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A Migrant World of Services

Abstract

The strong demand for women's domestic, caring, and sexual labor in contemporary Europe promotes migrations from many parts of the world. This article examines the history of concepts that marginalize these as unproductive services (and not really "work") and questions why the west accepts the semifeudal conditions and lack of regulations pertaining to this sector. I argue that the moral panic over trafficking and the limited feminist debate on "prostitution" contribute to a climate that ignores the social problems of the majority of women migrants.

In a variety of scenarios in different parts of Europe, non-Europeans are arriving with the intention to work; these are largely migrant women and transgender people from the "third world" or from Central and Eastern Europe and countries of the former Soviet Union.¹ The jobs available to these women in the labor market are overwhelmingly limited to three basic types: domestic work (cleaning, cooking, and general housekeeping), caring for people in their homes (children, the elderly, the sick and disabled), and providing sexual experiences in a wide range of venues known as the sex industry. All these jobs are generally said to be services.

In the majority of press accounts, migrant women are presented as selling sex in the street, while in public forums and academic writing they are constructed as "victims of trafficking." The obsession with "trafficking" obliterates not only all the human agency necessary to undertake migrations but the experiences of migrants who do not engage in sex work. Many thousands of women who more or less

chose to sell sex as well as all women working in domestic or caring service are “disappeared” when moralistic and often sensationalistic topics are the only ones discussed. One of the many erased subjects concerns the labor market—the demand—for the services of all these women. The context to which migrants arrive is not less important than the context from which they leave, often carelessly described as poverty or violence. This article addresses the European context for women migrants’ employment in these occupations. Though domestic and caring work are usually treated as two separate jobs, very often workers do both, and these jobs also often require sexual labor, though this is seldom recognized. All this confusion and ambiguity occurs within a frame that so far has escaped definition.

My treatment of these issues should be understood as part of a postcolonial project that problematizes Western endeavors to “help” and “save” migrant women. My research centered first in Latin America and then moved to Europe, where I have been in contact with migrants from every continent. My earlier theorizing about race has changed in the past few years, since the fastest-growing group of migrants comes from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union—women usually considered “white” and “almost” European. The same jobs are open to them, and the same discourses of “trafficking” and “helping” apply. Thus, although “exoticizing” may well be taking place, race is not a useful concept for analysis at this time.

A Sector That Cannot Be Defined

Definitions of services range from the most general, which includes everything but agriculture, mining, and manufacturing, through one that includes transportation, finance, communications, real estate, and trade, another that uses health care, advertising, computer programming, and repair services, and one that refers to banking, insurance, health, education, sex, gambling, labor-hire, building contracting, food production, maintenance and repair, personal care, transportation, entertainment, and retail. Attempting to arrive at a sector that might help define the jobs offered to migrant women in Europe, one encounters the term *personal/household services*, but this lacks reference to health and to amusement and recreation.

Service jobs in the formal sector are varied enough; among possible jobs listed on one government Web site were: beauty therapist, cashier, computer salesperson, embalmer, florist, funeral director, grave digger, hairdresser, make-up artist, nail technician, news agent, pharmacy assistant, retail buyer, retail manager, sales assistant, sales representative, service station attendant, ticket writer, and video hire/sales.

What do these jobs have in common, really? One might say that one individual pays another to help him get what he needs, in some area, whether in person, over the phone, or through correspondence. Service jobs in the so-called informal sector can be defined the same way, but notably these are *not* included among the potential job options in the list, nor are they offered to and found by migrant women all over the world.

In the general discourse about services, relationships between customer and employee may be conceptualized as dry and distant, but many involve considerable emotional or material contact (for example, washing and cutting hair, massage therapy, counseling). The gamut of occupations sometimes considered services is obviously too wide and complex to be contained reasonably with a discourse about an economic or labor sector.

Behind this complexity lie the awkward economic concepts of productive and unproductive labor. An early essentialist definition by the eighteenth-century physiocrats insisted that only agriculture was productive. Adam Smith suggested a new definition that called services unproductive, or not contributing to the accumulation of physical wealth. John Stuart Mill argued that some services contributed to economic growth, but the difficulty of defining these contributed to the shift of attention to another dichotomy, market versus nonmarket labor. So although by the twentieth century economists were agreeing that all paid services were productive, they only looked at market services; thus paid domestic workers were deemed productive but housewives were “unproductive,” “unoccupied,” or “dependent” (Folbre 1991; Folbre and Wagman 1993).

