Journey to Work: Transnational Prostitution in Colonial British West Africa

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> I was brought here from Nigeria by the accused [Bassey Assor] about three years ago. . . . I was brought to Sekondi and after a few weeks taken to Prestea. At Prestea a whiteman came and made some arrangement with [the] accused and I was then told to go into a room with the whiteman. I objected but was forced into the room by the accused and the man had connexion [*sic*] with me which resulted in my vagina bleeding profusely. I was in pain and ill for some time afterwards. On recovery I was taken to another whiteman but ran away from him and returned to the accused. The accused beat me and made me return to the man but I again left. After this I was taken to Konongo, Tarkwa and Bibiani. At each of these places the accused sent me to different men who had connexion with me. The men paid the accused and sometimes gave me chop [food] money. After leaving Bibiani I and the accused returned to Sekondi where we lived together in one room with a partition down the centre. Every evening I had to sit at the door and men would come to accuse [*sic*] and ask for me. If I refused to go with a man the accused would beat me.

THE ABOVE TESTIMONY, given in 1939 by a Nigerian child prostitute named Mwoanyaanyanwu who was trafficked to the Gold Coast (modern Ghana), unveils the subculture of forced prostitution—including the horrific atmosphere under which it operated—in a manner best told only by someone who experienced it.[1] A Nigerian woman, Bassey Assor, had lured Mwoanyaanyanwu from her parents under the guise of marrying her to one John Nnji (later discovered to be a boy of about nine years old) and then prostituted her to men of varying ethnicities and races. The victim escaped from sexual captivity and found refuge in a police station.

[1] The epigraph is from Commissioner of Police, Accra, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, Accra, 15 May 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, National Archives Ibadan (cited hereafter as NAI).

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Assor was later charged and sentenced to eighteen months in prison.[2] While Mwoanyaanyanwu was lucky to have escaped forced prostitution to narrate her ordeal, another child prostitute named Lady was murdered by her madam, Mary Eyeamevber Eforghere of Warri Province, Nigeria, for refusing to have sex with a European sailor. After killing Lady, Eforghere dumped her corpse in a bush and proceeded to the police station to report her missing. She was found guilty of murder by a Gold Coast court in August 1943 and sentenced to death. While Mwoanyaanyanwu's case was known only to a very few individuals close to the colonial administration, that of Lady gained front-page coverage in the print media—especially the *West African Pilot*, Nigeria's best-selling nationalist newspaper—inciting public outrage against British colonial authorities in West Africa for having failed in their responsibility to protect sexually endangered girls.[3]

This article examines the most elaborate international prostitution network in colonial British West Africa and arguably the entire African continent during the first half of the twentieth century. Between the outbreak of World War II and the 1950s, British colonial administrators fought to halt the emigration of women and girls from the southern Nigerian provinces of Owerri, Ogoja, and Calabar to the Gold Coast for the purpose of prostitution.[4] Yet, the transborder prostitution in West Africa was just one of the numerous networks of global sex work, otherwise known as the "white slave trade," which aside from being a global humanitarian crisis prompted the convening of several international conventions against sexual trafficking from 1904 through the end of the twentieth century.[5] Although the main nexus of white slave traffic was Asia, Europe, and the Americas, representatives of the League of Nations and later the United Nations who policed global prostitution were convinced that sexual exploitation in African colonial dependencies must be addressed to reduce global crime.[6] In inserting the Nigeria–Gold Coast prostitution network into the well-documented history of the global movement against sexual exploitation of

[2] E. C. Nottingham to the Colonial Secretary, Accra, 18 July 1940, CSO 15/1/222, Public Records and Archives Administration Department (cited hereafter as PRAAD).

[3] "Women Murdered Pretty Girl for Rejecting Friendship Advances," *West African Pilot*, 26 August 1943.

[4] For details on these regions, especially their ethnography, see Percy Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, vol. 3 (1923; London: Frank Cass, 1969); Percy Amaury Talbot, *Life in Southern Nigeria: The Magic, Belief, and Customs of the Ibibio Tribe* (1923; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967).

[5] Stephanie A. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Nils Johan Ringdal, *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); William W. Sanger, *The History of Prostitution: Its Extent, Causes and Effects throughout the World* (New York: Eugenics Publishing Company, 1937); Mark Thomas Connelly, *The Response to Prostitution in the Progressive Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

[6] Limoncelli, *Politics of Trafficking*, 42–60.

women and children, I argue that local social processes played an important role in molding imperial perceptions of the precise nature of the dangers that sex work presented to prevailing notions of respectability.

A brief excursion into the existing literature on African women's migration and prostitution is important for coming to grips with the core arguments and contributions of this article to the history of sexuality and the African colonial experience. Social anthropologist Kenneth Little was among the first Africanists to devote serious attention to women's migration. In his *African Women in Towns*, he demonstrates that women migrated into colonial urban centers to enjoy "the material and non-material elements of culture, behavior patterns and ideas that originate in or are distinctive to the city."[7] I could not agree more with Little that African women's migration to and presence in towns helped create a "social revolution," for not only did these developments reconfigure the demography of rural and urban spaces, they also unleashed unquantifiable social transformations of gender roles, social and economic mobility, and the new ideals of socialization, to mention but a few. Although urban centers, military camps, and mining settlements were established primarily for the purpose of asserting colonial economic and political power, and although they were constructed with male labor in mind, women followed a similar migratory pattern by also moving from rural communities to these centers. Drawing examples from various African locations, Little sheds considerable light on women's everyday life in cities and establishes that they, like other demographic groups, helped make colonial urbanization one of the major structural innovations of twentieth-century Africa.

Little's pioneering work has stimulated the efflorescence of scholarship that adopts gender, class, and race as frameworks for analyzing women's migration in Africa.[8] Instead of adopting Little's Africa-wide, synthetic

[7] Kenneth Little, *African Women in Towns: An Aspect of Africa's Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 18.

[8] Lynette A. Jackson, "'When in the White Man's Town': Zimbabwean Women Remember Chibeura," in *Women in African Colonial History*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyinke Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 191–215; Teresa Barnes, "Virgin Territories? Travel and Migration by African Women in Twentieth-Century Southern Africa," in ibid., 164–90; P. L. Bonner, *Desirable or Undesirable Sotho Women? Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Sotho Women to the Rand, 1920–1945* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand, African Studies Institute, 1988); Hamilton Sipho Simelane, "The State, Chiefs, and the Control of Female Migration in Colonial Swaziland, 1930s–50s," *Journal of African History* 45, no. 1 (2004): 103–24; Veijo Notkola and Harri Siiskonen, *Fertility, Mortality and Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Ovamboland in North Namibia, 1925–1990* (New York: Martin's Press, 2000); David B. Coplan, "You Have Left Me Wandering About: Basotho Women and the Culture of Mobility," in *"Wicked" Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl A. McCurdy (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2001), 188–211; Edward Tshidiso Maloka, "Canteens, Brothels and Labor Migrancy in Lesotho," *Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 100–122; Julia C. Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1993);

approach, however, most Africanists have taken a case-study or local approach toward examinations of how the colonial masters constructed women's rural-to-urban migration as a threat to their imposed notions of progress, modernity, and racial purity. This approach is useful for one main reason: experiences of African women under colonial rule were not homogeneous but varied from place to place and were shaped by prevailing local African customs and the policies of each colonial government. Nevertheless, as a whole this scholarship has demonstrated that, regardless of location and circumstances, the colonialists' response to women's migration was paradoxical: on the one hand, women made life in the cities, mines, and military bases comfortable for the men as providers of support services like food, accommodations, and sex; on the other hand, their absence from home allegedly reduced rural agricultural production and income accruing to native treasuries, facilitated the spread of VD, challenged male authority, and mutated the precolonial ideal of "pristine" African womanhood.

