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Migrant Women's Bodies in Transit: From Sub-Saharan Africa to Spain in Real Life and Film

1 Introduction

The story of a journey that starts long before it makes the headlines.

(Gerardo Olivares)

Given its geo-strategic position, Spain has become the gateway to the EU for thousands of African migrants. Contrary to other European countries such as the United Kingdom or France, the social phenomenon dubbed the “massive African emigration” has been relatively recent *vis-à-vis* Spain, as it did not start until the 1980s. Although hesitantly at first, it was at this time that the traditional fishing boats from West Africa (called “*pateras*” and “*cayucos*”) began to arrive packed with migrants; first to the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura in particular), and later to the coastal towns of Andalusia in the South of the peninsula. From then on, Spain has played a major role in the transportation and reception of “human cargo.”

Interestingly enough, we should bear in mind that due to socio-political circumstances, and its dictatorial regime, from the 1950s to the 1960s Spain became a “sender,” mostly of unskilled migrant workers (to the factories of Switzerland, Germany, or England), but also of artists and intellectuals (to the universities and cultural institutions in France, the UK, Argentina, or Mexico (to name a few of the major countries). Today, Spain has become a “receiver” of migrants from the African continent—in particular from the sub-Saharan countries. Thus, starting in the late 1980s, due to the dangers of a long and uncertain journey mostly young, robust, athletic, and strong men were the first to arrive. As was the case with the slave trade and the Middle Passage of the “peculiar institution” of slavery, only the strongest and the fittest would survive such a dehumanizing experience. African women would arrive later, braving the treacherous routes, the extremely long distance, the unbearable and extreme weather conditions, plus having to deal with the threat of smugglers and mafias, as well as their sexual vulnerability. While they cover the same routes and risk their lives exactly as male migrants, the experience of African women on their way to Europe differs significantly from that of their male counterparts.

The purpose of this chapter is to focus on African women's bodies in transit from West Africa to Spain, in view of Gerardo Olivares's⁴² pioneer film on the topic, *14 Kilometros* (2007). Although the protagonist Violet's journey does not speak for all African migrant women's passage to Spain, it is my intention to highlight and analyze certain experiences that female migrant subjects share—even before the actual journey starts—as well as to address specific gender-oriented issues, such as prostitution or sex trafficking, that assault them throughout the duration of their excruciatingly painful voluntary or forced self-exile. In this sense, I would maintain that for the African women in transit, whether real or fictional, the journey of migration to Spain is written on their bodies. Finally, throughout the chapter I comment on and establish a parallel between the transatlantic slave trade and contemporary human trafficking and migration subjects.

To achieve this goal, I have organized this chapter into two separate sections. In the first, I provide a brief overview of the reality of migration from sub-Saharan Africa to Spain, which might help to better understand the route Olivares chose for the protagonists of his film, as well as to highlight the life-or-death risks they must overcome in order to survive. In the second section I focus on the film itself, and once we get to know Violet's human, social, and geographic landscape, we travel hand in hand with her from her homeland in Mali to the South of Spain. Although Violet's motivations are certainly her own and her painful experience of migration cannot possibly reflect that of all African female migrants, in my reading and viewing of Olivares's film her journey—both physical and psychological—serves as a metaphor for other stories of African women's search for “ideal elsewhere.” As Helga Ramsey-Kurz and Geetha Ganapathy-Doré claim in *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*, “migration and exile produce strangers” who “have to ... constantly redefine their presence in different places and their state of unbelonging both to themselves and to others” (24). The film's migrant protagonists, whether real or fictional, all experience these contradictory rites of passage and unsettling states of mind. In this chapter, I focus on selected scenes of significance from Olivares's film *14 Kilometers* which, in my opinion, accurately mirror the odysseys of African women's passage from the rural villages or urban cities they leave behind to the “land of milk and honey”—the North, Europe—a place they are eager to reach.⁴³ Moreover,

⁴² Gerardo Olivares (b. Córdoba, 1964) has produced hundreds of documentaries. Since 2006, Olivares shifted to producing feature films. Nature-oriented and open minded about different cultures, Olivares has produced *La gran final* [The Great Match] (2006), *14 Kilometros* (2007), *Entre lobos* [Among Wolves] (2010), *Hermanos del viento* [Brothers of the Wind] (2015), and *El faro de las orcas* (2016). Fourteen kilometers is the shortest distance between North Africa and the South of Spain. All translations from Spanish to English are mine.

⁴³ A metaphor used in the Old Testament to refer to the Promised Land, Israel, where the Israelis would be free. It was frequently used by African Americans in slave narratives and spirituals linked to the abolition of slavery and their journey to the abolitionist states in the North (Exodus 3:8; Num-

I try to show that more often than not, in contrast to male migrants, these African women in transit systematically suffer from traumatic sexual abuse and exploitation and their apparently invisible wounds are extremely difficult or impossible to heal.

2 The Early African Routes to Spain: Colonization in Reverse⁴⁴

2.1 The Ocean Route: “The Easy One”

Generally speaking, from the mid-1990s on there have existed two major routes that lead from the African continent to Spain—the so-called ‘door to Europe.’ The first one is the Atlantic Ocean route (shorter and relatively less dangerous), currently known as “the easy route” by West African migrants. This route was “inaugurated” in August 1994, when two Sahrawis became the first to arrive by boat to Fuerteventura (Canary Islands). The news soon made the headlines, and desperate Africans also heard by word of mouth; so that by 2006 the numbers had increased so sharply that the Canary government faced serious problems in dealing with the humanitarian chaos (“Spain’s Handling of the Cayuco Crisis”). Thus, after arrival some migrants were flown to the African mainland. Starting in maritime countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, or Mauritania, highly experienced local fishermen can cover the respective distances from the country of origin to the point of destination in the Canary Islands (Fuerteventura, in particular), in about a week or ten days. The duration of the “crossing” depends on, *inter alia*, the skipper’s experience, the state of the means of transportation used (*cayuco*), the load the boat bears, and the weather and sea conditions.⁴⁵

Contrary to common belief, to date hundreds of young Africans have drowned in the Atlantic Ocean. For instance, in March 2006 Yayi Bayam Diouf’s only son Alioun Mar, aged 26, lost his life, together with eighty-one other Senegalese young men from his village, off the coast of the Canary Islands. In conversation with Tidiane Sy for the

bers 14:8). Nowadays massive migration to Europe parallels the exodus in the Bible and the search for a better life.

⁴⁴ For thousands of Africans, whether refugees or economic migrants from the East and Central areas, the Italian tiny tourist island of Lampedusa has also become a new door to Europe, thus paving a new but still more dangerous route. See Horsti.

⁴⁵ I serve as a volunteer for an NGO at my University. These statements are based on personal testimonies of African migrants and the prison inmates I work with at the Local Penitentiary, the latter of whom had covered the distance between Dakar and the Canary Islands twice a month beginning in 2006 and until they were caught and flown to Almería or Málaga.

BBC News, Ms. Diouf blames poverty and the poor fishing equipment (“too old motors and boats”) for the unprecedented exodus: “So when the “*passseurs*” [traffickers who organize the trips] came here to offer the opportunity to travel, the young people who knew the sea were tempted and they all signed up.” But, despite the tragedy, the boats have kept coming and going. According to Christopher Châtelot, Ms. Yayi Bayam Diouf still feels guilty for having encouraged her son “to go, work in Europe and send money back home,” and she has become the founder of the “*Collectif des femmes pour la lutte contre l’émigration clandestine*” (“The Association of Women Fighting Against Clandestine Immigration,” previously named “The Association of Mothers and Widows of Cayucos”). She has also obtained permission to fish, and, most importantly, she walks up and down her fishing village, Thiaroye-sur-mer, located on the outskirts of Dakar, telling the truth about a deadly journey—especially to young and restless fishermen—and keeps fighting clandestine migration. Not surprisingly, the women’s association motto is “*Ne partez pas*” (Don’t Leave). Furthermore, in “*La voix des femmes: Yayi Bayam Diouf*,” her moving and illuminating speech for TEDx, Diouf highlights how women who have lost their sons and/or husbands have proved they “can change their patriarchal communities” by learning skills, becoming financially independent, and adopting orphan children whose parents have been victims of clandestine migration, sending them to school and taking care of them. She concludes that “[her] sadness and the trauma of losing [her] son has given [her] the strength to go on.” Knowing that in Mali the number of women who migrate has drastically increased, she fights against the feminization of migration by spreading the word, sharing her association’s strategies, and helping Malian women to stay in Mali.

