

International Workshop

The Bonds of Migration: Debt, Interdependence and Mobility

Paris, January 19-20, 2012

Chicago Centre in Paris (France)
6 rue Thomas Mann
75013 Paris, France

1. Concept Note

This workshop explores the relationship between people who migrate in order to work and the economic, affective and moral debts and obligations that inspire, enable, and result from their migrations. We seek to examine relationships of interdependence between migrating laborers and the various people who benefit or profit from their labor, including but not limited to the kin to whom they send remittances, creditors, loan sharks, and smugglers, and their partners, procurers, masters, or employers. As such, we are interested in exploring relationships that span the range of possibilities of, and blur clear-cut distinctions between consent and coercion.

In its examination of mobility, debt, and interdependence, the workshop focuses upon two main topics: 1) the relationship between contemporary anti-trafficking discourses and their historical precedents, primarily as both engage with notions of debt-bondage and “modern slavery,” and 2) localized practices of indebtedness, obligation, and debt-bondage in contemporary examples of labor mobility. Although many of these contemporary practices involve extralegal migration and informal labor, relevant papers are not limited to these examples.

The first section focuses upon discourses of slavery and debt-bondage embedded in anti-trafficking campaigns. The matrix of the contemporary discourses was shaped in the early twentieth century during the campaigns against the “White Slave trade” in Europe (Chaumont 2009, Doezema 2000), and the “Yellow trade” in Asia, that is to say the Mui-Tsai child-slave trade in Hong Kong (Jashock, 1988) and the Indochinese trade (Lainez & Le Roux 2009, Lessard 2009). Since the emergence of these campaigns a century ago, organizations like the League of Nations have relied on the imagery of slavery and debt bondage to strengthen their capacity to lobby against “human trafficking.” The powerful image of masters who abuse their serfs and use debt to enslave them has been etched into the collective imagination by anti-trafficking organizations.

The trafficking of women and children became an international concern once more in the 1990s (Day 2010). Although initially related to sexual exploitation, discourses on trafficking have slowly encompassed the wider service sector (domestic service, brokerage marriage), and industry (textile, fishing, construction). Scholars (Bales 2004), journalists, government agencies, and abolitionist organizations recycle the concept of debt bondage and “modern slavery” in the production of ideological discourses that prioritize victimization (Andrijasevic 2007, Darley 2006). These actors and many others project ill-conceptualised representations of slavery into a variety of contexts and realities and claim sensational – and often unfounded – statistics to arouse indignation and to create a state of “moral panic,” to strengthen enforcement of their intellectual, political and moral agendas (Weitzler 2007, O’Connell Davidson 2006, 2010, Lindquist 2010). A handful of researchers have

demonstrated how positing migrants as a priori victims erases the fact many migrants go to great lengths to migrate in order to sell sex and other forms of labor. These researchers examine the ways in which migrants exercise agency while keeping in mind their structural vulnerabilities (Agustin 2007, Cheng 2010).

The second part of the workshop will examine empirical research on indebtedness, debt-bondage and bonded-labor within the frame of labor mobility. Three types of situations that are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive may serve as possible topics for papers:

The first relates to financial indebtedness that causes mobility. This is the case of poor and indebted families, who sometimes rely on the “loan shark” industry (loans with 20% monthly interest in mainland Southeast Asia for example). The parents call upon their children to migrate to seek work in order to assist in repaying the debt. In this context, young people often act under pressure and accept migration and employment under risky conditions.

The second case concerns migration that generates economic and moral debt. The cost of mobility is often directly proportional to the degree of illegality of the migration and marginality within which the service providers operate. “Illegal” migrants also face additional charges for board and accommodation, often exacted through coercion, bondage and exploitative work practices. Their extralegal status necessitates that many migrants work in the informal economy – prostitution, domestic work, construction, fishing, textile production – and some must work for years to repay family, travel or personal debts. Creditors and debtors establish particular agreements and labor conditions that this workshop aims to explore. This is the case for migrants from Southern China who agree to pay smugglers US\$60,000 to cover the journey to the United States (Zhang 2008, Chu 2010), or Nigerian women who finance the €70,000 smuggling fee by selling sex on the streets of Europe (Peano 2010, 2011). This type of migration often plunges migrants into or exacerbates situations of vulnerability, risk and exploitation (Laacher 2007). Whilst national and international laws formally protect victims of trafficking, state practices often criminalize them or enforce morally charged processes of rehabilitation, which subordinate protection to acts of denunciation, and to compliance with specific processes of subjectification (Agustin 2007, Giordano 2008, Peano 2010).

