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Meet me in the Islands: Sun Sand and Transactional Sex in Caribbean Discourse

Paula E. Morgan Dr

The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, Paula.Morgan@sta.uwi.edu

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Tourism is pivotal to Caribbean nation states. For some islands, structural adjustment, spiralling inflation, currency devaluations, trade liberalization and privatization have combined to make tourism the backbone of their economies. This industry has received strong government support including intense marketing campaigns which slickly package and represent the nations in contradictory and paradoxical fashions. The state becomes complicit in private sector transnational initiatives which parade a reprehensible history served up as glitzy *plantation* inns, featuring gracious *colonial* architecture, staffed by *friendly natives* who live to serve—all made ready for a new generation of adventurers in search of contemporary El Dorados. The Caribbean has been figured in literary, state, touristic and advertising discourses as a dream space getaway, in which one can shed inhibitions and social accretions for a therapeutic dose of sun and sand. Transactional sex has become the third element of the vacation which promises to heal, restore and put the alienated back in touch with the senses.

This essay explores the deployment of fantasy, ideology, sensuality and desire in the Caribbean tourist economy. Using as its primary material samples of fictional, state and advertising discourses, I argue that the respective strengths and vulnerabilities of first and third world populations propel the creation of “a place for us” - transactional sex sites. Diverse, complex and subtly nuanced transactional sex practices are variously linked to ideologies and images which undergirded the historical encounter between worlds and to contemporary divergent transnational gender norms and interactions. Finally the essay probes the discursive representations for cues on how these myriad factors drill down into the material conditions of the everyday lives of the players. It interrogates conceptual notions of the empowerment of sex trade workers through their deployment of affective skills to derive financial gain.

A corollary of the centrality of tourism to Caribbean island economies has been the informal trade in sex and related services. Disparities between first and third world development and power relations play themselves out on the “most intimate of spatial scapes, the body” (Mullings 1999, 56). This multifaceted body/contact trade, which incorporates the offerings of escort services and massage parlours, supports a range of related trades including pimping and procurement, transportation, housing and accommodation and provision of supplies. Mullings (1999, 55) states that between 1980 and 1984, Jamaica’s tourist sector had become “by far the largest and most important contributor to GDP in the country.” For some Caribbean nations, tourism “accounts for up to 70 per cent of the national income.” The Caribbean occupies a place of global primacy in terms of the significance of tourism to “employment, hard currency, earnings and economic growth” (Kempadoo 2004, 115-116). Mullings traces a direct link between the islands’ official tourist strategies—development of niche markets, the prototype of all-inclusive holidays—and the less overtly welcome sex tourism industry:

... the growth of the sex tourism in Jamaica reflects the power of increasingly globalized flows; of capital, policy directives and information to draw places which were once “off the map” into ever closer networks of commodified trade and exchange....Twenty years of structural adjustment have seen the liberalization, privatization, and devaluation of the Jamaican economy as well as the simultaneous loss of commodity markets, as the producers of bauxite and bananas have become the victims of falling prices or regional agreements to limit preferential markets. As tourism has become the number one foreign exchange earner, an increasing number of women, men and children have entered this industry in search of opportunities to generate income at wages that more realistically reflect the current cost of living than the existing minimum wage (1999, 55).

Sex tourism as a multi-million dollar industry which has spread its tentacles into diverse state, private and familial organizations has proven extremely difficult to pinpoint for analysis and even more difficult to eradicate. It is a major subset of a fluid series of transactional sex arrangements which are defined by Kempadoo (2006) as “sexual-economic relationships that are not considered by the actors to be prostitution, but are not based exclusively on intimacy or love” (quoted in Reddock & Roberts xvi). Based on Mullings (2000), the UN Report on Sex Tourism and HIV/AIDS identified the Caribbean sex industry as diversified with countries developing specific products which appeal to differential market segments:

For example, Jamaica has a specialized place for the consumers who seek the services of *Rent a Dreads*: black men with Rastafarian dreadlocks; Barbados and Tobago for *Beach Boys*: Black men with well developed bodies, and the Dominican Republic for *Sanky Pankies*: Latin men offering hetero and bisexual services and fair skinned women (94).

Given the fact that in the majority of Caribbean nation states, sex tourism is illegal but widely tolerated if not accepted, it is difficult and arguably even undesirable to police and clamp down on the pleasures of consenting adults.

Cabezas (1999) in *Economies of Desire* focuses on the ingenuity of needy individuals who subvert the parameters of global economic structures that benefit the transnational tourist industry and in the process deploy a diverse range of skills for affective and personal gain. This approach focuses on the agency of these service providers and seeks to subvert discourses of stigmatization and blame. Calling for a more “nuanced” theoretical lens for understanding this phenomenon, Cabezas takes issue with the application of the term sex worker to the local service providers in transactional exchanges as being a reductive and inadequate descriptor in view of the combination of “pleasure, intimacy and monetary arrangements” they facilitate (21). She argues, “Affective relationships both complement the accumulation of capital and siphon profits from state and transnational enterprises. Intimacy functions as countereconomy” (17). Chris and Hall offer a perspective of sex tourism as the interaction between two sets of liminal peoples “separated from the mainstream of society through a process of fragmentation derived from the Industrial Revolution” (22). Although Hall acknowledges that the tourist is enacting a “socially sanctioned and economically empowered marginality while the prostitute is stigmatised” (1), his analysis which focuses on the social symbology of mutual liminality, pays insufficient attention to the persistent underlying reality. What if on the supply end, those adults tend to be needy, impoverished, exploited, oppressed by the mechanisms of the sex trade, vulnerable to violence, disease, abuse, targets for drug addiction and early mortality (Kempadoo 2004). The seamier side of sex tourism aggressively rears its head in the market for younger and younger targets, especially as HIV/AIDS continues to take its toll and myths circulate on the curative powers of consuming a virgin.