2.2 The Continental Route: The End of the Road

The second route is called the “continental” route (much longer in terms of both time and distance). It crosses the Sahara Desert and is, by comparison, more dangerous since it is plagued with all sorts of perilous hazards. Starting in countries as different and distant as Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana (in the South), or Mali (or any other country in the West), this route literally forces the migrants to cross central Africa through the Teneré and the Sahara Deserts on their way to the North. Over the years, and only a few dangerous but successful expeditions later, the dirty and lucrative business of migration has changed the face of Agadez (Niger), the meeting point at an arbitrary and dusty crossroad from where African migrants are basically left on their own and, sadly, have to depend on the avarice of smugglers and/or the charity of strangers, as Olivares’s film demonstrates. The greedy strangers include locals who act as guides, security men, or middle men and skilled drivers who are experienced in navigating the desert—a mesmerizing ocean of sand dunes. One way or another, all of these intermediaries benefit from the transactions with the clandestine smugglers and mafias who quietly yet effectively operate in the area, taking advantage of

migrants' ignorance, and profit from the outrageous numbers of desperate people who are in search of a better life in Europe. Once again, as in slavery times and the triangular slave trade, and as their own ancestors before them, Africans themselves participate in and are complicit with these smuggling networks, and obtain huge economic benefits from the mafias who market in human trafficking, which, according to former President Barack Obama "must be called by its true name—modern slavery" (qtd. in "Human Trafficking").⁴⁶

Once the proud and ancient capital of the Tuaregs—the people of the desert—and the home of Agadez's famous Mosque (1515), the desert town profited from a booming tourism economy until the 1990s and the 2007 Tuaregs's revolts made the sandy, dusty, lively, and magic market town unsafe. Since 2010, the Tuaregs have been at peace, and Agadez is now the proud owner of an international airport and has gained the prestigious cultural title of being a Unesco World Heritage Site. However, among multiracial, multicultural, and multilingual Africans—even among the illiterate ones—Agadez's reputation stems not from her uranium depositories (which contribute to the enrichment of politicians, government officials, foreign investors and corrupt civil servants and individuals),⁴⁷ but from its crucial role in the abusive business of trafficking in migrants, as well as from its open but secretive support of smugglers, mafias, and, in general, a variety of illegal activities related to the transportation of African migrants, as if they were cattle, across the Teneré and the Sahara Desert. Given the relevant role this sandy city plays in human trafficking, it is no coincidence that the trio of protagonists in Olivares's film cross paths for the first time in Agadez. Nor is it any wonder that the two brothers, Mukela and Buba, stop at the hotel appropriately called "Le fin du chemin" (The End of the Road). Like Agadez itself, this hotel marks a beginning and an end for thousands of, for the most part, young, healthy, and strong willed African migrants—whether male or female—who are captivated by the lure of Europe.

Turning back to the notion of the Black Atlantic and the "peculiar institution" of the transatlantic slave trade, today's Agadez might act as a mirror of the "door of no return" that we find in the colonial castles and fortresses that have historically peppered the Gold Coast or Slave Coast, such as Elmina and the Cape Coast Castle (in today's Ghana), or La Maison des Esclaves on Gorée Island (Senegal). As was the case in slavery times, the narrow door of no return forced the terrified and tortured slave to look at the vastness of the blue but wild ocean in front of her/him—maybe for the first

⁴⁶ "Human Trafficking by the Numbers" pays special attention to women, minors included, from all over the world who, like Violet, suffer from sex trafficking.

⁴⁷ Referring to some of the "conditions" that contribute to corruption in Africa, in *Institutions and Reform in Africa: The Public Choice Perspective*, John Mukum Mbaku denounces "the pervasive corruption in the civil services of many African countries," and adds that those "who are supposed to enforce laws against theft ... or fraud, either function poorly or do not function at all" (125).

time—but nobody had prepared this unfortunate and much abused human being for the horrors that lay ahead once they were locked in the belly of the slave ship.

Along the same lines of thought, for the desperate, scared and disoriented migrant, Agadez (a desert village itself) represents a similar door of no return. By the time African migrants reach Agadez (regardless of their country of origin), although they had been excited by the promise of a long-awaited dream and were finally allowed to leave their dwellings, they have already been squeezed onto a bus and many of them have already suffered from theft, have had their passports stolen, or have already lost friends or kin. Thus, for the sub-Saharan migrants navigating the dunes of the desert becomes as terrifying as the crossing of the Atlantic Ocean was for their ancestors. From then on, there is only the vastness of the desert—no marked roads, no signs, no lighthouse, no trees, no water and, most important, no laws and no compassion. It is just the survival of the fittest. “Le fin du chemin” (“the end of the road”) can be read as and associated with the entrance into a dehumanized world, devoid of ethical principles and/or cultural and religious beliefs.

3 The Female Migrant African Body and Prostitution

In an interview with journalist Mara Torres, Olivares explains that the idea to write the script of *14 Kilometers* came to him while he was producing his documentary *Caravan* (2005). He spent forty days in the Teneré Desert with the Tuaregs, who trade with salt, and to his shock he came across trucks crammed with sub-Saharan Africans and their belongings. The Tuaregs commented that they had found up to two hundred African corpses that were abandoned by the drivers or in trucks that had had mechanical problems. The passengers died of hunger, thirst, and consumption. Thus, the director had the chance to gather first-hand information about the migrants’ lethal journeys, and thought about making a film about them. Oliver explains that in order to better understand their plight, while he was working on the script he did the migrants’ route himself and lived in Niger and Morocco. When Torres asks, “What is the scene that lives with you after that journey?” Olivares does not hesitate about his answer: “Seeing that very young women were forced to prostitute themselves, starting in Agadez and throughout the whole journey across Africa until they reached Europe.” It is a journey, he highlights, that might take years because they are often robbed or deported to their countries of origin, yet have the stamina to start it all over again. Thus, whenever Olivares hears people saying that “it is madness for African women to travel pregnant!” he cannot help but think of the unspeakable things unspoken about the trafficked women. Given the impact this image had on Olivares, it is no wonder that migrant women’s misinformation and prostitution are a relevant issue in his film.

Consequently, in Olivares's *14 Kilometers* the protagonist Violet—a strong-willed, self-sufficient, brave, and decent young woman—hears from her best friend about a pension in Agadez where women like her would always find plenty of work. When a still innocent and inexperienced Violet enquires what kind of jobs specifically—in case she might not qualified—her friend responds, “I don't know. As a waitress or cleaning rooms.” For Violet, the truth is a bitter pill to swallow when she finds out that the only job available for women of all ages and complexions is prostitution. Trapped against their will, threatened by middle men or smugglers and robbed of their passports and money, they have no other option than to pay with their sexuality for the ticket that will help them escape.

For African women in transit like Violet, the time they spend trapped and engaged in unwanted sexual activities varies. The strenuous working conditions, long hours, and the clients' preferences for sexual intercourse without condoms or other forms of protection only lower these women's—even pubescent girls'—self-esteem, together with their physical, psychological, and sexual well-being. Intentionally, Olivares fixes the camera's gaze on a huge official poster placed outside the central bus station that tells “la vérité” (the truth) about the dangers of “Clandestine Immigration to Europe through the Sahara and the Mediterranean,” which include “faim” (hunger); “soif” (thirst); or even “mort” (death), and enumerates gender-specific attacks such as “banditisme” (banditry) and “agression” (aggression). Among the dangers listed on the poster, there are also two related to prostitution and sexual violence: “viol” (rape) and “SIDA” (AIDS). However, this frighteningly long list does not deter these young women or make them stop in their tracks or return home. As we will see later Violet, like thousands of African female migrants before her, is forced into prostitution. Moreover, it is in Agadez where she will have to learn her first lessons. Echoing Taiye Selasi's acclaimed short story “The Sex Lives of African Girls” (2011) on African girls' abrupt and violent awakening to sexuality, “the sex life” of Violet starts with child abuse, apparently tolerated by her family, and it continues in her teens with prostitution once she reaches Agadez.⁴⁸

4 Agadez and Human Trafficking

Today, ten years after Olivares shot *14 Kilometers* (2007) and after “many thousands gone” in their attempt to cross the desert and reach the coasts of the EU, things have not changed much in Agadez.⁴⁹ In his article entitled “El cementerio de arena” (The

⁴⁸ Selasi's acclaimed short story, like Morrison's novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), shows that child abuse “begins with Uncle,” that is, at home, and the victimizer is no stranger, as is the case with Violet (236).

⁴⁹ Here, I draw a parallel between the Spiritual/American Folk Song “Many Thousands Gone”—which refers to the human cost incurred by the horrors of slavery—and the thousands of today's Afri-

Sand Cemetery), Nacho Carretero uses the metaphor of a cemetery to refer to thousands of people (men, women, and children) who have lost their lives in the Sahara Desert while traveling by bus from Agadez to Sabha in Libya—a three- or four-day journey across the Sahara Desert. So the journalist’s description of Agadez in 2017 does not differ much from the way Olivares’s cinematography captures the atmosphere of a desert town and its ghostly soul. Echoing Olivares’s long shot of Agadez, Carretero writes, “the streets and every nook and cranny of this city made of mud brick, red earth and dust are crowded with people from different countries who are waiting to ‘jump to Europe.’”⁵⁰ The journalist also describes the unhealthy living conditions of the migrants, who have to wait until the vehicle—either a van or a bus—is full to capacity. Located in the outskirts of the city, the smugglers provide ramshackle shacks where women are exploited and forced into prostitution. “The gateway to a better life has the shape of a nightmare,” concludes Carretero.