The third case concerns forms of debt that interlace with kinship, obligation and intimacy. Often migration itself is spurred by a sense of responsibility towards one’s kin, to whom migrants feel indebted, and for whom they work to send remittances. Love is often expressed, created, demanded and reinforced through material support, and relationships contain burdensome as well as uplifting elements. Another form of bondage concerns the debt to the deities whose powers are enlisted to seal contracts – Nigerian women swear oaths of allegiance which make them accountable to non-human powers (Peano 2010), or to ensure positive influence on Chinese migrants in their journey to the United States by offering dollars to gods, ghosts, and ancestors (Chu 2010).

In summary, the objective of this workshop is to examine the relationship between debt, labor mobility and interdependence. We will first examine the genealogy of discourses on debt bondage, the connection of past and present campaigns, and the recycling of the debt and slavery imagery that, since its abolition in mid-nineteenth century, continues to stir the public opinion as well as the scholarly and activist community (Chaumont & Wibrin 2006). Furthermore, it seeks to challenge a narrow focus on human trafficking as an exploitative dynamic between masters and slaves, to examine the broader political-economic contexts in which these relations emerge as well as the complex relationships of interdependence between migrant laborers and those that they labor for. We seek to understand the debts and obligations that propel people to migrate, the debts and obligations that they incur in order to migrate, and the relations of interdependence between these mobile actors, the people they

migrate for in order to support, and the people they work for. Case studies on phenomena relating to debt and obligation studied in the diverse contexts of labor mobility will bring out the multiplicity and complexity of practices that anti-trafficking discourses tend to amalgamate and obfuscate. Thus, our goal is to begin to construct an alternative analytical framework about the relationship between debt, mobility, and interdependence grounded in empirical findings.

The Chicago Centre in Paris is organizing the two-day workshop with funding from the University of Chicago.

The members of the Scientific Committee are Alan Kolata (University of Chicago), Nicolas Lainez (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore), Jean-Michel Chaumont (Université Catholique de Louvain), Irene Peano (University of Cambridge), Julie Y. Chu (University of Chicago), Sarah Luna (University of Chicago).

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CHAUMONT (Jean-Michel), *Le Mythe de la Traite des Blanche. Enquête sur la Fabrication d'un Fléau* (La Découverte 2009)

CHAUMONT (Jean-Michel) & WIBRIN (Anne-Laure), “Traite des Noirs, Traite des Blanches: Même Combat?” *Cahiers de Recherche Sociologique* 43, 2006: 125-36

CHENG 2010, *On the Move for Love: Migrant Entertainers and the U.S. Military in South Korea* (University of Pennsylvania Press 2010)

CHU (Julie Y.), *Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China* (Duke University Press 2010)

DARLEY (Mathilde), “Le Statut de la Victime dans la Lutte Contre la Traite des Femmes” *Critique Internationale* 30, 2006: 103-122

DAY (Sophie) “The Re-emergence of ‘Trafficking’: Sex Work Between Slavery and Freedom” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 16, 2010: 816-834.

DOEZEMA (Jo), “Loose Women or Lost Women? The Re-emergence of the Myth of ‘White Slavery’ in Contemporary Discourses of ‘Trafficking in Women’” *Gender Issues* 18, 2000: 23-50.

GIORDANO (Cristiana) “Practices of Translation and the Making of Migrant Subjectivities in Contemporary Italy” *American Ethnologist* 35, 2008: 588-606.

JASCHOK (Maria), *Concubines and Bond Servants: The Social History of a Chinese Custom* (Oxford University Press & Zed Books 1988)

LAACHER (Smain), *Le Peuple des Clandestins* (Calmann-Lévy 2007)

LAINÉZ (Nicolas) & LE ROUX (Pierre) (eds.), *Bétail Humain: La Traite des Femmes et des Enfants en Indochine et en Chine du Sud (1860-1940)* (Connaissances et Savoirs 2009)

LESSARD (Micheline), "'Cet Ignoble Trafic:' The Kidnapping and Sale of Vietnamese Women and Children in French Colonial Indochina (1873-1935)" *French Colonial History* 10, 2009: 1-34

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O'CONNELL DAVIDSON (Julia), "Will the Real Sex Slave Please Stand Up?" *Feminist Review* 83, 2006: 4-22

O'CONNELL DAVIDSON (Julia), "New Slavery, Old Binaries: Human Trafficking and the Borders of 'Freedom'" *Global Networks* 10 (2), 2010: 244-261

PEANO (Irene), "Dynamics of Bonded Labour: Genealogies, Histories and Hopes in Narratives of Trafficking from Nigeria to Italy" In J. Quirk & D. Wigneswaran (eds.) *Slavery, Migration and Contemporary Bondage in Africa*. (Africa World Press 2011 forthcoming).

