

Vassar College Interlibrary Loan



ILLiad TN: 219998

Borrower: DOS
Lending String: *VXW,TTS,WYU,ORC
Patron: Manamperi, Panini D (Colombo)
Journal Title: The Asia Pacific journal of anthropology.
Volume: 11(3-4). **Issue:**
Month/Year: 2010**Pages:** 378-393

Call #: GN1 .A853 v.11 2010
Location: PERIODICAL RM
AVAILABLE

Odyssey Charge
Maxcost: 15.00IFM

Shipping Address:
Ralph Bunche Library
ATTN: INTERLIBRARY LOAN /Room 3239
U.S. Dept. of State /Ralph Bunche Library
2201 C Street, NW
Washington US-DC 20520-3239 US

Article Author:
Article Title: Erasure of sexuality and desire; State morality and Sri Lankan migrants in Beirut, Lebanon

Fax: 202-647-2971
Ariel:

Imprint: Canberra ACT ; Published jointly by the

ILL Number: 102368986



Save in email folder

Vassar College Library (VXW)

Contact: Evan James
845-437-5764 - Phone
845-437-5795 - Fax
evajames@vassar.edu

If there are any problems with this document, please let us know within 2 business days. Thank you!

ILL Number: _____
Borrower Symbol: _____
Ariel Address/Fax Number: _____
Problem with Scan: _____

Please resubmit this page to us with needed corrections via Ariel or fax and we will make corrections as soon as possible.

Erasure of Sexuality and Desire: State Morality and Sri Lankan Migrants in Beirut, Lebanon

Monica Smith

This paper presents a critical analysis of State and non-State interventions into the intimate and sexual lives of Sri Lankan migrant women in Beirut and interrogates the ways that normative ideals of heterosexual marriage and family are regulated and enforced transnationally. Drawing on research in Lebanon and Sri Lanka in 2006–9, I juxtapose official representations of Sri Lankan migrant women with migrant accounts that disclose the diverse and often transgressive realities of migrant lives. Focusing in particular on a United Nations Development Program report, I highlight how non-State actors, deliberately or otherwise, fall in line with moralistic State discourses in ways that purposefully ignore and act to constrain women's sexual agency in diasporic situations. The promotion and repression of certain sexualities, images, desires and stereotypes leads to the marginalisation of those who deviate from the norm and places them in an even more precarious situation outside state protection.

Keywords: Migration; Sexuality; Gender; State; International Agencies; Lebanon; Sri Lanka

Migrant women, experienced in living and working within different state boundaries, are confronted with varying national ideologies and projects that aim to discipline them as sexual subjects (Hubbard 1998; Tyner 2004; Manalansan 2006). Geographies of constraint, such as state laws and practices, normative moral beliefs and economic restrictions, affect what types of sexualities and intimate relationships are readily possible, legally recognised, economically beneficial and desirable for them (Povinelli 2006). Drawing upon fieldwork in 2006 and 2007–9 in Beirut, Lebanon, as well as in Colombo, Sri Lanka, I focus in the present paper on the normative and moral discourses produced by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Regional Center in Colombo (RCC), particularly its HIV Practice Team's research project, as

Correspondence to: Monica Smith, 18 Hythe Road Singapore 557499, Email: Monica.annsmith@gmail.com

ISSN 1444-2213 (print)/ISSN 1740-9314 (online)/10/3-40378-16
© 2010 The Australian National University
DOI: 10.1080/14442213.2010.511630

Desire: State Migrants in

an example of how state actors (inclusive of extrastate actors) operate through apparently self-evident normativities to silence and make invisible the sexual desires and actions—which lie outside the relationship between husband and wife—of Sri Lankan female migrant workers. My knowledge of this project comes not only from my own research, but also from work as a researcher for the UNDP RCC, specifically on a study of Sri Lankan migrant women in Sri Lanka and Lebanon.

The paper is concerned with the multiple operations of gendered and sexualised power that are simultaneously raced and classed, yet not practised within hermetically sealed or epistemically circumscribed borders of the nation-state. In the Gramscian sense, I look at the ways that practices of dominance are simultaneously knitted into the interstices of multiple institutions as well as into everyday life (Alexander 2005, p. 4). Deploying Foucault's notion of biopolitics, 'an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations' (Foucault 1977, p. 140), I analyse how institutions like UNDP RCC use research, analysis and writing techniques to make visible and invisible, and thus to bestow with state protection, only certain sexual desires and practices.

It has been argued that neoliberal states are minimally concerned with disciplining variations of sexuality within the private sphere, particularly of migrant populations, and more concerned with reinforcing marriage or couplehood as a foundation of an economically functional and productive unit (Luibheid 2009). Yet, within Sri Lanka and its female migrant population, although economics guide decision making, the identity of the nation is strongly and continually tied to the morality of the female subject as pure, traditional and chaste. This was even more salient throughout the last civil war and into the post-war 'rebuilding of the nation' period (de Alwis 1996; Lynch 1999; Cats Eye 2009). In line with normative morals of sexuality and the correct sexual citizen within Sri Lanka, UNDP RCC aims to encourage marriage, monogamy and motherhood while discouraging transgressive sexual practices that deviate from the norm. In addition, it operates to create an image for the wider public of Sri Lankan migrant women as the victims of sexual abuse.

