Beyond Consent: Rethinking Approaches to Sex Tourism in the Global South

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ABSTRACT

Sex tourism is a complex, multi-billion-dollar industry entangled with issues of consent, exploitation, and power imbalances. Traditional frameworks for understanding consent — dominance feminism and sex-positive feminism — offer limited insights into the nuances of sex tourism. In this paper, I argue that the concept of consent is too narrow to embody the social, political, and economic complexities of agency, sex work, and exploitation within the realm of sex tourism in the Global South specifically. Additionally, I seek to establish an alternative framework for understanding sexual relations within the realm of sex tourism, encouraging divestment from and addressing the lack of applicability of conventional consent frameworks. In this paper, I apply dominance feminism and sex-positive feminism frameworks to the context of sex tourism and discuss their implications and shortcomings. Following this, I expand upon Daniel Loick's (2017) politics of forms of life to establish a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing the complexities of sex tourism. I intend for this paper to serve as a starting point for an approach to sex work and agency in the context of sex tourism that does not simply rely on a rigid, binary framework of consensual or non-consensual as a measure of goodness and to build upon literature that seeks to recognize the agency of sex workers while also recognizing the broader social, political, and economic contexts in which sexual encounters occur within this realm.

Introduction

Sex tourism, or travel for the purpose of having sex, typically with sex workers, is a growing multibillion-dollar industry in which predominantly males from the Global North travel to countries in the Global South (Barger Hannum 2002). The industry is fraught with contention, controversy, and misunderstandings — child sex tourism and sex trafficking are often associated with and inseparable from adult sex tourism in common conceptualizations of the industry. Within the context of sex tourism occurring in the Global South with those from the Global North purchasing sex, questions of marginalization and economic and sociocultural power imbalances and their impact on consent arise (Barger Hannum 2002). Although there is literature that exists on sexual exploitation within sex tourism, consent and its applicability or inapplicability to sex work, and the exercise of agency in sex work, there is a dearth of literature that applies dominant understandings of consent to sex tourism in the Global South to reveal the unsuitability of the standard in this sphere. With the goal of addressing this gap in the literature, I intend to build on O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor's (2004) insightful assertion that sex tourism "[...] is not easily accommodated within either radical feminist or sex radical frameworks" through exploring how both frameworks conceptualize consent in this context and providing an alternative model to address better the situational complexities that surround the subject (93).

Therefore, in this paper, I will apply dominant understandings of consent to the context of sex tourism in the Global South to show that the debate around sex tourism often replicates a strict consensual versus non-consensual binary as a metric for goodness that cannot properly account for the contextuality and complexity of consent and agency in

OPEN ACCESS

Citation: Allenby, K (2025) "Beyond Consent: Rethink Approaches to Sex Tourism in the Global South." *Spectrum* Issue No. 15

doi: 10.29173/spectrum292

Received: Sept 2024
Accepted: April 2025
Published: Sept 2025

the industry. More specifically, I will explore dominance and sex-positive feminist conceptualizations of consent and consent within sex tourism as said dominant understandings, elucidating how both suggest an unsuitable standard for evaluating sex work in this context, whether that is by further victimizing marginalized women through rendering their agency obsolete or obfuscating the broader power imbalances that contribute to the industry and its harms with a nuance-avoiding consensual versus non-consensual binary, respectively. In support of my analysis, I will explore the slippages between sex work, sexual exploitation, and sex trafficking in literature on the subject as they operate to invalidate female sexual agency and uphold the consensual versus non-consensual binary. In doing so, I establish my main argument that the concept of consent is too narrow to effectively encompass the social, political, and economic complexities of agency, sex work, and exploitation in the context of sex tourism in the Global South. As a solution, I suggest a divestment from using consent as a lens for understanding the relational activities occurring within the industry and propose a more holistic model based on Daniel Loick's (2017) politics of forms of life that both recognizes and validates the legitimate harms posed by sex tourism through situating it within the context of historic and ongoing colonialism and related sexual violence without eroding the agency and sexuality expressed by women in the industry.

What Is the Global South?

Given the history, breadth, and complexity of colonialism, the summary provided here will not be sufficient to entirely encapsulate every dimension of the relationship between the Global North and the Global South. Even so, in this section, I intend to provide a brief but concise explanation of the existing inequitable structures between countries that create the conditions that give rise to the sex tourism industry. This is not to suggest that sex tourism does not exist in nations falling under the Global North umbrella — as explained by Jillian Grouchy, nations become popular for sex tourism when there is a significant level of poverty and unemployment, as these factors drive prostitution (2015, 1). Poverty exists in all nations to varying extents, and, therefore, prostitution presents as a global phenomenon. However, for reasons I will discuss later in this section, the Global South encompasses a disproportionate share of people living in poverty as measured by the international poverty line, income-group-specific poverty line, and societal poverty line (Baah et al. 2023). It follows, then, that sex tourism tends to be more prevalent in the Global South (Pohlmann 2023).

