

The Rise and Fall of the Norwegian Massage Parlours:

Changes in the Norwegian Prostitution Setting in the 1990s

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to bring together knowledge about the Norwegian prostitution market, public debates on prostitution and prostitution laws and regulation in order to explore the processes whereby the prostitution setting is constituted. Norway has been the site of changes in the ways female prostitution takes place, changes that are being experienced by the women involved due to a growth in indoor prostitution. These changes seem to have been produced by, and to take part in, the production of new images of prostitutes and new means of prostitution control.

Keywords

female prostitution; prostitution control; media images of female prostitutes; processes of change in the prostitution setting; HIV/AIDS prevention among female prostitutes; prostitution début

Introduction

Individuals' daily lives and opportunities change with time. Sex workers' lives are especially susceptible to change as new regimes or new winds bring with them views and policies on how to handle the phenomenon of prostitution. This again influences the recruitment of clients and prostitutes and how easy or difficult it is to work as a prostitute. This is exactly the point of this article. A thorough analysis of the phenomenon of prostitution would not be possible without taking into account (1) the (often popular) representations of prostitutes in media and political debate, (2) the laws and regulations governing prostitution, as well as (3) the relation or transaction itself between prostitute and client. Changes in any of these levels will affect the others. It is therefore important to take a closer look at the links between the market, debates and regulation, as prostitution is such a widely debated and regulated area of social life. Looking into prostitute's lives without emphasizing how these lives are influenced by society at large

will therefore present an incomplete picture. In addition, prostitutes all over the world report that some of the worst things about being a prostitute are the condemnation and control-efforts they run up against.

I go about this by addressing the social and legal position of prostitution and female prostitutes in Norway in the 1990s. This will be viewed in light of the reality of prostitution presented by prostitutes themselves. The article attempts to examine the dynamics that constitute and are constituted by developments in the prostitution market, perceptions of the prostitute and prostitution control. I hope to show how these different aspects influence each other in today's society.

I choose to use the terms 'prostitute' and 'prostitution' as I find them to be most relevant to my purpose. The present article focuses on developments in the capital of Norway, Oslo, which has been at the forefront in terms of changes in the prostitution market and in media coverage at the beginning of the 1990s, and is home to the headquarters of the prostitutes' rights organization PION. Moreover, a great deal of Norwegian prostitution takes place in Oslo since for various reasons prostitutes find other Norwegian cities to be too small.¹ It should be noted that prostitution in Oslo and Norway as a whole is a somewhat marginal phenomenon and problem since fewer people are involved than in other European countries, and since the health, security and welfare of prostitutes are provided for to a larger degree in Norway than in many other countries.

The material for this article derives from two studies I carried out in the years 1994–7. Unless otherwise mentioned, the text below is based on these studies. The first was a qualitative study of Norwegian women's recruitment to prostitution and their lives after making their prostitution début with a special emphasis on indoor prostitution (Skilbrei, 1998).² The study was based on fieldwork over the course of a year comprising observation, in-depth interviews and conversations with women at massage parlours and in places frequented by street prostitutes. The project was of a descriptive nature as indoor prostitution until recently was a very marginal phenomenon compared to street prostitution in Norway and this made producing knowledge about what actually goes on in massage parlours essential. The second study was a comparison between Norway and Denmark of societal conditions for massage parlour prostitution (Skilbrei, 1999).³ This project included interviews with people working with prostitution issues in the two countries, mostly social workers and other researchers, a review of the laws and regulations addressed to various agents involved in prostitution and their application and various other examples of how massage parlour prostitution is looked upon and handled in Norway and Denmark.

The status of prostitution in the 1990s

As I mentioned, prostitution is a somewhat marginal phenomenon in Norway. In Oslo, a city with 500,000 inhabitants, between 1,500 and 2,000 female prostitutes operate on a yearly basis. Some of these women work as prostitutes full time, but a substantial number do not. In addition to clients living in Oslo and visiting tourists, these prostitutes receive clients from a much wider geographical area consisting of most of the eastern part of Norway. These 2,000 female prostitutes work in different arenas, but mostly on the streets and in massage parlours. A growing number of women are of foreign nationalities, and some of these women live in Norway permanently, while others could be said to be involved in trafficking.

