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Prevailing Voices in Debates over Child Prostitution

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In the early 1990s child prostitution became a central focus of worldwide concern. Concentrating on South East Asia, especially Thailand, the issue was analyzed in a particular way, which blamed the problem on Western men traveling abroad to countries with lax law enforcement and taking advantage of the poverty and gullibility of local children and their parents. A consensus on the nature of the problem was quickly reached between the Thai government, which was horrified to see the country described in the Western media as a "Disneyland for pedophiles" (Ehrlich 1994), Thai nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which campaigned on behalf of the children, and their Western counterparts. Eventually, too, Western governments would come to support anti–child prostitution campaigners by bowing to pressure and passing extraterritorial legislation allowing the prosecution and imprisonment of men in their home countries for sexual crimes committed against children abroad (Montgomery 2010).

Such unanimity of purpose and understanding was both intellectually and morally satisfying and, indeed, in the face of some of the horror stories coming out of Thailand, completely justified. Yet the image of the child prostitute presented in these campaigns did not tell the full story, and other children, whose lives and experiences did not fit into the prescribed pattern, were overlooked, ignored, and silenced. This chapter examines the way in which the image of the "perfect" child prostitute was constructed in Thailand and the West, comparing this to a group of children, with whom I did research, who worked as prostitutes and whose lives did not fit the ideologically expedient stereotypes.

Creating the Context

Despite its reputation for sexual license, all forms of prostitution are, in fact, illegal in Thailand (Montgomery 2001a). It is also evident, however, that prostitution is implicitly condoned, and various red light districts, such as

Patpong in Bangkok or The Strip in Pattaya, exist as proof that law enforcement is not so much lenient as nonexistent. Outside the tourist areas the sex industry is even more endemic, and it is rare to find even the smallest towns or villages that do not have a brothel (Fordham 2005). The reasons behind the pervasiveness of the sex industry have been a source of much debate. Some NGOs prefer to see prostitution as a foreign problem, imported into Thailand by outsiders with minimal Thai involvement. Others have argued that foreign influences have simply been mapped onto preexisting social institutions and that prostitution was long regulated, taxed, and implicitly condoned by the Thai authorities before becoming criminalized in 1960 as part of a wider plan to rid the country of "undesirables" such as beggars and prostitutes (Montgomery 2001a).

Evidence strongly suggests that a thriving indigenous market for sex dates back hundreds of years in Thailand (Boonchalaksi and Guest 1994), but also undoubtedly true is that the influx of large numbers of foreigners into Thailand in the 1960s dramatically changed the nature of the Thai sex industry. During the Vietnam War the Thai government allowed the United States to station troops in Thailand where American servicemen were permitted to use Thailand as a base for "R&R" (rest and recreation). The large numbers of young Western men with money to spend quickly led to the creation of bars and brothels catering to foreigners, and it was during this period that a recognizable industry was first established to sell sex to foreigners. After 1975 the troops were gone, but they had left behind the sex industry's infrastructure in the form of clubs and bars, as well as the stereotype of beautiful, pliant, and docile Thai women who would fulfill every sexual fantasy for a small price.

This infrastructure was easily harnessed to the needs of the Thai state, which wanted to develop and modernize the economy. With money no longer coming in from the Americans and with a very limited manufacturing and industrial base, Thailand needed other sources of revenue; like in other developing countries in the 1970s, tourism was viewed as the way forward, and, despite the illegality of prostitution, sex tourism was seen as part of the development strategy. The Thai deputy prime minister stated this quite explicitly in 1980 in a statement to provincial governors:

> I ask all governors to consider the natural scenery in your provinces, together with some forms of entertainment that some of you might consider disgusting and shameful because they are forms of sexual entertainment that attract tourists . . . we must do this because we have to consider the jobs that will be created for the people. (Quoted in Ennew 1986, 99).

By the 1990s however, the policy of condoning sex tourism was coming under attack. Women's groups and anti-tourism groups started to campaign against the use of sex tourism as a way of promoting the tourist industry and launched a series of high-profile publicity stunts in which they attacked the image of "brothel Thailand." Activists picketed Bangkok airport and targeted tourist flights with placards that read "Thailand not Sexland" and "Gonorrhea Express" (Montgomery 2008, 907). Furthermore, the international image and reputation of Thailand began to come under scrutiny and, if anyone had any doubts about how Thailand and its tourism industry were perceived in the West, in 1993 *Time* magazine published a special report on the sex trade and featured on its cover a picture of a young Thai prostitute (Hornblower 1993). A week later a new edition of Longman's *Dictionary* was published in the United Kingdom that described Bangkok as "the capital city of Thailand. It is famous for its temples and other beautiful buildings, and is also often mentioned as a place where there are a lot of prostitutes" (Sakboon 1993, 8). These two images of Thailand were widely publicized within the country, causing great controversy and alarm that Thailand had become so synonymous with sex tourism that the words "Thailand" and "prostitution" were interchangeable.

