SEX, DEPORTATION, AND RESCUE: ECONOMIES OF MIGRATION AMONG NIGERIAN SEX WORKERS

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ABSTRACT
This contribution explores the economies interlinked by the migration of Nigerian women sex workers. The literature and politics of sex work migration and human trafficking economies are commonly relegated to the realm that focuses on profits for criminal networks and pimps, in particular recirculating the claim that human trafficking is the “third largest” criminal economy after drugs and weapons. Based on ethnographic fieldwork among Nigerian sex worker migrants conducted in Benin City, Nigeria, in 2011 and 2012, this study brings together four otherwise isolated migration economies – facilitation, remittances, deportation, and rescue – and suggests that we have to examine multiple sites and relink these in order to more fully understand the complexity of sex work migration. Drawing upon literature within transnational feminist analysis, critical human trafficking studies, and migration industry research, this study seeks to broaden our current understanding of the “economy of human trafficking.”

KEYWORDS
Human trafficking, sex work, deportation, rescue industry, economy, Nigeria

JEL Codes: A14, A10, A12

INTRODUCTION
In Benin City, Southern Nigeria, families depend upon remittances from their daughters, mothers, or sisters who are selling sex in European cities to pay for food, medicine, and school tuition. Along the roads in the city center, signs advertise Spanish, French, and Italian language lessons for prospective migrants. At the markets, entrepreneurial women sell synthetic dresses and imitation Gucci bags sent to them from their women family members who migrated to Europe. A variety of enterprises in Benin City depend on the mobility of women including the “sponsors” or “traffickers” who arrange the women’s migration, either by providing counterfeit documents that allow them to board flights from Lagos or
by organizing high-risk journeys through the Sahara Desert. Pastors and witchdoctors take money for blessing the women prior to departure. And anti-trafficking nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) get funds to buy hair salon equipment for migrant women who return to Benin City from Europe through anti-trafficking reintegration programs. Benin City is not the only place in which Nigerian women’s migration plays a part in a multiplicity of economies. Other economies and actors interlinked by Nigerian women’s migration include the financial and intimate exchanges between actors as different as the women and their clients in Europe; European anti-trafficking NGOs; international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM); European governments with anti-trafficking action plans on their budgets; and international private security companies, such as British Serco and Anglo-Danish G4S, which detain and deport the Nigerian women categorized as undocumented migrants. Though differing in scale, several institutions and individuals see business opportunities and have vested interests in the migration, deportation, and rescue of Nigerian migrant sex workers (IOM 2011a; G4S 2011; Serco 2013; Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women [GAATW] 2013; Council of Europe [COE] 2014; Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen and Ninna Nyberg Sørensen 2013).

This study explores the economies of sex work–related migration and human trafficking. It brings together the multiple economies generated by and the localities interconnected through the mobility of Nigerian migrant women sex workers. Including the perspectives of the migrant women themselves illuminates not only the financial aspects of trafficking, but also the entangled moral economies.¹

Economies of sex work–related migration are commonly located within a framework in which criminal trafficking networks and pimps are portrayed as the sole actors who profit from sex work migration. Indeed, human trafficking is described as the third most profitable organized crime behind drugs and arms trafficking (Hamish McCulloch 2000; Amanda Walker-Rodriguez and Rodney Hill 2011). Though evidence for this claim and how it is calculated are difficult to locate, it has been cited widely since it was first introduced in 2000 (Ann Jordan 2011; Ann Jordan and Lynn Burke 2011). The main problem with this perspective, however, is that it reduces a complex constellation of economies into a simplistic statement. The view that human trafficking thrives because it is profitable for criminal networks precludes a more accurate and nuanced understanding, and it protects the political and economic structures that enable sex work–related migration and human trafficking from scrutiny. Additionally, it ignores the multifaceted ways in which a range of other actors profit, legitimately as well as illegitimately, from the migration of sex workers, not least the women themselves, and how these economies shape migrant women’s lives and migratory trajectories. As opposed to separating certain economies from
others, this contribution links isolated economies and locates them within a broader framework of neoliberal governance, where not only human trafficking, but also the deportation and rescue of migrants emerge as business opportunities.

Taking Benin City – a so-called “migration hub” or “trafficking hot spot” – in Nigeria as the point of departure, this study strives to make ethnographic sense of the economy of human trafficking and sex work–related migration and to provide an analysis that differs from those typically offered.

This study is based upon ethnographic fieldwork among Nigerian migrant women sex workers from Benin City, in everyday language called Benin, who migrated in search of better opportunities and earned a living by selling sex on the streets of European cities. Eventually all of the women were returned or deported to Nigeria. I interviewed and did fieldwork in 2011 and 2012 among a core group of 25–30 Nigerian women between the ages of 19 and 35 and their families (twenty-eight of the women were former sex workers in Europe, of which most had been there five to six years before their return to Nigeria; one woman was deported from Libya on her way to Italy, another from Austria after one day at the airport). Approximately half of the women were officially identified as victims of human trafficking and returned through the so-called Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration (AVRR) program, implemented to assist officially identified victims of human trafficking to return to their home country. The other group of women was deported as “undocumented immigrants.” Some of the women had multiple return experiences – some had been deported, later migrated to Europe again, identified as a victim of human trafficking, and then returned through AVRR. AVRR is a humanitarian exception within the broader politics of deportation, exemplified by the fact that 160,699 migrants (including Nigerians) were deported from the European Union in 2013, and only 16,660 were returned through the AVRR program (Eurostat 2014).

