

## Recasting 'Black Venus' in the 'New' African Diaspora<sup>1</sup>

*Jayne O. Ifekwunigwe*  
*University of East London, UK*

There are a number of ideas that attempt to draw together new African diasporas by looking backwards to an ideal African homeland and to sets of Afro-centric values that stream from this common origin. Beneath the pan-African imagined global networks, however, run fluid discursive structures that blur conventional and taken-for-granted classificatory practices with emergent nodes of cultural identity that we have yet to imagine... There is no trans-historical box large enough to contain such disparate and heterogeneous processes, rather linkages must be accounted for with greater care and specificity (Carter 2003: x-xi).

Much theorizations on and periodizing of the African Diaspora<sup>2</sup> either privileges the narrative of transatlantic slavery or addresses the social and historical processes of imperialism and (post)colonialism (Koser 2003).<sup>3</sup> These earlier circuits of trade, processes of settlement, and political economic regimes created similar and different points of reference for African diasporic constituents, be they in the Americas, the Caribbean or Europe. However, in the twenty first century, there are new epistemologies of the African Diaspora, which are not predicated on current problematic distinctions between "authentic" diasporas of transatlantic slavery and to a certain extent (post)colonialisms and faux diasporas ("economic" migrations) (Butler 2001). In particular, I am referring to clandestine movements "by any means necessary" of the unwanted and the impoverished from structurally (mal)adjusted West African urban centers to economically and demographically restructured Western and Southern European metropolises (Harding 2000). What motivates West African migrants is the promise of European Union (EU) wages "10-15 times higher than in Africa... [given] the [GDP] gap between the EU and the less-developed non-EU Mediterranean [and Sub-Saharan African] countries" (Gold 2000: 133). At every stage of the migration process, strategies are highly gendered (Morris 2002). That is, West African clandestine migrant women and men may share a similar destination, but by virtue of their glocalized

---

(Robertson 1995) structural positions, their destinies will be very different: “If one asks a recently arrived migrant woman today where the opportunities for work lie in Europe, she will tell you that apart from sex work or domestic work, the avenues for employment are closed to her” (Westwood and Phizacklea 2000: 131). Conventionally, these contemporary continental African dispersals have been analyzed either utilizing traditional tropes of “push/pull” migration or within the broader contexts of European asylum and immigration discourses. I argue for the reassessment of recent clandestine West African migrations as culturally specific, differentially gendered and similarly racialized new African diasporas, which are situated within, and not outside, the latest political economic circuits of global capitalism (Akyeampong 2003, International Organization for Migration 1996). Placing trafficked Nigerian migrant women sex workers in Italy at the center of my analysis, it is my intention to provoke a rethinking of what constitutes volition, agency and victimhood in theorizing about the politics of race in the “African Diaspora” in particular and “diaspora” in general (Brazier and Mannur 2003, Anthias 1998).

This chapter represents one facet of a broader ongoing theoretical project, which, using the transnational circulation of people as a paradigm, rethinks the gendered relationship between continental Africa and the African Diaspora. Rather than treating contemporary processes of continental African migration as separate entities outside the diaspora paradigm, I outline a theoretical formulation that assumes their interconnectedness and demonstrates their dynamism. To test this reformulation in current everyday lived contexts, I address the newest layer of African diasporas which have resulted from recent continental African dispersals to Europe. These transnational migratory processes include the smuggling of West African (and North African) women and men via Morocco to Southern Spain-the Gateway to Fortress Europe (Harding 2000); the trafficking in West African (in particular Nigerian) women to Italy as part of the global sex trade (Aghatise 2002); and the strategic and “voluntary” migrations of West Africans (once again mostly Nigerian) to the Republic of Ireland (E.J. White 2002). In the cases of both Spain and Ireland, the arrival of pregnant West African migrant women, who subsequently give birth on Spanish and Irish soil, has generated significant religious and political debates about the limits of citizenship and contingent definitions of family (Lentin 2003).

In the following discussion, I will highlight two of the theoretical strands that comprise my current thinking on complex, compound and new African diasporic formations (Koser 2003, Stoller 2002). First, I position contemporary documentary film representations of trafficked Nigerian sex workers in Italy in dialogical relation to nineteenth century discourses of black sexuality-in particular, Sharpley-Whiting's reinscribed "Black Venus Master Narrative"-and assess historical and geographical (dis)continuities in their modes of signification. Second, by linking endemic factors feeding the supply of Nigerian women for the purposes of (in)voluntary participation in the Italian sex industry, such as the localized feminization of poverty and regionally specific perceptions of sex work as a temporary economic strategy, I address the extent to which women can be both victims and exercise agency. Their victimization stems from their plight as unemployed or unskilled young women with a limited range of available options "back home." Even if agency is partial, delayed or never achieved, for conscripts and their extended families back in Nigeria, (in)voluntary conscription for participation in the migrant sex worker industry in Italy holds "the promise" of economic empowerment. The emergent and existing literature on trafficked Nigerian sex workers in Italy does not explore the full extent of this individual and familial strategizing. In this new trade encounter, the ways in which old racialized stereotypes about black female sexuality are trafficked and commodified have also not been scrutinized in relation to the changing relevance of race and blackness, in particular. This article outlines a dialectics of structure and agency (Alexander and Mohanty 1997) as well as the feminized interface between processes of racialized embodiment and sexualized commodification (Collins 2004).

In the next section, I critique a 2002 Channel Four British television documentary on the politics of illegal immigration in Italy that highlighted the status of two groups of undocumented youth who are both workers in the informal economy: trafficked Nigerian sex workers and smuggled Albanian migrant men. This critical reading, which specifically addresses filmic representations of only the first group of "subjects," is the starting point for a "'deterritorialized' practice, that deals with inequities not only in that 'other [Nigerian] place,' but also in one's 'own' [European] community" (Behar 1995:22). My deployment of documentary film, which relies on "evidence" to verify its authenticity and reliability, is not accidental (Trinh 1991). In this genre, the subject, in this instance black female undocumented migrant sex

---

workers, must submit to the higher power of the filmmakers and their audience (Trinh 1989).

### **(Mis)Representing “Foreign Bodies” in the Italian-African Diaspora**

I also hope to avoid the rather wooden presentation of notions of “Otherness,” so common in work on representations of the socially oppressed, whether women, black people or working-class people. This ends up by placing the oppressed as objects within a previously conceptualised framework that denies them any conscious potential to refuse their place within this framework or to challenge it. We can certainly try to deconstruct images to attempt to understand their meanings in terms of ideology and how that ideology is visualised, however, every deconstruction is also an act of construction (Doy 1998: 306).

In an unspoken negotiation, creators and spectators retrieve mythologized images of both the hypersexual black female and the clandestine migrant sex worker as polluted interloper, which provide missing symbolic links between what exists on the moving frame and “realities” before and beyond: “The new sociohistorical text thus rules despotically as another master [mistress]-centered text, since it unwillingly helps to perpetuate the Master’s [Mistress’] ideological stance (Trinh 1991: 42). In my reframing, I inscribe both a “black female gaze” (Roach and Felix 1989) and a critical black anthropological perspective that problematize the ways in which dominant Eurocentric and essentialist ideologies of “Africa” and “the African Diaspora” are reproduced (Ginsburg 2002, Harrison 1991). By an oppositional black feminist gaze, I mean an engaged and enraged standpoint that is situated in alternative and empowering frameworks (hooks 1992, (charles) 1997, Abraham 2002).