PEANO (Irene) *Ambiguous Bonds: A Contextual Study of Nigerian Sex Labour in Italy* (PhD Thesis, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cambridge 2010).

WEITZER (Ronald), "The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade" *Politics & Society* 35, 2007: 447-475

ZHANG (Sheldon X.), *Chinese Human Smuggling Organizations: Families, Social Networks, and Cultural Imperatives* (Stanford University Press 2008)

2. Workshop Schedule

19 JANUARY 2012 (THURSDAY)	
9h-9h15	WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS
	Alan Kolata Academic Director (2011-12) of the University of Chicago Center in Paris
	Nicolas Lainez Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore
	Julie Y. Chu University of Chicago
9h15-10h45	PANEL 1 – REGULATING MOBILITY: COLONIALISM AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING DISCOURSES
Discussant Chairperson	Nicolas Lainez (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore)
9h15-9h30	Maria Jaschok (Oxford University) <i>Discourse on Female Slavery, the Chinese Moo Jai Practice and Patriarchal Power in Colonial Hong Kong at the Turn of the 20th Century – from Confucian ‘Patriarchal Charity’ to ‘Female Slave Labor’</i>
9h30-9h45	Jean-Michel Chaumont (Université Catholique de Louvain) <i>The Philanthropic Traffickers and Their Humanitarian Disguise: On “Repatriation” (1904-1937)</i>
9h45-10h	Micheline Lessard (University of Ottawa) <i>‘Cet Ignoble Trafic’: The Kidnapping and Sale of Vietnamese Women and Children in French Colonial Indochina (1873-1935)</i>
10h-10h15	Discussant’s Remarks
10h15-10h45	Q&A + Discussion

10h45-11h	COFFEE BREAK
11h-12h30	PANEL 2 – BEYOND THE TRAFFICKING PARADIGM: LABOR MOBILITY, COERCION AND CONSENT
Discussant Chairperson	Milena Jaksic (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/Institut de Recherche Interdisciplinaire sur les Enjeux Sociaux)
11h-11h15	Ronald Weitzer (George Washington University) <i>Rethinking Sex Trafficking: A Critique of the Dominant Paradigm</i>
11h15-11h30	Jo Doezema (Paulo Longo Research Initiative) <i>The Quagmire of Consent: Trafficking and the Sexual Contract</i>
11h30-11h45	Julia O’Connell Davidson (University of Nottingham) <i>Paradoxes of ‘Freedom’: Dependence, Debt, Labor and Belonging</i>
11h45-12h	Discussant’s Remarks
12h-12h30	Q&A + Discussion
12h30-14h	LUNCH
14h-15h30	PANEL 3 – THE ECONOMIC AND AFFECTIVE OBLIGATIONS OF MIGRANT SEX WORKERS: DEBT AND INTERDEPENDENCE
Discussant Chairperson	Ronald Weitzer (George Washington University)
14h-14h15	Irene Peano (University of Cambridge) <i>Debt Chains: Migrant Nigerian Sex Workers Between Bondage, Interdependency and Ambiguous Obligations</i>
14h15-14h30	Sarah Luna (University of Chicago) <i>The Spatialization of Economic and Affective Obligations: Migrant Sex Workers in a Mexican Border City and Those They Labor For</i>