HISTORICAL CONTINUITIES

Since the beginning of recorded history and far more so since the beginning of European imperialism, travel and cross-ethnic intimate encounters have been intimately tied to global economic impulses. Sexual characteristics and practices were crucial to colonial construction of the native as Other. As Kempadoo notes, “Polygamy, tribadery, sodomy, rape, adultery,

prostitution, incest, bestiality, pederasty and sexual profligacy as well as a perceived lack of modesty were taken as prime indicators of inferiority” (2004, 30). The *barbarism* of these practices became a major plank of the theorization of racial difference and primitivism which undergirded the mass enforced labour migrations to fuel the enterprise of the Indies. Imperialism’s impulse to conquer was directed towards the inner space of the native as surely as it was directed towards the external geo-political landscape. The hot, muggy climate was itself held to bring super excitement to the sexual organs (Kempadoo 2004). From inception, the languaging and imaging of empire was grounded on metaphors of sexual pursuit and conquest (Mohammed 2010). And interracial sexual interconnection in every imaginable way, shape and form became pivotal to the imperial endeavour as Empire provided infinite possibilities for Europe to slake off its dammed up libido. Robert Young concludes his study of colonial desire with this statement:

The history of the meanings of the word “commerce” includes the exchange both of merchandise and bodies in sexual intercourse. It was therefore wholly appropriate that sexual exchange, and its miscegenated product, which captures the violent, antagonistic power relations of sexual and cultural diffusion, should become the dominant paradigm through which the passionate economic and political trafficking of colonialism was conceived (1995, 182).

The historical underpinnings of the global sex trade are clear. Its ingredients included, on the one hand, a master race with economic prowess and political ascendancy and, on the other, a servant race which was economically and politically subordinate. On the one hand, there was an obsessive desire simultaneously to exoticize and denigrate, as well as to consume the vitality and sexual energies of the racialized Other; on the other hand, there was both resistance to possession and an established practice of using interracial sexual liaisons for intergenerational skin lightening and upward social mobility. Quite apart from servicing white masters and overlords, many a slave woman provided productive, reproductive and sex labour for the slave plantation. There is a direct path linking the sexual dynamics of the slave plantation to those surrounding Caribbean military occupations of the 1940s and to the contemporary sex trade.

Advertising scripts and images accentuate the manner in which the contemporary tourist industry draws on imperial representations and discourses. Symbolic resonances and cultural cartographies of the colonial past are constantly being evoked in the contemporary tourist industry to market the attractiveness of the islands as destinations. These advertisements can be read as ideological collusions between Caribbean state agencies, private industrialists and international hoteliers, all in the interest of marketing the paradise of Western imaginaries:



FIGURE 1 Barrelling into Paradise

Figure 1 demonstrates an exquisitely set table on a beach emerging out of the mouth of a barrel which is suggestive of the rum trade that was deeply implicated in the imperial encounter as a major product of the sugar industry. Rum served as a significant plantation commodity in a slaves-for-rum exchange and as its primary drug to anesthetize the pain of dislocation and back-breaking labour. The strong lines and brown colour of the barrel form a stark contrast to the beautiful blue beach scene and table impeccably set in pristine white for a feast. The scene suggests correlations between the grandeur, wealth and privilege ascribed to the master of the past and the mastery accorded to the contemporary visitor to paradise. There is no life in the photograph, not even a passing bird. Indeed this lack serves as a lure to the target audience to take their place in order to enliven the scene. The touristic gaze suggests avid consumption of the landscape and products and simultaneous distancing and objectification of the servitors. The servants who laid the impeccably set table decked for excessive consumption are as conspicuously absent as were their enslaved ancestors who were accorded no presence or humanity outside of their usefulness to the master race and who, to borrow Zora Neale Hurston's phrase, served as eyeless, earless, mouthless conveniences (1).

The mouth of the barrel offers a bird's eye view of the perfect environment with elegant palm trees and bright blue sea and sky. The palm tree, which made its initial appearance in Western discourse in the Seventeenth Century accounts of Buccaneers as a tropical botanical wonder and source of highly sought after palm wine, appears here in its transmuted form as an essentialized symbol of the romanticized exoticism of the island landscape (Sheller 2003, 40-41). The barrel with its strong lines is suggestive too of a transition from a dark confined space (a birthing passage) into a bright and beautiful light-filled heady existence. And, of course, there is the inevitable ocean which beckons travellers. The lusts which fuelled empire for mythical golden El Dorados, sun-drenched beaches, cobalt seas, willing servitors, tropical languor and exotic intoxicants are stirred anew into the stimulating brew offered to today's visitor to paradise.

A PLACE FOR US

A salient contemporary issue emerges: Why at this particular stage of the globalization project are increasing numbers travelling long distances to buy sex and what makes the transactional sex encounter sweeter there than here? Brenner, with her particular focus on women involved in the transactional sex industry, identifies common preconditions of global sex sites:

Sex tourist destinations do, however, share certain characteristics: women's poverty in these spaces in the developing world leads to their participation in the sex tourist industry...second, global economic inequities have resulted in more sex-tourist destinations in the developing world and, finally, inexpensive travel opportunities have permitted more- and less-moneyed tourists to circulate the globe (Brennan 2004, 28).

The tourist economies are predicated on the host nation's ability to create a lavish fantasy paradise world to pamper and to pander to tourists. There are a diverse range of encounters, from the one-night stand to the long-term "romantic" liaisons with repeat visits in which the sex provider may be invited to visit the long-term lovers in the metropolitan nation. The common denominator in all of these encounters is that for the duration of the encounter and even beyond, the sex worker/"romantic interest" is afforded escape from poverty, boredom, lack, grime and squalor and gains access to a glitzy paradisiacal leisure world, the passport to which is money. Affiliation with the tourist partner wins status and prestige among friends. All parties entering into the encounter bring powerful and enduring assumptions about what the engagement will yield.