Despite the protests, however, the campaigns against sex tourism had minimal impact. Tourism was perceived as necessary to the Thai economy and was supported by the government. Furthermore, the demonstrations were being held at a time when feminist writers in the West were moving away from a complete abolitionist perspective when discussing sex work. While some authors remained opposed to all forms of commercial sex, viewing it as inherently oppressive to women, others began to explore issues of force and choice, voluntary and involuntary prostitution, and the agency that sex workers could deploy in prostitution (Day 2007). Thus, although launching a battle against male sex tourists in Thailand generated some headlines, it provoked limited action, and even though several Thai NGOs battled hard to keep the issue on the agenda, only the discovery of large numbers of young girls and boys working as prostitutes with Western clients provided an issue that could unite various vested interests (Saunders 2005).

Child Sex Tourism

The issue of child prostitution galvanized public opinion nationally and internationally. Although the morality and necessity of adult prostitution continued to be debated, child prostitution was seen as beyond the pale and the lurid stories that emerged around this time reinforced the notion that

child prostitution was quite separate from adult prostitution and of a different magnitude of horror. Discussions could only concern the scale (already huge and always increasing) or the terminology, whether or not to call these children child prostitutes, prostituted children, abused children, or commercially sexually exploited children (Saunders 2005), but issues such as agency were off the agenda for debate. At the forefront of these campaigns were ECPAT (End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism, later End Child Prostitution, Child Pornography, and Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes) and ECTWT (Ecumenical Council on Third World Tourism), both of which drew very explicit links between tourism, child rape, and child trafficking (Montgomery 2001a).

In its earliest days ECPAT relied on extremely compelling personalized testimonies and accounts of innocent children being horribly abused by Westerners. One campaigner told the *Bangkok Post*, "I still remember vividly the tears in the eyes of the child rescued from a Bangkok brothel who told me how she begged a customer not to harm her, only to have her pleas mercilessly rejected" ("Tourists Pay Dearly for Underage Sex" 1993). The media quickly picked up on these stories and began to publish heartbreaking accounts of individual children's lives that had been ruined by abuse and HIV infection because of Western men's selfishness. These stories tended to follow a reliable pattern involving a young Thai girl tricked into leaving home or sold by impoverished parents into a brothel, where she was repeatedly raped and terrorized into servicing many foreign clients a night before being rescued by a charitable organization, only to be discovered to be suffering from HIV (Montgomery 2001a; Murray 2006). By the early 1990s journalists had a clear image of the "right" sort of child prostitute as well as a narrative that always repeated the familiar patterns of betrayal, abuse, rescue, and death, with the foreigner the ultimate cause of the misery (Montgomery 2001a; Fordham 2005). Child prostitution had become, as one newspaper article put it, a "scandal which has left youngsters of only 10 available as prey for charter-flight tourists" (Drummond and Chant 1994, 20).

There is no doubt that terrible cases of child abuse did occur and that it was possible for Western men to buy sex from children in Thailand with impunity.[1] Such stories, however, were not necessarily typical of all child prostitutes in Thailand, even though they were presented as such, and the situation was far more complex than these rather formulaic cases would suggest. For a start, although the concern was focused on children with Western clients, such children actually formed a minority (Black 1994). The overwhelming majority of young prostitutes were not found in the tourist bars

of Bangkok, Pattaya, or Phuket but in the brothels of rural Thailand or the backstreets of Bangkok, where they serviced local clients for low wages. It is sometimes assumed that because buying sex from children is so heavily condemned that it must be the most expensive and forbidden form of prostitution, but this is not always the case and children may also be at the bottom end of the market. It was very rare for such children to have foreign clients, and suggestions that all child prostitutes had Western clients and that the problem of child prostitution in Thailand was caused primarily by tourism seriously warped discussions and made research into actual prostitution practices extremely difficult.