14h30-14h45	Nicolas Lainez (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore) <i>Commodified Sexuality and Mother-Daughter Power Dynamics in the Mekong Delta (Vietnam)</i>
14h45-15h	Discussant's Remarks
15h-15h30	Q & A + Discussion
15h30-15h45	COFFEE BREAK
15h45-17h00	ROUNDTABLE
Chairperson	Jean-Michel Chaumont (Université Catholique de Louvain)
20 JANUARY 2012 (FRIDAY)	
9h-10h30	PANEL 4 – MIGRANT'S DEBT REGIMES: CIRCULATIONS OF PEOPLE AND MONEY
Discussant	Gustav Peebles (New School for Social Research)
9h-9h15	Johan Lindquist (University of Stockholm) <i>Circular Migration and Gendered Regimes of Debt in Contemporary Indonesia</i>
9h15-9h30	Julie Y. Chu (University of Chicago) <i>Unsettling Accounts: Debt, Theft and the Calculus of Fortune Among Chinese Transmigrants</i>
9h30-9h45	Cheryll Alipio (National University of Singapore) <i>Affect, Debt and the Shaping of Filial Piety Among the Children of Filipino Migrants</i>
9h45-10h	Discussant's Remarks

10h-10h30	Q & A + Discussion
10h30-10h45	COFFEE BREAK
10h45-12h15	PANEL 5 – DEBT, MOBOILITY AND THE DEBTOR/LABORER RELATIONSHIP
Discussant	Irene Peano (University of Cambridge)
10h45-11h	Jan Breman (University of Amsterdam) <i>The Continuing Story of Labor Bondage</i>
11h-11h15	Isabelle Guérin (Université Paris I Sorbonne/Institut de Recherche sur le Développement) <i>Debt, Circulation and Social Mobility in Rural South-India</i>
11h15-11h30	Danièle Bélanger (The University of Western Ontario) <i>Debt, Labor and Mobility: Vietnamese Labor Migrants Bound to East Asia</i>
11h30-11h45	Discussant's remarks
11h45-12h15	Q & A + Discussion
12h15-14h	LUNCH BREAK
14h-15h30	ROUNDTABLE
Chairperson	Gustav Peebles (New School for Social Research)

3. Abstracts

Panel 1

REGULATING MOBILITY: COLONIALISM AND ANTI-TRAFFICKING DISCOURSES

Discussant: Nicolas Lainez (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore)

Maria Jaschok (Oxford University)

Discourse on Female Slavery, the Chinese Moo Jai Practice and Patriarchal Power in Colonial Hong Kong at the Turn of the 20th century – from Confucian ‘Patriarchal Charity’ to ‘Female Slave Labor’

My contribution to the Workshop reconnects me with research conducted for my doctorate (London/SOAS, “A Social History of the Moo Jai Institution in Hong Kong, 1843-1938”). Within the wider theme of the Workshop – concerned with debt, debt bondage, labor mobility and interdependence – my study develops perspectives from women’s studies and Chinese social history. After brief discussion of (1) the cultural and kinship contexts for the institution of *moo jai* (with its popular and official usages comprising a spectrum of ambiguous and fluid statuses, from sister and servant to slave and entertainer) and for the widespread practice of transfers of *moo jai*, and (2) the history of an international campaign for the abolition of this practice in early 20th century Hong Kong, I shall outline the political origin of debates over the significance of the enduring *moo jai* practice in a modern colonial society. What were the arguments brought for and against abolition and the range of divergent viewpoints which reflected a rapidly changing colonial context, rising anti-colonial sentiments in the adjacent province of Guangdong and, no less, women’s growing influence in the political landscape back home, in Britain? I ask how, and why, the *moo jai* practice developed and changed from a feudal, patriarchal form of charity rooted in Chinese kinship society into a capitalist form of labor exploitation (with these forms not infrequently existing side by side). Looking more closely at the anti-slavery discourse of the Hong Kong-based Anti-*Moo jai* Campaign, its protagonists, advocates and adversaries, I will be discussing the politicization of the *moo jai* issue as conflicts intensified and insults were traded between colonial administration and the Chinese elite, between representatives of British laissez fair colonial rule and critical Western reformers, and between Chinese traditional elites and local middle-class modernizers. How did the bodies of vulnerable and marginalized girls and women come to serve as a contested site for political traditionalists, opportunists, reformers and international feminists? The activists’ voices may have shaped a campaign of considerable, if divisive, local impact and international notoriety but also, arguably, might be said to have in the end failed those who were the objects of traffic in abandoned girl-children and disposable daughters.