Revisiting the comparison between the transatlantic slave trade and contemporary African migration, one has to note that in both cases Africans are (mis)treated as human chattel. For example, today’s migrants are also piled up in filthy conditions until it is guaranteed that the journey from the countries of origin or countries of transit is profitable enough for the modern “slavers,” “middle men,” and “merchants.” In a similar vein, in the Agadezes of the world the overcrowded bus stations, the dilapidated shanties, coupled with the overcrowded buses, bring to mind the image of the slave ship *Brooks* and African slaves packed like sardines. According to Carsten Junker, the first drawings of the plans of the slave ship *Brooks* were published in Bristol in 1789. It shows a capacity for 294 figures (men, women and children), “tightly packed and arranged in orderly fashion” (20). Until 1804, it made ten voyages. The main purpose of the publication, sponsored by British abolitionists, was to enable people to visualize the horrors of the slave trade, touch people’s consciences, and put an end to slavery. Junker claims that the publication of the plans of the *Brooks* “provok[ed] an emotional response on the part of a larger free public by evoking the violence and terror of the trade” since they were forced to visualize “the miseries and enormity of the slave trade” (16). In my reading of Olivares’s film, the image of the *Brooks* is the visual metaphor that helps us see the enormities of today’s human trafficking in the images of overloaded buses in the Sahara Desert or inflatable boats in the Mediterranean Sea.

In contrast, although the means of transportation (vans, pick-ups, and buses—albeit dilapidated, old and in need of repair)—have not changed for the better from

cans who have fled their homelands to die, nameless, in the Sahara desert, the Atlantic Ocean or the Mediterranean Sea. From all the powerful lyrics, I would choose the following poignant lines: “No more action block for me / No more, no more / No more children stole from me / No more, no more.”

50 Among migrants, “dar el salto” literally means “to jump” from Africa to Spain. In contrast, for African slaves in the Americas, the myth of the “Flying African” mirrors their desire to go back home.

the time Olivares shot his film, nowadays some drivers from Agadez, like Kawal, drive in style with the help of a GPS and a compass. However, as Kawal asserts, the desert is anything but friendly: for the migrants, there are neither tourist adventure packs, nor moonlight Berber drum circles, which tourist agencies currently advertise to market the magic of the Sahara desert. As he admits to Carretero, even for a driver as experienced and skilled as himself, the desert can become a lethal trap: "There is no marked path, not even a track. There are stretches [in the way] where the only thing your eyes can reach is the sand. [The desert] is like the sea, like an ocean. Everything is the same. It is impossible to get oriented." Thus even drivers with lengthy experience and skills in crossing the desert face an uncertain journey every time they are at the wheel. To make matters worse, for the passengers the most insignificant mechanical problem can make the difference between life and death. Kawal, who has been witness to these heartbreaking dramas, graphically but stoically describes them: "On every journey, I come across vans which are left stuck [in the desert]. Some of them are surrounded by corpses. In others, you find people desperately screaming for help. But I cannot stop. What can you do? I have my van loaded to the full."

The rationale behind Kawal's terrifying words lies in the fact that, as the statistics show, human trafficking in Agadez seems unstoppable despite never-ending regulations to control the sandy borders. Thus, human rights associations like ARCI report that between February and April 2016 more than 60 000 African migrants passed through the city of Agadez.⁵¹ For the majority (45 000 people), Agadez is the transit country to the "new route" to Europe via Libya.⁵² For the fifteen thousand migrants who remained, where women abound due to the commonplace belief that the continental route through Algeria and Morocco is to some extent safer, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta or Melilla become their final "transit countries." Once they reach one or the other they are convinced that their "long deferred dream" will not "dry up like a raisin in the sun"⁵³ since Spain is *only* fourteen kilometers away.

51 ARCI offers a reliable and critical study of regulations between African countries and the EU (with an emphasis on their effects on the Central Mediterranean as well as on the African countries of departure) that have done little—if anything—to contribute to putting an end to human trafficking and/or "[to improve] the conditions of the border control system" (12).

52 For a detailed and matter-of-fact description of this third route from Agadez to Libya, see Kingsley.

53 I am borrowing here from the African American poet Langston Hughes and his often quoted poem "A Dream Deferred."

5 Spanish Enclaves in Africa: Ceuta and Melilla or “the Gateway” to Europe

For African “economic migrants”—as they are called in order to distinguish them from the asylum seekers who seek to escape from brutal dictatorial regimes, armed conflicts, and/or political persecution—Ceuta and Melilla also epitomize the door to Europe. However, this is not the final stop. Both Spanish enclaves are separated from Morocco by their respective twenty-foot-high, barbed-wired double fences that run for about eight kilometers. But for those who have spent months—even years—trying to reach the North—that is, Europe—a razor wired-topped border fence is not enough to stop them. Although countless migrants have been seriously injured or even died while trying to break through the fences, whether in Ceuta or in Melilla, they keep trying and more will come. As Dan Bilefsky writes for *The New York Times*, reporting on a recent “migrants fence storming” in Ceuta, being “the only two land borders between the European Union and Africa, [Ceuta and Melilla] have become a magnet for sub-Saharan migrants willing to cross deserts, brave razor wire and endure perilous conditions in search of a better life.”

Lizzie Dearden, writing for *The Independent*, refers to the same massive break-in, but the journalist employs an ethics of care and pauses to pay attention to those who were injured: “Many needed medical treatment after scaling the barbed wire fence separating Ceuta from Morocco, with several bleeding from their hands and legs while others were injured falling to the ground.” Just three years earlier, the BBC News opened with a similar headline, but only the location has changed: “African Migrants Storm into Spanish Enclave of Melilla.” This piece of news stresses their determination to overcome just one more obstacle preventing them from making their dream come true: “Melilla’s formidable border barrier does not deter migrants desperate to get into Europe.” As with Dearden, the BBC reported not only that the migrants “suffered cuts scaling the fence,” but also that they tried to protect themselves [from Moroccan, and Spanish police brutality] by [throwing] “stones, sticks and bottles at police.” As can be inferred, the majority of those who made it (on February 17, 2014) were not only in good shape and strong—they were obstinate too.

6 Mireille, Astan Traoré, and Tatiana Kanga: Pioneer African Women in Transit to Spain

Surprisingly, despite the nearly insurmountable wire fence, there was a young woman among those who overcame it. For teenager Mireille (from Cameroon), this was not her first attempt. She had tried on four occasions, but this time, despite some bone fractures, she made it and became the first African woman to scale the triple twenty-foot

barbed-wire fence between Melilla (Spain) and Morocco. As Mireille herself recounted to the press, in her previous failed attempt she was subjected to a merciless beating by the Moroccan police, and she fell onto the ground with a broken tibia and she was sent to the Nador Hospital Morocco. Mireille was still on crutches the day before she decided to scale the fence. After doing so, she lied to the authorities and she said she was fifteen to facilitate the process of being granted asylum or citizenship in Spain. Thus, she was first sent to an institution for minors, but was later moved to the CETI (Center for the Temporary Residence of Immigrants) once the tests proved she might be between sixteen and eighteen years old (Blasco de Avellaneda).

In an interview for Spanish TV Channel 3, Mireille summarizes her year-long journey from Cameroon in the company of her younger brother. She was fortunate as, according to her statement, she had neither been harassed by smugglers nor been sexually abused: "I never paid a cent." Discussing the push factors behind her decision to migrate, Mireille explains that the traditional African family is too large, and that she felt she was a burden for hers, and that back home there is not enough food for everybody. Besides, she adds in her well-articulated French, young girls (and boys) like her who have diplomas cannot find jobs: "Even if we go to school and get a diploma there is nothing for us to do." She braved all the hardships faced by African migrants on their way to Europe. Her position was additionally vulnerable due to her gender, and the objectification and sexualization of her body. Given the inherent threats to emigrant women's bodies in transit from Africa to Spain, one more question remains: How has Mireille been able to keep both her mental sanity and her amazingly good physical shape? "Playing football," she says, has been both her hobby and her remedy. Shy but self-confident, Mireille does not smile much.