One example of the effect of this representative straightjacket was the way a fire in 1984 at a brothel in Phuket was reported. Newspaper accounts told how, on entering the building, fire fighters discovered the charred remains of five young prostitutes who had been unable to escape the blaze because they had been chained to their beds. This case generated a public outcry, and the pimps and procurers of these girls were prosecuted and made to pay compensation to the victims' parents (Rattachumpoth 1994). It was a gruesome story that has been endlessly repeated to show the "typical" horrors of brothel life. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that these girls had Western clients or that the brothel catered to tourists. The pimps and procurers were local men and, in all probability, so, too, were the clients. This, however, did not stop the incident from becoming part of the child sex tourism mythology. The story found its way into an ECPAT book, *The Child and the Tourist* (O'Grady 1992, 97–98) and was also fictionalized by the Foundation for Women in the book *Kamla* (1990), which was distributed among girls considered to be at risk of becoming prostitutes, in order to warn, through the story of the eponymous heroine, of the dangers and likely outcomes of entering prostitution. This book makes the point that Kamla moved to Phuket, because "she was told by her friends that it was in the south of Thailand and that there were plenty of tourists there" (ibid., 23). Inevitably she was burned to death in a brothel fire.

It may well seem offensive to quibble over details; the abuses that went on in this brothel were indefensible, and the ten-year sentences handed out to the pimps and brothel owners were clearly inadequate. It is equally clear that lessons were not learned and similar abuses continued throughout the 1990s. In 1994 another fire claimed the lives of two other young women trapped in a brothel (Sakhon 1994). Yet in neither case were these brothels catering to Westerners, and to suggest that these children died because of their involvement in tourism is disingenuous. As development studies scholar and journalist Maggie Black has argued:

> No society wants to admit that it practices "child prostitution." And where the evidence is undeniable, it is more bearable to blame the "unclean other"—decadent foreigners with their incomprehensible tastes and misbehaviours. Where there is an overlay of North-South exploitation—the Western tourist ruining innocent paradise with his credit card and unleashed libido—this aversion plays easily in certain well-meaning ears (1994, 13).

Highlighting the abuse of Thai children by foreigners meant that other forms of child sexual exploitation, which were less politically expedient to expose, received much less attention. Chief among these was the treatment of Burmese children and young women found in brothels on the Thai side of the Thai–Burmese border. In 1993 a human rights group, Asia Watch, reported on the widespread collusion of Thai officials in the indigenous sex trade and, in particular, on their treatment of Burmese girls. Asia Watch discussed at length a raid on a brothel in Ranong (near the Burmese border) in which the police found 148 underage Burmese girls. Although this case attracted some attention in the Western press, that it involved poor Burmese children having cheap sex with poor Burmese men rather than depraved Westerners indulging their tastes at high prices meant that the story quickly faded from view and no mention was made of immigration policies, racism, law enforcement, or the use of child prostitutes by local men. Yet it exposed another side of the child sex industry in Thailand, which was acutely embarrassing for the Thai government. The exploitation that occurred in Ranong was a gross abuse of human rights taking place with the full knowledge of Thai officials. Far from being an imported problem of oversexed Westerners causing social chaos with their wallets and depraved tastes, exploitative sex involving children was shown to be commonplace, endemic, and supported by those who should have been stamping it out.

With the parameters of the problem firmly set, child prostitution was understood as being caused primarily by foreigners, and it was therefore argued that the solution was also a foreign one. Although some comments were made in the Western press about law enforcement and the corruption of the local police (Drummond and Chant 1994), the most pressing problem was understood to lie in the lax legal systems of the tourist-sending countries which meant that if men had escaped justice in Thailand then they could not be prosecuted in their home countries. One of the cases ECPAT highlighted was that of a Swedish man, Bengt Bolin, who, in 1992, was caught with a naked boy in his bed but claimed that he had been led to believe that the boy

was over fifteen and therefore of legal age. Before he could be prosecuted, he applied for a new Swedish passport and left the country. Three years later, in 1995, the *Bangkok Post* reported the case of a Frenchman who had been found guilty in a Thai court and sentenced to four years imprisonment but had been bailed out in order to launch an appeal. Instead of doing so he simply left the country, having had his passport returned to him by the French Embassy ("Child Molester Flees Thailand" 1995). In both these cases, once the men involved had left the country, nothing could be done. Sweden does not extradite its citizens to non-Nordic countries, and the French government claimed that because their citizen had already been tried once for these offenses, he could not be tried again (Hirst 2003, 268).