It is also worth noting that the label "Global South" raises some contention and risks oversimplifying the hugely heterogeneous group of countries commonly associated with this term. It is an abstract, non-geographical concept with no one universally accepted definition. There are no definitive parameters within which a country must fall to receive said label; however, when used, the Global South category typically refers to the postcolonial and developing member countries of the UN's G77[1] (Brooke-Holland, 2024).

For the purposes of my discussion of sex tourism, I use Global South to refer to countries such as Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Kenya, and India, as they are the focus of much of the existing literature on the subject given their status as popular sex tourism locations. I do not intend to homogenize the experiences of people in these nations but, instead, use the label to speak to the broader pattern of those with comparatively higher socioeconomic statuses — that is, typically White, Western men — travelling for sex with marginalized women in comparatively poorer nations.

Colonial Logic and Sex Tourism

Colonialism refers to the social formation and corresponding set of practices by which one nation imposes its will upon another, exploiting resources and peoples and unsettling or eradicating local systems of control. The logic that undergirds colonialism is imperialistic, positioning the colonists as superior and, therefore, justified in their subjugation of other people and the extraction of their resources (Biswas, 2020). Colonialism perpetuated by the Global North has left a legacy tangible in the Global South's disproportionate share of the global poor, their loss of cultural groups and practices, unstable political systems, and their lack of vital health, education, and food infrastructures resulting from centuries of resource extraction, the displacement or genocide of Indigenous populations, and the breakdown of local social, political, and economic structures (Singh, 2023).

With regard to tourism, the colonial aftermath presents itself through the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990). As Kachipande (2023) asserts, the way tourists "gaze" upon the subject of their holiday (that is, the land and people) is shaped by identifying the difference between their sociocultural environment and that of the host (7). In the context of a tourist from the Global North visiting the Global South, global inequalities resulting in part from the legacy of colonialism inform this identified difference, and, in turn, this difference informs the power imbalance between them. The guest consumes the services and resources of the

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host, enjoying and displaying wealth, rights, and freedoms often unreachable to locals in the tourism industry, situating the host as a subordinate to the guest both in role and socioeconomic status (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004; Kachipande 2023). This economic power imbalance further benefits the guest through access to experiences at a price far lower than similar sexual experiences in their more affluent home countries — O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) refer to this wealth of sexual opportunity as a "sexual Disneyland" (84).

Within the realm of sex tourism, further power imbalances exist along racial and gendered lines. Poverty and a lack of educational opportunity in the Global South create the conditions for the sex work industry, and marginalized women selling sex then capitalize on the tourist's gaze of the exotified "Third World woman" — a colonial and racialized conception of women from the Global South that posits them as submissive sexual objects that will treat White westerners "[…] as gods […]" (Gezinski et al. 2016, 791; Pohlman 2023). This framing of women in the sex tourism industry in the Global South is quite common[2] and both perpetuates and profits from colonial constructs of domination, white supremacy, and patriarchal constructions of women of colour. Therefore, as O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) put it, "the asymmetry of power between European and North American sex tourists and their local or migrant sexual partners is also racialized" (86). Through this lens, then, we can view tourism in which a guest from the Global North travels to a country in the Global South for sex with a local woman as perpetuating colonial logics of dominance and superiority, whether the logic is engaged in explicitly for the sake of fulfilling sexual fetishes or inadvertently benefited from due to the structures that give rise to the industry. It is these multiple intersecting power asymmetries across sociopolitical, economic, racial, and gendered lines at play within the sex tourism industry that complicate consent-giving and, as I suggest, make necessary an understanding of the relational activities in this sphere that divests from standard sexual consent frameworks.

A Framework for Consent

I will begin my discussion by exploring the origins of nonsexual consent to establish a baseline for subsequent understandings of sexual consent. Using Weber's (2007) overview of the development of the social contract theory with consent as one of its central tenets, consent, broadly, is an agreement between parties that is explicit, revocable, and given freely without exploitation and coercion. This baseline of consent then establishes the model for sexual consent. While consent scholars debate the minutiae of the definition, sexual consent generally refers to an agreement between two parties to engage in sexual activity in which the agreement is devoid of coercion, force, or exploitation. When we apply this understanding of consent to the context of sex tourism in the Global South, an immediate blurring of consent in sexual relations becomes apparent. If consent is freely given, non-exploitative, and uncoerced, can we consider the sexual relations that take place in the sex tourism industry across racial, class, gender, and global borders genuinely consensual? Or, more provocatively, is consent even a helpful metric in this circumstance?