I am mindful of the possibility that in the process of constructing counter-hegemonic discourses (Harrison 1995) I am indeed reproducing the precise iconography I am attempting to critique: “the insistence of the image and its signification, in this case the sexualised, colonised female African body, can simply collapse into restatement” (Edwards 2001: 196). I may also be accused of reinstating a “First World” feminist hegemony (Ong 1995, Spivak 1988). Oyewumi’s astute terms for this imposed recapitulation are the “bio-logic of the sisterarchy” (1997:11). Neither is my intention. Instead, the plight of debt-bonded Nigerian sex workers in Europe functions as a symbolic lens through which to critically view the “changing same” economic, social and political

positions of multiplex black women in the African Diasporas (Gilliam 2001, Terborg-Penn and Benton Rushing 1996).

On 13 January 2002, here in the United Kingdom, as part of a Channel Four series on contemporary Tuscany, a programme aired which dramatically destabilized notions of social progress in media portrayals of contemporary gendered African diasporic processes. The piece, entitled "Foreign Bodies," addressed the plight of young Nigerian women who had been trafficked for the purposes of participation in the lucrative global sex trade. What was most troubling was the sensationalized and overtly sexist and racist angle chosen by the filmmakers. The series' English producer, Catherine Bailey, and the Italian director of "Foreign Bodies," Enrica Colusso, are both white. Their intentions may have been honorable—they did highlight forms of victimization and agency—and their primary motivation may have been to expose these young women's desperate situation. Over-all, though, their particular portrayals of black women reproduced negative representations (Hooks 1991) and thus indicated the extent to which, in the words of the late great Audre Lorde: "the work [and experiences] of women of Color is [still] being ghettoized by a white [wo]man dealing only out of a patriarchal western European frame of reference" (1984: 68). The opening description by the documentary's male narrator falls into the problematic trap of describing black women as part of the naturalistic surroundings: "an extraordinary spectacle" dotting the Italian landscape. The objectifying description of the behavior of the arrested Nigerian prostitutes as animalistic and 'primitive': "biting...smearing police with menstrual blood...raining voodoo curses" (Channel Four, 2002)...is consistent with nineteenth century 'race' science fictional representations of black/African people as socially and morally degenerate (Abraham 2002, Collins 1990, Walker 1971). A white male journalist, who reviewed 'Foreign Bodies' for the *New Statesman*, also fails to contextualize, humanize or address the political economic complexities of this 'phenomenon' and instead asserts his male privilege as the spectator not the spectacle:

I once nearly crashed a hired car on the road from Siena to Florence. I would have plead temporary insanity, caused by the sudden appearances around the corner of a flock of beautiful black African women dressed in bras and hot pants- a vision I would have dismissed as a trick of a diseased mind, had the scene not been repeated shortly

---

afterwards, thigh for thigh, in Bernardo Bertolucci's film "Stealing Beauty" (Billen 2002).

There are disturbing parallels between the early nineteenth century objectification and exploitation of Saartjie Baartman, also known as the Hottentot Venus, who due to the size of her protruding buttocks was exhibited in London and Paris as a representation of deviant sexuality, and this film's lingering shots of Nigerian sex workers' backsides (E. F. White 2001, Hammonds 1997). In her insightful and provocative book, *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears and Primitive Narratives in French*, Sharpley-Whiting (1999) refers to this as an invocation of the "Black Venus master narrative." Though primarily engaging with nineteenth and twentieth century French representations of black women from Hottentot Venus to Josephine Baker, throughout the text and explicitly in the epilogue, Sharpley-Whiting argues that the Black Venus master narrative is reasserted in other European/colonial milieux and in contemporary historical moments:

Black women, embodying the dynamics of racial/sexual alterity, historically invoking *primal fears* and desire in European (French) men, represent ultimate difference (the *sexualized savage*) and inspire repulsion, attraction, and anxiety, which gave rise to the collective French male imaginations of Black Venus (*primitive narratives*) [emphases in original text] (1999: 6).

Sharpley-Whiting's study is also a critique of the influential work of Sander Gilman (1985), in particular *Difference and Pathology*, wherein he argues that the black female body was the lens through which forms of deviant white female sexuality were viewed. Gilman's metaphorical white-centered stance provides the reader with very little information about Saartjie Baartman<sup>4</sup> herself rendering her at once highly visible but yet textually silent. In 'Foreign Bodies,' the "subaltern does speak" (Spivak 1988) but her words are drowned out by the deafening voices of patriarchy, scientific racism and neo-colonialism (Hammonds 1997).

The film highlights the fact that the Catholic Church is one of the main Italian institutions campaigning for the emancipation of Nigerian prostitutes and administering aid. The rehabilitation strategies of church-based 'protection'

programs encourage victims to atone for their transgressions by denouncing their traffickers and/or Madams. In return, they are offered 'salvation' in the form of accommodation, employment, residency permits, or repatriation and family reunification (Crane 2001). This paternalistic intervention is a thriving relic of the civilizing missions of the past wherein religion was part and parcel of imperial conquest (Oyewumi 1997, Hall 2002)<sup>5</sup>. What this documentary does reveal in a lucid fashion are the gendered and racialized hierarchies within global sex work, which force feminist debates beyond issues of morality, prevention and protection.

By reinscribing 'Black Venus', I am not simply suggesting that Khoikhoi Saartjie Baartman from the Cape Colony, South Africa, displayed in nineteenth century Paris and London, and Bini women from Edo State, Nigeria, working in the sex trade in twenty first century Florence, are the sum total of their inscribed black bodies (Marshall 1996). Such an over-simplification feeds into the false European 'brain'/African 'body' dichotomy (Bordo 1993, Butchart 1998, Davis 1997), perpetuates the Africa as monolith figuration (Appiah 1992, Mudimbe 1994) still prevalent in media imaginings of this vast and heterogeneous continent,<sup>6</sup> and ignores the ways in which conceptions of black female sexuality shift across time and space (Gilliam 2001, Shaw 2001). Rather, as Magubane argues in her brilliant critique of the "theoretical fetishization of Hottentot Venus":

Baartman represented far more in the European imagination than a collection of body parts. Indeed, closer examination of the furor that ensued in the wake of her exhibition demonstrates that what she represented varied (as ideologies are wont to do) according to the social and political commitments of the interested social actors. Baartman's exhibition provoked varying and contradictory responses. These responses are better understood if they are analyzed as part and parcel of larger debates about liberty, property, and economic relations, rather than seeing them as simple manifestations of the universal human fascination with embodied difference (2001: 827).

When recasting 'Black Venus' in the contemporary transnational sites of Italy and Nigeria, Magubane's conceptual frame facilitates a deeper understanding of complicated and triangulated dynamics involving various

---

'social actors' with differential access to liberty, property, and economic resources. Severe poverty "back home" rather than the marketability of black female sexuality "abroad" is the main catalyst for the migration of young female labor (Ume-Ezeoke 2003, Okojie et al. 2003). This "skin trade" conscription process involves multiple actors and agents, including entire families, who may be partially motivated by the prospect of status enhancement:

Our study has confirmed the hypothesis that sending female children abroad has, in most cases, become a sort of status symbol for families. This is as a result of the breakdown of social and cultural values, the disintegration of traditional family structures, and the lack of valid, efficient social reference models in substitution. Most families interviewed tacitly accepted the idea of prostitution as a solution where extreme poverty has made life difficult. They were, however, less ready to accept this when the violence and humiliation involved in it was made clear to them. Thus feminisation of poverty comes to have the greatest expression in the sale of female children into trafficking for prostitution (Aghatise 2002: 7).