The philosophizing of economists as to what constitutes production and markets translates into government policies that affect national census-taking and calculations of economic growth through national income accounts. Christine Bose (1987) shows how ideological goals may enter into the exclusion of particular occupations, so that while in Britain in the late nineteenth century there were proposals to include housework “to present a picture of Britain as a community of workers and a strong nation,” Australia “divided the whole population into breadwinners and dependents, the latter including women doing domestic work and unpaid workers in the home, as well as children and the infirm. The intent was to provide an image of a country where everyone did not need to work, and thus to appear to be a good place for British investment” (Bose 1987, 101).

Many authors have shown how the majority of women’s jobs inside houses are neither paid nor even considered work, and therefore don’t count in official government statistics (Benería 1981; Waring 1988). Housewives are counted neither among the employed

or the unemployed. Ruth Levitas gives a recent example from Great Britain:

In October 1997 the Office of National Statistics (ONS) published the first estimates of the extent and value of unpaid work in the British economy. If a monetary value were put on such work, at 1995 values it would have been at least equivalent to £341 billion, or more than the whole UK manufacturing sector, and perhaps as much as £739 billion, 120% of gross domestic product. Among the reasons for this statistical development was the insensitivity of conventional national accounts to the movement of activities between market and non-market sectors. Yet despite this official endorsement, the dominant public and social-scientific understanding of “work” remains paid work. Since the ONS figures confirmed that women do much more unpaid work than men, and that although men do more paid work, they also have more leisure, men’s work is more acknowledged, as well as more highly rewarded, than women’s work. (1998, 8)

According to Levitas, this nonrecognition of household and caring labor and the concomitant “[privileging] of market activity” (28) are factors that *construct* the discourse of social exclusion. And if work by women citizens is excluded, the same work done by women migrants is doubly or triply so (woman/migrant/illegal).

Journalist Peter Kellner demonstrates how growth of the economy itself is judged on very partial statistics, those deriving from “tax returns, VAT records, payroll data and company records. Illegal activities, involving cash-only transactions hidden from the Inland Revenue and Customs and Excise, do not show up” (1999, 21). According to Kellner, *Economic Trends* valued such transactions at £700 million for stolen goods, £800 million for gambling, £9.9 billion for drug dealing, and £1.2 billion for “prostitution.”² Since many of the myriad forms of trade found in the sex industry are usually not included under this term, it is likely that figures for commercial sex, including pornography, were much higher.

A slightly different kind of classification refers to reproductive labor, which reproduces social life by maintaining families and the houses they live in. This notion is also not clear-cut, entering into questions of what is necessary and what is not.

The reproduction of life melds into the reproduction of status. . . . Nobody has to have stripped pine floorboards, handwash-only silk shirts, ornaments that gather dust. All these things create domestic work, but they also affirm the status of the household, its class, its access to resources of finance and personnel, and the adequacy of its manager, almost invariably a woman. (Anderson 2000, 14)

In a discussion of how to measure household activities, Anne Chadeau points to a similar problem: “The changes some services bring about in household members through their emotional content have no market substitute, and therefore no market price” (1985, 241). This becomes clear in the idealized discourse of the agent who is selling domestic servants in the market:

You have a “wife” at home, . . . Imagine coming home at the end of a workday, and all the stress is off. The kids are happy, the laundry is washed and folded, you can smell the chicken cooking in the oven. The girls don’t want to stick around with you and your husband at the end of their work day, so you have all the time alone you want. . . . They leave to their room and you are home with your kids. It gives you peace of mind and it gives you your equilibrium. (Bakan and Stasilius 1995, 325)

All jobs widely offered to migrant women today fall into these disputed categories, which can hardly be a matter of chance. While the categories cannot be defined and agreed to, the work goes on, uncounted, undervalued, and subject to all manner of exploitation. For want of a better term, these jobs may as well be called services. As Saskia Sassen says, “What emerges clearly is that a large share of women migrants constitute *a certain kind of labor* (1984, 1148, emphasis added).³ But what do the jobs actually have in common, and what makes them come to be work?

