

Reviews

sleaze and SMUTCH

THERE'S SOMETHING FOUL ABOUT THE NEW BOOK *GODDESSES OF THE LUST TRIANGLE*, AND KATHLEEN MALTZAHN SAYS THE STINK IS COMING FROM ITS AUTHOR, A KNOWN HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATE.

"Like many true-blooded males of my generation, I was socialized to appreciate female bodies, especially in its (sic) prurient dimension. For men like me, the tempting sight of these ladies is hard to resist. They satisfy our sexual needs and provide a much-needed respite from a hard days work." (p.3)

No, this is not a sleazy Australian sex tourist visiting Thailand or the Philippines. Nor a big-bellied businessman leaving the strip shows of Metro Manila. This is Arnel de Guzman, executive director of the Philippine migrant welfare NGO KAIBIGAN, and author of the *Goddesses of the Lust Triangle: An Excursion into Manila's Erotic Dance Industry*.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle describes itself as an attempt to "contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of women working in Manila's erotic dance industry.." (p. 5). Its author comes to this issue with expertise in several areas: Arnel de Guzman is a long-standing human rights advocate and an academic. As well, he says he has a "personal commitment to explore the issues of exploitation of Filipinas abroad," explaining that the growing phenomenon of Filipino women entertainers abroad has an impact on what

he calls erotic dancers. It seems a promising combination.

One hopes that as a human rights advocate, he will talk about the increasing recognition that women's rights are human rights, and perhaps investigate the international push to treat prostitution and other forms of sexual violence as human rights violations. One would also expect that as an academic, he will provide a broad perusal and sharp analysis of the issue. There is a rich array of information to be tapped on this issue; women's NGOs have been working with prostituted women for almost a decade now. Finally one would hope that as an activist committed to exploring the issues of women's exploitation, Arnel will at least show some compassion and sensitivity.

De Guzman does none of these. Perhaps, he sees no reason to. It is enough, he says, to make the data public. Those who may be "interested in exploring more possibilities can use [it] as a take-off point."

So what does he do?

He enters the bars, watches the strip shows, invites the women to his table and fondles their bodies. I can't see what take-off point these provide, except for male suprema-

cists out to consolidate their feelings of dominance. The reader is hard-pressed to find any evidence of his promised sociological "edge in terms of being able to intellectualize [his] own erotic tendencies" (p. 4), much less his self-declared commitment to serious research.

Try and find genuine discussion of exploitation in the following extract, where de Guzman, and his friends, enter the club *Night Tripper's* VIP Room. VIP rooms are private rooms in bars that men can rent and have women sent into. There they can sit and watch the strip show without anyone seeing them, and they are given free reign with as many women as they want and can afford. VIP rooms allow men to treat women as they please and have sex in whatever way they want, without even having to leave the bar. In the name of research, de Guzman and three of his friends hire a VIP room, and women. Their "partners" are dancers and periodically leave the VIP room to perform:

"We breathlessly awaited [Aiko's] re-entry into the room for the much-awaited "shower and lotion" portion. She was really well-endowed. Her breasts were round and firm. The nipples were not so big and a little

THE WOMAN IS THERE TO BE CONSUMED, AND IF SHE WON'T OBLIGE BY PRETENDING TO ENJOY HERSELF,

pinkish. The mound between her shapely thighs was bushy. Handling [sic] [Engineer Nelson] a bar of soap, she poured some water from a small pitcher onto her smooth and shiny body...Dutifully, Nelson did as he was told. ...[He] rubbed her behind. Since it was not forbidden to scrub her luscious breasts, he also massaged her melon-like boobs...In her second set, Aiko returned... Nelson was the first to massage her body with the lotion. But this time, she allowed us to participate in the act." (p.45)

And this, I think, is the value of this book. It shows us how men such as de Guzman see women. It is not about "goddesses" but gods: men who believe themselves to be the masters of women and their bodies. It shows the lack of compassion and intelligence of supposedly mature, even politically progressive men, and it underscores how irrelevant the likes and dislikes of these women and girls are.