As highly illuminating as the current body of scholarship on women's migration is, a couple of gray areas remain. First, the bulk of the work focuses on women's migration and sex work within national boundaries. The dearth of critical scholarship on transnational sex work in colonial Africa tends to imply that women did not cross the artificial colonial boundaries for the purpose of sex work. This article addresses a set of interrelated questions that are presently missing or underdeveloped in the literature on transborder prostitution: How did the attitudes of colonialists and Africans toward transnational prostitution change, and what factors account for the changes? How did the politics of stemming the tide of international prostitution dovetail with broader imperial practices of maintaining the colonies as sites of ruthless exploitation while fulfilling the so-called civilizing mission? What were the identities of the women involved in prostitution? How did transnational prostitution emerge? What impact did it have on the local economies? What were the challenges of policing it? In placing global sex work within the wider history of colonialism during the extremely unstable era that began with World War II, I seek to reveal the degree to which discussions about "dangerous" sexuality and methods of addressing

Gina Buijs, "Women Alone: Migrants from Transkei Employed in Rural Natal," in *Migrant Women: Crossing Boundaries and Changing Identities*, ed. Gina Buijs (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Carina Ray, "Sex Trafficking, Prostitution, and the Law in Colonial British West Africa, 1911–1943," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, ed. Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), 101–20; Saheed Aderinto, "The Problem of Nigeria Is Slavery, Not White Slave Trade: Globalization and the Politicization of Prostitution in Southern Nigeria, 1921–1955," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 46, no. 2 (2012): 1–22; Benedict B. Naanen, "The Itinerant Gold Mines: Prostitution in the Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930–1950," *African Studies Review* 34, no. 2 (1991): 57–79; Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution among the Akan of the Gold Coast, c. 1650–1950," *Past & Present*, no. 156 (1997): 144–73.

it took center stage in the relationship between Britain, the metropole, and the colonial periphery in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. The fight against transnational prostitution suggests that sex work was not just a "sinful" affair between men and women; it formed a nexus between the movement of human bodies and capital and imperial politics.

My second goal is to demonstrate that the influential idea that African men were against women's migration, especially for the purposes of prostitution, needs to be thoroughly qualified. As I will show, the Nigerian–Gold Coast prostitution network flourished partly because men—whether as husbands, parents, relatives, or community leaders—benefited from the remittances of women.[9] This article thus reconciles the contradiction between women's alleged criminality and the multiplier effect of their emigration on both rural and urban economic spaces. Lastly, I focus on the complications and difficulties inherent in the criminalizing of international prostitution by appraising the often blurred boundary between voluntary and forced prostitution. As will become clear, colonial administrators gave diverse meaning to the circumstances and motivations of prostitutes by drawing an unrealistically stark dichotomy between these two types of prostitution because they felt compelled to justify their specific forms of intervention.

To support the above claims and others espoused in this article, I rely on primary documents from three archival collections: the Ibadan and Enugu offices of the Nigerian National Archives and the Public Records and Archives Administration Department in Accra, Ghana. This rich documentation clearly reveals the complex geography of sex work and the influence of administrators who occupied diverse locations in the hierarchy of the imperial order. While documents from Enugu were generated by "on-the-spot" officers—that is, administrators who had governed the regions from which most of the emigrants had come—the Ibadan and Accra archives unmask the voice of the highest-ranked authorities in Britain and its African possessions.

Prostitution and Colonial Migration

Before the establishment of colonial rule and the creation of modern African states and their corresponding artificial boundaries between the late nineteenth century and the outbreak of World War I, the entire region of West Africa was linked together by communication networks that permitted the flow of humans and commerce over thousands of miles. As Mahdi Adamu has demonstrated, migrant communities of Hausa, originating in what is now northern Nigeria, dotted the northernmost part of West Africa centuries before the establishment of colonial rule in the first decade of the twentieth century.[10] In the southern part of the region, sustained contact

[9] White, *The Comforts of Home*, 1–10.

[10] Mahdi Adamu, *The Hausa Factor in West African History* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1978), 1–15.

with coastal neighbors similarly predates the era of the transatlantic slave trade.[11] Moreover, during the first half of the nineteenth century, much of what became southern Nigeria and southern Gold Coast, at various times and under a multiplicity of circumstances, came under imperial surveillance as the British fought to stamp out the transatlantic slave trade.[12] The formation of modern Nigeria and modern Ghana began in the 1850s. Lagos became the first part of modern Nigeria to yield to colonial rule in 1861, following its bombardment by the British a decade earlier, while the Gold Coast Colony was established in 1874 after the defeat of the Asante, signaling the gradual evolution of what would later be known as the Gold Coast.[13] Under British colonialism, policies that supported immigration intensified new patterns of migration in response to the effective integration of the West African region into the world capitalist system.[14] Before July 1943, when an immigration law was passed to prevent transnational prostitution, Nigerians traveling to the Gold Coast (and vice versa) were not required to possess traveling documents variously called exit permits or passes.[15] Transfers of money across the borders of the two British colonies and acculturation were easy because Nigeria and the Gold Coast had the same currency (pound sterling) and English was both the official and commercial lingua franca. Nigeria and the Gold Coast also shared similar administrative systems, educational institutions, and economic policies. During the era of decolonization (after World War II), the emergent African leaders built on the long history of relations to forge a pan-African movement against colonial oppression. By 1969 the population of people of Nigerian origin in Ghana was about three hundred thousand.[16]

It is impossible to tell when Nigerian women in the Gold Coast began to sell sex, since, as noted earlier, people of modern Nigeria had lived in the Gold Coast centuries before the establishment of foreign rule. The emergence of a distinct and well-defined stream of migration purposely for prostitution could have started around the second half of the nineteenth

[11] Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire, c. 1600–1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), chap. 8; J. S. Eades, *Strangers and Traders: Yoruba Migrants, Markets and the State in Northern Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1993), chap. 3; K. Arhin, *West African Traders in Ghana in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Longman, 1979), chap. 1.

[12] J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885–1906: Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 26–60; T. N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase, 1898–1914* (New York: Humanities Press, 1972), 1–94.

[13] William Ernes Ward, *A History of Ghana* (New York: Praeger, 1963), 232–64.

[14] For relevant readings on some Nigerian migrant communities in the Gold Coast, see Eades, *Strangers and Traders*; and P. Hill, *Migrant Cocoa Farmers of Southern Ghana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

[15] Commissioner of Police to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 11 February 1944, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[16] Eades, *Strangers and Traders*, 200.

century, becoming fully entrenched by the second decade of the twentieth century. The rise of colonial cities like Accra and mining settlements like Obuasi created demand for migrant male labor and thus for female sexual and other services traditionally obtained at home. The establishment of railway termini and harbors in Sekondi and Takoradi in 1898 and 1928, respectively, transformed the small Ahanta villages into the booming, ethnically heterogeneous city of Sekondi-Takoradi.[17] According to J. R. Dickinson, the chief inspector of labor, who documented the exploits of Nigerian prostitutes as part of a broader investigation into labor conditions in the Gold Coast in 1938, Nigerian women started immigrating to the sister colony after World War I, when the presence of soldiers increased demand for transactional sex. By 1933 about four hundred women and girls from Calabar Province alone were practicing prostitution in the Gold Coast.[18] A 1939 census of Nigerian prostitutes working in various locations in the Gold Coast conducted by the Accra branch of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM), a prominent political party, gave an estimate of 1,206. This census was carried out in order to publicize the alleged immorality of Nigerian women and to press for institutional attention. The 1,206 figure only counted women working from popular brothels and in the red-light zones of select towns.[19] It did not include others who worked from their homes. However, "independent" women engaged in "respectable" professions, and those from countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Togo might have been wrongly enumerated as Nigerians by the NYM.[20] What remains certain is that transnational sex work was a well-entrenched component of sociocultural life both in Nigeria, where the women came from, and in the Gold Coast, where they worked.

