms of sexual abuse and exploitation perpetrated by older street children against younger children. Our impression was that sexual violence amongst street children is about something much more than simple vengeance or the imitation of experience, for many of the stories we heard about rape and abuse by street boys were stories in which sexual violence was a response to another human either needing or providing care.

Young children who need protection are sexually violated and there are also reports of women who offer protection being sexually violated by the street boys to whom they have given food or shelter. We would argue that both the giving and the acceptance of care rests, up to a point, on the human capacity for empathy, a capacity which in turn rests on naming and acknowledging our own emotional experience. To do this would be virtually impossible for most street children and it struck us that their sexual violence can perhaps be understood as a kind of distancing strategy.

To exist in the conditions that street children exist in and yet retain a consciousness of your own desperate need for care would be to live in a state of unbearable grief. Bettelheim (1960), a survivor of the Dachau and Buchenwald camps, has discussed the defence mechanisms adopted by inmates of Nazi concentration camps and two such mechanisms seem to us to be relevant to understanding the behaviour of street children.

First, he talks about 'splitting' the self and others into subject and object: "I became convinced that these dreadful and degrading experiences were somehow not happening to 'me' as a subject but only to 'me' as an object" (1960:127).

Second, he observes that, at the time when prisoners still received mail, letters from home caused them both elation and despair: "All these emotions in the wake of each letter were an added strain... The psychological defense against all this was to withdraw one's emotional attachment where it only led to pain" (1960:195).

In the same way, we hypothesise that for street children, shutting off from the emotions surrounding care and viewing the self and others as objects may be mechanisms for defending the self against grief. Anything which threatens to break down these defenses (for instance, a younger child's need for care, an adult giving care) would elicit a reaction of panic, anger and hostility.

Though terrible and tragic, it is not impossible to see how sexually violating the 'weaker' or 'kinder' individual would restore a sense of distance from that individual's emotions and humanity and so also restore the child's sense of distance from his own.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENT**

The apartheid regime promulgated an ideology that was brutally racist, sexist and homophobic. It also ensured that massive inequalities of wealth were structured along racialised lines. Wealth was concentrated in white hands (albeit in the hands of a minority of the white population), while the mass of black people were condemned to live in abject poverty.

This regime may be over but the evils of apartheid could not be expected to evaporate in the 'miracle' 1994. Its ideological and material effects have to be deconstructed and the new South Africa's government is attempting to achieve this end.

It is uniquely committed to constructing a society which values and protects human rights (it is, for example, producing a constitution which protects individuals' rights not to be discriminated against on grounds of 'race', gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language), and it wishes to raise the living standards of the poorest sections of society.



But it cannot do this without aid. It cannot, for example, enact measures which would lead to a serious redistribution of wealth without appearing to attack the white community in whose hands wealth is concentrated. If it did so, it would not only enrage white South Africa but also the international community.

The international community vociferously denounced apartheid. A cynic might point out that grand words and the imposition of economic sanctions cost that community very little (especially since those sanctions were often evaded).

If those denunciations meant anything at all, the international community must now display an equal determination to assist the new South Africa in its struggle to overcome the legacy of apartheid.

Until such determination is translated into meaningful aid, all of us who enjoy lives of privilege and dignity, and more especially those individuals who wield political and economic power in this world, should be haunted by the knowledge that there are children for whom the cheap, cramped brothels described above are a haven, as well as by images of the HIV positive children whose lives have been traded for their families' subsistence.

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## Footnotes:

1. In economically developed countries, research invariably indicates that a high percentage of sex workers have endured physical, sexual or emotional abuse in childhood; that a high percentage have been victims of rape or multiple rapes; that the average age of entry into prostitution is below 18; and that a high percentage of prostitutes are drug addicted. It is also the case that groups which are, relatively speaking, economically, politically and socially powerless are over-represented in prostitution. In Europe and North America, for example, there are more female than male prostitutes and a disproportionate number of working class and black women are to be found in prostitution. In other words, poverty and a lack of alternative earning opportunities, often combined with a history of abuse or neglect and the low self-esteem that results from it, are the factors which most typically push individual women, men and children into prostitution. In economically underdeveloped countries, there are many sex workers who fit this same description but because poverty is so much more intense and widespread, for many women and children sexual and physical abuse and the destruction of self esteem begins once they start working as prostitutes, rather than before.

2. Except for the information about street children, which was supplemented through interview and observational work in Cape Town and Durban, the material in this section was provided by representatives of organisations involved in support work with exploited and abused children. We are particularly indebted to Joan Van Niekerk of Childline, Durban, Robyn Hemmens of Tennyson House, Durban, and Nyameka Manbeyi and Shifra Jacobsen of Rapcan, Cape Town.

3. It should be noted that not all sexual activities between street children are violent. As Joan Van Niekerk points out, sometimes sexual activity between street children is the only kind of 'positive' human touch that they experience. The need for physical 'affectionate' touching may prompt sexual interaction between street children.

4. Indeed, anger and hostility are not uncommon reactions to human suffering, especially when people also feel powerless to relieve that suffering.