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# Women Work, Men Sponge, and Everyone Gossips: Macho Men and Stigmatized/ing Women in a Sex Tourist Town

Denise Brennan  
*Georgetown University*

## Abstract

*This article focuses on gossip about Dominican women's sexual labor as an entry point into documenting shifting gender relations and ideologies in Sosúa, a sex tourist destination frequented primarily by German tourists. In Sosúa's sexscape, new meanings of masculinity have emerged alongside women's earning capacity. While sex workers must temper their displays of monetary gains so as to not compromise their reputations as mothers sacrificing for their children, men openly enjoy freedom from gender ideologies that make demands on them to appear as hard working and sacrificing fathers. In this sexual economy, men even can flaunt their unemployment. Their laziness and/or dependency are recast as macho. Here is one industry where poor Dominican women have the opportunity to make significant earnings and to jump out of poverty, yet their labor strategies do not necessarily ensure a reconfiguration of gender roles and ideologies that works in their favor. Rather, migrant men in Sosúa enjoy such a reworking that lowers expectations for them, while women are caught in a set of increased expectations. [Key words: masculinity, gossip, sex tourism, women's labor and globalization]*

Carlos's wife worked in Europe.<sup>1</sup> Everyone gossiped that she worked in the sex trade and Carlos admitted as much to his close friends. In his wife's absence he and his sons lived relatively well. Surrounded by wooden shacks, their house was constructed with cement, they always wore pressed shirts and the latest belts and jeans, and they—especially Carlos—wore many gold chains and rings. The biggest symbol of Carlos's wife success overseas, however, was his motorcycle—which set him apart from other men in town who putted around on mere motor scooters. Carlos worked hard, as a manager of a small hotel, but it is unlikely his salary alone—without his wife's remittances—would have allowed for such extravagances. His wife's remittances gave him and his two sons more disposable income than they could earn working (legally) in Sosúa's tourist economy on the north coast of the Dominican Republic.

Although gender issues long have been ignored in scholarship on migration and transnational studies, a body of scholarship<sup>2</sup> is emerging that asks, among other questions: Does the experience of migration and accompanying labor-market activities to which it gives rise, reaffirm or reconfigure (or both) gender relations and ideologies (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, Mahler 1998, and Pessar 1999). Some of this scholarship documents women's increased authority in the household through migration and wage work as a reconfiguration or challenge to "traditional" gender relations and ideologies (Hirsch 2003, Kibria 1993, and Pessar 1984). There also are migration studies which highlight the reproduction of traditional gender ideologies, both when families move and also when men migrate alone and women stay behind. Sarah Mahler (2001), for example, writes about the bind El Salvadoran women are placed in by their husbands who migrate north to the United States when members of their husbands' kinship networks keep a close eye on these wives in an attempt to ensure their sexual fidelity.<sup>3</sup> If these absentee husbands suspect or discover infidelity, they could "take revenge" by withholding remittances. But, what happens when women migrate, either internationally (as Carlos's wife did) or internally to work in tourism or sex tourism (the focus of this article). And how does this migration affect the men who stay behind? Women's migration strategies and earning power in the sex industry pose interesting questions about how women-as-breadwinners become the object of gossip, particularly on how they spend money or with whom they have sexual affairs. In Carlos's case, gossip about him spending money for a motorcycle as well as on clothes and jewelry for himself centered on how lucky and smart he was to have a wife in the overseas sex trade, not on how he was an irresponsible

spendthrift husband and father. His nights out in dance clubs and bars with a string of girlfriends only boosted his reputation as a macho. As a man “left behind” in Sosúa, Carlos swaggered around town, a far cry from the prying eyes that restricts the public behavior of the El Salvadoran women about whom Mahler writes.

Examination of Sosúans’ gossip about sex work and money—money earned either in the sex industry overseas<sup>4</sup> or in Sosúa’s sex-tourist industry—reveals three interrelated issues: women’s capacity for power, control, and opportunity in a globalized economy; the effect of women’s earning power on gender relations and expectations; and women’s role in not only challenging traditional gender ideologies through their earning capacity, but also in perpetuating them through their gossip about other women. This article focuses on gossip about Dominican women’s sexual labor as an entry point into documenting shifting gender relations and ideologies in Sosúa, a sex tourist destination frequented primarily by German tourists.<sup>5</sup> It examines how Sosúa’s sex workers create and hold one another to a restrictive “code of behavior,” essentially operating like the “village eye” described by Mahler. Even though these particular internal migrants have freed themselves from the constraints of traditional gender ideologies and practices in their home communities, they find themselves nevertheless ensnared within a new set of gender-based expectations. What is of interest to me is that a comparable set of expectations and pressures does not exist for men in Sosúa—specifically sex workers’ new boyfriends who are also migrants to Sosúa.<sup>6</sup> While sex workers in Sosúa are subject to new kinds of expectations—within their own community of sex workers—men in Sosúa experience a kind of loosening of expectations (among other migrant men) on their behavior. They become the envy of other migrant men in town, not stigmatized objects of their gossip. We will see that sex workers are criticized for giving money to boyfriends and for not working enough, while men are praised for sponging off of women and for working less.

The women’s lives I write about here are more marked by continuity than change, and thus demonstrate the endurance of gender ideologies. However, the reversal of breadwinner status in Sosúa combined with some sex workers’ use of sex tourism with European clients as a way to migrate to Europe are also significant challenges to traditional gender practices. I am reluctant, therefore, to write that the ethnographic stories here signal either the wholesale endurance or transformation of traditional gender ideologies. Rather, I see gender ideologies in this sex tourist town as both changing and continuing to inform peoples’ self-image, performance, and life choices. Of course, assessing

changes in gender thinking and doing is difficult while the forces of change—in this case foreign capital, new migration circuits to Europe, and a thriving sex industry—are relatively new and still unsettling. Moreover, fissures in gender ideologies may appear in one sex worker's life but not in another's, just as the power dynamics of one relationship might look different from another, and the decision-making in one household might look different from the next. And, ethnographers face the inevitable tension of how to adequately attend to both agency and constraints, without presenting one-dimensional portraits of women as victims of persistent machismo or as innovators of bold new gender scripts. As Abu-Lughod counsels, feminist ethnographers must not only look for “hopeful confirmation of failure—or partial failure of systems of oppression” and but also to “respect everyday resistance not just by arguing for the dignity or heroism of the resisters but by letting their practices teach us about the complex workings of historically changing structures of power (1990:53).”

The writing and re-writing of gender scripts do not happen over night. Rather, it often occurs in fits and starts. As the old world of men as breadwinners changes, and women turn to sex work not just to make ends meet but also as a stepping stone to international migration, women's gossip about one another reflects their efforts to hold on to traditional constructions of gender roles, motherhood, and sexuality. These attachments to old understandings of gender roles operate as a kind of drag on the changes tourism and sex tourism introduced, as well as on the possibilities of benefitting from the appearance of foreign capital and new migration choices to Europe. Meanwhile, as women might choose to hold on to past conceptualizations of gender roles (even though their practices indicate otherwise), men benefit from a re-working of the old notions of men as breadwinners, as they still remain macho without actually working.

