7

Sexual exploitation and the State

This chapter examines how sexual exploitation is configured both within states and across borders. While grooming, trafficking and **prostitution** are distinct phenomena, each deserving specific attention, it is also important to draw connections between these phenomena as they fall under the umbrella of sexual exploitation. A quick search on Google Scholar highlights that the term 'sexual exploitation' gained currency in the 1980s. At this time, scholarship began to broaden the scope of research about rape (Brownmiller, 1975) and abuse (a label used particularly in relation to children; Finkelhor, 1984), using sexual exploitation as a more encompassing label. Primarily associated with women and children, sexual exploitation evokes different forms of exploitative behaviours, ranging from sexual abuse and rape through to prostitution, which is often associated with grooming and trafficking in persons (Farley et al., 2004; Outshoorn, 2005). Put simply, grooming entails the building of a bond with a child, or anyone under the legal age of consent, for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking entails the transportation of bodies from one place to another for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Prostitution entails the exchange of sex for money and is considered a form of sexual exploitation by some (see, for example, Bindel, 2017).

By the end of this chapter, you will understand more about:

- the effects of social, political and economic inequalities within the state and between the *Global North* and *South* on sexual exploitation
- how to explore the phenomenon of online and localised grooming with reference to technology, '*race*', *class*, *gender* and institutional failure
- the process whereby states use fear of sexual exploitation to justify the tightening of border control and the deportation of migrants
- the lack of widespread criminalisation of demand in prostitution and sex tourism, and what this implies.

The word 'prostitution' has negative connotations. The fact that we use it to denote the activity does not mean we endorse the idea that the act of selling sex is always necessarily exploitative. We acknowledge that many prefer the term **sex work** and its overall more positive connotations. There are disagreements in the literature, and indeed between the authors of this book, about the nature of this activity. We want to allow some space for debate without providing a single unified view, or final argument on this, as we hope students are enabled to approach these debates with an open and critical mindset. To strike a compromise between the two positions, we will refer to the activity as prostitution, while we refer to those involved in it as sex workers.

In this chapter, we will think about whether and how grooming, trafficking and prostitution intersect, not just in terms of the similarities or overlaps between them, but also in terms of governmental responses towards them. In this way, we will also address them as discursive constructs.

Scholarly debates on these issues are not without controversy. However, there seems to be some agreement that grooming, trafficking and prostitution should be understood in the context of widespread economic inequalities, institutionalised **patriarchy** and **neoliberal globalisation**. Hence, this chapter reflects on the forces that shape the conditions for sexually exploitative relations. The trajectory towards a more interconnected world, punctuated by neoliberal globalisation (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of neoliberalism), has consequences that are of relevance for the way in which sexual exploitation may occur, but also for the way in which different societies understand it and intervene in it. In this market-driven, technology-enhanced context, bodies are increasingly made into disposable, surplus subjects.

The chapter recognises the push-and-pull factors of **migration** and inequality for exploited groups within a neoliberal globalisation context. We trace the beginning of both the **human rights** and the trafficking **discourses** on the global arena (Milivojevic and Pickering, 2013). More specifically, we will see how the human rights discourse represents deep contradictions between theory – that all human beings have equal rights – and practice – that some humans are privileged by nature of the position they occupy geographically, economically, socially and culturally. We then explore the intersections of migration, sexual exploitation and labour, trafficking and control. Spearheaded by international governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and embraced by states in an era of tightening borders, the trafficking discourse often conflates economic migration with human trafficking, simplifying a complex issue while relying on the criminal law as a tool of the state to intervene in and control immigration. We will explore, for example, how the trafficking discourse colludes with **abolitionism** in the context of prostitution.

Another theme we recognise in this chapter is the widespread use of the victim narrative across trafficking, prostitution and grooming discourses and how this impacts our understanding of **agency**, specifically its denial. We also deal with another form of denial: that of states' responsibility for **colonialism** and their supporting of postcolonial configurations. This is expressed through a renewed commitment to nationalism by states, a nationalism tied to ethnic groups, known as **ethnonationalism**. This is visible in nation-states' increasing efforts to curb and control migration through criminalisation. This process is evident across all issues under scrutiny: in prostitution, primarily through its conflation with sex trafficking, we find persistent attempts by states and other agencies to shift our attention away from inequality as being the root cause of prostitution, towards blaming the immorality and criminality of the other, be it the sex buyer, the human trafficker, or in some cases still, the sex worker, who has now largely been relegated to the status of victim. In the case of grooming, ethnonationalism and **femonationalism** (see Chapter 3) are

encapsulated by public discourses that point the finger towards British Asian men grooming white young girls, in the media and in the public domain.

The human rights turn

The human rights discourse represents one key development in the construction of a global shared cultural understanding, providing an instrument to define people's rights in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The creation of a system of cooperation supported by international governmental institutions such as the United Nations (UN) has consequences because of its ability to form binding agreements among **nations**, but also, and perhaps more crucially, its ability to construct and shape new ideas and principles which states should, in theory, abide by, and which people come to consider *sacred*.

Human rights, in the contemporary sense of the term, are a twentieth-century **Western** invention. Indeed, many of the principles stemming from religious morals do ascribe versions of what we would now understand as universal human rights, but our current description of human rights comes from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the UN in 1948. This universal declaration marked the beginning of conceptualising all human beings as having equal rights regardless of 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (Article 2, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Human rights have become an important, if not dominant, frame of reference, providing impetus for collective action, particularly for advocacy around the recognition of marginalised, stigmatised (as we see in Chapter 10, in the context of disability) and even criminalised groups. There are many examples of organisations using human rights as a principle on which to construct their advocacy, ranging from people who use drugs (International Network of People Who Use Drugs; Ezard, 2001), to sex workers (Global Network of Sex Work Projects; Jackson, 2016; Kempadoo and Doezema, 2018), to refugees and other disenfranchised groups (Goodhart, 2016).

BOX 7.1

Consider the following:

- When you hear the words 'human rights', what comes to mind?
- Are human rights sacred?
- Are human rights universal?

The repurposing of the human rights idea as a tool of liberation, as a beacon of hope for the disenfranchised, does not come without its problems. Poverty, inequality and the variety of extant moral standpoints, cultural norms and legal systems prevent such rights from becoming realised (Cornwall and Molyneux, 2006). A universalising discourse always hides a sinister side: namely that human rights is a Western philosophical and juridical conception that is criticised for having little applicability or resonance beyond the West (Pollis and Schwab, 2006). Even in a Western context, it has thus far proven impossible to build universal equality on the foundation of continued patriarchy, economic inequalities and lasting colonial relations. Susan Dewey and colleagues (2018) have noted that efforts to regulate sex stem from dominant (read Western) values and concerns that shape our understandings of and interventions in sexual behaviour, work, public health and even human rights. More concerning still, Elizabeth Bernstein (2012) argues that the human rights discourse is being exploited by apparently benevolent forces – principally made up of White feminist moral reformers – to justify simple narratives that reduce the problem of trafficking to sexual exploitation alone, rather than acknowledging its deeper political and economic drivers. These benevolent actors often advocate for the criminalisation of deviant individuals as the solution to the sexual exploitation problem, thus individualising blame (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of this process). While it is important to acknowledge that sexual exploitation by deviant individuals does take place, it is even more important to interrogate the structural drivers, the socio-political and cultural mechanisms, that underpin such **deviance**. Too often, as will become apparent in the following sections, states and institutions rely on a reductive understanding of sexual exploitation to escape responsibility and to justify repressive measures against vulnerable, rightless groups, including sex workers, migrants and young girls.

The political economy of sexual exploitation

In general terms, the political economy of neoliberal globalisation (that we encountered in Chapter 2) entails greater transnational mobility for people and goods, extensive use of mobile and Internet technology, and high levels of migration through both legal and illicit channels. It also features deep levels of inequality and lack of opportunities, particularly for people from the Global South (Aas, 2013; Hickel, 2017). However, it is worth remembering that such high levels of inequality do not just characterise Global North–South relations; they are also at the heart of the political economic system within states in the Global North (Alvaredo et al., 2018; Kuhn et al., 2016).

In this context, immigrant populations are disproportionately affected, partly as a result of rising nationalism.

Countries that were once regarded as lands of opportunity are increasingly experienced as hostile environments by immigrant populations old and new (Webber, 2019). It is enough to think about some recent events in the anglophone world to see this in action. In the UK in 2018, we saw the unfolding of the Windrush scandal, which involved the threat of deportation – because they were undocumented – of some Black Britons who arrived as children on their parents' passports in the UK between the 1940s and the 1970s; a time when the British state needed cheap labour from former British colonies (Monrose, 2019). We can also observe the proliferation of detention centres that incarcerate undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK; these places are characterised by the brutal treatment of migrants, including the separation of families and indefinite periods of incarceration (Mainwaring and Cook, 2019). Finally, the Brexit referendum and subsequent exit of the UK from the EU was premised on rising anti-immigration sentiment, as was the political success of Donald Trump in America.

Political scientists have found a link between increasing levels of inequality and rising nationalism. Diversionary nationalism is the process whereby states re-invest in the nationalist project to distract citizens from the harsh realities of economic inequality (Solt, 2011). Other researchers have found a link between rising inequality and Euroscepticism in the EU (Kuhn et al., 2014). Nationalism and Euroscepticism have implications for issues of security, crime control and border politics. We have been witnessing the shaping of a paradox: on the one hand, the universalist ideas and institutions of Western liberal societies are being forcefully spread through Western economic and political dominance via globalisation, the governance of international governmental institutions, and the spread of ideas like universal human rights; on the other hand, Western liberal states are becoming further obsessed with sovereignty and security (Aas, 2013), while waves of **populism** and ethnonationalism are sweeping through Western states, creating increasingly hostile environments (Heinisch et al., 2019). The contrast between global mobility and the tightening of border controls defines our current condition.

But what does all this have to do with sexual exploitation? In a sense, the way we experience and intervene in sexual exploitation is shaped by this very contrast between freedom and mobility as the liberal values underpinning the globalisation project, and the controls and regulations that states exert upon this freedom. In the words of Piyasiri Wickramasekara (2008: 1249), 'while there has been greater integration of global markets for goods, services and capital across borders, its impact on the cross-border movement of people and labour remains much more restricted, regulated by a complex web of immigration laws and policies that uphold the principle of state sovereignty'.

This contrast between greater mobility and harsher restrictions manifests itself vividly in the context of human trafficking and trafficking for sexual exploitation. It also has relevance for understanding recent changes in some states' shifting approaches to address prostitution. Inequality, and lack of opportunity, remain core drivers for people's decision to migrate and/or sell sex. Yet, rather than tackling these root causes, states continue to invest their efforts in the criminalisation of undocumented migrants and people involved in the sex industry, or in the targeting of individual deviance.

Multiple vulnerabilities create prime opportunities for certain groups to become subjected to exploitation. These vulnerabilities include, but are not limited to: being undocumented, coming from a poor background, being young, being female, being alone or isolated, having no access or recourse to justice or protection from law enforcement, and having no status or credibility. We will examine how these vulnerabilities, as shaped by the current political economic context, play out as the state interacts with grooming, trafficking and prostitution.

Grooming

In this section, we discuss online and localised grooming as being relevant and distinct phenomena tied to sexual exploitation in the context of globalisation and the state. The issue of grooming presents us with unique dilemmas, in part because grooming involves children and young people who are always regarded as victims, unable to consent to sex (something which we explore at length in Chapter 12). However, grooming remains underpinned by political, economic and cultural processes, and should not be regarded simply as a phenomenon caused by deviant individuals. The spread of mobile and Internet technology opens up new opportunities for online grooming, but also legislative, criminal justice and vigilantes' responses. Unlike online grooming, localised grooming is not a new phenomenon. We focus on grooming cases involving **BAME** perpetrators and young white victims. Here, gender, 'race' and class have a role to play, while multiple levels of vulnerability make for more successful targets in the grooming process.

Taking (online) grooming seriously

In 2017, the Serious Crimes Act in England and Wales was amended to create the offence of grooming: 'for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and

the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response' (Ministry of Justice, 3 April 2017). Similar legislation exists in Australia, Norway, Singapore and the USA. Much of this legislation targets grooming which happens online, using mobile phones, social networking sites, email, and so on.

