

CHAPTER FOUR

SEX ACROSS THE BORDER: RESEARCHING TRANSNATIONAL PROSTITUTION IN COLONIAL NIGERIA

SAHEED ADERINTO

A book-length historical research on sexuality in colonial Nigeria does not exist. Indeed, a quick count of existing published works is easy to do.¹ Historians of Nigeria have yet to draw any meaningful connection between sexuality and nationalism despite the fact that these two concepts are closely related, and that Nigeria (arguably Africa's most studied country) is also the birthplace of modern African and nationalist historiography.² Even the unprecedented output of scholarship on African women since the 1980s (from Nina Mba's pathbreaking and foundational *Nigerian Women Mobilized* (1982) to Nwando Achebe's brilliantly crafted *Female King of Colonial Nigeria* (2011) has not found any critical expression in the treatment of such highly significant themes as the intersections of class, race, and sexuality in the making of Nigerian women's history.³ Without any gainsaying, the paucity of published work on sexuality in colonial Nigeria constitutes a concern, not only because it seems to suggest that discourse of the sexual component of Nigeria's past is not worth studying, but also because of the enormous body of ideas and data left unexplored. If contemporary researchers thought that sexuality is associated with obscenity and should be silenced in terms of scholarship, the makers of the Nigerian colonial past (both men and women, Africans and colonialists alike) thought it was important and readily voiced their positions on it.

While historians of Nigeria have yet to invest adequate scholarly energy on sexuality discourses, their counterparts like Luise White, Laketch Dirasse, and Charles van Onselen, among others, working in southern and eastern Africa have seen the need to venture into this aspect of the African experience.⁴ Extant works examine such themes as the sociology and political economy of sexuality, urbanization and social change, venereal disease and pathology, the commoditization of sex, and body politics. From

recent scholarship on homosexuality, especially Marc Epprecht's book *Heterosexual Africa?*, we now know the historical processes that galvanized into the idea of Africa's exclusive and "normative" heterosexuality and the much licensed same-sex affairs.⁵ In all, existing literature establishes and validates the significance of sexuality to nation building, identity formation, the clash between tradition and modernity, and by extension, Africa's historical formation. Although the methods, approaches, sources, and politics varied across time, space, and place, historians of sexuality have shown that Africa's experiences of gender and sexuality differ from region to region, and were shaped by both local as well as global politics.

In this chapter, I present an introductory exploration of primary archival sources for researching transnational prostitution in colonial Nigeria with particular focus on the Nigeria–Gold Coast network during the first half of the twentieth century. Between the 1920s and 1950s, women from Southern Nigeria emigrated to the Gold Coast where they worked as prostitutes. This first instance of major transnational prostitution in twentieth-century Nigeria involved many adult women who practiced prostitution voluntarily.⁶ Comprehensive reports and petitions by Nigerians (both at home and abroad) and British abolitionists representatively establish that many underage girls (mostly younger than thirteen) were also criminally lured into the sex trade by adult men and women.⁷ The Nigeria–Gold Coast prostitution network involved the movement of bodies, culture, language, and money across artificial colonial boundaries. It is impossible to give an estimate of its value partly because it was an off-the-books sector of the colonial economy. But we do know that Nigerian prostitutes remitted about £2,000 to their local communities in Ogoja, Owerri, and Calabar Provinces during the late 1930s and early 1940s. According to colonial administrators, some communities such as Ediba and Obubra depended almost entirely on the proceeds from sex work during the 1930s.⁸ So important was prostitution to the economy of Ogoja Province that the Native Authorities suggested a direct tax of 30 shillings on returnee prostitutes because "they possessed as many loads as a white man."⁹

Although the substantive literature in the social sciences tends to treat transnational prostitution as a "new" development and manifestation of the postcolonial quagmire of underdevelopment, its history actually dates back to the early decades of the twentieth century or earlier.¹⁰ The spectrum of sources presented here is capable of stimulating work that connects colonial with postcolonial ideas and puts history at the center of major issues of national interest by supplying the historical context to some of the challenges of nation building. The similarities and differences in the dynamics of prostitution in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria is significant for understanding

the shifting social and economic processes and the continuum in sexual practices that are often constructed as “illicit” or “deviant.” During the colonial period, as in the postcolonial era, prostitution took on a purely urban character as women from rural areas migrated to such cities as Lagos, Ibadan, Port Harcourt, Accra, and Secondi to work as prostitutes. The physical and cultural geography of sex work, like most forms of labor, expanded to accommodate societies’ changing economic and social structures.

The documents to be analyzed are those deposited at the Enugu and Ibadan offices of the Nigerian National Archives (NAE and NAI, respectively) and the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD), in Accra, Ghana. They include official “fact-finding” reports and correspondence between colonial officers of Nigeria and the Gold Coast, on the one hand, and the League of Nations, on the other. Between 1920 and 1955, the League and its successor organization, the United Nations, coordinated a global movement in opposition to transnational prostitution, demanding that sovereign nations and colonial dependencies alike submit information concerning the matter on an annual basis. This body of archival materials basically represents the perceptions of the colonialists and the politics of sexuality in the empire. Nigerian perspectives on casual sex work included petitions from a spectrum of reformists—from rural patriarchs to ethnic or home improvement associations. Taken together, these sources provide a vivid look into the perspectives of colonialists and Nigerians on transnational sex work, social mobility, and cultural legitimacy. They help reconcile the contradictions inherent in the colonialists’ project of modernization, and the conflicting nature of Nigerian sexual nationalism. The materials established the importance of sex as a gateway into a host of complicated narratives about gendered colonialism, imperial modernity, agency, and identity formation.

