CHAPTER 3

REPRODUCTIVE LABOR: SEX AND DOMESTIC WORK IN CYPRUS, GREECE, AND TURKEY

Why should IPE and feminism be concerned with the sale and purchase of reproductive labor under globalization and the strategies capitalism uses to exploit female working-class migrants’ labor? Female sex and domestic workers migrate not merely to survive but also to advance their positions in the fringe economies of desire. Put differently, the working-class migrant woman tries to navigate the terrain that simultaneously makes it possible for her to seek opportunity while making possible the expropriation of her labor. Within this transnational economy, gender, sexuality, and desire cannot be separated from the political and economic conditions that shape them (Altman, 2001: 2), and, more specifically, labor exploitation and production (Ebert, 1996: 129). And yet, many IPE theorists (Cox, 1987; Scholte, 2001) and feminists (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002; Lutz, 2002; Irek, 1998; Hochschild, 2000; Parrenas, 2001) ignore these issues in their analyses. The intensified restructurings of the transnational world economy (e.g., privatization of social resources, high rates of unemployment, poverty, militarization of everyday life) are further separating the producers from their own production which, in turn, subjects them to exploitation by “private” powers, that is, those owning and controlling private property, that is upper and middle-classes within the peripheries.

In the desire industries, profits are generated through four processes: (a) commodifying, or turning everything, including reproductive labor power, into things for the production of profit (Cotter,
(b) colonizing the labor power of migrant “white but not quite” and “black” working-class women and their bodies (e.g., socially subordinating women to private property by naturalizing working-class women’s labor and bodies sexually and racially); (c) organizing and perpetuating particular kinds of masculine and feminine desire as informed by the dialectic relation of the domestic and neoliberal global social relations, including the sex and domestic workers’ fantasies for opportunity, security, and success as well as their employers’ fantasies about them; and (d) criminalizing the local/non-local working-class by identifying both sex and domestic workers as “threats” to the society, the sex workers as “dirty,” immoral, and/or “deviant,” and the domestic workers as “polluters” who “black” the society. The upper owning-class draws upon racist and sexist mythologies that “white but not quite” and also “black” women’s labor is natural so that it can be sold cheaply. Sexual reproduction becomes the terrain on which struggles and conflicts are fought around the dialectic of material relations of production, global capital, and ideas about sex and desire.

The next section focuses on the dialectics among the construction of desires for consumption, identity, and needs, the ways individuals fulfill their desires, and how their position in the international racialized and sexed division of labor affects the fulfillment of such needs and desires. For example, a woman’s position in the international division of labor (e.g., a sex worker) compels her to take up a strictly heterosexual position in this sexual and economic service to a pimp, or a client, in order to make ends meet. The material conditions of domestic (and sex workers) are quite stringent when compared to those of a woman who is a well-paid professional in a bank and is able to hire a domestic worker (Cotter, 2001: 8). In the next section, I examine the ways “private” powers through the market control the circuits of capital, labor, and production of ideas in the peripheries through the desire economies to increase profits.

Sexing and Racializing Desire as a Commodity

[Sexualized, gendered, cross-cultural bodies…have histories of production in the United States at the nexus of academic and nonacademic discourses. These histories are histories of tourism and exploitation. They are histories that simultaneously seek and produce commodities as queered fetishes, feminized fetishes and nativized fetishes.