The broader study was set at the geographical division between Benin, Nigeria, and Copenhagen, Denmark (including visits to Barcelona, Spain and Lagos, Nigeria). Because the study is mainly about the post-deportation phase in migrants’ lives, my fieldwork and my informants were primarily in Benin. The other field sites to which Nigerian women migrate to sell sex provided an ethnographic context. I met the women identified as victims of trafficking through NGOs in Benin and Lagos (these women were from Benin, but stayed temporarily at a shelter in Lagos immediately after their return because they had arrived at the international airport in Lagos). Over time, I developed my own rapport with this group of women, and we met outside the realm of the NGO in Benin. I met the deportees through my research assistant’s personal networks in Benin. I also met the deported women through some of the women I met at the NGO who had several friends who had been deported. Since most
of the women I met knew other deportees, I benefited from a snowball
effect. We regularly met at my apartment in Benin and talked about our
different lives and experiences while eating meals, watching TV, and getting
manicures, occasionally going to church or preparing food in their homes.
In this way, I developed a relationship with the women that would not have
been possible had my access required permission from local gatekeepers at
anti-trafficking NGOs. Besides interviewing and staying with the deported
women and their families in Benin, I also conducted interviews with social
workers, governmental anti-trafficking employees, and a group of Nigerian
researchers in charge of a research program on human trafficking in Edo
State at the University of Benin City, as well as local pastors at the churches
and the priests at the shrines which the women frequented.

The reliability of my data is connected not only to my attempts to get
access to the women outside of the realm of NGOs, but also to how the
women understood my presence in Benin. It was not uncommon that some
of the women initially associated me with anti-trafficking social workers.
No doubt this had in part to do with my status as a foreigner. For most
of the women, the only European women they had ever spoken to were
anti-trafficking social workers (and a few police women), both in Europe
and in Benin. Of the ten “white” foreigners I met during the entirety of
my fieldwork in Benin, six were involved in anti-trafficking work, hence the
women’s association between my soliciting information and the provision
of assistance.

A few of the women I encountered instantly began negotiating the
price for an interview. They did that almost in the same way as I had
observed Nigerian women negotiate with male sex clients in Europe. Some
of the women were very experienced negotiators and knew their worth
and the value of their information. While I declined paying up front for
interviews, I would pay for their transport, meals, beers, and phone cards.
This negotiating was often contested by some of the women closer to me,
who would dismiss the claims and try to explain to their peers that I was
not like the “others” – the anti-trafficking social workers (or clients) – and
thus they should not request money from me. None of the women declined
meetings or interviews because I did not pay them. But throughout my
time in Benin, I consistently had to make sure that the women did not
incur expenses because of their involvement in the research and make sure
that I offered them food and drinks. Otherwise, our relationship would be
jeopardized.

Multiple field sites and my interviews with a range of actors across
transnational boundaries allowed me to explore the women’s different
legal statuses, migratory trajectories, and experiences as well as to follow
the multiple economies that are connected through the women’s mobility.
They further allowed me to examine who generates money, where it is
generated, and how these economies intersect in Benin. Thus, rather than
providing an economic calculation, I elucidate the different economic domains involved in the realm of Nigerian women sex workers’ mobilities. Exploring these economies is a case in point to illustrate how we might more broadly reach empirically based understandings of the intersection of gender and migration economies, communities, and trajectories.

THE PROBLEM WITH ISOLATED MIGRATION ECONOMIES

The concept of trafficking has been redefined, contested, narrowed, elaborated, and buried over the past few decades. In the United Nations Palermo Protocol of 2000, the most-cited definition, human trafficking refers to persons’ recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt by the means of threat, use of force, or other forms of coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, position of vulnerability, or giving or receiving of payment and benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR] 2000). Crucially, the Protocol addresses all types of trafficking, not merely of women into the sex industry, though it specifically mentions prostitution. Widely used, it is often critiqued for not capturing the multiple experiences and processes in which migrants are involved (Kamala Kempadoo, Jyoti Sanghera, and Bandana Pattanaik 2005; Rutvica Andrijasevic 2010; Jo Doezema 2010; Stephanie A. Limoncelli 2010). These strands of literature likewise claim that the Protocol can be utilized to conflate all types of sex work–related migration with human trafficking, muting the complexity of migration as well as the agency of the migrants in their pursuit of a better life. The problem being that viewing all sex work–related migration as human trafficking diverts attention away from the individual aspirations of migrants and the political economy of migration.

The Palermo Protocol’s definition of human trafficking is challenged by the empirical reality in Benin. The women in this study did not know all of the conditions and hazards involved in their job in Europe, yet all but one knew they were going to sell sex. They also knew they would work under a “madam,” and they anticipated and accepted two to three years of hard work while repaying the debt. By then, they hoped to have repaid their madams and to have started working for themselves.5

Thus, in most cases it seems more precise to conceptualize the processes in the Nigerian context as indentured labor.6 Furthermore, Nigerian women migrating to Europe are often self-recruited, which complicates the recruitment aspect in the Palermo Protocol. The women or their families contacted individuals whom they knew could provide them with travel documents and arrange their trip to Europe, thus creating a dependent relationship with the madams. As one of the women whom I interviewed in Denmark explained, she would not denounce her madam to the Danish
police because that would be biting the hand that feeds her. In such ways, everyday practices of migration come to deconstruct concepts in the Palermo Protocol and its definition of human trafficking. Still, the indentured labor practice does sometimes transform into very exploitative situations, which fits the Palermo Protocol definition of, and legally is, human trafficking.7

Taking the specific Nigerian context into consideration and building on Sealing Cheng (2013) as well as Bridget Anderson and Julia O’Connell Davidson (2003), I conceptualize and term the women’s overall situation, not as human trafficking, but as indentured sex work migration, acknowledging that situations of indenture can lead to severe exploitation.8 By using the term indentured sex work migration instead of human trafficking, I pay attention to the ways in which contemporary migrant labor is organized and the ways in which debt is a significant, yet often analytically overlooked, part of this organizing.9 Thus, I understand the Nigerian women’s situation as fluctuating on a trafficking/migration continuum. That is, the precise point at which tolerable forms of sex work migration end and human trafficking begins will vary according to political and moral values not easily captured by legal definitions (Anderson and Davidson 2003). Thus, while human trafficking certainly is profitable, the trafficking/migration continuum illustrates how economic analyses of trafficking should not focus exclusively on the profits of traffickers. In order to present an accurate, more nuanced analysis, my study builds upon important work that has been done in critical trafficking studies in recent years, as well as in the realm of economics.