I situate the documents within the larger historical processes of the period, highlighting the circumstances under which they were produced and their connection to larger issues of the African colonial encounter. The paucity of documents produced by civil authorities before the outbreak of World War II sharply reflect the disposition of the colonialists toward prostitution, which did not pose a serious danger to imperialism in Nigeria until the early 1940s. As historians of Africa generally understand, the volume and coverage of documentation on a particular subject was mostly determined by the impact it had on the colonial status quo. This chapter does not pretend to carry out an exhaustive exploration of all the sources for reconstructing transnational prostitution. For instance, it excludes newspaper coverage and public debates during the 1940s. However, it gives an

introductory insight into the general trends of documentation, the main characters, and the viability of sexuality as a subfield of Nigerian history.

Some Conceptual Clarification

The politics of morality and emotions, and the diverse interpretations accorded to sociosexual behavior across societies, necessitate a brief clarification of important concepts. For the purposes of this chapter and the historical reality under examination, prostitution is defined as a form of labor that involves the sale of sexual services.¹¹ It is framed as comprising contractual heterosexual affairs that were mostly transient and geared toward mutual material and erotic satisfaction. Men bought sex with money from the proceeds of their labor, while women sold sex. Hence both participants were involved in production. The way that proceeds from labor flowed was similar to how resources were spent on essential consumable items such as food. In other words, buying and selling sex—under circumstances that do not involve intimidation, force, or coercion—was little different than other everyday transactions.

This definition is not exhaustive—it is impossible to have an all-inclusive conceptualization of prostitution—not only because sex evokes divergent connotations across physical and cultural geographies but also because of the secrecy associated with it. Secrecy and repression of sex and sexuality, as Michel Foucault has shown, was accentuated by the consolidation of the aristocratic capitalist class in Europe.¹² The invention of sexuality, according to him, not only created categories of “normal” and “abnormal” behavior but placed the state at the center of regulating the private lives of its subjects.¹³ The colonialists in Africa as elsewhere imported Eurocentric categories of “good” and “bad” and a culture that marginalized and/or silenced the documentation of sexuality. In fact, illicit sexuality only became an issue subject to documentation when its negative consequences such as venereal disease (VD) and its connection to criminal behavior threatened prevailing ideals of morality and respectability. If historians of Africa encounter difficulties researching the history of sexuality under imperial rule, it is because the colonialists treated sex as an aspect of human experience that must be silenced and repressed in order to enhance a morally sanctified society.

Prostitution, as both a sociosexual relationship and a performance, has been a subject of debate among scholars of various ideological standpoints—from liberal to Marxist feminist.¹⁴ However, this is not the appropriate place to review the theoretical and ideological controversies that cut across contours of power, patriarchy, agency, and exploitation.¹⁵ What is more

important here is that prostitution in the context of the colonial African encounter created new forms of social and economic process that both colonialists and African reformists moralized against. The chiefs who moralized against illicit sex and pressured the colonialists to criminalize it felt that the proceeds from prostitution tilted local agency in favor of women. In other words, at the center of criminalization and moralization lay the factor of money and its impact in realigning prevailing notions of gender and hierarchy. Moralizing against illicit sexuality also fit into traditional African and Victorian designations of sexual conduct outside marriage as immoral, unacceptable, and sinful. For the colonialists, prostitution was both a symptom and a manifestation of African sexual pathology that they intended to correct through their modernizing and civilizing influence. Although the period between the 1870s and 1940s witnessed unprecedented involvement of women in prostitution globally, the colonialists constructed sex work purely as an "African social problem" that must be curtailed in order to promote healthy living and to sanitize the society under siege by the forces of moral decadence.¹⁶

In reading and rereading the prostitutes' work, researchers have to consistently appraise and reappraise, construct and reconstruct colonial rhetoric that pathologized women's productive and reproductive capacities. The colonialists perceived prostitution and the women who practiced the "illicit" trade as if it were just another form of opportunistic labor that might allow them to benefit from colonial capitalism. Men paid for sex partly because it was an alternative means of securing companionship, and sometimes food, away from home. As Luise White has argued, our conceptualization of prostitution must not come from the moralists' fixation on prostitutes' bodies and social standing, but rather from the function they served and how they used the resources they accrued.¹⁷ Prostitutes did not spend their incomes alone. They typically invested in real estate and in their families, thus providing much needed resources for alleviating the negative effects of the epileptoid character of the colonial economy. Aside from providing the sociosexual balance in important sites of imperial power such as mines and urban centers monopolized by men, prostitution created the financial resources that led to increased independence for women from colonial and African structures of domination.

The term "migratory prostitution" is used interchangeably with "domestic and transnational prostitution." Regardless of the period and location, women traditionally practiced prostitution outside their native communities—hence prostitution, like many forms of labor that emerged under the colonial capitalist system, was associated with migration.¹⁸ Occasionally, I use the term "migratory prostitution" in lieu of "traffic," and put traffic in

quotation marks to problematize the assumption of some reformists that women who practiced prostitution were forced into the sex trade or that the entire network of sex work was criminal. A careless use of the term "traffic" can indicate a researcher's acceptance of colonial prejudice.