Different techniques are used to try to identify grooming before sexual abuse occurs (Penna et al., 2005). The placing of investigative officers in chat rooms to record and possibly entrap would-be offenders is a time-consuming and precarious technique that has been used to detect adults who are attempting to groom children (Pendar, 2007: 235; Penna et al., 2005: 1). Several software-based interventions are being developed in an attempt to detect people who may be grooming children online. Network-monitoring software which identifies the Internet Protocol (IP) address of computers can be used when a suspected offender has been identified. Algorithms designed to detect suspected adults who are posing as children, or to detect conversations – especially hidden or secret conversations – can also be used to detect grooming. Lyta Penna and colleagues (2005) suggest that analysing the discourses between different speakers can help to identify potential sex offenders: by analysing the length of the message, the complexity of the sentences and the length of time it has taken to compose the response, potential groomers can also be identified. However, there is a risk that these 'sting' operations inadvertently cajole people into trying to meet children for sex when they otherwise might not have gone that far. There is also a risk that by posing as a child online, officers risk jeopardising the conviction of child abusers.

Other examples of using software to detect adults who groom children online include the interactive avatar known as 'Sweetie', a computer-animated child created by children's rights organisations to obtain the personally identifiable data of predators that could then be reported to law enforcement agencies. Posing as a 10-year-old Filipino girl, over a ten-week period, 20,000 men contacted Sweetie, with 1,000 offering to pay money for her to perform sex acts. However, as with investigative officers posing as children in chat rooms, there are concerns that the use of Sweetie may prevent prosecutions due to concerns over perpetrators being entrapped. Sweetie is also designed and operated by a private Dutch organisation called *Terre des Hommes Netherlands*. Though, by their own account, *Terre des Hommes* has been able to use Sweetie successfully to identify the location of groomers and report these to the police, it is worth reflecting on the fact that this is an extra-judicial organisation and not a formal law-enforcement agency. How far do you think it matters that *Terre des Homme* is an extra-judicial organisation? Should we be wary of extra-judicial initiatives, or should we embrace them as filling a gap left by law enforcement?

Creating software which can stop the sexual abuse of children before it happens is obviously desirable, however there are a number of challenges that prevent this from being an easy task. Private conversations, for instance,

which happen via messenger systems, cannot be monitored in the same way that chat rooms or forums might be. This is even more problematic when one considers that adults who successfully groom children do so by befriending them, making the use of private chats even more likely (see Gámez-Guadix et al., 2017). Potential offenders who use virtual private networks (VPNs) to hide their location, or who benefit from the anonymity that the Internet affords by holding several email addresses with unverified identity information, can also evade detection. Researchers suggest that developing more complex algorithms capable of conducting more complex cryptoanalyses, including the enhanced ability to detect pornographic stories or images featuring children, will help in detecting suspected child abuse before it happens.

All of this happens online of course, and the online realm is a good place for offenders who seek to molest children to search for them while successfully hiding their identity. As part of their analysis of the process of grooming, Samantha Craven and colleagues (2007) note that potential sex offenders seek out ideal opportunities to engage with children in order to identify vulnerable ones who might be easier to contact for abuse. They also help us to bust the myth of the paedophile groomer by emphasising that grooming is not something that is committed by paedophiles alone. Child abusers are not necessarily paedophiles and, moreover, limiting a definition of grooming to a practice undertaken by paedophiles obscures the mundane ways that children can be groomed by people known to them: neighbours, family friends, the parents of friends, and club leaders, for instance. Grooming occurs as a precursor to sexual abuse, or attempts at sexual abuse, and sex trafficking.

Does the legislation against grooming actually work? In the Norwegian context, Elizabeth Staksrud (2013) is doubtful. She argues that anti-grooming laws target an imagined groomer–victim relationship which is 'highly inaccurate'. Very young children are not usually online, though more recent reports show an upward curve of children as young as 4 having their own devices, enabling them to get online (Turner, 4 October 2018). Staksrud (2013: 154) suggests that 'Internet-related sex crimes involving adults and juveniles mostly fit the standard model of statutory rape' because adults usually seek to contact and seduce children who are aged between 13 and 15. These facts do not reflect the popular imaginary of naïve children being preyed on by adults. Indeed, as we see in Chapter 12 in the context of teen sexting, children have agency over their sexual practices, which they exercise. The notion of the stranger lurking online does not reflect the way that children who interact with these adults experience them. Manuel Gámez-Guadix and colleagues (2018: 16) note that, as part of the process of being groomed, children can become emotionally invested in their relationship with the groomer; they might be 'highly motivated to connect with the aggressor … and even report being in love with them'. This kind of intimacy is hard to underestimate. Staksrud (2013: 158) suggests that, for some children, a stranger (or 'a new person', as Staksrud

puts it) whom they meet online might become a 'friend' in as little as 15 minutes. After that, children report that, from time to time, they do meet people in the offline world whom they first met online. Of these, 59 per cent reported that they 'had a good time' at the meeting, with only 2 per cent reporting that they had been attacked or verbally abused at the meeting (Staksrud, 2013: 161).

One of the reasons for this is that the online tendency among children is not to pretend to be someone they are not or to create a false profile. People 'know' who they are speaking to and, as a result, sexual violence against children happens 'through the establishment of trust and intimacy, rather than deceit and violence' (Staksrud, 2013: 162). In the context of grooming, most children have 'online coping strategies' to help them to avoid risky situations (2013: 162). Building resilience, knowing when to ignore a potential abuser's request, or knowing when to ask for help prevent potential abuse in a way that anti-grooming legislation cannot. The blurring of categories between child molester, abuser and paedophile means that these acts of child abuse become hard to discern, especially when the abuser takes the guise of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Acknowledging children's agency may increase resilience and enhance children's ability to discern abuse.

BOX 7.2

Consider the following questions:

- Is anti-grooming legislation too heavy-handed?
- Does it target the wrong sort of abuser?
- Is there a better way to target the online and offline grooming of children? Or is the sexual abuse of children so abhorrent that notwithstanding the imperfect application of the legislation, it still serves a social good?
- Do you think other approaches focusing on education for children about how to use the Internet, including a risk-reduction approach which accepts that some risk is acceptable, might work best? Or is all risk to be avoided when it comes to children?

Localised grooming in the UK: 'race' and place

Grooming can also take place offline, as part of a localised effort. In 2011, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command recognised 'localised grooming' as a tactic used to sexually exploit children. Localised grooming is defined as occurring:

where children have been groomed and sexually exploited by an offender, hav-ing initially met in a location outside their home. This location is usually in public, such as a park, cinema, on the street or at a friend's house. Offenders often act together, establishing a relationship with a child or children before sexually exploiting them. Some victims of 'street grooming' may believe that the offender is in fact an older 'boyfriend'; these victims introduce their peers to the offender group who might then go on to be sexually exploited as well. Abuse may occur at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions. (CEOP Command, 2011: 7)

Indeed, in his account of paedophilia discussed in Chapter 12, Tom O'Carroll (1980) confirms that paedophiles seeking to meet children in order to groom them (though he does not use this terminology), might well take up a position as a scout or youth group leader, or volunteer as a sports coach, in order to increase their chances. In his own words, 'a paedophile working as a voluntary helper has the opportunity gradually to win the confidence and affection, and perhaps, ultimately, the erotic interest, of youngsters, over a period of months or even years' (O'Carroll, 1980: 119).

O'Carroll justifies this behaviour as a form of befriending a child. Intimacy is formed as a way of separating the child from their peers or family to better foster between the adult and child the notion that they are in a relationship with each other. The keeping of secrets is part of this intimacy. Keeping secrets helps to obscure the abuse. If a child believes their abuser to be their girlfriend or boyfriend, or if they believe that they are friends, they are more likely to keep those secrets. If children – who might often be kept in the dark about sexual practices, anyway – do not recognise forms of touching or hug-ging as being sexualised, they may not themselves realise that they are being abused. It is worth highlighting that children who are groomed and abused are often those who are likely to be already vulnerable in other areas of their lives. Children with poor relationships with their parents, children in care or children living in other precarious situations are likely to be especially vul-nerable as they are flattered and given attention and gifts as part of the grooming process.

There have been several cases of localised grooming in the UK which have received significant media attention, particularly in the aftermath of the Rochdale, Bradford and Rotherham scandals in the north of the UK in the 2000s. Nine men were jailed in Bradford for grooming and sexually abusing two 14-year-old girls who were classed as 'vulnerable' (BBC, 27 February 2019). Another nine men were jailed for the grooming and sexual abuse of girls as young as 13 in Rochdale, and seven men were jailed in Rotherham for similar crimes (Halliday, 29 October 2018). These male abusers have often been portrayed as belonging to an organised group or 'gang' in media coverage. Most of these men are British Asian, while many of the girls are white. These cases triggered a specific brand of moral outrage with racist undertones,

evident in the political and media commentary at the time that awareness of the abuse ruptured into the public domain.

BOX 7.3

In 2011, Jack Straw, Member of Parliament for Blackburn, UK, at the time, noted 'a specific problem which involves Pakistani heritage men ... who target vulnerable young white girls' (BBC, 8 January 2011). In an interview, Straw continues:

> These young men are in a Western society, in any event, they act like any other young men, they're fizzing and popping with testosterone, they want some outlet for that, but Pakistani heritage girls are off-limits and they are expected to marry a Pakistani girl from Pakistan, typically … So, they then seek other avenues and they see these young women, white girls who are vulnerable, some of them in care ... who they think are easy meat. (BBC, 8 January 2011)

Now, let us pause and reflect on this opinion:

- What was your initial reaction to this?
- Do you feel outraged in any way?
- Do you feel like this sort of commentary is justified?

On the one hand, one thing that Jack Straw unquestionably got right was in identifying the vulnerability of victims of grooming. Successful grooming is often underpinned by the multiple vulnerabilities of victim targets. On the other hand, we could argue that Straw's opinion is steeped in **Orientalism,** which shapes our representation and understanding of British Asian men's 'dangerous masculinities' (Tufail, 2015). Ella Cockbain (2013) discusses the creation of the 'Asian sex gang predator' figure in the aftermath of the Bradford, Rochdale and Rotherham cases. The racialised nature of the label starts with the word *gang*, a word normally reserved for BAME deviant groups. The ensuing media portrait is that of Asian men as being both *natural* and *organised* predators of young white girls (Gill and Harrison, 2015). Interestingly, the media attention given to these men tends to be far greater than that given to their white groomer counterparts. In this way, the problem is identified as one of 'race', rather than one of gender, masculinity and power. White groomers, such as Jimmy Savile (see Chapters 5 and 12), statistically make up the majority of sexual predators, yet they are seldom, if ever, identified as being part of a gang (even though their abuse may be facilitated by being part of a group, in which case it would be called a 'ring'). They are even less likely to

be identified as white. Their ethnic group belonging is not considered relevant: call it the power of privilege (Miah, 2015).

A review of the child sexual abuse case in Rotherham (Jay, 2014) found that 1,400 children and young people were abused over the course of 16 years. 'Race' and class, along with institutional failure by the police and social services, played a significant role in the unfolding and continuation of the abuse. Accordingly, senior figures both in the police and child protective services were aware of the abuse but believed reports to be grossly exaggerated due to the status of victims, many of whom were young, 'troublesome' girls in the care system. The ethnic background of perpetrators was not made explicit by authorities out of fear of accusations of racism. It was reported that 'council and other officials sometimes thought youth workers were exaggerating the exploitation problem. Sometimes they were afraid of being accused of racism if they talked openly about the perpetrators in the town mostly being Pakistani taxi drivers' (Pidd, 27 August 2014).

Many victims were rendered invisible by their working-class, underprivileged background, but also by gendered assumptions. A trend we see in state intervention in children's sexuality is the impact that perceptions of deviant sexuality has had on the policing of the behaviour of girls and young women. In Rotherham, the police directly targeted girls who were being abused through arrests for drunken behaviour, ignoring the underlying abuse these girls were being subjected to. The police also stopped monitoring some of these girls because they were either pregnant or had given birth, despite many being under the age of consent (Jay, 2014; see Chapters 4 and 12 for discussions of age of consent).