Economists’ contribution to the literature on human trafficking is modest and largely consists of theoretical models preemptively predicting that areas of significant out-migration are likely to have more “trafficking” (Smriti Rao and Christina Presenti 2012), or cost–benefit calculations that attempt to determine the volume of human trafficking in a specific area (Alicja Jac-Kucharski 2012). This limited focus might be due to two factors. First, feminist critiques have shown that economics struggles to handle the complex questions of power, exploitation, and coercions in human trafficking (Rao and Presenti 2012). Second, there is a dearth of reliable data (Rao and Presenti 2012). Indeed, perhaps nothing is more disputed within mainstream human trafficking debates than the data and, in particular, the number of people who are trafficked worldwide (Denise Brennan 2005; Kay B. Warren 2010). Thus, as a consequence, the widespread claim of human trafficking as “the third largest crime economy” has flourished and circulated uncontested (Jordan and Burke 2011: 2).

There are two main problems with this claim. First, it conceptually conflates human trafficking, smuggling, and forced labor. This conflation lumps together the estimated economic footprints of these actions,
which ends up inflating the estimates of profit earned through human trafficking. In 2002, when the claim began circulating, conflating smuggling and human trafficking was not unusual. More recent research on human trafficking has shown that although practices of smuggling and human trafficking often overlap, and conceptual binaries of trafficking/smuggling generate an oxymoron, embedding profits from smuggling into profits from human trafficking is not analytically adequate (Julia O’Connell Davidson 2013). Embedding the profits in this manner mutes the way in which increasingly restricted immigration laws make smuggling migrants across borders highly profitable, and thus it “would certainly make more sense to say that smuggling is the third largest source of organized crime” (Jordan and Burke 2011: 1).

As economicist is difficult to determine the role of debt in the original calculations from the early 2000s. As I will explain further, in the Nigerian case, the women and their families incur debt to migration facilitators to obtain tickets, visas, and transport to and accommodation in Europe. This debt is increased by high interest rates, which are meant to be the profits of the “trafficking network.” Yet, in the cases I encountered in Europe and Nigeria, the debt was rarely completely repaid. Thus, while some theoretical economic calculations may include the complete repayment of debt and interest (Mohammad Abdul Munim Joarder and Paul W. Miller 2013), empirically there is a discrepancy between what traffickers are imagined to earn based on the calculations of the debt and the amount of money they actually earn. The role of debt in (mis)calculating human trafficking profits points to a broader gap in migration research where “[t]he costs involved and debts incurred to finance cross-border mobility seldom are taken into account in analyses of migration’s effect on home country economies. Nor are the consequences of not being able to repay the debts” (Ninna Nyberg Sørensen 2015: 160).

Critical scrutiny of the numbers and calculations circling within the realm of human trafficking is crucial because a wide variety of institutions, activists, and the media use numbers as a political tool, whether to support an anti-immigrant position or a pro-sex work stance. Such actors might have political, vested, and sometimes financial interests in flattening or inflating numbers. Yet, the problem with conflated and inflated numbers is the way in which they create a field for intervention, which ultimately can be counterproductive for migrant men and women. Although inflated numbers create increased political attention toward the problem of trafficking, prompting funding to anti-trafficking interventions, they simultaneously create increased border control, interceptions, and street raids in the name of rescuing migrants. As I will show, the multifaceted complexity of economies I encountered in Benin and through the women’s
trajectories could not be neatly situated into a crime framework. Instead, it is necessary to locate the multiple sites that are interconnected as a result of Nigerian women’s migration.

**MOBILITY AND TRANSNATIONAL CONNECTIVITIES**

Transnational feminist scholarship and critical trafficking studies, drawing upon ethnographic research among sex workers and migrants’ perspectives and experiences, have complicated understandings of human trafficking as merely a question of crime, exploitation, and degradation. Instead, this literature is concerned with the ways in which migrants’ agency, political economy, the restricted flow of migrant labor, global inequality, and women’s sexuality, race, and nationhood are deeply intertwined in the discourses and practices of human trafficking (Denise Brennan 2004; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2005; Elizabeth Bernstein 2007; Andrijasevic 2010). The concept of “transnational connectivities” has been suggested to capture the ways in which seemingly unconnected phenomena might be related and how movements of labor, economies, and discourses, although uneven and complex, are linked with a multiplicity of other elements across national boundaries (Inderpal Grewal 2005).

I apply this concept here to explore how disparate economies are connected through the mobility of migrant women and the discourses on human trafficking and how these economies converge in certain localities, such as Benin. The notion of transnational connectivities also helps us understand how unemployment in Benin spurs mobile livelihood strategies through undocumented migration to Europe and becomes linked to EU deportation governance as the migrants are deported back to Nigeria.

The second strand of literature I draw upon is concerned with the military–industrial complex, the prison–industrial complex, the rescue industry, and the migration industry. The concept of the military–industrial complex developed in the United States in the 1960s and points to the close relationships between the corporate elite, bureaucrats, and politicians, and the ways in which these actors work together to ensure that state military investments serve the interests of private capital (Stephen Cobb 1976). Decades later, Angela Davis conceptualized the prison–industrial complex by arguing that the dismantling of the welfare state and the growth of the prison–industrial complex were taking place simultaneously. In this process, private capital is viewed as enmeshed in the punishment industry (Angela Davis 1998; Avery F. Gordon 1999; Tracy F. H. Chang and Douglas E. Thompkins 2002). The two complexes illustrate the intersections of public- and private-sector interests in military intervention and incarceration. In short, they point to an era that introduced neoliberal governance. It is crucial to emphasize that these complexes are not abstract
conspiracies, but rather “a confluence of special interests” that emerge as concrete when contracts and profits are unearthed and mapped (Ken Silverstein 1997: 10).