The Colonialists' Sources

Colonial documentation of transnational prostitution includes "fact-finding" investigations and correspondence among civil, military, legal, and medical officers. These authorities were directly and indirectly involved in either reporting the nature of the sex trade and its impact on public health and security or devising the appropriate legislation to halt the "traffic," or both.¹⁹ The information they generated can be found in the "Simple List of Chief Secretary's Office collections (CSO)," under the entry "Traffic in Girls from Nigeria to the Gold Coast" in NAI and in PRAAD.²⁰ The CSO files help unlock the perspectives of officers operating from the seat of imperial power in Accra and Lagos. They contain correspondence between the governors of Nigeria and the Gold Coast, and the colonial office in London. Other classes of documents from Ogoja, Calabar, and Owerri Provinces deposited at the Enugu office of the Nigerian National Archives deal precisely with on-the-ground assessments by local colonial officers and Nigerians. They are labeled clearly as "Prostitution in Obubra Division," "Nigeria-Gold Coast Traffic," Exodus of Nigerian Women in the Gold Coast," and so on.²¹ These documents contain minutes of meetings with the Native Authorities, notes of district officers, annual reports, and petitions from "concerned and law-abiding" citizens about women's emigration and its impact on the economy, "tradition," and the social life of the communities.

One would have to read both the CSO collections and the files from Enugu Archives in order to make sense of the positions held by various colonial officers. The comprehensiveness and length of the documents varies in accordance with the subject under discussion and the capacity in which each officer was acting. As one would expect, the most detailed information about the "traffic" came from officers under whose jurisdiction most of the Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast originated from. These areas included Ogoja, Owerri, and Calabar Provinces of Southern Nigeria. However, Nigerian officers did not produce one of the earliest and most comprehensive reports on transnational prostitution. J. R. Dickinson, Gold Coast chief inspector of labor, was the first colonial officer to fully document Nigerian prostitutes in the Gold Coast as part of his larger survey of labor conditions in the colony in 1938.²² Although the government of the Gold Coast failed to publish his report for political reasons and classified it as "confidential,"

Dickinson's findings would later help authorities in devising legislation against the "traffic." A portion of this highly significant report is worth quoting:

My investigations were made with the object of ascertaining the effect which these women had on the labourer's pocket and health rather than the conditions in which the prostitutes live. . . . The girls interrogated looked upon their professions as ordinary work undertaken with a view to earning money which they intended to take back to Nigeria as savings or in finery. As in the case of the labourers themselves, the women leave their country with the idea of making money and returning home with their savings and quantity of fine clothes. They appear to have an organization among themselves.²³

Different sections or departments of the colonial establishment produced documents that reflected how transnational prostitution affected their operations. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) traditionally supplied detailed reports about arrests and prosecutions of people accused of trafficking in young girls. These reports provide the most credible information about the identity of women accused of prostitution, their clients, and other members of the subculture such as pimps. Some police reports also included photos of pimps arrested and prosecuted for trafficking. Occasionally, the annual report of the NPF included data on repatriated prostitutes and other categories of offenders derogatorily classified as "undesirables." The data produced by the Director for Medical and Sanitary Service (DMSS) and the military authorities of the colonial army, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), focused on the medical impact of gonorrhea and syphilis on the soldiers, while the attorney general's office was frequently contacted to advise on the appropriate legislation and implementation. The "Simple List of Paper from Federal Ministry of Health Lagos," contains adequate entries on VD treatment and other procedures. Legal perspectives can be gleaned from the files of the attorney general of Nigeria. A full listing of all anti-transnational prostitution laws can be found under the immigration legislation section of the "Annual Law of Nigeria," published by the Government Printer between 1940 and the 1950s. Others are contained in the body of law labeled "Offences against Morality" and "Children and Young Persons Ordinance (CYPO)," which was updated annually between 1941 and the 1950s.²⁴

C O P Y.

GOLD COAST POLICE

C.R.O. No. 1509/52. 29th day of April, 19 52.
 Offences Register No. 553/1952
Takoradi Station Western Province

The under-mentioned particulars are forwarded for registration:—

Name <u>REGINA CHEWIZI</u>	Age <u>41.30</u> yrs. Height <u>5</u> ft. <u>2</u> ins.
Alias <u>IBO</u>	Complexion <u>BROWN</u>
Race <u>IBO</u>	Hair <u>Black</u> Eyes <u>Black</u>
Birthplace <u>IKADULU</u>	Marks <u>four vaccination marks on the upper part of the left arm.</u>
Occupation <u>FARMER</u>	<u>two tribal marks on each cheek.</u>
Address <u>H80, No. 15/5, Anninul, Takoradi</u>	
Sentence <u>District Magistrate's Court</u> <u>20th</u> day of <u>April,</u> 19 <u>52</u>	<u>2nd</u> <u>to</u> <u>A fine of £10 or 2 months</u>
<u>I.H.L. deportation order recommended. (Fine paid)</u>	
For <u>Keeping brothel, contrary to Section 182 D.S.S. (1) of Cap. 9.</u>	
Method used <u>Accused kept a premises for habitual prostitution.</u>	

Convicted in the name of REGINA CHEWIZI
 With whom convicted (Accomplices) Alone
 Police officer who made arrest HO. 9304, E.C/4, YAKO BASABARINI
 Prison officers present at conviction SUB-INSPECTOR G.H. DICKSON HO. 9413 G/Cpl. I.Y. ANAN
and HO. 8088 D.C. 2 O. B. DEMANYA
 Also known to HO. 7874 C/2, B. I. JOFFA and HO. 9726 G.C/2, E.O. NUNNAN

State if photograph is a good likeness or bad: (Sgd.) F. A. Njomonah
Asst. Superintendent of Police

* Show offence and value of property stolen. Show full charge on back of form.
 † Method used in committing offence—stealing from his employer, stealing from store, breaking open front door, forcing window, etc.
 In addition to name state Police number.
 If this form is correctly filled in, it need not be accompanied by a letter or memo.
 State if the photograph is or is not a good likeness.