The second African woman to scale the double wired fence and successfully accomplish the harsh objective was twenty-year-old Astan Traoré (Cameroon). In contrast to Mireille's multiple attempts, in the case of Traoré, she was successful in her first attempt. Moreover, by the time Traoré jumped the fence in Melilla she was about twelve-weeks pregnant. Like Mireille, Traoré's determination speaks volumes about these African women's physical strength, psychological determination, and stamina. As for her plans for the future, Traoré has very clear ideas: "I just want to go to Europe. I want to get a job. I want to be free." Traoré reports that she has left some fifteen women behind in the bushes who, like her, dream of a better life on the other side of the fence. Traoré will soon be sent to mainland Spain since her pregnancy makes her "vulnerable," and, thus she will receive special medical treatment and will have access to health social services (Ramos).

Traoré's case is not an exception, as more and more African women are following the path of African male migrants, leaving their lives behind and travelling lightly. However, due to the duration of the journey (the continental route, in particular), which might vary from months to years, by the time these women are ready to get on board and attempt to cross the Strait of Gibraltar or scale the deadly fences in the enclaves of Ceuta or Melilla, frequently they are already pregnant. Pregnancies might

be wanted—as seems to be Traoré’s case—or unwanted, because the women have been raped, or forced into prostitution out of necessity, or exploited by the smugglers to pay for the ticket to Spain. Francisco Cansino, the director of the Spanish Commission for Refugee Help in Malaga, reflects on the growing numbers of pregnant women, sometimes travelling with little children: “Maybe it’s hard for white, Western Europeans to understand why a pregnant woman, with her toddler in her arms, would risk her life in a rubber raft. But, the concept of “life” isn’t the same in Spain and Africa. It’s not the same for someone who has absolutely nothing—or who’s escaping conflict and war” (Frayer). Cansino refers to unnamed and invisible women and their babies, who died trying to cross the Mediterranean Sea, as well as to those who miraculously have survived, as is the case with Kanga.

Also from Cameroon, like Mireille, Tatiana Kanga’s story differs because she left her homeland and headed for Spain through the continental route and attempted crossing the Mediterranean Sea on board an inflatable boat. Like Mireille, she was pregnant. In Kanga’s case, though, she was nine months pregnant with Antoni (now three years old), and was travelling with her toddler daughter Chantel (then about two years old). As journalist Lauren Frayer reports, what makes her story unique is the fact that she has survived this ordeal, and that the family has been living in Malaga since they landed in September 2014. As usually happens with African migrant women who have experienced the nightmare of crossing the Sahara Desert and being smuggled into Morocco, Kanga does not provide much information about either the reasons for leaving while pregnant and with a toddler in tow, or about the details of the route. However, she does share some relevant facts about her crossing. Talking about the means of transportation and the load, Kanga says that “it was an inflatable boat, with 17 people.” It is interesting that in this particular case not only women and children abounded, but specifically pregnant women. According to Kanga, “seven of them were women, three children—and six of the women were pregnant, including [her].” Like Violet in Olivares’s film, Kanga reached Spain by crossing the 9 miles (which equals 14 kilometers and explains the significance of the film’s title)—the shortest distance between the continents of Africa and Europe—after surviving the continental route and the Sahara Desert.

Like thousands before her, she was smuggled in by a Moroccan man she does not dare to identify. She complains that she had to pay the trafficker an exorbitant price for the tickets even though they were squeezed in a rubber dinghy where they all risked their lives: “He charged me 1,200 Euros (about USD 1,290)—1,000 for me and 200 for my daughter. ... She cost only 200, because she takes up less space.” Despite the short distance, the crossing was not an easy one. “We set off at 4 o’clock in the morning from Morocco,” Kanga remembers. “We could see Spain, but we had so many problems. By 8 a.m., the motor broke. I thought we were going to die. It was so hot. I brought some cookies and orange juice, but we didn’t have enough drinking water for 17 people.” “Miraculously,” Kanga continues, “they reached a Spanish beach after only a fourteen-hour journey ... just as [their] raft began deflating.” Like

Mireille or Traoré before her in Melilla, Kanga is happy in Malaga, where she is staying at a migrant detention center, but her future in Spain is as uncertain as that of Mireille or Traoré. However, she is happy that she has got this far. Lauren Frayer emphasizes that Kanga “beams” when she utters the words “It’s Europe!”; she sees it as her “ideal elsewhere”—a place of arrival similar to Paradise, a recurrent dream for migrants and, at times, just an illusion (Ramsey-Kurz). Similar to Mireille’s determination and will power to dare to scale the barbed-wire fence, Kanga adds: “I did not know what would happen that morning when I got in the boat, but I was determined to live without fear” (Frayer).

Frayer’s article contains a touching family picture of Tatiana Kanga on April 22, 2015, walking the streets of Malaga with both Chantel and Antoni, now aged 3 years and 7 months, respectively, all impeccably dressed and in good health. The mother wears the latest fashionable outfit: a tight tiger printed top, tight jeans, a long-sleeved white jacket, and white moccasin shoes to match; she is smiling and proudly looking at Antoni. The two children, Chantel and Antoni, are looking at the camera. Despite the picture perfect family group, their future remains uncertain and the single mother with her two children might be repatriated back to Cameroon, her country of origin. And this is not fiction or an open-ended film—this uncertain and excruciatingly long liminal state, coupled with the sense of dislocation and unbelonging, awaits the thousands of migrants who have successfully reached Europe but whose legal status is not yet secure. Only then would Kanga be able to remain in Spain or head for any other country of destination in the EU. The legal process, though, is long and tedious, since most undocumented migrants travel with fake passports, get rid of them, or are robbed before crossing the border. To put it briefly, if Tatiana Kanga is allowed to stay for five years in Spain, she can apply for a residency permit. If she stays for more than ten years, she can start the process of becoming a Spanish citizen. However, one way or another, she will be required to obtain a work permit and to submit documents that take a long time to obtain from Cameroon (or any other African country), such as a Birth Certificate, a valid criminal record certificate issued by the authorities in Cameroon, and a document that certifies her marital status (issued by her home authorities too), as well as to show documentation that proves her long-term legal residence in Spain, (just to name a few). Given the insurmountable bureaucracy, the expensive process, and the possibility of entering the job market by the back door, some African migrant women do find domestic jobs (but they are usually exploited, work longer hours, and are paid below the minimal legal wage), get an education or, in the worst case scenarios, are caught by mafias and force to work as prostitutes.

7 14 Kilometers: Gerardo Olivares's Fictionalized Documentary

“The Sea is History,” writes Afro-Caribbean poet Derek Walcott with reference to the centuries-long tradition of the transatlantic slave trade and the transactions of human cargo across the Atlantic Ocean and the Caribbean, in which Africa was the continent of origin and the Americas and Europe were the continents of transit and destination, respectively. “The sea is slavery,” echoes Afro-British writer Fred D’Aguiar in his fictionalized historical novel about the slave ship the *Zong* and the 132 sick and dead bodies of African slaves who were thrown overboard to profit from the insurance company in 1781. Similarly, in Edwidge Danticat’s “The Children of the Sea,” her unnamed Haitian activist and teenage protagonist, who is about to drown in the Caribbean Sea on his way to Florida and freedom of speech, writes in his journal his last letter to his girl friend, and accepts his fate “to live life eternal, among the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery” (27). More recently, Marie H el ene Cauvin created a powerful and unsettling oil painting *Vers un destin insolite sur les flots bleus de la Mer des Antilles* of an African woman who seems to be desperately swimming (or is it walking?) away from a sailboat in the distance, without noticing that she is stepping on the corpse of a drowned woman put to rest on a ladder of shackles. Struck by this image, Tanya L. Shields invokes Walcott, D’Aguiar, and Danticat and maintains that Cauvin “tells the story of desperation, allowing us to read gender in terms of freedom and labor” (27), and at the same time highlights “the violence endured by the [female] flesh” (26). Though separated in time and geography, the trafficking in human cargo that has been going on for the past three decades between the African continent and the South of Europe is to some extent analogous to the transatlantic slave trade, only now it is the Mediterranean that records Black history. As with African slaves, those who have lost their lives in their attempt to cross the fourteen kilometers which separate Africa and Europe lie at the bottom of the sea in a vast, unmarked cemetery made of sand and salt water, with no graveyards or burial stones; nameless, invisible, forgotten, and unrecorded. Only the ones who are fortunate enough to reach the coastal towns of Spain make the headlines and become visible in the European public discourse because, as Olivares complains, “on TV, the piece of news takes twenty-five seconds, the delivery is cold, and there is a news-fatigue element because people change TV channels” (Torres). Thus, the images of the newly arrived are soon forgotten by most people; they become unnamed faces, like those who lay at the bottom of the sea. At the same time though, it is true that in the media one finds countless powerful images of dangerous rescue actions by the coast guard boats—whether in the middle of the Mediterranean or on nearby tourist beaches. There is the presence of humanitarian associations like, among others, the Red Cross; and there are eager volunteers of all ages and stages of life who show their professional training as well as their human side; hundreds of African faces with des-

perate eyes crying for help are shown in the newspapers or on TV screens; where one can see long lines of exhausted rescued migrants wrapped in red blankets or aluminum foil, holding plastic bottles of water and biscuits in their shaky hands, looking absently into the horizon or just lying on their backs, both exhausted and fully asleep. Furthermore, the media is not shy about showing the dead bodies of African migrants floating on the sea, washed up on the beaches, or wrapped in dark plastic bags carried by the rescuers; waiting in line to be, hopefully, identified. But these, Olivares insists, will soon be forgotten too. He argues that the faces and bodies of these nameless African migrants, whether dead or alive, are only the tip of the iceberg of a dehumanizing and traumatic journey through the heart of Africa, which still remains unknown.