The greatest change in the Norwegian prostitution setting during the first half of the 1990s was the restructuring of the prostitution market. While I believe we also saw an increase in prostitution, especially in Oslo,⁴ the most conspicuous change in the prostitution market refers to the locales in which female prostitution took place. Up until 1989–90, street prostitution was the dominant form of female prostitution in Oslo. It was considered almost impossible to establish more structured prostitution arenas, such as massage parlours, from the 1970s on (Høigård and Finstad, 1986). But during the first part of the 1990s, massage parlours flourished.

Changes in the public's responses to prostitution

As in many other countries, prostitutes are a favoured topic in the media, and even though most female prostitutes' lives are much like any other women's lives, it is the extreme life stories that receive attention. I will now show the ways in which prostitution was made visible in the media and in public debate during the first half of the 1990s.

Massage parlours in Oslo were not located in the already established prostitution area worked by street-walkers, but were rather scattered around town, typically in central residential areas. This caused agitation in parts of the city as people were offended by prostitution taking place rather openly in their (decent) neighbourhood. Attempts were made to close down the massage parlours by reporting them to the police and through campaigning. Anti-massage parlour organizations picketed the parlours and approached clients on their way in, some going so far as to vandalize the premises. These activities, and female prostitutes' complaints about them, received a lot of attention in the media. Some massage parlours closed, but the same people soon started up again in apartments elsewhere. From the outset massage parlours were primarily found in areas of the city inhabited by people with fewer resources, and as massage parlours

came under activist fire, this tendency became stronger. By mid-decade some neighbourhoods in the eastern part of Oslo had several massage parlours per block, while in most parts of western Oslo there were none.⁵

As their motivation for combating the massage parlours the activists referred to their personal interest of protecting their children and neighbourhood, even the value of their real estate, from the undue influence of prostitution, as well as the more idealistic vision of saving prostitutes. In a poster announcing the time and date of a neighbourhood debate on the massage parlours that existed there, one group of activists wrote:

Are you against prostitution and pornography? And young girls being pressured into selling their bodies? Do you think it's bad that it's almost as easy to buy women as it is to buy Coca Cola here in Løkka [the neighbourhood]?

As we see from this quotation they bring prostitution generally and even pornography into the matter, and they assume that girls experience pressure before entering prostitution, especially mentioning young ones, assuming that there are a lot of them in Norwegian prostitution. They also refer to prostitution as the act of buying women and of selling one's body.

The new phenomenon of massage parlours in the early 1990s had a potentially more explosive quality to it than prostitution formerly had, since their proper façades and decent-looking girls shook some of our perceptions of 'the prostitute'. They advertised unabashed for clients and employees in widely read Norwegian newspapers. They put their business signs out on the streets and some even distributed business cards. The women working there were interviewed, though mostly anonymously, in newspapers and men's magazines bragging about what they did, saying that we would be surprised if we knew who their clients were: celebrities, politicians, you name it. They told us they were not drug addicts, alcoholics or mad. They also told us they were like other women: often dependent on men for a living as employers or clients, but still actively choosing their own path. Not only did they earn many times more than street prostitutes did per client, they could actually earn more than the prime minister, so it was not as easy as before to pity them. They were all in all not as 'prostitute-like' as we would expect, perhaps, want them to be. In 1990 a Norwegian prostitutes' rights organization, PION, was formed. This prostitutes' rights organization arose out of a collaboration between prostitutes and the Municipality of Oslo aimed at preventing HIV/AIDS and at setting up a self-help group for prostitutes.⁶ It had, of course, been in the making for some time, as a more open debate on the consequences of prostitution during the 1980s made the need for such a group more evident, and as international influences and ideas reached Norway. In Norway, as internationally (Jaget, 1980; Jenness, 1993; Bell, 1994; Doezenma, 1998), the

prostitutes' rights organization has challenged the way prostitutes and prostitution are portrayed in the media and research. I believe the restructuring of the prostitution market in the 1990s both sprang out of and influenced the increased empowerment and visibility of female Norwegian prostitutes on their own terms.