In one incident, a naked woman is sent into de Guzman's VIP room. The author describes without surprise or dismay the fact that she says nothing to them as she is pawed and perved at. It seems her personhood is considered absolutely irrelevant:

"Bruce held her waist and sucked her two erect prune-like nipples. We were envious so each complained loudly. "It is unfair. How about us? Oh, she even gyrated". Lyka ignores us completely. She just continued swaying to the music as if savoring each word. "Close your eyes, I'd like to see you tonight in my sweet dreams." (p. 58)

Many people would see this

as a classic example of disassociation: a woman cutting off from a situation, and even her body, to cope with being humiliated, harmed, or treated like an object. It is often discussed as a common coping mechanism of people being sexually abused, including women in prostitution. But the sociologist not only misses this completely, he misinterprets the whole scene. According to him, she is not struggling to survive; she's savouring the song. De Guzman does not get it and does not care. The woman is there to be consumed, and if she won't oblige by pretending to enjoy herself, de Guzman will re-write reality and say she is savouring sweet dreams.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle is shallow, simplistic and self-indulgent, and one can only wonder how it qualifies as research towards a PhD in sociology. But it is more than embarrassingly superficial. This book contributes to the never-ending justification of the sex industry. It feeds into the ongoing blurring of the way men benefit from and enjoy the sex trade, and legitimises the blaming or trivialising of the women involved. One example of this is the author's approach to the women. While conceding that the culture of the club is "one of exploitation" (p. 113), de Guzman insists that the women "are not angels" (p. 114). "Their 'lumpenic' or socially deviant tendencies are obvious..." he says, "[g]ive them an inch and they will take a foot." This is, he says, 'a result of the "social world" and "conditioning." What this means is not explained or explored. However, in case we read such comments as showing compassion for these women, or awareness of the way society forms, uses and exploits them, the book ends with a reminder of the dangers of prostitution, for men!

"...these are instances when

these victims become the "victimizers." They take their "revenge" on the customers...These customers are stripped off [sic] their money. The women twiddle them around their fingers. It is too late when they realize that they have been scored at [sic]. The world of the exotic dancers in the "lust triangle" is a complicated one. The world of Aiko and Medina and Patricia Jones is definitely not a one-dimensional world. Enter their world at your own risk." (p. 115)

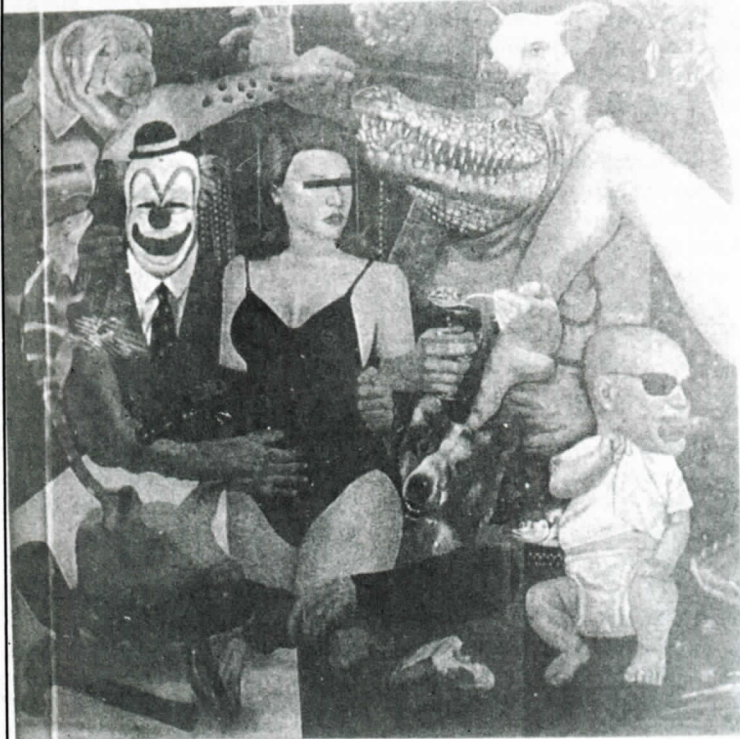
This world of the sex industry is a risky one. But it is women and girls who are at risk, not men like Arnel de Guzman, or any other man who goes to strip clubs and uses women in prostitution.