Jean-Michel Chaumont (Université Catholique de Louvain)

The Philanthropic Traffickers and Their Humanitarian Disguise: On “Repatriation” (1904-1937)

Several scholars such as Weitzer (2005, 2010)¹ and Steinfatt (2011)² have convincingly

¹ Weitzer, R. (2010), “The Mythology of Prostitution: Advocacy Research and Public Policy”, *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 7: 15-29; (2005), “Flawed Theory and Method in Studies of Prostitution”, I, vol. 11(7): 934-949; “The Social Construction of Sex Trafficking: Ideology and Institutionalization of a Moral Crusade”, *Politics and Society*, 35: 447-475.

demonstrated that advocacy research on human trafficking and prostitution is often problematic, flawed and based on emotional stories rather than on substantiated data. In addition, Weitzer (2007) has shown that hidden agendas in the moral crusade against human trafficking prevail. Other scholars – including Doezema (2000, 2010)³ – have shown that crusaders against human trafficking at the beginning of the twentieth century had similar agendas. Their main targets were not the prostitutes themselves, but prostitution per se and, as a first step, regulated prostitution: the “legalized vice”. Yet when prostitutes became collateral victims of the activist’s inspired policies, it didn’t prevent the philanthropists to go further in the same groove. A tendency to substitute deportation to repatriation which had begun as an almost unexpected consequence became gradually a cynically conducted policy. Culminating with the idea of an International Convention on “compulsory repatriation” of foreign prostitutes in 1927, the enforcement of this policy would have required provisions which would have turned the philanthropists themselves into traffickers. Most shocking of all, even when contemplating this possibility, they were still claiming to act on behalf and for the sake of the prostitutes. One wonders then if today’s activists are really the “victims” allies.

Micheline Lessard, University of Ottawa

“Cet Ignoble Trafic: The Kidnapping and Sale of Vietnamese Women and Children in French Colonial Indochina (1873-1935)”

This paper examines instances of kidnappings of Vietnamese women and children from Vietnam for sale in China during the early period of French colonial rule. While difficult to quantify, these kidnappings appeared to various groups (missionaries, military personnel, French colonial administrators, and French consuls in China) substantial enough to merit attention and action. These kidnappings were reported on particularly in Tonkin, in the border areas with China, and during a period of economic and political transformation in French Indochina.

Panel 2

BEYOND THE TRAFFICKING PARADIGM: LABOR MOBILITY, COERCION AND CONSENT

Discussant: Milena Jaksic (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales)

Ronald Weitzer (George Washington University)

Rethinking Sex Trafficking: A Critique of the Dominant Paradigm

In the United States and some other countries, government policies regarding sex trafficking have been driven by a powerful group of “moral crusaders” who seek to eliminate both trafficking and the entire sex industry. Under the Bush regime (2001-2008), these social forces were incredibly successful in influencing state policy – resulting in several changes, including: (1) the way trafficking and prostitution are officially conceptualized, (2) how resources are used to combat these practices, (3) a new and robust enforcement apparatus, and (4) dissemination of the American model internationally, including sanctions against nations whose policies do not fully conform to U.S. anti-trafficking demands. The paper argues that

² Steinfatt, T. (2011), “Sex Trafficking in Cambodia: Fabricated Numbers Versus Empirical Evidence”, *Crime Law Social Change*, 56: 443-462.

³ Doezema, Jo (2000), “Loose Women or Lost Women: The Re-Emergence of the Myth of White Slavery in Contemporary Discourses of Trafficking in Women”, *Gender Issues* 18(1): 23–50; (2010), *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters. The Construction of Trafficking* (London, Zed Books).

virtually all of the claims made by leaders of this moral crusade (and American government officials) lack an evidence-basis and are instead highly ideological. I demonstrate this by examining the discourse and demands of the crusade's leading activists. I then propose an alternative framing of the trafficking issue and argue that this framework is superior to the dominant American paradigm.

Jo Doezema (Paulo Longo Research Initiative)

The Quagmire of Consent: Trafficking and the Sexual Contract

The dynamic between consent and coercion gives shape to the notion of slavery. Slaves are considered to be utterly without choice as regard their condition, completely unable to exercise will or volition. Their status is reduced to the status of things, or animals. Seen in this way, the possession of the ability to grant or withhold consent can be seen as the marker of being human. And indeed, apologists for slavery have maintained that slavery is justified for certain groups because they are sub-human. In this slippery, circular fashion, consent both instigates and perpetuates the condition of slavery: A slave is one without the (inherent) ability to consent, and one without the (realisable) ability to consent is a slave.