Even though it was positive that experiences of prostitution other than those of street prostitutes were finally gaining visibility, the positive portrayals of prostitutes' lives were sometimes taken too far. Stories about Happy Hookers were commonplace in regular newspapers and magazines, and men's magazines tapped into the change by increasing their coverage of the Norwegian prostitution scene. In addition to the more liberal approach to prostitution in the media during this period, the Norwegian population became more liberal towards prostitution as well (Statistics Norway, 1997). It is not impossible that the new way of portraying prostitutes had an influence on this. In the 1980s a great deal of media attention was given to female prostitutes who were drug addicts. During the 1990s indoor prostitutes used interviews as advertisements for their businesses and their massage parlours. I have interviewed women who report having lied through their teeth when being interviewed by newspapers and magazines about enjoying sex with clients and about the women who work on this arena in order to attract clients.⁷

Changes in the official response

The official Norwegian approach to prostitution is, as in many countries, full of inconsistencies. Selling and buying sexual services are to all intents and purposes legal; it is not prosecuted per se, but laws exist that can be used against prostitutes or clients of prostitutes at will. One of these is the prohibition against soliciting in the Norwegian penal code. This prohibition has been used to intimidate prostitutes. Norwegian policemen have, for example, threatened to arrest street-working prostitutes for soliciting in order to make them move elsewhere after complaints from shop-owners and the tourist authorities in Oslo. But the police never charge anyone for soliciting, and there is no will in political quarters to start doing so. It is also possible for prostitutes to be charged with vagrancy in Norway, but this law has not been used for the past thirty years. These two laws, which penalize the ways in which prostitutes approach their clients, may be of no practical importance, but their continued existence emits signals contrary to the official legal stance on the buying and selling of sex.

As neighbouring countries with similar languages and cultures, Norway, Denmark and Sweden have more to bind them together than to separate them. Yet there is a field in which the differences have increased at the end

of the 1990s: the legal approach to prostitution. Whereas Denmark, Norway and Sweden until recently had almost identical legal approaches to prostitution, as outlined above, the last couple of years have taken Denmark in one direction, Sweden in another, while Norway remains in the middle. In 1999 prostitution became fully legalized in Denmark (though pimping, procuring and buying sex from minors are illegal) when provisions that could be used against prostitutes and clients of prostitutes were removed from the penal code. These include the prohibition against soliciting that was identical to the Norwegian one mentioned above. In Sweden buying sex became an offence on 1 January 1999. Interestingly, the Norwegian and Swedish prostitution debates have been almost identical through the years, both in the media and in political forums. From time to time calls for the prohibition of prostitution have also arisen in Norway. A broad spectrum of political parties advocates legal action against prostitution. Usually the emphasis is on prohibiting the buying of sexual services, but penalizing prostitutes has also been on the political agenda for the last couple of years. This was launched as a means to push women into quitting prostitution, and to seek alternative work or to quit drug-use. But while the idea has enjoyed considerable support, the proponents of prohibition have not yet succeeded in reaching their goal. It is too soon to assess the results of the changes in the legal status of prostitution in Sweden and Denmark, but it will be most interesting when the changes have been incorporated in Swedish and Danish society, and we can inspect more closely what consequences this has had. The recent Swedish and Danish changes can be seen as an effort to adopt a clear approach to prostitution. The two countries swung in opposite directions, but the rationale was the same: to stop sending mixed signals.

Pimping and procuring are illegal in Norway, but are not often prosecuted as they are difficult to uncover and prove. It is only extreme cases that reach the courtrooms, and even then the testimony of a prostitute is needed.

The law against pimping and procuring was amended in 1995 to include landlords who know or should have known that an apartment is being used for prostitution. The amendment was made in reaction to the changing face of the prostitution market in the 1990s, and was designed to enable additional control over massage parlour prostitution. The idea behind it was that massage parlours would have a more difficult time finding appropriate flats as landlords would become more cautious about renting out flats for prostitution purposes. I did my fieldwork before this amendment came into effect, and the massage parlours I visited were obviously renting flats from landlords who knew what went on there as they charged a very high rent, often doubling the market value.