Although I focus on the case of the UNDP RCC and suggest that this example is demonstrative of how normative moral discourses aim to affect the lives of Sri Lankan female migrant workers, I also use examples from the Sri Lankan government and from civil society to support my argument. My research looks at the same kind of moralising discourses and actions that support a specific hegemonic notion of couplehood within other organisations, such as the Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), the branch of the government responsible for migrant training and welfare; Caritas, a large non-governmental organisation (NGO) operating in Sri Lanka and Lebanon that addresses migrant issues, and the UNDP Sri Lanka. I argue that UNDP RCC is complicit in the manner in which the state does not acknowledge or protect migrant women's sexuality.

The work of UNDP RCC is analysed vis-à-vis a specific cohort of Sri Lankan migrant women, those living outside their employers' homes in Beirut and,

state interventions into the
Beirut and interrogates the
family are regulated and
and Sri Lanka in 2006
with migrant accounts
migrant lives. Focusing
I highlight how non-state
discourses in ways that
cy in diasporic situations
sires and stereotypes lead
and places them in an

il Agencies; Lebanon;

ifferent state boundaries
ts that aim to discipline
nsan 2006). Geographical
oral beliefs and economic
relationships are readily
rious for them (Povinelli
ut, Lebanon, as well as in
e normative and moral
ogram (UNDP) Regional
am's research project, a

Monica.annsmith@gmail.com

specifically, within Doura (a suburb north of Beirut and home to many migrant workers), whose lives and sexualities deviate from expected norms. In Sri Lanka, migrant women, most of whom are married with children, move from a relatively restricted environment in which state and civil society projects have encouraged them to be monogamous, heterosexual, responsible wives, mothers and daughters (de Alwis 1996; Tambiah 2005) to a less restricted environment in Lebanon. In Lebanon, the regulations and constraints change; for example, migrant women are often perceived by Lebanese society to be 'the other'—sexually available and not tied down to family (Jureidini 2006; Moukarbel 2009). In addition, once abroad, some migrant women feel free to engage in what are deemed transgressive relationships because they live far from the watchful eye of family and community.

Although some women choose to be celibate and thus remain monogamous, those who live outside their employers' homes frequently cohabit with male partners. Unable to secure permission from their employers to live independently, many of these women, called 'freelancers', reside illegally within Lebanon. They choose to cohabit with male migrants and Lebanese nationals partly to share expenses and secure a sense of safety and protection from unwanted male attention, but also for the fulfilment of love, a sense of belonging and sexual desires. This cohort of women makes evident the manner in which the sexual desires and practices of some migrant women are silenced and not bestowed with the economic benefits and social acceptance that migrant women who practise normative heterosexual behaviours may receive. State and extrastate institutions are in a difficult situation when they address the sensitive, controversial and highly moralised issues surrounding the sexualities of female migrant workers. However, concealment of the day-to-day lived intimate experiences of some of these workers not only ignores and diminishes their sexual agency, but also leads to their further marginalisation as people unprotected by the state.

Sri Lankan Female Migration to Lebanon

Migration of domestic migrant workers from Sri Lanka to Lebanon started in the 1970s, initiated by the oil boom in the Middle East (Gamburd 2000; Sriskandarajah 2002). Since then, for nearly four decades, Sri Lankan women have been migrating to work in the Middle East and Lebanon as maids and nannies to support children, husbands and extended families who remain behind (Jureidini 2004). The money women send home is one of the largest sources of foreign exchange for Sri Lanka—an income the country depends upon for economic survival (De Silva 2007). At present there are over one million Sri Lankan female migrants working in the Middle East and their earnings help support five million people, one-quarter of Sri Lanka's population (De Silva 2007). Not surprisingly, women are encouraged through national policies and discourses to go abroad to earn wages that they may not otherwise be able to earn in an economically unstable Sri Lanka—not least of all because of the recent 25 years of civil war (Gamburd 2000). In Lebanon alone there

are over 120,000 Sri Lankan migrants at present. Ninety per cent of the migrants are female and they are almost exclusively domestic migrant workers. Women migrate for between 2 and 20 years, and 75 per cent are married with children (Gamburd 2000; UNDP 2009).

Most households in the Middle East employ foreign domestic help to perform tasks that are vital to the running of households (Jureidini 2004; Sabban 2004). Migrant women clean, cook and care for children and the elderly—chores that most nationals are unwilling to do (Jureidini 2004). As such, Sri Lankan migrant women have become an integral part of the Middle East home and economy. However, despite the great responsibility shouldered by Sri Lankan migrant women in order to support their own families, as well as to care for families abroad, the position of a domestic maid has become one that carries a particularly low status. This is not only because of the perceived servile nature of the tasks, but also because of the racialised associations of domestic employment and the lack of residency and citizenship rights (UNDP 2009).

The migration process also often places women in circumstances where they are vulnerable to abuse. This takes the form of employers not paying wages due, curtailing freedom of movement, withholding passports, long working hours and verbal, physical and sexual abuse (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2004, 2006). To date, domestic migrant workers cannot legally reside outside their employers' homes (UNDP 2009). Consequently, most are compelled to live in the households in which they work. Thirty-five per cent of households do not allow their employees to leave the home (ILO 2006); 87 per cent of employers hold their employees' passports (ILO 2006). Over the past few years, some measures have been undertaken by Middle Eastern and Asian states to protect the rights of domestic migrant workers (UNDP 2009). For example, a unified contract, signed by the Lebanese Ministry of Labour, is now effective. The contract emphasises a migrant worker's right to decent living conditions and acknowledges a right to adequate food, clothing and accommodations (UNDP 2009). This means that only certain aspects of Sri Lankan domestic migrant workers' existence as subjects have been brought under the purview of the law: that of a labouring subject. At the same time, there continues to be a partial exclusion of the Sri Lankan migrant domestic worker as a sexual subject. This exclusion is mirrored in UN research and policy advocacy.