Neither the male-centeredness of mining areas and urban centers nor the common experience of colonialism is sufficient to explain the emergence and consolidation of the Nigeria–Gold Coast prostitution network. It is also important to note that sexual exoticism—a preference for foreign sexual liaisons—was at play. Men in these regions mostly preferred foreign prostitutes for transient sexual liaisons, not only because of the assumption that these women were more sexually skilled than their local counterparts but also because such relations protected the men's own anonymity and

[17] Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution," 157–59.

[18] J. R. Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, Accra, 8 May 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[19] Here is the breakdown of the census: Accra (66), Kodoridua (52), Nsawam and district (89), Sekondi (116), Takoradi (186), Dunkwa and district (120), Tarkwa and district (338), Axim (2), Cape Coast (71), Winneba (17), Oda (32), Swedru and district (32), Kumasi (58), Konongo (10), Obuasi (17). See "Census of Nigerian Prostitutes in some Gold Coast Cities and Towns conducted by the Nigerian Youth Movement," July 1939, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

[20] Ione Acquah, *Accra Survey* (London: University of London Press, 1958), 72–74; K. A. Busia, *Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi* (London: Crown Agents, 1950), 107–8.

thus guaranteed the freedom to express desire. During the 1940s, widespread rumors about Calabar (Efik) women's sexual dexterity made them very popular in Nigeria and the Gold Coast.[21] They were believed to have received special training in sexual technique, beauty strategies, and the art of womanly charm, which enhanced their attraction to men.[22] In 1938 Dickinson observed that "many harlots now claim to be from Efik to increase patronage."[23] In addition, Nigerian women traveled hundreds of miles to the Gold Coast, not because there was no demand for sexual services in large Nigerian cities like Lagos and military and mining centers in their own country but because they knew that men tended to place higher material value on uncommitted sexual affairs with foreign women.[24] A Nigerian prostitute in the Gold Coast in 1938 gave a short comparative insight into the benefits of working abroad: "Here we got plenty more money than in Calabar."[25] Sexual exoticism also explains why some Ghanaian women preferred to work in Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire rather than in Accra or Sekondi, which were hotspots for Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast.[26] According to a survey conducted in Sekondi-Takoradi in the late 1940s, out of 127 known prostitutes, only 9 were indigenous women. Fifty-two were from other parts of the Gold Coast, fifty-five from Nigeria, and eleven from Liberia.[27] The Nigerian prostitutes were widely called "Tutu," a likely derivative of "two shillings, two shillings," the price that they were known to charge for a sexual encounter.[28]

Transnational prostitution also flourished because the Gold Coast, unlike Nigeria, did not have legislation that prohibited prostitution and related activities such as brothel keeping and public solicitation. "In my mind," the Gold Coast commissioner of police wrote convincingly, "the underlying reason for this extensive 'traffic' is the very fact that there are no [antiprostitution] laws in the Gold Coast."[29] Although the Nigerian gov-

[21] Oral interview with Mr. Fred John, Accra Ghana, 15 May 2003. Rumors about women and sexual preference are by no means unique to Calabar women. For the case of Manyema women of East Africa, see Sheryl A. McCurdy, "Urban Threats: Manyema Women, Low Fertility, and Venereal Diseases in Tanganyinka, in Hodgson and McCurdy," *"Wicked" Women*, 212–33.

[22] This rumor is still very much alive today. See Naraland Forum, accessed 14 July 2015, http://www.nairaland.com/314471/calabar-men-real-sag-machines; and "How Calabar Women used Sex to Keep their Husband," http://juicygists.blogspot.com/2012/09/how-calabar-women-use-sex-to-keep-their.html.

[23] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[24] On the history of prostitution in southern Nigeria, see Saheed Aderinto, "Of Gender, Race, and Class: The Politics of Prostitution in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria, 1923–1958," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 33, no. 3 (2012): 71–92; and Naanen, "Itinerant Gold Mines."

[25] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[26] Little, *African Women in Towns*, 88.

[27] Busia, *Report on a Social Survey,* 107–8.

[28] Little, *African Women in Towns*, 88.

[29] Commissioner of Police, Accra, to the Chief Secretary to the Government, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

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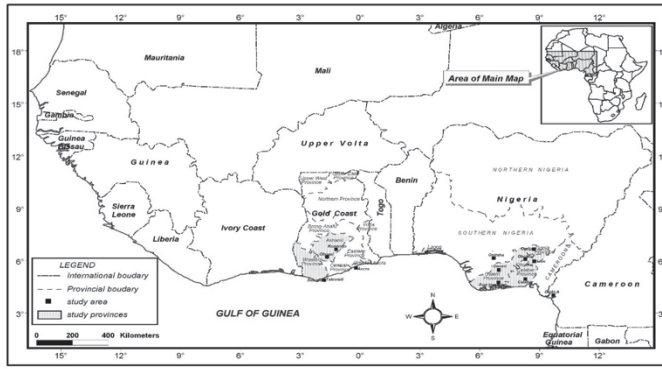

Figure 1. Map of West Africa showing study areas.

ernment implemented antiprostitution laws discretionarily, the absence of antiprostitution laws in the Gold Coast protected prostitutes against police prosecution and facilitated the sale of sexual favors. Assor, the first Nigerian to be convicted for girl trafficking, was prosecuted not by a prostitution-related law but for "being in illegal possession of another person," which simply meant depriving people of their freedom.[30]

The numerous transportation options for Nigerian women revealed that transnational prostitution was sustained by preexisting communication networks that had been established over centuries of human contact and were being transformed through colonial networks. During the first half of the twentieth century, Nigerian immigrants made an Atlantic voyage directly from Port Harcourt (Nigeria) to Accra, or they took an indirect route with a stopover in Duala (in modern Cameroon). Alternatively, they could join inland water routes along Porto Novo creeks to Porto Novo and Cotonou (Dahomey). From Cotonou, they could continue via a water route or take the network of roads traversing French Togo until they reached their final destination in the Gold Coast. There was also a direct lorry service covering a distance of about five hundred miles from Lagos through Dahomey and Togo. The costs of land and sea transportation were not beyond the reach of most average West Africans. During the first half of the 1940s, the fare for a direct vessel and lorry service to Accra from Lagos was £3 and £3 10s., respectively. Very few people traveled by air, which cost about £8 10s.; not only was air travel uncommon at the time, it also was generally reserved for the elites and high-ranking colonial officers.[31]

[30] Commissioner of Police, Accra, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[31] "The Overland Route to Gold Coast," *West African Pilot*, 31 March 1944. Note on currency: s. and d. stand for shillings and pence, respectively.

BODY AT WORK: SEX AND ACCUMULATION

Upon arriving in the Gold Coast, the women joined their fellow prostitutes, who provided relevant information on where and how to solicit. Prostitutes could choose between renting a private lodging or living in a brothel that housed several women and girls. During the 1930s and 1940s, a Nigerian man named Geoffrey operated a brothel in Takoradi.[32] A new entrant into prostitution from Calabar interviewed in 1938 said she spent 2s. on food per day and rented a room for 6s. per month in Konongo.[33] Although prostitutes' income varied in accordance with age, type of services, and method of solicitation, we can calculate that with an average payment of 2s. for each sexual encounter in the 1930s and 1940s, a prostitute who entertained three men could make up to 6s. per day, £9 in a month, or £108 per annum—an income that was more than the yearly minimum wage of £36 for government employees.[34] Aside from Africans, the clientele of prostitutes also included European military personnel, whom the Gold Coast commissioner of police blamed for the "apparent increase" in prostitution. In terms of the geography of sex work, Nigerian women worked in both mines and urban centers, notably Accra, the seat of the colonial government, and Sekondi, Takoradi, and Obuasi. They were found in clubs, restaurants, and conventional brothels that served as either permanent or temporary homes. According to the Gold Coast commissioner of police, the numerous "dances" and social events organized to raise money for the war effort attracted a large number of prostitutes who capitalized on the rowdy, mostly male crowd drawn to such events. He wrote confidently that the cheap "single ladies tickets" offered by organizers of social events indirectly facilitated prostitution.[35] The following extract from the interview that Dickinson conducted in 1938 with three male customers of Nigerian prostitutes based in Obuasi, Juaso, and Konongo reveals why men patronized prostitutes and displays a male-centered perspective on the importance of sex work to the colonial labor economy:

> Labourer I (Obuasi): "I have no wife here or at home but I get a women occasionally."
>
> Labourer II (Juaso): "I pay 1/- if I go to a woman but this was so when I was at Konongo. This place [Juaso] I do not pay anything because if I get chance I go and work for my lover on her farm."
>
> Labourer III (Konongo): "I go to my lover three times a month and she takes 5/- from me as her month's wages. The woman is not for

[32] Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution," 160.