## **Part I. Sex Work in Sosúa**

### ***Sex Workers as Exploited and Exploiting***

Sosúa's sexual economy shapes its gender relations and ideologies around earning, spending, and saving money. With its constant flow of Afro-Dominican and Afro-Haitian migrants for work in the sex and tourist trades, and of white European tourists for play, as well as of a large foreign-resident community (primarily German) living there year-round, Sosúa has become a transnational sexual meeting ground. The transnational process of *sex tourism*

has quickly and flamboyantly changed daily life in Sosúa in different ways than has *tourism*—especially for Dominican women who can out-earn most Dominican men. Because sex tourism has played a critical role in the town’s transformation, I see it as a space inextricably tied up with transactional sex—it has become of sexscape of sorts.<sup>7</sup> As sites in the developing world become known as sexscapes, sex-for-sale can come to define these countries—and the women who live there—in North American and European imaginations. The association between nationality, race, and sexual prowess draws sex tourists to sexscapes in the developing world where they not only buy sex more cheaply than in their home countries, but they also can live out their racialized sexual fantasies. Sex tourists’ girlfriends or wives (or ex-girlfriends or ex-wives) might not travel with them to these sexscapes, but they are there, nonetheless, as imagined points of contrast. Misogyny among these foreign male travelers directed towards women “back home” can play a role in the men’s racialized sexualization of women as “Other” in the sexscapes to which they travel. In Seabrook’s (1996) interviews with Western male sex tourists in Thailand, they told him they traveled to Thailand because Western women were not as compliant or as feminine as Thai women. In the Dominican Republic it is also common for European men to seek long-term relationships with Dominican women as a break from the “demands” of “liberated” European women. They have fantasies not only of “hot” and “fiery” sex, but also of greater control and power than they might have in their relationships with European women. Elena, a former sex worker with foreign clients explains: “These men are here because European women are cold. Not Dominican women—we are *caliente* (hot).” As Sosúa’s sex workers proudly repeat their foreign clients’ misogynist comments about European women as a way to distinguish themselves as better and more exciting lovers, they, too, take part in perpetuating racialized and sexualized stereotypes.

The proliferation of sex-tourist destinations/sexscapes throughout the developing world reflect global capital’s destabilizing effects on less industrialized countries’ economies where the globalization of capital not only shapes women’s work options in the developing world, but also often forces them into dangerous and insecure work.<sup>8</sup> In Sosúa we see the tremendous effects of global capitalism’s disruptive and restructuring activities: Its re-direction of development and local employment, especially women’s work and migration choices; its creation of powerful images, fantasies and desires (both locally and globally inspired) that are inextricably tied up with race and gender; and its generation of new transnational practices from which foreigners benefit

more than Dominicans. By examining hierarchies in transnational spaces, we see the people, particularly women whom Saskia Sassen (1998) describes as left out of the “mainstream account” of economic globalization: those who keep houses and hotel rooms clean, food hot, and tourists sexually satisfied.<sup>9</sup> The growth of the sex trade in the developing world and poor women’s participation in it are consequences of not only the restructuring of the global economy, but also of women’s central role in the service sector of tourism, a “hospitality” industry (Sinclair 1997, Kinnaird and Hall 1994, Swain 1995). Women perform the majority of this “service-oriented” labor, and since they often are paid less than men, their relatively cheap labor has assured that destinations—such as Sosúa—are affordable to even the most budget-conscious travelers. But sex tourism can be different and in Sosúa it is. It pays considerably more than cleaning hotel rooms (a typical job for women in Sosúa) or driving a motor scooter taxi (a typical job for men in Sosúa). While a sex worker can earn 500 pesos *a client*, these other tourist-related jobs yield around 1000—1500 pesos *a month*.

Women in Sosúa’s sex trade not only out-earn Dominican men in Sosúa but also control much of their working conditions in their daily work lives since they do not have pimps or any other intermediaries. I should note that except for Maria, whose story I tell below, this article analyzes men’s role as opportunists who try to sponge off of women’s sexual labor and not as sex industry entrepreneurs. Sosúa’s sex workers use the sex tourist trade as an advancement strategy, not just as a survival strategy. This strategy hinges on their performance of “love” as they try to marry their European clients-turned-suitors and migrate to these men’s home countries. Their earning power, retention of earnings, and the migration strategies they weave into the sex trade, are examples of how women struggle to take advantage of the foreign men who are in Sosúa to take advantage of them.

As Sosúa’s sex-tourist trade grew, particularly since the early 1990’s, poor Dominican women—all single mothers—were drawn into Sosúa’s sex trade and new migration patterns were set in motion. Like feminist ethnographers who explore larger structural forces that contribute to poor women’s oppression while also highlighting how these women try to improve their lives (Constable 1997), I too not only consider structures of inequality in sex workers’ lives—such as limited educational opportunities for poor women, and the relationship between consensual unions and female headed households—but also their creative responses to them. I see a great deal of what Ortner calls “intentionality” in these women’s use of the sex trade.<sup>10</sup> Their cre-

ative strategizing presents an important counter-example to claims that *all* sex workers in *all* contexts are powerless victims of violence and exploitation.<sup>11</sup> Rather, women enter sex work for diverse reasons and have greatly varying experiences within it. Even within Sosúa, sex workers' experiences are highly differentiated. In Sosúa there are Dominican and Haitian sex workers; women who work with foreign or Dominican clients; women who receive money wires from European and Canadian clients; women who receive financial help from local Dominican *clientes fijos* (regular clients); women who live with or separated from their children; women who have AIDS, and/or have been raped and/or battered in the sex trade; and, the focus of this article, women who give money to Dominican boyfriends and women who are careful to not give any money to any men. These differences are crucial to shaping a woman's capacity for choice and control in Sosúa's sex trade.

Consequently, rather than lumping all sex workers in all places together as victims with no control over their lives, I suggest a nuanced understanding of women's room to maneuver (agency) within the sex trade—at least within the context of Sosúa,<sup>12</sup> especially since I propose that Dominican women use Sosúa's sex trade as an *advancement* strategy through marriage and migration. These women, local agents caught in a web of global economic relations, try to take advantage (to the extent that they can) of the men—and their citizenship—who are in Sosúa to take advantage of them. In Sosúa's bar scene, European sex tourists might see Dominican sex workers as exotic and erotic, and pick out one woman over another in the crowd, as a commodity for their pleasure and control. But Dominican sex workers often see the men, too, as readily exploitable. The men all are potential dupes, essentially walking visas, who can help the women leave the island—and poverty. By migrating to Sosúa, these sex workers are engaged in an economic strategy to capitalize on the very global linkages that exploit them.

