

Distribution: Limited

SHS-85/CONF.608/12
Paris, 16 November 1985
Original: English

UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL,
SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

International Meeting of Experts (Cat. VI) on the
social and cultural causes of prostitution and strategies
against procuring and sexual exploitation of women

PROSTITUTION IN EGYPT

by

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31 OCT. 1985

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Division of Human Rights and Peace

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The Harem of the god Amoun

Prostitution is linked in history with the birth of patriarchal society. Before patriarchy was instituted as a system, women had no reason to prostitute themselves. As long as matriarchal systems held sway, both women and men were equal, and enjoyed the same social and personal freedoms. But class and patriarchy relegated women to an inferior position, and progressively deprived them of their equal, or even superior, status with men. They started to suffer discrimination in all areas whether economic, political or legal. Monogamy was forced upon them, whereas men were permitted to marry more than one woman, or to have concubines and mistresses. And with women practising prostitution, considered as one of the oldest professions in the world, double moral standards started to prevail.

A prostitute was a woman who had sexual relations with a man to whom she was not married in return for a monetary payment. But in the early days such women were not looked down upon. On the contrary they were often highly respected and even considered sacred, since the first institutions where prostitution flourished were the temples of the gods.

In ancient Egypt the god Amoun indulged in sexual relations freely with many women, concealing his debauches under a religious guise. Families chose their most beautiful daughters, and offered them to the priests of his temple. As soon as they grew too old to satisfy the sexual appetites or tastes of the priests, they were permitted to leave the temple surrounded by all due respect. Often they would marry into noble families and enjoy the greatest honours and respect.⁽¹⁾ Girls

(1) Niazi Hetata, Garaim El Bagha'a, Dar El haab, Cairo, 1961, P. 14.

practised prostitution until they married. A special category of holy prostitutes was constituted of the priestesses in the temples. It was classified as the "harem of the god" or the "harem of Amoun".⁽¹⁾ The mistress of Amoun was called "Mareet Amoun". She was the daughter of the emperor "Ramses" the great. Her father married her and she became the first lady of the Kingdom and replaced her mother "Isis". He bestowed on her the title of the "Great Spouse", god of the two worlds.

Recently archaeologists prospecting in the town of "Akhmeem" discovered a finely sculptured statue of her burn in clay stone which had calcified over thirty three centuries of time. They dug four metres deep into the ground to come upon it. On her crown the patches of colour could still be seen, and her lips were painted red. Around her waist she wore a belt.

After the Arab Invasion

Holy prostitution continued to exist during the Greek, Roman and Ptolemic era and was considered as a source of revenue for the temples. At the time of the Roman Empire and after the Arab invasion it was widely practised as a part of the corrupt and licentious life style which characterised the behaviour of rulers, princes and even ordinary men. "Ibn Ias" mentions that during festivals men used to celebrate holy occasions by quenching their lust in the arms of prostitutes.⁽²⁾

The historian "Al Makvizi" mentions that prostitutes with unveiled painted faces walked the streets and roamed on the outskirts of the cities. They often spent the whole night and part of the day on the banks of the river in Cairo.

Taxing whore houses

During the reign of the "Mamelukes" prostitution was so rampant that the rulers considered it a recognized profession, and starting from the year 1250 levied taxes on whore houses. Such taxes or dues were called

(1) Etienne Drioton and Jacques Vandier "Misr" translated by Abbas Bayumi Matabaat Misc 1950, p. 524

(2) Ibn Iyas, Kitab Tareekh Misr al Mashhour bibadae el Zohour f, Wakai Al Oumour. Vol I First Edition Al Hatba'elAmiriya Boulac 1311 P. 46.

"Prerogatives of the Sultan and Procedures of his Diwan". This continued until the reign of "Al Zahu Bibras" who started to campaign against prostitution. He declared it to be illegal and abolished tax levies on whore houses in 1267.⁽¹⁾

The increasing practice of prostitution necessitated that "virtuous women" be protected from "falling into sin". An institution was formed in Cairo to take care of divorces, or abandoned women until they returned to their husbands, or remarried. The institution was called "Ribat El Baghdadeya".⁽²⁾ However when the Turks entered Egypt prostitution was made legal again and was subjected to systems of inspection and taxation.