Politicians have also suggested revising the law on pimping and procuring so as to explicitly state that running advertisements for prostitution is included in the prohibition. Different newspapers and magazines run advertisements for massage parlours and women who work in flats alone. Some of these newspapers and magazines have a substantial income from these advertisements, and in the opinion of those in favour of such an amendment, this should be regarded as illegal in the same way as regular pimping. But for now the amendment concerning landlords is the only change in laws and regulations linked to the changes in the prostitution market.

The earlier lack of prostitution arenas other than street prostitution in Oslo is thought to be due to the Government's efforts to prevent these forms of prostitution (Høigård and Finstad, 1986). In Norway, we therefore seem to have experience of prostitution being successfully combated in indoor arenas. In the forefront of the anti-prostitution movement in the 1970s were different feminist groups that emphasized the problems women in prostitution face and argued that the existence of female prostitution has negative consequences for all women in society. The government responded to the demands made by activists working against prostitution, and initiated police raids and legal action. Women working more or less by themselves on the streets or elsewhere are more difficult targets for this kind of activism and police raids than many indoor prostitutes, since there are often a number of organizers involved in indoor prostitution who can be prosecuted for pimping and procuring.

Norwegian society as a whole does not look kindly upon men buying sex from women, but is clearly on the side of the women. As prostitution among the powerful, e.g. in the public administration, in politics and in academia, is regarded as violence against women, being on the side of the women most often means fighting for the abolition of prostitution. The political debates have had problems in keeping up as new knowledge has been produced, and it seems that myths about female prostitutes and prostitution have a strong position in a widely defined political realm. The image politicians and others hold of the female prostitute is the drug-addict on the streets. This has consequences for the kinds of programme that are initiated to combat prostitution and to help prostitutes in different ways. These are always directed at the presumed needs of street-workers, assuming that prostitutes have a need for a roof over their head, a place to do their laundry, help with applying for social welfare benefits and a place where they can take refuge in different respects. An additional evidence of their starting point when dealing with prostitution is that prostitution came under the heading 'Sexualized violence' in the written deliberations on the subject by the City Council of Oslo all through the 1990s. The

prostitutes were explicitly named as victims, and the clients as perpetrators, in the written deliberations by the City Council.

Since the beginning of the 1980s there have been many activities initiated or sponsored by the Municipality of Oslo directed at combating prostitution and/or helping prostitutes. In 1988 the City Council stated that it wanted the Municipality to give the fight against prostitution and sexualized violence the highest priority. But in written deliberations about this, prostitution was mostly understood as street prostitution until 1992–3. In 1991 the City Council was aware of the phenomenon of massage parlours in Oslo, but stated that this was outside their reach, instead they stated that dealing with this was a police task, while the Municipality of Oslo continued to invest time and money into projects concerning street prostitutes. As far as I can tell (since there are no records of the numbers of prostitutes in Oslo), there were even at that time more indoor prostitutes than street prostitutes in Oslo. But the City Council decided in 1991 to evaluate how they together with the police could find ways to combat organized crime in connection with indoor prostitution.

With the changing face of the prostitution market in the 1990s, and the change in the way prostitutes were portrayed in the media and understood by Norwegians, came worries over how this development was going to affect Norwegian society. Was Oslo going to become like Copenhagen, or even Amsterdam? These concerns were not as visible in the beginning of this period as they became later, but by 1993 the changes in the prostitution market were becoming more visible for politicians and others. With these new worries came demands for new ways to control the prostitution market. When the City Council decided to combat massage parlour prostitution, the politicians involved took the conventional knowledge about street prostitutes as their starting point. They assumed that the same kinds of women who walked the streets were recruited to massage parlour prostitution: down-and-out drug-addicts who had been sexually abused. They imagined massage parlours being a place where really young girls worked as prostitutes, the women being a source for the spread of HIV/AIDS and a nest of organized crime. The first two assumptions seem to have no hold in reality whatsoever, and the last one, the association between the massage parlours and something resembling organized crime, was only the case in a very small part of the market. In order to help the women involved and to stop them spreading HIV/AIDS, the politicians were keen to close down as many massage parlours as possible from 1992–3 on. They searched high and low for appropriate means of achieving this goal. As prostitution is legal in Norway, few means were given to them, and they had to search in odd places for a solution.⁸ What they found in these odd places were building and health regulations. Based on these building and health regulations,