Once trafficked to Italy, in presentations of self and the provision of sexual services, "*Italos* in the skin trade"-the folk Nigerian terms used to describe the workers and their work-actively deploy prevailing universalized stereotypes of deviant black female sexuality as "marketing strategies" (Spanger 2002). Writing about the ways in which the sexual iconography of the Hottentot Venus in particular and black women in general represented unbridled sexuality Gilman suggests: "the primitive is the black, and the qualities of blackness, or at least of the black female, are those of the prostitute" (1985: 99). These *Italos* are themselves controlled by Madams,<sup>7</sup> who dictate the stringent terms and conditions of their employment. Both Madams and *Italos* are economically dependent on indigenous Italian male clients' demand for Nigerian female sex workers: "...how the body is marked is integral to the commodity exchanged" (Sanchez Taylor 2000: 50). What I am arguing is that although nineteenth century colonial stereotypes of the 'Third World' woman of color as exotic and sexually uninhibited are recycled in the twenty first century global sex trade (Kempadoo 1998, Sanchez Taylor 2000), the gendered, racialized and economic relations of power deeply embedded in all of these encounters and negotiations



must be interpreted within not outside the feminized circuits of global capitalism and under-development (di Cortemiglia 2003, Prina 2003).

### **The Cultural Politics of Transnational Sex Work and The Traffic in Nigerian Women**

Trafficking in women is an international problem often involving complex transnational and criminal elements. It is also, however, simultaneously an immigration issue, a labour issue, and a gender issue, requiring a frame that encompasses analyses of immigration, labor, race, and gender (Berman 2003: 39). In this section, in an attempt to rethink the changing face of race in the globalizing context, I will address endemic factors feeding the supply of women for the purposes of sexual exploitation, such as the localized feminization of poverty as well as the ways in which the social functions of sex work intersect with other Nigerian social relations. Under capitalism, sex work becomes wage labor and thus is susceptible to exploitation (Weitzer 2000, Hennessy 2000).

Although transnational sex work is not a new practice, as capitalism has globalized in search of cheap labor so has the sex industry (Ryan and Hall 2001, Kempadoo 1999). In other words, the ideology of cheap sex is synonymous with the ideology of cheap goods and cheap labor (Clift and S. Carter 2000). It is 'exotic' migrant women from Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America who satisfy this 'First World' consumer demand for inexpensive and 'unique' sexual services:

Prostitution across borders has increased in the last twenty to thirty years...the number of women who migrate to richer countries from poorer and work in prostitution has also grown. The differences in circumstances of migrant prostitutes are vast. Some may have been cheated or forced into the trade; others have chosen it voluntarily, knowing what the work entails, and some have had experience of prostitution both at home and abroad before travelling (Thorbeck 2002: 1).

Of the myriad routes into transnational migrant sex work, the most disempowering and exploitative is via trafficking, wherein the inflated and exorbitant debt for services rendered by traffickers and his/her associates (provision of false documentation, arranging travel, securing accommodation

---

and employment in destination countries) is recovered from the young woman or child's limited future earnings (Taylor 2002). In the case of trafficked Nigerian migrant sex workers in Italy, the imposed and enforced debts range from "sixty million Italian Liras (ITL) (about USD \$30,000 by current exchange rates) to a hundred and twenty million ITL (about USD \$60,000)...the girls charge an average of twenty/thousand ITL (USD \$10/15) per client and at times, as little as ten thousand ITL (USD\$5)" (Aghatise 2002: 5). While the existence of this new form of sexualized globalization is rarely disputed, needless to say, due to its clandestine and illegal nature, there are significant discrepancies in 'official' statistical accounts of its extent (Thorbeck 2002). In an important analysis of European sex-trafficking discourses, Berman observes:

The International Organization for Migration's (IOM) estimate of 500,000 women annually trafficked into Western Europe redundantly appears in media and official documents, adding social scientific authenticity to the claim that this is an immense problem. Figures range from "175, 000 women and girls...taken into the EU illegally every year" to "epidemic proportions" of "700,000 to 1 million women and children sold into modern day slavery" ...The United Nations estimates the worldwide profit to be "\$7 billion a year" while others claim that "mobsters on every continent...pocket an estimated 12 billion each year from the sex trade" (2003: 65).

On the other hand, there is consensus regarding the ways in which the increased presence of 'Third World' trafficked women in 'First World' sex industries further complicates debates on the empowerment and/or victimization of 'working women' (Andrijasevic 2003, Pattanaik 2002).

In the global sex work literature, the term 'sex worker' is advocated in order to distinguish the pathological social characterization "whore" from the form of income generating labor performed by women (and men) (Doezema 1998). If prostitution is seen as work, then the rights of those exploited can be protected. Current debates center on the extent to which sex workers can be both victims and exercise agency (Chapkis 2000). In addition, distinctions are made between voluntary ('guilty') and forced ('innocent') prostitution, i.e. women who have been trafficked and are thus in debt bondage – a form of slavery (Murray 1998).

As Bindman suggests: "...in the case of the sex industry, the ending of slavery-like practices is held back by the distinction between sex workers or prostitutes and other workers" (1998:66). Global sex work activists argue that a strictly abolitionist agenda deprives sex workers who have not been trafficked of their human rights as laborers:

We in the human rights field must work alongside efforts towards economic justice, towards viable economic alternatives for everyone, ending vulnerability to slavery-like practices...Let us fight laws which exclude women in the sex industry from society and which deprive them of the rights that everyone else enjoys, at least on paper. Let us fight exploitation in every form (Bindman 1998: 68).

As such, sex trafficking is at once a development, a feminist and a political economic problematic.

It is worth noting that just as not all sex workers are trafficked nor is all trafficking in women confined to sex work: "traffic in women" is a broad category covering various forms of exploitation and violence within a range of informal labor sectors that migrant women work, including prostitution, entertainment industries and domestic work" (Wijers 1998: 70). Trafficked women in general are extremely vulnerable and are frequently at the mercy of violent criminal networks (Bales 2000). What is particular about trafficked sex workers is their double stigmatization: first as illegal migrants and secondly as prostitutes (Lederer 2001). The Italian findings of a recent multi-sited (Nigeria and Italy) collaborative social science research project on 'Trafficking from Nigeria into Italy', which was commissioned by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICJRI) as part of a 'Programme of Action Against Trafficking in Minors and Young Women from Nigeria into Italy for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation', support the notion that trafficked sex work is a double bind:

Even for those who choose to come to Italy knowing that they are coming to prostitute themselves, the discovery of the way of work, the entity of the debt that must be repaid and the conditions of life and work ahead of them produces discouragement and rethinking. What prevails at this point is a sense of impotence and isolation. The girls

---

find themselves in a foreign country, without family support and without any possibility of contact (sic) friends and parents possibly present in Italy or Europe... Without documents, taken away or immediately destroyed, without the minimum idea of how to escape their destiny, frightened by the threats of action against the family and with the fear of the negative influences of *wodo*<sup>8</sup>, sometimes subjected to physical violence, they wind up doing the will of their “owners” [:] starting the activity of a prostitute (Prina 2003: 47).

These un-named migrant sex workers comprise an ever-expanding army of Nigerian surplus labor:

None of these girls or women would be in the streets of Europe and the other parts of the world selling their bodies had IBB [Ibrahim Badamosi Babanginda] and Abacha not handicapped Nigeria and bequeathed economic hardship upon us. It is true that prostitution is a problem, but we need to put the blames (sic) where they belong (Evbayiro 2000).

Their passages from Nigeria and processes of settlement in Italy are frequently orchestrated and facilitated by crime syndicates, who, capitalizing on desperation and misery, run a lucrative trade in female cargo. These carriers are part of but not necessarily connected to a global, highly organized and sophisticated communication system for the transportation of undocumented sex workers:

We are talking about a country [Nigeria] that is increasingly claiming the premier position in the exportation of prostitutes to Europe... Our exports in this regard are equaling (sic) our oil exports to the western world (David-West 2002).