The French invaded Egypt in 1798. They housed the prostitutes in a special district of "Ezbekeya", opened musical ballees, bars and other establishments, and brought in women of different nationalities from Europe. Whore houses were visited by French soldiers and venereal diseases spread amongst them. The French authorities promulgated a law which applied the death penalty to any soldier visiting one of these whore houses, or receiving one of the prostitutes in his rooms.⁽³⁾

Prostitution continued to be taxed until 1837 when Mohamed Ali made it illegal. It had become a source of much disease and scant revenue.

Prostitution is organized

The British occupied Egypt in 1882. The authorities fearing that disease might spread among soldiers made legal provisions in order to organize the profession, and established systems of health inspection. The Ministry of Interior issued a circular on the 11 November 1882 which aimed at limiting the spread of venereal diseases. In the month of July 1885 regulations governing health inspection of prostitutes were issued by the authorities, and in 1896 a new set of regulations were added in order to control whore houses. Such houses were refined as places where two or more of the women who habitually practised fornication were gathered.⁽⁴⁾

(1) Al Makrizi Vol. 2 P. 104.

(2)

(3) Abdel Rahman Al Gabarti "Agaib Al Athar fil Taragim Wal Akbar, Al Matbaa Al Amiraya, 1899, Vol 4, P. 60.

(4) Al Magmouwa Al Dāima Lil Kararat Al Masreya Vol 2 "Beyout Al Aahirat".

The abolition of prostitution in Egypt

During the year 1949 the government issued the military order number 76 abolishing whore houses. If a prostitute had sexual relations with a man this in itself was not considered an offence. However if a woman was in the habit of having relations with men for a fee she was considered guilty of prostitution, and made liable to prosecution under the law number 68 article 9 paragraph 3. This law dates from the year 1951, and was promulgated by the Wafd party when it came to power.

In Egyptian Society some people have opposed the legal abolition of prostitution on condition that it is subjected to strict regulation. This view considers that legalizing prostitution helps to protect "virtuous women" from being subjected to seduction and temptations and would safeguard the family. In addition it permits health inspection and prevention of widespread disease both amongst the women and amongst the men who visit them.

But the prevalent view is that legal abolition is the best course. Not to do so is against morality, and transforms the state into an instrument involved in organization of corruption. As a result a Cabinet decree issued in 1932 abolished licences for prostitutes and established the public morals police corps. In 1937 the new Egyptian penal code included an article punishing men who lived out of the earnings of a prostitute. (1)

Egyptian laws and prostitution

The Mixed Penal Code of 1867 made hardly any mention of prostitution except in article 240 which states: "A pimp who incites young men or women below the age of 21 years to evil practices leading to rape is to be punished by a period of imprisonment not less than one month and not exceeding one year".

Article 241 increases the penalty if the offence is committed by a father or a mother or the guardian of a minor.

(1) Kanoun Al Oukoubat Al Masri 1937
Article 272 of the Egyptian Penal Code.

These legal provisions did not enforce penalties for prostitution but were directed against acts which affected the moral behaviour of minors leading to rape of young girls.

The law number 68 promulgated in the year 1951 provided for penalizing:

1. Acts of prostitution if practised habitually;
2. Acts of prostitution whether practised by males or females.

The term used in dealing with females was "Prostitution" whereas in males it was replaced by the term "licentiousness". The law also included penalties for acts calculated to facilitate the practice of prostitution in females or immorality in males, or which could be considered as an incitement to such practices.

3. Acts inciting others to practise prostitution on condition that the aim is to satisfy the lust of others than the person accused of incitement.
4. International trading in prostitutes (white slave trade) if carried on by Egyptians, or if introducing persons into the country with the aim of engaging in prostitution.
5. The provision of housing or premises, or entertainment establishments where prostitutes can carry on their trade.
6. The advertisement of prostitution in an open or disguised way.

What is meant by prostitution?

In law number 68 issued by the Wafd government during the year 1951 it is mentioned that prostitution means "practising fornication with people indiscriminately". This definition is drawn from a judgement issued by the "Court of Appeal" in which incitement to prostitution is described as incitement to the indiscriminate practice of fornication with different people". The judgement went on to differentiate between cohabitation of spouses and prostitution as follows: "The cohabitation of a man and a

woman who are linked by conjugal relations cannot be considered as a form of licentiousness or prostitution liable to punishment by law, since only such practices as involve indiscriminate licentious relations with a number of people are to be looked upon as constituting a criminal offense.