representatives from the government agencies involved performed police-escorted inspections at about fifty massage parlours during the years 1993–6. Thirty-six of these were temporarily closed down, but most of them started up again shortly afterwards in new apartments. Sometimes these inspections involved immigration control.

Female prostitutes' response

Although these building and health inspections had little direct impact on the number of massage parlours, as most owners and prostitutes still stayed in the business, they stirred up the market and led to a lot of media attention. And parallel to and because of these inspections, media coverage of the massage parlours became more negative in mid-decade. This happened at the same time as anti-massage parlour activists received media coverage for their work. So we can see that the media attention and the pressure were quite heavy at this time.

One of my strongest findings in the first project was that there were large differences in the 1990s between those who began at massage parlours and those who began on the streets concerning drug-use, experience with violence, family life, experience with the legitimate work market and in affiliation with 'normal' society. When street prostitution was still the predominant form of prostitution in Oslo, a wider variety of women were to be found there. But when indoor alternatives grew in number and therefore became more accessible, the street-working women with the most resources began indoors. One of the women who had noticed this development said:

What's on the streets now is very different from what it was like ten to fifteen years ago. There were normal girls there before, housewives and students, but now those groups have started indoors, now there are only drug-addicts left. Those who are clean start in massage parlours or bars. The street is the only place where the drug-addicts are allowed to work. The massage parlours prefer the girls fresh, the right age, drug-free and with good looks.

These two processes, the differences in recruitment and the most well-off working on the streets leaving to work indoors, led to a polarized prostitution market, which is said to also include the clients. Recruitment to prostitution was formerly thought to take place on the streets, as this is the most visible and accessible form of prostitution (Høigård and Finstad, 1986). Women were then thought to be recruited onwards to indoor prostitution from the street. In my research, though, I found that many women at massage parlours were recruited directly to this prostitution arena, and had beforehand had no contact with street prostitutes, and often not with any prostitutes at all.

Many street prostitutes in Norway live their lives outside of 'normal' society anyway because of their long-term drug problems that have given them additional social problems like homelessness, estrangement from family and unemployment, while many massage parlour prostitutes besides their prostitution experiences live quite 'normal' lives. This leads to indoor prostitutes being more integrated in the Norwegian society and more eager to fit in in different respects than street prostitutes. Their prostitution début did not come as a result of a rejection of societal norms, but rather from taking the norms of economic independence very seriously, and from sharing materialism and a need for money in order to live 'the good life' with the rest of the Norwegian population without having the same resources for fulfilling these needs.

At the beginning of the decade the massage parlours advertised in one of Norway's largest newspapers. Many women were recruited through these advertisements, and these advertisements' appearance in a respected newspaper made massage parlours seem legitimate for women searching for solutions for their immediate economic difficulties. In my research on recruitment to massage parlour prostitution I found media images to be an important part of why women started as prostitutes during the early part of this period. They mentioned information about the business in newspapers and magazines as having inspired them to begin themselves. Another media-related factor in their recruitment to prostitution was the discrepancy between the impression they had of prostitute women beforehand, and the prostitution they saw when they first contacted a massage parlour. One woman said: 'There were many different kinds of girls there. Many were normal schoolgirls, non-users [of drugs]. The girls there use their money on schooling and clothes and ordinary things. I was shocked the first time I visited one [massage parlour].'