The model of the industrial complex shares similarities with the conceptualizations of the migration industry and the rescue industry. The migration industry literature analyzes how, over the last few decades, a host of new business opportunities have emerged that capitalize both on the migrants’ need to move and on governments’ attempts to manage migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). Thus, the migration industry encompasses service providers facilitating or controlling migration, businesses producing control and surveillance equipment, and rescue providers, including NGOs, social movements, faith-based organizations, and other philanthropies. In short, the commercialization of migration includes an array of non-state actors who provide services that facilitate, constrain, or assist international migration (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). The rescue industry commonly justifies their role on the basis of social and humanitarian capital, not financial capital. The rescue industry is constituted by social agents such as social workers, policymakers, NGOs, and religious personnel, individuals, and groups working to better migrant’s lives (Laura María Agustín 2007). While profit may not drive the rescue industry, the commercialization of international migration means that even humanitarian organizations have to operate on market terms providing services outsourced by the state (Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). A few studies that focus on the economy of the rescue industry question anti-trafficking funds – where they come from, who they go to, what they are meant to do, what they actually achieve, and whether they are needed at all (Agustín 2007; Sealing Cheng 2008; Mike Dottridge 2014).

Directing our gaze to ways in which seemingly disparate units of analysis might be connected across transnational domains, and supplementing insights from the analytical models of industrial complexes with theories on the migration and rescue industries, one could argue that the mobility of Nigerian women to the European sex industry constitutes a “migration–industrial complex.” Yet, the models of the military–industrial complex and the prison–industrial complex were conceptualized by scholars as overarching structures (Cobb 1976; Davis 1998; Gordon 1999). Such models arguably reduce the complexity of social and penal components to the fields of “industrialization” and “privatization.” In short, these models take profit too literally and leave unexplained the more subtle moral, symbolic, and sociological mechanisms that are equally salient (Julia Sudbury 2005; Loïc Wacquant 2008). For instance, I suggest that to understand the Nigerian women’s mobility more fully, we need to include the agency and remittance livelihood strategies of migrant women. Before I elaborate on this, I provide a brief overview of the political economy and
ethnographic context of Nigerian women’s migration to the sex industry in Europe.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES IN BENIN

For decades, Benin has appeared in public media, scholarly work, and institutional reports as a city from which migrants, particularly women, embark on high-risk migration through the Sahara Desert, relying on ramshackle boats to sail them across the Mediterranean Sea (Adejumoke A. Afolayan, Godwin O. Ikwuyatum, and Olumuyiwa Abejide 2008), or enter Europe by air using counterfeit documents and later work in the European sex industry (Jørgen Carling 2005; Hein de Haas 2006; Kristin Kastner 2009; Christina E. E. Okojie, Kokunre Eghafona, Gloria Vincent-Osaghae, and Victoria Onuoha 2009; IOM 2011b). Some studies argue that this migration flow was spurred by the dual dynamics of demand for labor in Southern Europe and the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in June 1986 in Nigeria. While the push and pull of labor demand (also sex clients’ demand in Europe) and the SAP certainly contributed to the flow of women from Benin, the women in my study migrated for multiple reasons, driven not only by their desire for greater autonomy and adventure but also by divorce, love, poverty, and familial expectations.

The first Nigerian sex workers in Europe tended to work independently and, initially, within other labor sectors in Southern Europe. Yet, as European borders during the past two decades became increasingly policed, crossing became more expensive and more dangerous for migrants (Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi 2007; Gammeltoft-Hansen and Sørensen 2013). Facilitating the crossing and profiting from restricted borders, some of the migrants already in Europe began to recruit and organize the migration of women from Nigeria, fronting the money for travel, providing temporary accommodation and job brokering, and creating a system of indentured sex work migration.

With no exceptions, the women I studied described their families as poor due to unemployment or underemployment and stated that one or two meals a day were the norm. They explained migration as a search for business opportunities, and upon arrival in Europe, all of them became their families’ main breadwinners through remittances. Typically, their migration was spurred by a specific critical event in their families, such as divorce, or the death of a father, husband, or brother. Criminal violence in Benin, which is located in close proximity to the unruly Niger Delta, and domestic violence also fueled the women’s aspirations to migrate. In one case a woman wanted to leave Nigeria due to unemployment and forced entrance into a cult, which she did not want to join. For another woman, it was the continuous abuse by her uncle that made her contact a person to help her get to Europe. Driven by these dynamics, the number of women
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who migrated grew significantly. Thus, in contemporary Benin and certain areas of Edo State, it is difficult to find an extended family that does not have a family member, usually a woman, who migrated to Europe (Kastner 2009).

In Nigeria, the issue of human trafficking came to the fore in 1999, following media coverage of a mass deportation of Nigerian women who had migrated to Italy for sex work. The furor generated by this incident, and the increasing international concern with human trafficking (de Haas 2006), compelled the Edo state government to enact a law to prohibit trafficking in persons as well as prohibiting prostitution (Franca Attoh 2009). These regulations were enacted parallel to increasingly enhanced European migration control, which resulted in a steep increase in the costs of entering Europe through informal migration industries and increased deportation (Eurostat 2014). This intersection of increasingly restrictive policies of global migration governance and the simultaneous emergence of policies to regulate sex work changed the social landscape of Benin. It is no longer just a city from which women depart – a city of migration. It has now become a city to which women migrants return as deportees and try to reestablish their lives – a city of deportation. The women arrive in Benin labeled as either “victims” or “criminals.” The victims arrive in the context of anti-trafficking reintegration programs – the AVRR; what I term humanitarian deportations. The so-called criminals arrive as undocumented migrants in the context of punitive deportations. These deportations, whether humanitarian or punitive, have resulted in business opportunities for a wide range of actors, some who are in it for financial gain and others who claim that their interest is humanitarian. Their return to Benin connects a multiplicity of actors and economies all seeing a business opportunity in mobility. In what follows, I carve out the four main economies that are a part of this process: the facilitation economy, the remittance economy, the deportation economy, and the rescue economy.

**THE FACILITATION ECONOMY**

Prospective women migrants in Benin usually contact younger men (or are contacted by them) to explore migration opportunities to Europe. Typically, the men facilitating migration have family members, often women – the so-called madams – already in Europe, and they draw upon these personal networks to arrange the journeys. Some of the young men travel from other Nigerian states making a business out of migration facilitation and other informal business opportunities in Benin. Others are young men who previously worked undocumented in Europe in factories, restaurants, and the agricultural sector, or as small-scale drug sellers in the streets, but were deported because they violated immigration or penal laws. As a result of the economic precarity prompted by deportation, deportees
use their experience to become facilitators and make a business of taking women out of the country through the Sahara Desert or arranging the process of producing counterfeit documents so that the women can enter Europe by plane. The women in the facilitation economy are typically in Europe already. Some have themselves been in states of indenture, but have repaid their debts and proceeded to work as a madam or as a supervisor for a madam. The migrant women often voiced ambiguous moral perspectives about their madams in which they simultaneously viewed them as role models, mother figures, and exploiters (Kastner 2009; Sine Plambech 2014).