Prostitution under Egyptian Law can be seen as extending to a wide range of licentious behaviour since:

- The offender can be either a man or a woman.
- The practices involved are indiscriminate in nature that is are repeated with more than one person.
- The definition does not necessitate the existence of a monetary remuneration.

The intention probably was to chose a definition which did not make proof of the offense a difficult matter to obtain. It was assumed that repetition of licentious acts with a number of people could only have profit as its aim. Perhaps this explains why in its judgements the Court of Appeal tended to consider that if a woman was proved to have accepted a monetary payment, this in itself was sufficient proof to condemn speaking prostitution could not be considered to have taken place according to Egyptian law unless the act occurred on several occasions, that is tended to be habitual.

In addition men clients are not guilty of prostitution even if caught in the act of having sexual relations with a prostitute in a whore house. They are elevated to the status of witness against the woman who has satisfied their sexual need.

Studies on Prostitution in Egypt

Despite a diligent search spread over several months I have not succeeded in coming upon many studies or research papers or articles on the subject of prostitution in Egypt. In fact they are rather rare. Amongst them is a study of prostitution published in 1961 by Dr. Niazi Hetata, one time head of the "Public Morals Police Corps" ^{1/}. He presented this study, which is mainly a doctorat degree. The prevalent view which discernible throughout Dr. Niazi Hetata's paper is that "prostitutes" are to be considered as "social and moral offenders or deviants".

The same year another study was published by the "National Institute for Sociological and Criminological Research" ^{2/}. The attitude towards prostitution

1/ Niazi Hetata, Garaim El Gaha, Dar Matabi El Shaab, 1961.

2/ Al Bagha fil Kahira, Manshourat Al Markaz Al Kawmi lil Bouhouth Al Igtimaeya wal Ginaeya, 1961, p. 137.

differs little in this paper from the previous one, but there is a section which deals with the psychology of women prostitutes and their personalities.

The general conclusion of this section is that prostitutes have an unbalanced or abnormal psychological constitution. They are divided into three categories:

1. Those who possess a psychopathic personality.
2. Mentally retarded women.
3. Women who have failed to adopt socially or mentally to their surroundings.

The research in this paper was carried out on a sample of 1,055 women practising prostitution and whose ages varied from 15 to 29 years. The most salient points in the research may be summarized as follows:

1. Statistics from the "Bureau for Protection of Public Morals" show that the number of females inciting to prostitution during the period 1950-1959 rose from 375 to 1972. During the same period the number of whore houses was 47 in 1950 and 138 in 1959.

2. One third of the women had migrated from alone from rural areas to Cairo in search of work and an income.

3. One third of the women had started out as domestic servants, as a first job in the city.

4. Of the total number of prostitutes in the sample 39.4 % continued to work as domestic servants, while 24.4 % were hawkers. The rest found jobs in entertainment houses, dance clubs, cabarets or worked on and off as "comparses" in film or theatre plays.

5. Three quarters of the women were illiterate and came from poor families.

6. Many of the women were forced into marriage under the pressures of an exploiting man, or as a means to gain protection for themselves when dealing with the police or clients. A good proportion of these ended up after divorcing by becoming the sole supporters of their children, or other members of the family such as a father, a mother, or young brothers and sisters.

7. Half of the women drink alcohol to please their clients, but only 9.7 % smoke "hasheesh", also mainly as a gesture to their clients (according to the women themselves).

8. The women are exposed to great humiliation by public opinion which considers prostitution as a shame, and they are despised and mistreated by the police and the judiciary, since they are outlawed both morally and legally. Some families have recourse to killing a woman member if she practices prostitution.

9. Seventy per cent of the women are frigid.

The economic and social factors which are at the basis of prostitution amongst women and which lead initially to their migration from rural areas to the city are no longer a matter of doubt. Nevertheless the psychological observations in this study were not linked in any way to the social aspects of the problem. Even the mental problems which many of these women faced, such as depression, or hysteria, were considered as personality traits rather than as the product of their situation. The mental constitution of these women was depicted as being psychopathic, or as characterised by an inability to adapt to their surroundings either socially or psychologically. These mental factors were made to appear as the root cause for their choice of prostitution as a means of living, as though the problem lay within the minds of these women, rather than in the society to which they belonged or their environment.