The *third-person* criterion has been used to draw the household product boundary between work and leisure. . . . If a third person could be paid to do the unpaid activity of a household member, then it is “work”; so clearly cooking, child care, laundry, cleaning and gardening are all work, as a household servant could be hired to perform these activities. On the other hand, it would not be sensible to hire someone to watch a movie, play tennis, read a book, or eat a meal for you, as the benefits of the activity would accrue to the servant, the third person, not the hirer. (Ironmonger 1996, 39–40; emphasis in original)⁴

Duncan Ironmonger proposes classifying types of care and nurture “as to whether they were care of the body or of the mind. The physical or bodily category includes meals, exercise, health, washing and sleep” (1996, 55). The tasks allotted to migrant domestic and caring workers would be covered (sex is not mentioned).

Diemut Bubeck, in an analysis of the gendered nature of caring work, focuses on its “live” aspect: “Caring for is the meeting of the needs of one person by another person where face-to-face interaction between carer and cared for is a crucial element of the overall activity

and where the need is of such a nature that it cannot possibly be met by the person in need herself” (1995, 129). Her emphasis on the interactional quality means that it isn’t enough to simply “meet needs”; instead there must be a face-to-face relationship (or ear-to-ear or eye-to-eye, so that telephone calls and letters may be included).

Chadeau brings in the ambiguity over aspects of household work that are not strictly utilitarian, do not refer to actual biological needs, and can thus be called leisure. She points out that the boundaries for these definitions are personal and depend on cultural contexts:

Adults . . . usually perform these acts for themselves in western countries (washing, dressing, for example) but these acts could be delegated. The criterion on which the classification is based is then the social norm. . . . Is washing and setting one’s hair work (since this service can certainly be bought on the market), leisure for the direct utility it produces or a biological need? It probably belongs, to a greater or lesser degree, to all three categories. Here again how great a part do social norms play in classification? (1985, 241)

Rhacel Parreñas, speaking of the domestic and caring work of Filipina migrant domestic workers, agrees that the labor of care varies according to different cultures:

There are three main forms of care expected to ensure the reproduction of the family: 1) moral care, meaning the provision of discipline and socialization to ensure that dependents are raised to be “good” moral citizens of society; 2) emotional care, meaning the provision of emotional security through the expression of concern and feelings of warmth and affection, and 3) material care, meaning the provision of the physical needs of dependents, including food, clothing, and education or skills-training to guarantee that they become producers for the family. (2001, 117)

The search continues for ways to pin down acts of caring, with no agreement yet. Meanwhile, migrants are expected to accept such jobs, along with their lack of prestige, low pay, and confusion as to what the work actually consists of and how it should be done.⁵ Do different cultures clean and care differently? According to many European employers of migrant women, they do (Anderson 2000; Colectivo Ioé 2001). In one popular stereotype that crosses borders, Latin American women are said to be good at child care because they are affectionate or sweet, while they are also accused of being sloppy cleaners. On bulletin boards accessible to migrants, in places like the lobbies of migrant organizations, clinics, and nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs), classes are commonly offered in Spanish cooking or French cooking, as well as in how to be a domestic worker in general. There is an odd irony here: women from the “third world” are widely said to be more domestic and traditional than European ones, to be naturals at cleaning and caring, but at the same time, they are found to require instruction in the up-to-date and particular ways of Europe.

The Gender of “A Certain Kind of Labor”

But why should the demand be for *women*, particularly, to fulfill these roles? A migrant man presenting himself as a candidate for live-in domestic or caring work seems like an anomaly, though men were once as common in domestic work as women (Oso 1998), and boarding a Filipino couple remains a status symbol in some elite circles. The literature on an ethics of care and sociology of emotions does not agree so far as to whether women are somehow inherently better at caring (Abel and Nelson 1990; Gilligan 1982). What is clear, however, is that societies widely *believe* that they are; across cultures, women are those who “know how” to care.