Place—both metropolitan and island—is very significant in this transnational, transactional commoditization of sex and love. Convergences and divergences of the first world and third world interface around pleasure industries clearly indicate complex transnational notions of place. Indeed a number of different terms have emerged to identify the way in which tourists relate to sex sites. Some self-identify as "mongers", and term traveling for sex as "mongering". This apparently derives from the word "warmonger" or "whoremonger". For the long-term dweller or immigrant, the term "sexpat" is sometimes applied to persons whose reasons for migration include the availability of cheap sex. On the supply side, since maintaining these long-distance relationships is significant in terms of encouraging the flow of remittances, visits or even migration to the metropolitan space, persons who do not leave the island participate in complex transnational social networks in which gender, race and nationality are mutually constituted and performed in fluid ways.

What do various discourses reveal about how island and metropolitan places are variously imagined and experienced? In state discourse, tourism is proffered as an opportunity to speed up the island nation's engagement in the global economy in a developmental thrust which may have risks, but which can be expected to yield significant opportunities for entertainers, hotel workers and small entrepreneurs. Selling place is a highly competitive concern predicated on the capacity to serve up warm and welcoming exoticism. Consider for example the description of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival on the official tourist board website:

Often described as the world's greatest street festival, Trinidad and Tobago Carnival is an event to behold. From the colourful, resplendent costumes shimmering in the tropical sun, to the hypnotizing beats of Soca music and the unique, exotic sounds of our indigenous instrument, the steel pan—the only musical instrument invented in the

20th century, Carnival 2009 promises to be an event of a lifetime.
<http://www.gotrinidadandtobago.com/impressum/media-gallery/videos/#TB_inline?height=455&width=611&inlineId=video2>

The description locates the Carnival in a place of global primacy—not frivolously so since Trinidad and Tobago-derived carnivals are now popular in major metropolitan cities in North America and Europe, attracting millions of participants annually (Guilbaut 2005).¹ The brief paragraph suffers from adjectival overload—greatest, colourful, resplendent, tropical, hypnotizing, unique, exotic, indigenous, musical—which promises a primitive experience beyond measure and sensual overload in terms of colour, sound, touch and kinetics. The graphics amply display the exoticized sensuality of the natives. The sex worker cum bartender, swimming instructor and tour guide often provides the human touch to the sensory experience beyond compare.

A central irony is that the marketing of tourism in the state discourse undergirds the thriving range of industries with informal sex tourism as a major sideline. Yet the latter is defined by the said government agencies as a form of harassment which locals are imposing on tourists and which, therefore, requires a greater level of policing and legal intervention. Consider, for example, the statement by the Jamaican Minister of Tourism in his 1998 budget address:

The truth is that the type of harassment that has given us the reputation that we have has nothing to do with the socio-economic situation in the country—it has to do with a type of Jamaican who has no intention of earning an honest day’s pay for an honest day’s work but is much more comfortable preying upon others—be they visitors or Jamaicans—for a livelihood (Quoted in Mullins, 65).

In the process, the state denies any connection between the tourist industry and the sex industry and certainly does not entertain the possibility that growth in the latter could conceivably be fuelling growth in the former. The state discourse also disavows any link between its own and broader global economic processes and any practitioner’s selection of sex tourism as a means of earning a viable living. Indeed, the state representative quoted here takes recourse to old hegemonic discourses in which he takes advantage of his position of privilege to articulate the truth to an audience which he constructs as a similarly empowered public: to blame an impoverished, degenerate, indecent and unacceptable fringe element for their recourse to an unsavoury profession. Focus is thus shifted away from need, economic policies and inequitable practices to ascriptions of the laziness and exploitative orientation of the individual. Moreover, the implication of a moralistic state voice of censure sets up a them-against-us divide which decries the manner in which *their* contagion is besmirching *our* otherwise impeccable reputation.

Yet, in islands which are heavily dependent on tourism, children are schooled in the subtle modes of representing their island *paradises* from infancy. A startling example of the shaping of new generations of young Caribbean servitors for the tourist industry is reflected in this poem and illustrations inscribed on the walls of Road Primary School on the island of Anguilla. The poem reads as follows:

¹ Jocelyne Guilbault in “Making and Selling Culture: Calypso Music During Carnival” indicates that carnival attracts between 30,000 to 40,000 visitors in Trinidad alone. For Caribana in Toronto, the figure climbs to one million visitors and in Notting Hill UK, it draws some two million persons over its two-day duration. (141)

Hello Tourists
The pupils and staff of
Road Primary Schools
Welcome all Tourists
To Anguilla

You have started
Your dream vacation
Relax, unwind
Free your mind

We are here to serve you!
We are very
friendly people
We love you
We love you

Eat at our restaurants
And enjoy our
Authentic cuisine

Environment is fundamental
Our population
Is approx. 10, 000 people
The most northern
Leeward island

Hey don't forget
To visit
our offshore Cays

Don't forget our island
Is your island
once again
thanks for coming

Goodbye Tourist
Your dream is over
Back to reality

We hope you enjoyed your stay
Do dream again
And visit us again
We miss you

Keep our beaches clean

The poem reflects both an educational thrust and a youthful grasp of the nation's utter dependency on tourism; hence, the significance of socializing the young at a tender age into a service orientation which will ensure the ongoing prosperity of that industry. What does it

take to raise up successive generations of friendly doormen, chamber maids and tour guides? The children encapsulate the tourist experience as a dream mutually constituted by the tourist and “native” in which each is required to play a specific role. The tourists constructed by implication as tense, weary, uptight and in need of recreation are invited not simply to “relax and unwind free your mind” but to do so by allowing themselves to be seduced into a collective fantasy which becomes possible because of the entrancing tropical landscape.