The Nigerian research team's extensive report, which was produced for the aforementioned collaborative UNICJRI social science research project on 'Trafficking from Nigeria into Italy,' supports David-West's claim:

The scanty data available suggest that trafficking in women and minors to Italy has been increasing over time, from when the flow started in the late 1980s...most of the women trafficked out of Nigeria for prostitution are from Edo State. Some of these victims are minors, that is, they are below age 18 years...Reasons why Edo women are involved in trafficking include: the low valuation of women reflected in limited access to education, employment and income earning opportunities. Other reasons are poverty, greed, peer group influence...ignorance of the types and conditions of work in Italy. A few success stories, usually of victims who have become madams, have proved sufficient to lure young girls and their relations (parents, brothers, sisters, and even husbands) to be involved in trafficking. The devaluation of the Naira whereby a few units of foreign currency convert into thousands of Naira also encourages the youth to desire to leave the country to do any type of job (Okojie et al. 2003: 127).

The most intriguing finding of Okojie et al's (2003) study, which has also been reported elsewhere (Ume-Ezeoke 2003, Prina 2003, di Cortemiglia 2003), has to do with the over-representation of women from one particular region in Southern Nigeria. That is, it is estimated that up to 80 percent of girls and women trafficked to Italy from Nigeria for sex work come from Edo State in general, Benin City in particular (Aghatise 2002). There are two explanations for this trend. The first, a multifaceted structural and political analysis, has already been provided by Okojie et al (2003). The second is that since the late 1980s as a direct result of the failed IMF/World Bank implemented Structural Adjustment regime, Nigerian women and men have been smuggled or trafficked into Europe, where they contributed to informal economies, such as itinerant tomato-picking in the Italian agricultural industry (Ume-Ezeoke 2003). Over time, laborers drifted into cities, and the women discovered another market within which to sell their labor, so much so that turf wars ensued between Nigerian and Italian sex workers. Benin City gained a national reputation as the headquarters for illegal immigration fixers (Advocacy Project 2003). Therefore, some migrant sex workers may not 'originate' from Edo State, but that is where their hopeful journeys begin. In this twenty first century skin trade, though the modes of transport and the destinations have changed,

---

Benin's former prominence as one of West Africa's slave trading centers has been restored.

There are other complex reasons for this booming export business, which have less to do with the victimization of vulnerable young women and more to do with the problematics of cultural translation and re/territorialization (Inda and Rosaldo 2002). In their trailblazing work, Nigerian scholars Amadiume (1987) and Oyewumi (1997), compare the more egalitarian gender systems which existed in pre-colonial Igbo and Yoruba societies respectively, to the Western binary sex/gender system predicated on the devaluation of women (Goddard 2000), which was inherited by Nigeria as part of the British colonial project. They also demonstrate the deleterious impact on local 'traditions' of these racist and patriarchal institutions, which were maintained in the (post)colonial milieu (Amadiume 1987, Oyewumi 1997). As such, in form and function, localized and indigenous Nigerian conceptions of sex work both differ from and mirror their Western counterparts. More specifically, sex work did exist in pre-colonial Nigeria, was reinvented as part of the colonial encounter, and has been transformed in (post)colonial Nigeria (Little 1973, Mama 1997).

In his survey entitled, *Prostitution and Society: Primitive, Classical and Oriental*, Henriques (1962) identified three types of African sex work, which included pre-colonial forms institutionalized by both the Nupe and Hausa of Nigeria in order to circumvent strict traditional codes of sexual morality. In (post)colonial Nigeria, the dividing line between social relations and sexual services is not clearly demarcated:

So common has prostitution become, and so widespread, that some are unable to see a distinction between prostitutes and those who are not. In Akure, the capital of the cocoa producing Ondo State, residential prostitutes are scarcely to be found. Yet girls, especially students of secondary schools, colleges of education, as well as workers, can be seen laundering their boredom at drinking and eating places, waiting for customers (African Guardian 1987 cited in Amadiume 2000:139).

What these fuzzy social borders illustrate is how in a context wherein forty percent of the 'developing world' lives in cities, "structurally adjusted urbanism" becomes a way of life (Centner 2002). That is, global economic policies do impact local urban social practices (Ogden 1996). As the most densely

populated and one of the wealthiest countries on the continent, nowhere are the failures of structural adjustment and fiscal mismanagement more apparent than in Nigeria (Maier 2000). Former Senior Investigator for the U.S. Senate and attorney Jack Blum (2002) estimates that since colonial independence from Britain in 1960, at least \$120 billion has been stolen from the government's coffers by corrupt politicians and military dictators such as Babangida and Abacha.

The on the ground ramifications of such poor governance have a human cost and more specifically a female face. That is, on the African continent in general and Nigeria in particular, women from particular regions (i.e. Edo and Delta States) and specific sectors of society (young, poor, relatively uneducated) are increasingly embracing sex work as an economic survival strategy, what Iliffe describes as "subsistence prostitution" (cited in Farmer et al. 1996:159). Ifi Amadiume (2000) attributes its feminized persistence and its growth to the unhealthy state of the Nigerian economy as well as to the failure of the aforementioned externally imposed but locally implemented Structural Adjustment Programs:

Because of the direct economic relationship between women and prostitution, we find that prostitutes are mostly mothers-widows, divorcees and unemployed teenagers. Most Nigerian female prostitutes go into the business to raise the capital to begin a trade or to educate their children. Many "retire" after they have achieved their goals, and many become "somebody." The post-colonial culture in Nigeria is such that "money talks"-i.e. wealth is respected, regardless of the means by which it is acquired (Amadiume 2000: 138).

A study of sex workers in Nigeria, cited in John Anarfi's chapter on Ghanaian sex workers in Cote d'Ivoire in *Global Sex Workers*, also highlights the perceived 'use value' of sexual labor in the present as a means of securing economic stability in the future:

A recent study of prostitutes in Nigeria (Orubuloye et al. 1994) asserts that the women who engage in prostitution regard it as a transient phase in their lives. The study notes that in order to ensure a later life of marriage, business ownership and respectability in one's area of

---

origin, it is necessary that the transient period as a prostitute be spent far away (1998: 112).

Niger-Thomas' research among women smugglers who operate between Cameroon and Nigeria illustrates a direct link between sex work and other income generating activities:

There is indeed an historical connection between prostitution and trade: an occupational shift from prostitution to entrepreneurship. Some of the women smugglers were former prostitutes who were used to money, nice clothes, good food and drink, and other forms of luxury and saw smuggling as an easy way to earn more money (2001:63).

To summarize, after first situating this case study within the broader contexts of the global sex work and migration literatures and their concomitant feminist debates, I have then highlighted the different globalized ways in which sex work is deployed by young Nigerian women as a mode of either survival or economic enhancement.<sup>9</sup>

## **Conclusion**

With the strategies and struggles of trafficked Nigerian sex workers as my object of analysis, I have illustrated the complexity of gendered life ways in the age of globalization and transnationalism, wherein universalist conceptions of sex work as merely the exchange of sex for money are entirely too simplistic (Tandia 1998). I have demonstrated that socio-political constructions of 'Nigerian women' can no longer be exclusively confined to national boundaries or specific localities (Mustapha 1985) or simple conceptions of race or citizenship. Trafficked Nigerian sex workers exemplify the intersectionality of continental African and 'new' Italian-African diasporic subjectivities (Greenleaves 2000). There is a lived tension between the migrants' desire for eventual repatriation back to Nigeria (with elevated status and a bulging bank balance) and the harsh social realities for undocumented trafficked migrant workers owing huge debts to their sponsors. This dialectic is emblematic of the Nigerian/diasporic nexus (Marble 1996). Young women's initial and strategic embrace of sex work in Italy as a temporary economic strategy is motivated by a genuine wish to provide for themselves and their extended families "back



home" (Sassen 1999). Once settled in Italy, their vulnerable status as illegal immigrants deprives them of the rights and entitlements afforded citizens and designated refugees (Daniel 2002). This marginalization is compounded by everyday racism and threats of violence (Prina 2003). Daily survival dictates that young women create support systems, pool resources (i.e. share housing and information), maintain transnational links (i.e. send remittances and correspondence to family in Nigeria), and renegotiate meanings of community and belonging:

The cosmopolitanism of migrants has entailed the proliferation of illegal or clandestine spaces. This can be seen in the existence of genuine unofficial towns constituted by so-called illegal immigrants. It can also be seen in the flexible practices adopted by illegal immigrants in the country of reception, and in the xenophobia which contributes to confining them to legal obscurity. In these spheres of illegality, marginality might favor the reconstruction of complex forms of community life (Mbembe 2001: 11).