Seeing these risk, humiliation and harm, many feminists talk of prostitution as a male system, one that benefits men and insists on their self-proclaimed right to women's bodies. In the short-term, some women earn enough to survive. In the long term, however, women pay a high price. Prostitution is not a long-term, life-affirming "profession". It is not something women can stay in safely and securely. Instead, it is likely to expose them to humiliation and violence, make them sick, leave them to raise children without support, and discard them when they are too "old", too "ugly" or just aren't wanted any more. But not everybody loses out as badly as the women who are its raw materials. Ironically, the sex industry is a multi-million dollar, multi-national industry. In prostitution, and its brother industry, pornography, sex industrialists are made wealthy and powerful, and ordinary men are reassured about their power over and superiority to women.

DE GUZMAN WILL RE-WRITE REALITY AND SAY SHE IS SAVOURING SWEET DREAMS.

GODDESSES

LUST



ARNEL F. DE GUZMAN

If de Guzman had been interested, he could have discussed all these and more with the women's groups in Quezon City, who have offices only minutes away from his office. He didn't bother. Instead, he devoted only one paragraph, in the last pages of the book, to considering these arguments, incorrectly claiming that feminists see the women as blameless and victims, and in doing so depict them as "helpless creatures" (p. 114). In fact, feminists are among the first to affirm and salute the survival skills and fortitude of women in prostitution but that does not mean they excuse the industry. Feminists believe the women should be supported and assisted, and at the same time, the dehumanising in-

dustry of prostitution should be criticised and dismantled.

But de Guzman does not simply ignore feminist work and feminists, he denigrates and ridicules them. He describes Bruce Lewis, his "constant companion in the course of [his] research" as "the quintessential 'feminist'." This is the same man who is shown repeatedly sexually harassing the women. Why feminist? Because, says de Guzman, in what one can only as-

sume he sees as a little joke, he prefers his own "Filipino translation of that label - 'babaero' (womanizer)". (p. 116). It's about as cute as calling Marcos a human rights advocate.

While this book would be a concern regardless of who wrote it, Arnel de Guzman's position in KAIBIGAN, an NGO working for Filipino migrants' rights and welfare makes it doubly so. What does it mean to advocate and lobby for Filipino entertainers in Japan when in the Philippines he is clamoring to get his hands on their bodies? Is it just that his macho patriotism means that he does not want Japanese men to have "his" women? And how would he be able to listen to, represent and fight for women who are being humiliated and objectified, and at times beaten, raped, or murdered, when he thinks that prostitution and the trafficking in women are about "lust", men's "sexual needs" and women "twiddl[ing] [men] around their fingers'. It may be that KAIBIGAN's integrity as a migrant organisation committed to all people's human rights, regardless of gender, is severely and irreparably compromised by de Guzman's continued leadership within it.

Goddesses of the Lust Triangle is a sleazy, shoddy, little book. It capitalises on women's pain and feeds off their bodies. It reminds us how ordinary, supposedly decent and enlightened men can still see women as less than human. It reminds us of what it means to live in a world where men are gods, and women their playthings. And it reminds us of the need to work for a world where we can bring down the gods from their heights, and all live equally as human beings with dignity and value.

Kathleen Maltzhan, an Australian, lived in the Philippines for five years and helped found SINAG and BUKAL, NGOs that work with streetwalkers on issues like health, AIDS awareness and police harassment. Aside from freelance writing, Kathleen also writes poetry; some of her works have previously appeared in Women in Action, HECATE and other feminist publications.

Healthy Readings

IN 1991 FIVE WOMEN'S DOCUMENTATION CENTERS from different regions, each with health as a primary focus, met in a roundtable conference to try to develop a common core collection of resource materials on women and health. Originally, the five women's centers conceived of a single core collection. This core collection was seen as representative not only of the width and breadth, but also of the high quality of productions on women's health issues and concerns. It was soon realized though that, since together they represented three languages, it made more sense to develop two or three collections: one in English, one in Spanish, and perhaps another one in Portuguese. The five centers were ARROW (Malaysia), Cidhal (Mexico), Isis International (Chile), Sos Corpo (Brazil) and the Boston Women's Health Book Collective.