Both Thai and international NGOs began to push for extraterritorial legislation to be passed in tourist-sending countries that would enable the prosecution of those accused of sexual crimes against children abroad. In 1994 Australia became the first country to introduce extraterritorial legislation, passing the Crimes (Child Sex Tourism) Amendment Act which brought in penalties of up to seventeen years imprisonment for those convicted of sexual crimes against children overseas. Over the next five years Norway, Germany, France, Belgium, New Zealand, Sweden, and the United Kingdom passed similar laws and successful prosecutions were quickly obtained in 1996 in Australia and in 1997 in France (Montgomery 2010).[2] Interestingly the first case to be successfully brought before the Swedish courts was that of Bengt Bolin, mentioned above, who was sentenced to three months imprisonment in 1995 for his crime of having sex with a teenage boy in Thailand.

In passing such laws Western governments acknowledged that they shared responsibility in finding a solution to the problem of their citizens traveling overseas to have sex with children. Pushing for such laws also enabled Thai and international NGOs to work together without the charge that Western NGOs were interfering in another country. There was also support from the Thai government, which had been embarrassed by the country's reputation as a place where commercial sex with children was freely available. Indeed, it would be hard to imagine anyone or any institution that did not support the aim of stopping Western men from sexually abusing young girls and boys abroad. Yet, by focusing so exclusively on the prosecution of Westerners, the troubling way that Burmese women were treated, the widespread use of child prostitutes by local men, the problems of law enforcement, and the use of tourism as a development strategy were obscured and ignored. Perhaps most important of all, focusing on the perpetrator meant that the children themselves became marginal to discussions about their own lives.

Child Prostitution in Thailand: An Ethnographic Study

When I went to Thailand in 1993 with the aim of conducting ethnographic fieldwork among child prostitutes, I wanted to ask the questions that had not been discussed by the media or the campaigning groups. Who were the children who became prostitutes? What were their living conditions? What were their relationships with their parents, their family, or the broader community? Who were their clients? What were their paths in and out of prostitution? I wanted to hear the children's own view of what they did and why, and find out if the reality of their lives matched up to the image of child prostitutes that was widely disseminated at the time.

Not surprisingly finding children who were working as prostitutes, and who were willing to talk about their lives, was extremely difficult.[3] It took several months of visiting various anti–child prostitution projects before I found a small charitable organization whose practitioners worked with young prostitutes and street children and who were prepared to let me work with them. I had to promise that I would not name the organization, its workers, any of the children I worked with, or indeed the town I worked in. This group's focus was on a community I call Baan Nua, which consisted of approximately 150 rural migrants and their children, who lived in a slum village set up on the outskirts of a larger town whose major industry, as in much of the rest of Thailand, was tourism. It was a poor community that survived almost exclusively through the prostitution of some of its children. The children's clients were Western and their parents were well aware of, and even encouraged, what they did. There were sixty-five children in Baan Nua, and around thirty-five of them worked regularly or occasionally as prostitutes; this number included both boys and girls between the ages of six and fourteen. I spent fifteen months doing this research, interviewing the children, gathering life histories, and acting as a participant observer in their lives.

As I have discussed my findings at length elsewhere (Montgomery 2001a), here I focus on the three issues I identified as central to understanding these children's lives. First, these children had not been trafficked or debt-bonded into brothels. They lived with their parents, worked part-time, and exercised some choice about which clients they accepted; second, the children never identified themselves as prostitutes; and, third, they saw prostitution not in terms of abuse and exploitation but as a filial duty and obligation. This final point is the most important. Prostitution was seen as a means to an end; by selling sex, the children kept their families and their communities together.

The concepts of filial duty and supporting one's parents are fundamental throughout Thai society (Tantiwiramanond and Pandey 1987). Whereas the generalized pattern in Western societies is that parents support their children and, if necessary, sacrifice for them, in Thailand the reverse is true. Although this is now changing and the emergence of a Westernized Thai middle class is beginning to transform understandings of the family and of parent-child relations, in many rural areas, or those far away from the metropolitan center, children's obligations to their parents remain strong and are highly valued. Children are seen as a parental investment with an anticipated return, and they are expected to work for the family as soon as they are able. This emphasis on filial duty has been a constant theme in ethnographic and other studies of prostitution in Thailand, and anthropologist Marjorie Muecke (1992) has argued that whereas girls in the past would have earned money through market trading, contemporary young women are likely to earn money through prostitution. Economist Pasuk Phongpaichit (1982) made a similar point in an early study of young prostitutes in Thailand, showing that daughters who left their rural homes to work as prostitutes were not running away, being coerced into prostitution, or discarding the principles of support and repayment; instead, they were fulfilling those principles as best as they could in a changed environment by earning money elsewhere and sending home the remittances.