Interventions by the UNDP RCC

To demonstrate the manner in which the UNDP has silenced and made invisible women's desires for intimacy while at the same time emphasising women's roles as dutiful and chaste mothers, daughters and wives, I focus on the production of the multicountry UNDP report entitled *HIV Vulnerabilities Faced by Women Migrants: From Asia to the Arab States: From Silence, Stigma and Shame to Safe Mobility with Dignity, Equity and Justice* (UNDP 2009). Research was undertaken in 2007–9 and the report was released in March 2009. The report concludes that Asian women working

in the Arab states are highly vulnerable to HIV infection because they often travel and work under unsafe conditions and are targets of sexual exploitation and violence (UNDP 2009). The US\$120,000 research project included the countries of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Philippines, Bahrain, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Over 500 migrants and state and non-state officials were interviewed for the study. The work was jointly undertaken with three UN agencies and four NGOs. The project received national and international attention and wide media coverage.

My focus here is primarily on the portion of the report that addresses Sri Lankan migrant women in Beirut, although the information does apply to all groups of female migrants within the study. In particular, I want to highlight the editorial changes that were made to the initial executive summary (UNDP 2008) of the UNDP report on Asian migrant women and the risk of HIV referred to above. The summary, which was initially launched in October 2008, was first inadvertently released without having been edited and reviewed by officials within UNDP RCC. This pre-edited version (UNDP 2008) was originally released with the explicit statement that many migrant women (and migrant men) had consensual sex while living abroad and that some women originally left to go abroad because of the prospect of such intimate relationships. Migrants' and researchers' accounts, which spoke of migrants as sexual subjects, and as desiring and engaging in sexual relationships, were subsequently erased from the final report. Once edited, the report was rereleased to reflect only certain aspects of women's desires and practices.

There are several reasons why the individuals involved in the editing of the final UNDP RCC report may not want to recognise the sexuality and desires of Sri Lankan migrant women.¹ Although I focus on the moral discourse involved, I also briefly mention two additional reasons. First, there was a desire to make migrant women appear to be as vulnerable to HIV as possible to ensure that AIDS remained on the UN agenda. Second, there was a fear that if governments were informed through the report that migrant women willingly engaged in sex abroad, there would be negative state repercussions for the women. Yet, as was revealed during formal meetings and discussions, the report was also shaped by the moral notions of, for example (as was stated by one UN official during a May 2008 meeting in Bangkok, Thailand), 'instilling proper values in migrant women', such as motherhood and monogamy; a disbelief that women may experience sexual desire; and a belief that Arab males or migrant males, as subjects who are expected to have and do have 'transgressive' or excessive sexual desires, were inevitably sexually harassing or abusing migrant women, or responsible for migrant women's indiscretions. The stance taken by UNDP RCC officials not only fell in line with the beliefs and actions of the Sri Lankan State, but also with other UN offices and even, for example, the UN Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which states that the family is the natural and fundamental unit of society.

Turning to the omissions and insertions of the specific report, any mention of women seeking sexual relationships on their own accord and out of emotional and physical need was removed. For example:

Domestic workers engage in sexual relations for a variety of reasons, including physical needs and economic and material benefits. All domestic workers interviewed in . . . [the Arab States] . . . shared [the view] that sexual activity is easier for women migrant workers who do not live within the home of their employer, and who therefore enjoy full freedom once they are off-duty. They also have days off and are able to own and use mobile phones, which facilitates easy contact. (UNDP 2008, p. 20)

Similarly, the following statement by one researcher was deleted: 'Inevitably, sexual relationships between domestic workers and their male co-workers take place. As human beings they have sexual desires and have the right to fulfil them' (UNDP 2008, p. 19). Another researcher wrote:

Savings realised from sharing rent enabled workers to spend money on sexual activities with other nationalities . . . The overwhelming majority of Pakistani males interviewed in the study claimed to have sexual relationships with female sex workers, [which included some] Sri Lanka women [working as sex workers as well] . . . Migrant workers who are away from their wives for long periods of time need to fulfil their sexual urges. (UNDP 2008, p. 24)

Words that were deleted about women migrating for and desiring sex were replaced by brief mention of 'consensual relationships', which was always followed by emphasising exploitative acts such as rape and group rape. For example:

While many relationships are consensual, there are instances where partners, both nationals and other migrant workers, take advantage of the women. Reports indicated that some domestic workers become victims of sexual exploitation by abusive partners and/or by employers and their relatives. Incidents of rape and group rape, either by local nationals or male migrant workers from other nationalities, were reported in the host countries. Usually, the domestic workers do not disclose incidents of sexual exploitation for fear of losing their jobs and to avoid stigma and discrimination. (UNDP 2009, p. 71)

Finally, the full report is replete with photographs of Sri Lankan migrant women who are supposedly representatives of exploited women but, in actuality, the images are of women enjoying themselves at a Sinhala concert in Beirut in July of 2008 (Figure 1). The women were with their boyfriends and friends; they spoke loudly, drank, smoked and wore jeans and tank tops. If these women had been in Sri Lanka, this type of attire and behaviour would elicit comments of *lajj-baya nathi* (loose and immoral, literally without *lajja-baya*—fear and shame). But here, in Lebanon, most women support each other's new attire, mannerisms and relationships. They encourage each other, laugh and pass the time.