Dominance Feminism's Conception of Consent and Sex Tourism

MacKinnon (1989) and Jeffreys (1999) are representative of dominance feminism's position on consent as it relates to sex, sex work, and the sex tourism industry. Broadly, for dominance feminism, consent in sex work operates as an illusion of choice (Jeffreys 1999, 180). For dominance feminism, any woman choosing to engage in sex work within the sex tourism industry is doing so under the situation of poverty, homelessness, and family obligation, which the patriarchy socially and politically constructs (Jeffreys 1999, 180). The patriarchal system prioritizes and facilitates male subjugation and use of female bodies and sexuality, creating the conditions for commodified access to their bodies. Therefore, women in the industry exploit their sexual and economic inequalities for personal and commercial gain (MacKinnon 1989, 195). The dominance feminism logic implies that, if not for the unequal power relationships under a system of male supremacy, sex work would not present as a viable option, as it exists only under the circumstances of exploitation. According to this line of argumentation, because global inequalities inform the conditions under which sex tourism in the Global South arises, and sex work itself is inherently exploitative, sex work within the sex tourism industry in the Global South is always non-consensual (Kachipande 2023; MacKinnon 1989).

However, under dominance feminism's conception of consent and sex tourism in the Global South, several slippages and false equations occur, operating to obfuscate female agency and frame the debate around sex tourism in an already-victimizing light. In much of the literature on the subject, slippages occur between the concepts of sex work, sex trafficking, and sexual exploitation, framing them as the same and constructing sex workers as always already victims, regardless of their understanding of their agency. For example, Jeffreys (1999) considers sex tourism as

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international commercial sexual violence, "prostitution tourism," and the exploitation of women's bodies under global capitalism, exemplifying Benoit's (2021) argument that, in the literature on sex tourism, the "prostitution problem" is framed as an issue of sexual exploitation of women (180, 185; 2). Benoit (2021) also notes that radical feminists do not distinguish between victims of sex trafficking and prostitution. In the radical feminist understanding, sex -trafficked women and prostitutes are both victims of enslavement, given that, according to their understanding, prostitution requires unequal gender relations under which prostitutes are exploited and of which are capitalized upon by the man purchasing women's sexuality (Benoit 2021).

Although it is true that sex tourism can facilitate commercial sex trafficking or that trafficked women are often forced into prostitution, blanket conflations between sex tourism (prostitution) and sex trafficking frame participants in the industry as always victims, regardless of how they entered the industry or their motivations for doing so. This eliminates diversity among sex workers in their degrees of oppression, privilege, status, and agency and, in this sense, frames all sex work in the sex tourism industry as inherently non-consensual if all or the majority of those in the industry have been trafficked (and, therefore, are all exploited). There are a variety of contextual complexities surrounding the decision to engage in the industry that this understanding of consent does not adequately address, and this construal of victims of sex trafficking and women involved in sex work both as victims of enslavement makes impossible the rational, informed choices to enter the sex tourism industry which we know women are making (Karandikar et al. 2022). Based on ethnographic research and interviews with female sex workers, Karandikar et al. (2022) demonstrate that women choose to engage in sex work for a variety of reasons, including economic independence from a male partner, for the ability to provide a better life for their children, and, for some, autonomous decision-making and freedom of choice (27-28). O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) also speak to the desire for locals to engage in the sex tourism industry as a means of gaining access to the privileges reserved for tourists, such as the food, medicine, personal care products, and other gifts tourists often give to their sexual partners (85). Therefore, even in situations that we may consider exploitative, women pursuing sex work often identify themselves as making rational choices in response to their environment rather than the powerless victims the dominance feminism logic establishes them as (Karandikar et al. 2022, 28).