C.I.D. Form No. 4
 (P.T.O.)

Figure 4.1. Criminal record of Nigerian Madam Regina Chewizi convicted for brothel keeping in Takoradi on April 29 1952. Source: NAI, CSO 26/1/36005

Antiprostitution laws and CYPO are published primary documents. They are also available in some research libraries in Europe and North America.²⁵ It is an unusual body of materials in that most primary documents generated during the colonial period were not published. Scholars interested in the evolution of postcolonial human trafficking laws would find this collection useful. A researcher could do a comparative work on anti-transnational legislation during the colonial and the postindependence period to uncover the changes and continuity in institutional approaches to activities constructed as “social problems.” For instance, colonial and postcolonial transnational prostitution laws alike

produced contradictory outcomes of prohibiting women's migration. Women in twenty-first-century Nigeria as in the 1940s require the permission of their fathers or husbands to receive passports or traveling documents. Although enacted to prevent trafficking in women or girls, this component of antitrafficking law negatively affects women's freedom of choice.

Unlike in the 1940s when the NPF, customs office, and Colony Welfare Office were chiefly responsible for policing transnational prostitution, twenty-first-century Nigeria saw the emergence of new agencies like the National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP) that monitored sexual exploitation of girls.²⁶ Rehabilitation of prostitutes in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (since 1999) has become the focus of a newly created women's agency, supported by the wives of politicians and heads of government, who appropriated the cause of trafficking as a means of demonstrating their relevance in the new political dispensation.²⁷ Regardless of how one chooses to approach research on the institutional response to migratory prostitution, the colonial background remains vital in that it laid the foundation of the state's construction of this social problem and its intervention in issues of sexuality that citizens traditionally consider a "private" matter. Whether under colonial or postindependence dispensation, illicit sexuality threatened mainstream ideas of reproduction, respectability, morality, and social purity.

Another genre of documents was generated by the Gold Coast and Nigerian regiments of the WAFF. The history of the colonial army is as old as the story of Britain's imperial presence in West Africa. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the WAFF performed a critical role in assisting the British to brutally expand their territorial influence on hitherto independent African empires and states.²⁸ By the twentieth century, the role of the force encompassed the suppression of "revolts" and "insurgencies" that threatened the colonial project.²⁹ The WAFF also saw action both in and outside Africa during World War I and World War II. Like most colonial outfits, the WAFF experienced such problems as mutiny; but VD was perhaps the most severe noncombatant threat to its productivity. Gold Coast authorities identified Nigerian women as the main purveyor of gonorrhea and syphilis in its regiments.³⁰ As worrisome as the situation appeared, the British—which, for military-centered reasons, attempted to keep the soldiers within the barracks—did not police prostitution or prevent the African rank and file of the WAFF from patronizing prostitutes.³¹ Early data from the second decade of the twentieth century establish the colonialists' position of tolerating sex work in both Nigerian and Gold Coast armies. The outbreak of World War II

intensified documentation on prostitution because the incidence of VD reached an all-time high.³²

The NAI and PRAAD each have several files on the incidence of VD in the Nigerian regiment of the WAFF that can help researchers bridge the interconnections between sexuality, race, and sexually transmitted disease in the colonial military. The annual reports of the Federal Ministry of Health also contain returns of cases of VD in the army. Although not contextual and mostly inconclusive, these data help pinpoint the types of VD prevalent among the troops and the nature of treatment offered. They also open endless possibilities for research into colonial medical history, an area that is currently underresearched. In addition, military and public health documents are capable of enhancing our knowledge of sexualized racism in the colonial force. Like that of African women, whose bodies were constructed pathologically, the identity of African soldiers represented a sort of sexual aberration, as they were labeled as “primitive” individuals incapable of controlling their sex impulses.³³

Another category of files from the CSO deals with correspondence between Nigeria and the Gold Coast, on the one hand, and the League of Nations and United Nations, on the other. As previously mentioned, the League and later the UN coordinated a global movement against transnational prostitution between 1921 and 1955. The immensely useful documents filed as the “Annual Report on the Traffic in Women and Children and Obscene Publications vol. I–IV” and the “International Convention on the Suppression of White Slave Traffic” help situate prostitution during the first half of the twentieth century in its global context.³⁴ If properly interpreted, the League’s annual questionnaire on trafficking in women and girls that Nigeria, like many other countries in the world, completed could help researchers understand the imperial politics of vice and humanitarianism.³⁵ These documents expose the contradictory position of the Nigerian government on the regulation of prostitution. However, they do not answer why the government refused to report transnational prostitution to the League; nor do they explain the interrelatedness of sexual pathology and civilization—rhetoric that featured abundantly in the colonialists’ justification for the imposition of colonialism. One would need a thorough theoretical grounding in imperialism, race, gender, and the imperial construction of otherness to be able to discern the politics of sex—whether in Nigeria or in other British imperial locations.³⁶