UNDP RCC: In Line with Government and Civil Society

The UNDP RCC addresses female migrant sexuality in a similar manner to Sri Lankan government agencies and non-governmental agencies. The sexuality of female migrants is an aspect of the subject that is left unacknowledged and unprotected. In



Figure 1 Sri Lankan women enjoying themselves at an outdoor music concert in Beirut, Lebanon, 2008. Similar photos were used from this event in the UNDP Report, but with the understanding that the women depicted were in vulnerable and discomfoting situations in the Middle East. I have distorted the photograph so that the identities of the women are concealed because the UNDP did not receive the consent of the women for their photographs to be used in this way.

the following, I provide examples from both the SLBFE, the branch of the government directly involved in protecting and training migrants; and the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center (CLMC), an extrastate organisation that assists migrants through educational and media projects. The CLMC works closely with Lebanese General Security and maintains informational dialogues with the Sri Lankan Embassy in Lebanon and the Sri Lankan government. The CLMC is part of Caritas Internationalis, a worldwide charitable organisation founded by the Catholic Church under the patronage of the Vatican.² Not surprisingly, Catholic morality permeates its discourses on migrant sexuality, paralleling that of the Sri Lankan State.

Throughout the 40-year history of Sri Lankan women's migration to Lebanon, a Sri Lankan State discourse has developed regarding how Sri Lankan female nationals working as maids and nannies are treated and perceived within the Middle East. This discourse is evident in the training packs handed out in the predeparture training sessions. For example, the Sri Lankan State acknowledges the sexualised space in which women work and live in Lebanon, but they understand that it is the Sri Lankan

example, the distraction of work. The curriculum demonstrates that the Sri Lankan State acknowledges the sexualised space in which women work and live in Lebanon. Despite this, it squarely places the burden to manage and protect one's body and sexual being on the female migrant herself. The SLBFE training sessions make clear that it is the migrant woman who is responsible for what occurs while she is working abroad. In particular, the SLBFE female migrant subject should not act to fulfil any sexual desires. Rather, female migrants should distract themselves through thoughts of their children or hobbies. What is not acknowledged are the subjects' resistance to conforming to the norm of dutiful wife and mother and their willingness to act upon their sexual desires. Instead, the official message is that for the good of her family and nation, she, the migrant worker, should remain focused on her work, which is the reason she migrated abroad in the first place.

Similarly, the CLMC, through its media projects, aims to instil in women a desire to maintain their economic responsibilities to family at home and to continue to use their bodies for work and mothering, rather than for sexual pleasure. It also aims to inform the wider public that Sri Lankan migrant women are moral and chaste, with natural ties to home. In March 2006, the CLMC released a film entitled 'Maid in Lebanon' (Mansour 2006). The 30-minute documentary depicts the situation of women migrant workers in Lebanon, and their different experiences lived while abroad. The film received national and international attention.³ However, the image of Sri Lankan migrant workers that the film presents is singularly one of the dutiful mother, wife and daughter who sacrifices her life for family back home, or of women who have been the victims of sexual violence. Six Sri Lankan women, aged 18–45 years, are interviewed in the film. Leela, a mother of five, cries for her children back home; Nirosha writes love letters to her husband as she sends remittances home to build a family house; Surayka goes abroad as the dutiful daughter to support her sisters' schooling; Kumari supports two children while her husband is unable to get work back in Sri Lanka; woman X and woman Y tell of being sexually and physically abused, respectively. The remaining subjects in the film who pass in front of the screen are dead or abused anonymous Sri Lankan female bodies. Although the creation of the film is a bold step in addressing the need to reinforce the human rights of domestic migrant workers, what is absent from the film is women's individual agency, apart from family, or the manner in which they desire and choose to practice sexual and intimate relationships.

An Unspoken Story: Journey to Doura

To contextualise the personal trajectories and experiences of many Sri Lankan domestic migrant workers residing in Beirut outside their employers' homes, I provide the following case study that was deleted from the final UNDP report. The case study exemplifies the steps that often occur when Sri Lankan migrant women go abroad to Lebanon and make the decision to live outside their employers' homes and to engage in intimate sexual relationships. It is based on multiple

interviews and meetings that took place between 2006 and 2009 in Lebanon and Sri Lanka with Sureyka, a 39-year-old Sri Lankan migrant woman with 2.5 years experience in Lebanon. I spoke with Sureyka regarding her reasons to migrate, her migration experiences and her reasons to remain abroad. Below is a narrative of Sureyka's migration experience reconstructed from her account. Her story was told to me over the course of 2 weeks as we met in the evenings in Beirut after her work day. Although I focus on one woman's migration trajectory, Sureyka's story exemplifies the experiences of the more than forty-five Sri Lankan female freelance workers I interviewed regarding their intimate lives, desires and expressions of sexuality in Lebanon. What is presented here is one woman's story, which represents the significant part of migrant women's stories that the UNDP RCC neglected to tell. The UNDP RCC report on Asian migrant women's health and vulnerabilities to HIV purposefully left these portions of women's experiences out in the fear of exposing female migrant subjects who are not chaste and pure by the standards of normativity set in the report. These deletions demonstrate the extent to which the UNDP RCC's perspective on migrant women's sexuality is in keeping with that of the Sri Lankan government. The international agencies and civil society organisations use a similar biopolitical discourse that works to discipline the female migrant subject.