These ideals of family obligation and support remained strong in Baan Nua, and it was because of the duties that kin felt toward one another that the children were able to rationalize and justify what they did. Concepts of gratitude and obedience toward parents remained important cultural reference points, and whenever I asked the children about prostitution they almost always referred to them. I was constantly told that prostitution was a way of fulfilling the filial obligations that they felt their families demanded of them. Despite the stigma against prostitution, a powerful mitigating circumstance for many was the financial support they provided for their mothers. The children felt that they were acting in socially sanctioned roles as dutiful daughters and sons, and that prostituting themselves with the "right" intentions meant that there was no moral opprobrium on what they did (Montgomery 2001a). In all the conversations I had with the children about selling sex and their feelings about it, this was the point they kept referring to. As one twelve-year-old informant put it, "[that's] only my body but this is my family" (Montgomery 2001b, 84). Such a view is not uncommon and, as other studies have shown with both adults and children, the way that a person spends his or her earnings can help mitigate the stigma of sex work.[4]

This is not to argue that child prostitution is an intrinsic part of Thai culture or that it is not abusive; it does suggest, however, that the children's view of prostitution should be understood through the cultural reference points of duty and obligation.

The issue of force and choice is central to discussions of adult prostitution, but, with regard to children, it is assumed that they have no agency and are inevitably victimized and crushed by sex work. Yet the children that I knew in Baan Nua did exercise some agency, whether this meant involving some clients in longer-term relationships, pimping for other children, denying victimhood by concentrating on filial duty rather than abuse, or by choosing prostitution above other bad options. In many cases the children in Baan Nua had tried other jobs before entering prostitution, but the opportunities for poor, uneducated slum children were limited to working in sweatshops, street vending, begging, or scavenging on a nearby garbage dump. All these options carried risks, brought in less income, and were generally unpopular with the children. Although prostitution is usually presented as the worst of all possible options, many children saw it as one of the better choices given a limited and terrible set of alternatives. Prostitution with foreigners was relatively highly paid and enabled them to eat the food they wanted, go to places they could not afford, such as amusement arcades or theme parks, and, paradoxically, enjoy some aspects of a childhood otherwise denied to them.

However misguided the children might have been, and however little they understood the wider political, social, and economic contrast of their situation, they remained adamant that they were agents who could exercise some choice. Their language also suggested an attempt to manipulate their reality. They consistently refused to admit to prostitution, rejecting the very term when I used it, calling it an ugly thing that had no meaning in their lives. They continually emphasized that they did not "sell sex," that they were just going "out for fun with foreigners" or "having guests." In their terms, only children in brothels could be called prostitutes. Given this view of the world, it was not surprising that they distinguished between different types of clients. Some, they admitted, were customers who simply bought sex, but the children disliked these sorts of relationships and rarely talked about them. They preferred to discuss the men who were "friends" who would respond to requests for help, give large lump sums when the children needed it, and had been integrated to some extent into the lives of their families. With these men it was possible to downplay, and even deny, that the relationship was about the exchange of sex for money and the children couched their descriptions in terms of love and romance rather than commercial transactions.

There was no set price for sexual acts; money given to them after sex was referred to as a gift or as a token of appreciation. Sometimes a client would not leave cash for the children but would contribute it for the rebuilding or refurbishing of a girl's house. The children in Baan Nua were not immune to romantic dreams, and they avidly watched Thai soap operas and talked about their love of certain pop stars. These views, however, were tempered by realism. The girls did not dream of true love or of being poor but happy; they dreamed instead of a rich man taking them away from Baan Nua and looking after them and their family.