[33] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[34] R. S. Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province, 7 February 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[35] Commissioner of Police to the Colonial Secretary, 30 May 1941, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

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> me alone. Plenty labourers go there. Some pay 6/- each some 7/- but I do not go there very often."[36]

Aside from places of socialization and events, the activities of delinquent juveniles and young adults known as "pilot boys" also facilitated prostitution. Their job included serving as illegal guides by bringing male customers of sex (mostly foreigners) to the red-light districts, where prostitutes and brothels were located. In Lagos and Freetown (Sierra Leone) they were known as "boma boys," "jaguda boys," and "rarray boys."[37] During the late 1940s they earned between £3 and £6 (8s. for each pound that the prostitutes earned) per month.[38] A pilot boy could determine the income of a prostitute—the more a prostitute was willing to give him, the more customers she would receive. However, it does not appear that pilot boys exerted significant power over a prostitute's movement or how she chose to do her work. The relationship between prostitutes and pilot boys appears to have been mutually beneficial.

Some members of the prostitution subculture, particularly underage girls, were, however, subjected to monetary and sexual exploitation. Child prostitutes like Mwoanyaanyanwu and Lady were lured from their parents with promises of betrothal and apprenticeship. The story of nine-year-old Onowomake of Oleh in Urhobo Division of Nigeria sheds light on complicated traditions of betrothal and on the involvement of men in the prostitution network. When Atake Okpokolisi, Onowomake's mother, found out that her daughter was missing, she petitioned her district officer, who initiated an investigation involving Lagos and Gold Coast authorities.[39] After weeks of investigation, Nigerian and Gold Coast authorities discovered that one B. M. Akpolu, a Nigerian based in Takoradi, had arrived by ship in the Gold Coast with Onowomake (whose travel document bore the fictitious name "Christmas") on 20 August 1946. Akpolu claimed that he had paid £2, £15, and £2 to Onowomake, her stepfather, and Okpokolisi, respectively, as a "customary monetary donation."[40] However, Okpokolisi said she did not collect any money. Colonial officers' assessment of Onowomake's situation was informed by their knowledge of similar cases. Alison Izzett, the deputy head of the Colony Welfare Office

[36] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[37] Laurent Fourchard, "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920–1960," in *The Third Wave of Historical Scholarship on Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Ayodeji Olukoju*, ed. Saheed Aderinto and Paul Osifodunrin (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012), 246–73; Simon Heap, "'Their Days Are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets': Male Juvenile Delinquents in Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s," in ibid., 274–76.

[38] Busia, *Report on a Social Survey,* 108.

[39] District Officer of Urhbobo Division to the District Officer of Takoradi, 16 August 1946, COMCOL 1, 2844, NAI.

[40] District Commissioner of Takoradi to the Senior District Officer of Urhobo Division, 26 September 1946, COMCOL 1, 2844, NAI.

(CWO), a Nigerian government institution that policed child and juvenile delinquency, was convinced that Onowomake's stepfather had received money; Gold Coast authorities believed that Akpolu brought Onowomake to the Gold Coast for prostitution.[41]

Both Nigerian and Gold Coast officials were very aware that long-standing rituals and local practices accompanied the movement of prostitutes from their homes to the prostitution centers and back again. According to Theo Ashife, a Nigerian immigrant who moved to the Gold Coast around 1913 and operated a commercial school at Kumasi, "a week before the women left for the Gold Coast they went to a place called Ono-Ago to consult a native doctor who would give them a medicine called Calabar beans or sash wood, which prevented them from contracting VD." The process of reintegration into society after about three to four years of working away from home also carried a strong element of spirituality. "Before they reunite with their husbands," Ashife narrated, "they [returnee prostitutes] go back to the native medicine man who prescribes for them a course of retreat and ablution after which they go back to their husbands when other wives will have to migrate to replace those at home."[42] References to the real or imagined efficacy of spirituality or charms (juju) for enhancing prostitution and silencing the voice of critics appear frequently in colonial documents.[43] For example, in a 1940 denunciation of Madam Alice, a native of Warri who was trafficking in underage girls, Prince Eikineh, the president of the Gold Coast branch of the NYM, called her "a demagogue and colosial hamburger [*sic*]" and the "Ring leader" of Nigerian prostitutes. He claimed that she was attempting to "import" a "witch doctor" from Nigeria "to finish the lives" of members of his group.[44]

The belief in spiritual charms within the system of prostitution is also evident in the writings of prostitutes themselves. Segilola's autobiography, *Itan Igbesi Aiye Emi Segilola Eleyinju Ege, Elegberun Oko L'aiye* (The Life History of Me Segilola Endowed with Fascinating Eyes, the Sweetheart of a Thousand and One Men), is one of the most comprehensive sources about the life and times of Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast during this period. Initially serialized into thirty chapters in the *Akede Eko* (*Lagos Herald*), a leading bilingual newspaper, in 1929–30, then published as the first Yoruba novel, and later translated into English, the book describes the life of a popular Lagos prostitute and her clientele and tells a story that transcends nationality, social class, race, and ethnicity.[45] Segilola dedicated

[41] District Officer of Urhobo Division to the Colony Welfare Officer, 24 October 1946.

[42] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[43] Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 74.

[44] Prince Eikineh to the President of the Nigerian Youth Movement, 8 January 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI. For more information about spiritual cleansing before and after practicing prostitution, see Acquah, *Accra Survey*, 74.

[45] I. B. Thomas, *Itan Igbesi Aiye Emi Segilola Eleyinju Ege, Elegberun Oko L'aiye* (Lagos: C.M.S. Bookshops, 1930).

chapters 25, 26, and 27 to her one-year sojourn in the Gold Coast, detailing predeparture arrangements, the risk of the ocean voyage, sexual networking, and the important place of beauty and charms in sex work. After practicing prostitution in Lagos, where she was born and raised, Segilola, who was already legally married, eloped with a second husband, a Nigerian based in Sekondi. In her book, she describes her Nigerian-Sekondi lover as an "exceedingly wealthy merchant" who had a business network traversing several parts of West Africa. Three months into her stay in Sekondi, she began to quarrel with her lover because she had been keeping "an eye open outside for other men." Segilola, who describes herself as a "fair-skinned beauty . . . armed with the knowledge of medicines and charms," with which she hypnotized men, discloses how she asserted her rights and freedom: "I told him [her lover] bluntly that the food a child likes to eat never gives it a stomach-ache, so he would have to let me have my own way and do what I was accustomed to [prostitution]." Her over fifty clients in the Gold Coast included European and African consumers of sexual pleasure.[46]

Our discussion of the use of charms in prostitution brings us to the topic of ethnicity. The ethnic background of Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast was diverse, including Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Edo, among other smaller ethnicities.[47] However, one of the most difficult questions about transnational prostitution in the region is the explanation for the numerical preponderance of women from Ogoja, Owerri, and Calabar Provinces.[48] Indeed, the preponderance of archival documentation on transnational prostitution was produced by colonial officers and Nigerians based in these regions. One could argue that the geographical contiguity of these provinces with the Atlantic Ocean, the main gateway to the outside world, facilitated migration to the Gold Coast. Yet, there are several other regions of Nigeria (particularly Lagos and parts of western Nigeria) that were nearer to the Gold Coast than Ogoja and Calabar Provinces (see figure 1). In their search for why women from their provinces dominated the sex trade, colonial administrators were influenced by and emphasized preconceived stereotypes about African marriage customs and hypersexuality, but they also developed new theories based upon the peculiarities of their own regions. In a 1938 report, K. V. Hanitsch, the resident officer of Ogoja Province, drew upon a recent divorce case, upon his "good" knowledge

[46] Karin Barber, ed. and trans., *Print Culture and the First Yoruba Novel: I. B. Thomas's "Life Story of Me, Segilola" and Other Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 229.