Regarding this Nigeria/Italy transnational circuit and domestic deficits in knowledge and opportunity that perpetuate the cycle, development discursive interventions tend to emphasize the victimized status of women at the expense of their current agency and future empowerment (Mama 1997). Amartya Sen's insistence that the ultimate goal of development is freedom strikes a more appropriate balance:

The extensive reach of women's agency is one of the more neglected areas of development studies, and most urgently in need of correction. Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of political, economic and social participation and leadership of women (1999: 203).

In the long and the short term, ameliorating poverty and gender inequalities must be at the top of any development agenda and is an important route towards the sustained empowerment of African girls and women in all their diversity (Moser 1993, Kolawole 1997). There have been successful initiatives, which simultaneously address processes of under-development,

---

gender inequities, and human rights (Brussa 1998, Christian Science Monitor 2000). These more multi-pronged interventions do acknowledge the voluntary/involuntary sex worker distinction but the intervening emphasis is on female educational empowerment and poverty reduction in ‘sending’ countries and immigration policy reform and the decriminalization of undocumented migrant sex work in ‘receiving’ countries (D’Cunha 2002, Giammarinaro 2002).<sup>10</sup>

The trafficking in Nigerian women for the purposes of (in)voluntary participation in the Italian sex industry is but one example of the gendered dynamics of clandestine global migration processes:

The growth of a global economy has brought with it an institutional framework that facilitates cross-border flows and represents, in that regard, an enabling environment for these alternative circuits. It is increasingly on the backs of women that these forms of survival, profit making and government revenue enhancement operate...Linking these counter-geographies to programs and conditions at the heart of the global economy also helps us to understand how issues of gender enter into their formation and viability (Sassen 2000: 512-3).

The case study of Nigeria shows us that the human face of global migration is increasingly young, female, black and African (Joyce 1999, Kofman et al. 2000). These new nomadic communities are part of the latest global forced migration system, which in turn grew out of the earlier globalizing phases of transatlantic slavery and Empire (Narayan 1997). They represent what Catherine Hall (2004) describes as a “reconfiguration of colonial relations”, wherein the North and South are still connected by the sinews of inequality and subordination (Hardt and Negri 2000). In light of these re/territorializing processes of migration, which transport workers from African to European metropolises, new gendered African diasporic differences must be situated in appropriate historical, social, cultural and geopolitical contexts, which we must now refashion as merely “one node in a [post]national network of diasporas” (Appadurai 1996: 171). Rethinking African diasporas necessitates the simultaneous pivoting of the conceptual axes of time, space and shifting condition (Gilroy 1993, Schipper 1999). Rather than mapping specific diasporic communities on to particular (post)colonial landscapes, the analytic framework

within which we must build new theories is one based on the simultaneity of transnational existences and of (post)national life-worlds and material-worlds rooted in multiple fusions and confusionsxi (Busia 2000, Westwood and Phizacklea 2000, Sassen 2000). More recent migrants and refugees from continental Africa have different shared narratives of home, community, longing and belonging than their predecessors (Chabal 1996, Drachler 1975, Drake 1987, Drake 1990).

---

## References

- Abraham, Linus. 2002. "The Black Woman as a Marker of Hypersexuality in Western Mythology: A Contemporary Manifestation in the Film *The Scarlet Letter*." *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 26 (2), 193-214.
- Adi, Hakim. 2000. "Pan-Africanism and West African Nationalism in Britain." *African Studies Review*, 43(1):69-82.
- Advocacy Project. 2003. "Girls for Sale: Building a Coalition to Fight Trafficking in Nigeria." [http://www.advocacy.net.org/cpage\\_view/nigtraffick\\_girlsforsale\\_g\\_25.html](http://www.advocacy.net.org/cpage_view/nigtraffick_girlsforsale_g_25.html).
- Aghatise, Esohe. 2002. "Trafficking for prostitution in Italy." Concept Paper, Expert Group Meeting on Trafficking in Women and Girls, 18-22 November, 2002, Glen Cove, New York, USA.
- Akyeampong, Emmanuel. 2003. "Diaspora and Drug Trafficking in West Africa: A Case Study of Ghana." Conference paper, Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora conference on Affirmations and Contestations: Interpreting the Connections between Africa and the African Diaspora, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, USA, 2-4 October, 2003.
- Alexander, M. Jacqui and Mohanty, Chandra (Eds.). 1997. *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. London: Routledge.
- Amadiume, Ifi. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed.
- Amadiume, Ifi. 2000. *Daughters of the Goddess, Daughters of Imperialism*. London: Zed.
- Anarfi, John. 1998. "Ghanaian Women and Prostitution in Cote d'Ivoire." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 104-113. London: Routledge.
- Andrijasevic, Rutvica. 2003. "The Difference Borders Make: (Il)legality, Migration and Trafficking in Italy Among Eastern European Women in Prostitution." In *Uprootings/Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*, Eds. Sara Ahmed et al., pp. 251-271). Oxford: Berg.
- Anthias, Floya. 1998. "Evaluating 'Diaspora': Beyond Ethnicity." *Sociology* 32(3):557-580.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
- Appiah, Anthony. 1992. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*. New York: Oxford University.

- Bales, Kevin. 2000. *Disposable People*. London: University of California.
- Behar, Ruth. 1995. "Introduction: Out of Exile." In *Women Writing Culture*, Eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, pp. 1-32. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Berman, Jacqueline. 2003. "(Un)Popular Strangers and Crises (Un)Bounded: Discourses of Sex-Trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of the Modern State." *European Journal of International Relations* 9(1):37-86.
- Billen, Andrew. 2002. "Television-Devilish Pursuits." *New Statesman*, 21 January 2002.
- Bindman, Jo. 1998. "An International Perspective on Slavery in the Sex Industry." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 65-68. London: Routledge.
- Blum, Jack. 2002. Panel presentation, *Under the Radar Screen: Corruption, the Hidden Market, and Inequities*, EPIIC Symposium on Global Inequities, Tufts University, 28 February- 3 March, 2002.
- Bordo, Susan. 1993. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bousquet, Ben and Douglas, Colin. 1991. *West Indian Women at War*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Braziel, Jana Evans and Mannur, Anita. 2003. "Nation, Migration and Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies." In *Theorizing Diaspora*, Eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur, pp. 1-22. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Browning, Barbara. 1998. *Infectious Rhythm: Metaphors of Contagion and the Spread of African Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Brussa, Licia. 1998. "The TAMPEP Project in Western Europe." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 231-240. London: Routledge.
- Busia, Abena. 2000. "Plenary Comments. Crossing the Boundaries: The African Diaspora in the New Millennium," New York University, 20-23 September 2000.
- Butchart, Alexander. 1998. *The Anatomy of Power: European Constructions of the African Body*. London: Zed.
- Butler, Kim. 2001. "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse." *Diaspora* 10(2):189-219.