But if consent gives meaning to slavery, so slavery also gives consent its meaning. Far from being a fixed term, consent derives its meaning from the social and political context in which it is used. This paper examines the current ways in which 'consent' is reciprocally active in the discourse of trafficking. It traces the development of "consent" through historical discourses of "white slavery," in particular, the ways in which sex has come to be determined as a contractual relationship. Examinations of contemporary arguments against trafficking show how contentious term "consent" remains. These contentions derive from the inherent instabilities in the view of sex as contract. Finally, the paper considers whether a new ethical appreciation of sex as care, rather than contract, can lead us out of the quagmire of consent.

Julia O'Connell Davidson (University of Nottingham)

Paradoxes of 'Freedom': Dependence, Debt, Labor and Belonging

Many migrants use a portion of their earnings to repay debts incurred in the process of migration and/or of securing employment, accommodation etc. (just as many non-migrant workers use a portion of their earnings to repay certain debts), and such debts are not automatically regarded as wrongful infringements on personal autonomy or read as implying a problematic form of dependence between debtor and creditor. In dominant discourse on 'trafficking', however, debt is configured with notions of freedom and dependence in a very different way, such that (some) migrants' indebtedness, and the social relations that surround it appear as 'modern slavery'. This paper begins by considering the kinds of indebtedness and dependence that come to be defined as constitutive of the condition of 'unfreedom', and then asks why – given the many and obvious parallels between them and forms of indebtedness and dependence that are socially and legally tolerated - they appear anomalous. The answer, the paper argues, is not only revealing about the nature of the freedom that is celebrated in liberal democratic societies, but also illustrates the theoretical and political importance of attending to the experience of many millions of people who currently stand either on the margins of, or quite outside, the compromises that have been struck in liberal democratic states to accommodate the contradictions thrown up by this fictitious 'freedom'.

Panel 3

THE ECONOMIC AND AFFECTIVE OBLIGATIONS OF MIGRANT SEX WORKERS: DEBT AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Discussant: Ronald Weitzer (George Washington University)

Irene Peano (University of Cambridge)

Debt Chains: Migrant Nigerian Sex Workers Between Bondage, Interdependency and Ambiguous Obligations

This paper seeks to analyze a range of transactions involving debts and obligations, whereby Nigerian women, mainly from the southern Edo State, negotiate their passage to Europe. Contracts of debt bondage are often sealed through rituals of oath swearing, or fictitious loan agreements, in which the women commit themselves to repay several tens of thousands of euros to their sponsors (often fellow Nigerian women). The sums owed are usually repaid through street prostitution. I explore the interlacing of different modalities of relationality, from the kinship ties based on custom, hierarchy, and obligations of support that often motivate a desire to migrate, or actively encourage migration even against the women's will, to the debt contracts with their logic of exchange, teasing out their shared features and significant differences. Attention to the domains of affect and subjectivity, I argue, forces a reconsideration of the appropriateness of schematic analyses that portray relationships as based on clear-cut, distinct models, in favor of a more nuanced understanding of specific relations, dispositions, desires and attachments.

Sarah Luna (University of Chicago)

The Spatialization of Economic and Affective Obligations: Migrant Sex Workers in a Mexican Border City and Those They Labor For

Sex workers in Reynosa's prostitution zone often use the Spanish verb "*obligar*" to describe their obligations to the people that they labor for, including complex relationships to pimps, clients, children, and organized criminals associated with drug cartels. Although occasionally used to describe situations of force, such as the instance when the representative of a drug cartel put guns to their heads of sex workers and forced them to protest the military presence in the city, the verb is also used to describe situations that blur clear-cut boundaries between consent and coercion. Based upon ethnographic fieldwork among sex workers in the northern Mexican border city of Reynosa, this paper examines how spatialization is used to create or fulfill three kinds of obligations that are relevant to the lives of sex workers 1) a pimp's separation of a woman from her family and leveraging of relationships with her children in order to convince her to work for him 2) a sex worker's geographical and informational separation from her family and negotiation of a "double life" in order to protect her family from the stigma associated with prostitution, and 3) instances of ambiguity of consent in certain sexual encounters. Through an analysis of emic uses of the term "*obligar*" and an expansion to etic uses of the concept, this paper sheds light upon how social actors use space to leverage or fulfill obligations both economic and affective.