These sample media images speak volumes about the ever-increasing waves of mass African migration to Spain. They also reflect the horror of the enterprise as well as its transnational socio-political and financial implications. These heartbreaking images are both re-making and questioning the recent history of the [Black] Mediterranean Sea. They make the headlines world-wide, but in the context of today's media culture, packed with drama and bombarding the public with ever-new stimulating images, people cease to react to the unspeakable suffering of the African migrants. This is why comparisons between today's African migrations and the transatlantic slave trade—reinforced by artistic images such as Cauvin's painting—may prove more effective in communicating the new Black history written on the Mediterranean Sea than typical media images. In other words, as with the slave narratives told or written by the slaves themselves and used by British and North American abolitionists as ideological weapons to put an end to slavery in the nineteenth-century, Olivares's script and his characters' dramatic journeys to the North attempt to shake people's consciences as well as to question legislators' and politicians' socio-economic strategies.

Analogously, Olivares's film evokes more affect from the viewer than the public media discourse or traditional documentaries. Olivares has chosen to produce a road movie, his *opera prima*, instead of a documentary, although he has produced countless documentaries and for decades has crisscrossed the African continent. Thus, he is familiar with the human and geographic landscape of Africa and is well-informed about the variety and complexity of its internal and international conflicts. Olivares is highly concerned about the lack of visibility, misinformation, and the lack of reliable reporting about the extremely long and deadly journeys of Africans along the continental route to Europe. Thus, Olivares's main goal is to focus on and deal with the silenced and untold tragedy of African migrants who either choose to or are forced to leave their countries of origin and travel to Spain—a stepping stone to Europe.

In an interview with Javier Estrada, the director confesses that he produced *14 Kilometers* with a clear pedagogical goal in mind: to fight against the ignorance about African migration; to show what the media ignores; and to address a target audience: Spanish young people. Contrary to the widespread idea that the toughest and most perilous part of such a long journey is the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar, Olivares insists that “people cannot possibly imagine what [African migrants]

have gone through before they actually arrive on board the pateras” in the south of Spain. To correct this misapprehension, Olivares's film focuses on the experience of the journey and the continental route, and devotes special attention to the harshness of the crossing of the Teneré Desert (Niger). Moreover, as his three protagonists' individual and painful journeys fully show, the director reminds us that his ultimate goal is to spread the idea that “behind each one of those [African] faces there is a drama that starts in Mali or farther away” (Estrada).

National and international critics agree with the director's philosophy. Thus, Jonathan Holland suggests that Olivares's film is an “ambitious” and “honest portrayal” of the “physical and psychological stress” suffered by the trio of protagonists. Similarly, Felipe Gómez Isa emphasizes “the film's commitment” to “illustrate the human suffering involved in the hard and extenuating migration process,” while at the same time praising the director for presenting “a perspective that has not received much attention so far” (1061). Olivares's cinematography has gained a virtually unanimous favorable critical reception, but some critics object to the discrepancy between the film's stunning beauty of the desert and the traumas experienced by the protagonists. Writing for *Variety*, Holland claims that “the pic ... only intermittently explores or communicates the tragedy beneath its suspiciously good looks.” In a similar vein, Ray Bennett observes that the cinematography “clashes” with the screenplay, since “the three protagonists' desperate plight is often at odds with and not informed by the gorgeous desert scenery.” In Spain, Jordi Costa's review for *El País* offers a similar comment, as the critic asserts that Olivares “sublimates some extremely harsh realities into beautifully poetic images.” However, there is little critical reference to the characters' specific trials, except for Bennett's and Holland's texts. While the former maintains that Aminata Kanta's [Violet's] is an “appealing story” of “a young woman desperate to flee an unwanted marriage,” he objects that “the script doesn't get under [her] skin.” Holland praises Olivares for his “refusal to craft a well-rounded plot from real-life horrors” such as African women's prostitution.

In line with Bennett's and Holland's statements, I would argue that though there is no need to eroticize Violet's body or show sexually explicit scenes, the fact remains that she is a victim of sexual trafficking and bears sexual abuse and unwanted sexual aggressions that become written on her sexuality, and I would further argue that Violet's scars remain almost invisible. Additionally, the director touches only in passing on Violet's shame and horror at being forced to work as a prostitute, even as he confesses that the image that stands out from his *solo* journey from Niger to Morocco is that of young African women who were forced to sell sex in places such as Agadez. It is true, though, that in the process Olivares projects the image of a strong, proud, and dignified Violet who, despite the circumstances, keeps her ethic principles and dignity intact throughout the extenuating long and traumatic journey from Mali to Tarifa, during which her body is sexualized and objectified.

Thus, *14 kilometers*, invites the audience to experience the horrors and the shame of the physical and psychological journey across central Africa through the three

main characters, who embody three representative types of migrants.⁵⁴ Firstly, an adult, Mukela (Illiassou Mhamadou Alzouma), typifies those who have tried once, have been deported to their countries of origin—Niger in his case—but are convinced there are good reasons to try once more. Olivares chooses to omit the shame of Mukela, a “been-to,” as they call them in Ghana, meaning a migrant who has been to Europe but comes back to Africa with empty hands and real or symbolic debts and unpaid loans from his family and friends. The film starts in *media res* and there is no hint about Mukela’s adjusting to his apparent failure. However, Mukela will not quit, and—as is the case of thousands of migrants in real life—he is already thinking of giving it a second try.

Secondly, there is his teenager brother, Buba (Adoum Moussa). Mukela firmly believes in his brother’s dexterity as a football player and is convinced that he could possibly make it in one of the leading European clubs. Mukela’s insistence, as well as the encouraging words of Buba’s coach—“No international scout comes here [Naomey, Niger]. [If I were you] I’d try my luck in Europe. I should head for Europe”—move Buba to start the journey. In so doing, Buba attempts to fulfill his dream of being a football player. Thus, in the case of Buba, Olivares introduces the topic of the European dream—personified by a young, hard-working, skilled, and exploited car mechanic who manages to do his job while engaging in constant and serious practice and training for a sport—despite the odds. For example, Buba is one of the few players in his team that wears branded sports shoes and the Real Madrid official t-shirt—a clear and sad reminder of, and a souvenir from, his brother Mukela’s previous attempt to travel to Europe.

Finally, and most importantly, the increasing number of African migrant women in transit are represented by Violet (Aminata Kanta), a young girl from Mali who runs away from home and travels alone, but who happens to meet the two brothers, Muleka and Buba, on her way to the North. The story of this trio is one of friendship, resilience, sacrifice, stubbornness, disappointment, death, exploitation, generosity, anger, frustration, broken dreams, and, perhaps, a hopeful future.

As mentioned above—and as I did with respect to real migrants such as Mireille, Traoré, and Kanga—in my analysis of Olivares’s film I place the spotlight on Violet (Mali). Even though she is a fictional character, Violet’s own nightmarish experience of emigration mirrors that of hundreds of African women who have come after her; both then and now, and both in real life and in fiction. Generally speaking, as human rights associations and volunteers insist, and as statistics show, African women migrants are most vulnerable in terms of their sexuality. After being examined and

⁵⁴ The three protagonists, as well as most of the cast, are non-professional actors. Some were hired as the producers changed locations. In different interviews, Olivares stresses his preference for a non-professional casting, and for shooting outdoors and in contact with nature—the desert is a character in itself in this film.

interviewed, a large number of African women report having suffered from some (or all) of the following: a) rape and/or gang rape; b) [unwanted] pregnancies as a result of forced sexual intercourse; c) [unsafe] induced abortions, whether women wanted to end their pregnancies or not, due to the hazardous journey; d) prostitution and all kinds of sexual exploitation. As we will show later, both the real migrants (Mireille, Traoré, and Kanga) and the fictional Violet are rather shy and reserved and refrain from talking about sexual issues.