It is crucial to look at the many ways in which the “job” of facilitating women’s journeys to Europe emerges as a business opportunity and how it is related to the political economy of men’s unemployment and immobility in Benin. Young men in Benin, as in other parts of Nigeria, have been faced with mounting unemployment during the past decade. Thus, the business of migration facilitation links seemingly delinked dual dynamics – the unemployment of young men in Benin and the possibility of profitmaking from increased EU immigration restrictions. Critical analyses of the prison–industrial complex likewise combine the rise in unemployment and the accompanying criminal behavior necessary to maintain a livelihood, with the rise in felony convictions as one explanation for the global growth in incarcerations (Sudbury 2005; Anne Bonds 2006).

In 2012, the price for a plane ticket and counterfeit visa and passport for travel from Benin to Europe ranged between US$6,500 and US$12,000, depending on the quality of the documents, and usually required the migrants to borrow money or pawn ancestral land. Upon arrival in Europe this amount often increases and, in the most extreme cases, migrants end up owing US$50,000 to the madams who got them to Europe. Some of the Nigerian women plan to repay their debt entirely by their earnings from selling sex, others try to or hope to repay the debt doing other kinds of work such as cleaning, selling items at the markets in tourist areas, or picking tomatoes or oranges. Their madams do not always require that the debt be repaid through the earnings from sex work, as long as the installments are steady and in the agreed amount. Yet, the women quickly realize that as undocumented migrants without access to the formal labor market, sex work is often the only and “the quickest way to make money.” Thus sex work appears both as a problem, which the women hope will be temporary, and as a solution, since it is the fastest way to get out of debt and remit as much money as possible to Nigeria.

In Benin, the women and their families would often refer to the migration offers involving debt and sometimes deception (of the conditions upon arrival to Europe) as an incident of “419.” 419 is what Nigerians call fraud, after a section in the Nigerian criminal code that describes these crimes (Daniel Jordan Smith 2007). “419 men” in
popular language refers to individuals who gain fast wealth through fraud, corruption, and internet scams and display their wealth buying new German cars, Blackberry phones, and tiled houses (Smith 2007). Sonia, who was deported from Italy, explained: “Yes, now there are some from Nigeria they buy a ticket to go to Europe and eat every day. They have money. They go to Europe and come back. They go there for lunch, every day and come back.” Though Sonia here points to her ultimate elite version of 419, for the women and their families, the typical notions of 419 in Benin also encompassed armed robbery, theft, internet fraud, selling of other people’s houses, kidnapping, and in general what anthropologist Daniel Jordan Smith (2007) conceptualizes as everyday deception. Likewise, the facilitation economy is constituted of a mix of illicit and semi-illicit activities that have to be placed within the broader field of other types of (illicit) businesses and crimes such as money lending, armed robberies, theft, scams, fraud, and deceptions. Through these dynamics, illicit migration facilitation and indentured sex work migration, defined as crimes by migration authorities and in international protocols, emerge as two among many business opportunities in a site of unemployment.

The women I interviewed were aware, before traveling, that they had to pay a high interest rate for the debt they incurred. However, they did not know how difficult it would be to pay back the debt and the circumstances of living deportable lives in Europe. In this process, facilitation becomes a business opportunity, and migration, the commodity, sharing similarities with other commodities. Borrowing money in order to migrate is just one commodity among many bought by loaned money, and moneylenders usually lend money for a range of purposes and not merely migration. Debt is common in Benin, and the money is often borrowed from a combination of local moneylenders (“big men”), family members, social networks, and criminal networks. It is very difficult to borrow money from the bank; even the educated middle class must see their business adventures stall because of lack of access to capital through the banks, and borrowing money to migrate is not obtainable from the banks. Instead, people borrow money privately to buy everything from daily food to cellphones, houses, and cars and to migrate.

It is difficult to estimate the role of debt and interest in the calculation of profits in human trafficking. Interest rates and debt inflate profits for the facilitation economy, yet the empirical reality in Nigeria certainly raises a number of questions. Although the women and their sponsors might agree to a loan of US$60,000 (including interest rate), at times the women would end up paying back “only” US$20,000. Often the debt and interest were not repaid in full for a number of reasons, including deportation and detention. Additionally, some women would relocate to other cities to avoid repaying the debt, or they would make less money doing sex work than expected, which happened in Southern Europe during the financial
crisis that began in 2008. In other circumstances, madams would lower the debt. Thus, while high interest rates certainly seem profitable for networks, and some are, in most cases women did not repay the debt entirely. The repercussions of not paying back the debt varied from mostly indifference to threats and in one case a violent nightly visit to the family of the woman. The madam might nevertheless continue to be an important figure in the lives of the women, as the madam is the one who can assist their return to Europe.

As stated earlier, the women often voiced ambiguous perspectives on the men and women facilitating the migration. They would call them wicked and evil, and yet they would also voice a certain understanding about the facilitators’ need to make money. They often saw it as just another effect of poverty, and they were particularly forgiving of the young men (not so much the madams, who were already in Europe). They would also voice gratitude because the sponsors or madams, despite the debt, served as vehicles for social mobility and refused to denounce them to the police in Europe. In the moral economy of migration, the women displayed normative ideas and dismissed other women and families who ended up having substantial debt as greedy or ignorant, explaining that it was their own fault because they were ignorant enough to become victims of 419 and everyday deception and did not care to think about how the promised wealth in Europe might not be the reality upon arrival. In this way, the women and their families simultaneously displayed anger, fearfulness, and respect for the migration facilitators and disrespect for those families who had not been smart enough to juggle the 419. Thus, the facilitation economy cannot be understood outside the context of the social fabric of Benin.