Mental and Psychological Studies Related to Prostitutes

In this field also I was able to locate only one study published in the "National Magazine of Criminology"^{1/}. It is based on the utilization of the "Ten Ink Spots" test. The researchers who were engaged in this study had started out with an assumption that a prostitute is necessarily a woman whose human relations were unbalanced and disturbed. This imbalance or disturbance would necessarily be reflected in her awareness of human images as imagined in the different ink spots.^{2/}

The research paper ends with a certain number of observations.

1. The women were unable to visualize total human beings. Even when they did the image would be closer to that of a dead body than of a living person. Or if the person is alive he or she would show distortions and engage in strange activities akin to those of ghosts, or devils, or wild ferocious animals.

2. Mechanical movements tended to predominate over spontaneous living movements. The result was reactions such as - "open eyes" - "stretched out fingers" - an "erect penis" - "thighs stretched apart" - "legs lifted in the air" - "rigid arms". Mechanical movements seemed to reflect the muscular tension and spasms experienced by the prostitute.

1/ Al Magala Al Ginaeya Al Kawmeya, July 1958 (Sowar Al Insan fi Azhan Al Baghaya, p. 89, Rousoum Al Baghaya, p. 105).

2/ An ink spot is drawn on a sheet of white paper which is then folded at the middle with the ink spot showing. The paper is pressed with the fingers, and strange figures are formed by the spread of the ink. Ten of these figures were used to provoke the imagination of these women. This is called Herman Rorshah Test

3. Reactions and responses elicited among the women were often related to violent tearing apart of the body, or scattering of its organs into detached pieces. Perhaps this could be explained by the attitude of the prostitute to her own body: namely an exaggerated muscular evocation of the various parts of her body, or being preoccupied with its parts, in the same way as a sick woman would feel towards the diseased painful areas of her physique. It would appear that a prostitute remains at the early primitive stage of mental development, a stage in which she is almost totally absorbed in her physical sensations or perhaps even if she has developed further the practice of prostitution which involves continuously bodily contact (without desire or volition on her part) is responsible for her withdrawal from external human preoccupations to a narcissistic fixation on her body (p. 94).

4. Prevalence of reactions which express aggressive and violent feelings directed towards the subject herself or towards external objects. These aggression factors exhibit themselves in visualizations expressing a tearing apart of the body, or a body without a head, or female body with legs amputated below the knee, or a man with his belly slashed, or a body bleeding from its wounds, or a person who is neither a man nor animal and who although human is getting ready to devour someone, or two people fighting (p. 94).

"All the women without exception seem to carry with them a distorted vision of other beings. This expresses the disturbance in their human relations and in their feelings towards their own bodies, although it does not necessarily mean that they are similar in their mental make up. In other words they may have one or other personality trait in common without exhibiting an identical personality pattern" (p. 94).

The researchers finally concluded:

1. Most of the responses of the prostitutes included one or other reference to the body of the human being or to their own bodies.

2. The prostitute's consciousness of the human body as expressed by the images she visualizes in the ink spots demonstrate her inability to see it as a harmonious whole, and to relate its different parts and organs to one another in a healthy and normal way. This supports the inference that the behaviour of a prostitute is conditioned by the fact that her image of the human body is fundamentally disturbed.

The drawing or designing test was based on asking each one of the women to sketch the image of a human being, an animal, and a plant. After examining the sketches the researchers came to a certain number of conclusions:

1. The prostitutes do not exhibit the same personality pattern but tend to differ. Some of them can be grouped under the hysterical pattern. Still others tend to be psychotic while a number of them can be considered to be balanced and to possess a normal capacity for social adaptation.

2. The personality of prostitutes is dominated by elements of the pregenital phase, although a minority are relatively mature and have developed as far as the phallic or even oedipal phase.

3. The majority of prostitutes avoid drawing a human body and proffer the excuse that this is a difficult exercise. The real reason behind this refusal is the fact that it is the subject of a conflict central around the human relations of the prostitute with other people whether men or women.

4. In their drawing the women had a tendency to link up contradictory features, and to change the normal proportions of things. These same leanings are exhibited by recalcitrant or deviant youth.