The books featured here make up the core collection of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, a pioneer in women and health issues and the publisher of "Our Bodies, Ourselves," a classic guide to women's health for nearly 25 years. Their core collection, according to the BWHBC, might serve as a "start up" library collection in health or a "useful health component added to a collection with a broader focus."

We at Isis are particularly keen in promoting the BWHBC Core Collection, not only because all the books in it are available in our own resource center and library or because one of our own books made it to the list. Many of the books in BWHBC's list have received good feedback from our library users and readers. If we are made to draw up a list of the most frequently borrowed books in our library, a number of BWHBC's top choices will most definitely be on it.

1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic edited by Judy Bride (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1991); **Challenging the Culture of Silence: Building Alliances to End Reproductive Tract Infections** by the International Women's Health Coalition; **Women and Development Unit-University of the West Indies** (New York: IWHC, 1994) **Changing Bodies, Changing Lives** by Ruth Bell (New York: Random House, 1987); **Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide** edited by Vandana Shiva (Philadelphia, New Society Publishers, 1994); **Freedom from Violence: Women's Strategies from Around the World** edited by Margaret Schuler (New York: UNIFEM, 1992); **From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom: Transforming a Movement** edited by Marlene Gerber Fried (Boston: South End Press, 1990); **Immigrant Women's Health Handbook** by the Immigrant Women's Health Centre (Toronto: IWHC, 1988); **Natural Healing in Gynecology** by Rina Nissim, translated by Roxanne Claire (New York and London: Pandora Press, 1986); **Norplant: Under Her Skin** by Barbara Mintzes, et al. (Amsterdam: Women's Health Foundation and Eburon, 1993); **Organizing Strategies in Women's Health: An Information and Action Handbook** edited by Lakshmi Menon (Manila: ISIS-Manila, 1992); **Reproductive Rights and Wrongs The Global Politics of Population Control** (revised edition) by Betsy Hartmann (Boston: South End Press, 1995); **Taking Population Out of the Equation: Reformulating I=PAT** by Patricia H. Hynes (North Amherst, Massachusetts, Institute on Women and Technology, 1993); **The Health of Women: A Global Perspectives** by Marge Koblinsky, et al. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1993); **The Menopause Industry: How the Medical Establishment Exploits Women** by Sandra Coney (Alameda, California: Hunter House, 1994); **The New Our Bodies, Ourselves: A Book by and for Women** (4th edition) by Boston Women's Health Book Collective (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992); **The New Ourselves, Growing Older: Women Aging with Knowledge and Power**

Boston Women's Health Book Collective's Core Collection

by Paula B. Doress-Worters and Diana Laskin Siegal (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994); **The Universal Childbirth Picture Book** by Fran P. Hosken and Marcia L. Williams (Lexington, Massachusetts: Women's International Network News, 1981); **Vaccination Against Pregnancy: Miracle or Menace** by Judith Richter (Amsterdam: Health Action International and BUKO Pharmakampagne, 1993); **Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden, World Bank Discussion Paper No. 255** by Lori L. Heise, Jacqueline Pitanguy and Adrienne Germain (Washington DC: World Bank, 1994); **Women and Disability** by Esther Boylan (London: Zed Books, 1991); **Women and Health** by Patricia Smyke (London: Zed Books, 1991); **Women and HIV/AIDS** by Marge Berer and Sunanda Ray (London: Pandora Press, 1993); **Women as Wombs** by Janice G. Raymond (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993); **Women's Health: Readings on Social, Economic, and Political Issues** (2nd edition); edited by Nancy Worcester and Marianne Whatley (Dubuque, Indiana: Kendall/Hunt, 1994).

For more information about the books, write or email Isis International-Manila, or the Boston Women's Health Book Collective: Box 192, West Somerville, MA 02144, USA.