THE REMITTANCE ECONOMY

One problem with existing analyses of the economics of human trafficking is the separation of the human trafficking economy from other gender and migration economies. Earlier ideas of women’s work within the household as “unproductive” and not part of the economy meant that much of women’s essential care work was also excluded and delinked from the economy (Helen Longino 1993). This gender blindness has also previously been the case in migration studies, ignoring how migrant women contribute to both local and global economies by remitting. Such assumptions have been challenged over the past twenty years, and more attention is being paid to the fact that women migrants account for more than half of global migration flows and are generally acknowledged to remit back home a greater share of their earnings than men (Patricia R. Pessar and Sarah J. Mahler 2003; Ninna Nyberg Sørensen 2005; Nina Glick Schiller and Thomas Faist 2010). Still, excluding or dismissing the earnings
of the women presumed to be involved in human trafficking is a recurrent argument, as the debates on human trafficking continually stress that the women are kept as slaves and not paid any money for their sexual labor and thus only trafficking networks profit from it. Yet my own data, as well as others’ show that despite their difficult situations and debt, migrant women selling sex or in a state of indenture in European cities do manage to remit money.\textsuperscript{11} The amount may differ significantly and is often much less than the woman anticipated, but they manage to send enough to meet the most pressing demands of their families in Benin. When the women were low on money, they did not contact their families in Nigeria and instead waited until the crisis was over to resume remitting. Thus, what the women extract, despite debt, must not be ignored or dismissed as pin money. The amount is enough for the women to find it more profitable to stay in Europe than to return to Nigeria, despite, at times, their very difficult and exploitative circumstances. Indentured labor furthermore carries a temporal aspect as the women’s aspirations for a better life and remitting more money is tied to an imagined future where the debt is repaid and the money earned is the women’s own. Indeed, while fewer sums are remitted from women still in a state of indenture, according to governmental officials and interviewees in Benin, the large sums of remittances to Benin stem from women who have paid off their debts and proceeded to work as madams themselves or in other labor sectors abroad.

Even when most migrants take supporting family back home as a matter of course, this duty is a fraught one for migrant women (Kastner 2009). Often, family members in Benin idealize Europe as an easy place to earn money. As one woman deported from Denmark explained, “My family did not understand the price I paid to send them money.” While the families, in particular the women’s mothers, were aware of the sex work, it was difficult to explain the complexity of the challenges of living deportable lives in Europe. Everything was a challenge including obtaining affordable housing, living undocumented, getting health services without documents, social relationships, and being constant targets of racism.

Migration facilitation is linked to the remittance economy because it directly profits from the ways in which the display of remittance-financed goods and houses in Benin serve as advertisements in the shaping of migration as a commodity. Nigeria is by far the largest recipient of remittance inflows in Sub-Saharan Africa, and Benin accounts for the largest concentration of property development in Nigeria through remittances transferred primarily from Europe (Raul Hernandez-Coss and Chinyere Egwuagu Bun 2007; World Bank 2013).\textsuperscript{12} Thus, one cannot understand the facilitation economy and migration as a commodity without exploring how it is inscribed in the broader socio-moral-economic landscape in Benin. The anthropologist Mary Douglas has pointed to the ways in which commodities communicate about the individual, the family,
and the community. Mary Douglas and Baron Isherwood (1979/2002) understand consumption as an active process in which social categories are being continually redefined. Categories of gender and age are being redefined both through practices of migration and remitting in Benin. While women selling sex in Europe are portrayed as victims in the media and by anti-trafficking actors, the women and families in my study considered migration as potentially empowering. In another study, the majority of the household agreed that although parents and women participated in income-generating activities, before women began migrating to Europe, men were “the ultimate provider and breadwinner in the family” (Clementina O. Osezua 2011: 7). Thus migration has affected the family structure so that children, in particular girls, are no longer just “old age security,” but are conceived of as vital economic components of a family’s financial well-being. In this way migration is often seen as a major accomplishment in life (Osezua 2011: 6). Some women are successful in these endeavors while others end up being severely exploited in Europe. Remittances are the main reason migration has become a business opportunity, and the money greatly supports the local economy of Benin.

When the women are deported, the flow of remittances is impeded. This has consequences for the individual women and their families. From being providers, the women turn into financial burdens, and family members often still expect that the woman would migrate again or could draw upon connections in Europe to earn money. On the one hand, most of the women were relieved that the deportation, at least momentarily, was an excuse for not selling sex and remitting. On the other hand, these women still had the responsibility to provide for their families, and they now had no jobs. Thus, while deportations impede remittances, they simultaneously place a large group of unemployed deportees, who had often been in Europe for several years, without social networks to find work in formal or informal labor markets in Benin. The loss of livelihood opportunities and the abruptly interrupted remittances result in many women (and men) returning to poorer economic conditions than those they left behind. Several women were in acute despair upon deportation, constantly unsure of what to do to make ends meet. In this way, migration policies and deportations cannot be seen as unlinked to local remittance economies, as the structural context of European migration policies often hinder the mobile livelihood strategy of the migrants and their families.

THE DEPORTATION ECONOMY

Typically, when I visited one of the deported women at her home, neighbors and friends would come by, and as I got to know them, there were usually men or women who had been deported from Europe. Though
it seems that deportation is increasingly perceived as a collective experience rather than an individual failure, it is still highly stigmatized in Benin, and a topic the women considered a “sealed lips” issue, as they termed it. When compared, deportation appeared to be more embarrassing and stigmatizing than sex work because deportation does not hold the potential or concrete result of upward social mobility. Deportation is unambiguously perceived as downward social mobility. At times the women encountered other deported women in the streets of Benin whom they had met in Europe, but they ignored them if these women were not from their neighborhood. The embarrassment of deportation, the women explained to me, is too much to handle in public space. Hence, both while living deportable lives in Europe, and back in Benin, deportation is a key structural and social factor in the lives of Nigerian migrant women.