The regulation, control and punishment of girls' sexualities has historically informed welfare policy and social support from the state. As Pamela Cox (2003) outlines in her study of the gender development of the British juvenile justice system in the first half of the twentieth century, the difference in juvenile justice responses to girls deemed to be 'troublesome' could depend on whether the girl was deemed to be sexually innocent or sexually precocious. Most often, state sanctions were targeted towards working-class girls, and the courts were used to 'protect' girls who had, or were believed to be at risk of losing, their virginity. We have already discussed the significance of virginity in Chapter 3. The loss of virginity may have been as a consequence of child sexual exploitation (historically, and too often today, referred to as 'child prostitution'), as part of an emotional relationship, or due to sexual abuse. Regardless of the nature of the sexual encounter:

> girls leading 'wayward' lives and who 'chose' to be sexually active were thought to bear much, if not all, of the responsibility for their choice. But even in abuse cases, the very fact that a girl was able to articulate her experience often worked against her. A child possessing the vocabulary to describe a sexual act was no 'innocent' child. (Cox, 2003: 41)

Such state responses to sexually active girls (including those who had been abused or were being sexually exploited) is deeply troubling when we consider that the girls had not committed an actual criminal offence. They were being brought into the juvenile justice system purely because of their sexual activity. Responses by state officials were a blend of protection of and punishment for the girl, but, as Cox argues, were also designed to protect other children as 'she could "contaminate" the other children with this "knowledge of evil"' (2003: 41). Thus, as we can see here, the 'good' girl, the one who does not need to be punished, is the sexually innocent one.

The sexualisation of girls' delinquency has not been confined to the history books. These processes are visible in the Rotherham case, and have been high-lighted in numerous studies by feminist criminologists completing work on girls' involvement in criminal justice (see, for example, Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 2013; Mallicoat, 2007). Furthermore, such controls and regulations are saturated with the wider discrimination of 'race' and class, as working-class girls and girls of colour are much more readily sexualised, and have their sexual activities policed to a greater extent (Gaarder et al., 2004; Rosenbaum and Chesney-Lind, 1994).

In Rotherham, some of the abused girls were internally trafficked between towns and cities in the north of England. Here, we can reflect on how our ideas of trafficking may themselves be influenced by Orientalist assumptions. Trafficking does not necessarily involve an exotic victim, who is Black or Eastern Europeanbeing groomed and exploited. It can happen closer to home, and to girls who are white and Western. Being female, young, isolated and poor make up the multiple vulnerabilities that create the conditions for suc-cessful grooming and trafficking. These vulnerabilities may make one invisible, or only visible as a troublesome youngster, to state authorities. However, successful grooming and trafficking also require the presence of a set of configurations shaped by both discourse and state responses, to which we now turn.

The 'invention' of trafficking

Anne Gallagher (2001) argues that international efforts to tackle trafficking were mainly driven by concerns over state sovereignty and security at a time of the expansion of illicit global markets. The Palermo Protocols, a series of agreements ratified by UN member states between 2000 and 2003, represented the first coordinated action by states to address the issue of trafficking as a form of lucrative transnational organised crime. The Palermo Protocols were con-cerned with all manner of trafficking, not just the sexually exploitative kind.

And yet our shared social imagery tends to be more concerned with trafficking for sexual exploitation than it is with other forms of trafficking for labour exploitation (Alvarez and Alessi, 2012). The Protocols define human trafficking specifically as:

> the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UN, 2004: 42)

In the above list of types of exploitation, prostitution and sexual exploitation appear first, even though most human trafficking seems to occur for purposes other than sexual exploitation (ILO, 2017). Still, trafficking for sexual exploitation does occur. In a 2017 report, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that, globally, 24.9 million people are in forced labour, and 4.8 million people in forced sexual exploitation, with women and girls being disproportionately affected (ILO, 2017). In its Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2018), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) made a contrasting claim that most trafficking occurs for the purposes of sexual exploitation, albeit there are regional variations. This claim is based on the numbers detected by law enforcement. Here, it may be the case that more resources are being directed at the investigation and detection of trafficking for sexual exploitation than other forms of human trafficking. Official statistics show an upward trajectory from 2003 to 2016, with the numbers of detected victims increasing over this time period (UNODC, 2018: 7). Note the start date: 2003 is when the Palermo Protocols came into force, and efforts to record international trafficking began. If global trafficking was happening to the same extent prior to 2003, we would not know about it, because records are patchy at best. Other numbers worth highlighting are countries of destination – with the wealthy countries of the Global North more likely to be destination countries – and the gender split of victims: 'the vast majority of the detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are females, and 35 per cent of the victims trafficked for forced labour are also females, both women and girls. At the same time, more than half of the victims of trafficking for forced labour are men' (UNODC, 2018: 10).

It appears that, over the past two decades, we have become more concerned with trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation than ever before. We could argue that this is a positive development; why should we not be content that sexual exploitation has risen on the international agenda, becoming a global concern punctuated by intervention efforts? It is tempting to reach such

a conclusion. However, there are issues we need to consider before becoming blinded by optimism. First, despite such efforts, the numbers of sexually exploited people worldwide do not seem to be dwindling. Indeed, we must be careful of making assumptions based on numbers, as, with any 'slippery statistics' that characterise illicit markets, there is a dark figure (Gozdziak and Collett, 2005). Furthermore, a constructivist view of statistics would highlight that these numbers tell us more about the institutions that control and record, than the actual reality of trafficking. This means that when resources are invested into tackling trafficking for sexual exploitation, as they have been since 2003, the numbers of detected victims may increase simply because trafficking, and its recording, has become a priority for law enforcement.

There are other, more sinister sides to this issue. The expansion of global markets under neoliberal globalisation does not stop at licit goods and services; illicit markets are also expanding. Johan Lindquist (2010) notes that, along with illicit drug markets and terrorism, human trafficking is the fastest growing global market. He is not interested in proving whether this is the case, as he recognises that statistics in this field are, at best, misleading (something that others have agreed with; see Weitzer, 2014). He does, however, point to the manner in which trafficking is established as being a problem through cultural artefacts, such as counter-trafficking films. The early 2000s were characterised by the shaping of what Laura Augustin (2005) calls 'the rescue industry' – organisations that came into existence for the purpose of establishing trafficking as a problem, and intervening in it by creating a simple victim narrative that separates the issue of trafficking from the broader political economic conditions in which it occurs. This is what Lindquist (2010: 226) calls 'a depoliticizing function through the concern with – and intervention on behalf of – a particular type of migrant, namely, the "victim," rather than broader issues such as labour rights and the freedom of mobility'. Separating the issue of trafficking for sexual exploitation from other forms of economic exploitation and vulnerability is a useful tactic to blame organised crime and the deviant individuals therein, rather than the system that supports them. Then, the problem is not of a political or an economic nature, and the solution is not political economic reform. Rather, the problem is the deviance and opportunism of individual offenders, the traffickers of the world, and the solution is targeted intervention through law enforcement and rescue organisations.

Here, we need to return to the contrast outlined above: on the one hand, freedom and global mobility characterise the neoliberal globalisation narrative, engendering the hopes and aspirations of people around the world; on the other hand, it is only a minority of people who are afforded such freedoms and rights, making the rest more vulnerable to all forms of exploitation through widespread poverty, inequality, lack of labour protection, and tight border controls. In this context, economic migrants can more easily become, and be portrayed as, sexually exploited victims (Augustin, 2005). Interestingly, law

enforcement interventions are principally aimed at victims or perpetrators, with no comparable regulations, interventions or programmes that target sex buying and sex tourism. We will return to this issue later in the chapter. For now, let us focus on the case of a USA celebrity-sponsored anti-trafficking campaign targeted at men who buy sex.

#RealMenDontBuyGirls

In 2011, Hollywood actors Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore launched the *Real Men Don't Buy Girl*s campaign, enlisting a series of Hollywood celebrities to carry this message through an advertising campaign after learning about the extent of trafficking worldwide and in the USA. According to Kamala Kempadoo (2015: 12), initiatives such as *Real Men Don't Buy Girls* appear genuine on the surface: 'the main thrust behind such celebrity campaigns and attention is the rescue of women, particularly young women and underage girls from what they deem to be "modern-day slavery" and "sex trafficking"'.

So far so good. But what do they imply? Kempadoo explains that this campaign is made up of 'videos that make fun of things that "real men" don't do (such as driving while blindfolded, making a grilled cheese sandwich with an iron, shaving with a chainsaw, etc.)' (2015: 12). The jokes are in the exaggerated tools men use in the ads, carrying a connotation of lack of responsibility and cluelessness which supposedly shows a 'woke' attitude towards gender. Aside from the disconnection between the rather trivial jokes in the ads and the sombre realities of trafficking and sexual exploitation, there is an interesting role reversal whereby some gendered activities are recast as manly. Yet, the 'real men' of the campaign rely on their status as masculine celebrities to call upon an ideal of 'moral masculinity' within a postcolonial configuration; 'so rather than producing a self-reflexive white subject, we are presented with the image of a daring knight whose moral obligation is to save the world – especially Asia and Africa – from itself and an affirmation of white masculinity as, amongst other things, powerful, heroic, and morally superior' (Kempadoo, 2015: 16).

As Sarah Steele and Tyler Shores (2014) have compellingly argued, celebrities' role as engaged activists and stakeholders has increased through extensive use of social media, to the point that they have come to be considered 'expert-advocates' by a general public who places trust in them. Of particular concern is the ability for these celebrities to reach expert status and large audiences without understanding the complexities of any given issue, giving way to inaccurate representations (Steele and Shores, 2014). As the celebrity reaches 'expert-advocate' status, they can reinforce the state's sovereign mandate to intervene in trafficking, tightening border controls and further criminalising migrants. These celebrities become agents of the sovereign state, creating a

straightforward connection between real men and moral masculinity, and state intervention and control. An alternative reading is that of Samantha Majic (2018), who argues that the Kutcher and Moore campaign promotes an 'individual responsibility norm' which masks structural solutions to human trafficking. Whichever reading you find more convincing, there is a commonality between the two: ignoring structural determinants and advocating for interventions focused on *individual behaviour*, whether it is stopping individuals from buying sex, or stopping individuals crossing borders. Thus, the system that produces and reproduces inequalities across 'race', class and gender is not called into question. Rather, individual deviants are singled out and criminalised, while business continues as usual.

Kempadoo sees any attempt to intervene in aiding the trafficking victim as being embedded in a system of patriarchy, postcolonial convictions and White supremacy, where:

> the rescue fantasy is a means through which the endeavors are legitimized as altruistic and humanitarian, obscuring the reliance on and reproduction of the racial knowledge of the Other in the historical tropes of, on the one hand – the hopeless victim, impoverished and incapable of attending to one's own needs – and, on the other, the benevolent civilizing white subject who must bear the burden of intervening in poor areas of the world. (2015: 14)

This resonates with Elizabeth Bernstein's (2012) account of anti-trafficking organisations and benevolent White feminism. White supremacy is intertwined with the power of Western states and their colonial legacy. As such, this moral crusade:

> locates its moral obligation and civic responsibility in great part in the rescue of 'prostituted' women and children (victims) from the clutches of male privilege, power, and lust (sex trafficking) and celebrates its success in extending its international reach (especially in Asia), reproducing the colonial maternalist position in relation to the non-Western world while reconfirming white Western feminine subjectivity as benevolent. Contemporary antislavery advocates share a similar dimension of the modern 'white man's burden' in that they see themselves as leading a moral crusade against an 'unconscionable evil' that proudly claims to be following in the footsteps of the British and American nineteenth-century evangelical-inspired movements to abolish the enslavement and trade of Africans. (Kempadoo, 2015: 14–5)

On this reading, abolitionism is the new anti-slavery movement that obsesses over trafficking for sexual exploitation over other forms of labour exploitation. When an abolitionist logic is uncritically applied to the context of sexual exploitation, it results in multiple erasure effects. It erases the distinction between sexual exploitation and sex work, rendering agency meaningless and championing instead the idea of a powerless victim in need of rescue. It also

erases the difference between undocumented migrant and trafficked victim. Lastly, it contributes to individualising blame for sexually exploitative relations. This abolitionist shift is very visible in the context of changing approaches towards prostitution and its regulation.

State responses to prostitution

In this next section, we discuss how state responses towards prostitution have developed, noting the recent trend towards shifting the burden of responsibility away from those who sell sex and towards those who buy it. We reflect on some of the limitations of this approach in an increasingly globalised context, where even those who cannot legally buy sex in their native country are still able to travel and buy sex elsewhere by engaging in sex tourism. Meanwhile, those who sell sex outside their country of birth, migrant sex workers, can face prosecution, detention and even deportation, while having limited access to licit labour market opportunities and limited recourse to justice.

'Get off in Thailand': Why don't we regulate sex tourism?

In February 2019, AirAsia introduced an advertising campaign in Australia, affixed on public transport, using the tagline 'Get Off in Thailand'.