One Month Before Departure Abroad, 15 May 2007

It was late in the evening and 39-year-old Sureyka—at her home outside Colombo, Sri Lanka—was thinking about her decision to go abroad for the first time to Beirut to work as a maid and nanny. She hoped that by going she would create a better economic future for her family. Her mother would take care of her two daughters, aged 15 and 17 years. For the past 12 years, Sureyka had worked as a seamstress and her husband had worked as a day labourer. But the work was irregular and their combined salaries of US\$6 a day were sometimes barely enough to cover the monthly costs of children's school fees, food, tea and milk, as well as her husband's allowance for arrack and occasional gambling. Sureyka's husband was sleeping now after a night of drinking and yet another argument between them over money. She thought about what a struggle life had been for so many years. She knew she must bear these hardships in life and quietly. Life abroad may be difficult too. She would miss her daughters, but held out hope for good luck and a benevolent employer. Sureyka had heard stories of married women in her situation going abroad and meeting men too; they moved to Lebanon and had the 'time of their lives'. But just the thought made her shy, though perhaps a little curious too.

Two Days Before her Departure, 13 June 2007

During the SLBFE pretraining sessions, Sureyka was instructed to stay focused on her work and her family. The following is Sureyka's retelling of what she was taught in the SLBFE training:

strates that the Sri Lankan
work and live in Lebanon
id protect one's health and
aining sessions made them
occurs while she is working
ould not act to fulfill an
mselves through thought
e the subjects' resistance to
eir willingness to act upon
the good of her family and
on her work, which is also

o instil in women a desire
me and to continue to enjoy
al pleasure. It also aims to
re moral and chaste, similar
l a film entitled 'Maid and
depicts the situation and
t experiences lived within
ion.³ However, the image
gularly one of the dutiful
back home, or of women
lankan women, aged 18 to 25,
ries for her children and
nds remittances home to
daughter to support her
husband is unable to get
ng sexually and physically
who pass in front of the
le bodies. Although the
enforce the human rights
m is women's individual
ire and choose to practice

es of many Sri Lankan
heir employers' homes.
the final UNDP report.
hen Sri Lankan migrant
outside their employers'
It is based on multiple

You must work hard, be patient, remember why you have come . . . Remember that there are no social security or retirement structures in place for you . . . You must work and save now . . . Prepare your family for your departure . . . Make sure your husband and children are taken care of in your absence . . . Once you are away your loneliness will be your burden. However, you must not stray. You must concentrate on your work. If you feel sexual desire you must distract yourself, sew, think of your family, and so forth . . . If your *baba* [the male employer] makes sexual advances toward you, you must avert your eyes, and if he persists, above all do not let him penetrate you . . . Finally, know that your employer is required to pay USD170 per month. Complain to your hiring agent and embassy if he/she does not do so.

Eighteen Months Later, 13 December 2008

Sureyka was working in a house in Beirut. She was not pleased with the situation. Usually she worked from five in the morning until eleven at night, sweeping, cleaning, scrubbing, polishing, cooking, preparing meals, cleaning up after meals. Her hands ached and her back hurt. She had had no days off and the pay did not always come in, or not on time. Upon her arrival, her *madame* had confiscated all her clothes, including the new emerald green dress she had purchased especially for her trip abroad; in exchange, her *madame* gave her an oversized, previously used navy blue maid's uniform to wear every day. The other morning when Sureyka was fixing her hair and putting on lipstick, her *madame* told her that there was no need to do so as there was no one whom she needed to get dressed up for. She felt so ashamed. Although she would never tell her *madame*, the *baba* (the *madame's* husband) did sexually proposition her, but had left her alone after Sureyka had refused his advances. In actuality, Sureyka was alone most of the time and missed Sri Lanka bitterly. She cried at night, but quietly so that no one could hear. She thought:

Is this what my life will be? Is this how I will die—working like an animal in someone else's house, or will I return to my life in Sri Lanka with little hope of ever improving my situation and that of my daughters?

A week later, Sureyka learnt from Rajesh, the Indian male gardener, speaking to her in hushed tones so that their employers could not hear, that she could earn higher wages outside and have more free time to meet others. She decided she would make a plan to escape from the house so that she could earn US\$300–800 per month compared with the US\$170 she was earning currently. Sureyka was also curious about these 'others' and about Rajesh too.

Six Months Later, 13 June 2009

Sureyka had 'jumped'/run from her employer's home. Rajesh helped her escape, offered to share his apartment, found work for her and was helping her with expenses. He wanted her to be his 'wife' and she accepted. After working in the day, she spent her free time with her 'husband' or in the homes of other migrants in a similar situation to her own. They drank whiskey and beer and listened to music and danced. She had more money and freedom than she had ever had in her life. She was

enjoying the pleasures of a sexual life and, being so far from Sri Lanka, she had little fear of her family back home finding out. She still remitted the required sum back to her mother of US\$100 per month so the children were taken care of. In fact, the longing for her family began to fade. Nonetheless, she knew she was in a precarious situation. Living illegally away from her Lebanese sponsor, Sureyka was taking great risks. Everyone knows of women being questioned by the police, detained and deported. Sureyka also had to be cautious about who she allowed into her life. The week before, a woman from Colombo near her apartment was shaken up and robbed by a new boyfriend. Two weeks earlier, a woman had all her savings and passport stolen. There were no officials or police to call for help when that sort of thing happened. Anything could happen where they lived. But, despite the difficulties, Sureyka described her experience as one of 'women finally having the time of their lives'.