While the understanding of deportation in Benin is embedded in moral economies, deportations are simultaneously highly embedded in the far tougher currency deportation economy. Beginning around 2004, a general hardening of EU immigration policies increased the numbers of deportees from EU member states. Nigerians are among the largest group of migrants deported (Alexandros Bitoulas 2013; Eurostat 2014). The deportees consist of a diverse group of migrants with multiple experiences while in Europe who meet multiple actors on their way back to Nigeria. Tessy, whom I met in Benin upon her deportation from the United Kingdom, illustrates the workings of the deportation economy.

At the age of 16, Tessy traveled with another Nigerian woman, who had arranged all of the paperwork and flight from Benin to London. Initially, Tessy went to school and worked as a babysitter, but later the woman invited different men to her home to have sex with Tessy. Since Tessy felt a moral debt to the woman for getting her to the UK, she did not protest initially. After a few months Tessy decided to explore her social networks to find another place to stay. During this time, she was leaving a supermarket on the outskirts of London and was picked up by the police who accused her of shoplifting and later of overstaying her visa and working with no legal work permit. Tessy was not aware that her documents had expired since the woman she lived with kept them.

Tessy was detained in Yarl’s Wood Immigration Removal Centre, UK’s largest and main removal center for women migrants (UK Border Agency 2011). As detention is outsourced to private companies by the UK government, Yarl’s Wood is run by the private service company, Serco. Serco is based in the UK but contracted globally by national governments to operate public transport, military and nuclear weapons contracts, schools, prisons, and detention centers. Both Yarl’s Wood and another of Serco’s controversial centers, the Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre in Australia, have been accused of severe human rights abuses of migrants (Phil Miller 2012; Lexi Metherell 2014; Sarah Turnbull 2014). While
detained in Yarl’s Wood, with assistance from a local anti-trafficking NGO, Tessy filed for asylum on the grounds of human trafficking but was deported, in Tessy’s understanding, while her asylum case was under decision. While Serco runs the detention center, it was another private company, G4S, which handled Tessy’s deportation and accompanied her and other Nigerian migrants on the EU-chartered flight back to Nigeria (FRONTEX 2012). When Tessy arrived in Lagos International Airport, there was no one to pick her up, but she eventually returned to Benin with help from a local NGO. From her arrest in London until I met Tessy in Benin months after her deportation, Tessy had encountered eleven institutions. Tessy’s experiences illustrate the range of actors transnationally connected through the dynamics of Nigerian women’s mobility as the women incorporate multiple migrant categories and identities connecting a variety of governmental, private, and social constituencies.

The state-funded deportation of migrants has emerged as a business opportunity for private companies worldwide since 2001 (Nicholas de Genova and Nathalie Peutz 2010). Both Serco and G4S have been investigated by the UK’s Serious Fraud Office for allegedly charging for tagging migrants who were dead or did not exist to get more money from the UK government (Anthony Loewenstein 2014). The business profits increase as the number of migrants that are detained and deported increases. Three women in my study, including Tessy, deported from the UK, Italy, and Spain, described how they felt pressured by the security personnel to board the chartered deportation plane, despite feeling sick and having been diagnosed as such by the doctor at the detention center. As service providers to the state, the private companies continually have to pay attention to efficiency and the cost of not filling up the chartered planes heading to Nigeria.

Exploring the multiple localities where a deportation economy is generated through Nigerian migrant women illustrates the transnational connectivities between unemployment in Benin, which leads to more undocumented migration of women (and men) to Europe, which in turn, justified by immigration policies, comes to fuel the profits of the deportation industry that removes the migrants from EU territory. In a further, ironic linkage, some of the deportees in Benin become facilitators of migration for future migrants, resulting in a circular dynamic.

THE RESCUE ECONOMY

As a response to the attention being paid to trafficking, a government shelter and many NGOs have emerged in Benin. Some are financed by religious congregations, some through the international donor community from the UN, the EU, the United States Agency for International
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Development (USAID), and the Ford Foundation; but most appear to be funded by European governments through IOM, who repatriate Nigerian women rather than give them asylum or other types of residencies (University of Benin Observatory 2011). The organizations provide counseling, medical, and legal assistance to preemptively prevent trafficking or to assist women migrants returned through the AVRR programs.

Esther is one of the women who were returned from Denmark. Esther sold sex, primarily as an escort, for two years in the Copenhagen area. Due to a violent encounter with a client, she came into contact with the police and was officially identified as a victim of human trafficking. She spent nine months in a detention camp in Northern Denmark before she was returned to Nigeria through AVRR. Esther knew before leaving for Europe how to bead hair; through her experiences with the AVRR, including a brief business course while in Denmark, her skills were refreshed. While some women decide to open a small food stall or tailor shop with the reintegration funds, Esther had decided to open a hair salon upon return to Benin. Early one afternoon, Esther visited me at my rented apartment, explaining that she had left the salon because there were no customers. Her hair salon, which had opened in an upmarket area of Benin just two weeks earlier, was already faced with difficulties: she was unable to provide the amenities expected by stylish customers – such as air-conditioning, sliding doors to protect from rain, and a generator to provide electricity during the daily power outages. As a result, Esther’s salon averaged only one customer every other day.

As part of the AVRR, women like Esther returning to Nigeria receive $4,500, and her tiny rented room was paid for a year by the program. While the $4,500 was not pin money to Esther, she would often compare this amount to the money she potentially could have earned had she not been deported. Other women would compare this amount to the debt they had repaid, which could range between $10,000 and in a very few cases up to $50,000. In their calculation, rescue gave very little money compared to what they (potentially) could generate selling sex. The $4,500 Esther received became part of the local small business economy as she bought a chair, a mirror, a blow dryer, and other equipment for her salon and paid a local landlord the one-year rent. Because she was deported from Denmark in the midst of an emerging love affair with a Danish man, Esther spends almost all her money at the local internet café to stay in contact with her boyfriend and Nigerian friends in Denmark through Facebook, Skype, and e-mails. Esther hopes she will be able to return to Europe again and stays in contact with her European contacts through social media, paid for by the money from her reintegration salon, to strategize about a future migration.