Reversing the traditional polarity of the haves and the have nots, the collective servant—the persona of this deceptively simple poem—affirm dependency on tourism in the same breath in which they assert their power to grant participation in the racialized mass fantasy. The dream offers the tourist a grandiose location, ascendancy and pampering by a group of islanders who by their smiles, warmth, hospitality and love, cheerfully take their ordained place of subordination in the dreamscape. The innocent voice and tone of the poem barely mask the promise of sexual fantasy fulfilment:

We are here to serve you!
We are very
friendly people
We love you
We love you

The poem demonstrates understanding that care in the affective domain is highly significant for the encounter; indeed, it is integral to the package that tourists are pampered, petted and made to feel loved by a population which seems naturally inclined to be warm, loving and generous.

The power play which underlies the touristic encounter between peoples and worlds rises closest to the surface in the final stanza, the terse lines in which the collective persona aka dream weavers indicate in no uncertain terms—what we have the power to give we have the power to take away:

Goodbye tourist
your dream is over
back to reality.

The tourist site becomes a place of confluence of imagined communities; it represents the place where dreams can come true. Weary, lonely, stressed and overworked pleasure seekers can touch down in paradise for restoration and recreation facilitated by servant populations whose greatest purpose is to fulfil the fantasies and desires of all who can afford to pay for the privilege.

This essay turns now to the work of creative writers to analyse their fictional explorations of the dynamics at work in the complex and transglobal interchange which is playing itself out on the most intimate of spatial scapes—the body. It focuses on Olive Senior’s “Meditation on Yellow”, Louise Meriwether’s “A Happening in Barbados” and Oonya Kempadoo’s *Tide Running* to examine the complex range of desires, subject constructions and ideologies which come into play when fantasies, aspirations, needs and hopes collide in paradise.

Senior’s “Meditation on Yellow” locates the contemporary sex trade industry squarely within an historical framework with a focus on the imperial will to power which fuelled the confrontation between races in the early wave of globalization leading to the formation of modern Caribbean societies. The poem deals with successive migrations to the Caribbean in search of El Dorado and docile labouring bodies to power the imperial enterprise. Running as

a common thread through the diverse endeavours is the search for acquiescent sexualized bodies which would facilitate exoticized joinings. Hence, the implied author equates the lust for racial and sexual adventurism with a quest for compliant working bodies to power a system of inequitable economic relations. In the economy of that time, the dominant imperial thrust which has been gendered as male sought expression of its right of ascendancy by imposing its will to power on black women who were constrained to function as labouring bodies—producing often simultaneously productive labour, reproductive labour and sex work—all for the benefit of the master.

Senior, in crafting the links of the chain which bind today's labourers to the toiling foremothers, makes a significant shift. She deploys a generic ungendered protagonist who in a single voice speaks on behalf of oppressed people beginning with the indigenous Amerindian who happily welcomes the stranger:

we were peaceful then
child-like in the yellow dawn of our innocence

so in exchange for a string of islands
and two continents

you gave us a string of beads
and some hawk's bells (11)

The inequity of the exchange from inception, though rooted in economic imperatives, soon becomes more sexualized in nature. Senior points to the fact that the encounter between races and cultures was as much about dream, fantasy, greed, lust for wealth (yellow gold) and lust for the Other. The Other, of necessity, had to be objectified as inferior, but nevertheless rendered a worthy quest object of intense racialized desire. In this process, it is insufficient for the pursuer to distance the Other by objectification; it is imperative for the pursuer to engulf the Other by appropriating the native's energy, sensuality, and eruptive ungovernable primitivism. Paying no attention whatsoever to compelling and learned arguments against essentialism, Senior's poem asserts that from the inception of the encounter between races, Western man has discerned nebulous qualities in the inferior and the oppressed which he has ever since lusted after and which despite his best efforts to subdue and conquer he still cannot appropriate:

you cannot tear my song
from my throat

you cannot erase the memory
of my story

you cannot catch
my rhythm

you cannot comprehend
the magic (17)

This craving after an ungraspable essence has long been identified as a factor in cross-cultural sexual liaisons. This is the impulse which drives the husband in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Caribbean writers have characterized Western

men as compelled, sexually and representationally, to grasp after a feminized Other which they are incapable of appropriating.

Louise Meriwether's "A Happening in Barbados" demonstrates the complex range of transnational ideologies, motives and intents which can collide in paradise. Revenge for historical injustice emerges as a major theme of this narrative. An African American woman in search of a sexual encounter entices a crass, vengeful beach bum away from a rich young white heiress. The latter chose him as a companion the better to anger and frustrate her father with whom she is travelling. Well into the process of taking revenge on the white woman as representative of all white women who mate with black men, the unnamed first person narrator reneges because of the paradoxical realization that she is colluding with a man to hurt a sister.

Meriwether's narrative fleshes out a process described by Brennan (2004) in her anthropological study on the sex market. The latter indicates that the transactional sex encounter, in order to fulfil its fantasy quotient, must masquerade as a romantic courtship. The protagonist sets out to snag the attention of a desirable beach bum and does so by parading the beach dressed in tantalizing designer swimwear which sends signals of wealth, foreignness and sexual availability. In swift time, she attracts the attention of several men, young enough to be her sons, who patrol the beach seeking to sell their services to the highest bidder. Yet despite the precise intentionality of her initial move as expressed in the opening sentence: "The best way to pick up a Barbadian man I hoped was to walk alone down the beach" (302), the protagonist who set out to attract sexual services must nevertheless persuade herself that she is yielding to the seductions of an irresistible male. The encounter has to appear spontaneous and romantic and not merely transactional; hence, she simultaneously salivates over the youths and mourns their lost innocence, selects a catch and initiates a swift mating dance—casual brushing of the body, dalliances and should I should I not advances and retreats—to swiftly set the stage for the sexual encounter. "I got up to dance with Edwin. He had natural grace and was easy to follow. Our bodies found the rhythm and became one with it while our eyes locked in silent ancient combat, his pleading and mine teasing" (304). For the encounter to work its magic, it must masquerade as ancient rituals of courtship and romance.