Nicolas Lainez (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales/National University of Singapore)

Commodified Sexuality and Mother-Daughter Power Dynamics in the Mekong Delta

The paper explores how one family from An Giang Province (Mekong Delta, southern Vietnam) commodifies the sexuality and emotional labor of the daughter for the interests of the family. The case study illustrates the way in which commodified sexual economy occurs

in the context of an indebted and economically vulnerable household. In this family, “transactional sex” is one of the resources employed to repay the debt incurred. The study shows the ways in which the mother provides, initiates and maintains the conditions for the sexual commodification of her daughter through the power situated within the mother-daughter relationship, as manifested through the narrative of gratitude and duty, the use of violence and the definition of commodified relationships in fictive kinship and reciprocity.

Panel 4

MIGRANT’S DEBT REGIMES: CIRCULATION OF PEOPLE AND MONEY

Discussant: Gustav Peebles (New School for Social Research)

Johan Lindquist (University of Stockholm)

Circular Migration and Gendered Regimes of Debt in Contemporary Indonesia

This paper deals with the gendered production of migrant debt in contemporary Indonesia. Since the 1997 Asian economic crisis there has been a dramatic increase in documented transnational migration from Indonesia to countries across Asia and the Middle East, most notably Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. In this process, the regulation and protection of transnational migrants has developed in tandem, leading not only to growing demands for documentation but also higher fees for the migrants themselves. In order to cover fees, men who travel abroad to work as construction workers or on palm oil plantations generally borrow money prior to departure, while women who work as domestic servants most often experience salary deductions upon arrival, often for periods of six months or more. In other words, the constitution and organization of migrant debt varies significantly between men and women, particularly in relation to the forms of labor they perform.

The paper briefly considers potential models for understanding this gendered regime of debt in relation to the centralization of capital and the fragmentation of labor recruitment in post-authoritarian Indonesia, but also with an eye towards historical continuities and discontinuities. In methodological terms, the paper is based on ethnographic research in the middle space of the migration process, namely that of labor recruitment. More specifically, the paper follows from extended field research since 2007 with informal migrant brokers and formal recruitment agencies – primarily on the Indonesian island of Lombok, but also in other key sites in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore – who function as key mediators in the new regime of circular migration.

Julie Y. Chu (University of Chicago)

Unsettling Accounts: Debt, Theft and the Calculus of Fortune Among Chinese Transmigrants

In contemporary accounts of transnational human smuggling out of Fuzhou, China, debt and theft commonly appear as figure and shadow, sometimes working in tandem and other times at odds, to configure the moral project of money accumulation overseas. This paper explores the fraught and ambiguous line between mutual aid and *ponzi* in Fuzhouese schemes for migrant prosperity. Specifically, I compare the sociality of debt across three distinct modes of informal finance: 1) via debt payments to spirits to extend this –worldly credit for migrant ventures, 2) borrowing among kin and friends organized around the idiom of *renqing* (human feeling), and 3) loans distributed through rotating credit associations based on standards of *xinyong* (creditability). While it is easy to see theft’s relationship to debt as simply one of “crisis,” this paper argues somewhat counter intuitively that debt and theft are the transactional registers that make the circulation of bodies and money pragmatically and

morally legible for this group of Chinese; that is, they are the twin figures that hold the Fuzhounese project together against other possibilities of wealth creation.

Cheryll Alipio (National University of Singapore)

Affect, Debt and the Shaping of Filial Piety Among the Children of Filipino Migrants

In this paper I draw upon fifteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in San Pablo City, Philippines between 2006 and 2007 to look at how affect becomes the medium in which specific techniques that simultaneously draw upon reciprocity and religion are mobilized to shape child subjects, who then actively engage in particular economic activities created by contemporary transnational migration. In specifically evaluating a triad of cultural notions of reciprocity – *utang na loob* (literally, “debt of the inside” or figuratively, “debt of gratitude”), *hiya* (shame) and *awa* (pity) – against a non-governmental organization’s Roman Catholic- and Weberian-inflected ethic of “saving,” this paper aims to provide a more thorough understanding of the experiences of low-income, migrant families and of children’s roles and responsibilities in maintaining the household. Through analyzing case studies, this paper argues that the new economies of transnational migration move beyond the realm of patron-client, debt-bondage, emotion-laden kinds of relations to those that are affectively built upon the cultivation of individual accountability, productivity and rationalization that, in turn, creates the probability of children’s own labor migration, the potential for their future familial and civic investments, as well as the possibility of these children accumulating nearly two million pesos from parental remittances in a money-savings program.