### ***Sosúa's Sex Workers Look to Migrate off the Island***

Critical to understanding the shifting of gender relations and ideologies in Sosúa, is the role of migration—or the hope of migration off the island. Since I am concerned with Dominicans' internal migration to Sosúa—and their hope for international migration out of Sosúa—this article and the larger book project is informed by migration scholars' ground-breaking work on transnational migration.<sup>13</sup> Migration scholars pay particular attention to the flow of people, goods and ideologies through transnational social fields and the effects of these flows on the cultures of both sending and destination

countries. These empirical and theoretical foci are particularly well-suited to exploring the multiple forms of movement into and out of Sosúa (by foreign tourists and expatriate foreign residents). Transnational migration scholarship is also significant for this study since the largest cities to the smallest rural villages in the Dominican Republic have sent migrants to the United States—particularly to New York—since the mid-1960’s (Levitt 2001; Georges 1990; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Guarnizo 1994; Duany 1994).<sup>14</sup> No scholar studying anything “Dominican” can ignore the role migration has played both on the island and within Dominican communities in the United States. In fact, the past few decades of Dominican migration to New York and the transnational cultural and economic flows between these two places have led many Dominicans to look *outside* the Dominican Republic for solutions to economic problems *inside* Dominican borders. So adept are Dominicans at migrating off the island, that Sørensen even refers to Dominicans as “natives” to transnational space. The quest for a visa, to Canada, the United States, or Europe, is virtually a national pastime. Dominican musician, Juan Luis Guerra, captures this preoccupation with *fuera* (outside/off the island) and the visas necessary to get there in his hit song “Visa para un Sueño” (Visa for a Dream).<sup>15</sup> Whereas tourists can enter the Dominican Republic without a visa, Dominican citizens must jump through hoops to travel abroad and often undertake elaborate and dangerous schemes to do so. Since the benefits of working abroad can prove transformative for extended families left behind (through remittances), a variety of legitimate means to get *fuera*, as well as scams, abound. Some are so desperate to get off the island, that they willingly risk their lives. Dominicans perish in *yolas* (small boats or rafts used to travel to Puerto Rico),<sup>16</sup> professional line-waiters are paid to hold places in the visa line at the United States consulate, and there is a lively industry in false papers, including passports and visas, some of which cost thousands of dollars.

This preoccupation, with getting *fuera* plays a significant role in shaping women’s expectations that Sosúa’s sex trade with foreign tourists might be an exit from the island. As a transnational space, Sosúa represents a land of opportunity within the Dominican Republic and a point of departure to other countries. Many often migrate internally to Sosúa since it the closest they can get to the “outside.” Consequently, when women move to Sosúa to enter into sex work, they are able to see themselves as taking the first step toward entering another country with more and greater possibilities. Sex tourism links the two forms of migration in a powerfully gendered and racial-

ized way as it relies on and perpetuates sexualized and racialized stereotypes of Afro-Caribbean women.

### ***Performing Love and Selling Sex for Visas***

Dominican sex workers not only pretend that they desire their clients and enjoy the sex—a charade sex workers the world over undertake—but they also pretend to be in love. Sex workers in Sosúa, make a distinction between marriage *por amor* (for love) and marriage *por residencia* (for visas). After all, why waste a marriage certificate on romantic love when it can be transformed into a visa to a new land and economic security? Theirs is a high-stakes performance that, if successful, could catapult their families out of poverty. Sex workers correspond by fax with four or five clients at the same time (it costs under a dollar to send or receive a fax at Codetel, the national phone company) and dropping by the Codetel office to see if they have received any faxes is a daily ritual for these women. The lucky ones receive faxes instructing them to pick up money at the Western Union office. Others, such as the women whose stories I tell below, receive word that their European clients-turned-boyfriends are planning return visits to Sosúa, or have news about the women's visas and travel arrangements to visit or to move to Europe with the men. However, even though I distinguish between sex work as an advancement or survival strategy, as a feminist scholar I walk a tightrope between calling attention to marginalized women's attempts *progesar* (to get ahead) and highlighting the role of both local and global forces that constrain them. Relationships with foreign men inevitably fall short of mutual exploitation since white male sex tourists are better positioned than Afro-Caribbean female sex workers to leave Sosúa satisfied with their experiences there. Sex workers in Sosúa are at once independent and dependent, exploiters and exploited by foreign men—and as the stories below indicate—by Dominican men as well.

## **Part II: Rewriting the Gender “Script” in Sosúa**

### ***Sosúa's Sex Workers' Code of Behavior***

While men in Sosúa enjoy a re-writing of gender-based expectations that praise them for sponging rather than earning, women in Sosúa's sex trade risk being subjected to stigmatizing gossip if they stray too far from a different set of gender-based expectations. Impressed by the “vividness and style with

which women recounted stories of everyday life,” Abu-Lughod decided to write a book based on the tales—“the constructions, narratives, arguments, songs and reminiscences”—that Bedouin women in Egypt shared with her (1993). In the case of Sosúa’s sex workers, it is not just their talent for expressive story-telling that makes their self-descriptions and gossip compelling. Another striking feature is that a diverse group of women with vastly different experiences in sex work adhere to the same themes as if their stories were scripted. Of course the themes in sex workers’ gossip and self-descriptions might not have anything to do with the values and beliefs that women hold dear or actually live by; rather the values and beliefs women publicly claim to embrace reveal the pressures sex workers are under to appear to live in a certain way. Within days of arriving in Sosúa, sex workers learn the “code of behavior” to which they are expected to adhere. Newcomers quickly catch on to the major themes their coworkers expect them to stress: Motherhood and the suffering and sacrifice it demands, safe sex, and frustration with Dominican men’s infidelity. This code undergirds their idealized construct of the self-sacrificing mother who is not *really* a sex worker. By setting up these expectations, sex workers pit themselves against other sex workers. In so doing, they preserve their self-esteem in the face of public scrutiny and stigma, and also try to avoid being the object of gossip themselves.

### ***Gossip’s Function: Unifies and Divides***

Since my field notes are bursting with sex workers’ gossip about one another, I turn to their gossip as a guidepost to their perceptions of their social obligations both to their families and in their daily experiences in sex work. Gossip can bring people together as well as pull them apart. When it takes the form of what Patricia Meyer Spacks calls “serious” gossip “in private, at leisure, in a context of trust, usually among no more than two or three people,” it functions as a sign of “intimacy” and it “provides a resource for the subordinated.... a crucial means of self-expression, a crucial form of solidarity” (1985:5). Although “intimate” discussions are essential to the friendships sex workers forge in the bars and boarding houses, the distinctions that sex workers draw among themselves also clearly divide them. At the other extreme, gossip “manifests itself as distilled malice. It plays with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes about the motives and feelings of others. Often it serves serious (possibly unconscious) purposes for the gossipers, whose manipulations of reputation can further political or social ambitions by damaging competitors or enemies, gratify envy

and rage by diminishing another, generate an immediate sense of power” (Spacks 1985:4). As sex workers compete with one another for clients, especially sober, clean, and generous customers, the atmosphere in the bars and boarding houses is ripe for gossip and back-biting.

### ***I’m Not Like ‘Other’ Sex Workers***

The central image Sosúan sex workers overwhelmingly use in their self-descriptions and in their gossip about one another is that of the “good mother.” Within a matrix of maternal responsibility and morality, sex workers depict themselves as selfless, responsible and caring mothers. By using the themes of family obligation and sacrifice, sex workers liken themselves and their concerns to those of other poor mothers. “We poor women suffer a lot” is a phrase Sosúan sex workers frequently employ in daily conversation. In fact some women adamantly do not identify as sex workers, such as Helena, who explained: “In my head I don’t see myself as a prostitute.” In sex workers’ self-descriptions *prostitutas* (prostitutes) or *putas* (whores) are set in opposition to good mothers.<sup>17</sup> Just as in his book on manhood, Gilmore (1990) examines what makes a man “good at being a man,” Dominican sex workers rely on dominant discourses about gender relations and roles—especially about motherhood—to determine not only what makes a woman *good at being a woman*, but also what makes a woman who sells sex to meet her financial obligations as a single mother *good at not really being a sex worker*.