[47] Little, *African Women in Towns*, 85–91.

[48] The government provided the following census of women of Obubra Division of Ogoja Province practicing prostitution in the Gold Coast in 1941: Afafani (8), Igoni Igoni (1), Ebon (28), Usumutong (37), Afunatam (12), Jagon (1), Ediba (400), Appiapum (1), Abayongo (13), Obubra (1), Abanyum (11), Gbongon (7), Akunakuna (12), total 532. See OBUBDIST 4.1.71, National Archives Enugu (cited hereafter as NAE). See also "Eighty Women from Owerri Province Are Found Practicing Trade of Prostitute in Gold Coast," *Eastern Nigeria Guardian,* 7 January 1941.

of the culture of the people under his jurisdiction, and upon a field-note compiled by his colleagues to attribute transnational prostitution to "lax local marriage customs." By this he meant that the Cross River people (especially the Nta, Nselle, Abanyum, and Nnam clans of Ikom) did not pay bride-price and dowry and that men and women (in both precolonial and colonial times) were thus living together as husband and wife without fulfilling traditional marriage rites common among other Nigerian ethnic groups.[49] For him, a "great many" marriages that were recognized as "proper marriages, are undoubtedly [formed] on this basis." A year later, he offered a specific solution to what he termed "Matrimonial Problems." He called for the payment of bride-price, which he believed would give men power to control their wives and force them to stay at home. He also asked the chiefs to draw up strict marriage rules based on those of either Christian marriage or other ethnic groups.[50]

In contrast to Hanitsch's arguments, several petitions written by traditional elites and "ordinary" Nigerians put the blame for international prostitution on "materialism"—that is, the quest to get rich quick—and on women's assertion of independence and disregard for male authority. Arguing against the colonialists' assertion that women of Cross River (in southern Nigeria) were sexually promiscuous in both precolonial and colonial times, the chiefs of Appiapum handwrote a four-page petition to educate the resident of Ogoja Province about the impact of colonialism on traditional marriage customs and sexuality. According to them, an association called the Ogua Society, which was proscribed by the colonial government, had been responsible for the regulation of sexuality in precolonial times and had attempted to ensure that men and women did not engage in pre- and extramarital sex or live together until traditional marriage rites and ceremonies had been conducted. The chiefs' request that the Ogua Society be reinstated fed into a broader attempt to assert male authority over independent women.[51] Yet, some of the concerns of the Cross River people mirrored those of the colonialists; for instance, the Egbisim Improvement Union of Agwagwune Town contended that a "scarcity" of men had created a surplus of women and prostitutes who could not find husbands. The union defended men, claiming that they could not marry more women than they could afford in order to reduce the population of surplus women and prostitution. They even appeared to normalize singlehood for women while denouncing migratory prostitution as an alternative to the so-called problem of a scarcity of men:

[49] K. V. Hanitsch to the District Officer of Obubra Division, 4 January 1938, AIDIST 2.1.373, NAE.

[50] K. V. Hanitsch to the Secretary, Southern Province, 13 February 1939, AIDIST 2.1.373, NAE.

[51] Chiefs of Appiapum to the District Officer of Obubra, 18 March 1938, AIDIST 2.1.373, NAE.

"Those women who find no husbands can conveniently live at home and do various hand-works to maintain themselves, our neighbouring villages do the same."[52]

Prostitutes' independence prompted particular discomfort because of the profitability of their trade. When colonial authorities commented on the estimated income of prostitutes, they expressed disgust with both the immorality of the activity and the fact that the women had financial resources far beyond the reach of most "ordinary" African men and even beyond some European colonial officers. Information about the lucrativeness of prostitution occasionally came from women who practiced it. Segilola wrote in her autobiography that she had "amassed [an] enormous quantity of goods, and had secretly sent countless money and valuables" home within a year of working in the Gold Coast.[53] Dickinson interviewed a Nigerian migrant prostitute who gave an idea of the impact a successful career could have on other women back home: "If I get plenty money and buy plenty fine things, my sisters in my country also will follow me to do the same job."[54] According to R. S. Mallinson, the district officer of Obubra Division, where several Nigerian migrant prostitutes originated, the Area Harlots Society, "a properly organized" association of Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast, was "so affluent" it was "building special quarters for [its] members." He also noted that he had met a Gold Coast returnee who asked to change eighty pounds of currency notes—a sum that he believed "by no means represented her total capital."[55] Similar comments about the women's "enormous" wealth came from Dickinson, who mentioned that they provided legal assistance when necessary and that they could "amass sufficient money to invest in compound houses from which they can obtain a livelihood by letting lodging."[56] In addition, the 1938 annual report of Ogoja Province noted that returnee prostitutes had "as many loads [luggage] as the white man."[57] Administrators did not have any data on the remittances of each prostitute to her family, but they firmly believed that Nigerian prostitutes collectively remitted up to two thousand pounds to Ogoja, Owerri, and Calabar Provinces per month. This estimate could be on the low side, since a 1941 report from the district officer of Afikpo Division stated that about five hundred Buhumunu women alone remitted about eight thousand pounds per year.[58] All these estimates were derived from postal (money) orders, which represent only one method by which money

[52] Egbisim Improvement Union to the District Officer of Obubra Division, 3 April 1948, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

[53] Barber, *Print Culture*, 229.

[54] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[55] Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province.

[56] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.

[57] Extract from Ogoja Province Annual Report, 1938, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[58] R. K. Floyer to the Resident of Ogoja Province, 10 December 1943, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

was transferred across the border. The cash that prostitutes sent through friends and families could not be accounted for.

As previously mentioned, the Nigeria–Gold Coast prostitution network flourished partly because it received the support of men as husbands, parents, relatives, and community leaders.[59] Indeed, husbands, according to Dickinson, took out loans to pay for their wives' passage to the Gold Coast. Evidence abounds about how husbands profited from their wives' labor. "When the husbands get this money [remittances from abroad]," Dickinson remarked, "they accumulate it and later spend some in employing domestic servants. The social status of the men in that country is determined by the number of servants he possesses."[60] The chiefs and local communities also profited from the proceeds of sex work. By 1938 the chiefs of Obubra Division were imposing a "harlot fee," a tax of thirty shillings on all returnee prostitutes. According to the resident of Ogoja Province, the levy was meant to ameliorate the impact of the women's absence on the native authority's treasury, but—to the chief's frustration—it had no legal basis and could not be enforced in court. In 1937, in Afikpo (Cross River), the chiefs asked the government to ratify a fine of one pound for returnee prostitutes, "as her communal work had to be done by others."[61] It is impossible to tell if the "harlot fee" genuinely served its professed ends, and we might speculate instead that it was simply an attempt by traditional elites to partake in a profitable venture. Commenting on the approval of transnational prostitution in some parts of his jurisdiction, Mallinson noted: "It is not an exaggeration to say that in certain areas of this Division [Obubra] (notably Buhumunu and between Afunatam and Bansara) there is hardly a family which has not an interest in it." He added that the people of Usumutong demanded a post office "solely because they want to keep in touch with their itinerant gold mine—the whole population battens on them."[62]