This advert presumably targeted Australians, and particularly Australian men, as a 'double entendre'. In theory (and often in practice), Global North passport holders can travel to any country and do what they like with their powerful passports and money in their pockets, including buying sex. However, the 'Get off in Thailand' advert received harsh criticism from members of the organisation Collective Shout: a campaigning platform against the sexualisation of women and children in the media. Collective Shout took this opportunity to expose the scale of sex tourism from Australia into Thailand. Such criticism then triggered negative reactions from public officials. After only a few weeks, AirAsia removed the advert and released a public apology (France24, 27 March 2019).

How would you interpret this chain of events? Since the advert was removed, one could argue that this was a victory for rights-based advocacy against sexual exploitation. However, despite the successful targeting of advertising campaigns by advocacy groups, there are no easily enforceable regulations preventing men from travelling to Thailand to buy sex, nor are there regulations preventing men from earning disproportionately to their needs and having large disposable incomes. Indeed, Thailand's economy relies

on leisure and sex tourism in a significant way (McDowall and Wang, 2009). Havocscope (2015) estimated that up to 10 per cent of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) originates from the sex industry. This is an estimate, but it remains an indication of the size and importance of the sex industry in the Thai economy.

Should states be doing more to regulate sex buying? Should they criminalise it? In general, relatively few states worldwide have attempted the regulation of the purchase of sex, and not without controversy. To date, legislation that criminalises the purchase of sex was implemented in Sweden first in 1999, later followed by Norway, Finland and Iceland, and more recently by Belize, Canada, France, Ireland, Israel, Martinique and Northern Ireland. One issue with this approach has to do with scope. Any such legislation can only target incidents within a given country's territory, and not across borders. There is no easily enforceable regulation criminalising sex tourism, and no simple way of establishing whether people engage in sex tourism or not when they travel. Criminalising the buying of sex in Sweden does not prevent Swedish people from travelling to Thailand to buy sex.

A further dimension of this debate is that the criminalisation of the purchase of sex has come under fire by some academics and sex workers' rights groups (Scarlet Alliance; the Rose Alliance; the English Collective of Prostitutes; the Global Network of Sex Work Projects are some examples). Scholars and activists have been critical about using the criminal law as an instrument of liberation (Bernstein, 2010; Scoular and Carline, 2014), about the mistaken assumption that criminalising demand will not drive supply further underground (Scoular and O'Neill, 2008), and about the negative effects criminalisation has on the most vulnerable among sex workers. There are profound inequalities in the treatment and regulation of tourists versus other travellers, such as migrants. Migrant sex workers (those who sell sex in a country different from their country of birth) and survival sex workers (those who exchange sex as a means of survival) are particularly vulnerable. Scholars also point to the process of individualising blame, echoing the femonationalistic debates we encountered in Chapter 3 whereby gender inequality is seen exclusively in the actions of a few 'bad men' towards women who are victims, rather than as a structural problem (Harrington, 2018).

Whether you think criminalising the purchase of sex is a positive, progressive practice or not, there are some things worth considering. This approach generally does little to tackle gender and economic inequalities, unless it is part of a much broader package of welfare reforms targeting such inequalities, as was the case in Sweden:

> the Swedish woman-friendly welfare state's reliance on gender equality through women's participation in the labour market and men's entry to the home as care takers, the gender-equal tax system designed to facilitate such practices, and

the sexual politics where 'free and equal sex' was promoted, all suggested that men and women were essentially alike and in need of the same rights and social benefits to make a good life. In this context, the gendered and violent reality of prostitution did not make prostitution seem like a job, rather a vehicle perpetuating gender inequality. (Yttergren and Westerstrand, 2016: 48)

While Sweden is often pictured as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, this presumed equality is tarnished by ethnonationalism and heteronormativity (Schierup and Ålund, 2011). Welfare reforms were implemented primarily for the benefit of Swedish nationals, and not immigrant groups. Meanwhile, this approach denies people any choice to engage in sex work as a legitimate occupation, meaning that sex workers are denied any agency in the matter (Levy and Jakobsson, 2013). Niina Vuolajärvi's (2019) ethnography across Sweden, Norway and Finland has highlighted that migrants make up the majority of sex workers in the region, and that, instead of prosecuting clients, Nordic states are busy prosecuting migrant sex workers through immigration laws. Nationals are being afforded the welfare of the generous Nordic states through support, counselling and exit programmes. Meanwhile, foreigners increasingly become targets of punishment and deportation: a trend not unique to Nordic states (Pickering and Ham, 2014).

In sum, efforts to regulate prostitution are inherently limited by hegemonic norms which transfer into law (Scoular, 2010), and by a system of nationalist allegiances and borders which is antithetical to the globalisation of markets. In this context, while states are busy fortifying and deporting, moral campaigners are focusing our attention on the immorality of buying sex. Meanwhile, they want to convince us that sex workers are victims of sexual exploitation; but what if the realities of prostitution were more complex than that?

Sex workers, austerity and survival

So far, we have identified some trends that are shaping the prostitution landscape, including the framing of the problem in terms of trafficking and sexual exploitation, the rise of abolitionism and the criminalisation of buyers in some countries, and the targeting and deportation of migrant sex workers. We will conclude the chapter by reflecting on the effects of criminalisation and the political economy of austerity on sex workers in England.

While the act of selling sex from person A to B is not illegal in many jurisdictions, and indeed the same goes for the act of B buying sex from A (minus the countries outlined in the earlier section), many of the activities *associated* with prostitution are criminalised. In England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Policing and Crime Act 2009 are the central pieces of legislation regulating prostitution. Under these Acts, activities including soliciting,

causing or inciting prostitution for gain, controlling prostitution for gain, paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force, and loitering (as covered by the Street Offences Act 1959) are criminalised. It is also illegal for two or more people to sell sex from the same premises.

There are significant variations in the law and application of the law across the UK, at both jurisdictional and local level. Northern Ireland notably adopted the criminalisation of buyers' model in 2014 (Huschke, 2017). Meanwhile, different police forces across the country have adopted distinct and often contradictory approaches to prostitution, varying from the innovative Merseyside model, which treats violence against sex workers as a form of hate crime (Campbell, 2016), to waves of eviction and 'cleansing' of specific areas as being tied to gentrification, particularly evident in the country's city centres (Neville and Sanders-McDonagh, 2017). Lastly, there has been increasing investment in anti-trafficking operations, leading to detention and deportation. For example, a report by the organisation After Exploitation found that, in 2018, hundreds of trafficking victims were placed in detention centres awaiting deportation (Taylor, 9 July 2019).

The English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) is a sex worker-led advocacy organisation. Box 7.4 contains an excerpt from its website. We would like you to read it carefully.

BOX 7.4

The English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) is a network of sex workers working both on the streets and indoors, campaigning for decriminalisation and safety.

We fight against being treated like criminals. We've helped sex workers win against charges of soliciting, brothel-keeping and controlling – the last two most often used against women who are working together for safety.

Most sex workers are mothers trying to do the best for their children. We campaign against austerity cuts and for housing and other survival resources so that any of us can leave prostitution if and when we want.

We have an international network including sister organisations in Thailand (Empower) and the US (US PROStitutes Collective).

WHAT WE STAND FOR:

- Decriminalisation of sex work – on the street and in premises – as in New Zealand. The laws land us in prison, divide us from families and friends, make us vulnerable to violence, isolate us. Criminal records trap us in prostitution.

- Protection from rape and other violence.

- An end to police brutality, corruption, racism and other illegality. Prosecute police who break the law.

- No zones, no licensing, no legalised brothels – they are ghettos and state pimping.
- Self-determination. Sex workers must decide how we want to work – not the police, local authorities, pimps, madams/managers who profit from our work.
- An end to racism and other discrimination within the sex industry.
- Rights for sex workers like other workers: the right to organise collectively to improve our working conditions, a pension and to join trade unions.
- No criminalisation of clients, which would force sex workers underground and into more danger. Consenting sex between adults is not a crime.
- Free and accessible health services for all: no mandatory health checks.
- Cis and trans women's right to organise independently of men, including of male sex workers.
- Economic alternatives: no one should be forced into sex by poverty. People who want to leave the sex industry (or any industry) should have access to resources.
- Shelters and benefits for children/young people so they don't have to beg or go into prostitution to survive.
- No 'rehabilitation' schemes which punish us or force us into low-paid jobs.
- The right to freedom of movement within and between countries. Stop using anti-trafficking laws to deport sex workers.

Source: Adapted from the English Collective of Prostitutes website (ECP, n.d.)

Take some time to summarise the issues identified in this position statement, then reflect on the following:

- What does this organisation stand for?
- What are its demands?
- What problems does it identify as affecting sex workers?
- What solutions does it propose?
- Who is the organisation speaking on behalf of?
- How do you feel about the above positions? Do you agree or disagree with them and why?

Recently, the ECP collected a series of articles on its website coming from disparate news sources, all pointing to the same issue. The headlines read:

Selling sex for £5 is the only way I can survive after universal credit chaos. (Sky News, 25 October 2019)

Universal credit: MPs call for action on women driven to 'survival sex'. (BBC, 25 October 2019)

> Universal credit: Women say they are forced into 'survival sex' by DWP's five-week wait, MPs warn. (Sandhu, 25 October 2019)

> Why is it only when universal credit forces women into sex work the government actually listens? (Aspinall, 25 October 2019)

These headlines point to 'the violence of austerity' (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). They are interesting because they identify the state as being responsible for pushing women into prostitution as a direct result of austerity and welfare reform. Austerity has been the dominant political economic approach in the UK in response to the 2008 economic crisis. As discussed in Chapter 2, this approach entailed extensive cuts to public services and a substantial review of the structure of welfare benefits, which culminated in the creation of Universal Credit. Hailed as a one-stop shop to replace a more antiquated and fragmented welfare benefits system, Universal Credit has received widespread criticism and been deemed a policy failure (Norris and Rutter, 2016).

While survival sex work in the context of austerity appears far removed from conceptualising prostitution as a free choice for women, it is also a far cry from the idea that prostitution should be understood solely as a form of sexual exploitation, or even as an expression of gender inequality. Inequality is a core driver, but inequality should always be understood as intersectional. In the context of austerity, the state enables entry into prostitution because of its failure to provide alternatives for the most vulnerable in society, including migrants and people in poverty. It is unsurprising then that sex workers' advocacy groups, along with many academics, see attempts by the state to criminalise any aspect of prostitution as a bogus solution to the problem.

Summary

In this chapter, we have observed the somewhat disparate yet interconnected issues of grooming, trafficking and prostitution, with the aid of key concepts and structural categories, including the usual suspects: gender, 'race' and class. We insist on observing the way these categories intersect to support our understanding of these phenomena and state responses to them under the umbrella of sexual exploitation. The recognition that sexual exploitation takes place in the context of grooming, trafficking and prostitution does little to address their causes. What is more, such recognition can be used by states in perverse ways. States use the fear of sexual exploitation and trafficking to justify the tightening of borders and their policing. They use this fear to justify punitive responses towards individual deviants such as British Asian groomers and sex buyers, but also migrant sex workers. These state interventions do not halt

these phenomena in any significant way, and often do more harm than good; for example, by fostering cultural stereotypes about groomers, by driving prostitution further underground, by rendering sex workers more vulnerable and by detaining and deporting migrant sex workers.

If we are to give validity and meaning to the rhetoric of universal human rights, we must start by actively addressing the rights of people who are marginalised and made vulnerable in these contexts. Conversely, and by relying on dominant discourses about trafficking and sexual exploitation shaped by undercurrents of ethnonationalism, femonationalism, colonialism and abolitionism, states continue to support criminal justice interventions targeted at individual deviants, rather than investing in systemic change. Such change would require addressing the root causes of economic and social inequalities and redesigning political economy away from neoliberal globalisation, something that cannot be done through criminal justice reform alone.

Review questions

- In what ways does nationalism play a role in state responses to grooming, trafficking and prostitution?
- What are the limitations of current understandings of, and state interventions in, sexual exploitation?
- What should states do differently to address the causes of sexual exploitation?