Insistence that they are not like “other” sex workers pervades Sosúan sex workers’ self-descriptions and gossip about co-workers. Simultaneously their gossip about “other” sex workers mirrors the criticism and rumors that Sosúan residents, angered by rapid commercial development and the influx of sex tourists, circulate about them. Although sex workers help and support their co-workers, they also actively castigate one another by strategically and selectively appropriating the dominant discourse of women’s sexuality as dangerous and uncontrollable. Sosúa’s sex workers often describe “other” sex workers as dangerous (transmitters of AIDS and petty thieves who prey on unsuspecting, or drunk, tourists); untrustworthy (liars about their HIV status); and manipulative (opportunists when it comes to men and money). Ani, for example, singles out sex workers who steal from tourists, and she imagines that their plunder has made them wealthy and enables them to live well in “two-story houses surrounded by lots of land.” Their criticism of one another contrasts with Nelson’s findings among female beer brewers (and part-time sex workers) in Kenya, who, marginalized by the larger society, “feel that they

must stand together or fall separately” (1978:88). Nelson contends that their stigma as “bad women,” “helps to heighten a sense of sisterhood, mutual responsibility, and solidarity” (1978:89). Sosúa’s sex workers share the sentiments that, in Nelson’s words “women must help each other” (Nelson 1978), while divisive discourse allows them to position themselves as different from—in a way, superior to—their co-workers.

This distancing is also critical to their self-perceptions as “good mothers” not *putas* (whores). Rita (who entered Sosúa’s sex trade to pay for a leg operation her daughter needed as well as to save money to buy a house) carefully distanced herself, for example, from other sex workers by elaborating on what characterized other women as *putas* while emphasizing that she was “not of the street.” She explained “I’m different from other *prostitutas*. I’m not used to this life. I don’t like the Anchor (the main tourist bar), and I am embarrassed with tourists. I don’t approach them—that’s shameful. I sit and wait and order a beer myself. And I’m afraid of AIDS so I always use condoms unlike other women.” She continued, “I stay with one man a night, while some women go with four or five” and remarked that she was a discriminating seller and unwilling to have sex with anyone willing to pay. “I make sure they are clean—their hair and teeth.” She also refused to go out with clients during the day; that was *her* time. Rita saw herself as worlds apart from the other, more “aggressive” women in the tourist bars, so much so that she did not consider herself a *prostituta* at all. Rather, she explained, “My style is different—I always dress like a *señora*. I sit and wait to be invited for a drink. I would rather go home alone than throw myself at a man like some of the other girls.” Her “style” meant she did not “make as much as some of the other women,” who were more confrontational in their attempts to get clients. Rita’s approach not only reflected her desire to distinguish herself from “real” *prostitutas*, but also her own comfort level which, as I discuss elsewhere (Brennan 2004), is inextricably linked to safety.

By gossiping about “other” sex workers as behaving in a way they claim they do not, “good mothers” such as Rita set themselves apart from other women—the “real” *prostitutas*. They gossip about these other women as selfish, irresponsible mothers who enjoy having paid sex, living apart from their children, and not having to perform the daily household chores that come with taking care of children. One woman, Mari, went so far as to distance herself from the sex-working community that she denied outright that she was a sex worker. The night I met Mari at the Anchor; she told me she was vacationing for a couple of months in Sosúa but lived during the year in Germany with

her German husband. I explained I was interviewing sex workers, and she agreed to an interview. The next day, during our conversation, she emphatically asserted that she was not, nor ever was, a sex worker. Yet her claims did not correspond with her actions. When I met her in the bar, she was sitting in a male tourist's lap and on several occasions after our day-time interview I saw her draped around tourists in the bars—by day and night. It is extremely unlikely that she was in the bars “just for fun” as she claimed. Sex workers and other Sosúans made it clear that Dominican women would not be seen in the bars where sex workers hang out since they not only risk being labeled sex workers, but also arrest. In her quest for constructing a suitable self, Mari wanted me to think she was simply having a good time while on vacation from living in Europe with a German husband.<sup>18</sup> In the stories below, competing arenas of responsibility and conflicting belief systems help explain women's, such as Mari's, contradictory narratives.

## Multiple Scripts

### *Ambivalence*

Although no other woman hanging out in Sosúa's tourist bars denied working in the sex industry, women I interviewed presented deeply ambivalent—and at times contradictory—accounts of their experiences in Sosúa. This ambivalence reflects the trade off between the potential material rewards of sex work and its dangers and stigma. Sosúa's sex workers are careful in their conversations with one another and other residents in Sosúa not to dwell on sex work's material rewards for themselves. To do so would be tantamount to an admission that they spend their earnings on nonessential items for themselves rather than remit them to their children back home. Consequently, sex workers' stories often alternate between complaints about the suffering they endure in sex work, and praise for the money it procures. In the same breath they describe how much they hate the work and extol its high earnings and flexible hours. Francisca's opinion of sex work captures the contradictions running through sex workers' narratives: “On one side tourism is good, on the other not. Tourists don't care what we are, who we are, if we are sick or whatever. You know when they drink they care about nothing. Tourists come here for vacation with *putas*. This makes me ashamed. But I make money in this work for my children that I can't make in other jobs. And, I work fewer hours. So in this way tourism is good for our country; without it we would have no

work.” As Sosúa’s sex workers struggle to justify their choice to sell sex over other jobs, it is not surprising that their narratives alternate between sex work’s rewards and risks. While the job allows them to provide for their families, it also can be a source of danger, regret, frustration, and low self-esteem. Despite their best efforts to stick to the accepted scripts of motherhood and frugality, they diverge by drawing on multiple—and contradictory—scripts simultaneously. In so doing they reveal themselves as real women, not idealized visions of martyred mothers.

Let me be clear about Sosúa’s gossip mill and its gender-based sanctioning: they affect different women in different ways. Even though their “code” often compelled Sosúa’s sex workers to hit upon certain themes, they reveal themselves as real people struggling to appear in the best possible light. While some sex workers self-consciously stress accepted themes to make themselves look good—such as publically claiming they do not spend money on themselves but send all earnings to their children—other times they unselfconsciously reveal personal desires that fly in the face of the prevailing expectations. Their often contradictory stories demonstrate that the beliefs, values, and “culture” of sex workers is not coherent or homogenous. Rather, beyond the scripted, obligatory themes, sex workers’ narratives display a diversity of motivations, experiences, and values. They are not “automatons” as Abu-Lughod writes, “programmed according to ‘cultural’ rules or acting out social roles,” but “people going through life wondering what they should do, making mistakes, being opinionated, vacillating, trying to make themselves look good, enduring tragic personal losses, enjoying others, and finding moments of laughter.” The expectations sex workers place on one another, and the threat of gossip if they trespass them, tempers, for example, some women’s spending or at least drives them to conceal their spending from their friends. Gossip within the sex workers’ community, however, does not deter all sex workers, especially the younger ones from openly spending money. Nor does it stop them from enjoying their time away from their parents, home communities, and daily care-taking responsibilities of children. Some of these women swagger through town like migrant men such as Carlos, buying new clothes and eating out, announcing their new-found economic independence to the other cash-strapped migrants in town.