- 
- Campbell, Horace. 1985. *Rasta and Resistance*. London: Hansib.
- Carter, Donald. 2003. "Preface." In *New African Diasporas*, Ed. Khalid Koser, pp. ix-xix. London: Routledge.
- Centner, Ryan. 2002. "Neoliberalism and Third World Cities: Structurally Adjusted Urbanism as a Way of Life, from Buenos Aires to Istanbul to Kuala Lumpur." EPIIC Symposium on Global Inequities, Tufts University, 28 February-3 March 2002.
- Chabal, Patrick. 1996. "The African Crisis: Context and Interpretation." In *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, Eds. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger, pp. 29-54). London: Zed.
- Channel Four. 2002. "Tuscany: Foreign Bodies." 13 January 2002.
- Chapkis, Wendy. 2000. "Power and Control in the Commercial Sex Trade." In *Sex for Sale*, Ed. Ronald Weitzer, pp. 181-202). London: Routledge.
- (Charles), Helen. 1997. "The Language of Womanism: Rethinking Difference." In *Black British Feminism*, Ed. Heidi Mirza, pp. 278-297). London: Routledge.
- Christian Science Monitor. 2000. *Ending the Global Sex Trade*. 1 January 2000.
- Chuck D. 1997. *Fight the Power: Rap, Race and Reality*. Edinburgh: Payback Press.
- Clift, Stephen and Carter, Simon (Eds.). 2000. *Tourism and Sex*. London: Pinter.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2004. *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender and the New Racism*. New York: Routledge.
- Crane, Kristine. 2001. "Italian Haven Offers Hope to Trafficked Women." *Christian Science Monitor* 93(237):7.
- D'Cunha, Jean. 2002. "Trafficking in Persons: A Gender and Rights Perspective." Expert Group Meeting on Trafficking in Women and Girls, 18-22 November, 2002, Glen Cove, New York, USA.
- Daniel, E. Valentine. 2002. "The Refugee: A Discourse on Displacement." In *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Frontlines*, Ed. Jeremy MacClancy, pp. 270-286). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- David-West, Tonye. 2002. "In Search of a Virgin in Nigeria." 5 March 2002, <http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/david-west/030502.html>

- Davis, Kathy. 1997. "Embody-ing Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body." In *Embodied Practices*, Ed. Kathy Davis, pp. 1-26). London: Sage.
- di Cortemiglia, Vittoria Luda. 2003. "Programme of Action Against Trafficking in Minors and Young Women from Nigeria into Italy for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitation." Desk Review, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.
- Doezema, Jo. 1998. "Forced to Choose: Beyond the Voluntary v. Forced Prostitution Dichotomy." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 34-50. London: Routledge.
- Doy, Gen. 1998. "More than Meets the Eye..Representations of Black Women in Mid-19th Century French Photography." *Women's Studies International Forum* 21(3):305-319.
- Drachler, Jacob (Ed.). 1975. *Black Homeland/Black Diaspora*. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press.
- Drake, St. Clair. 1987. *Black Folk Here and There*, Volume One. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Drake, St. Clair. 1990. *Black Folk Here and There*, Volume Two. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Edwards, Elizabeth. 2001. *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology and Museums*. Oxford: Berg.
- Evbayiro, Hilary. 2000. "Nigerian Women's Involvement in International Prostitution: A Case for Edo Bashing." 13 June 2000. <http://nigeriaworld.com/feature/publication/evbayiro/0613100.html>.
- Farmer, Paul et al. 1996. "Rereading Social Science." In *Women, Poverty and AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Structural Violence*, Eds. Paul Farmer et al., pp. 147-206. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.
- Farmer, Paul et al. (Eds.). 1996. *Women, Poverty and AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Structural Violence*. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.
- Ford, Clyde. 1999. *The Hero with an African Face*. London: Bantam Books.
- Giammarinaro, Maria Grazia. 2002. "Trafficking in Women and Girls." Expert Group Meeting on Trafficking in Women and Girls, 18-22 November, 2002, Glen Cove, New York, USA.
- Gilliam, Angela.M. 2001. "A Black Feminist Perspective on The Sexual Commodification of Women in the New Global Culture." In *Black Feminist*

- 
- Anthropology*, Ed. Irma McClaurin, pp. 150-186. London: Rutgers University.
- Gilman, Sander. 1985. *Difference and Pathology*. London: Cornell University.
- Gilroy, Paul. 1993. *The Black Atlantic*. London: Verso.
- Gilroy, Paul. 2000. *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*. London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press.
- Ginsburg, Faye. 2002. "Fieldwork at the Movies: Anthropology and Media." In *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Frontlines*, Ed. Jeremy MacClancy, pp. 356-376. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goddard, Victoria Ana (Ed.). 2000. *Gender, Agency and Change*. London: Routledge.
- Gold, Peter. 2000. *Europe or Africa?: A Contemporary Study of the Spanish North African Enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Green, Charles (Ed.). 1997. *Globalization and Survival in the Black Diaspora*. Albany: State University of New York.
- Greenleaves, Jennifer. 2000. "Divided in Unity: the Nigerian Diaspora in Italy." Colloquium on New African Diasporas, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, 5 May 2000.
- Gysels, Marjolein et al. 2002. "Women Who Sell Sex in a Ugandan Trading Town: Life Histories, Survival Strategies and Risk." *Social Science and Medicine* 54(2):179-192.
- Hall, Catherine. 2002. *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hall, Catherine. 2004. "Discussion on Empire and Globalisation." *Today Programme*, BBC Radio 4, 12 January 2004.
- Hammonds, Evelyn. 1997. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Eds. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, pp.170-182. London: Routledge.
- Harding, Jeremy. 2000. *The Uninvited: Refugees at the Rich Man's Gate*. London: Profile Books with the London Review of Books.
- Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. 2000. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Harrison, Faye (Ed.). 1991. *Decolonizing Anthropology*, Second Edition. Arlington, Virginia: Association of Black Anthropologists.



- Harrison, Faye. 1995. "Writing Against the Grain: Cultural Politics of Difference in the Work of Alice Walker." In *Women Writing Culture*, Eds. Ruth Behar and D.Gordon, pp. 233-248. London: University of California.
- Hennessy, Rosemary. 2000. *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*. London: Routledge.
- Henriques, Fernanando. 1962. *Prostitution and Society: Primitive, Classical and Oriental*. New York: Citadel Press.
- Hooks, Bell. 1991. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. London: Turnaround
- Hooks, Bell. 1992. *Black Looks*. Boston: South End Press.
- Inda, Jonathan Xavier and Rosaldo, Renato. 2002. "Introduction: A World in Motion." In *The Anthropology of Globalization*, Eds. Jonathan Xavier Inda and Renato Rosaldo, pp. 1-34. Oxford: Blackwell.
- International Organization for Migration. 1996. *Trafficking in Women to Italy for Sexual Exploitation*. Geneva: International Organization for Migration.
- Joyce, Joyce Ann. 1999. "African-Centered Womanism: Connecting Africa to the Diaspora." In *The African Diaspora*, Eds. Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies and Ali Mazrui, pp. 538-554. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 1998. "Introduction: Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 1-28). London: Routledge.
- Kempadoo, Kamala. 1999. "Continuities and Change: Five Centuries of Prostitution in the Caribbean." In *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*, Ed. Kamala Kempadoo, pp. 3- 33). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Kofman, Eleonore, et al. 2000. *Gender and International Migration in Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Kolawole, Mary E. Modupe. 1997. *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press.
- Koser, Khalid (Ed.). 2003. *New African Diasporas*. London: Routledge.
- Lederer, Laura. 2001. *Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Women and Children: A Human Rights Report*. Washington, D.C.: The Protection Project.
- Lentin, Ronit. 2003. "Strangers and Strollers: (Re)searching Ireland's Gendered Migratory Spaces." Conference paper, Women's Movement: Migrant