Dominance feminism's understanding of consent in sex work as an illusion of choice due to the patriarchal structure of society also risks making consent meaningless regardless of the sexual context, sex work or otherwise. That is, under any circumstances in which a woman is having sex with a man, suggesting that consent is an illusion of choice because of the conditions of male domination strips consent of any meaning, given that the patriarchal structure of society is not limited to the realm of sex work (Halley 2016). However, suggesting that any heteronormative sexual relation renders women completely devoid of agency is impractical. To combat this, dominance feminism logic turns to affirmative consent (Halley 2016). The standard of affirmative consent emphasizes the clear, voluntary, often enthusiastic, and actively communicated expression of the desire to engage in each specific sex act. Further, proponents of the affirmative consent standard consider any sexual act a person does not excitedly desire a sanctionable offence (Halley 2016, 260). Janet Halley (2016) charges this evolution of dominance feminism's understanding of consent with requiring that sexual relationships have subjective wantedness rather than just an agreement to participate in order for consent to exist. Therefore, in the context of sex tourism, where sex is performed more as an economic exchange than a passionate, exciting, desirable escapade[3], the standard of affirmative consent risks labelling sex within the industry as always non-consensual, given that sex workers may not always want the relationship in the truest, most erotic sense. This standard, then, does not properly account for sex that can be consensual — that is, agreed upon by both parties and without explicit force or violent coercion — yet not necessarily desirable, exciting, or enthusiastic for the person providing the sexual service.

Lise Gotell (2008) further critiques dominance feminism's standard of affirmative consent as an effective means of understanding sexual relations. For Gotell (2008), affirmative consent is a neoliberal standard that operates to reorient sexual relations around individual risk management as the logic of neoliberalism atomizes and reinforces gendered sexual relations (866). In this sense, good sexual citizens are those who manage risk. The gendered liberal legal discourse of consent prescribes male risk management as seeking consent to prevent the risk of criminalization and female risk management as avoiding risky situations (heavy intoxication, overly flirtatious behaviour, being alone at night) and maintaining a strong regard for personal safety (Gotell 2008, 877, 880). It is under this conception of sexual subjects, I argue, that women in the sex tourism industry face portrayal as "risky women," devaluing their experiences of sexual violence and framing them as violable under the individualized risk management standard (Gottell 2008, 882). Therefore,

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Taylor 2004, 94). Whether driven by a desire to satisfy overtly racist fantasies or as a capitalization on the rewards of the globalization of Western culture and values that uphold Whiteness as a desirable trait, racial power dynamics lead to a demand for racialized and sexualized encounters with "the natives" (Cabezas 2002, 43). Framing the debate around sex tourism as oppression resulting from moralistic determinations of "good" or "bad" sexuality, as per the sex-positive logic, does not adequately address the fact that many using the sexual services of women in the Global South take pleasure in the power difference in the racial, gendered, and economic identity of the sex workers (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004). An application of a sex-positive conception of consent within the industry then fails to account for the full array of power relations operating behind consent given in this context by declaring that, so long as the woman agrees, the sex is consensual and that, by suggesting otherwise, we enact oppressive conditions on women. This understanding of sexual relations risks over-individualizing the act of consent giving through placing the determination of what is consensual or not solely in whether or not the woman has chosen to engage in sexual relations. As Gotell (2008) warns against in her critique of the gendered liberal legal discourse of consent, such individualizing risks constructing vulnerability as the fault of the woman — that is, if the woman chooses to engage in the sex tourism industry and consents to sex as a part of her profession, she is vulnerable because of her choice rather than racialized, classed, and sociopolitical power imbalances (883-844).

The recognition of women's sexual agency and agreement that moralistic determinations of "good" and "bad" sexuality are restrictive does not mean consent to sex in the sex tourism industry is, therefore, immune from the power relations that problematize consent. As O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) state, such power relations blur the boundary between consensual and non-consensual (98). Then, from the working definition of consent established by Weber (2007), in conditions where racial and economic imbalances exist, the circumstances of consent will always be inherently ambiguous regardless of whether the woman chooses to participate in the industry (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 98). In this sense, the sex-positive analysis of sex and consent in the context of sex tourism falls short of being an adequate response to the risk of harm posed by the industry (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 98). It is not as easy as declaring that because a woman chooses to partake in the industry (that is, was not trafficked into it), the decision is consensual; this reading creates a strict, narrow-sighted consensual versus non-consensual binary. As O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) assert, sex tourism primarily operates in an ambiguous space between consensual and non-consensual, given the situatedness of consent-giving in a context of broader inequality between tourist and local, Global North and Global South. The consensual versus non-consensual or exploitative versus non-exploitative binaries that tend to dominate conceptions of sex work, then, do not map well onto the ambiguous space in which sex tourism exists.