Further studies about prostitutes are required:

In Egypt to the present time the prostitute remains a woman who is not only oppressed by society, by laws, by the moral code of conduct and religion, but also by researchers, social scientists, and legal experts. For she is still a victim of the patriarchal class relations which prevail not only in Egypt but in most countries of the world. As a result we need an increasing number of studies, and more research work which would deal with them as a social and human phenomena, as a social problem closely interlinked with the political and economic structure dominant in society.

We need studies and research work capable of responding to the following questions:

1. What is the real definition of prostitution? Is it only sale of the body? It is also sale of the mind?

2. What is the difference between a woman who sells her body by signing a marriage contract and a woman who does it without a contract?

3. If a man buys a woman's body to satisfy his sexual appetite, and a woman sells her body to feed her children, who of the two is the prostitute?

4. If a woman is obliged to depend on her husband for her livelihood what does she do if her husband divorces her? What does she do if she faces a situation where she and her children are bereft of any means of livelihood while she herself possesses no qualifications and has never been trained

to work, so that the only vocation made available to her by society is that of a prostitute? And who is responsible for this situation?

a) The father or the family that forced her to be dependant on her husband.

b) The society which closed all possibilities of earning a living to her except through prostitution?

c) What is the relationship between sex tourism and open or disguised prostitution? If a country depends on sex tourism to attract hard currency, and uses open or disguised prostitution as one of the means to attract tourists, what would be the difference between this state and a mafia of white slave traders or pimps?

d) Does prostitution flourish under all systems whether they are capitalist or socialist or do differences exist? Does prostitution in "developing countries" increase the more they become linked to the world capitalist market and dependent on Western capitalist circles? Did prostitution increase in Egypt for example during Sadat's reign (1970-1981) in comparison to what it was under Nasser's regime (1952-1970) research is needed to answer this question. But there are some observations that we have to consider.

General observations on the situation in Egypt

1. The national model of development which prevailed during Nasser's regime (1952-1970) put emphasis on national production, industrial and agricultural development, nationalisation of banks and big companies, and comprehensive planning, based on public sector ownership of key sectors of the economy.

2. Starting from 1974 the Sadat regime promoted another model of development called "El Infitah" (open door policy) which shifted the direction of development for industrial and agriculture production to import-export activities, tourism, to black market operations, land speculation, foreign investment by foreign banks and companies, luxury urban construction, hotels for tourists, and to consumption goods needed by the privileged minority. The majority of men and women became victims of an increased rate of unemployment, inflation, of the deterioration of public services and the contradictions between commercial values on the one hand and religious values on the other.

To promote foreign imported goods women's bodies were used in advertisements, and to promote tourism women were used in half naked belly dances and disguised prostitution, to attract visitors from the west and from rich oil Arab countries.

But to fight against Nasserism and socialism the Sadat regime promoted Islamic fundamentalism. The religious revival became a visible phenomenon and women were pressurized to wear the veil under the name of Islam.

3. With the open door policy there was a spread of veil among women and an increase in sex tourism, use of women bodies in advertisements.

The limited economic liberalization was accompanied by a limited political (or social or personal or even sexual) liberalization which could operate as long as there was no threat to the regime.

4. This double game was encouraged by neo-colonial powers and ruling elites to promote notions of modernization and liberalization linked to consumerism, sex tourism, pornography, etc. in so far as this encourages commercial activities and selling of their goods. But at the same time, they gave support and assistance to religious fundamentalist movements either directly or through intermediaries in order to maintain control of the masses of people and prevent enlightened progressive ideas from spreading.

5. Women are the first victims of this double game. As consumers and sex objects they are called upon to become more liberal and more modern. That is what we witness amongst women of the urban elite, women working in branches of multinationals in Egypt, women in tourism hotels and night clubs. But the mass of Egyptian women in rural and urban areas are told to stay at home (because of increased unemployment) and wear the veil.

6. Poverty increased especially in rural areas and peasants (men and women) started to migrate to the cities (or to rich oil Arab countries). In the city those men and women are exposed to different types of exploitation. Women are more exploited when they work as house servants, or when they become prostitutes. Exploitation is both economic and sexual. They are also exposed to psychological exploitation. A combination of western acculturation and religious indoctrination have become the daily mental nutrition of those women.

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Cairo, June 1985.