Chapter 17
Virtual Tourism as a New Form of Oppression against Women

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ABSTRACT

This chapter draws upon parallel developments in tourism and new media studies basing on the emergence of virtual tourism. Virtual tourism, and by extension real tourism, is taken as a site for analysis where both these methods can be employed. This chapter looks at certain websites and sees how prostitution and other forms of work are subsumed under the garb of development, whereas they are in fact crimes against women.

INTRODUCTION

While feminism impacted social sciences and literature to a large extent, international relations did not feel the impact till the late 1980's, thanks to work of Cynthia Enloe, (Enloe 2000), J Ann Tickner (Tickner, 1992) and Jean Elhstain, (Elshtain1993) amongst others. On a parallel note the internet and new media was also not taken seriously by scholars of International Relations till a series of developments have forced governments all over the world to wake out of their slumber. However these two developments have largely remained as parallel streams. One of the central arguments is that while there has been a sustained critique of tourism, such a critique of virtual tourism straddles the field of gender and international relations and can be constructed as an area of cybercrime against women.

BACKGROUND

Wiki leaks has hogged the limelight in the recent past by capturing the attention of the world at large on the US actions in Afghanistan thus proving that the new media has come of age. Such an atmosphere has also led to the maturation of audiences and many questions are being asked in the new media that has echoes in the world over establishing a link between the traditional and the new media and thus bringing issues of women's exploitation in cyberspace as a mainstream agenda. Thus the question of commoditization of women can be revisited if we take into account the role of new media in international relations by focusing on international tourism which is one visible aspect of women being exploited in cyberspace and by extension in the real world. Another related example is human trafficking that has assumed

alarming proportions in the recent years and also has a very strong cyber component that needs to be studied, in the absence of which we will be failing to establish causal connections of how new crime operates in today's world.

Most works on cyberspace do not link up the production of images, text and sounds in cyberspace with the ground reality, thereby creating a situation where the discussion on the subject is de-contextualized. One of the oft quoted examples is that of pornography which also happens to be one of the largest money spinners on the internet. Many arguments about pornography under the garb of right to freedom of information, entertainment and even newer arguments like women's right to pornography made famous by the book bearing the similar title A Woman's right to pornography, (W. McElroy, 1995) have led to a general confusion by not accepting the basic premise that pornography is bad which is further compounded by the fact that this book uses the same feminist jargon and language current in academia. Here she employs a critique of the definitions of pornography and after a critique offers a definition that "Pornography is the explicit artistic depiction of men and/or women as sexual beings".As pornography is equated with art, bad pornography is equated with art. (W. McElroy, 1995:). Sd she states in her definition of pornography, the preface proceeds to offer a value neutral definition as she states and after this definition is another section that asks whether pornography is good or bad and here also she is non-committal saying that there are diverse shades of opinion on whether graphic portrayals of men and women are good. Further she proposes to deal this point from a aesthetic viewpoint saying that with regard to a specific work of pornography, one may label it as a good work of art or a bad work of art depending on aesthetics of the work. For her understanding, most works of pornography are artistically bad works as the people who create them are most often persecuted with the result that we do not have any great minds working on pornography

but people who just want to make a fast buck(W. McElroy, 1995:). The fact that pornography is bad is not based on aesthetic criticism but for the simple point that it dehumanizes women and makes them as objects or commodities and once this core argument is removed then the agenda of these people can get set rolling. By the same yardstick pornography can also dehumanize men and young boys, not exclusively women. Why pornography is equated with the oppression of women is simple because of the fact that most of the works of pornography deal with women's bodies while male porn ranks a very low next. This argument can also be extended to prostitution where we do not deny the existence of male prostitution but the overwhelmingly large number of prostitutes is women, who are force against their will. This strategic use of language to spread many distortions has been labeled a linguistic terrorism by Naomi Wolf in her celebrated work *Fighting Fire With Fire*. (Wolf, N. 1993:120-124).

They may be called as the 'purveyors of pulp' and their actions can find full and free expression only in the new media as this does not provoke a backlash and even if it does there are no immediate repurcussions.

The rise of the knowledge economy and the emergence of the new media have transformed all aspects of human activity and also have brought about hitherto unkown aspects into emergence like internet pornography, cyber terrorism, virtual reality etc. Tracing this a few decades back, we see that Alvin Toffler's Future Shock signaled the end of the industrial society and pointed to emergence of newer forms of economic organization where information was the key factor and input in production. He postulated a threefold model of development starting from the agricultural and the industrial revolution- to the rise of post-industrial society, knowledge economy or the new economy by whichever name it is known. Since the revolution is only beginning we cannot characterize it fully as we do not know in which direction it will steer the whole world towards. It is this ambiguity

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