It may be that, in order for an ethic of care to develop individuals need to experience caring for others and being cared for by others. From this perspective, the daily experience of caring provides [women and “minority men”] with the opportunity to develop this moral sense. The dearth of caretaking experiences makes privileged males morally deprived. (Tronto 1987, 652)

Being morally privileged, then, contradictorily leads to being apportioned some of the least well-paid work in the least controlled employment sector, where feudalism and exploitation are routinely accepted. In Joan Tronto’s (1987) analysis, “minority men” are also experienced in caring, yet in Europe they are rarely considered for these jobs. Arlie Hochschild (2000) addresses another moral consequence of the employment of migrant women as carers: the possibility that care is being imported from (and thus diminished in) third-world countries to first as though it were a simple resource. Migrant domestic workers indeed reveal pain at having left their own children behind, but at the same time, some start new families in their new country, some contract other women at home to take care of their children there, and so on. This complex issue, in which knowledge that one is supporting one’s own family may palliate feelings of guilt, inadequacy, or rage—or not, crosses geographic and disciplinary borders (Parreñas 2001).

Introducing Sex into the Equation

The issue of sexual services needs to be treated separately because so far it has not been possible to integrate them into other service discourses. This separation forms part of the highly rigid manner in which migrant women workers are treated in Europe, by governments, feminists, NGOs, and the press. The situation of women who do sex work either full- or part-time has so far been inextricable from the polemic on “prostitution” and “trafficking.” My concern is that while this is going on, the day-to-day situation of hundreds of thousands (millions, worldwide) of women is not being addressed in the pragmatic terms necessary to improve their living conditions.⁶ Treating sex as a taboo contributes to the marginalization not only of jobs in the sex industry but of domestic and caring tasks, since they often include sexual labor as well.

On the theoretical level—within the sociology of work, for example—most scholars are willing to consider carers and domestics together, and a few would include sex workers with them. In this analysis, there exists a continuum of commercial opportunities involving intimacy, including psychotherapy, therapeutic massage, bartending, hairstyling, and escort work. Here sex is only another aspect of intimacy. Many discussions among those selling sex and some researchers do normalize the service aspect; Perkins et al., for example, refer to the “personal services” offered by gays involving “strippergrams, nude waitering for private parties, nude housecleaning” and so on (1994, 190).

But many argue that sexual services cannot be considered work, whether they are paid occupations for millions of people or not, because sex should always be the expression of love (Barry 1979; Dworkin 1987). For Carole Pateman, sex is incomparable to other things, acts, situations:

The services of the prostitute are related in a more intimate manner to her body than those of other professionals. Sexual services, that is to say, sex and sexuality, are constitutive of the body in a way in which the counseling skills of the social worker are not. . . . Sexuality and the body are, further, integrally connected to conceptions of femininity and masculinity, and all these are constitutive of our individuality, our sense of self-identify. (1988, 562)

A colleague who responded to researcher Lynn Chancer’s hypothetical proposal to do participant observation in studies of sex for sale said: “But you don’t understand—prostitution is disgusting because what you’re doing is so intimate. It’s different . . . it just is” (Chancer

1993, 145). Obviously, this concept of intimacy is widely held, although the Western notion of “self” and its assumed relationship to sexuality should not be universalized to non-Western cultures. But why should these intimate acts be excluded from theorizing on commercial services? Barbara Sullivan notes:

The retailing of intimacy is a common feature of modern life and of other paid work like therapy and massage. In the case of both therapy and massage, equality and reciprocity are not usually features of the professional relationship. Moreover, it is only in the last few decades that these values have been seen as desirable in “normal” intimate relations. It is clear, too, that the enormous differences between men and women, particularly in terms of economic, social and political resources, means that equality and reciprocity are rarely real features of contemporary relationships between adult men and women. (1995, 184)

One thing is clear: it is *only* possible to isolate sex from other personal services if sexual contact is accepted as utterly different from all other kinds and in that sense both sanctified and stigmatized, and if intimacy is constructed as occurring in particular ways, its definition based on particular acts (Johnson 2002; Vance 1984). My own contribution to this debate is to point out that the isolation of paid sex from other services assumes that the *only* thing that happens in a sexual service is a sexual act. The relationship between customer and service-provider is thus reduced to overt and specified physical contacts with particular points of the human body known as erogenous zones, and everything else that goes on is excluded. For “anti-prostitution” theorists, if sex is there, then that is the only thing that has to be looked at, and if any other kind of intimacy is present, then it is intimacy gone wrong. But much research demonstrates that there is a lot more than sex going on in the long evenings spent in bars, clubs, driving around, and other social activities that may or may not end in paid sex (Allison 1994; Frank 2002; Leonini 1999).