8 Violet's Journey from Mali to Tarifa (Spain): Migrating Women's Sexual Vulnerability

In Olivares's film, a teenaged Violet runs away from home in the region of Mopti, a riverside village in Mali, to avoid an unwanted arranged marriage to a well-positioned old man who has sexually abused her since she was a child. Using a shoulder camera, the film employs a right to left slow panning that shows the everyday routine in a rural community. Children play and sing or help their mothers with errands, women get ready to cook or leave to sell in the market, and some middle-aged men sit on the floor and repair their fishing nets. All of them occupy a traditional compound. Animals like goats or sheep are scattered around. The mud brick houses all look alike. We hear a conversation that is going on nearby while the camera approaches Violet's dwelling. Once inside the room, we find three people: the woman and the suitor are sitting on a large rug that partially covers the earthen floor; and a younger man is sitting on a low wooden stool—a symbol of power. There is no sign of Violet. The old man is wearing a dark blue kaftan, a variety of silver pieces, and a conical hat typical for the Dogon country. Violet's mother is wearing a black and white boubou and a flowered dark blue headwrap, and Violet's brother is wearing a brownish kaftan from African waxprint, probably tailored for the occasion. The camera catches them in the middle of the arranged marriage transaction which, following tradition, includes a lengthy bargaining session between Violet's mother and her husband-to-be. Interestingly enough, all three characters remain unnamed throughout the conversation, a clear metaphor for the universality of the practice that is still common, albeit silenced, in African countries, even though different NGOs consider arranged marriages to be a "violation of human rights" ("Child Marriage"). In this case, the starting bride price for Violet is twenty cows:⁵⁵

55 Though set in the fifties in Lagos (Nigeria)—one of the African countries with the highest rate of child marriages—Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Bride Price* (1976) fiercely denounces this traditional custom as well as the high price her protagonist Aku-nna has to pay.

Man: How many cows do you want?

Mother: At least 20 cows.

Man: That is outrageous! I can offer you half that.

Mother: That's not enough.

Brother: She is a good girl. She will look after you. You'll see.

Mother: If you're offering me ten cows, then you will have to include 100 kilos of salt and some money. And you pay for the party!

Man: Alright!

Mother: Your future wife is waiting. Go see her.

[Man enters a small and ill-illuminated room where Violet is sitting on the bed, and looking miserable. She is holding her left hand under her chin and she does not show any sign of interest when he sits by her side. She is wearing a cotton long sleeve top, a long skirt, and a headwrap, all in matching white, red and green African print.]

Man: Aren't you happy? At last you'll be my wife. Ja! Ja! I told you you'd end being mine!

While arranged marriages have been part and parcel of African cultures for centuries, some African countries show alarming numbers. According to the UNICEF "Girl Summit," "more than one out of three young women in sub-Saharan Africa are married by their eighteenth birthday."⁵⁶ Thus, by addressing the issue of Violet's arranged marriage, Olivares introduces a relevant social and cultural problem that seriously affects the lives of thousands of young girls like the young protagonist.

It's worth noting that, as customary, the partner is chosen by the parents or family elders—in this case, Violet's mother. Apparently, it is the mother who has matched Violet with the old man whom her daughter (most probably a minor) not only detests but by whom she has also been traumatized through repeated sexual abuse that has been going on since she was a child, as we learn in the next scene. It is clear from Violet's defensive body language—she pushes her suitor off her when he tries to embrace her—that she is not in the least receptive to the idea of becoming the spouse of a man who is at least thrice her age and, more importantly, has molested her since she was a child.

Curiously enough, Violet's unnamed mother seems quite comfortable with the role she plays, since that is one of her duties. As an African woman, she knows that a woman alone is stigmatized. If unmarried and without children, Violet will be considered a social pariah, thus the mother's firm resolution to seal this business with the suitor she thinks would "protect" and provide for her daughter's future, as well as for her extended family. Being a widow, the husband is absent from this transaction, and we later learn it is the bride-to-be's mother who is in charge of the negotiations of the bride price. For example, when the man lowers to half the number of cows, offering ten instead of twenty, Violet's mother becomes actively engaged in the negotiations,

⁵⁶ See also "Countries with the highest rates of child marriage." According to UNICEF statistics, the West sub-Saharan countries with the highest rates of child marriage (before women are eighteen) are Niger (75%), and Mali (55%), which is where Violet comes from.

requesting the payment of salt and money and, on top of that, the expenses generated by the wedding celebration—which, following the tradition, add up to large sums of money, given the variety and duration of the rituals as well as the usual large number of guests. Equally noticeable is the fact that, although there is a male figure present during the negotiations, Violet's unnamed brother remains silent and let's Violet's mother negotiate. Interestingly, when he does speak it is only to emphasize Violet's good character (i.e., subservient and docile), as well as her domestic skills (she will cook for him and will take good care of the husband-to-be's sexual needs), which will prove Violet's excellent training within the parameters of a patriarchal and traditional society.

Coming back to my assertion that the *peculiar institution* of slavery and the slave trade can be compared to the contemporary human trafficking and migration, here too the arranged marriages share common traits with the auction block whereby men, women, and children are sold to the highest bidder. Likewise, in Olivares's scene about Violet's bride price and her arranged marriage, the old man bids, buys, and gets the woman. Moreover, similar to the tradition of runaway slaves such as Harriet Jacobs (1813–1897) who was sexually harassed by the owner and doubly punished for taking the liberty of choosing her lover and the father of her two children, Violet also knows that her life is at risk as well as the reputation and safety of her whole family, and like Jacobs, who declines an adulterous relationship with her master—“her great curse” (27), Violet rejects a forced sexual relationship and an arranged marriage and goes into hiding, to later flee from her homeland.

Violet's reasons to leave are clear, but she would not have gone far if she had not found sanctuary in her friend's comfortable house, similarly as Jacobs hid for seven years in her grandmother's tiny attic, “[her] loophole of retreat” (117). In the film, the viewers learn about Violet's abuse through their conversations. Additionally, we are informed that, as currently happens today, the blame is put on the victim of sexual abuse. Thus, Violet confesses that had she told her mother, she would not have believed her despite the conspicuous marks on her little body, and Violet's sister heard her cries, she would have never come to her rescue or told her mother. It can be inferred, therefore, that both in Violet's arranged marriage as well as in the recurrent episodes of childhood sexual abuse, women are often complicit in perpetuating the use and abuse of other African women by conforming to the norms of a strict patriarchal culture and tradition.

In contrast, Violet's friend both listens to and empathizes with her dilemma. When Violet reaches her house, she has no idea where to hide. In response to her friend's query, a still traumatized Violet responds: “I don't know. I think I will go to Europe. If he finds me, he will kill me. I have to go as far away as possible where nobody might find me.” Out of fear and ignorance, Violet cannot even place “Europe” on the map, nor does she know the thousands of kilometers that separate her from a life or death situation. On her part, Violet's friend's positive complicity leads her to lend Violet money for the journey to Europe, even though it means that her own

dream of leaving for the North will have to be put aside, at least temporarily. However, apart from Violet's friend's efforts to comfort and help her, this scene is most relevant because it reveals the extent of African women's lack of information about the dangers that lie ahead of them once they take the decision to migrate and cross half the continent to reach Europe.

In a similar vein, in her acclaimed novel *Three Strong Women* the French writer Mari Ndiaye tackles the topic of African women's migration and their sexual exploitation without apology. In contrast, Olivares deals with the same issue albeit in a more subtle way. For Mari Ndiaye's Khady—one of the protagonists who is sent against her will to France to provide for her in-laws once her husband dies and she is left childless—Europe is just an idea. In the case of Khady, Europe is a mantra that keeps her alert and on her feet, and like Violet, she is not familiar with the social and geographic reality of migration: “What had to be continually in mind was this: the journey could take months, even years, as it had for a neighbour ... who had only reached Europe (what “Europe” was exactly, where it was situated, she put off until later to find out) five whole years after leaving home” (253). Both Khady, before leaving Senegal, and Violet, before leaving Mali, have no idea either about the length of the journey or about the hardships ahead.

Likewise, though Violet's friend is generous enough to lend her own savings, she is unfortunately similarly not well informed. As happens in both fiction and in real life—even today—Violet's ignorance about the route will have unspeakable consequences for Violet's mental, physical and sexual integrity:

Violet: I can't take the money!

Friend: You're going to take it. Mine is a dream, and yours is a question of life or death. When you go to Agadez, look for a hotel, The End of the Road (Le fin du chemin). I am told you can always find work there.

Violet: What kind of work?

Friend: I don't know [pause] ... As a waitress, I imagine, or cleaning rooms.

I have previously highlighted the existence of the many myths and lies about the “door of no return.” While most migrants—Violet's friend included—have heard about The End of the Road Hotel (Le fin du chemin), few women know, are willing to tell, or have lived to confess that there are no decent jobs available such as waitressing or cleaning rooms. Instead what is in high demand in Agadez and elsewhere along the route to the North is prostitution.