A critique of the sex-positive analysis is not to suggest that the dominance feminism argument is entirely correct or the preferred view of sex work in the sex tourism industry in the Global South, nor is a critique of dominance feminism's analysis a suggestion that sex-positive feminism is entirely blind to the inequalities faced by women in the industry. It is not necessarily true to suggest that all sex work in the sex tourism industry is non-consensual on the basis that sex work itself is exploitative and the result of sex trafficking. As Kesler (2002) argues, it is dangerous to second-guess women in the industry who state that they have freely chosen to engage in sexual labour (223). This desire to paint sex work as impossible to consent to forces victimization on women while conveniently ignoring that, in some sense, we are all victims of the capitalist system that requires us to sell some part of ourselves (that is, our labour, sexual or otherwise) for our survival (Kesler 2002, 223). That said, it is also not entirely accurate to hold the belief that because a woman chooses to engage in sex work, the choice is freely made devoid of coercion, force, or exploitation — that is, always consensual. While it is true that moralistic determinations of "good" and "bad" sexual behaviour are present in the debate regarding sex work and that such determinations are restrictive, I raise both sides of the argument to draw attention to the strict binary created when applying the standard of consent to the context of sex work in the Global South and establish that it does not adequately account for the context of local, national, and international material conditions and power imbalances underlying the decision to enter the industry or the harms present within it. With this consideration of the inapplicability of the standard of consent, I will now, in the following sections, suggest a divestment from using consent as a lens for understanding the relational activities occurring within the industry.

An Alternative Approach

An alternative framework I draw from to understand sex work in the sex tourism industry in the Global South is Daniel Loick's (2019) politics of forms of life, as this framework allows a reading of sex work that acknowledges harm while making space for women

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in instances where women in the industry experience sexual violation, their assault risks being discredited on behalf of their "risky" behaviour — in this case, engagement in the sex tourism industry.

As Gottell (2008) argues, there are gendered, racialized, and classed power relations that construct vulnerabilities in women (883). In the context of sex tourism in the Global South as created landscapes reliant on international economic, social, and political inequalities, these vulnerabilities are present yet disappeared from analysis under the affirmative consent standard (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 85; Gottell 2008, 883). The neoliberal logic reconstructs vulnerability as an individual problem; that is, if the women in the sex tourism industry were better at self-management, they would not find themselves turning to a lifestyle as risky and as threatened by sexual violence as sex work. Then, as Gotell (2008) presents as the conclusion of this line of thought, deviations from the standard of the responsible male sexual subject can be excused, given that the female sexual subject has already deviated from responsibility (885). This individualized understanding of responsibility and sexual safekeeping does not allow for an analysis of the greater global and historical political, social, and economic power dynamics that facilitate sex tourism in the Global South and leave women vulnerable to physical, sexual, and financial abuse. Therefore, the very women dominance feminism seeks to protect through blanket determinations of non-consent in sex work are then harmed two-fold by more contemporary iterations of consent under its logic: women's agency to choose sex work is invalidated, yet the factors that may encourage them to pursue such work are ignored under neoliberal individualizing logic — these women are already always victims, as sex work is inherently exploitative and likely the result of sex trafficking[4], yet they are simultaneously individually responsible for the results of their "poor risk management."

By ignoring the variety of reasons why women may engage in sex work by deeming the conditions exploitative under the patriarchy, dominance feminism constructs women as incapable of exercising social or economic power in oppressive conditions. Further, if we consider sex work inherently exploitative because the patriarchal structure of society provides a right of access to women's bodies, we fail to address other postcolonial structural inequalities that cause harm to sex workers in the Global South that may underlie the decision to engage in the industry, such as a lack of access to education, healthcare, safe and well-paid employment, political representation, and reliable food sources. Condemning sex work as inherently exploitative because of unequal gender relations, therefore, falls short of a more holistic and contextual understanding of the industry itself.

A Sex-Positive Conception of Consent and Sex Tourism

Alternatively, a sex-positive conception of the sex tourism industry in the Global South sees sex work as an expression of agency and locates the oppression within the industry not as the result of the patriarchal structure but from moralistic determinations of "good" and "bad" sexuality (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 91). The sex-positive conception of sex tourism challenges the notion that sex work in this context is inherently exploitative and non-consensual and supports the ability of women to build self-efficacy and choose their work regardless of its potential dangers (Karandikar et al. 2022, 29). Sex-positive advocates maintain that sex work is consensual in many instances and that the type of work one does and the conditions around intimacy should be decided by the woman. Dictating what women can and cannot do occupationally and intimately, then, is oppressive, forcing victimization onto them by undermining their consent and decision-making by labelling all sex work as exploitative and non-consensual (Kesler 2002, 223).