Panel 5

DEBT, MOBILITY AND THE DEBTOR/LABORER RELATIONSHIP

Discussant: Irene Peano (University of Cambridge)

Jan Breman (University of Amsterdam)

The Continuing Story of Labor Bondage

Debt bondage is by no means a new phenomenon. In the past it was the customary manner by which landless low-caste workers were attached to landowning households of higher castes. This master-serf relationship was common throughout the South Asian subcontinent. The outcome of my first round of fieldwork in south Gujarat during the early 1960s led me to characterize such bondage as a pre-capitalist system of unfree labor. In the course of my fieldwork I found that, although the former system of bondage no longer existed, the members of the landless underclass had not become free laborers. Indebtedness continues to be a crucial feature of the capitalist work regime that I have called new or neo-bondage. It is a mode of employment that is not restricted to the shrinking category of farm servants. Similar arrangements also characterize a diversity of labor in the rural as well as urban sectors of the informal economy. The new regime of bondage differs from the traditional one in terms of the short duration of the contract (often no longer than for one season), its more restricted character (labor instead of a more encompassing beck-and-call relationship), its easier termination or evasion (even without repayment of the debt), while also the gap that existed in the past between high caste master and low-caste servant has gone. Often the social identity of the jobber is the same as that of the laborer recruited by him and, consequently, their relationship is not any longer one of superiority versus inferiority.

Isabelle Guérin (Université Paris I Sorbonne/ Institut de Recherche sur le Développement)

Debt, Circulation and Social Mobility in Rural South-India

This paper deals with the articulations between debt, circulation and social mobility in the day-to-day life of poor rural laborers in south-India (Tamil Nadu). In a context of persistent agricultural decline, labor circulation rhythms households' daily life, while being indissociable from debt – one migrates to repay a debt or because the recruiter offers an advance – and with ambivalent effects in terms of social mobility: circulation and debt may translate into debt traps and bondage or into (relative) forms of social mobility. This paper sets out two specific arguments.

The first one criticizes usual the dichotomies such as free/unfree labor, formal /informal debt and highlights a continuum of debt relationships with varied degrees of freedom and combining characteristics that are both formal and informal. This continuum starts from debt bondage – seasonal migrants indebted to a recruiter who also acts, though relatively, as a protector and a patron – to contractual debt relationships with private consumer credit companies localized in towns, and with in-between hybrid forms (loans offered by local elite, NGOs, etc.). Laborers are rarely attached to one single employer or creditor. Most of them juggle with a large diversity of labor and debt relationships and it is the modalities of this juggling which reveal the consequences of debt in terms of mobility.

The second argument emphasizes the ambiguities of debt and the contrast between its material consequences and its social meaning. Certain forms of debt lead to material impoverishment and exploitation while supporting aspirations of equality and integration. This contradiction illustrates the paradoxes generated by the coexistence of ancient social institutions and the will for modernity expressed by the laboring poor.

Danièle Bélanger (The University of Western Ontario)

Debt, Labor and Mobility: Vietnamese Labor Migrants Bound to East Asia

In Southeast Asia, candidates for international labor migration from rural Vietnam pay among the highest pre-departure fees in order to become temporary migrant workers in East Asia (South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan). The debts incurred to pay these pre-departure fees are a precondition for accessing international labor mobility. Another important factor leading to international labor migration among Vietnamese peasants is debt that is unrelated to migration. In this paper, I examine the relationship between social and spacial mobility and debt. In rural Vietnam transnational spacial mobility is available to laborers who have material and moral debts; however, social mobility is far more difficult for migrants to achieve. This paper also discusses how the interdependence between material and moral debts is embedded within a hierarchy of destinations and images of places associated with modernity, wealth, and success. Based on interviews and survey data collected in 2009 from Vietnamese migrant returnees who labored in South Korea, Taiwan, or Japan during the 2000s, this analysis examines the process of financing migration (securing loans), reimbursing debts once abroad, and returning home – either as a winner (debt-free) or a loser (with debt). Debts are central to the entire migration experience and are intrinsically linked to migrants' trajectories: early return, contract completion, or overstay. While debt provides access to international spacial mobility, social mobility is contingent upon complex transnational processes of the recruitment, placement, and employment of workers who may or may not succeed in earning income and achieving the dream of social mobility through transnational labor migration. Despite the very high risks inherent to transnational labor migration to East Asia, some successful returnees become creditors and spacial mobility can be achieved by new candidates to labor migration who can borrow money from them. Since

the only option available to those who return with unpaid debts is a subsequent international migration, this cycle is situated within the literature on debt bondage and the relationship between credit and debt.