In another scene, later on in the film, Buba and his brother Mukela briefly stop at a pension to just have a drink. The “been-to” Mukela remarks, “The only thing that has changed in two years are the girls. The rest is exactly the same.” Both look around and see the sorrowful faces and sad eyes of African women of all ages and complexions, which speak volumes about their sexual slavery. It is Buba who first spots Violet, still wearing her friend's gift (a wood and silver pendant around her neck), sitting by the slot machine, (a powerful visual metaphor for her commodified body), and

showing the most desolate look in her eyes. Obviously she is not working as a waitress or a cleaning woman, as her friend suggested, and she naively believed. She wears the uniform and trademarks of her profession—bright make-up and a tight strappy brown tank top, à la mode European. Violet's immobility and loneliness matches that of most of the African women in the bar. They look too tired, or too high, or too drunk to even keep up a conversation. Violet looks shocked—like she has finally opened her eyes to the horrors of her unplanned and unprepared journey. But, as Amma Darko writes about her Ghanaian protagonist Mara, who is forced into prostitution by her own husband in German night clubs, Violet is still “too green” for the job (88).

Interestingly enough, though Olivares is quite conscious of the existing problem, in *14 Kilometers* we do not find any graphic descriptions of the world of forced prostitution, the smugglers' sexual abuse, the sex traffickers' strategies, or the many ways women have to pay with their sexuality for a ticket that might take them one hundred miles further ahead. It could be argued that although this is the first time we find Violet transformed into the kind of person she probably never dreamt of becoming, she does have to provide sexual services to her clients. Captured in a medium shot, the camera depicts Violet's horror and shame through her stasis. Echoing Paul Gilroy's oft quoted concept in *Against Race*, Violet's unmapped and urgent “route” to her imaginary Europe has her migrant body “rooted” in unwanted prostitution—an otherwise recurrent fantasy and imagined cliché about the African woman migrant (155).

As a diasporic subject, Violet continues *en route*. She manages to leave The End of the Road (Le fin du chemin) behind and exchanges her stasis for action. In this sense, Olivares presents a heroine who strives to re-build her shattered ego from scratch, as well as her sexually abused body. Thus, even though Buba and Mukela have offered her their protection and company and have shared with her the unpaved roads of the desert for miles on end, not to mention food and water, Violet drastically puts an end to her friendly relationship with Buba the night he tries to caress her breasts. When Violet asks him to stop it, Buba playfully reminds her of her job at the pension in Agadez. Furious, Violet responds by slapping him on his face and shouting: “Don't you ever touch me!”

Once again, the scene at the check point provides further evidence of the sexual vulnerability of the migrant woman in transit. To start with, the setting seems surreal: A dilapidated desert camp tent in the middle of nowhere. A white pickup parked nearby. Half a dozen men wearing military uniforms, heavy boots, sun glasses, and desert turbans wrapped around their heads appear sitting down and leisurely talking to each other. The check point is marked by a thin piece of cotton fabric about two meters long. It is held on both ends by stones placed on two old jerry cans, one at each end. There is a long establishing shot that highlights the absurdity of the invented frontier. The passengers in the bus include men, women, and children. A menacing and athletic soldier orders the driver to open the doors and gets on the bus. He checks carefully right and left, and asks some passengers at random to show him their passports. So ordered, a frightened Buba shows him his fake Malian passport (purchased

for 50 Euros) and passes inspection. The soldier stops now in front of Violet, who is sitting a couple of rows behind, and asks her for hers. The soldier opens the passport and looks at Violet. He then turns back, gets off the bus, and heads towards a man sitting on a plastic chair—obviously in charge. We do not hear the conversation between the soldier and his superior because Olivares focuses the camera on Buba and Violet, alternately, to show their concern and anxiety. When the soldier comes back to the bus, passport in hand, he orders Violet to follow him, accusing her of having a fake passport: “Don’t tell me lies!” he shouts at her, and he adds: “Come with me!” When she refuses, the soldier tries to grab her by her arm, and Violet screams: “Leave me alone!,” Buba begs, “Let her go!”

Violet is the type of woman who will not give up without a fight. It takes two soldiers to handle the situation. Violet keeps screaming, fighting, and kicking both soldiers until she is finally taken by force and pushed in front of the officer in charge. Buba throws Violet’s backpack through the window, and the bus is allowed to pass the check point. This time, contrary to her job in the brothel of Agadez, Violet does not have the protection of other women like herself. She is left alone in the company of several men who are hungry for sex. Once again, though she has committed no crime—her passport is legal—she is arrested and taken by force just because she is young and attractive, a recurrent risk for African women who travel alone on the way to the North. And once again, as in the scenes in the Agadez pension, Olivares does not dwell on the serious and dangerous implications of Violet’s situation. In his cinematic discourse, Olivares leaves it to the viewers to come up with their own conclusions. He insists that the use of sexually explicit scenes would have been “the easiest thing to do.” However discreet and evasive the director’s decision might be, the fact remains that Violet once again suffers from sexual abuse, and this time it is not forced prostitution but gang rape.

There is still one more sequence in which Olivares deals in an oblique manner with Violet’s forced prostitution and unwanted sexual advances. After she has been kidnapped, Violet and Buba remain ignorant for months of each other’s painful yet parallel journeys. While Buba suffers from cold, hunger, and death threats from the Moroccan border police, as well as the theft of his Real Madrid ball by an Algerian low rank border official, Violet literally remains out of the picture. It is only by chance, after Buba pays the Moroccan smuggler to get him a seat on the crowded patera that will finally make it possible for Buba to land on the shores of Spain, that he hears about Violet’s whereabouts. While waiting for the patera to materialize, dozens of men are kept locked up and treated as if they were chattel in a small room without ventilation. Buba notices that a new passenger enters the room, but does not pay much attention to him until he notes that he is wearing Violet’s pendant. When Buba asks, the man responds, “It is from a whore who refused to fuck with me.” After her rather long absence, the viewer is informed that Violet has been working as a prostitute at Hotel Tropical, in Asilah, Morocco. Buba manages to cheat the guardians, leaves the shelter, and rushes to find Violet to offer her to cross with him that night. It is evident that

Hotel Tropical is a brothel. A general shot, though late at night, highlights the illuminated sign. Using long and medium indoor shots, the camera shows Buba's search. He knocks on different doors before opening them and checking, one by one. There are neat individual rooms; in two of them there are African women, fully and nicely dressed à la European, leisurely lying on the bed or reading a magazine. Surprisingly, they apparently seem quite relaxed and at ease. When Buba opens Violet's door and begs her to go along with him and leave, a still furious Violet responds: "We? Go with you? Where? Listen! If you came to fuck me, there are two girls in there, okay?" Cold and dignified, Violet rushes from the room and locks herself out, while Buba frantically calls her name, apologizes "for the misunderstanding"—that is trying to take advantage of her in the past—and begs her to hurry so that they can get on the patera.

If, as I maintain elsewhere, for African women's bodies in transit "the dress is a text," in this scene Violet's progressive transformation proves it ("The Dress" 171). As a young, unmarried, and rural girl, from Mopi, she wears colorful African cotton wrappers tied under her bare arms, or dresses more formally—for the arranged marriage negotiations—adding a head wrap to her long sleeves and long skirt with a beautiful white, green and red design. The migrant that crosses the Ténéré Desert has exchanged her cotton, bright, and light clothes for jeans, heavy woolen jerseys, and a dark blue woolen hat. She is wearing green socks and green plastic sandals. Her backpack gets lighter and lighter as the journey proceeds. The first drastic change in clothes occurs when the camera offers a slow panning from left to right, and a middle shot of Violet in the Agadez pension, a prostitute. Her nudity shows through her brown tank top, still adorned by her friend's pendant. The scene in the bus at the checkpoint shows that Violet has grown more experienced, against her will, but she is also able to fight back and defend herself. Contrary to the other female passengers, she is not only unveiled, but she is also wearing her European outfit: jeans, a tank top, and a blouse. Finally, despite her job as a prostitute at the Hotel Tropical in Asilah, she does not look as sophisticated as the other women the camera shows. In contrast with the westernization of the other sex workers, Violet still wears African clothes, as at the beginning of her journey, but in the Moroccan version of the attire, i.e. a bright and shiny long-sleeved dress in dark reddish color combined with silver threads. Except for the soft background sounds of love making, there is little more to identify Violet with prostitution or with being stuck in a brothel. Moreover, although she does not seem happy to meet Buba, neither her mind nor her body show the scars of sexual exploitation.