The title foregrounds the significance of place. Barbados is one of the oldest and most established tourist destination sites in the region. Kempadoo notes that since the 1970s increasing numbers of Barbadian men have engaged in transactional sex strategies "to escape lower paying and demeaning occupations and as a form of resistance to the existing social, economic, racial, and sexual order" (119). The Barbados of this fictional happening is represented as inherently touristic, intoxicating, and resplendent in exquisite beauty and intensely polarized colour:

The crystal-blue sky rivalled the royal blue of the Caribbean for loveliness, and our *black bodies on the white sand* added to the *munificence of colours*. We ran into the sea like squealing children when the sudden raindrops came, then shivering on the sand under a makeshift tent of umbrella and damp towels waiting for the sun to reappear while nourishing ourselves with straight Barbadian rum" (my emphases, 302).

In this scenario, race—read blackness—is imbricated into the scenario as a natural element of the paradisiacal scene. The protagonist who earlier boasted a "tall *brown* frame" which she parades in order to entice, moments later self-identifies as *black* as a mark of solidarity with her newfound Barbadian playmates and as the natural enhancer of the vivid tropical landscape.

The practice of observing native bodies within the natural environment—at work to emphasize their load bearing power similar to beasts of burden, or scantily clad and at play to emphasize their sensuality—has been long established: “The tourist’s eager eyes seek out Caribbean bodies and especially black skin, for his viewing pleasure” (Sheller 159). Ironically, by virtue of skin colour, the African American protagonist asserts her right to belong far moreso than the white tourist and competitor for male attention who disrupts the paradisiacal “munificence of colors” with her deathlike visage and exfoliated redness: “a bony white woman—more peeling red than white, really looking like a giant cadaver in a loose fitting bathing suit—came out of the sea and walked up to us” (302). The fictional scenario is indicative of a strong competitive dynamic on the demand side of the interchange. Having found their men, women on the prowl manifest a strong sense of possession and willingness to fight over what is their own. In terms of the demand side of transactional sex, race binaries have collapsed. In both Merriwether’s and Oonya Kempadoo’s scenarios, the black American and wealthy black Trinidadians are similarly located in relation to their impoverished “local” providers.

For all of the players of “A Happening in Barbados” revenge is the order of the day. The crude island man Gregory of the “thick, rubbery lips, a scarcity of teeth, and a broad nose splattered like a pyramid across his face” (302) takes revenge for the outworking of historical injustices which have essentialized black males on the basis of phallic prowess and located them in such a subordinate position in the global economy that he, in his time, feels compelled to prostitute himself for a living. Revenge propels the protagonist who is irritated at the white girl’s easy familiarity and impulse to mask within the island social context an ongoing complicity with racist systems which keep African American women oppressed on the mainland. Ideological clashes which throw up shifting frames of identity construction and belonging based on gender and race complicate the process. As soon as she humiliates the girl by taking away her man, she berates herself for colluding with a black man against a sister. The white American takes revenge on the strictures of patriarchy which would control her mobility and police her sexuality. Trading on her father’s fear that she would run away, she has intercourse with a vulgar, abusive, black man in the hearing of her father who dares not discipline her. She plays with the myths of the prodigious sexual capacities of the black male and the fear of black male sexuality which was so intense that in the post-slavery American South a black man became a candidate for lynching for daring to gaze at a white woman.

New measures of gendered exploitation accompany the contemporary influx and demand for sex tourism, which currently engages service providers in numerous islands which are dependent on the tourist trade. The concourse in transnational sex, like the slave trade before it, is fed by a range of complex ideologies demonstrating the manner in which transnational ideologies circle in the Sargasso seas between nations and eras, only to entrap the very peoples who initially deployed them for their wealth and empowerment.

Western women freed from Victorian strictures and empowered by their access to education, profitable jobs and first world economic status are nevertheless seduced by ancient mythic notions of black sexual prowess. With bulging purses they come to the islands for leisure, a key dimension of which involves sex with the blackest and roughest and crudest men they can find. Mullings (1999) indicates in relation to Barbados and Jamaica, two of the oldest and most favoured tourist destinations in the region, the appeal of a particular type of beach hustler among the white female population. This male is first and foremost young, while for his partner, youth is not a salient criterion. Economic empowerment is. Moreover, the beach boy, also known as a beach bum or a hustler, is most desirable if he wears sun-bleached dreadlocks which characterize him as an authentically primitive, natural and

unspoilt black man with all the promise which this entails when the interaction goes into high gear and the young man gets to show his lady that he can truly dish up the stuff.

It is to this scenario that Senior referred:

a new set of people
arrive
to lie bare-assed in the sun
wanting gold on their bodies
cane-rows in their hair
with beads – even bells

So I serving them
coffee
tea
cock-soup
rum
Red Stripe beer
sensimilla
I cane-rowing their hair
with my beads

But still they want more
want it strong
want it long
want it black
want it green
want it dread (15)

This dangerous pursuit is rooted in the Manichean binaries and rationalizations which undergirded the imperial trade in human flesh. At the root, are the very assumptions which Lamming, in his historical narrative which probes the middle passage, *Natives of my Person*, ascribes tongue in cheek to the other dissociative category—nationality. It is the other whites of the rival kingdom, to whom moralizers travelling on the Reconnaissance conveniently relegate these damning cross-cultural pursuits:

It is a matter not fit for record, nor would I mention it except as a warning to more noble natures, for it be known these heathens do have a power which may bind some Christian natures against their wish... many examples can be found of men who could not overcome the first taste of black women on this coast, but did seem to enter a trance of passion which did make it impossible for them to redeem their Christian nature; where in it is a fact that they never allow their wives to travel as company or otherwise along these coasts, fearing that a similar spell of lust might excite them to entertain the heathen blacks who go naked everywhere like beasts, though some in imitating our own discretion do try to decorate their organs with various articles of nature like leaves or grass, and thereby hide the grossness of its size, for they be creatures with truly massive instruments which they can erect at will, and without encouragement from the other sex, causing in all Christian men a most terrible fear for the safety of their lawful wives (125-126).