Another woman had experienced the same thing: 'I realized right away that this wasn't the same as what goes on on the street'. This led her and others to think that what went on at the massage parlours was not really prostitution. Several had therefore not expected to suffer from negative long-term effects of prostitution as portrayed in prostitution research and media coverage during the 1980s. Prostitution portrayed only in terms of what goes on on the streets did not concern the women working at the massage parlours. The women indoors were, for example, quite unwilling to receive HIV/AIDS information directed at sex workers, but instead used the information they had received as members of the general population in doing their work. Prostitutes have access to free condoms, which are rather expensive in Norway, but the women at the massage parlours would rather buy condoms themselves than be associated with street prostitutes by taking up this offer.

The women working indoors were very aware of the differences between themselves and the women working on the streets. Collectively the women working at massage parlours worked at eliminating any similarities between the arenas. Even though they were rivals, the massage parlours were in contact with each other in order to make sure they held the right price level. They were concerned that if one massage parlour put its prices down, it would affect the way they all were perceived: as cheap whores like those on the street. It was therefore important that the women working at massage parlours stuck together in distinguishing them all as expensive goods.

A woman who had only worked indoors had the ‘politically correct’ view on the differences between women at massage parlours and women on the street: ‘I don’t regard it [working at massage parlours] as prostitution. Then [when you are a real prostitute] you hang around on the street getting paid for everything.’

Former street-workers were not popular, and drug-addicts were banned from most massage parlours. The clients who reported having been with street-workers were disliked. Since they experienced this as such a big difference, the rhetoric of the anti-massage parlour activists and the City Council left them bewildered. The activists and the City Council gained ground in the general population, but they received little understanding from the women they had set out to rescue. The women working at the massage parlours were annoyed with the activism directed at closing their workplaces. As Anine said: ‘I find it annoying. They write about things they know nothing about. I think these “brothel-smashers”⁹ should try and help someone who needs it instead.’

The inspections initiated by the City Council were also reacted to in this manner: how could they interfere with the business of the massage parlours, while the poor women on the streets were the ones in need of help?

But the amount of negative attention directed at these women through the media and activism in the mid-1990s made it less comfortable to work at the massage parlours. In addition to the practical difficulties because of the activism and the inspections, it became more difficult for the women to maintain a self-image of being regular citizens, and not whores or enemies of the State. The information in the media became more and more tuned into the reality of the massage parlours, which made it easier for the women there to identify with it. Some massage parlour prostitutes eventually told stories in the media about the more negative sides of this arena and how their emotional life was affected by their prostitution experiences.

The aftermath

By the mid-1990s the number of clients decreased. This was probably due both to the negative media attention in relation to different action groups and to the City Council, and ordinary market factors. Massage parlours were a new and exotic phenomenon for clients as they started out. Beforehand many Norwegian men had travelled over the border to Sweden in order to visit massage parlours there, so when massage parlours started up in Norway as well, men came from all over the country to sample this new experience. As interest in this new phenomenon subsided, so did the number of clients.

The above factors worked together, and from mid-decade onwards the number of massage parlours fell. What apparently happened next was that well-off ethnic Norwegian women disappeared from the massage parlours. During my first project, when the massage parlour market narrowed in about 1994–5, many of these women started on their own, working in flats alone or with one other woman instead of at massage parlours. Those with the most resources had most to lose when the massage parlours were under fire, and they also had an easier way out. Starting out alone in a flat requires more effort than joining an already established massage parlour, so there is reason to believe that those with the most resources now are to be found in flats. As control tightened, the massage parlour business hardened, and by the end of the decade the majority of prostitutes in Oslo were working from flats. This made the women more difficult for support workers to contact, and more exposed to danger as working at massage parlours gave better protection because the women did not work alone. This inaccessibility of a large number of Oslo's prostitutes was an unintentional consequence of the action taken against the massage parlours, based on faulty knowledge of the prostitution arena. Prostitution going underground is always a possibility when the market meets opposition, and this was exactly what prostitutes and critics said would happen.

Conclusion

As I hopefully have demonstrated, these influences on prostitutes and their work are to a high degree intertwined: the prostitution market produces and is produced by the popular perception of the prostitute, which the makers and executors of prostitution-control relate to in one way or another and take part in producing.