But despite everything the children said about prostitution, I remained deeply unhappy about the children's denial of abuse and their rejection of victimhood. While acknowledging their resilience and admiring them greatly, I personally believe that when an older, richer man from the West is buying sex with young children, exploitation is inevitable. Even though the children claimed that their clients treated them well, this must be set against the risks they faced and certain other aspects of their behavior. There was a high level of drug and alcohol use in Baan Nua among the children; there were unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. A child's body is too small for penetration by an adult, and some of the harm done by these men was evident in the bleeding and tearing that occurred during occasions when the children sold sex. Though almost never mentioned, the threat of HIV was ever present, and toward the end of my fieldwork one twenty-year-old, who had worked for several years as a prostitute, died of tuberculosis which I believe, but cannot prove, was AIDS-related.[5]

Given all these problems and evidence of vulnerability, why did the children still claim to see no abuse? One possible reason is that the images of child prostitution that saturated the media bore no relationship to them and their lives. By the end of my time in the field, the children had become aware that what they did was considered wrong and stopped talking about it. Even so, they never identified themselves as prostitutes; indeed, they went to great lengths to deny it. They believed that child prostitution, as noted above, only referred to those children who had been tricked into brothels and forced to sell sex to whoever wanted it. In their own minds they were very different: they lived with what in their terms were loving parents; they were not trapped in a brothel; and they had plans for life after prostitution. The image of child prostitution so prevalent at the time had the unintended effect of excluding them from believing that there were other forms of abuse and that what was happening to them was wrong. They saw no overlap between their own lives and the image of a child prostitute propagated by the media.

Conclusions

When child prostitution was first identified as a major problem, a consensus was quickly reached on its nature and what needed to be done. The solution was assumed to be extraterritorial legislation to prosecute men in their home countries for crimes against children abroad. Trying and condemning such men had a neatness to it which was appealing: it united Western NGOs and governments with their Thai counterparts, and it made a symbolic gesture that this problem was also the responsibility of the Western world. It was also intended to send a message to men who might think about using children sexually and make them reflect before they traveled to buy sex from children abroad. Yet it is questionable whose needs were really fulfilled by this legislation. For NGOs and governments there were tangible benefits to legislative change, namely, proof that something palpable was being done in spite of the legal and constitutional difficulties. Focusing on the prosecution of foreign men also allowed less palatable issues to be swept aside, such as the fact that sex tourism was developed and condoned by the Thai government and allowed to flourish with minimal regulation. Emphasizing commercial sex with foreigners also ignored the issue of patchy law enforcement and police corruption, charges that remain until this day, according to a recent U.S. State Department's Human Rights Report(Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor 2008). Immigration policy and the treatment of illegal migrants, especially from Burma, was a sensitive issue in Thailand, and the emphasis on Western clients, once again, neatly sidestepped this problem.

In terms of its impact on the actual children who worked as prostitutes, the picture was less clear and little thought went into the issue of what would happen to children who reported abuse to the authorities or testified against abusers. Would they be placed in government or foster care, given counseling and alternatives to prostitution? Would they be stigmatized in the eyes of the government and their communities? Or would they simply be forgotten? Certainly, for the children in Baan Nua, extraterritorial laws would have been meaningless. Neither the children nor their families had any interest in seeing their clients prosecuted. In the absence of any social support or any form of welfare, these men were the only form of income and protection they had, no matter how damaging that might seem to outsiders. Obtaining a conviction against them, in either Thailand or abroad, would be close to impossible.

In 1996 a change of law in Thailand meant that parents could be prosecuted if they allowed or encouraged their children to work as prostitutes.

Given the emphasis the children placed on family relationships and filial obligations, such laws would make it extremely difficult for the children to ask for help, even if they recognized that they needed it. Keeping the family together was their primary justification for what they did and, concomitantly, the prosecution and imprisonment of their parents was their worst fear. Furthermore, laws such as this made it very easy to ignore structural causes of child prostitution, thus giving the state immunity by privatizing the issue and laying the blame at the feet of the family. Despite the presence of NGOs and the state claiming to protect such children and act in their best interests, it is the voices of children like those in Baan Nua that tend to get lost in debates about child prostitution. They were not the suffering innocents trapped in a brothel; they were well paid and had certain freedoms. They were undoubtedly exploited but, unfortunately for them, they were exploited in the "wrong" way. Ideologically out of place and challenging to accepted ideas of what a child prostitute should look and act like, these children were an embarrassment and, along with so many other uncomfortable issues concerning child prostitution, were overlooked, and even silenced, by those claiming to speak in their name.

NOTES

1. For a nuanced and balanced account of the problem, see O'Connell-Davidson 2005.
2. For a summary of the laws in each country, see the World Tourism Organisation, n.d.
3. For a full discussion of methods and ethical dilemmas, as well as issues of access, see Montgomery 2007.
4. See Kelly 2008 for a vivid example of this.
5. For a fuller discussion of the risks of pregnancy and disease, see Montgomery 2001b.