The returned migrant women are not the only ones spending rescue money in Benin. As the rescue of migrant women has increasingly become
a business opportunity, the local NGO staff receives their wages, pays
rent for shelter, and buys food and amenities at the local markets. While
it is easy to dismiss the channeling of funding from the international
donor community into numerous NGO directors’ pockets as corruption,
as has been the case, it should rather be understood in the context of the
few opportunities available to the educated middle class in contemporary
Nigeria – to found churches and start NGOs (Smith 2007). Obviously only
a small fraction of Benin City’s population actually earns a living by starting
an NGO, yet the proliferation of NGOs (and churches) in Nigeria since the
early 1990s has been striking and extraordinary (Smith 2007).

Through contracts with local NGOs, European governments outsource
their humanitarian responsibility, as ratified in UN conventions,
transnationally for victims of human trafficking (OHCHR 2000).
These multiplicities of economic transactions enable governmental and
international donor money to flow and merge into the local economy in
Benin. This dynamic changes the landscape of rescue in Benin because
whereas the NGOs in Benin previously emerged as humanitarian or activist,
they now appear as a response to the demand for outsourced services,
increasingly providing humanitarianism on market terms. The merging of
governmental, private, and humanitarian economies into local economies
takes place not only in Benin but also in Europe, the US, and Australia
where prisons and detention and asylum centers are located (Gregory
Hooks, Clayton Mosher, Thomas Rotolo, and Linda Lobao 2004). Thus,
just as migration to Europe and deportation to Nigeria are business
opportunities, so is rescue.

CONCLUSION

This contribution has sought to re-link the otherwise isolated economies
of sex work–related migration by unearthing the ways in which the
four economies of facilitation, remittance, deportation, and rescue are
transnationally interconnected. Through these transnational connectivities,
Benin emerges as a local site where multiple global migration governance
rationales and technologies converge. Although on a different scale
and having differing moral interests, the four economies profit from
the same phenomenon – Nigerian women’s mobility. By understanding
the scope of the local economies involved, we begin to more fully
see the content and contours of sex work–migration economies. These
connectivities, I suggest, emerge and are justified by a combination of three
aspects: an urge for social mobility through migration, a threat (from the
perspective of European governments) of undocumented migration, and
the simultaneous desire to rescue women.

When linking the economies, we come to see how migration, facilitation,
deportation, and rescue are business opportunities. Yet, the political
paradox of these connections is that some actors profit from the migration of the women to Europe (the facilitation and remittance economy) while others profit from the women returning to Nigeria (the deportation and rescue economy). Deportation and rescue have emerged as business opportunities as state functions are outsourced to private actors and NGOs, and thus, the economies of rescue in Benin cannot be delinked from the broader process of neoliberal governance. The consequence is that while it may be politically convenient to delink and isolate economies, a linking of economies shows how the dearth of employment in Benin, the lack of legal migration opportunities, and the upsizing of deportations and rescue are two sides of the same coin. Conceptualizing the “economy of human trafficking” as more than simply a criminal economy requiring policing and security interventions illustrates the ways in which neoliberal migration governance involves a series of paradoxes in which the problems and the solutions develop in a mutually interdependent fashion.

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NOTES

1 All personal information that would allow the identification of any person(s) described in the study has been removed.
2 While Benin City is in everyday language termed Benin, it should not be conflated with Nigeria’s neighboring country, Benin.
The International Organization for Migration (IOM) manages the AVRR program. This program manages the return and reintegration of migrants, such as identified victims of trafficking, who are unable or unwilling to remain in host countries and wish to return voluntarily to their countries of origin (IOM 2012).

The interviews were performed in English and Bini. At times, I was assisted by my Nigerian research assistant, if interviewees preferred speaking in the local language, Bini (which happened only during interviews with the women’s mothers). My research assistant also transcribed the interviews and translated Bini into English.

The women would usually term the individuals who arranged their travels to Europe as “madams,” “sponsors,” or “guides.” Only rarely did they use the term “traffickers”; this term was primarily used by the women enrolled in NGO programs.

Indentured labor is defined as borrowing money and then voluntarily agreeing to work off the debt during a specified term, sometimes under a restrictive contract of employment in a foreign country in exchange for payment of passage, accommodation, and food (Encyclopedia Britannica 2014).

The women in this study did not necessarily feel exploited because they sold sex. More often, they felt exploited and deceived by their traffickers when they realized the difficulties of living undocumented in Europe: the prices of housing, food, and other necessities, which meant it would take them much longer to pay off their debt; the racism and sexual violence they encountered in the streets; their random, shabby, and expensive accommodation options; and their lack of access to the formal labor market or to healthcare.

In her work on migrant hostesses in Japan, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2011) uses the term indentured mobility to label a middle zone between human trafficking and labor migration. Rather than labeling a middle zone, my use of the term indentured sex work migration does not exclude that this state of indenture legally or judicially could be labeled human trafficking, but points to the way in which migrant labor is organized.

I employ the terms “trafficking” and “victim of human trafficking” in cases where the women are officially categorized as such by immigration authorities and institutions granting the women certain rights and where it is used as a political or legal category as defined by conventions. While I engage with these terms, I acknowledge the limitations of such terminology.

I deliberately do not use or reproduce specific numbers of trafficked persons globally, neither do I estimate the number of Nigerian women selling sex in Europe. I avoid this simply because there are no reliable, or credible, statistics in this specific area, neither more broadly nor specifically on the number of people who are trafficked internationally (Warren 2010).

In her work on migrant sex workers in Italy involved in what she terms “third-party controlled prostitution,” Andrijasevic (2010) shows how women were paid the agreed sum at the end of the contract and that others gained money through tips from clients, by hiding a part of the earnings from third parties or, in some cases, by being given a sum of money by the third party to send home.

This figure includes the 50 percent of remittances to Nigeria transferred informally (Hernandez-Coss and Bun 2007).

Between 2010 and 2013, the cost of Joint Return Operations to Nigeria from the EU was, on average, $427,000 per flight (FRONTEX 2014).

Despite the financial collapse of 2008, Serco’s track record of growth and revenue has increased steadily from $206.7 million in 2006 to $528.5 million in 2012 (Serco 2013).
In 2010, IOM was awarded $265 million to help governments in carrying out voluntary return programs to run anti-trafficking programs and to assist in border management (IOM 2011a).

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