Wendy Chapkis (1997) supports her argument that sex is work with Hochschild’s study of the emotional labor of flight attendants, which concluded that the most telling issue may be their “control over the conditions and terms of the exploitation of [their] emotional resources.”⁷ Faked orgasms have been offered as a clear-cut example of emotional labor performed by sex workers for clients who feel more excited and gratified if they believe workers are (Lever and Dolnick 2000), and, in this sense, those selling sex without themselves feeling sexual interest are presumably engaging in emotional labor simply by making the effort to appear excited. There is no reason to limit this faking to those selling sex, however: babysitters and carers

of grannies may pretend to care, too, by smiling on demand, listening to boring stories, or doling out caresses without feeling affection.

The “prostitution” concept erases the diversity of the sex industry, which includes phenomena as disparate as erotic telephone conversations, accompaniment of businessmen to elegant parties, brief acts such as “hand relief,” dancing or shows in bars, sex shops, soap-bubble massages—the list goes on (Agustín 2000). Suffice it to say that in these activities, too, definitions and perceptions of service vary not only according to the kind of acts involved but also according to subjective perceptions of pleasure. How can we define good sex? What makes a client feel fulfilled? How does one project or perform sensuality, lust, receptivity, sexual caring? Each of the many activities now included in the industry is open to clients’ differing subjective judgments about whether they are carried out satisfactorily or not, and few limit definitions of satisfaction to the purely physical (see the World Sex Guide Web site, <http://worldsexguide.com>, where clients describe their experiences). The value of a service depends on the customer’s personal perception of it. Moreover, a desire for satisfaction should not be limited to the receiving end of the service; purveyors also have ways of feeling satisfied by their work. No one would deny that job satisfaction can occur in nail salons or among shoeshine boys and street sweepers, other tasks viewed as low-skill and low-prestige, so why deny it to people selling sex?

Beyond moralizing discourses, where it is possible to talk about a sex industry, there is a tug of war between the rationalized discourse of health, safety, and professionalism at one extreme (related to concepts of sex worker rights and in state regulatory projects), and, at the other, the “irrational” discourse of tenderness, flexibility, and nonprofessionalization (in Western clients’ testimonies as well as those of some sex workers). In this way, sex-service discourse is no different from discourses on housework and caring work; all share a tendency to define tasks that can be bought and sold as well as assert the particular, special, indefinable human extra necessary to do the job well. Paid activities in these domains may include feelings of intimacy and reciprocity, whether the individuals involved intend them or not, and despite the overall structures involved being patriarchal and unjust. The ability to maintain emotional distance turns out to be an aspect of the work that only some workers master (Chapkis 1997; Hochschild 1983; Wouters 1989). There is a further problem, that emotional involvement may occur on the part of the *buyer* of services as well: employers who demand acts of pointless servitude from domestic workers or unreasonable educational skills from ill-paid nannies, clients who become dependent on particular sex workers, elderly people who manipulate their carers.

The Demand for Services

Western societies have long employed people outside the family to help with housework and home nursing, and sex has been paid for outside the home as far back as historians have been able to go. What is notable now is the lack of progress or rationalizing among these chores concomitant with other kinds of changes in society. The domestic and caring sector is often referred to as feudal, involving servitude or servility. How is it that these social phenomena are looked on so uncritically within Western societies? I have identified three areas of life that appear to be involved—family, sex, and consumption, but because boundaries between them cannot be maintained I will treat them generally, beginning with the concept of family.