Other chapters that this links to:

Chapter 3 (Sex and crime in time and space)
Chapter 5 (Sex and institutional cultures of abuse)
Chapter 8 (Sex and war)
Chapter 12 (Children, sexualisation and the law)
Chapter 14 (The future)
Chapter 15 (How to change your life)

7

Sexual exploitation and the State

This chapter examines how sexual exploitation is configured both within states and across borders. While grooming, trafficking and **prostitution** are distinct phenomena, each deserving specific attention, it is also important to draw connections between these phenomena as they fall under the umbrella of sexual exploitation. A quick search on Google Scholar highlights that the term 'sexual exploitation' gained currency in the 1980s. At this time, scholarship began to broaden the scope of research about rape (Brownmiller, 1975) and abuse (a label used particularly in relation to children; Finkelhor, 1984), using sexual exploitation as a more encompassing label. Primarily associated with women and children, sexual exploitation evokes different forms of exploitative behaviours, ranging from sexual abuse and rape through to prostitution, which is often associated with grooming and trafficking in persons (Farley et al., 2004; Outshoorn, 2005). Put simply, grooming entails the building of a bond with a child, or anyone under the legal age of consent, for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Sex trafficking entails the transportation of bodies from one place to another for the purposes of sexual exploitation. Prostitution entails the exchange of sex for money and is considered a form of sexual exploitation by some (see, for example, Bindel, 2017).

By the end of this chapter, you will understand more about:

- the effects of social, political and economic inequalities within the state and between the *Global North* and *South* on sexual exploitation
- how to explore the phenomenon of online and localised grooming with reference to technology, '*race*', *class*, *gender* and institutional failure
- the process whereby states use fear of sexual exploitation to justify the tightening of border control and the deportation of migrants
- the lack of widespread criminalisation of demand in prostitution and sex tourism, and what this implies.

The word 'prostitution' has negative connotations. The fact that we use it to denote the activity does not mean we endorse the idea that the act of selling sex is always necessarily exploitative. We acknowledge that many prefer the term **sex work** and its overall more positive connotations. There are disagreements in the literature, and indeed between the authors of this book, about the nature of this activity. We want to allow some space for debate without providing a single unified view, or final argument on this, as we hope students are enabled to approach these debates with an open and critical mindset. To strike a compromise between the two positions, we will refer to the activity as prostitution, while we refer to those involved in it as sex workers.

In this chapter, we will think about whether and how grooming, trafficking and prostitution intersect, not just in terms of the similarities or overlaps between them, but also in terms of governmental responses towards them. In this way, we will also address them as discursive constructs.

Scholarly debates on these issues are not without controversy. However, there seems to be some agreement that grooming, trafficking and prostitution should be understood in the context of widespread economic inequalities, institutionalised **patriarchy** and **neoliberal globalisation**. Hence, this chapter reflects on the forces that shape the conditions for sexually exploitative relations. The trajectory towards a more interconnected world, punctuated by neoliberal globalisation (see Chapter 2 for a discussion of neoliberalism), has consequences that are of relevance for the way in which sexual exploitation may occur, but also for the way in which different societies understand it and intervene in it. In this market-driven, technology-enhanced context, bodies are increasingly made into disposable, surplus subjects.

The chapter recognises the push-and-pull factors of **migration** and inequality for exploited groups within a neoliberal globalisation context. We trace the beginning of both the **human rights** and the trafficking **discourses** on the global arena (Milivojevic and Pickering, 2013). More specifically, we will see how the human rights discourse represents deep contradictions between theory – that all human beings have equal rights – and practice – that some humans are privileged by nature of the position they occupy geographically, economically, socially and culturally. We then explore the intersections of migration, sexual exploitation and labour, trafficking and control. Spearheaded by international governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and embraced by states in an era of tightening borders, the trafficking discourse often conflates economic migration with human trafficking, simplifying a complex issue while relying on the criminal law as a tool of the state to intervene in and control immigration. We will explore, for example, how the trafficking discourse colludes with **abolitionism** in the context of prostitution.

Another theme we recognise in this chapter is the widespread use of the victim narrative across trafficking, prostitution and grooming discourses and how this impacts our understanding of **agency**, specifically its denial. We also deal with another form of denial: that of states' responsibility for **colonialism** and their supporting of postcolonial configurations. This is expressed through a renewed commitment to nationalism by states, a nationalism tied to ethnic groups, known as **ethnonationalism**. This is visible in nation-states' increasing efforts to curb and control migration through criminalisation. This process is evident across all issues under scrutiny: in prostitution, primarily through its conflation with sex trafficking, we find persistent attempts by states and other agencies to shift our attention away from inequality as being the root cause of prostitution, towards blaming the immorality and criminality of the other, be it the sex buyer, the human trafficker, or in some cases still, the sex worker, who has now largely been relegated to the status of victim. In the case of grooming, ethnonationalism and **femonationalism** (see Chapter 3) are

encapsulated by public discourses that point the finger towards British Asian men grooming white young girls, in the media and in the public domain.

The human rights turn

The human rights discourse represents one key development in the construction of a global shared cultural understanding, providing an instrument to define people's rights in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The creation of a system of cooperation supported by international governmental institutions such as the United Nations (UN) has consequences because of its ability to form binding agreements among **nations**, but also, and perhaps more crucially, its ability to construct and shape new ideas and principles which states should, in theory, abide by, and which people come to consider *sacred*.

Human rights, in the contemporary sense of the term, are a twentieth-century **Western** invention. Indeed, many of the principles stemming from religious morals do ascribe versions of what we would now understand as universal human rights, but our current description of human rights comes from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, ratified by the UN in 1948. This universal declaration marked the beginning of conceptualising all human beings as having equal rights regardless of 'race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status' (Article 2, Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Human rights have become an important, if not dominant, frame of reference, providing impetus for collective action, particularly for advocacy around the recognition of marginalised, stigmatised (as we see in Chapter 10, in the context of disability) and even criminalised groups. There are many examples of organisations using human rights as a principle on which to construct their advocacy, ranging from people who use drugs (International Network of People Who Use Drugs; Ezard, 2001), to sex workers (Global Network of Sex Work Projects; Jackson, 2016; Kempadoo and Doezema, 2018), to refugees and other disenfranchised groups (Goodhart, 2016).

BOX 7.1

Consider the following:

- When you hear the words 'human rights', what comes to mind?
- Are human rights sacred?
- Are human rights universal?

The repurposing of the human rights idea as a tool of liberation, as a beacon of hope for the disenfranchised, does not come without its problems. Poverty, inequality and the variety of extant moral standpoints, cultural norms and legal systems prevent such rights from becoming realised (Cornwall and Molyneux, 2006). A universalising discourse always hides a sinister side: namely that human rights is a Western philosophical and juridical conception that is criticised for having little applicability or resonance beyond the West (Pollis and Schwab, 2006). Even in a Western context, it has thus far proven impossible to build universal equality on the foundation of continued patriarchy, economic inequalities and lasting colonial relations. Susan Dewey and colleagues (2018) have noted that efforts to regulate sex stem from dominant (read Western) values and concerns that shape our understandings of and interventions in sexual behaviour, work, public health and even human rights. More concerning still, Elizabeth Bernstein (2012) argues that the human rights discourse is being exploited by apparently benevolent forces – principally made up of White feminist moral reformers – to justify simple narratives that reduce the problem of trafficking to sexual exploitation alone, rather than acknowledging its deeper political and economic drivers. These benevolent actors often advocate for the criminalisation of deviant individuals as the solution to the sexual exploitation problem, thus individualising blame (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of this process). While it is important to acknowledge that sexual exploitation by deviant individuals does take place, it is even more important to interrogate the structural drivers, the socio-political and cultural mechanisms, that underpin such **deviance**. Too often, as will become apparent in the following sections, states and institutions rely on a reductive understanding of sexual exploitation to escape responsibility and to justify repressive measures against vulnerable, rightless groups, including sex workers, migrants and young girls.

The political economy of sexual exploitation

In general terms, the political economy of neoliberal globalisation (that we encountered in Chapter 2) entails greater transnational mobility for people and goods, extensive use of mobile and Internet technology, and high levels of migration through both legal and illicit channels. It also features deep levels of inequality and lack of opportunities, particularly for people from the Global South (Aas, 2013; Hickel, 2017). However, it is worth remembering that such high levels of inequality do not just characterise Global North–South relations; they are also at the heart of the political economic system within states in the Global North (Alvaredo et al., 2018; Kuhn et al., 2016).

In this context, immigrant populations are disproportionately affected, partly as a result of rising nationalism.

Countries that were once regarded as lands of opportunity are increasingly experienced as hostile environments by immigrant populations old and new (Webber, 2019). It is enough to think about some recent events in the anglophone world to see this in action. In the UK in 2018, we saw the unfolding of the Windrush scandal, which involved the threat of deportation – because they were undocumented – of some Black Britons who arrived as children on their parents' passports in the UK between the 1940s and the 1970s; a time when the British state needed cheap labour from former British colonies (Monrose, 2019). We can also observe the proliferation of detention centres that incarcerate undocumented migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in Australia, Canada, the USA and the UK; these places are characterised by the brutal treatment of migrants, including the separation of families and indefinite periods of incarceration (Mainwaring and Cook, 2019). Finally, the Brexit referendum and subsequent exit of the UK from the EU was premised on rising anti-immigration sentiment, as was the political success of Donald Trump in America.

Political scientists have found a link between increasing levels of inequality and rising nationalism. Diversionary nationalism is the process whereby states re-invest in the nationalist project to distract citizens from the harsh realities of economic inequality (Solt, 2011). Other researchers have found a link between rising inequality and Euroscepticism in the EU (Kuhn et al., 2014). Nationalism and Euroscepticism have implications for issues of security, crime control and border politics. We have been witnessing the shaping of a paradox: on the one hand, the universalist ideas and institutions of Western liberal societies are being forcefully spread through Western economic and political dominance via globalisation, the governance of international governmental institutions, and the spread of ideas like universal human rights; on the other hand, Western liberal states are becoming further obsessed with sovereignty and security (Aas, 2013), while waves of **populism** and ethnonationalism are sweeping through Western states, creating increasingly hostile environments (Heinisch et al., 2019). The contrast between global mobility and the tightening of border controls defines our current condition.

But what does all this have to do with sexual exploitation? In a sense, the way we experience and intervene in sexual exploitation is shaped by this very contrast between freedom and mobility as the liberal values underpinning the globalisation project, and the controls and regulations that states exert upon this freedom. In the words of Piyasiri Wickramasekara (2008: 1249), 'while there has been greater integration of global markets for goods, services and capital across borders, its impact on the cross-border movement of people and labour remains much more restricted, regulated by a complex web of immigration laws and policies that uphold the principle of state sovereignty'.

This contrast between greater mobility and harsher restrictions manifests itself vividly in the context of human trafficking and trafficking for sexual exploitation. It also has relevance for understanding recent changes in some states' shifting approaches to address prostitution. Inequality, and lack of opportunity, remain core drivers for people's decision to migrate and/or sell sex. Yet, rather than tackling these root causes, states continue to invest their efforts in the criminalisation of undocumented migrants and people involved in the sex industry, or in the targeting of individual deviance.

Multiple vulnerabilities create prime opportunities for certain groups to become subjected to exploitation. These vulnerabilities include, but are not limited to: being undocumented, coming from a poor background, being young, being female, being alone or isolated, having no access or recourse to justice or protection from law enforcement, and having no status or credibility. We will examine how these vulnerabilities, as shaped by the current political economic context, play out as the state interacts with grooming, trafficking and prostitution.

Grooming

In this section, we discuss online and localised grooming as being relevant and distinct phenomena tied to sexual exploitation in the context of globalisation and the state. The issue of grooming presents us with unique dilemmas, in part because grooming involves children and young people who are always regarded as victims, unable to consent to sex (something which we explore at length in Chapter 12). However, grooming remains underpinned by political, economic and cultural processes, and should not be regarded simply as a phenomenon caused by deviant individuals. The spread of mobile and Internet technology opens up new opportunities for online grooming, but also legislative, criminal justice and vigilantes' responses. Unlike online grooming, localised grooming is not a new phenomenon. We focus on grooming cases involving **BAME** perpetrators and young white victims. Here, gender, 'race' and class have a role to play, while multiple levels of vulnerability make for more successful targets in the grooming process.

Taking (online) grooming seriously

In 2017, the Serious Crimes Act in England and Wales was amended to create the offence of grooming: 'for anyone aged 18 or over to intentionally communicate with a child under 16, where the person acts for a sexual purpose and

the communication is sexual or intended to elicit a sexual response' (Ministry of Justice, 3 April 2017). Similar legislation exists in Australia, Norway, Singapore and the USA. Much of this legislation targets grooming which happens online, using mobile phones, social networking sites, email, and so on.