The problem is that the lawful wives of the colonial era have become in contemporary times women—wives and others of all colours, nationalities, and ages who are financially empowered, mobile and well set for a shot of primitivism. A case in point is that of Simona Fricker, a Swiss tourist who had had sexual relations with numerous males who frequented the popular Store Bay beach in Tobago. Ms Fricker is reported to have self-confessed that she had done this for revenge after contracting HIV AIDS from her husband, who in turn, had picked up the disease in the Caribbean. This incident provoked public contention and stimulated broad-based national dialogue on transnational, transactional sex.²

The final segment of this chapter analyses Oonya Kempadoo's *Tide Running* which provides a closer fictional snapshot of the subject construction of the key players and the changing dynamics of transactional sex encounters in the islands. The demand is generated by expats drawn from a global workforce for whom access to technology facilitates work and settlement in touristic islands, allowing them to plant a more permanent stake in paradise. The narrative sets up an interesting demonstration and interrogation of Cabezas' contention:

The different material and discursive conditions in which multiple kinds of sexual-affective practices are produced, distributed, and consumed call for an understanding of tourism as a process of extraction and transference of eroticized capital that is always already racialized and exoticized.(22)

Tide Running does not proffer a positive example of mutuality implicit in Cabezas's concern with "the ways in which participants in transcultural liaisons negotiate power, local and global, through affect, sex, solidarity, and monetary exchanges. Intimate exchanges thus become a way to subvert systems of class and racial inequalities and allow for the creation of new identities" (Cabezas 1999, 22).

The site in this case is the island of Tobago which is marketed in state discourse as the sleepy, beautiful, paradisiacal sister isle of the twin-island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Tobago, also known as Crusoe's Isle, is widely though erroneously reputed to be the island in which the adventurer Alexander Selkirk was marooned, which in turn became the inspiration for Daniel Defoe's famous *Robinson Crusoe* (1719).³ Crusoe's Isle has long held a pivotal place in Western imaginaries as a location on which the challenges and potentialities for the spread of progressive Western "civilization" into the "savage" islands can be put to the test. The protagonist Crusoe with his trusty Black Friday at his side affirmed the inherent superiority of the white male and the urgency and effectiveness of his civilizing mission. Tobago has long been implicated in the racial and ideological confrontations in paradise.

² Ms Fricker is reported to have met a tragic end – murder by the hand of her estranged husband.

³ This notion is rooted in the curious interplay of fact and fiction. Daniel's Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* was published in (1719) under the lengthy self explanatory title *The Life and Strange Surprizing Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoque; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pirates*. This narrative of encounter between races and worlds, is a fictionalized autobiography of a castaway who spends 28 years on a remote tropical island near Trinidad, encountering cannibals, captives, and mutineers before being rescued. The story was reputedly influenced by the adventures of Alexander Selkirk, a Scottish castaway who lived for four years on the Pacific island called "Más a Tierra" Chile (renamed Robinson Crusoe Island in 1966). The notion of Crusoe's Isle has captured capture literary and popular imaginations as reflected in Derek Walcott's play *Pantomime* and poem "Crusoe's Island" (1965)

In *Tide Running*, the ménage à trois develops between an interracial couple—a middle-aged English corporate lawyer Peter; his young, brown Trinidadian wife Bella who is an aspiring artist; and the shy Tobagonian boy whom they seduce into their lifestyle and into their bed. Although the couple befriend adolescent brothers Cliff and Ossi, they keep the voluble, more socially adept Ossi at bay and annex the services of the more innocent, diffident and less articulate Cliff. The process culminates in his theft of their property and by the end of the narrative the sensitive troubled young man is transformed into a novice criminal with all the promise of becoming hardened and beyond recuperation. Kempadoo frames her novel against broader evocations of the “little black boy” as an object of exploitation and desire, and as a stereotypical social deviant as characterized in the controversial calypso “Little Black Boy” by Winston “Gypsy” Peters.⁴ Kempadoo is careful to display both an individual subject in construction and the interplay of broader socio-cultural forces which produce a given outcome. In other words, she explores the elements which determine the identity of the young male provider of transactional sex within his specific family, community, state, and global constellations. How does village boy evolve into beach bum, swimming instructor, professional escort? And in this particular case what pathways does he take to become the third wheel in the ménage à trois with the biracial married couple and ultimately a young offender before the courts for stealing? And on the demand side what goes into the making of the predatory couple?

Kempadoo sketches young males of great beauty and sexual desirability who are trapped by geopolitical conditions which shape their island birthplace into a context in which nothing happens—there are no ambitions and no possibilities for gainful and satisfying employment, or for social advance. The adverse social framework stifles the potential and awakening of the soul. Energies are dissipated on the most basic of physical necessities, and beyond that, there is a gaping void:

Time pass like every day in Plymouth. Ossi fetch two bucket’ a water from the standpipe down the hill, enough for Lynette to bathe Keisha and cook. Jump on he bike and gone for the day. She watch him curling heself onto the small bike wearing nothing but the same shorts he was sleeping in. Gone. Off roaming. Hanging around them big fellas by Masta Barbar shop. Looking to trouble people girl-chil’ren, even though he is a child himself. One long aimless child (14).

⁴ There was a little black boy,
Ah black boy was he
The boy went to school and he come out duncy
He never learn how to read, he never learn about Math
He never learn how to write, he never study bout that
All he study was his sneakers, his sneakers and clothes
He learn how to dress, and he learn how to pose
He cah get no work, he cah get no job
He decide to steal, and he decide to rob
But little black boy couldn't last long at all
The police put ah bullet through he duncy head skull

Little black boy, go to school and learn
Little black boy, show come concern
Little black boy, Education is the key
To get you off the school and off poverty

The song was intended as a warning to young Afro Caribbean males to steer way from a life of crime and not to allow young males from other ethnic groups to outstrip them in achievement. The calypso was greeted with some contention including the charge that by singling out the black boys, Gypsy was racist in intent. The resultant commentaries also chronicled the number of Indians who were involved in the drug trade.