In some parts of Europe, middle- and upper-class families still prefer to hire live-in maids, servants who are present from morning to night to perform a wide range of tasks, some considered personal and even taboo (preparing and serving food, cleaning bathrooms, washing undergarments, for example). When the employee is a carer, she may have charge of the most personal and delicate of bodily tasks, and even the maid or babysitter who comes in for a few hours and then leaves is privy to intimate family details. In some places, more commonly in Mediterranean countries, this willingness may not represent a change so much as a holdover: in these societies an acceptance of social hierarchy means that families may decide to forgo some privacy in exchange for having a servant available at all times (King and Zontini 2000; Oso 1998). On the other hand, *all* societies in which both partners in a family relationship leave the house to work generate a need for outsiders to be brought in to care for children and the elderly, unless a complete array of state services exists. As extended families are reduced to their nuclei, there are not extra aunts and grandmothers willing to take on these tasks, and daughters are growing up in societies where women's independence from family is now promoted.

At the same time, Western gender politics are changing the shape of the nuclear family or committed couple. The most obvious outcomes of the movement toward gender equity since the 1960s have been women's entry into many labor markets once closed to them and acceptance of the idea that women have the right to work outside the home. Nancy Folbre and Julie Nelson refer to the results of this change in a discussion of concepts of "public and private":

While some of women's tasks were largely instrumental—cleaning and cooking, for example—many tasks contained more personalized and emotional components. Women were in charge of

children, elderly, and the ill; maintaining personal relationships; offering emotional support, personal attention, and listening; embodying (or so it was understood) sexuality. This social contract is changing. As women move increasingly into the world of paid work, many of these traditional intimate tasks are being performed in relationships that include the explicit movement of money. Paid child care, nursing homes for the elderly, talk therapy and phone sex are just a few examples. (2000, 1)

The point is that while women have moved significantly into the public sphere, men have moved to a much lesser degree into the private. Assuming the demand remains steady for cleanliness and order inside the house, this means that either women who work outside it do double labor or someone is hired to do the housework and caring. “Equal” gender relations between the members of the Western couple therefore may crucially rely on the employment of a third person. Women, not illogically, are those hired to do this traditionally women’s work.

Traditionally, the family was assumed to be the site of love and commitment and sex to be properly located only there, as Rapp et al. explain:

In the family history literature, family usually means a grouping of kinsfolk minus servants, boarders, etc, who *should* be living together inside of households. I want to argue that we need to focus on the “should” portion of that definition (i.e., the idea of kin-based families as normative) in order to reveal a key structure crucial for the understanding of ideology. It is through their commitment to the concept of family that people are recruited to the material relations of households. Because people accept the meaningfulness of family, they enter into relations of production, reproduction, and consumption with one another. (1983, 235)

Nowadays, however, more *kinds* of relationships are accepted as meaningful, or, indeed, as familial (Davidoff and Hall 1987; Silva and Smart 1999). Though these changes are not universal and vary by generation, class, and ethnicity, it is fair to say that in Europe many concepts of family now extend beyond the walls of houses (living together not being a requirement) and increasingly include nonblood or formal marriage relationships. This means that the commitments Rapp et al. refer to are also made outside home environments, and, therefore, family homes that bring in an outsider do not strike such a dissonant note.

This loosening up or broadening of the field of significant relationships may help explain some of the demand for sexual services, as well. Anthony Giddens (1992) has pointed out how present-day Western societies idealize relationships considered sexually and emotionally free and equal, supposedly formed without interests and that continue only as long as the two people involved (they are always two) feel satisfied. Part of the freedom experienced within this structure is ascribed to a sexuality now not tied to reproduction. In some parts of the West—again variable according to generation—it is common nowadays to speak of relationships and partners rather than marriage. Discourses of gender equality and individuality encourage heterosexuals to look for relationships that suit their own personal emotional needs (Nelson and Robinson 1994). In the literature on nonheterosexuality, there are emphases on the right to form family-like arrangements as well as the right not to (Weston 1997). For many people, the romantic ideal has not been achieved, is not sought, or has failed, which means they may not be part of a couple but still want intimacy and sex. In this context, paying for it occasionally looks less important.

Families, even those that appear conventional from the outside (married woman and man with children all living together), are not impermeable sites. As hundreds of AIDS studies have shown, loving a wife or husband does not impede having sex with or loving all kinds of other people. When someone else comes to live in the house as a maid, in conditions of intimacy, they may be told to feel they are one of the family. Sex occurs within families, but there is public outrage if it becomes known that a family member has sex with a domestic worker—this seems to constitute a contemporary taboo, despite a wealth of literature demonstrating the historically strong erotic association between maids and sex in European societies (McClintock 1995; Stallybrass and White 1986). The contradictions are rife. This said, I now move on to changes in the domain of sex that affect the market for services.