Figure 4.2. Mugshot of Nigerian Madam Regina Chewizi convicted for brothel keeping in Takoradi on April 29 1952. Source: NAI, CSO 26/1/36005

The Nigerian Sources

Sources on prostitution and the sex trade produced by Nigerians took the form of petitions from rural patriarchs and chiefs. The general tone of the petitions tilted toward the condemnation of women's emigration. For the Native Authorities, composed of men, the local economy suffered setbacks when women who contributed immensely to the domestic economy as traders, agriculturists, and artisans left for the Gold Coast. In addition, it was generally assumed that prostitution delayed marriage and reduced women's reproductive life and capabilities. But the Native Authorities' practice of policing women's movement was not unique to Nigeria. Throughout the colonial period of African history, rural chiefs fervently worked with the colonial authorities to maintain their patriarchal grip on women's economic and physical mobility.³⁷ Control over women's productive and reproductive rights and capabilities—publicly couched in the vocabulary of preserving the integrity of African culture—targeted their growing influence in the society. A petition by the chiefs of Obubra Division in 1948 sheds adequate light

onto the power of women's labor and agency and the perception of the impact of prostitution on the community:

Because of harlotism the population of our village is diminishing. Our taxable males are few and for that sake our taxable money is so little that it does not suffice for use for general improvement of the town. . . . Owing to our small population, it is difficult for us to maintain our school. Owing to lack of population we cannot do anything to improve our town. . . . Because our women cannot marry or live at home to produce children, the shortage of labour is acute in our town so much that we are compelled to employ labor from other villages. It is practically impossible to count all the havoc done to any village, town, or nation in which harlotism prevails.³⁸

The correspondence and petitions in the files on prostitution from Calabar, Ogoja, and Owerri Provinces deposited at the NAE reveal that returnee prostitutes challenged established hierarchies when they invested their income in property considered to be the preserve of men.³⁹ Men feared that the wealth displayed by returnee prostitutes could discourage young girls from marrying and jeopardize the prospect of receiving bride-price. Bride-price and other marriage payments augmented the income of some families and increased the power rural men had vis-à-vis young urban wage earners. However, it would appear that the attitude of the chiefs toward casual sex work varied from place to place and was shaped by the impact of women's emigration on local economies. It would also appear that the men who protested migratory prostitution were those who did not benefit from remittances.

Another class of documents that were produced by Nigerians is variously designated in Africanist literature as belonging to "tribal," "ethnic," "hometown," or "diaspora" associations. These groups were formed chiefly to facilitate grassroots development in their communities and create positive social cohesion in places of sojourn. The hometown association is indisputably one of the new forms of identity formation under colonial rule. Although the history of these associations dates back to precolonial times, colonial "pacification," rapid urbanization, the creation of national artificial boundaries, and massive migration of people recast their composition and changed the functions they performed. Some of them—like the foreign branches of the Nigerian Youth Movement—cut across ethnic and location boundaries. Their numerical strength and contribution to the development of the homeland depended on the economic and social structure of the diaspora and the access the host community gave them in maximizing the gains of living away from home. Although scholars from James Coleman to Abimbola Adesoji have studied the contributions of hometown associations

to nationalism and grassroot development, they have largely neglected their role in the regulation of sexuality.⁴⁰ Like the colonial states, the hometown unions in Nigeria and in the Gold Coast—Akajuk Union, Ngwa Clan Union, Calabar Improvement League, and Akunakuna Union, among others—were equally interested in the regulation of women's movement.⁴¹ For them, the activities of “undesirable” women smeared their images both at home and abroad. But this situation transcended the rehabilitation of image and perception: the associations risked being penalized by their host community and government for not “taming” the sexuality of their women. A petition dated July 8, 1941, by the Owerri Division Union captured the essence of hometown associations' attitudes toward sex work:

The subject of this petition is the growing habit of some women from Owerri Province leaving behind both their husbands and children and making their ways to various parts of Nigeria and even to the Gold Coast for the expressed purpose of indulging in the illicit bodily traffic, an act which is very disgraceful as it tends to lower the high standard of morals that was set up by our progenitors. In addition, young girls are often taken over to the Gold Coast where money is received on their heads, a procedure which is more or less trade in human beings; some are again taken there in order to make money through prostitution for their mistresses. The Gold Coast press failed to spotlight or call attention occasionally to this traffic in women and its attendant evils, especially with regard to the spread of venereal diseases which act as canker-worms eating up the fabric of our manhood. We have had consultation with the officers and members of the Union as to the best method of approach in carrying out a successful campaign against this indecent traffic. It was finally decided that a letter should be written requesting ... the Government of Nigeria to view this matter with the gravest concern, because the mere mention, in local and foreign newspapers with wide circulation, of Nigerian women practising prostitution on the Gold Coast, reflects very unfavourably on the people concerned.⁴²

Petitions by the ethnic unions can be found in the files on prostitution in Ogoja, Calabar, and Owerri Provinces and their districts deposited in the Enugu National Archives. They were usually addressed to the NPF, the CSO, the CWO, or the Native Authorities. Extracts on prostitution from the minutes of their meetings were occasionally attached to the petitions sent to these authorities. But collaboration between the hometown associations and the authorities transcended helping the latter to police their “recalcitrant” members. Internal politics of gender and power were easily grafted onto the tension over illegitimate sex and social purity. An in-depth examination of the politics of hometown associations and illicit sexuality is beyond the focus of this chapter. However, what seems obvious is that unlike studies

from other parts of Africa that summarily narrate that the “tribal” unions were “enemies” of women who practiced prostitution, the Nigerian experience transcends the rhetoric of dangerous sexuality to a complex interplay of class, agency, and power within the associations.