It is hard not to notice their economic power in Sosúa where sex workers are everywhere. They consume items that either were not available back home (especially if home is rural), or were unaffordable. New consumption possibilities are a part of many rural to urban migrants’ experiences, regard-

less of their type of work. Mills, for example, writes of Thai women factory workers who compensated for low wages and repetitive tasks by purchasing consumer items and participating in weekend outings (Mills 1999). Sosúa migrants soon find, however, that the more they engage in these new leisure activities and consumption opportunities, the less likely they are to return home with any economic security. As she worked to build and to furnish her house, Carmen, for example, never bought new clothes or jewelry for herself. In turn, she derided co-workers who allowed themselves these indulgences and gossiped that they were spoiled, selfish, and irresponsible mothers.

As sex workers dominate cafés and restaurants since they can afford to eat out more often than male migrants (as well as female migrants not in the sex trade), and they walk around in large groups, conspicuous by their style of dress, and loud talking to one another, they also present new challenges to the use of social space. Some of the migrants in Sosúa—women and men—come from small towns where men dominate public spaces, particularly at night when they go out to the local bar(s), but there is no such public/private dichotomy along traditional gender lines in Sosúa. Women’s migration to Sosúa’s sex trade, and their subsequent newly acquired earning power, bears true Roger Rouse’s observation on the relationship between migration and social space: “Migration has always had the potential to challenge established spatial images...(it) reminds us that, within the limits imposed by power, existing spatial arrangements are always susceptible to change” (1992:11).

### **Part III: Boyfriends Sponge while Women are Subject of Gossip**

#### ***New Meanings of Masculinity***

Beyond new spatial arrangements, this section explores other examples of challenges to traditional gender ideologies and practices in Sosúa. One Nineteen-year-old sex worker from the capital, Santo Domingo, was shocked at the inversion of gender relations in Sosúa: “Here in Sosúa women take care of men, and give them money. In Santo Domingo (the capital city) it is men who take care of women.” Honor and manhood long have been associated in Latin America and the Caribbean with protecting and financially providing for one’s family (Gutmann 1996, Safa 1995). Contrary to these myths of manhood, Dominican men in Sosúa who siphon money from their Dominican girlfriends—even from women who have sex with other men for a living—are not seen as any less macho. In the context of Sosúa’s sexscape/sex-tourist

economy, depending on a woman—as Carlos does—is, in fact, macho. Carlos's financial dependence on his wife (through her remittances) affirmed his machismo rather than compromised it.

With women's new-found earning power through the sex trade with foreign men, men in Sosúa such as Carlos openly—even flamboyantly—rely on their wives<sup>19</sup> or girlfriends' participation in Sosúa's or the overseas sex trade, or their migration to Europe to live with the European men they met while working in Sosúa's sex trade. New meanings of masculinity emerge in Sosúa that allow men to be *tígueres* (tigers),<sup>20</sup> the ultimate Dominican machos, without out-earning the women in their lives—or in some cases without earning at all.<sup>21</sup> *Tígueres*, Christian Kohn-Hansen argues, is “a type who acts according to the situation, is cunning, and has a gift for improvisation...the image of the *tiguere* represents both an everyday hero and a sort of trickster.” Even though sex workers harshly criticize men who sponge off of fellow sex workers' hard-earned money and call them *chulos* (pimps), these men—this new brand of *tígueres*—at the same time, are admired by the other migrant men in town. In the process, while men try to reap the benefits, women assume all the stress, risks, and possible dangers associated with the experiences of sex work and migration—as well as with having to “perform” at being in love with their European clients/suitors.

### ***Drains on Sex Workers' Earnings***

While saving money is not possible in factory or domestic work (where women earn around or under 1,000 pesos a month), sex workers whose clients are foreign tourists, in theory at least, make enough money to build up modest savings. In practice, however, it is costly to live in Sosúa. Many sex workers earn just enough to cover their daily expenses in Sosúa while sending home remittances for their children. Even though poor women earn more money in sex work than they can in other jobs available to them, they end up spending most of it picking up the financial obligations abandoned by absentee fathers. Realizing this, and missing their children, most women return to their home communities in less than a year, just as poor when they first arrived. Those who manage to save money use it to buy or build homes back in their home communities. Alternatively, they might try to start small businesses, such as *colmados* (small grocery stores), out of their homes. But first, soon after they arrive in Sosúa, women must learn how to guard their earnings since their new-found economic power invites exploitation. The police (through extortion), Dominican boyfriends, family, friends, and shop

and restaurant owners all hope to profit from women's participation in the sex trade. These women's Dominican male lovers' attempts to siphon their earnings, in particular, can severely jeopardize women's financial independence and few are able, for example, to put enough money aside to start a small business, something to move on to after sex work. However, Dominican men in their lives, in some cases, benefit considerably. In the remaining parts of this article I explore examples of men who sponge off of women who earn in the sex trade. Throughout these ethnographic examples I also weave instances of women's gossip.

### ***Boyfriends Benefit from Sex Workers' Transnational Relationships***

#### **ANDREA'S BOYFRIEND**

Andrea's Dominican boyfriend significantly benefitted from Andrea's ongoing relationship with a German man whom she had met while she was working in the sex trade. Andrea's German suitor returned to Sosúa to visit her many times, and sent money wires so that she could quit the sex trade and move out of her wooden shack with mud outside her door. With his financial help, she stopped working and rented the second-floor of a cement house. She also was able to bring her two daughters to live with her in Sosúa (her mother had been taking care of them in her home community in the Dominican countryside while she had been working in the sex trade). The money wires allowed Andrea and her daughters to live comfortably, much like a middle-class housewife—except that her boyfriend/"husband" was in Germany. Andrea shared her good fortune with her close friends and Dominican boyfriend. On more than one occasion she put up the bribe money necessary to get her girlfriends out of jail. She lent out the new clothes that she was able to purchase with money wired from Germany, and always had food on the stove to share with friends. Her Dominican boyfriend perhaps benefitted the most: She paid for his apartment, bought him clothes, and picked up the tab for their nights out on the town. She also brought back gifts for him (and her friends and family) from Germany when she went to visit her German boyfriend (on a tourist visa that he helped her to secure).

Since they were not legally married and he was not the father of her daughters, Andrea's Dominican boyfriend had much to lose when she decided to legally marry her German boyfriend and to move to Germany with her daughters. On the morning of her departure, I dropped by to wish her well before she left for Germany. Her Dominican boyfriend was there, still asleep.

Stepping outside on her porch she explained that she could not lie about her feelings for her soon-to-be husband, “No, it’s not love.” Yet with images of an easier life for her and her two daughters compelling her to migrate off the island and out of poverty, she put love aside.