Analysis

Sureyka's story makes it evident that migrant women are desiring subjects. Sureyka initially desired to migrate for a better economic future for her family. She was also curious about and aware of the potential for different sorts of intimate relationships abroad. Once abroad, she sought pleasure by creating free time and innovative relationships with men. However, her desire for intimacy propelled her to move outside of the sphere of surveillance of the Sri Lankan State and risk the uncertainty of her illegal position. Although the desires and actions of migrant women are apparent in the stories and practices of women such as Sureyka, the Sri Lankan State, in collaboration with civil society organisations such as the UNDP RCC, neither acknowledges the possibility that migrant women may move away to fulfil a desire for intimate relationships nor admits that such putatively transgressive relationships take place abroad. Rather, the intimate relationships that Sureyka and others engage in are routinely silenced. This unwillingness to acknowledge women's sexuality and sexual desires while overseas continues to leave many migrant women unprotected and disqualifies them from the economic benefits and social acceptance that migrants who practice mononormative heterosexual behaviours receive.

Conclusion

The present paper has highlighted the manner in which sexuality is disciplined by state and extrastate institutions in a manner that normalises and naturalises monogamous heterosexuality, marriage, family and biological reproduction. Those people who deviate from the norm are subject to marginalisation and silencing in official policy. Assessing the UNDP RCC's project in relationship to Sri Lankan female migrants who transgress normative expectations highlights how institutions operate to promote and repress certain sexualities, images, desires and stereotypes (see Minter 1993). Implicit moral assumptions ignore the agency of women's practices that have to do with

desiring sex and forms of sexuality outside monogamous marriage. The witting and unwitting failure of organisations such as the UNDP RCC to prevent so-called transgressive women's voices proliferates the stereotypes of migrant women as either dutiful female family members or victims—with the Middle Eastern employer or state inevitably the victimiser. A more critical grasp of sexuality may enable a more inclusive and accurate portrayal of migrant women's practices and desires.

The UNDP RCC advocates the silencing of particular migrant sexual practices and desires out of a stated pragmatic fear that if the actions and desires are known, the response by government and employers will be to try to further curtail the movement, work and lives of female migrant workers. As matters stand now, my research shows that government bodies and employers already control the mobility of female domestic migrant workers in Lebanon out of a stated fear that they will, for example, 'find boyfriends', 'get involved with men that will take advantage of them' or 'become pregnant'. Further research may explore the sense in which oppression and exploitation of migrant women are tied not only to gender, class, racial stereotypes and practices (Pratt 2005; Silvey 2004; Yeoh 2004), but also to assumptions regarding sexual identity and practice, such as monogamy and the related concepts of the sacrificing and chaste mother, daughter and wife. As the analysis of the editing of the UNDP RCC report demonstrated, reinforcing an image of domestic migrant women as self-sacrificing and non-hedonistic leaves women's experiences outside these normative assumptions often unrecognised and unprotected by the state.

It has been well documented in the media and international organisations' reports (Human Rights Watch 2007; Jureidini 2004; UNDP 2009) that some Sri Lankan migrant women do experience sexual harassment and rape while working abroad. I do not wish to diminish the problem of sexual exploitation, but to suggest that women's sexual agency, desires and practices have been ignored. As research and reports focus solely on exploitation, they render invisible the manner in which women are also active sexual subjects who desire intimate and sexual relationships. This explains why they remigrate and want to remain abroad. Yet, their intimate relationships and sexual lives continue to remain outside the ambit and protection of the law. Living away from one's employer without their consent is still considered illegal in Lebanon, polyamorous relationships are considered deviant and legal marriages for female migrant workers outside their home countries are difficult to obtain.

Despite the fact that Sri Lankan women are well aware that they are in a precarious position in relation to the state in the absence of laws to protect them, as well as being vulnerable to exploitation and sexual abuse, they continue to enjoy intimate and sexual lives while abroad. And while their stories of enjoyment may pale in the face of women's bodies that have been abused, raped and killed, the silencing of their stories further constrains women's desires, practices and agency. Manalansan (2006, p. 236) proposes that our analysis needs to go beyond a labouring gendered agent and highlight a desiring and pleasure-seeking migrant subject. Female sexuality in

migration situations is the site of ideological and material struggles that shape the impetus to migrate and influence the manner of settlement and assimilation.

Although research makes clear the difficulties that Sri Lankan women face with regard to their intimate and sexual lives in Lebanon (Jureidini 2004; Moukarbel 2009), the question remains as to how state and extrastate agencies should address these issues, given that the nexus between sexuality and female domestic migrant workers is a sensitive one. States and extrastate actors fear negative repercussions for themselves as well as for their domestic migrant workers if they discuss sexuality frankly. On their part, migrant workers may support the need for silence on the issues because, when abroad, they are labelled 'loose' and 'sexually tainted', and when they return to Sri Lanka they are afraid to discuss their actual lived intimate experiences while abroad. But their inability to turn to the state for acknowledgement and protection renders their position even more precarious.