However, as O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor (2004) state, consent is neither given in a social, political, or economic vacuum nor can it be abstracted from the global and interpersonal power dynamics at play (98). As discussed in the Colonial Logic and Sex Tourism section, within the context of sex tourism in the Global South, there are multiple social, political, and economic power dynamics in operation that create an environment in which this form of sex work can flourish. Compounding these dynamics, sex tourism in the Global South is also partly a result of economic development policy aimed at increasing tourism industries in nations indebted to world financial institutions (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 84). As a result, tourists from the Global North represent a lucrative opportunity for women who otherwise lack stable or high-paying work; affluent tourists seek entertainment, creating a commodity market that also may mean access to services locals often do not have (running water, power, consumer services, and so on) as a result of significant investments into the tourism industry over investments in local infrastructure (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 86). While sex tourism is not always an explicit sector of the tourism economy, there is nevertheless a high demand for tourist entertainment in the form of sexual relations with locals.

Compounding this demand is the exotification of the racialized Other (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez

doi: 10.29173/spectrum292

to create and shape the conditions of sexuality in their specific spheres (412). To understand the politics of forms of life, I will briefly address what forms of life are, as is the starting point of Loick's theory. Forms of life are collective ways of life that exist in the "bundles of practices" that groups engage in (Loick 2017, 790). These ways of life are not always political in the traditional sense of parliamentary interventions or engaging with elected officials. Rather, a politicized understanding of what it means to live a good life then informs a collective's actions. This means that certain groups can perceive their way of life as reflecting and shaping a political existence, for which Loick (2017) provides examples such as the anti-authoritarian nurseries in the 1960s and 1970s, AIDS activism in the 1990s, and camping in public spaces during the Occupy protests (791). For Loick (2017), a politics of forms of life is about politicizing life itself rather than understanding political practice as separate from our way of life; in the context of sexual relations, then, a politics of forms of life frames them as a political question rather than a personal or a legal question (791; 2019).

Loick (2019) proposes his politics of forms of life as a way to move beyond the model of consent and better understand sexual relationality in his work "As if it were a thing: A feminist critique of consent." In his critique of consent, rather than the typical juridical approach to understanding intimate relations, Loick (2019) suggests situating sexual activities within a history of power, domination, and abuse to promote a sexual ethic sensitive to the "[...] specific normative structure of the social sphere [...]" (419). Juridicism, Loick (2019) suggests, centres law as the deciding ethical force in our society and frames sexual relations as legal questions — that is, consensual or non-consensual, legal or illegal. A juridical understanding, then, relies on the consensual versus non-consensual binary as a metric for the ethical goodness of sexual relations in the sex tourism industry. Sex thus takes the shape of a legal question that can be answered through a state's legal system, which, as scholars like Gotell (2008), Kesler (2002), Halley (2016), and Loick (2019) warn, risks individualizing vulnerability, imposing victimization, conflating consent with subjective wantedness, and decontextualizing sexual relations. As an alternative, a politics of forms of life "[…] seeks to transform the conditions of personal relationships without detouring through the state." (Loick 2019, 419). That is, allowing sex workers to determine the conditions of their intimate labour in ways that address their context-specific needs and understandings of what it means to live a good life without shaping their sexual experiences around the juridical consensual or non-consensual binary.

Under both the dominance feminism and the sex-positive understanding of sex tourism in the Global South, consent, whether its (im)possibility or its presence, is the operative notion in determining whether the sexual relationships occurring are or are not a violation. However, the application of consent as a means of measuring and understanding intimate relationships does not fully address the myriad of ways in which a sexual encounter may come to rise, consensual or otherwise (Gotell 2008; Loick 2019). In the context of sex work in the sex tourism industry in the Global South, women who are willingly providing sex are doing so in an environment facilitated by longstanding global economic relations they did not co-construct. Because these sexual agreements occur under unequal conditions within which the party providing a yes-or-no response had no part in shaping the larger context of the interaction, relying on consent without considering situatedness, as per the sex-positive logic, does a disservice to deeper analysis that could provide insight into tangibly improving sex workers' lives (Loick 2019, 413).

I argue that dominance feminism's logic also limits analysis, stymying any discussion regarding improving the quality of life for sex workers in the sex tourism industry that diverts from abolishing the industry in its entirety. Complete abolition, however, does not address the root cause of the sex tourism industry, nor does it allow for the recognition that, in some instances, women may legitimately choose to engage in sexual labour. As Kesler (2002) puts it, "just because someone cannot imagine why a woman would choose prostitution, does not mean that this is not in fact exactly what has happened" (223). Dominance feminism's logic does not allow for a woman to freely choose to enter the sex tourism industry, despite ethnographic evidence suggesting that some women not only perceive their choice as freely made but simultaneously empowering or beneficial (Karandikar et al. 2022). But, if there is no merit to the industry based on its inherent exploitative nature, attempting to improve conditions within it is not worthwhile. Both the dominance feminism's and sex-positive understandings of consent, therefore, limit the possibility for a more encompassing model of sexuality that holistically addresses harm, safety, and pleasure as they exist within the sex tourism industry in the Global South, instead leading to an oppressive and individualized form of subjectivity and intersubjectivity that blocks women from exercising social, cultural, and sexual power (Loick 2019, 412).