What is important in these concluding remarks is why politicians and activists overlooked the direct wishes of some of the women involved. Developments in Norway showed that the prostitutes' point of view did not change the attitude of people in power to prostitutes. One important

aspect is that it is impossible for policy makers to take into consideration the diversity of prostitutes' life experiences. This is true for most other issues as well; politicians are obliged to cut corners in order to reach goals that they find to be the best. In addition to their being blatantly ignorant and to some extent arrogant in sometimes presuming that the women involved did not know what was good for them, politicians also tended to overlook the opinions of the people involved for reasons of principle. A dilemma presents itself as prostitutes voice their demands for safer and more respected prostitution: in making prostitution a better way to make a living, we risk lowering the threshold for other women entering it. During my fieldwork at the massage parlours in Oslo, I saw the reality of this dilemma. As I have shown in this article, the positive media coverage in the beginning of the 1990s, the legitimate character of the recruitment of clients and women in newspapers, the lack of any substantial governmental control and the legitimate and decent façade and organization of the massage parlours seem to have made it easier for women to make their débüt selling sex at massage parlours. In a time of vulnerability in their lives owing to unemployment, financial difficulties or personal crisis, the impression they gained through different channels was that prostitution at massage parlours was not such a bad option. Here we have to take a stand as to what our priorities are: to what extent do we want to make the daily life of women already working as prostitutes as comfortable as possible? Should we instead prefer to make it worse, in order to make women search for other alternatives and make it an unattractive alternative for women considering working as prostitutes? The voicing of alternative ways to experience prostitution across the world in the 1990s has made choosing between these options even harder. Being aware of the broad range of prostitution experiences, it is no longer easy to view prostitution as sexualized violence and to take an abolitionist stance.

Notes

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1 The second half of the 1990s saw an increase in prostitution involving women from Eastern Europe, Asia and Latin America. In the northern part of Norway in particular, the phenomenon of Russian women travelling to Norway for short stays for purposes of prostitution has given rise to political and social concerns. This side of Norwegian prostitution has received most attention in recent years.

2 This project was partly financed by the Norwegian Board of Health and was partly executed at the Department of Sociology at the University of Oslo.

- 3 The project was financed by the Scandinavian Research Council for Criminology and took place at the Department of Criminology at the University of Oslo.
- 4 There are no regular statistics on this subject in Norway. Prostitution is legal and although the police formerly kept written track of prostitutes, it has now been ruled illegal to do so. Because prostitution is a rather concealed activity, knowledge of the number of people involved is not readily available other than through qualified guessing by the parties involved. There have been some efforts to produce statistics on the number of people selling and buying sex, but these are often unreliable as they are based on self-reported participation in prostitution, and are not necessarily more accurate than the figures produced by individuals involved in prostitution or the social workers monitoring the market.
- 5 Oslo is a quite segregated city when it comes to the inhabitants' resources: the inhabitants in the east have less education and money and poorer health than those in the western part.
- 6 Interestingly enough, HIV/AIDS-prevention work has been the starting point for prostitutes' rights organizations in many countries across the world (Kempadoo, 1998).
- 7 I believe that since in Norway there has been much attention paid to negative consequences for prostitutes, and to sexual abuse and drug-use as factors leading to prostitution, Norwegian men, to a higher degree than men in countries where the public opinion differs, need to believe that a prostitute is drug-free and rather well off in order to visit her with a clear conscience. Both on the streets and at massage parlours men ask the women whether they use drugs and ask questions that would seem to be an effort to find out how well off the women are. Women in both arenas have the same answer to the clients as to why they sell sex; it is not for buying drugs, it is for financing a university education. The women report men sighing with relief on hearing this. When being interviewed in newspapers and magazines almost all prostitute women therefore mention that there are many students working at their massage parlours or in prostitution generally in order to legitimize and normalize it and hopefully to recruit clients.
- 8 Charging prostitutes for tax evasion has been contemplated by politicians and the police, but was found to be too time-consuming to produce any effects.
- 9 One group of activists called themselves 'the brothel-smashers' (in Norwegian: *bordellknuserne*).

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