### **LUISA’S BOYFRIEND**

Luisa is another sex worker who received money wires from a German client and whose Dominican boyfriend also rode on her good fortune. In fact he moved in with Luisa (who paid for the rent), and even stopped working while he sponged off Luisa’s money wires from the German client as well as her earnings in the sex trade. Quite remarkably, she had received US\$500 every two weeks over a six-month period from her German client who had wanted her to leave sex work and to start her own clothing store (most money wires sex workers receive are \$100-200 and less frequent). She told him she had stopped working the tourist bars, and that she used the money he was sending her to buy clothes for the store. Months later, when he found out that she was still working as a sex worker (although not as much as before the money wires), had not opened a store, and was living with a Dominican boyfriend, he stopped wiring money. The way he found out testifies to the increasing efficiency of the transnational networks linking Sosúa and Germany, as well as the critical role of fax machines in the building and maintenance of these transnational social networks. Carla, another sex worker and a friend of Luisa’s, also had an ongoing fax and money-wire relationship with a German man, who knew Luisa’s German boyfriend. This is not uncommon, since the men in the tourist bars often are on vacation with other male friends from Europe and they go out to the bars together to pick up sex workers. Luisa believes Carla faxed her (Carla’s) boyfriend in Germany, who then told Luisa’s boyfriend, essentially “blowing the whistle” on Luisa’s infidelity and her phantom clothing store. After this revelation, the money wires dried up and Luisa’s German boyfriend stopped returning to Sosúa to visit Luisa. At this juncture, Luisa’s expenses soon outpaced her dwindling resources. She had not saved any money—in part because the house she had been renting was twice the size and double the rent of friends’ apartments—and in part because she had been supporting her boyfriend. She also sent money home to her mother in Santo Domingo, who cared for her twelve-year-old son (who, tragically, later died in Hurricane George when his Grandmother’s house collapsed).

When her Dominican boyfriend did not get a job during this financial crisis, but, rather, Luisa increased her time working in the sex trade—and

hocked some of her necklaces and rings in a pawn shop—it fueled other sex workers' gossip. They called her Dominican boyfriend a *chulo* (pimp), since he lived off of Luisa's earnings and money wires, and thought Luisa had been foolish for bankrolling him. However, while Luisa was castigated by fellow sex workers—for spending too much on herself (rather than her son) and for bankrolling a man (especially one who is not the father of her son)—her boyfriend was admired by other Dominican men in town. While other sex workers worked to distinguish themselves from Luisa, other men hoped to replicate and envied the good fortune of her financially dependent boyfriend.

### ***Gossip about Bankrolling A Boyfriend***

Although it is difficult to know what motivated Luisa's friend to snitch on her, she might not have if Luisa's son had appeared to be the main beneficiary of the money instead of her Dominican boyfriend. "Luisa is crazy," her friends gossiped, "She spends all her money on her *chulo* (pimp) who does not even work." Women who receive money from men overseas are enviable, but how they spend it determines their reputation. Even though many depend on money from regular clients, and look forward to marrying so that their new husbands can financially "take care of" them, Sosúa's sex workers also are proud of their ability to earn money to raise their children without the help of their children's fathers. Since their earnings are so hard won, some sex workers go to great lengths to protect their money from men in their lives. One woman, Carmen, for example, did not tell her Dominican boyfriend that she received money wires from a Belgian client. Unlike Andrea and Luisa, Carmen had no intention of spending a centavo of her money wires on a man; rather, she saved it all to build a house in Santo Domingo.

Within the sex-work community's code of acceptable behavior, sex workers often see certain lies that they tell men in faxes, letters, and phone calls—such as that they love them and miss them—as a necessary part of sex work. But sex workers also harshly criticize women who tell too many lies. Although within the sex-work community it is expected that women build relationships with foreign men not for love but for money and *residencia*, Luisa's friends told me Luisa had been overly greedy. When Luisa's German boyfriend stopped sending her money, her friends were not surprised, nor sad for Luisa. It is difficult to pinpoint what tarnished Luisa's reputation within the community of sex workers—her bankrolling of her Dominican boyfriend, her squandering of such large money wires, or her too-comfortable living arrangements (instead of spending the money on her son). Moreover, since it was not just

mere bad luck that dried up her money wires, but deliberate sabotage by her friend Carla, Luisa's stigmatization by other sex workers is a far cry from the uncritical admiration that her Dominican boyfriend enjoyed in his community of friends (comprised of men like him who had migrated internally to Sosúa to make money off the tourist trade). It did not help that, unlike some sex workers who generously buy drinks for their friends, or share new clothes—as Andrea did with the money her German boyfriend wired her—Luisa had a reputation for being stingy.

### ***Gossip about Women Who Spend Too Much Money on Themselves***

Whereas Carlos's open display (with his gold chains and expensive motorcycle) of his financial dependence on his wife's participation in the sex trade enhanced his reputation in town, sex workers' reputations were damaged by flashy displays of spent income. Sex workers cannot appear to live too well, otherwise their invocation of motherhood as a justification for selling sex will not ring true. Of course no sex worker can be sure how much their co-workers earn, what portion of their earnings they send home, or what they spend on themselves, unless there are material indicators (such as Luisa's large house). Or they might witness women spending money: Carmen admonished a sex worker, for example, with whom she had worked and lived at a bar, who was "in debt to vendors who go to the bars selling women's clothes, lingerie, jewelry and hair clips." Carmen observed that "Every time they come by, she buys things." Moreover, gossip began to circulate among the "old-timers" in the sex trade, about some of the newer—and younger (in their early twenties)—sex workers, who, as regulars in the restaurants, and the main patrons in the stores, became a focus of other—older (in their late twenties and early thirties)—sex workers' censure. The more seasoned and older sex workers explained that the behavior and stylish—and, at times, provocative—dress of their younger, flashier counterparts reflected their young age. Carmen thought that they were dressing "the way they think prostitutes should dress. They don't know any better. It's as if they are young girls play acting."

Sex workers seem to reserve their most serious criticisms, however, for older sex workers such as Luisa. These criticisms, of sex workers' diversion of earnings from their children, echoed complaints sex workers make of Dominican men's spending patterns as draining family income. Women certainly did not want to be seen as irresponsible as the men who left them. Whereas Carmen forgave the younger sex workers since they "don't know any better," Luisa's co-workers relentlessly scrutinized the way she lived. "At age

32,” Carmen complained, “Luisa should have known to live less extravagantly and to save money.” Most especially for someone like Carmen who cautiously guarded her earnings from the Dominican men in her life, Luisa’s spending on her Dominican boyfriend was synonymous with wasted income.

### ***Physical Abuse and Stealing***

The few instances of migration of sex workers to Europe as the girlfriends or wives of European tourists propel the fantasy that “anything could happen” even though most cases of actual migration that were known to the women I interviewed ended in eventual return and downward mobility. With only a handful of women regularly receiving money wires from clients in Europe—and a rarer few actually moving to Europe to live with their European sweethearts—success stories of women who are living out this fantasy nonetheless circulate within the community of sex workers like Dominicanized versions of Hollywood’s *Pretty Woman*.<sup>22</sup> Sosúa and its tourists represent an escape.<sup>23</sup> The women dream of European men “rescuing” them from a lifetime of poverty and foreclosed opportunities.<sup>24</sup> Their Dominican boyfriends, too, hope for—and facilitate—the success of their girlfriends’ transnational relationships. For these men, like their Dominican girlfriends, love and romance also take a back seat to more practical concerns. Maria’s boyfriend, Juan, in the story below, for example, willingly vacated their house when Maria’s German “boyfriend” visited her in Sosúa. Juan knew these visits kept the money wires flowing from Germany; he also knew the visits were a necessary prelude to any invitation to visit Germany as well as a marriage proposal.