While the concept of consent struggles to hold up against conditions of asymmetry and partiality present in the sex tourism industry in the Global South, I argue that Loick's (2019) politics of forms of life facilitates a proper consideration of the social, political, and economic power relations relevant to the

doi: 10.29173/spectrum292

decision to engage in sex work in this context without invisibilizing forms of oppression outside the patriarchy, invalidating women's sexual autonomy, or creating short-sighted binaries as a means of analysis (413). Conversely to a sex-positive approach, it does not simply suggest more consent as a solution to the threat of violence or harm in the sex tourism industry, nor does this approach suggest the complete eradication of "prostitution tourism," as would the dominance feminism model (Jeffreys 1999, 2). Rather, a politics of forms of life advocates for community accountability, transformative justice, and everyday behavioural changes as a means of changing the lived experiences of women on an everyday level by allowing women to control the conditions of their intimacy (Loick 2019, 419). By avoiding the limitations of the consent framework, whether through a dominance feminism or sex-positive conception, we can focus more on improving the conditions of life for sex workers in the sex tourism industry.

In the context of sex tourism in the Global South, I propose that a politics of forms of life facilitates the protection of sex workers in the industry through its ability to see alternatives other than legal determinations of consent versus non-consent and resulting criminalization or complete abolition. We can see efforts to transform the conditions of sexual relationships without framing intimate labour as a legal or personal question in community sex worker unions (Asociación de Mujeres por el Bienestar y Asistencia Recíproca in Venezuela and Unión Unica in Mexico, for example), political advocacy to have sex work recognized as work and therefore subject to labour regulations, and social media movements addressing stigma against sex workers. These are all examples of approaches that emphasize accountability and justice and improve the conditions of sex work in the sex tourism industry under Loick's (2019) framework without an explicit focus on the (non)consensuality of intimate relations (Cabezas 2002, 46). These approaches exemplify the application of Loick's (2019) politics of forms of life to the sex tourism industry, given that they approach sexual relations and intimate labour as a political existence mouldable by advocacy and grassroots organizations rather than a legal or personal question. That is, the women establish the conditions around consent and sex work under the belief that they should be able to do so in a way that reflects their agency and addresses their specific needs, unique to their lifeways. In amplifying the voices of women and enhancing their ability to make political and social change within their particular sphere rather than placing the onus of determining sexual conditions in the hands of the state or failing to address contextualities that diversify the experience of sex workers, Loick's (2019) politics of forms of life also reflects the feminist and strength-based perspective to sex work advocated for by Karandikar et al. (2022) that recognizes the ability of women to shape their environments and build self-efficacy as a means to reclaim power in a patriarchal society (29).

In a world still affected by colonial logic and exploitation, the tourist from the Global North, whether by possessing features associated with Whiteness or citizenship in an affluent nation, represents access to a lifestyle and upward mobility otherwise unattainable to local persons (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 87). There is a need, then, for decolonial discourses that challenge the colonial privileging of Whiteness alongside improvements in the material conditions of the lives of people in the Global South such that proximity to Whiteness is no longer one of the only means of upward social mobility (Kempadoo 2000). While the dominance feminist and sex-positive discourses around consent fall short of addressing the colonial logic present in the sex tourism industry, a politics of forms of life makes overcoming social domination within the intimate terrain possible because it is sensitive to contextualities[5] (Loick 2019). This sensitivity to existing contextualities allows a more holistic understanding of sexual relations, intimate labour, and the harms that exist for women in the sex tourism industry by enabling us to trace the power dynamics that inform the practice of sex tourism and shape the lived experience of sex workers in the Global South.

Benoit (2021) also speaks to a framework other than consent for improving the lives of sex workers in the sex tourism industry by suggesting efforts that foster people's capabilities and address the structural conditions facilitating the industry, such as increasing access to occupational safety policies, universal basic income, education, housing, and healthcare (7). At a domestic government level, divesting funds from the tourism industry to local services, infrastructure, and employment would allow locals to find well-paying work outside of the sex tourism industry in particular, as the income and service disparity between tourist and non-tourist spaces operates as a pull factor toward sex tourism when no other feasible options are present. Additionally, the growth of the informal economic sector and the driving down of wages in the formal economy in countries like the Dominican Republic and Jamaica as a result of unfettered global capitalism make the promise of higher wages (that is, those provided by citizens of affluent nations) through sex work all the more attractive (O'Connell Davidson and Sánchez Taylor 2004, 85). By implementing more robust tourism and labour regulations, improving community self-

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sufficiency outside of the tourism sector, and diversifying industry, nations in the Global South can begin to divest from exploitative relations with the Global North that exacerbate the harms faced by sex workers.