- 
- Women Transforming Ireland, International conference, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, 20- 21 March 2003.
- Lipsitz, George. 1994. *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*. London: Verso.
- Little, Kenneth. 1973. *African Women in Towns*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister, Outsider*. Trumansburg, New York: Crossing Press.
- Magubane, Zine. 2001. "Which Bodies Matter?: Feminism, Postructuralism, Race and the Curious Odyssey of the 'Hottentot Venus.'" *Gender and Society* 15(6):816-834.
- Maier, Karl. 2000. *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis*. London: Penguin.
- Mama, Amina. 1997. "Sheroes and Villains: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa." In *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, Eds. M.Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, pp. 46-63. London: Routledge.
- Marble, Michelle. 1996. "Europe Urged to Curb Sexual Exploitation of Women." *Women's Health Weekly*, 24 June 1996.
- Marshall, Anneka. 1996. "From Sexual Denigration to Self-Respect: Resisting Images of Black Female Sexuality." In *Reconstructing Womanhood, Reconstructing Feminism*, Ed. Delia Jarrett-Macauley, pp. 5-35. London: Routledge.
- Mbembe, Achille. 2001. "Ways of Seeing: Beyond the New Nativism: Introduction." *African Studies Review* 44(2):1-14.
- Modood, Tariq and Werbner, Pnina (Eds.). 1997. *The Politics of Multiculturalism in the New Europe*. London: Zed.
- Morris, Lydia. 2002. *Managing Migration: Civic Stratification and Migrants' Rights*. London: Routledge.
- Moser, Caroline. 1993. *Gender Planning and Development*. London: Routledge.
- Mudimbe, Valentin Yves. 1994. *The Invention of Africa*. London: James Currey.
- Murray, Alison. 1998. "Debt-Bondage and Trafficking: Don't Believe the Hype." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 51-64. London: Routledge.
- Mustapha, A. R. 1985. "On Combating Women's Exploitation and Oppression in Nigeria." In *Women in Nigeria*, Eds. S. Bappa et al. (Women in Nigeria Editorial Committee), pp. 241-246. London: Zed.

- Narayan, Uma. 1997. *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Niger-Thomas, Margaret. 2001. "Women and the Arts of Smuggling." *African Studies Review* 44(2):43- 70.
- Obichere, Boniface. 1975. "Afro-Americans in Africa: Recent Experiences." In *Black Homeland/Black Diaspora*, Ed. Jacob Drachler, pp. 15-42. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press.
- Ogden, Jessica. 1996. "Producing Respect: the 'Proper Woman' in Postcolonial Kampala." In *Postcolonial Identities in Africa*, Eds. Richard Werbner and Terence Ranger, pp. 165-192. London: Zed.
- Okojie, Christiana et al. 2003. "Report of Field Survey in Edo State, Nigeria." Programme of Action Against Trafficking in Minors and Young Women from Nigeria into Italy for the Purpose of Sexual Exploitations. United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.
- Ong, Aihwa. 1995. "Women Out of China: Travelling Tales and Travelling Theories in Postcolonial Feminism." In *Women Writing Culture*, Eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, pp. 350-372). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. 1997. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. London: University of Minnesota.
- Pattanaik, Bandana. 2002. "Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?" In *Transnational Prostitution*, Eds. Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik, pp. 217-230. London: Zed.
- Patterson, Tiffany and Kelley, Robin. 2000. "Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World." *African Studies Review* 43(1):11-46.
- Prina, Franco. 2003. "Trade and Exploitation of Minors and Young Nigerian Women for Prostitution in Italy." Research Report, Action Programme Against the Traffic from Nigeria into Italy of Minors and Young Women for Sexual Exploitations, United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.
- Roach, Jacqui and Felix, Petal. 1989. "Black Looks." In *The Female Gaze*, Eds. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, pp. 130-142. Seattle: The Real Comet Press.

- 
- Robertson, Roland. 1995. "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity." In *Global Modernities*, Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson, pp. 25-44. London: Sage.
- Rose, Tricia. 1994. *Black Noise*. Wesleyan: Wesleyan University.
- Ryan, Chris and Hall, C. Michael. 2001. *Sex Tourism*. London: Routledge.
- Sanchez Taylor, Jacqueline. 2000. "Tourism and 'Embodied' Commodities: Sex Tourism in the Caribbean." In *Tourism and Sex*, Eds. Stephen Clift and Simon Carter, pp. 41-53. London: Pinter.
- Sassen, Saskia. 1999. *Guests and Aliens*. New York: The New Press.
- Sassen, Saskia. 2000. "Women's Burden: Counter-Geographies of Globalization and the Feminization of Survival." *Journal of International Affairs* 53(2):503-524.
- Schipper, Mineke. 1999. *Imagining Insiders: Africa and the Question of Belonging*. London: Cassell.
- Sen, Amartya. 1999. *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University.
- Sharpley-Whiting, T. Denean. 1999. *Black Venus*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University.
- Shaw, Carolyn Martin. 2001. "Disciplining the Black Female Body: Learning Feminism in Africa and the United States." In *Black Feminist Anthropology*, Ed. Irma McClaurin, pp. 102-125. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Simmons, Janie et al. 1996. "A Global Perspective." In *Women, Poverty and AIDS: Sex, Drugs and Structural Violence*, Eds. Paul Farmer et al., pp. 39-90. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press.
- South African Times*. 2002. "Saartjie's Journey Comes Full Circle." 1 May 2002.
- Spanger, Marlene. 2002. "Black Prostitutes in Denmark." In *Transnational Prostitution: Changing Global Patterns*, Eds. Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik, pp. 121-136. London: Zed.
- Spivak, Gayatri. 1988. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Eds. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, pp. 271-313. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois.
- Stoller, Paul. 2002. *Money Has No Smell: The Africanization of New York City*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tandia, Oumar. 1998. "Prostitution in Senegal." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 240-245). London: Routledge.

- Taylor, Ernest Kweku. 2002. "Trafficking in Women and Girls." Expert Group Meeting on Trafficking in Women and Girls, 18-22 November, 2002, Glen Cove, New York, USA.
- Terborg-Penn Rosalyn and Rushing, Andrea Benton (Eds.). 1996. *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora*, Second Edition. Washington, D.C.: Howard University.
- Thorbek, Susanne. 2002. "Introduction: Prostitution in a Global Context: Changing Patterns." In *Transnational Prostitution*, Eds. Susanne Thorbek and Bandana Pattanaik, pp. 1-11. London: Zed.
- Torres, Arlene and Whitten, Norman (Eds.) 1998. *Blackness in Latin America and The Caribbean*, Volume Two. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Trinh, Minh-ha T. 1989. *Woman, Native, Other*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University.
- Trinh, Minh-ha T. 1991. *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge.
- Ume-Ezeoke, Juliet. 2003. "Desk Review for the Programme of Action Against Trafficking in Minors and Young Women from Nigeria into Italy for the Purposes of Sexual Exploitation." United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute.
- Walker, Alice. 1971. *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Weitzer, Ronald. 2000. "Why We Need More Research on Sex Work." In *Sex for Sale*, Ed. Ronald Weitzer, pp. 1-17. London: Routledge.
- Westwood, Sallie and Phizacklea, Annie. 2000. *Trans-Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging*. London: Routledge.
- White, E. Frances. 2001. *Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability*. Philadelphia: Temple University.
- White, Elisa Joy. 2002. "The New Irish Storytelling: Media, Representations and Racialised Identities." In *Racism and Anti-Racism in Ireland*, Eds. Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh, pp. 102-128. Belfast: Beyond the Pale.
- Wijers, Marjan. 1998. "Women, Labor and Migration: The Position of Trafficked Women and Strategies for Support." In *Global Sex Workers*, Eds. Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema, pp. 69-78. London: Routledge.