Conclusion

Nigeria’s history of sexuality is a viable site of scholarly endeavor. It is a history that dovetails with numerous aspects of Nigeria’s encounter with colonial rule and shows how a subject like sex traditionally associated with secrecy attracted significant public debates. The interrelatedness of sexuality and colonial security compelled the colonialists to police prostitution from the early 1940s. As previously mentioned, this chapter does not purport to be a complete exploration of all the materials on transnational prostitution in colonial Nigeria, but the themes and ideas expressed here are meant to introduce prospective researchers to sexuality as a budding subfield of Nigerian history. As interesting and historiographically significant as the aforementioned materials are, a number of problems make their availability problematic and difficult. The Nigerian National Archives, like virtually all the nation’s government-controlled institutions, is poorly funded, making the effective preservation of documents impossible. Hence, the documents on prostitution, like most other holdings of the archives, are decomposing very fast. It is sad to say that some of the documents I analyzed here might not be available in the future judging by their present precarious condition.⁴³

The holdings of the National Archives tell the history of migratory prostitution only from the perspective of Africans and Europeans whose narratives are predominantly about regulation and prohibition. Whereas there is much information about prostitutes as criminally minded women, men are rarely presented as members of the prostitution subculture. This one-sided narrative of prostitution mirrored the Victorian and African cultural practice of moralizing against sex in a strictly female-specific manner and painting women as “sexually dangerous.” One would need to explore other sources such as oral history to uncover the perspectives of women who practiced prostitution in colonial Nigeria, especially from the 1940s. Oral history is capable of providing information on undocumented aspects of prostitution—namely, wealth accumulation and investment, romance and love, and social status.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, Benedict B. Naanen, "The Itinerant Gold Mines: Prostitution in Cross River Basin of Nigeria, 1930–1950," *African Studies Review* 34 (1991): 57–79. See also the following works by Saheed Aderinto: "Of Gender, Race, and Class: The Politics of Prostitution in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria, 1923–1958," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 33, no. 3 (2012 forthcoming); "The Problem of Nigeria Is Slavery, Not White Slave Traffic: Globalization and the Politicization of Prostitution in Southern Nigeria, 1921–1955," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 1–22; "Dangerous Aphrodisiac, Restless Sexuality: Venereal Disease, Biomedicine, and Protectionism in Colonial Southern Nigeria, 1921–1955," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 13, no. 3 (forthcoming 2012); "'The Girls in Moral Danger': Child Prostitution and Sexuality in Colonial Lagos, Nigeria, 1930s–1950," *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 1, no. 2 (2007): 1–22; "Prostitution and Urban Social Relations," in *Nigeria's Urban History: Past and Present*, ed. Hakeem Ibikunle Tijani (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), 75–98; "Policing Urban Prostitution: Prostitutes, Crime, Law, and Reformers," in Tijani, *Nigeria's Urban History*, 99–118.

Reference to prostitution in colonial Nigeria can be found in the following works: Nwando Achebe, *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria: Ahebi Ugbabe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 77–86; Laurent Fourchard, "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920–1960," *Journal of African History* 46 (2006): 133–34; Gloria Chuku, *Igbo Women and Economic Transformation in Southeastern Nigeria, 1900–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 164–65; 217–18; Abosede George, "Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and the Colonial State in Development Era Lagos," *Journal of Social History* 44, no. 3 (Spring 2011): 837–59. Equally important is Abner Cohen's anthropological survey on Hausa prostitution (*karuwanci*) in migrant communities in southwestern Nigeria during the 1960s: *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa: A Study of Hausa Migrants in Yoruba Towns* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), chap. 2.

² A recent book on nationalist historiography is Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

³ Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900–1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Achebe briefly discussed prostitution in her latest book: *The Female King of Colonial Nigeria*, 77–86.

⁴ See, among others, Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Charles van Onselen, *Studies in the Social History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914*, vol. 1 (Johannesburg: Ravan Press), 103–62; Laketch Dirasse, *The Commoditization of Female Sexuality: Prostitution and Socio-*

economic Relations in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (New York: AMS Press, 1991); Diana Jeater, *Marriage, Perversion, and Power: The Construction of Moral Discourse in Southern Rhodesia, 1894–1930* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); and Keith Shear, “‘Not Welfare or Uplift Work’: White Women, Masculinity, and Policing in South Africa,” *Gender & History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 393–415.

⁵ Saheed Aderinto, review of *Heterosexual Africa? The History of an Idea from the Age of Exploration to the Age of AIDS* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2008), by Marc Epprecht, *Gender Forum* 23, no. 4 (2008), <http://www.genderforum.org/index.php?id=152>.

⁶ See Public Records and Archives Administration Department (hereafter cited as PRAAD), CSO 15/1/2222, Traffic in Women and Children, 1940–1948.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ National Archives Ibadan (hereafter cited as NAI), CSO 26, 36005, Extract from Ogoja Province Annual Report 1938.