### **MARIA’S BOYFRIEND**

Dominican men in Sosúa have tried to elbow in on sex workers’ transnational ties.<sup>25</sup> Juan even went so far as to push Maria, his girlfriend, into a transnational relationship with a German man (whom she had met as a sex worker). In a way, this was Juan’s transnational “fantasy,” not Maria’s. Even though the German man wanted to marry Maria, the goal of many Sosúan sex workers, she was clearly reluctant. Maria was not in love with her German boyfriend and dreaded going to Germany to visit him. Her German boyfriend had been quite generous with her, and had sent enough money on a regular basis that she was able to quit the sex trade and to bring her children to Sosúa to live with her. It is at this point when Maria rented a house that Juan moved in with her; soon after, he started physically abusing her. Juan greatly enjoyed the material benefits of Maria’s ongoing transnational liaison and pressured her

to continue the relationship. Extremely shy, Maria replied to her German boyfriend's faxes only at Juan's urging. He knew her transnational ties could prove to be a gold mine, and he was right. From the money wires the German boyfriend sent, he bought an impressive stereo system, a large color television, and a stove. He moved from a one-room wooden shack into a concrete house.<sup>26</sup> Juan had worked only sporadically before the money wires, but gave up looking for jobs altogether once the wires started.

When Maria finally moved to Germany, she returned only weeks later. She had not liked it there: It was too cold, she missed her children and, most of all, she was not in love. As it turned out, *residencia* was not enough for her. When she returned without the windfall of money Juan had hoped for, his beatings escalated. She eventually left him, however, and moved into her mother's home with her children. Afraid to bring along the things bought with the money wires, she left them behind with Juan. While Juan benefitted from Maria's transnational relationship, she ended up back where she financially had started off before she had ever been involved with a foreign man. In Maria's case, her greater earning power over Juan's translated into exploitation and abuse.

#### **ANI'S HUSBAND BENEFITS**

Ani also recounts a story of her Dominican "husband" as benefitting from her overseas earnings—but in this case he secretly stole all of the money she had sent home. Ani had joined a dance troupe that traveled to night clubs throughout Europe and the Middle East (at this time she was not a sex worker, although she later entered the sex trade in Sosúa which is when I met her). A Dominican girlfriend urged her to join the tour, against which her husband protested until he heard how much money she could earn. According to Ani, he had been treating her "like a slave" until then, always asking her to "cook this" or to "do that." But "he changed completely" when her friend explained to him how much Ani could earn. "He began to treat me well, it was marvelous." Ani went on the tour and in her 2-year absence her husband took good care of their children, but he did not participate in the wage-labor market and did not save any of the money Ani sent home (she did not wire the money but sent it back to the island with returning Dominicans). She sent a considerable amount of money—\$500-\$600—every month. She had given her husband specific instructions to use part of the money to purchase land on which they could build a house. To her horror, after two years of grueling travel and hard work (they were expected not only to dance, but also to talk

with customers and get them to buy drinks) she returned to find that “there was no land, there was no money, there was no house, there was nothing.” She promptly took her two daughters and left her husband; to this day she does not know what he did with all of her hard-earned money.

## **Conclusion**

As Carlos swaggers around town in clothes and jewelry purchased with money his wife has remitted, he, and other migrant men who benefit financially from women’s overseas or local sexual labor, challenge traditional understandings of gender roles and ideologies. In Sosúa’s sexscape, new meanings of masculinity have emerged alongside women’s earning capacity. While sex workers must temper their displays of monetary gains so as to not compromise their reputations as mothers sacrificing for their children, men openly enjoy freedom from gender ideologies that make demands on them to appear as hard working and sacrificing fathers. In this sexual economy, men even can flaunt their unemployment. Their laziness and/or dependency—such as Luisa’s and Maria’s boyfriends—are recast as macho. Only a savvy macho could cook up a way to make money—in some cases a lot of money—without actually working. Only fools would work in low-paying jobs; real men sponge off of women.

As men are freed from expectations to be households’ main breadwinners (or to earn at all), women find themselves working more than men. At the same time, women face intense scrutiny and possible criticism by their co-workers. Here is one industry where poor Dominican women have the opportunity to make significant earnings and to jump out of poverty, yet their migration and labor strategies do not necessarily ensure a reconfiguration of gender roles and ideologies that works in their favor. Rather, migrant men in Sosúa enjoy such a reworking that lowers expectations for them, while women are caught in a set of increased expectations. In order to keep their images as “good mothers” intact while selling sex, these successful entrepreneurs must appear to live frugally. As “good mothers,” they cannot risk swaggering around town.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>I have changed all the names of Sosúans, including sex workers, their boyfriends, husbands, and clients. I also have changed the name of bars and nightclubs. This article draws from field research that I conducted in Sosúa in the summer of 1993, 1994-1995, the summer of 1999, and January and July of 2003. I owe a great debt to the Dominican HIV/AIDS outreach and education non-governmental organization CEPROSH, particularly to its peer educators (known as *mensajeras de salud*)

<sup>2</sup>A special edition of the journal *Identities*, entitled “Theorizing Gender within Transnational Contexts,” works to fill in what Michael Kearney described in a 1995 Annual Review of Anthropology article on the anthropology of globalization and transnationalism as a “notable silen(ce) on gender issues” (1995:56). In the Introduction to this special edition of *Identities*, Sarah Mahler and Patricia Pessar provide an excellent assessment of how gender issues have been analyzed to date within transnational studies, as well as create a road map of sorts of un- or under-explored themes for scholars to take up in the future.

<sup>3</sup>Mahler also writes poignantly about the women’s ongoing financial struggles—which include waiting in line for hours for available pay phones to call their husbands in the United States to plead for them to send more money.

<sup>4</sup>The remainder of this article, however, focuses on sexual labor in Sosúa. For a discussion on Dominican women’s experiences in the sex trade overseas—as well as on their experiences living in Europe as the wives or girlfriends of European men—see Brennan 2004.

<sup>5</sup>Other tourists and sex tourists include Canadians and other Europeans such as Austrians, Dutch, English, Italians, and Spaniards.

<sup>6</sup>I want to be clear: The women who migrate to Sosúa to work in its sex trade do not have husbands or boyfriends in their home communities, but are entering the sex trade because men have abandoned them and their responsibilities to their children. The boyfriends I write about as sponging, are Dominican men these women met once in Sosúa. These women’s children usually remain in the women’s home communities, far from the knowledge of their mothers’ work, and cared for by female relatives such as grandmothers and aunts.

<sup>7</sup>I use the term “sexscape” to refer to both a new kind of sexual landscape and the sites within it. The word sexscape builds on the five terms Arjun Appadurai has coined to describe landscapes that are the “building blocks” of “imagined worlds:” “The multiple worlds which are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe” (1990: 4). He uses the suffix “-scape” to allow “us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes” (with such terms as *ethnoscape*, *mediascape*, *technoscape*, *finanscape*, and *ideoscape*) as he considers the relationship among these five dimensions of global cultural flows (1990: 6-7). Sex-for-sale is one more dimension of global cultural flows, and Sosúa is one site within a global economy of commercialized sexual transactions.