The ideal of sexual “liberation” has now been active in the West for four decades and has evolved to include specific ideals of liberation for women, gays and lesbians, bisexuals, transgender or intergender people, disabled people, children, and other identity groups. The liberation concept follows the classic hydraulic model of drives and repressions that must be set free (Gagnon and Simon 1973; Weeks 1982). Accordingly, every human being ought and has the right to know him- or herself intimately, both physically and emotionally, to arrive at a sexual identity. The link made between personal identity and sex and the construction of a new category, sexuality, was a central theme of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1978, 1985, 1986). The many paradoxes of the search for sexual identity—its possibilities for

limiting as well as expanding personal possibilities—have been the subject of much theorizing since, but the attainment of self-knowledge and discovery is still considered desirable.

Self-identity, at the heart of which is sexual identity, is not something that is given as a result of the continuities of an individual's life or of the fixity and force of his or her desires. It is something that has to be worked on, invented and reinvented in accord with the changing rhythms, demands, opportunities and closures of a complex world. (Weeks 1995, 38)

For R. W. Connell (1987), social practice, the individual's personal narrative, is what makes a sexual persona. Thus the search, with its experimentations, is constructed as necessary, and since such experimentation is considered perverse and criminal when it occurs inside Western families (as incest or abuse), it is outside the family that it must take place. So in many contexts, the desire to leave home and family and relate to other people in the world in intimate situations is seen as positive. If there were no hegemonic condemnations of promiscuity, infidelity, and paid sex, there would be no contradictions here, but these are still common. The result is that those who buy sexual services rarely speak about it in public, while speaking about it to peers in private may be actually constitutive of a heterosexual masculine identity (Allison 1994; Bird 1996; Leonini 1999).

These changes in attitudes to sexual behavior, so notable at the discursive level, look different through the lens of gender. There, the denunciation of promiscuity is almost universally leveled at girls, not boys (apart from some more generally antisex pronouncements from fundamentalist religious leaders and the Vatican). There is also resistance to the idea that women might want to watch others have sex, have multiple sexual partners, engage in public sex, pay for sex, or be paid to have sex, the last inevitable given much of the "prostitution" discourse, which insists that it is a form of exploitation *by men of women*. There is now a significant literature on Western women as purchasers of sex on holiday (see, for example, O'Connell Davidson and Sanchez Taylor 1999; Phillip 1999; Pruitt and LaFont 1995), but it remains to be seen whether this documentation will help expand our understanding of the search for identity and personal services or will only be treated within the prostitution debate, where it is condemned.

The drive model of sexuality mentioned has been the subject of much debunking, particularly in relation to a hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1987). Male sexual needs, which have justified much gender oppression, are criticized as not real but cultural constructions (McIntosh 1978; O'Connell Davidson 2001). Nevertheless, the liberation model is still

going strong, and the proliferation of sexual images and opportunities is usually related to a “de-repressing” of the population.

According to Jeffrey Weeks, “choice of lifestyles is central to radical sexual politics; choice to realize our sexual desire, choice in the pattern of sexual relationships, choice in our general ways of life” (1995, 45). Can this affirmation made on behalf of sexual identities apply to commercial sex? Is being a client, prostitute, or sex worker an analogous identity to those apparently based on sexual orientation? If identities are multiple, shifting, and temporary, perhaps so. For in the free markets of advanced capitalism, objects, experiences, and services that not long ago were not commercially available now seem to proliferate before our very eyes. Possible spaces to go (to experience or flee from life, rest, relax, hide, learn) have burgeoned, and as for travel, presently almost no site is too far away for consideration, even for working-class people (and if only once in a lifetime). A wide range of activities have become potential consumer products so that purchasable experiences continuously multiply.

Thus the proliferation of sexually oriented shows and services on offer is not surprising, because the same has occurred with products in most commercial domains. John Urry (1990) divides touristic gazing possibilities into “collective,” in which the presence of other people adds to the experience, and “romantic,” in which privacy is important. Both kinds of experiences are available in the sex industry, whose sites are used by clients to drink, eat, take drugs, get together with friends, do business, impress partners, watch films, travel, be with a variety of sexual partners, and pay for a gamut of services. The sexual moment need not occupy a central place within the whole experience; for many, drinking and socializing in the presence of symbolic, decorative women or men may be more important (Allison 1994; Frank 2002; Leonini 1999).