⁹ NAI, CSO 26, 36005, District Officer of Obubra Division to the Resident of Ogoja Province, February 7, 1941.

¹⁰ See, among others, Ifeanyi Onyeonoru, “Push Factors in Girl Trafficking for International Commercial Sex Work and the Gender Implications: A Study of Benin, Edo State,” *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies* 1, no. 1 (2003): 118–39; and O. Agbu, “Corruption and Human Trafficking: The Nigeria Case,” *West African Review* 14, no. 3 (2003): 210–52.

¹¹ White, *Comforts of Home*, 1–21; Lenore Kuo, *Prostitution Policy: Revolutionary Practice through a Gendered Perspective* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 1–50.

¹² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1: *An Introduction*, translated from the French by Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 17–49.

¹³ For a simplified analysis of Foucault’s arguments on the history of sexuality, repression, and power, see H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook, “Introduction,” in *Palgrave Advances in the Modern History of Sexuality*, ed. H. G. Cocks and Matt Houlbrook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 1–18.

¹⁴ A good review of the politics of naming prostitutes and their work can be found in Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 73–98.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ See the following works and others on global prostitution between the 1870s and 1940s: Nils Johan Ringdal, *Love for Sale: A World History of Prostitution* (New York: Grove Press, 2004); Stephanie A. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Nora Glickman, *The Jewish White Slave Trade and the Untold Story of Raquel Liberman* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000); Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887–1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); and Edward J. Bristow, *Prostitution and Prejudice: The Jewish Fight against White Slavery, 1870–1939* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982).

¹⁷ White, *Comforts of Home*, 11.

¹⁸ Kenneth Lindsay Little, *African Women in Towns: An Aspect of African Social Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 76–129.

¹⁹ Karen Jochelson, *The Colour of Disease: Syphilis and Racism in South Africa, 1880–1950* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills*, 129–54; Michael W. Tuck, “Venereal Disease, Sexuality, and Society in Uganda,” in *Sex, Sin, and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870*, ed. Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (New York: Routledge, 2001), 191–204; Nakanyinke Musisi, “The Politics of Perception or Perception of Politics? Colonial and Missionary Representation of Baganda Women, 1900–1945,” in *Women in African Colonial History*, ed. Jean Allman, Susan Geiger, and Nakanyinke Musisi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 95–115; Sheryl M. McCurdy, “Urban Threats: Manyema Women, Low Fertility, and Venereal Diseases in Tanganyika, 1926–1936,” in *“Wicked” Women and the Reconfiguration of Gender in Africa*, ed. Dorothy L. Hodgson and Sheryl M. McCurdy (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001), 212–33; Lynette A. Jackson, “‘When in the White Man’s Town’: Zimbabwean Women Remember *Chibaura*,” in *Women in African Colonial History*, ed. Allman, Geiger, and Musisi, 191–213; P. L. Bonner, *Desirable or Undesirable Sotho Women? Liquor, Prostitution, and the Migration of Sotho Women to the Rand, 1920–1945* (Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand African Studies Institute, 1988); and Clive Glaser, “Managing the Sexuality of Urban Youth: Johannesburg, 1920s–1960s,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 301–27.

²⁰ The file numbers are as follows: NAI, CSO 26, 278387, vols. 1 and 2; and PRAAD, CSO, 15/1/222.

²¹ See, among others, NAE, AIDIST 2.1.373; and NAE, OBUBDIST 4.1.71.

²² PRAAD, CSO, 15/1/222, Report on Labor Conditions in the Gold Coast, 1938.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ “Criminal Code (Amendment Ordinance) 1944,” in *Annual Volume of the Laws of Nigeria, Legislation Enacted during 1944* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1945); and “Children and Young Person Ordinance,” in *Annual Volume of the Laws of Nigeria, Legislation Enacted during 1943* (Lagos: Government Printer, 1944).

²⁵ The university libraries of the following institutions, among others, have the volumes: Michigan State University, University of Minnesota, Cornell University, and Yale University.

²⁶ See the NAPTIP website at <http://www.naptip.gov.ng>.

²⁷ Olukemi Adesina, “Between Culture and Poverty: The Queen Mother Phenomenon and the Edo International Sex Trade,” *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 1, no. 8 (2006): 218–41.

²⁸ For a good synthesis of the Scramble for Nigeria, see Obaro Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria: The British Conquest* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1977).

²⁹ For the details of the colonial military force, see, among others, David Killingray, “‘If I Fight for Them, Maybe Then I Can Go Back to the Village’: African Soldiers in the Mediterranean and European Campaigns, 1939–45,” in *Time to Kill: The Soldier’s Experience of War in the West*, ed. Paul Addison and Angus Calder (London: Picador, 1996); “‘Securing the British Empire’: Policing

and Colonial Order, 1920–1960,” in *The Policing of Politics in the Twentieth Century: Historical Perspectives*, ed. M. Mazower (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997); “Imperial Defence,” in *Oxford History of the British Empire*, vol. 5, ed. Robin Winks (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Timothy H. Parsons, *The Rank-and-File: Social Implications of African Military Service in the King's African Rifles, 1902–1964* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999); “‘Kibra Is Our Blood’: The Sudanese Military Legacy in Nairobi’s Kibera Location, 1902–1968,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 30, no. 1 (1997): 87–122; “Dangerous Education? The Army as School in Colonial East Africa,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 28, no. 1 (2000): 112–34; Sam Ukpabi, *Strands in Nigerian Military History* (Zaria, Nigeria: Gaskiya Corp., 1986); Sam Ukpabi, *The Origins of the Nigerian Army: A History of West African Frontier Force, 1897–1914* (Zaria, Nigeria: Gaskiya Corp., 1987); C. N. Ubah, *Colonial Army and Society in Northern Nigeria* (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka Press, 1998).