<sup>8</sup>For research on women’s factory labor see Fernández-Kelly (1983), Ong (1987), and Safa (1995); for research on women’s domestic labor see Bunster and Chaney (1985), Romero (1992), Constable (1997), and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001); and for research on women’s sexual labor see Phongpaichit (1982), Enloe (1989), Sturdevant and Stoltzfus (1992), Kempadoo and Doezema (1998), and Thorbek and Pattanaik (2002).

<sup>9</sup>Sassen writes about a “narrative of eviction” that “excludes a whole range of workers, firms, and sectors that do not fit the prevalent images of globalization” (1998: 82).

<sup>10</sup>Since I argue that Dominican sex workers’ opportunity for agency is highly nuanced, Ortner’s discussion of “partial hegemonies” in her “subaltern version of practice theory” helps to conceptualize the thorny territory of agency in the sex trade. Her analysis which looks for the “slippages in reproductions,” the “disjunctions” in the “loop in which structures construct subjects and practices” and “subjects and practices reproduce structures,”

allows for seeing how Dominican women try to find ways in the sex trade *progesar* (to get ahead) (1996: 17-18).

<sup>11</sup>In light of debates over whether sex work can be anything but exploitative, ethnographic accounts of Dominican women's experiences in Sosúa help demonstrate that there is a wide range of experiences within the sex trade, some beneficial and some tragic. The debate on how to conceive of women's sexual labor centers on issues of agency and victimization, as well as of economic empowerment and powerlessness. Some scholars, activists, and sex workers assert that women who are forced to choose sex work because of their race, class, nationality, colonial status and gender are not exercising "choice." To them, all forms of sex work are exploitative and oppressive, which is why they usually employ the terms prostitute and prostitution rather than sex worker and sex work. The latter terminology recognizes that selling one's body is a form of labor that—under certain contexts—women can *choose*. While grappling with the thorny issue of whether sex work is inherently oppressive, McClintock's warning against conflating agency with context in discussions about sex work is helpful: "Depicting all sex workers as slaves only travesties the myriad, different experiences of sex workers around the world. At the same time, it theoretically confuses social *agency* and identity with social *context*" (1993).

<sup>12</sup>Feminist scholars' contribution to "transnational feminist theory" is particularly valuable since it emphasizes the particularized, historical contexts of women's experiences (Grewal and Kaplan 1995). This contextualizing has profound consequences for the question of agency/choice in sex work since consideration of sex workers' experiences in various contexts throughout the globe challenges the view that sex workers experience a monolithic set of oppressions in the sex trade.

<sup>13</sup>For discussions on how the study of transnational migration evolved, see Mahler (1998); Glick Schiller (1999); Smith and Guarnizo (1998); Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Szanton (1992 and 1994).

<sup>14</sup>Grasmuck and Pessar (1991) and George (1990) document Dominican migration to New York, while Levitt (2001) analyzes ties to Boston. These studies shed light on Dominican migration strategies and transnational ties which link Dominican sending communities to communities in the United States. Glick Schiller, Basch, Szanton Blanc (1994) describe such transnational migration as a "response and resistance" to the Dominican Republic's integration into the global economy. This response is informed by ideologies that maintain that New York and—and more recently, Germany—(as well as other places off the island) are spaces where individuals are more likely to make economic gains than within the Dominican Republic.

<sup>15</sup>On account of this preoccupation Pessar named her book on Dominican migration after Guerra's popular song, *A Visa for a Dream: Dominicans in the United States* (1995).

<sup>16</sup>The U.S. Coast Guard interdicted 5,430 Dominicans at sea in 1996; 1,143 in 1997; 831 in 1998; 531 in 1999; 781 in 2000; 270 in 2001; and 801 in 2002 (U.S. Coast Guard 2003).

<sup>17</sup>These dichotomies (good-bad women, selfless mothers as Madonnas- selfish mothers as *putas*) engage notions of honor and shame that have been analyzed in studies on the Mediterranean. These writings explore how a woman's (and, by extension, her family's) reputation rests on her chastity, whereas a man's status is derived from his success in business and with women (Davis 1977; Herzfeld 1980 and 1985).

<sup>18</sup>It is possible that Mari would have responded differently if we had been introduced by another sex worker, the way I met nearly all the women I eventually interviewed. In fact, Mari is the only woman I ever introduced myself to in a bar. At the time, the Anchor was so crowded that she and I were quite literally pushed together so we started talking. Since she lived on her own, the health messengers from CEPROSH did not know her (since their *charlas*—talks/presentations—only reached women living in boarding houses, not those living on their own), and thus I had not met her before. Also, since I made a point of not taking

up women's time in the bars while they were working (other than with quick introductions by women I already knew), I did not use the bars as a way to meet women to interview. Rather I went to the bars to see the night-time scene in full swing.

<sup>19</sup>Unless I indicate otherwise, the "marriages" I write about between Dominican men and women are consensual unions, a common practice among the poor in the Dominican Republic of living together but not marrying.

<sup>20</sup>Christian Krohn-Hansen describes the meaning of *tíguere* in the Dominican Republic: "the Dominican mythology of the *tíguere* has shaped, and continues to shape, a man who is both astute and socially intelligent; both courageous and smart; both cunning and convincing; and a gifted talker who gets out of most situations in a manner that is acceptable to others, while he himself does not at any time step back, stop chasing, or lose sight of his aim (be it women, money, a job, a promotion, etc.)" (1996: 108-9).

<sup>21</sup>Sosúa's twist on what qualifies as "macho" or on who is a *tíguere*, dismantles hegemonic and unitary notions of "the Latin American male." Gutmann (1996) explores the varied and diverse interpretations and expectations of maleness and machismo in Mexico City. In contrast to Dominican men in Sosúa who often embrace the term *tíguere* and revel in being perceived as traditional machos, Gutmann found that Mexican men are resistant to being typecast as the "typical" Mexican macho.

<sup>22</sup>In the last scene of the movie the affluent, powerful Richard Gere character "saves" the Julia Roberts character, a poor—but resilient—sex worker. As Roberts' "white knight," he arrives hanging out the sunroof of a limousine carrying red roses. Gere then scales Roberts' fire escape to "rescue" her through her bedroom window.

<sup>23</sup>Erik Cohen and Glenn Bowman have written on a similar phenomenon between Palestinian youths in Israel and tourist women. The possibility of marriage and emigration with tourist women offered an escape from "the humiliation of always being marked as inferior in interactions with Israelis" (Bowman 1986: 78).

<sup>24</sup>For a critique of this idea of sex workers needing "rescuing" see Greenberg (1991). And, see novelist William Vollman's (1993) brash and insensitive depiction of his own "rescue" of an underage Thai sex worker as a manly and daring adventure in the music magazine *Spin*.

<sup>25</sup>Elsewhere I write about Dominican men who try to use romance and sex with foreign women as a way to build their own transnational ties that also can yield money wires, return visits with gifts, as well as marriage and migration overseas to the women's home countries ( Brennan 2004). Sosúans and other Dominicans pejoratively refer to these men as "sanky-pankies," which evolved from a Spanglish term "los hanky-pankies."

<sup>26</sup>When Maria's German boyfriend came to visit her on several occasions, Juan moved out temporarily.

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