The reality is that Sri Lankan women migrants are highly vulnerable and their intimate needs are rarely recognised or protected while abroad. If they experience sexual abuse, rape or maltreatment within an intimate partnership while abroad, few instances are brought to court and even fewer cases end in prosecutions (UNDP 2009). Sri Lankan domestic migrant workers' human relationships and sexual partnerships are affected on a day-to-day basis as they manage what information they disclose about themselves with people they come into contact with in Sri Lanka and Lebanon. They fear stories about their intimate and sexual experiences—experiences that help them manage years of separation and loneliness—will reach others who will try to label them as immoral and unchaste in the eyes of family and the wider community.

States and non-state actors—not easily separated from the state (Mountz 2003)—shape which relationships they recognise as legitimate or proper within their boundaries and which can legitimately cross the borders of the state (Nash 2005). In thus dictating moral norms of intimacy, the state and non-state operations of power operate to fragment identities as a way that denies humanity to the person as a moral agent.

Acknowledgements

The author thanks Mark Johnson, Claudia Liebelt and Pnina Werbner for their invitation to the conference 'Diasporic Encounters, Sacred Journeys Gendered Migrants, Sociality and Religious Imagination' (Keele University, 2009), for which this paper was written. The author thanks Mark Johnson, Pnina Werbner and the anonymous reviewers for excellent and thought-provoking suggestions and comments.

Notes

- [1] The people involved in the editing of the report will remain anonymous. Rather than implicating individuals, I want this discussion to serve as a constructive critique and a way of

opening up further dialogue of how best to address the nexus between sexuality and female domestic labour migration. Working as a researcher for the UNDP RCC HIV Project in 2009, I want this to serve as a critique and a self-reflection for my own work as well. A consideration of power and agency within large international agencies is an important topic in its own right but beyond the scope of the present essay, the focus of which is on the assumptions and consequences of normative discourses in denying and constraining migrant women's sexual subjectivities.

- [2] Caritas Internationalis claims to have a budget of US\$5.5 billion and a staff of 440,000 operating in more than 165 countries. For the official view, see http://www.caritas.org/about/Caritas_Internationalis.html (accessed August 2009).
- [3] The US\$25,000 project was funded in partnership with the UN's Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the ILO, The Netherlands Embassy and Caritas. The movie has been shown internationally at film festivals and universities, as well as at national workshops intended to raise awareness among Lebanese nationals of the plight of migrant workers within the country. In addition, clips of the film are available on YouTube (Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3rY91LCyY4s>, accessed 12 September 2010) and the national and international press continues to cover the film (conversation with C. Mansour, film director, 2009).

References

- Alexander, J. (2005) *Pedagogies of Crossing Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory and the Sacred*, Duke University Press, Durham.
- Cats Eye (2010) *Can a man be a minister of women's empowerment?*, Online blog post <http://catseyesrilanka.wordpress.com/2010/05/09/can-a-man-be-the-minister-of-women's-empowerment/>, accessed 15 September 2010.
- de Alwis, M. (1996) 'Sexuality in the field of vision: The discursive clothing of the Sigiriya frescoes in *Embodied Violence: Communalising Women's Sexuality in South Asia*, eds K. Jayawardena & M. de Alwis, Zed Press, London & New Jersey, pp. 89–112.
- De Silva, H. (2007) 'The State of the Sri Lankan Economy', talk given at UNDP RCC, Colombo, Sri Lanka, September 2007. Unpublished material.
- Foucault, M. (1977) *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan. Pantheon Books, New York, NY.
- Gamburd, M. (2000) *The Kitchen Spoon's Handle, Transnationalism and Sri Lanka's Migrant Housemaids*, Cornell University Press, Cornell.
- Hubbard, P. (1998) 'Sexuality, immorality and the city: Red-light districts and the marginalization of street prostitutes', *Gender, Place and Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 55–72.
- Human Rights Watch (2007) *Sri Lanka/Middle East Exported and Exposed: Abuses Against Sri Lankan Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Lebanon and the United Arab Emirates*, Human Rights Watch, New York.
- International Labour Organization (2004) *Domestic Migrant Workers in the Middle East*, United Nations, Geneva.
- International Labour Organization (2006) *The Awareness Raising Workshop on the Situation of Women Migrant Domestic Workers in Lebanon*, United Nations, Geneva.
- Jureidini, R. (2004) *Women Domestic Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, International Labour Organization, Geneva.
- Jureidini, R. (2006) 'Sexuality and the servant: An exploration of Arab images of the sexuality of domestic maids living in the household', in *Sexuality in the Arab World*, eds S. Khalaf & J. Gagnon, SAQI, London, pp. 130–51.