Benoit's (2021) approach, I argue, operates on the same ethos of the politics of forms of life given its rootedness in the "terrain of life" (Loick 2019, 419). Both Benoit (2021) and Karandikar et al. (2022), whether by advocating for approaches that foster capabilities and choice or by recognizing the agency of women to choose sex work even under exploitative conditions, therefore demonstrate ways of thinking about sex tourism in the Global South that divert from the juridical consensual versus non-consensual binary created by dominance feminism's and sex-positive feminisms conceptions of consent and instead seek to reorganize and reframe sexual relations in the contextualized, non-state-based way that Loick's politics of forms of life allows (2019). In practice, therefore, by providing safety mechanisms within the industry specific to the needs and way of life of sex workers, opportunities for exiting the industry by way of education or other paid labour, a more equitable quality of life through greater access to the resources necessary for life, and addressing the social norms that reward Whiteness, we can address the risks associated with sex work in the postcolonial context without the devaluation of women's agency on the basis of non-consent and exploitation.

Conclusion

The application of traditional understandings of consent within the context of sex tourism in the Global South reveals the inadequacy of the standard in the face of the complexities that agency, economic, gendered, and colonial power dynamics and exploitation present. Both dominance feminism's and sex-positive conceptions of consent and perspectives on sex tourism in the Global South present limitations when used as a lens for fully understanding the nuances of giving consent in this sphere, leading to a strict consensual versus non-consensual binary and a conflation between sex work, sex trafficking, and exploitation that fail to account for the broader social, political, and economic inequalities within the relationship between the Global South and the Global North as they play out in the sex tourism industry.

While the dominance feminism perspective correctly draws attention to the systemic gendered power imbalances that drive women into sex work in the sex tourism industry and expose them to potential harm, it risks oversimplifying the experiences of sex workers through a broad assertion that all sex work is exploitative because of the underlying patriarchal structure of society. This proposition frames sex workers in the Global South solely as victims, neglecting their agency and diverse motivations for joining the industry and invalidating their ability to create viable spaces for themselves even under a patriarchal system by making "patriarchal bargains" (Karandikar et al. 2022). The sex-positive approach, on the other hand, emphasizes the autonomy and agency of sex workers and validates women's ability to give consent within sex work, locating exploitation and oppression within the moralistic determinations of "good" and "bad" sexuality. However, this lens risks overlooking the structural inequalities and power dynamics that shape the broader conditions that facilitate the sex tourism industry. In this way, there is an issue of partiality and asymmetry under the sex-positive conception of consent as applied to the sex tourism industry in the Global South (Loick 2019, 413).

Given the limitations of the application of consent within this context, a solution to the threat of sexual violence or exploitation cannot be one that simply recommends more consent (Loick 2019, 419). Therefore, I have proposed Loick's (2019) politics of forms of life as an alternative framework that allows for a more holistic approach to understanding and addressing the complexities of sex tourism, fosters capabilities and creates choices outside of sex work, and recognizes agency and self-efficacy. By considering the broader social, political, and economic contexts in which sexual encounters occur, this framework advocates for community accountability, transformative justice, and structural changes to reduce harm and improve the conditions of the lives of sex workers in the Global South without focusing on consent as the sole metric.

Ultimately, addressing the issues of sex tourism in the Global South requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond simplistic and reductionist notions of consent as exemplified by dominance feminism and sex-positive theoretical lenses. It requires addressing systemic inequalities, decolonizing discourses and structures, and providing support for individuals within the industry and opportunities for those who want to exit the industry. Without such comprehensive efforts, we cannot begin to address the root causes of the exploitation that is present within sex tourism in the Global South, nor can we empower individuals to make informed and empowered choices about their bodies and livelihoods.

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Notes

[1.] The G77 refers to itself as the Global South and consists of 134 member states.

[2.] See Gezinski et al. (2016) for a content analysis of sex tour websites and marketplace mythologies of racism, sexism, and imperialism.

[3.] However, it is not to suggest that sexual encounters in the sex tourism industry cannot be desirable or exciting for the person providing sexual services.

[4.] As per the dominance feminism logic.

[5.] In the context of sex tourism, I define contextualities to include colonial logic and resultant postcolonial power imbalances.

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