Circumscribed by poverty in all of its dimensions—economic, cultural, spiritual—daily life is characterized by just chilling, liming and cruising. The only mobility they enjoy is that afforded by the child-sized bicycles but there is nowhere significant to go and nothing meaningful to do.

The familial context is the female-headed household in which the mother is coping with generational cycles of poverty and single motherhood. With the erosion of the extended family network, matriarchal power dwindles. Mothering women wield diminished authority and become increasingly incapable of controlling boys who run wild from puberty. In this scenario, Cliff constructs his mother as the traditional, overworked, sacrificial matriarch, a portrayal which has little bearing on the febrile, scantily dressed, highly sexualized character seen through Bella's eyes at the end of the narrative. The community also wields diminishing influence. The majority of its male role models are not positive. Many are sexual predators. Relatively few engage in wage-earning work. The younger men embrace rebellious, counterhegemonic masculinities, living out scripted lives based on televised bad johnism and ghetto thuggery. They gather a sense of self around a media-generated performance of "badness" to mask the fundamental insecurities and emptiness of their lives.

Communal sexual practices also figure prominently in the novel, pointing covertly to the real life health crisis which the nation confronts. Rampant HIV infection rates in Tobago are largely responsible for the fact that infection rates in Trinidad and Tobago rank second only to Sub Saharan Africa. Contributing factors include the relational patterns which allow young males to offer transactional sex to the highest tourist bidder and thereafter return to the villages to cohabit with wives, girlfriends and frequently also with multiple other partners. The fictional adolescents Cliff and Ossi are involved in diverse forms of recreational sex which bear no connection whatsoever to intimate connections. Ossi is portrayed as addicted to sex, indulging in sex with women old enough to be his mother, sex with both mother and daughter, group sex, involuntary sexual activity while asleep. Indeed, sex appears to lend him excitement, comfort and significance. Given the commonly held notions that sexual expression is healthy, repression is debilitating, and men demonstrate natural virility and prowess via sexual conquest, these activities proceed without communal or even maternal censure. Indeed, sexual profligacy conveys prestige and stature within the village environment.

Giving only a measured credence to Cabezas's argument about the sex provider's use of the encounter for image enhancement and empowerment, transactional sex within this social context conflates a range of conditions perceived as desirable—bountiful sexual activity, along with access to prestigious places and activities, and highly valued material goods. The flip side is immediately evident. The global context is defined primarily by rampant consumerism which commoditizes and debases the human person. The ubiquitous reach of its tentacles is reflected in the media's constant orientation towards another place. Mass-mediated, relentless significations of paradise draws tourists into a mind-numbing dreamspace. Even moreso for the islanders, televised unreality mediates every dimension of existence, setting up expectations of commodity-filled lifestyles and appetites for designer labels through an advertising industry in which consumerism constitutes the subject. The narrator indicates: "The national dress of Tobago for old and young alike, rich and poor—Fila, Hilfiger, Adidas and now FUBU. But it's only the music that's rough here....Hard-ramming, crowd-chanting, sex whipping abuse" (125). The commodity-based signifying system is oriented towards the projection of being, not towards function. And the television serves a dual function as child minder, serving up an unabated diet of cheap syndicated foreign programming promoting sensuality, materialism, and gratuitous violence. Arguably its most penetrative message—significance exists in another place not here—alienates the

impoverished islander from immediate conditions of meanness, squalor and meaninglessness, in the interest of a fantasized luxury, wealth, order and beauty.

The interplay of place, economic and spiritual impoverishment, and subject location is reflected in the third sibling Lynette, a single mother whose life conditions lock her out of the illusory televised reality of love and marriage, male breadwinners and female homemakers. Her greatest aspiration for her daughter is that she participate in teleworld. This heart share is literally purchased through commodity items which Lynette can ill afford, but which become, in her skewed psyche, the best to which she can aspire for her daughter. In the space of lack in which nothing happens, significance leaks and bleeds into televised fictions with their glitzy characters, tight plots, vignettes pregnant with meaning. Lynette dissolves into paroxysms of joy when her daughter speaks a word of television language. Even a word signals entrance into scripted reality and thereby into transcendence. The entire experience creates a profound cross-generational alienation from the natal environment. Even conception of the island's beauty and self within paradisiacal splendour is mediated through a foreign gaze:

Watch me nuh, here in dis room. The stylic doorway frame outside like one 'a Bella pi'tures. Sun bouncing coming in on de blue floor, jamming the foot of a long-time curly chair and them colour-colour cushions. Four bedpost posing round me, design like a crown. Watch me nuh (80).

Tide Running is clear on the range of motivations and notions of self which the players bring to the sexual encounter. The young man from the islands and the older metropolitan male are constructed as binary opposites. Cliff is sexually potent and wondrously endowed, innocent and shy, wild and primitive. He receives food, transportation, access to a dream house, companionship, in exchange for sex in which he is servicing the couple. But the fantasy does not stop here because the youngster is himself extremely needy in terms of the affective domain. His seducer Peter offers a perverted father-son relationship. He ushers Cliff into corrupt sexual relations in his own marital bed in a scenario which swings between warm, regulated, generous domesticity and "amoral" group sex without ties and responsibility. In his connection to the brown, passionate (read oversexed) Bella, Cliff is simultaneously pleasuring the gaze of the older white man who becomes in the process of their interactions a surrogate father. In Cliff's encounter with Peter, phallic competitiveness between son and surrogate father becomes overlaid with comparisons of the instruments of the black/white male. In relation to the wider community, it brings him the significance of having been found worthy to enter the other world to which they all aspire. In terms of realizing himself, it provides alleviation of meaninglessness, as well as commodities—food, a location in a virtual reality and intensified "digitally enhanced experience". An alternative father figure emerges in Stompy the fisherman who asserts his manhood in daily battles with the sea and teaches him wage-earning work, pride, resilience, strategies for battling the elements. The arduous work loses in the end to just chillin until idleness, need and opportunity draw him into transactional sex. He is reduced to an eroticized body bereft of ambition, purpose and power, which is aestheticized in the black dallie sculptures resembling those carved by Luise Kimme, who arguably commoditizes black male bodies as iconographic representations of exoticism and primitivism.⁵ These outward-oriented, inanimate, soulless life-sized forms