Different techniques are used to try to identify grooming before sexual abuse occurs (Penna et al., 2005). The placing of investigative officers in chat rooms to record and possibly entrap would-be offenders is a time-consuming and precarious technique that has been used to detect adults who are attempting to groom children (Pendar, 2007: 235; Penna et al., 2005: 1). Several software-based interventions are being developed in an attempt to detect people who may be grooming children online. Network-monitoring software which identifies the Internet Protocol (IP) address of computers can be used when a suspected offender has been identified. Algorithms designed to detect suspected adults who are posing as children, or to detect conversations – especially hidden or secret conversations – can also be used to detect grooming. Lyta Penna and colleagues (2005) suggest that analysing the discourses between different speakers can help to identify potential sex offenders: by analysing the length of the message, the complexity of the sentences and the length of time it has taken to compose the response, potential groomers can also be identified. However, there is a risk that these 'sting' operations inadvertently cajole people into trying to meet children for sex when they otherwise might not have gone that far. There is also a risk that by posing as a child online, officers risk jeopardising the conviction of child abusers.

Other examples of using software to detect adults who groom children online include the interactive avatar known as 'Sweetie', a computer-animated child created by children's rights organisations to obtain the personally identifiable data of predators that could then be reported to law enforcement agencies. Posing as a 10-year-old Filipino girl, over a ten-week period, 20,000 men contacted Sweetie, with 1,000 offering to pay money for her to perform sex acts. However, as with investigative officers posing as children in chat rooms, there are concerns that the use of Sweetie may prevent prosecutions due to concerns over perpetrators being entrapped. Sweetie is also designed and operated by a private Dutch organisation called *Terre des Hommes Netherlands*. Though, by their own account, *Terre des Hommes* has been able to use Sweetie successfully to identify the location of groomers and report these to the police, it is worth reflecting on the fact that this is an extra-judicial organisation and not a formal law-enforcement agency. How far do you think it matters that *Terre des Homme* is an extra-judicial organisation? Should we be wary of extra-judicial initiatives, or should we embrace them as filling a gap left by law enforcement?

Creating software which can stop the sexual abuse of children before it happens is obviously desirable, however there are a number of challenges that prevent this from being an easy task. Private conversations, for instance,

which happen via messenger systems, cannot be monitored in the same way that chat rooms or forums might be. This is even more problematic when one considers that adults who successfully groom children do so by befriending them, making the use of private chats even more likely (see Gámez-Guadix et al., 2017). Potential offenders who use virtual private networks (VPNs) to hide their location, or who benefit from the anonymity that the Internet affords by holding several email addresses with unverified identity information, can also evade detection. Researchers suggest that developing more complex algorithms capable of conducting more complex cryptoanalyses, including the enhanced ability to detect pornographic stories or images featuring children, will help in detecting suspected child abuse before it happens.

All of this happens online of course, and the online realm is a good place for offenders who seek to molest children to search for them while successfully hiding their identity. As part of their analysis of the process of grooming, Samantha Craven and colleagues (2007) note that potential sex offenders seek out ideal opportunities to engage with children in order to identify vulnerable ones who might be easier to contact for abuse. They also help us to bust the myth of the paedophile groomer by emphasising that grooming is not something that is committed by paedophiles alone. Child abusers are not necessarily paedophiles and, moreover, limiting a definition of grooming to a practice undertaken by paedophiles obscures the mundane ways that children can be groomed by people known to them: neighbours, family friends, the parents of friends, and club leaders, for instance. Grooming occurs as a precursor to sexual abuse, or attempts at sexual abuse, and sex trafficking.

Does the legislation against grooming actually work? In the Norwegian context, Elizabeth Staksrud (2013) is doubtful. She argues that anti-grooming laws target an imagined groomer–victim relationship which is 'highly inaccurate'. Very young children are not usually online, though more recent reports show an upward curve of children as young as 4 having their own devices, enabling them to get online (Turner, 4 October 2018). Staksrud (2013: 154) suggests that 'Internet-related sex crimes involving adults and juveniles mostly fit the standard model of statutory rape' because adults usually seek to contact and seduce children who are aged between 13 and 15. These facts do not reflect the popular imaginary of naïve children being preyed on by adults. Indeed, as we see in Chapter 12 in the context of teen sexting, children have agency over their sexual practices, which they exercise. The notion of the stranger lurking online does not reflect the way that children who interact with these adults experience them. Manuel Gámez-Guadix and colleagues (2018: 16) note that, as part of the process of being groomed, children can become emotionally invested in their relationship with the groomer; they might be 'highly motivated to connect with the aggressor … and even report being in love with them'. This kind of intimacy is hard to underestimate. Staksrud (2013: 158) suggests that, for some children, a stranger (or 'a new person', as Staksrud

puts it) whom they meet online might become a 'friend' in as little as 15 minutes. After that, children report that, from time to time, they do meet people in the offline world whom they first met online. Of these, 59 per cent reported that they 'had a good time' at the meeting, with only 2 per cent reporting that they had been attacked or verbally abused at the meeting (Staksrud, 2013: 161).

One of the reasons for this is that the online tendency among children is not to pretend to be someone they are not or to create a false profile. People 'know' who they are speaking to and, as a result, sexual violence against children happens 'through the establishment of trust and intimacy, rather than deceit and violence' (Staksrud, 2013: 162). In the context of grooming, most children have 'online coping strategies' to help them to avoid risky situations (2013: 162). Building resilience, knowing when to ignore a potential abuser's request, or knowing when to ask for help prevent potential abuse in a way that anti-grooming legislation cannot. The blurring of categories between child molester, abuser and paedophile means that these acts of child abuse become hard to discern, especially when the abuser takes the guise of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Acknowledging children's agency may increase resilience and enhance children's ability to discern abuse.

BOX 7.2

Consider the following questions:

- Is anti-grooming legislation too heavy-handed?
- Does it target the wrong sort of abuser?
- Is there a better way to target the online and offline grooming of children? Or is the sexual abuse of children so abhorrent that notwithstanding the imperfect application of the legislation, it still serves a social good?
- Do you think other approaches focusing on education for children about how to use the Internet, including a risk-reduction approach which accepts that some risk is acceptable, might work best? Or is all risk to be avoided when it comes to children?

Localised grooming in the UK: 'race' and place

Grooming can also take place offline, as part of a localised effort. In 2011, the Child Exploitation and Online Protection (CEOP) Command recognised 'localised grooming' as a tactic used to sexually exploit children. Localised grooming is defined as occurring:

where children have been groomed and sexually exploited by an offender, hav-
ing initially met in a location outside their home. This location is usually in public,
such as a park, cinema, on the street or at a friend's house. Offenders often act
together, establishing a relationship with a child or children before sexually
exploiting them. Some victims of 'street grooming' may believe that the offender
is in fact an older 'boyfriend'; these victims introduce their peers to the offender
group who might then go on to be sexually exploited as well. Abuse may occur
at a number of locations within a region and on several occasions. (CEOP
Command, 2011: 7)

Indeed, in his account of paedophilia discussed in Chapter 12, Tom O'Carroll
(1980) confirms that paedophiles seeking to meet children in order to groom
them (though he does not use this terminology), might well take up a position
as a scout or youth group leader, or volunteer as a sports coach, in order to
increase their chances. In his own words, 'a paedophile working as a voluntary
helper has the opportunity gradually to win the confidence and affection, and
perhaps, ultimately, the erotic interest, of youngsters, over a period of months
or even years' (O'Carroll, 1980: 119).

O'Carroll justifies this behaviour as a form of befriending a child. Intimacy
is formed as a way of separating the child from their peers or family to better
foster between the adult and child the notion that they are in a relationship
with each other. The keeping of secrets is part of this intimacy. Keeping
secrets helps to obscure the abuse. If a child believes their abuser to be their
girlfriend or boyfriend, or if they believe that they are friends, they are more
likely to keep those secrets. If children – who might often be kept in the dark
about sexual practices, anyway – do not recognise forms of touching or hug-
ging as being sexualised, they may not themselves realise that they are being
abused. It is worth highlighting that children who are groomed and abused
are often those who are likely to be already vulnerable in other areas of their
lives. Children with poor relationships with their parents, children in care or
children living in other precarious situations are likely to be especially vul-
nerable as they are flattered and given attention and gifts as part of the
grooming process.

There have been several cases of localised grooming in the UK which have
received significant media attention, particularly in the aftermath of the
Rochdale, Bradford and Rotherham scandals in the north of the UK in the
2000s. Nine men were jailed in Bradford for grooming and sexually abusing
two 14-year-old girls who were classed as 'vulnerable' (BBC, 27 February
2019). Another nine men were jailed for the grooming and sexual abuse of girls
as young as 13 in Rochdale, and seven men were jailed in Rotherham for
similar crimes (Halliday, 29 October 2018). These male abusers have often
been portrayed as belonging to an organised group or 'gang' in media coverage.
Most of these men are British Asian, while many of the girls are white. These
cases triggered a specific brand of moral outrage with racist undertones,

evident in the political and media commentary at the time that awareness of the abuse ruptured into the public domain.

BOX 7.3

In 2011, Jack Straw, Member of Parliament for Blackburn, UK, at the time, noted 'a specific problem which involves Pakistani heritage men ... who target vulnerable young white girls' (BBC, 8 January 2011). In an interview, Straw continues:

> These young men are in a Western society, in any event, they act like any other young men, they're fizzing and popping with testosterone, they want some outlet for that, but Pakistani heritage girls are off-limits and they are expected to marry a Pakistani girl from Pakistan, typically … So, they then seek other avenues and they see these young women, white girls who are vulnerable, some of them in care ... who they think are easy meat. (BBC, 8 January 2011)

Now, let us pause and reflect on this opinion:

- What was your initial reaction to this?
- Do you feel outraged in any way?
- Do you feel like this sort of commentary is justified?

On the one hand, one thing that Jack Straw unquestionably got right was in identifying the vulnerability of victims of grooming. Successful grooming is often underpinned by the multiple vulnerabilities of victim targets. On the other hand, we could argue that Straw's opinion is steeped in **Orientalism,** which shapes our representation and understanding of British Asian men's 'dangerous masculinities' (Tufail, 2015). Ella Cockbain (2013) discusses the creation of the 'Asian sex gang predator' figure in the aftermath of the Bradford, Rochdale and Rotherham cases. The racialised nature of the label starts with the word *gang*, a word normally reserved for BAME deviant groups. The ensuing media portrait is that of Asian men as being both *natural* and *organised* predators of young white girls (Gill and Harrison, 2015). Interestingly, the media attention given to these men tends to be far greater than that given to their white groomer counterparts. In this way, the problem is identified as one of 'race', rather than one of gender, masculinity and power. White groomers, such as Jimmy Savile (see Chapters 5 and 12), statistically make up the majority of sexual predators, yet they are seldom, if ever, identified as being part of a gang (even though their abuse may be facilitated by being part of a group, in which case it would be called a 'ring'). They are even less likely to

be identified as white. Their ethnic group belonging is not considered relevant: call it the power of privilege (Miah, 2015).

A review of the child sexual abuse case in Rotherham (Jay, 2014) found that 1,400 children and young people were abused over the course of 16 years. 'Race' and class, along with institutional failure by the police and social services, played a significant role in the unfolding and continuation of the abuse. Accordingly, senior figures both in the police and child protective services were aware of the abuse but believed reports to be grossly exaggerated due to the status of victims, many of whom were young, 'troublesome' girls in the care system. The ethnic background of perpetrators was not made explicit by authorities out of fear of accusations of racism. It was reported that 'council and other officials sometimes thought youth workers were exaggerating the exploitation problem. Sometimes they were afraid of being accused of racism if they talked openly about the perpetrators in the town mostly being Pakistani taxi drivers' (Pidd, 27 August 2014).

Many victims were rendered invisible by their working-class, underprivileged background, but also by gendered assumptions. A trend we see in state intervention in children's sexuality is the impact that perceptions of deviant sexuality has had on the policing of the behaviour of girls and young women. In Rotherham, the police directly targeted girls who were being abused through arrests for drunken behaviour, ignoring the underlying abuse these girls were being subjected to. The police also stopped monitoring some of these girls because they were either pregnant or had given birth, despite many being under the age of consent (Jay, 2014; see Chapters 4 and 12 for discussions of age of consent).