Nevertheless, it is misleading to conclude that all families of emigrant prostitutes encouraged prostitution. For one thing, the absence of women from home reconfigured gender roles, as husbands had to take up jobs and responsibilities previously "reserved" for women. In December 1938 one Daniel Oza of Obubra Division petitioned the governor of Nigeria to intervene in the breakdown of the institution of marriage among the Buhumunu, his ethnic group: "For the sake of marriage which does not value anything, many people force their sisters to go down the coast without haven [*sic*] grant permission from their husbands. As soon as the woman reaches the Coast for harloting, she will not even communicate with her husband again but with all her mother's people. She will not think anything about her

[59] Ibid.
[60] Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary.
[61] Resident of Ogoja Province to the Secretary of Southern Provinces, 13 February 1939.
[62] Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province.

husband who she left by force without refunding the dowry."[63] In January 1945 one Zebulon Aguogu of Owerri murdered his in-laws "for turning his wife into a prostitute."[64] Yet on several occasions, in-laws blamed their daughter's husbands for pushing them into prostitution and for living off of this "wealth." Despite these clear allusions to prostitution, however, these complaints were more than just accusations of sexual impropriety; they reveal that successful women, regardless of profession, who sought to assert their independence or challenge men's traditional role as head of the household or breadwinner were frequently labeled as "prostitutes."[65]

Also, not all native authorities or communities supported transnational prostitution; there were numerous cases where chiefs and other male authorities agitated against it. One such petition by a group in Obubra Division argued that the women's absence contributed to the immorality of younger girls, who were themselves aspiring to become migrant prostitutes. More importantly, the authors of the petition noted that the most worrisome effect of women's migration was that it interfered with marriage and procreation: "Because our women cannot marry or live at home to produce children, the shortage of labour is acute in our town so much that we are compelled to employ labor from other villages."[66] However, the disposition of the chiefs toward casual sex work varied from place to place and was shaped by the impact of women's emigration on local economies. It would also appear that the men who protested the most against migratory prostitution were those who did not benefit from remittances. Other Nigerian opponents of transnational prostitution, such as the ethnic associations otherwise known as tribal unions and the Gold Coast branch of the NYM, based their criticism on the bad image that sex work created for their ethnicity and for Nigerian citizens abroad rather than on the economic and social impacts of sex work at home.[67]

Halting Transnational Prostitution

If the colonial economy benefited from the proceeds of transborder sex work, what might have been the motivation to stop it? The agitation against the Nigeria–Gold Coast prostitution network mirrored similar efforts in many parts of the world, with several notable exceptions. The prevailing assumption everywhere was that prostitution led to an increase in VD and

[63] Daniel Oza to the Governor of Nigeria, 3 December 1938, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

[64] "Man Is Alleged to Murder Whole Family for Turning His Wife into a Prostitute," *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, 17 January 1945.

[65] Hodgson and McCurdy, *"Wicked" Women*.

[66] Egbisim Improvement Union to the District Officer of Obubra Division, 3 April 1948, AIDIST 2.1.373, NAE.

[67] Prince Eikineh to the President of the Nigerian Youth Movement, 28 June 1939, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI; Secretary of Cross River Union to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 17 September 1953, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

promoted urban crime, and administrators did have data to support this claim. The average yearly percentage of new VD infections among Gold Coast soldiers, who were among the most important African customers of commercialized sex in 1942, was 39 percent.[68] Such a high incidence of VD among the African troops was not merely a matter of concern over sexual immorality; disease threatened the availability of healthy troops needed to secure the British Empire from Nazi Germany. But looking beyond the prostitutes' perceived role as the conduit of VD and delving into the politics of imperial civilization, one sees broader, complex concerns over sex work. First, the involvement of West African women in prostitution seemed to threaten British influence in the region because sex work (whether domestic or transnational) was constructed as a profession associated with sexual primitivity, which colonialism was seeking to eradicate through its so-called civilizing mission. Second, the emergence and consolidation of the "nefarious traffic" and the failure of Nigeria and the Gold Coast to report it in the League of Nations' annual questionnaire on global sexual exploitation during the interwar years pointed to administrators' incompetence.[69]

What is more, international critics of the British Empire, especially those in the international print media, were quick to highlight the "traffic," as it was called, as a further negative impact of imperialism. They brought the subject of transborder prostitution out from the local administrative arena and into the public global space. In March and September 1941 *West Africa*, the most widely circulated international magazine about Anglophone Africa, published two powerful articles: "'The Social Question': A Startling Disclosure" by Henry Ormston, and "Nigerian 'Social Question': Pertinent Posers That Demand Official Inquiry" by Mary Chorlton.[70] Aside from introducing race into the politics of sex by suggesting that Europeans' demand for prostitutes fueled the traffic, Ormston attempted to enlist the outrage of British citizens and the international community toward what was characterized as an "imperial" atrocity and wanton neglect by colonial administrators of the moral implications of transnational sex work. Relying on information garnered from Nigeria, Ormston told the world that eighty women from just one province in Nigeria were practicing prostitution in the Gold Coast, and he decried the lack of publicity given to this fact in the local African newspapers, which for the most part served as the watch-

[68] West African Governors' Conference, March 1942, MH (FED) 1/1 5021, NAI.

[69] For more on Nigeria and the politics of the annual questionnaire on traffic in women and girls distributed by the League of Nations and later the United Nations, see "Annual Report in Traffic in Women and Children and Obscene Language/Publication, 1930–1940," CSO 26/03338 vols. 1 and 2, NAI; and "Annual Report on the Traffic in Women and Children and Obscene Language/Publication, 1920–1955," CSO 26/27837 vols. 1 and 2, NAI.

[70] Henry Ormston, "'The Social Question': A Startling Disclosure," *West Africa*, 15 March 1941; Mary Chorlton, "Nigerian 'Social Question': Pertinent Posers That Demand Official Inquiry," *West Africa*, 13 September 1941.

dogs of colonialism.[71] After castigating British officers in a manner similar to Ormston, Chorlton ended her article by asking Parliament and British women's associations to compel the Colonial Office to investigate the traffic and its impact on the empire's Win-the-War effort. She insisted that VD spread by prostitutes was responsible for the inadequate mobilization of healthy West African men for the defense of the empire.

The *West Africa* articles achieved their desired effects. Not only did local African newspapers begin to publicize the moral question, but the Colonial Office also demonstrated a strong interest.[72] On 29 March, exactly two weeks after the first article was published, the Colonial Office directed the Nigerian and Gold Coast governments to "report the measures, if any, which may have been taken to deal with the 'traffic.'"[73] The articles also created an administrative row, as British colonial officers in Nigeria blamed one of their colleagues, R. K. Floyer, for granting an unauthorized interview to Ormston about the traffic.[74] West African administrators likely disagreed with Ormston and Chorlton that they were not doing their best to stop transborder prostitution, but they could not dispute that prostitution had a negative impact on the health of the colonial army.[75]

Nigerian officials were also sensitive to the fact that the policing of transnational prostitution could also be justified by the argument that not all prostitutes engaged in the trade voluntarily. On several occasions, some administrators, including Governor Bernard Bourdillon of Nigeria, reported that girls were kidnapped and lured or forced into prostitution.[76] His suspicions were confirmed by publicly reported cases. On 11 November 1943, for instance, the *West African Pilot* published a story about the ordeal of a Nigerian girl named Eleanor Nwayinkwerre of Umuahia who was kidnapped "while playing out of doors with her mate" and taken to the Gold Coast in 1936.[77] Nevertheless, the colonialists also believed that most of the adult women who engaged in prostitution acted independently—"in their own accord" or "with the full consent of their parents and guardians"—and that "in the majority of cases" they "enjoy[ed] the life."[78] The lack of compara-

[71] Ormston, "'Social Question.'"

