**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 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

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.

(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 virtually all of the claims made by leaders of this moral crusade (and American government officials) lack an evidence-basis and are instead highly

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).

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 INTERDEPENCE**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 Fuzhounese 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.