The regulation, control and punishment of girls' sexualities has historically informed welfare policy and social support from the state. As Pamela Cox (2003) outlines in her study of the gender development of the British juvenile justice system in the first half of the twentieth century, the difference in juvenile justice responses to girls deemed to be 'troublesome' could depend on whether the girl was deemed to be sexually innocent or sexually precocious. Most often, state sanctions were targeted towards working-class girls, and the courts were used to 'protect' girls who had, or were believed to be at risk of losing, their virginity. We have already discussed the significance of virginity in Chapter 3. The loss of virginity may have been as a consequence of child sexual exploitation (historically, and too often today, referred to as 'child prostitution'), as part of an emotional relationship, or due to sexual abuse. Regardless of the nature of the sexual encounter:

> girls leading 'wayward' lives and who 'chose' to be sexually active were thought to bear much, if not all, of the responsibility for their choice. But even in abuse cases, the very fact that a girl was able to articulate her experience often worked against her. A child possessing the vocabulary to describe a sexual act was no 'innocent' child. (Cox, 2003: 41)

Such state responses to sexually active girls (including those who had been abused or were being sexually exploited) is deeply troubling when we consider that the girls had not committed an actual criminal offence. They were being brought into the juvenile justice system purely because of their sexual activity. Responses by state officials were a blend of protection of and punishment for the girl, but, as Cox argues, were also designed to protect other children as 'she could "contaminate" the other children with this "knowledge of evil"' (2003: 41). Thus, as we can see here, the 'good' girl, the one who does not need to be punished, is the sexually innocent one.

The sexualisation of girls' delinquency has not been confined to the history books. These processes are visible in the Rotherham case, and have been highlighted in numerous studies by feminist criminologists completing work on girls' involvement in criminal justice (see, for example, Chesney-Lind and Shelden, 2013; Mallicoat, 2007). Furthermore, such controls and regulations are saturated with the wider discrimination of 'race' and class, as working-class girls and girls of colour are much more readily sexualised, and have their sexual activities policed to a greater extent (Gaarder et al., 2004; Rosenbaum and Chesney-Lind, 1994).

In Rotherham, some of the abused girls were internally trafficked between towns and cities in the north of England. Here, we can reflect on how our ideas of trafficking may themselves be influenced by Orientalist assumptions. Trafficking does not necessarily involve an exotic victim, who is Black or Eastern Europeanbeing groomed and exploited. It can happen closer to home, and to girls who are white and Western. Being female, young, isolated and poor make up the multiple vulnerabilities that create the conditions for successful grooming and trafficking. These vulnerabilities may make one invisible, or only visible as a troublesome youngster, to state authorities. However, successful grooming and trafficking also require the presence of a set of configurations shaped by both discourse and state responses, to which we now turn.

The 'invention' of trafficking

Anne Gallagher (2001) argues that international efforts to tackle trafficking were mainly driven by concerns over state sovereignty and security at a time of the expansion of illicit global markets. The Palermo Protocols, a series of agreements ratified by UN member states between 2000 and 2003, represented the first coordinated action by states to address the issue of trafficking as a form of lucrative transnational organised crime. The Palermo Protocols were concerned with all manner of trafficking, not just the sexually exploitative kind.

And yet our shared social imagery tends to be more concerned with trafficking for sexual exploitation than it is with other forms of trafficking for labour exploitation (Alvarez and Alessi, 2012). The Protocols define human trafficking specifically as:

> the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UN, 2004: 42)

In the above list of types of exploitation, prostitution and sexual exploitation appear first, even though most human trafficking seems to occur for purposes other than sexual exploitation (ILO, 2017). Still, trafficking for sexual exploitation does occur. In a 2017 report, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimated that, globally, 24.9 million people are in forced labour, and 4.8 million people in forced sexual exploitation, with women and girls being disproportionately affected (ILO, 2017). In its Global Report on Trafficking in Persons (2018), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) made a contrasting claim that most trafficking occurs for the purposes of sexual exploitation, albeit there are regional variations. This claim is based on the numbers detected by law enforcement. Here, it may be the case that more resources are being directed at the investigation and detection of trafficking for sexual exploitation than other forms of human trafficking. Official statistics show an upward trajectory from 2003 to 2016, with the numbers of detected victims increasing over this time period (UNODC, 2018: 7). Note the start date: 2003 is when the Palermo Protocols came into force, and efforts to record international trafficking began. If global trafficking was happening to the same extent prior to 2003, we would not know about it, because records are patchy at best. Other numbers worth highlighting are countries of destination – with the wealthy countries of the Global North more likely to be destination countries – and the gender split of victims: 'the vast majority of the detected victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation are females, and 35 per cent of the victims trafficked for forced labour are also females, both women and girls. At the same time, more than half of the victims of trafficking for forced labour are men' (UNODC, 2018: 10).

It appears that, over the past two decades, we have become more concerned with trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation than ever before. We could argue that this is a positive development; why should we not be content that sexual exploitation has risen on the international agenda, becoming a global concern punctuated by intervention efforts? It is tempting to reach such

a conclusion. However, there are issues we need to consider before becoming blinded by optimism. First, despite such efforts, the numbers of sexually exploited people worldwide do not seem to be dwindling. Indeed, we must be careful of making assumptions based on numbers, as, with any 'slippery statistics' that characterise illicit markets, there is a dark figure (Gozdziak and Collett, 2005). Furthermore, a constructivist view of statistics would highlight that these numbers tell us more about the institutions that control and record, than the actual reality of trafficking. This means that when resources are invested into tackling trafficking for sexual exploitation, as they have been since 2003, the numbers of detected victims may increase simply because trafficking, and its recording, has become a priority for law enforcement.

There are other, more sinister sides to this issue. The expansion of global markets under neoliberal globalisation does not stop at licit goods and services; illicit markets are also expanding. Johan Lindquist (2010) notes that, along with illicit drug markets and terrorism, human trafficking is the fastest growing global market. He is not interested in proving whether this is the case, as he recognises that statistics in this field are, at best, misleading (something that others have agreed with; see Weitzer, 2014). He does, however, point to the manner in which trafficking is established as being a problem through cultural artefacts, such as counter-trafficking films. The early 2000s were characterised by the shaping of what Laura Augustin (2005) calls 'the rescue industry' – organisations that came into existence for the purpose of establishing trafficking as a problem, and intervening in it by creating a simple victim narrative that separates the issue of trafficking from the broader political economic conditions in which it occurs. This is what Lindquist (2010: 226) calls 'a depoliticizing function through the concern with – and intervention on behalf of – a particular type of migrant, namely, the "victim," rather than broader issues such as labour rights and the freedom of mobility'. Separating the issue of trafficking for sexual exploitation from other forms of economic exploitation and vulnerability is a useful tactic to blame organised crime and the deviant individuals therein, rather than the system that supports them. Then, the problem is not of a political or an economic nature, and the solution is not political economic reform. Rather, the problem is the deviance and opportunism of individual offenders, the traffickers of the world, and the solution is targeted intervention through law enforcement and rescue organisations.

Here, we need to return to the contrast outlined above: on the one hand, freedom and global mobility characterise the neoliberal globalisation narrative, engendering the hopes and aspirations of people around the world; on the other hand, it is only a minority of people who are afforded such freedoms and rights, making the rest more vulnerable to all forms of exploitation through widespread poverty, inequality, lack of labour protection, and tight border controls. In this context, economic migrants can more easily become, and be portrayed as, sexually exploited victims (Augustin, 2005). Interestingly, law

enforcement interventions are principally aimed at victims or perpetrators, with no comparable regulations, interventions or programmes that target sex buying and sex tourism. We will return to this issue later in the chapter. For now, let us focus on the case of a USA celebrity-sponsored anti-trafficking campaign targeted at men who buy sex.

#RealMenDontBuyGirls

In 2011, Hollywood actors Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore launched the *Real Men Don't Buy Girl*s campaign, enlisting a series of Hollywood celebrities to carry this message through an advertising campaign after learning about the extent of trafficking worldwide and in the USA. According to Kamala Kempadoo (2015: 12), initiatives such as *Real Men Don't Buy Girls* appear genuine on the surface: 'the main thrust behind such celebrity campaigns and attention is the rescue of women, particularly young women and underage girls from what they deem to be "modern-day slavery" and "sex trafficking"'.

So far so good. But what do they imply? Kempadoo explains that this campaign is made up of 'videos that make fun of things that "real men" don't do (such as driving while blindfolded, making a grilled cheese sandwich with an iron, shaving with a chainsaw, etc.)' (2015: 12). The jokes are in the exaggerated tools men use in the ads, carrying a connotation of lack of responsibility and cluelessness which supposedly shows a 'woke' attitude towards gender. Aside from the disconnection between the rather trivial jokes in the ads and the sombre realities of trafficking and sexual exploitation, there is an interesting role reversal whereby some gendered activities are recast as manly. Yet, the 'real men' of the campaign rely on their status as masculine celebrities to call upon an ideal of 'moral masculinity' within a postcolonial configuration; 'so rather than producing a self-reflexive white subject, we are presented with the image of a daring knight whose moral obligation is to save the world – especially Asia and Africa – from itself and an affirmation of white masculinity as, amongst other things, powerful, heroic, and morally superior' (Kempadoo, 2015: 16).

As Sarah Steele and Tyler Shores (2014) have compellingly argued, celebrities' role as engaged activists and stakeholders has increased through extensive use of social media, to the point that they have come to be considered 'expert-advocates' by a general public who places trust in them. Of particular concern is the ability for these celebrities to reach expert status and large audiences without understanding the complexities of any given issue, giving way to inaccurate representations (Steele and Shores, 2014). As the celebrity reaches 'expert-advocate' status, they can reinforce the state's sovereign mandate to intervene in trafficking, tightening border controls and further criminalising migrants. These celebrities become agents of the sovereign state, creating a

straightforward connection between real men and moral masculinity, and state intervention and control. An alternative reading is that of Samantha Majic (2018), who argues that the Kutcher and Moore campaign promotes an 'individual responsibility norm' which masks structural solutions to human trafficking. Whichever reading you find more convincing, there is a commonality between the two: ignoring structural determinants and advocating for interventions focused on *individual behaviour*, whether it is stopping individuals from buying sex, or stopping individuals crossing borders. Thus, the system that produces and reproduces inequalities across 'race', class and gender is not called into question. Rather, individual deviants are singled out and criminalised, while business continues as usual.

Kempadoo sees any attempt to intervene in aiding the trafficking victim as being embedded in a system of patriarchy, postcolonial convictions and White supremacy, where:

> the rescue fantasy is a means through which the endeavors are legitimized as altruistic and humanitarian, obscuring the reliance on and reproduction of the racial knowledge of the Other in the historical tropes of, on the one hand – the hopeless victim, impoverished and incapable of attending to one's own needs – and, on the other, the benevolent civilizing white subject who must bear the burden of intervening in poor areas of the world. (2015: 14)

This resonates with Elizabeth Bernstein's (2012) account of anti-trafficking organisations and benevolent White feminism. White supremacy is intertwined with the power of Western states and their colonial legacy. As such, this moral crusade:

> locates its moral obligation and civic responsibility in great part in the rescue of 'prostituted' women and children (victims) from the clutches of male privilege, power, and lust (sex trafficking) and celebrates its success in extending its international reach (especially in Asia), reproducing the colonial maternalist position in relation to the non-Western world while reconfirming white Western feminine subjectivity as benevolent. Contemporary antislavery advocates share a similar dimension of the modern 'white man's burden' in that they see themselves as leading a moral crusade against an 'unconscionable evil' that proudly claims to be following in the footsteps of the British and American nineteenth-century evangelical-inspired movements to abolish the enslavement and trade of Africans. (Kempadoo, 2015: 14–5)

On this reading, abolitionism is the new anti-slavery movement that obsesses over trafficking for sexual exploitation over other forms of labour exploitation. When an abolitionist logic is uncritically applied to the context of sexual exploitation, it results in multiple erasure effects. It erases the distinction between sexual exploitation and sex work, rendering agency meaningless and championing instead the idea of a powerless victim in need of rescue. It also

erases the difference between undocumented migrant and trafficked victim. Lastly, it contributes to individualising blame for sexually exploitative relations. This abolitionist shift is very visible in the context of changing approaches towards prostitution and its regulation.

State responses to prostitution

In this next section, we discuss how state responses towards prostitution have developed, noting the recent trend towards shifting the burden of responsibility away from those who sell sex and towards those who buy it. We reflect on some of the limitations of this approach in an increasingly globalised context, where even those who cannot legally buy sex in their native country are still able to travel and buy sex elsewhere by engaging in sex tourism. Meanwhile, those who sell sex outside their country of birth, migrant sex workers, can face prosecution, detention and even deportation, while having limited access to licit labour market opportunities and limited recourse to justice.

'Get off in Thailand': Why don't we regulate sex tourism?

In February 2019, AirAsia introduced an advertising campaign in Australia, affixed on public transport, using the tagline 'Get Off in Thailand'.