⁵ Luise Kimme is a German-born sculptor who has lived and worked in Tobago since 1979. She has won widespread acclaim for her portrayals of everyday life, folk traditions and mythologies of the Caribbean. Identifying her work as evoking the "majestic presence of those classic bronzes from pre-colonial Benin", Trinidadian artist and educator Kenwyn Crichlow reportedly indicates that Kimme's work is "largely concerned with explorations of the physical and psychologically complex space that exists between a desire for the

raise unresolved issues of representation, volitionality, responsibility, and potential for change

Peter the liberal white corporate lawyer and world citizen enters the ménage à trois for the adventurism. His participation in group sessions is largely voyeuristic and geared to kick-start aging waning passions which seem unequal to the libido of his youthful mixed race wife. For the high-coloured young Trinidadian woman, it is necessary to mask sex as commodity, seeing in the encounter romance, excitement, passion and the joy of manipulation/orchestration. The highly sexed “browning” is fascinated by the vigorous young black male while her husband vacillates between performance anxiety and enjoyment of the new voyeuristic pleasures.

Residence in paradise comes at a cost. It erases the liminality of the hotel room encounter. Space becomes an issue in this narrative since the young black male is traditionally perceived as possessing the power of contagion and is consequently kept at bay from the domain of the rich by high walls, fierce dogs and patrolling security forces. The problem for the wealthy couple is how to seduce the youth as a sexual plaything and still protect their pristine space with its stark white decor. Cliff’s reduction to a criminal who steals from his benefactors is the mirror image of young black males for whom criminal activity is a portal to significance. In a symbolic economy, which ascribes value to youth on the basis of access to prestigious brands, resources gleaned through criminal acts give access to the power of becoming. More significantly, media-based, violence-ridden hyper reality lends young criminals an “authentic as seen on TV” location in a bizarre world.

What do the narratives explored in this chapter reveal about transnational transactional sex liaisons? The immediate material and discursive conditions which shape the diverse range of sexual and affective practices emanate from a range of sources, namely, the state including the educational system, the multinational tourist industry, the media, nation, community and individuals. On the intensely negotiated field of transactional sex encounters, buyers and sellers shift their self-fashionings based on colour, class and ethnicity in accordance with the strategies required to capture the desired benefit, experience or object. The most consistent underlying element, though it is underplayed by the nature of the encounter, is the economic disparity of the respective nation homes of the key players such that the needy third world objects of desire can be readily bought by exchanging sex for favours—food, drink, accommodation, trips, companionship, and when the relationship deepens, monies to tide partners over even after the tourist/lover returns home. In exchange, the tourist who has the upper hand financially can derive from the exchange dedication, flattery, show of affection, identity/image enhancement, sensual restoration, and a secure though transient location in a paradisiacal dream world. The sex provider is not completely disempowered in exchange. The pleasure seeker though financially dominant is perceived by the sex provider and even by preadolescent children being trained as dream weavers for the industry, as lacking in rest, sensuality, and hankering in vain after what Senior terms “the song... the memory... the rhythm ...the magic” (17).

The fantasy draws from an entire complex of stereotypical gender subject locations. First world ideology in the wake of the women’s liberation movement imposed expectations on men to pay their dues in terms of domestic responsibilities and to lower their expectations in terms of their partner’s provision of affective and household services. Island women, on the other hand, are generally more submissive, service-oriented, compliant, loving and feminine and make them feel more like men. A similar dynamic operates for the wealthy female pleasure-seeker who *finds herself* in a relationship which makes her feel more

presence of a sensual, physical power and a keen observation of the human form.” Kimme’s March 2013 exhibition was entitled: “Somewhere Over the Rainbow”. Source “A Bridge to the Spirit of Tobago”. Marsha Pearce. *Sunday Guardian* March 10, 2013 p. B4.

feminine. Courted intently by her financially challenged island boyfriend/lover, she becomes the centre of attention of a male whose entire job is to fete, flatter and cater to her every need. Rather than being perceived as disadvantaged by his economic disempowerment, he is an innocent victim of global forces and inequities which his woman would gladly redress since she has the means. This assuages her vague guilt since her people have been complicit in his disempowerment. This strong, gallant, experienced man about town acts as her gateway into exoticized vibrant or serene island cultures. The notion of the unwillingness of lower strata African Caribbean males to make long-term emotional commitment to partners on the home turf gives way within transactional sex arrangements to strong displays of romance, love and, if opportunity arises, eagerly sought after long-term commitment. In the playing fields of nostalgia, money and pleasure, multiple dynamics come into play including differential constructions of masculinity and femininity in the respective cultures.

The narratives demonstrate the significance of place—pleasure sites affirm tourist visitors because economic empowerment gives access to diverse luxuries and privileges including sexual adventurism. The eroticized environments create as it were a virtual reality in which constraints—habitual, moral and relational—are released. This reality is so all pervasive that even primary school children show evidence of being schooled in the formal environment in the artistry of dream weaving, which attunes successive generations to servitude and the complex mutual power play of the pleasure industries. Fantasy, sensuality and desire are pivotal features of the global tourist economy attendant upon the need of the disempowered, and the alienation and fragmentation of the economically empowered within the contemporary social order.

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