---

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements - This chapter has been enhanced by many stimulating exchanges with colleagues at countless invited seminars, symposia and conferences both in Europe and the United States. I am thankful to all who have provided such constructive feedback and engaged so enthusiastically with my work. Special thanks to Kamari Clarke and Deborah Thomas for shrewd editorial assistance and collegiality as well as for inviting me to contribute to what is destined to me a groundbreaking anthology.

<sup>2</sup> Borrowing from the seminal essay “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World”, co-authored by historians Patterson and Kelley (2000), I refer to African diasporas not simply as political *spaces* but also as *processes* and *conditions*. That is, first, contemporary African diasporic processes extend the links of the migration chains, which originated in the historical moments of the transatlantic slave trade and the rise of European Empires (Ford 1999). As a result, two adages pervade the collective consciousness of the older African diasporas of transatlantic slavery and (post)colonialism respectively: “We are here because you brought us here”. or “We are here because you were there”. Second, contemporary African diasporas are spatially constituted wherever African (post)colonial and transnational constituents find themselves be that conventionally in the Caribbean, North and Latin Americas, or Europe (Torres and Whitten 1998, Green 1997, Modood and Werbner 1997). Their spatial and ‘racial’ locations as both gendered African diasporic agents and former Black colonial, tribal and island subjects inscribe sameness as they mobilize and politicize (Adi 2000, Gilroy 2000, Obichere 1975, Bousquet and Douglas 1991). Finally, African diasporic conditions persist and are transformed by the interface of transnational African diasporic traditions of resistance, protest and cultural innovation with global economic, political gendered and racialized hierarchical structures which exclude as they appropriate and commodify (Rose 1994, Chuck D 1997, Campbell 1985). In other words, local and dynamic diasporic spaces, processes and conditions intersect with and in fact are produced by transnational identities, translated cultural commodities and global political strategies (Browning 1998, Lipsitz 1994).

<sup>3</sup> This work in progress is a think piece, which means my analyses are not based on ethnographic field work-the tool kit of my anthropological discipline.

Instead, I have drawn from a limited but rapidly expanding pool of available sources including four quite comprehensive United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute commissioned collaborative social science reports. In the future and as part of a larger enterprise on the transnational circulation of people and goods, I hope to make my own empirical contribution to this emergent and compelling problematic.

<sup>4</sup> As a poignant postscript: on 29 April, 2002, (post)apartheid South Africans won their long battle with the French government for the repatriation of Saartjie Baartman's remains. In a ceremony of 'reconciliation' involving French and South African delegates, two crates containing a plaster cast of her body, skeleton, and preserved brain and genitalia were handed back to the South African government:

Finally, dignity was restored to a women (sic) who has become a symbol of the damaging effects of colonialism, sexism and racism... In her address, Skweyiya [South African ambassador] said this final journey of Baartman's symbolised freedom for African women. "South African women fought a hard battle for equality and justice. We join hands with all peace-loving people in the world to sustain the fight for women's human rights." (*South African Times*, 1 May 2002).

<sup>5</sup> In Nigeria, it is the Catholic nuns who are working with both repatriated trafficked young women as well as those who are perceived to be 'at risk' of being lured into the trade. Though the humanitarian efforts of these nuns and priests are tainted by religious zeal, they and other Non Governmental Organizations are not only genuinely assisting those who are already in 'bondage' they are also trying to stem the tide.

<sup>6</sup> I spent Christmas 2003 in Los Angeles, California. One of the evenings, I was captivated by a special programme entitled 'Oprah in Africa', which was broadcast on national television. Oprah Winfrey was in conversation with the highly esteemed news broadcaster and journalist Diane Sawyer. Their exchange was interspersed with film clips from Oprah's recent visit to Southern Africa in general and South Africa in particular, where she performed astounding acts of philanthropy in an attempt to ease the material circumstances of young children and youth, many of whom had been orphaned by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Though at times both moved and inspired, I became increasingly annoyed at

---

the frequency with which both the interviewer and the interviewee referred to 'Africa' rather than naming the historically, politically, socially and culturally complex and specific country in question- 'South Africa'.

<sup>7</sup> Unlike other prostitution rings in Italy, such as Eastern European wherein those in control are pimps (Andrijasevic 2003), the Nigerian women are controlled by women in the form of ex-sex workers turned Madams:

Once they are able to make it to Italy, they are distributed to areas where their services are in demand. Before distribution, the Madame of the apartments where they are accommodated set the condition for engagement and remittance of proceeds from the trafficked woman's new trade of prostitution (Ume-Ezeoke 2003:17).

<sup>8</sup> In order to avoid reproducing some of the ethnocentric and racist stereotypes I have already critiqued, the prominent role of 'voodoo' in the recruitment, coercion and exploitation of trafficked Nigerian sex workers is one that must be analyzed with care and sensitivity. Such a detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this particular paper. Although, given its significance, Aghatise's discussion of its potent function is worth citing:

Another cultural aspect of the trafficking in Nigerian girls for prostitution is the fact of their being made to undergo black magic "juju" rites to ensure their payment of the debt imposed on them. This is perhaps the most relevant aspect because of the subsequent effect....The strong belief which they have in these rites coupled with an exaggerated sense of duty owed to their "benefactors" later develop into strong fear. This fear is up to the extent that even when they do succeed in paying all the "debt" to their exploiters, they still continue to live in the fear of some unmentionable misfortune happening to them or members of their family. Each and every misfortune they may suffer is attributed to the rite they were made to undergo (2002: 7-8).

<sup>9</sup> It would be naïve and irresponsible to focus entirely on agency without also addressing the link between African sex worker status and susceptibility to HIV/AIDS (Farmer et al. 1996). Unfortunately, within the confines of this argument, there is not ample textual space for me to address such a critical



issue. Nevertheless, without falling in to the pathologizing trap which presumes that sex workers are the primary vectors for HIV, there are significant implications for its transnational transmission in light of both the trafficking in women from West Africa to other parts of the continent and to Europe as well as their potential repatriation via escape or deportation:

The policy of deportation...adds to the stress of the women (many of whom are infected with the HIV-AIDS virus) and makes their reintegration in Nigeria much harder.... According to one prominent advocate in Benin City, the girls are medically screened in Lagos, whether they like it or not-and the results are then sent back to Edo State....The results are supposed to be confidential, but the statistics are available. We were told that the rate of HIV infection among the returning girls is in excess of 50% (Advocacy Project 2003).

If accurate, such statistics are indeed alarming, and are in accordance with disproportionate and mounting HIV infections rates for sub-Saharan Africans as a whole and young African women in particular (Gysels et al. 2002). However, just as the microstructural reasons why (young) women become involved in sex work and/or are susceptible to HIV/AIDS are many, varied and complex so must be the macrostructural antidotes and analyses (Simmons et al. 1996).

<sup>10</sup> For examples, in Nigeria: Women's Consortium of Nigeria; Idia Renaissance; Sisters of Sacred Heart, Benin City; National Council for Women Society; International Association of Criminal Justice Lawyers; Movement Against Trafficking in Persons; and Girls Power Initiative; in Italy: TAMPEP, New Wings, and Caritas; and in the United States: The Advocacy Project and The Protection Project.

<sup>11</sup> Whither the nation-state? This complex and highly contentious debate is one that I do not have time to adequately address. However, what I have tried to illustrate is the extent to which the nation-state is both extraneous to transnational identities formation and integral to the everyday policing, surveillance, management and containment of gendered and racialized diasporic bodies.