[72] "Prostitution," *Eastern Nigeria Guardian*, 26 July 1944.

[73] Colonial Office to the Governor of Nigeria, 29 March 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[74] Governor Bourdillon to the Governor of Gold Coast, 10 December 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI; Acting Chief Secretary to the Government to the Secretary of Eastern Provinces, 20 January 1942, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[75] Akyeampong, "Sexuality and Prostitution."

[76] Secretary of Eastern Provinces to the Honourable Chief Secretary to the Government, 18 March 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[77] "Young Girl from Umuahia Tells Amazing Story of Journey to Far-Off Takoradi," *West African Pilot*, 11 November 1943.

[78] The first quote is from Memo to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 1 April 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI; the second is from Dickinson to the Honourable Colonial Secretary. The remaining are from Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province.

tive data on the incidence of voluntary versus involuntary prostitution made a noninterventionist posture difficult to sustain. Regardless, transnational prostitution was problematic not just because it encouraged the exploitation of minors but because it negated mainstream ideas of moral respectability that imperialism sought to establish.

Deliberations on how to stop sex trafficking revealed the complexities of women's motivations for sex work, as well as its institutionalization, its dependence upon migration patterns, and the crisis of policing in the colonial state, especially during World War II. It also pointed to deep-rooted polarizations of ideology, geography, and power within the colonial system. As multifaceted as the recommendations were, they can be broadly grouped into two complementary approaches, namely, Nigerian centered and Gold Coast centered. Some colonialists like C. Wolley, the officer administering the government of Nigeria, believed that propaganda (i.e., public awareness about the ills of sex work), which was described in a more moralistic tone by the attorney general as "rendering the idea of the trade unpalatable to the social conscience of people," was the best means of stopping the traffic. Others, however, such as Mallinson, thought propaganda was "useless" and that transborder prostitution had "gone far beyond the point where it can have any effect at all."[79] Mallinson recommended "police action" instead—the arrest of "practically all the elders" of the villages who collected the "harlot fee" and the prosecution of those "living on immoral earning."[80] W. H. Paul, like Mallinson, was convinced that prosecuting family members who benefited from the proceeds of sex work could serve as a deterrent.[81] Another opponent of propaganda was Commissioner of Police W. C. C. King, who believed that "it cannot produce any immediate results" because "the minds of those concerned are fixed on the monetary profits to be made not on any moral values."[82] For the attorney general, new laws prohibiting transnational prostitution must, in addition to jail sentences, levy fines on prostitutes and give government the power to repossess the property they acquired through "immoral" means. Offenders, according to him, "should be unflinchingly skinned" to deter prospective migrant prostitutes.[83] Most surprisingly, the acting secretary of Eastern Provinces suggested a radical transformation of prevailing discriminatory gender practices that placed women at the bottom of the ladder of social mobility. Although he admitted that his proposal would "take years of social

[79] Woolley to Governor of the Gold Coast, 8 April 1940, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI; Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province; Attorney General's memo to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 25 May 1942, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

[80] Mallinson to the Resident of Ogoja Province.

[81] W. H. Paul to the Commissioner of Police, 10 November 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[82] Commissioner of Police to the Secretary to the Government, 23 June 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[83] Attorney General's memo to the Chief Secretary to the Government.

improvement," he believed that making the "life of the ordinary woman more attractive than the life of a prostitute" would yield the desired result.[84]

Opponents of transnational prostitution also suggested a drastic transformation of Nigeria's immigration policies. Advocates of tight immigration measures called for the policing of international waterways and for the implementation of traveling certificates or exit permits—similar to those in vogue in British South Africa—for women and girls, which would be issued only after extensive interviews with their husbands and male relatives. Some believed that only women traveling with their husbands should be allowed to leave Nigeria to pursue a "legitimate trade and vocation" in the Gold Coast. The commissioner of the colony made the age-specific suggestion that girls under twenty-one should not be allowed to travel to the Gold Coast unless police and immigration officers were satisfied that "there is no danger of her becoming a prostitute."[85] But these immigration-centered solutions would have had limited effect. First, women traveling to sell sex could of course lie about their mission, even if accompanied by men. King was convinced that the insufficient number of police and immigration officers would make a thorough investigation into the history of each applicant impossible. Moreover, a Nigerian woman traveling from Doula did not need an exit permit to enter the Gold Coast. Nor could policing the ports solve the problem, since not all travelers relied upon the conventional steamship lines departing from popular ports like Lagos, Calabar, or Port Harcourt; many traveled on smaller and unregistered vessels through obscure waterways dotting the whole of southern Nigeria. King contended that policing these waterways would be impossible due to inadequate law-enforcement resources.[86] Yet the likelihood of success of other recommendations had less do with the general insecurity of the wartime era or the geographical constraints and much more to do with deep-rooted corruption within the ranks of law-enforcement officers. Both King and Mallinson thought that immigration officers and the police could undermine government's efforts by collecting bribes from prostitutes en route to the Gold Coast.

Although the administrators were not united about the methods of curbing prostitution, and although they all agreed that Nigerian prostitutes should be arrested and repatriated, they were divided on the question of who should be responsible for the associated costs. Acting Chief Secretary G. Clifford believed that the families of repatriates should bear the cost of repatriation because the families directly benefited from the women's remittances. For his part, the resident of Owerri Province doubted the legality

[84] Acting Secretary of Eastern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 29 May 1941.

[85] Commissioner of the Colony to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 16 July 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

[86] Acting Commissioner of Police to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 24 November 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 1, NAI.

of compelling a family that refused to accept responsibility for the alleged crime of their daughters and wives to pay for repatriation. For example, the Ikom native authority argued that the women should pay for their journey back home because they "always have ample funds." For the resident of Calabar Province, however, punishing the prostitute's family violated a core principle of justice—only a convict should bear the brunt of the crime.[87] Moreover, according to him, not all prostitutes had families at home, and not all families benefited from the income of prostitutes. More problematic was the fact that migrant prostitutes tended to lie about their place of origin and ethnicity.[88]

As colonial administrators in Nigeria were exchanging correspondence about the best means of preventing women's emigration, their Gold Coast counterparts were brainstorming on how to purge their colony of the Nigerian "undesirables." Two Gold Coast–centered proposals surfaced: (1) a plan to prevent prospective prostitutes from entering the colony on arrival at the port, and (2) a plan to arrest and deport those already in the colony. Nottingham, the Gold Coast commissioner of the police and the main advocate of the second course of action, believed that the latter was a much cheaper procedure, since it involved identifying the major red-light districts, conducting a raid, arresting accused prostitutes, and putting them on vessels departing for Nigeria. As brilliant as it sounded, both Nottingham and the governor of the Gold Coast knew that their proposal was dead on arrival—the colony did not have any existing antiprostitution law; hence, it could not arrest or prosecute alleged prostitutes.

THE REPATRIATION CRAZE: THE NEW ANTIPROSTITUTION REGIME

On 10 November 1942, after three years of intense debate, Governors Bernard Bourdillon of Nigeria and Alan Burns of the Gold Coast agreed to a harmonized plan of action for suppressing sex traffic, and they contacted the secretary of state for the colonies, Oliver Stanley, for final ratification.[89] Stanley supported the proposal and expressed confidence in his officers' ability to stop the traffic.[90] It is difficult to determine why the governments of the two colonies took three years to finalize their antiprostitution campaign, other than that the monetary and labor-force implications of the plan necessitated extensive deliberations. Nonetheless, the new antiprostitution measures, signed into law in March 1943, focused primarily on the criminalization of prostitution and such activities as brothel keeping and

[87] Secretary of Eastern Provinces to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 6 May 1942, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

[88] Commissioner of Police, Accra, to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 18 December 1941, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

[89] Bernard Bourdillon to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 November 1942, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

[90] Oliver Stanley to Bernard Bourdillon, 21 December 1942, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

solicitation (especially by women) in the Gold Coast. Prostitution, for the first time in the history of the Gold Coast, was legally defined as the "offering by a female of her body commonly for acts of lewdness for payment although there is no act, or offer of an act, of ordinary sexual intercourse."[91] Aside from feminizing sex work, this legal definition established that sexual intercourse did not have to take place for the Gold Coast police to conduct an arrest. This should not be surprising, since law-enforcement officers had found it much easier to police public solicitation and brothel keeping than sexual intercourse, which took place mostly in private. Even more importantly, the new antiprostitution laws permanently put to rest one of the chief controversies among colonial officers—the contrast between forced and voluntary prostitution—by affirming that all adult women practicing prostitution, regardless of motivation, were breaking the law.