In fact, as mentioned earlier, she has had the audacity to reject a client and dares not to submit to a client's desire. This seems a privilege and an unthinkable reaction for most sex-trafficked African women who are forced to work as prostitutes. Contrary to Olivares's rather subtle portrayal of Violet's sexual profession and the existing demand of the erotic market on the route to the North, in Ndiaye's novel, the omniscient narrator describes Khady's forced sexual encounters in a graphic and

highly explicit way that is absent from Olivares's non-existing cinematic discourse on prostitution:

The man would then lower his trousers with almost anxious haste ... he would lie down on Khady. He would then enter her, often groaning in surprise, because a recent attack of pruritus which made Khady's vagina dry and inflamed also caused his penis some discomfort. She summoned all her mental strength to counter the multiple shooting pains in her back, her lower abdomen and her calf, and think "There's a time when it stops" until the man finished laboriously and, in a murmur of pain and disappointment, had withdrawn promptly. (265)

Though both Olivares's film and Ndiaye's novel make use of the "prostitute metaphor" (Stratton 53), where more often than not "the woman/whore is abandoned alone (a fact that reflects the brutal act of possession and penetration of Africa by Europeans" (Frías, "Women" 8), it is interesting to note that contrary to African male writers, who either kill or punish the female protagonist with the so-called act of "redemption through repatriation to the village"—where she will re-conduct her life, get married, have children, and perform her wifely duties to perfection, no matter how unhappy her married life turns out to be—Olivares tends to follow African female writers such as Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, who do not see the need to punish women's prostitution. They, in turn, understand sex-trafficked women—whether by force or election—as *a means to an end*. Far from getting "rooted" as a sex-trafficked young woman in the brothels of the continental African "route" to the North—and a better life in Europe—Violet, like Amma Darko's Mara—"keeps reclaiming and reconstructing her own private space." Whether in the Agadez pension, in the desert camp with the check point soldiers, or in the more sophisticated hotel in Asilah, she seeks "her own freedom"—whereby she runs away as soon as she sees the opportunity—"and her own financial independence" (Frías, "Women" 8), and when she finally gathers the exact amount of money needed for her to jump onto the next bus leaving the station, overcrowded and over expensive as it might be, she takes it.

9 Jumping Ship

Despite the excruciatingly long, painful, and humiliating journey through three countries (Niger, Algeria, and Morocco), and the additional suffering experienced by African women's bodies in transit, who are "clandestinely demanded, consumed and disposed of" to satisfy the needs of the erotic market in view of their sexual vulnerability and their urgency to reach their final destination (Barberán Reinas 149), Olivares's Violet reflects the statistics that show the anomaly of an African woman's attempt to follow the continental route, to later jump on a dilapidated boat and attempt a sea crossing of the fourteen kilometers that separate Africa and Europe. Violet does not hesitate to trust Buba once again, venture out, get on the boat, and treat Buba as her protector and guide. What is interesting about this scene is that, on the one hand, Olivares provides exact information as to how smugglers and mafias

work on both sides of the Strait of Gibraltar. The human cargo is kept in a hidden and untidy room with no ventilation until the vessel is full and the crossing is financially profitable for the head smuggler, regardless of whether or not the boat is in condition to load this number of passengers or if the strong winds and the stormy weather make the crossing a deadly enterprise. The camera follows the human cargo from the moment they are piled up in the suffocating room to the time they are urged to get on a van or lorry, where, once again, they fill the stifling space available. The camera follows them walking one after another, holding on to each other's back and holding their breath. We see Buba and Violet jump into the boat and they accommodate themselves as best they can. Their faces show the tension, the fear, and the scars of the journey by land. Olivares chooses an infrared detection system, a type of light filter that duplicates the one used by the police and the rescue patrols, whether by air or by sea. This greenish type of light does not allow the spectator to see in detail, but it replicates the images that the immigration officers and police departments or rescue patrols offer and are shown on the news. Thus, the audience is familiarized with the blurred and almost anonymous, threatening, and dehumanized portrayal of African human trafficking.⁵⁷ Olivares defamiliarizes these dehumanized representations by populating them with protagonists that the viewer has already identified with.

Comparatively speaking, while Olivares's film pays special attention to the continental journey that includes the crossing of the Teneré Desert and several African countries, from Mali and Niger to Morocco via Algeria, the director devotes very few scenes to the perilous and oft-times deadly enterprise of crossing the Strait of Gibraltar. Soon after the engine starts and the first, not yet menacing, waves hit the little boat loaded with clandestine passengers, Olivares cuts to an idyllic long establishing shot of the Tarifa Beach in Spain, to later show Violet and Buba, safe and sound, running wild and with no direction trying to escape from the Guardia Civil by hiding in the bushes. "Violet, it is all over!" Buba stutters when he thinks they are about to get caught by one of the officials. Instead, Olivares chooses an open ending, maybe too good to be true for some critics as well as for a number of humanitarian associations, as shown by the media, which keep counting the dead, whether drowned or missing, after their boats sink or capsize in the Mediterranean Sea. It is true that Violet is "saved"—albeit temporarily—but since Olivares's intention is to present uncomfortable facts and pose unsettling questions, the audience might wonder "[what about] the majority of other women who will stay trapped in the brothels and those who will continue to be enslaved by ruthless traffickers unless the circumstances that permit their exploitation begin to change?" (Barberán Reinares 155).

⁵⁷ According to González del Pozo, the scene of the arrival in the patera is "extremely short" by comparison (55). It is in this scene, he claims, that the viewer might come to identify with Buba's and Violet's individual struggles. Instead, they simply become part of the unwelcome and unwanted mass of African migration (57).

10 Conclusion: African Migration and the Mediterranean

They will keep coming and they will keep dying because history has shown that no wall can hold back people's dreams.

(Rosa Montero)

African migration to the EU through the back door of Spain started some thirty years ago. In the first stages, primarily due to the harshness of the journey, this was a male phenomenon. Images of the arrival of overcrowded pateras and cayucos to the Canary Islands or the south of Spain instantly made the headlines. The press tends to show pictures of the exhausted bodies of those who have finally made it to Europe. However, the horrors of their journeys across the Sahara Desert remain largely invisible to the European public, a lacunae which is partially filled by Olivares's film. Another significant element that he focuses on is the gender-specific fate of female migrants, and thus he manages to portray the relatively new trend of African women's migration to Spain. Gerardo Olivares's movie puts the spotlight on the continental journey and his migrant trio includes a young girl in her teens, i.e. Violet, thus providing visibility and giving voice to the specificities of gender in the African culture; their particular reasons to go North; and the commodification of migrant women. Personally shocked by the numbers of young African girls who are forced into prostitution to pay for their ticket to Europe, Olivares tackles the issue of the increasing feminization of African migration and female migrants' prostitution. At the same time, he denounces these women's sexual vulnerability, as well as the existence of a ruthless and lucrative industry of human and sexual trafficking along the route. While it is true that Violet's body has been sexually exploited from an early age, her migrant body in transit is commodified and objectified even more drastically and her body will be systematically used and abused from the beginning of the journey, in Agadez, to the end of the road, in Asilah, Morocco. However, what is innovative about Olivares's cinematographic discourse on migrant women's bodies in transit is that apart from both dealing with and denouncing women's prostitution as a common practice for survival—Violet's diasporic body is not an exception—the director refuses to offer explicit sex scenes, which would further eroticize her body and show the pornography of rape and unwanted sex. As a matter of fact, there are neither sex nor nudity scenes in the film, even though prostitution is part and parcel of Violet's ticket to the North. Moreover, I contend that Olivares takes pains to get rid of negative stereotypes that present African women as sexually insatiable, available, and objectified, and, instead, he portrays Violet as an exemplary migrant teenager, who dares to slap her travel companion when he tries to touch her; who furiously resists the lascivious border policemen's attempt to kidnap her by kicking and shouting; and who, finally, dares to refuse a client. On the whole,

by presenting this dignified, proud, and scrupulous Violet as a prostitute, Olivares spares the audience the horrors suffered by sexually trafficked African women, but at the same time his subtle and discreet approach to prostitution blurs the reality of some of the most excruciating pains African women's bodies in transit are forced to experience on their way to Spain.

Finally, in this chapter I have traced a parallel between the lucrative business of the transatlantic slave trade and the human trafficking industry of the twenty-first century. Like slave traders in the past, criminal gangs of smugglers and traffickers exploit the misery of desperate people who, in today's case, are in search of a better life or are running from persecution and armed conflicts. Once again, only the ablest and the fittest make it, thus draining the African continent of some of its best people. In the same vein, unscrupulous traders and human traffickers are profiting from migrants' urgency to leave. Like the Atlantic Ocean before, the [Black] Mediterranean Sea is nowadays dyed with the red blood of thousands of migrants who have lost their lives just off the shores of the coastal towns of Spain. Thousands of men, women, and children rest at the bottom of the sea. They are buried unnamed, their bones and bodies invisible to those who swim in the Mediterranean Sea, "the Mare Nostrum." Overall, Olivares's film shows that whether the sexual abuses are reported or silenced, as in the case of Violet, in order to reach an entry point to the EU, African women in transit will keep embarking on these deadly journeys even if they have to pay for part of the ticket with their bodies.

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