³⁰ NAI, MH 54, vol. I, Troops Diseases and Welfare—Control of, January 25, 1939.

³¹ NAI, Comcol 1, N 1088/1918, Venereal Disease in the Nigerian Regiment—the Commandant to the Director of Medical and Sanitary Service, 1918.

³² NAI, MH 544, Venereal Disease among African Troops—West African Governors’ Conference to the Honourable Chief Secretary, Lagos, March 18, 1942; and NAI, MH (Fed) 1/1 6304A, Venereal Diseases—Control of, 1941.

³³ NAI, N 1088, Senior Sanitary Officer to the General Staff Officer, WAFF, April 1918.

³⁴ See NAI, CSO 26, 27837.

³⁵ NAI, CSO 26, 03338, vols. 1–4.

³⁶ Some highly useful secondary sources on race, sex, and imperialism include, among others, Ronald Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1990); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Megan Vaughan, *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991); Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Jock MacCulloch, *Black Peril, White Virtue: Sexual Crime in Southern Rhodesia, 1902–1935* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

³⁷ The following literature examines the colonial state and African male elders’ campaign to regulate women’s reproduction, social status, wealth, and sexuality through English and customary laws: Racheal Jean-Baptiste, “‘These Laws Should Be Made by Us’: Customary Marriage Law, Codification, and Political Authority in Twentieth-Century Colonial Gabon,” *Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 217–40; Sheryl M. McCurdy, “Urban Threats: Manyema Women, Low Fertility, and Venereal Diseases in Tanganyika, 1926–1936,” in “‘Wicked’ Women, 212–33; Jean Allman, “Rounding Up the Spinsters: Gender Chaos and Unmarried Women in Colonial Asante,” *Journal of African History* 37 (1996): 195–214; Marc

Epprecht, *This Matter of Women Is Getting Bad: Gender, Development, and Politics in Colonial Lesotho* (Pietermaritzburg, South Africa: University of Natal Press, 2000), 80–96; Nakanyike Musisi, “Gender and the Cultural Construction of ‘Bad Women’ in the Development of Kampala-Kibuga, 1900–1962,” in “‘Wicked’ Women, 171–87; and Hamilton Sipho Simelane, “The State, Chiefs, and the Control of Female Migration in Colonial Swaziland, 1930s–50s,” *Journal of African History* 45 (2004): 103–24.

³⁸ NAE, AIDIST 2.1.373, Egbisim Improvement Union to the District Officer, Obubra Division, April 3, 1948.

³⁹ See the entries on prostitution in the Simple List of documents of Calabar, Ogoja and Owerri Provinces deposited in the NAE.

⁴⁰ James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); J. D. Barkan, M. L. McNulty, and M. A. O. Ayeni, “Hometown Voluntary Associations, Local Development, and the Emergence of Civil Society in Western Nigeria,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 3 (1991): 457–80; Immanuel Wallerstein, “Ethnicity and National Integration in West Africa,” in *Africa: Social Problems of Change and Conflict*, ed. Pierre L. van den Berghe (San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Co., 1965); S. Okafor and R. Honey, “The Nature of Hometown Voluntary Associations in Nigeria,” in *Hometown Associations: Indigenous Knowledge and Development in Nigeria*, ed. R. Honey and S. Okafor (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998), 9–16; L. Trager, “The Hometown and Local Development: Creativity in the Use of Hometown Linkages in Contemporary Nigeria,” *Journal of Nigerian Public Administration and Management* 1, no. 2 (1992): 21–32; Abimbola Adesoji, “Progressive Unions and the Competition for Community Development in Nigeria: A Study of the Ifon, Ilobu, and Erin Progressive Unions, 1940–1970,” *African Study Monographs* 29, no. 2 (2008): 51–72; Kenneth Little, “The Role of Voluntary Associations in West African Urbanization,” in *Africa: Social Problems*, 325–45; Dmitri van den Bersselaar, “Imagining Home: Migration and the Igbo Village in Colonial Nigeria,” *Journal of African History* 46 (2005): 51–73; Charles W. Abbott, “Hometown Associations and Ethnic Unions,” in *Nigeria in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 359–78; Austin Ahanotu, “The Role of Ethnic Unions in the Development of Southern Nigeria: 1916–66,” in *Studies in Southern Nigerian History*, ed. Boniface I. Obichere (London: Frank Cass, 1982); Kenneth L. Little, *West African Urbanization: A Study of Voluntary Associations in Social Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

⁴¹ These petitions can be found in the following files: NAI, CSO 26, 36005, vols. 1 and 2; NAE, AIDIST 2.1.373; and NAE, OBUBDIST 4.1.71.

⁴² NAI, CSO 26, 36005, Owerri Division Union to the Commissioner of the Colony, Lagos, July 8, 1941.

⁴³ For more on the problems facing the National Archives, see Falola and Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History*, chap. 2.