The Price of Wealth and Progress

The social changes sketched produce a demand that draws women migrants toward the West. At the same time, changes to the world economy, including manufacturing’s move out of the West, the structural adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund, armed conflicts, natural disasters, and poverty help draw them away from home. But human character is at work as well. Media images of travel reach everywhere, the desire to see the world is not limited to richer travelers and tourists, and some people seek adventure more than others. To pay attention only to the jobs migrants do is to essentialize them as workers and deny the diversity of their hopes and experiences (Agustín 2002a). When they arrive in the West, few of the jobs

available to them are located in the formal sector, many pay miserably, and working conditions are often semifeudal. Clandestine nature and lack of labor regulation leave the field open to abuses of all kinds, but to totalize all women's migrations as "trafficking" is to deny them the capacity to make decisions and take risks (Agustín 2002b, 2003).

There is no mystery, then, about why migrations take place, and very little about the demand for migrant women's services. What cannot be explained easily is why Western governments have failed for so very long to value women's service jobs and apply to them normal regulatory codes and rights. For some time the conditions discussed in this essay have been accepted: Women work more than men, housework exists in economic limbo, housewives aren't thought to be employed, caring is supposed to be its own reward, and the exchange of sex for money isn't considered work. The refusal to normalize traditional women's services reproduces negative ideas about women's worth and colonizes women from poorer countries as in the days of overt empire. Service jobs per se are not looked down on: the waiter, the physiotherapist, and the hairdresser are examples of employment involving some degree of physical and/or personal intimacy that are perceived as normal. Yet rather than examining this imperialist remnant, reactions often make the leap to saying European borders should be closed and women not allowed to migrate to do these jobs. This "solution" constructs non-Western women as better off staying home and negates the fact that the salaries offered are seen as positive opportunities that justify risk. The moral panic on "trafficking" conveniently feeds these isolationist proposals, keeping the social gaze fixed on extreme cases while neglecting the more prosaic needs of the majority of migrant women. Proposals to stem migration also fail to consider the European social context, with its changing needs and desires. The world of services in which migrant women live and the European social context could be ameliorated considerably by the adjustment of long-pending gender inequalities in the consideration of what is work, along with a willingness to reflect on desires that seem to be the price of wealth and progress.

NOTES

1. The quotation marks used with the term "prostitution" indicate that the concept has been shown to totalize a great deal of diverse activity, much of it temporary, occasional, or otherwise informally conceived. My own research as well as that of others demonstrates that "prostitution" is a constructed category that covers up more than it reveals and perpetuates stigmatization (see, for example, Walkowitz 1980, Bell 1994, and Agustín 2002a).

2. *Transgender* is the more encompassing term, gender rather than physical attributes being the overriding issue. Part-time and occasional transvestites, pre-op and post-op transsexuals, people identifying as “in between” and as a “third sex,” are all included. In this study, transsexuals working in service sectors are included as “women” because they usually present as women while working.

3. “Employers often openly stipulate that they want a particular type of *person*, justifying this demand on the grounds that they will be working in the home. . . . [She] should be ‘affectionate,’ ‘like old people’ or ‘be good with children.’ The worker wants to earn as much money as she can with reasonable conditions, but the employer’s wants are rather more complicated” (Anderson 2000, 114; emphasis in original).

4. Ironmonger (1996, 61, n. 4) notes not understanding why the term is *third person* rather than *second* or *other*.

5. These issues have been found to be similar in other parts of the world; see, for example, Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001).

6. Another recent collection, Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2003), has a similar focus.

7. “While some [flight attendants] distance themselves from the job by defining it as ‘not serious,’ others distance themselves from it in another way. . . . They use their faces as masks against the world; they refuse to act. Most of those who ‘go into robot’ describe it as a defense, but they acknowledge that it is inadequate: their withdrawal often irritates passengers, and when it does they are forced to withdraw even further in order to defend themselves against that irritation” (Hochschild 1983, 135).

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