This advert presumably targeted Australians, and particularly Australian men, as a 'double entendre'. In theory (and often in practice), Global North passport holders can travel to any country and do what they like with their powerful passports and money in their pockets, including buying sex. However, the 'Get off in Thailand' advert received harsh criticism from members of the organisation Collective Shout: a campaigning platform against the sexualisation of women and children in the media. Collective Shout took this opportunity to expose the scale of sex tourism from Australia into Thailand. Such criticism then triggered negative reactions from public officials. After only a few weeks, AirAsia removed the advert and released a public apology (France24, 27 March 2019).

How would you interpret this chain of events? Since the advert was removed, one could argue that this was a victory for rights-based advocacy against sexual exploitation. However, despite the successful targeting of advertising campaigns by advocacy groups, there are no easily enforceable regulations preventing men from travelling to Thailand to buy sex, nor are there regulations preventing men from earning disproportionately to their needs and having large disposable incomes. Indeed, Thailand's economy relies

on leisure and sex tourism in a significant way (McDowall and Wang, 2009). Havocscope (2015) estimated that up to 10 per cent of Thailand's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) originates from the sex industry. This is an estimate, but it remains an indication of the size and importance of the sex industry in the Thai economy.

Should states be doing more to regulate sex buying? Should they criminalise it? In general, relatively few states worldwide have attempted the regulation of the purchase of sex, and not without controversy. To date, legislation that criminalises the purchase of sex was implemented in Sweden first in 1999, later followed by Norway, Finland and Iceland, and more recently by Belize, Canada, France, Ireland, Israel, Martinique and Northern Ireland. One issue with this approach has to do with scope. Any such legislation can only target incidents within a given country's territory, and not across borders. There is no easily enforceable regulation criminalising sex tourism, and no simple way of establishing whether people engage in sex tourism or not when they travel. Criminalising the buying of sex in Sweden does not prevent Swedish people from travelling to Thailand to buy sex.

A further dimension of this debate is that the criminalisation of the purchase of sex has come under fire by some academics and sex workers' rights groups (Scarlet Alliance; the Rose Alliance; the English Collective of Prostitutes; the Global Network of Sex Work Projects are some examples). Scholars and activists have been critical about using the criminal law as an instrument of liberation (Bernstein, 2010; Scoular and Carline, 2014), about the mistaken assumption that criminalising demand will not drive supply further underground (Scoular and O'Neill, 2008), and about the negative effects criminalisation has on the most vulnerable among sex workers. There are profound inequalities in the treatment and regulation of tourists versus other travellers, such as migrants. Migrant sex workers (those who sell sex in a country different from their country of birth) and survival sex workers (those who exchange sex as a means of survival) are particularly vulnerable. Scholars also point to the process of individualising blame, echoing the femonationalistic debates we encountered in Chapter 3 whereby gender inequality is seen exclusively in the actions of a few 'bad men' towards women who are victims, rather than as a structural problem (Harrington, 2018).

Whether you think criminalising the purchase of sex is a positive, progressive practice or not, there are some things worth considering. This approach generally does little to tackle gender and economic inequalities, unless it is part of a much broader package of welfare reforms targeting such inequalities, as was the case in Sweden:

> the Swedish woman-friendly welfare state's reliance on gender equality through women's participation in the labour market and men's entry to the home as care takers, the gender-equal tax system designed to facilitate such practices, and

> the sexual politics where 'free and equal sex' was promoted, all suggested that men and women were essentially alike and in need of the same rights and social benefits to make a good life. In this context, the gendered and violent reality of prostitution did not make prostitution seem like a job, rather a vehicle perpetuating gender inequality. (Yttergren and Westerstrand, 2016: 48)

While Sweden is often pictured as one of the most gender-equal countries in the world, this presumed equality is tarnished by ethnonationalism and heteronormativity (Schierup and Ålund, 2011). Welfare reforms were implemented primarily for the benefit of Swedish nationals, and not immigrant groups. Meanwhile, this approach denies people any choice to engage in sex work as a legitimate occupation, meaning that sex workers are denied any agency in the matter (Levy and Jakobsson, 2013). Niina Vuolajärvi's (2019) ethnography across Sweden, Norway and Finland has highlighted that migrants make up the majority of sex workers in the region, and that, instead of prosecuting clients, Nordic states are busy prosecuting migrant sex workers through immigration laws. Nationals are being afforded the welfare of the generous Nordic states through support, counselling and exit programmes. Meanwhile, foreigners increasingly become targets of punishment and deportation: a trend not unique to Nordic states (Pickering and Ham, 2014).

In sum, efforts to regulate prostitution are inherently limited by hegemonic norms which transfer into law (Scoular, 2010), and by a system of nationalist allegiances and borders which is antithetical to the globalisation of markets. In this context, while states are busy fortifying and deporting, moral campaigners are focusing our attention on the immorality of buying sex. Meanwhile, they want to convince us that sex workers are victims of sexual exploitation; but what if the realities of prostitution were more complex than that?

Sex workers, austerity and survival

So far, we have identified some trends that are shaping the prostitution landscape, including the framing of the problem in terms of trafficking and sexual exploitation, the rise of abolitionism and the criminalisation of buyers in some countries, and the targeting and deportation of migrant sex workers. We will conclude the chapter by reflecting on the effects of criminalisation and the political economy of austerity on sex workers in England.

While the act of selling sex from person A to B is not illegal in many jurisdictions, and indeed the same goes for the act of B buying sex from A (minus the countries outlined in the earlier section), many of the activities *associated* with prostitution are criminalised. In England and Wales, the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Policing and Crime Act 2009 are the central pieces of legislation regulating prostitution. Under these Acts, activities including soliciting,

causing or inciting prostitution for gain, controlling prostitution for gain, paying for the sexual services of a prostitute subjected to force, and loitering (as covered by the Street Offences Act 1959) are criminalised. It is also illegal for two or more people to sell sex from the same premises.

There are significant variations in the law and application of the law across the UK, at both jurisdictional and local level. Northern Ireland notably adopted the criminalisation of buyers' model in 2014 (Huschke, 2017). Meanwhile, different police forces across the country have adopted distinct and often contradictory approaches to prostitution, varying from the innovative Merseyside model, which treats violence against sex workers as a form of hate crime (Campbell, 2016), to waves of eviction and 'cleansing' of specific areas as being tied to gentrification, particularly evident in the country's city centres (Neville and Sanders-McDonagh, 2017). Lastly, there has been increasing investment in anti-trafficking operations, leading to detention and deportation. For example, a report by the organisation After Exploitation found that, in 2018, hundreds of trafficking victims were placed in detention centres awaiting deportation (Taylor, 9 July 2019).

The English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) is a sex worker-led advocacy organisation. Box 7.4 contains an excerpt from its website. We would like you to read it carefully.

BOX 7.4

The English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) is a network of sex workers working both on the streets and indoors, campaigning for decriminalisation and safety.

We fight against being treated like criminals. We've helped sex workers win against charges of soliciting, brothel-keeping and controlling – the last two most often used against women who are working together for safety.

Most sex workers are mothers trying to do the best for their children. We campaign against austerity cuts and for housing and other survival resources so that any of us can leave prostitution if and when we want.

We have an international network including sister organisations in Thailand (Empower) and the US (US PROStitutes Collective).

WHAT WE STAND FOR:

- Decriminalisation of sex work – on the street and in premises – as in New Zealand. The laws land us in prison, divide us from families and friends, make us vulnerable to violence, isolate us. Criminal records trap us in prostitution.

- Protection from rape and other violence.

- An end to police brutality, corruption, racism and other illegality. Prosecute police who break the law.

- No zones, no licensing, no legalised brothels – they are ghettos and state pimping.
- Self-determination. Sex workers must decide how we want to work – not the police, local authorities, pimps, madams/managers who profit from our work.
- An end to racism and other discrimination within the sex industry.
- Rights for sex workers like other workers: the right to organise collectively to improve our working conditions, a pension and to join trade unions.
- No criminalisation of clients, which would force sex workers underground and into more danger. Consenting sex between adults is not a crime.
- Free and accessible health services for all: no mandatory health checks.
- Cis and trans women's right to organise independently of men, including of male sex workers.
- Economic alternatives: no one should be forced into sex by poverty. People who want to leave the sex industry (or any industry) should have access to resources.
- Shelters and benefits for children/young people so they don't have to beg or go into prostitution to survive.
- No 'rehabilitation' schemes which punish us or force us into low-paid jobs.
- The right to freedom of movement within and between countries. Stop using anti-trafficking laws to deport sex workers.

Source: Adapted from the English Collective of Prostitutes website (ECP, n.d.)

Take some time to summarise the issues identified in this position statement, then reflect on the following:

- What does this organisation stand for?
- What are its demands?
- What problems does it identify as affecting sex workers?
- What solutions does it propose?
- Who is the organisation speaking on behalf of?
- How do you feel about the above positions? Do you agree or disagree with them and why?

Recently, the ECP collected a series of articles on its website coming from disparate news sources, all pointing to the same issue. The headlines read:

Selling sex for £5 is the only way I can survive after universal credit chaos. (Sky News, 25 October 2019)

Universal credit: MPs call for action on women driven to 'survival sex'. (BBC, 25 October 2019)

> Universal credit: Women say they are forced into 'survival sex' by DWP's five-week wait, MPs warn. (Sandhu, 25 October 2019)

> Why is it only when universal credit forces women into sex work the government actually listens? (Aspinall, 25 October 2019)

These headlines point to 'the violence of austerity' (Cooper and Whyte, 2017). They are interesting because they identify the state as being responsible for pushing women into prostitution as a direct result of austerity and welfare reform. Austerity has been the dominant political economic approach in the UK in response to the 2008 economic crisis. As discussed in Chapter 2, this approach entailed extensive cuts to public services and a substantial review of the structure of welfare benefits, which culminated in the creation of Universal Credit. Hailed as a one-stop shop to replace a more antiquated and fragmented welfare benefits system, Universal Credit has received widespread criticism and been deemed a policy failure (Norris and Rutter, 2016).

While survival sex work in the context of austerity appears far removed from conceptualising prostitution as a free choice for women, it is also a far cry from the idea that prostitution should be understood solely as a form of sexual exploitation, or even as an expression of gender inequality. Inequality is a core driver, but inequality should always be understood as intersectional. In the context of austerity, the state enables entry into prostitution because of its failure to provide alternatives for the most vulnerable in society, including migrants and people in poverty. It is unsurprising then that sex workers' advocacy groups, along with many academics, see attempts by the state to criminalise any aspect of prostitution as a bogus solution to the problem.

Summary

In this chapter, we have observed the somewhat disparate yet interconnected issues of grooming, trafficking and prostitution, with the aid of key concepts and structural categories, including the usual suspects: gender, 'race' and class. We insist on observing the way these categories intersect to support our understanding of these phenomena and state responses to them under the umbrella of sexual exploitation. The recognition that sexual exploitation takes place in the context of grooming, trafficking and prostitution does little to address their causes. What is more, such recognition can be used by states in perverse ways. States use the fear of sexual exploitation and trafficking to justify the tightening of borders and their policing. They use this fear to justify punitive responses towards individual deviants such as British Asian groomers and sex buyers, but also migrant sex workers. These state interventions do not halt

these phenomena in any significant way, and often do more harm than good; for example, by fostering cultural stereotypes about groomers, by driving prostitution further underground, by rendering sex workers more vulnerable and by detaining and deporting migrant sex workers.

If we are to give validity and meaning to the rhetoric of universal human rights, we must start by actively addressing the rights of people who are marginalised and made vulnerable in these contexts. Conversely, and by relying on dominant discourses about trafficking and sexual exploitation shaped by undercurrents of ethnonationalism, femonationalism, colonialism and abolitionism, states continue to support criminal justice interventions targeted at individual deviants, rather than investing in systemic change. Such change would require addressing the root causes of economic and social inequalities and redesigning political economy away from neoliberal globalisation, something that cannot be done through criminal justice reform alone.

Review questions

- In what ways does nationalism play a role in state responses to grooming, trafficking and prostitution?
- What are the limitations of current understandings of, and state interventions in, sexual exploitation?
- What should states do differently to address the causes of sexual exploitation?

Other chapters that this links to:

Chapter 3 (Sex and crime in time and space)
Chapter 5 (Sex and institutional cultures of abuse)
Chapter 8 (Sex and war)
Chapter 12 (Children, sexualisation and the law)
Chapter 14 (The future)
Chapter 15 (How to change your life)