The new legal structure also responded to the criticism of the failure of state paternalism by recognizing that child prostitution constituted a different form of danger to the colonial states' ideas of respectability. In order to prevent the sexual exploitation of girls, section 5, subsection (2i & ii) made it illegal for anyone to allow girls under the age of thirteen to live in a brothel. Other child prostitution–oriented laws included punishments for defiling, encouraging defilement, or having carnal knowledge of girls under thirteen.[92] Although the methods of apprehending adult and child prostitutes were similar (in both cases the prostitutes were arrested during unannounced police raids of popular Nigerian brothels and red-light streets in Accra and other Gold Coast cities and were then deported to their home regions), the new antiprostitution statutes established a clear dichotomy between adult and child sexualities and pegged the age of sexual consent at thirteen. It identified children as passive individuals and codified them as a demographic group requiring state protection from criminally minded madams and procurers.

In March 1944 the first set of ninety-four repatriated Nigerian prostitutes arrived in Lagos from Accra in a convoy of lorries and were received by law-enforcement officers. Forty-five of the repatriates were from Obubra Division of Ogoja Province. After much hesitation, the Nigerian government then paid the additional cost of transporting the women to their various home provinces.[93] It would seem that during the 1940s prostitutes were not arraigned in court before being repatriated. But during the 1950s they were first convicted and then repatriated. Nigerians like thirty-year-old Janet Ogban (see figure 2), convicted for brothel keeping by a Takoradi magistrate court on 29 April 1952, could choose between serving a prison

[91] Amendment to the Criminal Code of the Gold Coast (CAP. 9 of the 1936 edition of the Laws) to Suppress Traffic in Women and Children for Immoral Purposes, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

[92] The Gold Coast: The Immigration Restriction (Amendment) Ordinance, 1943, CSO 15/1/222, PRAAD.

[93] Bernard Bourdillon to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 10 November 1942, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

sentence of two months or paying a fine of ten pounds.[94] In order to prevent new migrants and deportees from returning to the Gold Coast, the July 1943 immigration legislation empowered the superintendent of police at the ports of Lagos and Port Harcourt to issue traveling certificates and exit permits only after thoroughly interviewing all prospective travelers.[95] This new immigration policy and the local war against child prostitution in Lagos yielded some significant results. On 22 September 1946 the CWO stopped one J. Omadudu of Warri as he attempted to traffic four girls (Ejarmedawa, Ami, Mary Grace, and Ovovbe), all under the age of fourteen, to Accra from Lagos.[96] To a large extent, the new immigration regime focused on the policing of the major points of departure; the earlier suggestion that families of prospective travelers be interviewed before being granted exit permits could not be implemented because of a shortage of law-enforcement officers. Nor did the government enforce the section of the antiprostitution law that punished "living on immoral earnings," probably because it would have criminalized such a wide range of people, including the traditional elites that collected "harlot fees."

How effective was the antiprostitution campaign? This question must be viewed within the general context of colonialists' established approach to social panics. The implementation of antiprostitution laws went smoothly for the first few years, and their enforcement began to subside following the victory of the Allies, which alleviated concerns over the impact of VD on the strength of the colonial army. Although repatriation of Nigerian prostitutes continued into the mid-1950s, criminalization of brothel keeping and solicitation did not necessarily end transnational sex work, as prostitutes devised new means of circumventing the law by not soliciting in popular red-light districts and brothels. Many Nigerian women, with the aid of "fake" husbands and corrupt law-enforcement officers, also managed to obtain traveling documents. In one 1947 case, Regina Chewizi, convicted of brothel keeping in 1952, traveled to the Gold Coast with one Dennis Abilike, who posed as her husband.[97] Yet, in its attempt to curb international migration for "immoral" purposes, the colonial government derogatorily branded all Nigerian women traveling to the Gold Coast as "prostitutes." This overreach and its associated injustices meant that by the late 1940s, the police and immigration officials faced deep criticism for denying exit permits to women traveling for "legitimate" reasons.

Response to antiprostitution laws also took the form of mass public protest by women. On 18 May 1948 Madam Ekwe Eko, described by the

[94] Janet Ogban's case court record, 29 April 1952, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

[95] Immigration Restriction Ordinance, *Annual Volume of the Laws of Nigeria Containing Legislation Enacted during the Year 1943* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1943), D137.

[96] Colony Welfare Officer to the District Officer, Warri, 2 October 1946, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

[97] Regina Chewizi's case court record, 29 April 1952, CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, NAI.

Figure 2. Mugshot of Nigerian Janet Ogban, who was convicted of brothel keeping in Takoradi, the Gold Coast. Source: CSO 26/36005 vol. 2, National Archives Ibadan (NAI).

district officer of Obubra Division as "an elderly married woman" who was "championing the cause of the prostitutes," led over one hundred women of Agwagwune town to protest a native authority law. The law forbade women's migration "owing to continued immoral practices"; imposed a fine of £2 10s. on returnee prostitutes; stopped women from harvesting palm fruits because it was considered men's "prerogative" and a "degrading occupation" for women; and prohibited them from shaving their heads, a practice that symbolized independence from male authority. Although the district officer praised the chiefs for their "increasing consciousness" of the negative influence that transnational prostitution had upon the reputation of Agwagwune, he criticized them for "seek[ing] to make capital out of the immoral earnings of its women" through the fine imposed on returnee prostitutes. The protest compelled the chiefs to yield to some of the women's demands. The women lost the fight to stop emigration, as all unmarried girls were compelled to stay at home for four months to give men the opportunity to marry them.[98] Those who defied this policy, including returnee prostitutes, were ordered to pay a fine of £2 10s. upon returning from abroad. The women were permitted to harvest palm fruit, but they could only shave their heads "in cases where infestation of lice and other irritable hosts is apparent."[99]

[98] "200 Women Demonstrate against Order Imposed by Head Chief of Agwagwune," *Eastern Nigeria Guardian,* 27 May 1948.

[99] District Officer of Obubra Division to the Resident Officer, 20 July 1948, OBUBDIST 4.1.71, NAE.

Conclusion

This examination of transnational prostitution between the British colonies of Nigeria and the Gold Coast has demonstrated that it was an unanticipated consequence of broader socioeconomic and political processes involved in the creation of colonial states in West Africa, particularly of the concomitant emergence of urban centers, mines, and military bases. Although these sites of imperial economic and political power were designed essentially for men, women's presence was integral to the sites' functioning, since women provided men with the kinds of services—food, housekeeping, and sex—they had left behind in the move to these new regions. Women who practiced prostitution were thus seizing the economic opportunity resulting from the imposition of colonial rule and establishment of the Pax Britannica. As we have seen, although prostitutes' income created a multiplier effect in the domestic economies of both Nigeria and the Gold Coast, the colonialists' moralizing policies toward commercial sex eventually curtailed its economic impact in the two colonies. Prostitutes were blamed for spreading VD and undermining the colonialists' notions of respectability because sex work was considered to be a manifestation of sexual primitivity. Prostitution was treated as problematic not just because it was "immoral" to make a living through the "sale of flesh" but because it involved luring underage girls who were in need of family and state protection.

About the Author

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