- Luibheid, E. (2009) 'Sexuality and the state', lecture in the Department of Geography, National University of Singapore, 19 September 2009. Unpublished material.
- Lynch, C. (1999) 'The "good girls" of Sri Lankan modernity: Moral orders of nationalism and capitalism', *Identities*, vol. 6, pp. 55–89.
- Manalansan, M. (2006) 'Queer intersections: Sexuality and gender in migration studies', *International Migration Review*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 224–49.
- Mansour, C. (Producer), & Mansour, C. (Director). *Maid in Lebanon* [Motion picture]. Lebanon: Forward Productions.
- Minter, S. (1993) 'Sodomy and public morality offenses under U.S. immigration law', *Cornell International Law Journal*, vol. 26, pp. 771–818.
- Moukarbel, N. (2009) 'Not allowed to love? Sri Lankan maids in Lebanon', *Mobilities*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 329–47.
- Mountz, A. (2003) 'Human smuggling, the transnational imaginary, and everyday geographies of the nation-state', *Antipode*, vol. 35, no. 3, pp. 622–42.
- Nash, C. (2005) 'Geographies of relatedness', *Transactions of the Institute of the British Geographers*, vol. 30, no. 4, pp. 449–62.
- Povinelli, E. (2006) *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*, Duke Press, Durham.
- Pratt, G. (2005) 'Abandoned women and spaces of the exception', *Antipode*, no. 37, pp. 1052–77.
- Sabban, R. (2004) *Women Domestic Migrant Workers in Lebanon*, International Labour Organization, Geneva.
- Silvey, R. (2004) 'Power, difference and mobility: Feminist advances in migration studies', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 28, no. 4, pp. 490–506.
- Sri Lankan Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) (2005) 'Workshop for women migrating for foreign jobs and their husbands/guardians: Overcoming challenges of life through good sexual health and a happy life', SLBFE, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Unpublished material.
- Sriskandarajah, D. (2002) 'The migration–development nexus: Sri Lanka case study', *International Migration*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 283–307.
- Tambiah, Y. (2005) 'Turncoat bodies: Sexuality and sex work under militarization in Sri Lanka', *Gender and Society*, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 243–61.
- Tyner, J. A. (2004) *Made in the Philippines, Gendered Discourses and the Making of Migrants*, Routledge Curzon, New York.
- United Nations (1948) 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 16, Line 3'. Available at: <http://www.un.org/Overview/rights.html>, accessed 15 September 2010.
- United Nations Development Program (2008) *HIV Vulnerabilities Faced by Women Migrants: From Asia to the Arab States, Executive Summary*. Available at: http://www2.undprcc.lk/resource_centre/pub_pdfs/P1097.pdf, accessed 1 October 2008.
- United Nations Development Program (2009) *HIV Vulnerabilities Faced by Women Migrants: From Asia to the Arab States*, United Nations, Geneva.
- Yeoh, B. S. A. (2004) 'Transnational mobilities and challenges', in *A Companion to Feminist Geography*, eds L. Nelson & J. Saeger, Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 60–73.

female migrant's responsibility to manage and protect her sexual being. According to the SLBFE training sessions, it is the migrant woman who is responsible for what occurs while she is abroad. She must control herself as well as the man making sexual advances towards her. There are no state interventions to protect her. Although in practical terms the Sri Lankan State has limited jurisdiction over the spaces in which domestic migrant workers live and work while abroad, perhaps a greater recognition of the difficult issues women face in regard to access to and control over intimacy may allow for a transformation in the normative thinking that women should merely take on the burdens they face and remain silent.

The Sri Lankan government aims directly to reinforce women's connections to their nuclear families through mandatory predeparture training sessions provided by the SLBFE. The SLBFE is the branch of the government that has the most direct contact with domestic migrant workers. It currently operates thirty-four training centres throughout the island and runs training programmes of 12 or 13 days to prepare female migrant workers departing for the Arab States. Such programmes typically consist of instruction on the use of household cleaning and cooking equipment, care of children and the elderly, banking and financial matters, multicultural communication, basic Arabic and health. However, the last day of training also focuses on sexual health, sexuality and HIV while re-emphasising women's connection to family and the importance of sending remittances home (SLBFE 2005). The training session on sexuality and sexual health introduced in 2005 is entitled 'Workshop for women migrating for foreign jobs and for their husbands/guardians: Overcoming challenges of life through good sexual health and a happy life'. Although just one example of state intervention, my research shows that it is exemplary of the SLBFE normative discourse regarding sexuality and the female migrant worker and, more broadly, of the Sri Lankan State. Nonetheless, the action to create the additional focus on HIV and sexual health in the curriculum was a novel step in trying to address the sexual and intimate lives of domestic migrant workers.

The five sessions within the last day of the training are entitled 'Let's achieve the challenges of sexual health during migrant work', 'Let's promote the sexual wellbeing of the family', 'Let's be responsible in our sexual behaviour', 'Let's protect our children' and 'Let's save money and enjoy the happiness of life'. Women are to attend with their husbands or guardians if they are unmarried. The training manual is accompanied by ten 5-minute video clips that present scenarios on sexual health, sexual advancements and sexual harassment. That the Sri Lankan State wants good, healthy citizens to go abroad and remit satisfactorily comes through in the manual.

In addition to providing information on HIV, the training emphasises that women should be in control of their sexual desires and any sexual acts, including harassment, that may take place. Not only are they responsible for their own actions, but also for those of others who may try to proposition or sexually abuse them. In controlling themselves and the situation, they should remain calm and in control of their emotions because their demeanour and reactions work to control the actions of others. Women should manage their loneliness and sexual desire through, for



music concert in Beirut, UNDP Report, but with a notable and discomforting element is that the identities of the women for consent of the women for

SLBFE, the branch of the government that has the most direct contact with domestic migrant workers; and the Caritas Lebanon, a Catholic organisation that assists migrants closely with Lebanese women. Caritas at the Sri Lankan Embassy in Beirut is part of Caritas Lebanon, which is run by the Catholic Church. The moralistic discourse of Catholic morality permeates its discourse in the Sri Lankan State.

Migration to Lebanon, a Sri Lankan female national in the Middle East. This is the predeparture training, the sexualised space in which it is the Sri Lankan