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The Harmful Prioritization of
“Sex Trafficking” in U.S. Anti-Trafficking Discourse

By

Spencer Pennybacker

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Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for
Honors in the Department of Political Science

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ABSTRACT

PENNYBACKER, SPENCER The Harmful Prioritization of “Sex Trafficking” in U.S. Anti-Trafficking Discourse. Department of Political Science, June 2021.

ADVISOR: Guillermina Seri

In recent years, the issue of “human trafficking,” or what some have deemed “modern slavery” has become increasingly salient in the United States. No doubt, human trafficking is a major humanitarian crisis, with the International Labor Organization estimating some 5.4 victims caught in trafficking networks for every 1,000 people in the world. And yet, the dominant discourse in the US tends to allude solely to the sex trafficking of women. This sex trafficking hysteria in the United States is the backdrop of my research.

This Senior Thesis examines how anti-trafficking organizations leave out survivors by addressing human trafficking through selective cases of women’s sex trafficking, effectively framing trafficking as an issue of sexual morality rather than a product of oppressive political, legal, and economic systems. Anti-trafficking NGOs have adopted restrictive and stereotypical portrayals of the “deserving” trafficking victim as a young, sexually exploited woman, rendered powerless at the hands of evil deviants. When outsourcing their humanitarian efforts abroad, NGOs frequently represent women from non-Western countries as disempowered, naive, and unable to make the consensual, uncoerced decision to join the sex industry, maintaining harmful practices such as brothel raids. I frame the exclusionary narratives used by anti-trafficking NGOs against a backdrop of deep and expanding neoconservative and neo-abolitionist ideologies and policies in the United States. I argue that anti-trafficking organizations would better assist those affected by trafficking and forced labor by adopting a labor approach that recognizes the exploited individual as an exploited worker rather than a sexually objectified victim.

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Chapter One:
An Introduction to the U.S. Trafficking Discourse,
Ngo-ification, and the NeoAbolitionist Movement

In recent years, the issue of “human trafficking,” or what some have deemed “modern slavery” has become increasingly salient in the United States. Billboards overlooking busy highways display images of bound limbs and hopeless-looking, often bruised and bloody women and children; informational posters adorn the backs of bathroom stalls and mirrors in restaurants, airports, and shopping malls; social media graphics increasingly urge the public to pay attention to what the House of Representatives has called an “epidemic.” Politicians frequently name human trafficking as keystones of their platforms; most notably, George W. Bush called human trafficking an “unspeakable evil” while signing the Anti-Trafficking Bill into law in 2006. In 2010, the United States Senate designated January 11 “Human Trafficking Awareness Day,” which expanded to the entire month of January in 2011. On July 30, 2020, the United Nations recognized “World Day Against Trafficking in Persons;” US cities filled with marches in the midst of Black Lives Matter protests, demanding a spotlight on victims of human trafficking. No doubt, human trafficking is a major humanitarian crisis, with the International Labor Organization estimating some 5.4 victims caught in trafficking networks for every 1,000 people in the world. And yet, the dominant discourse in the US tends to allude solely to the sex trafficking of women. This sex trafficking hysteria in the United States is the backdrop of my research.

Although trafficking into non-sex sectors arguably accounts for a larger proportion of the global trafficking rates, the U.S. media primarily reports on trafficking in the sex sector. Following the release of the 2018 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, the United Nations

addressed the reported increase in the global number of trafficking victims in the last ten years in two *UN News* articles titled “Rising human trafficking takes on ‘horrific dimensions’: almost a third of victims are children” and “Human trafficking cases hit a 13-year record high.” Despite the UN’s recognition of armed conflict as a “key driver of human trafficking,” as well as sections on labor trafficking in agriculture and hospitality, American media specifically addressed the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation as the key takeaway of the articles, presenting it to the public as a distinct and urgent evil over other forms of trafficking. *CNN*’s article titled, “UN human trafficking report: Record number of girls reported as victims” primarily responded to the report’s claims surrounding the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation (Lewis, 2019). Similarly, *CBSNews* released an article titled “Human trafficking of girls in particular on the rise,” stating that “sexual exploitation is the main motivation for trafficking” (Falk, 2019). Without reading the 2018 Global Report or the *UN News* articles and solely listening to the American media, it would seem that sexual exploitation is the only form of trafficking grave enough to garner media attention.

US media prioritization of sex trafficking despite the UN’s recognition of multiple forms of human trafficking is supported by the spread of a giant network of NGOs, or what scholars have deemed the “NGOification” of the anti-trafficking movement (Lynne Musto). Anti-trafficking NGOs tend to produce narrow and biased definitions and ideologies of trafficking through stories, images, videos, and campaigns of “sex slavery” that oversimplify and misrepresent the causes and experiences of trafficking and forced labor to the public and add to an anti-trafficking field dominated by moral indignation of sex. Most troubling is the limited discussion of the populations made most vulnerable to trafficking (migrants, sex workers, and ethnic, racial, or national minorities) or the structural factors of inequality that cause trafficking.

Instead, the dissemination of only stereotypical stories in the public realm shapes ideals of the “deserving victim” while omitting other victims of exploitation; the woman victim of sexual exploitation is “deserving” of public sympathy and humanitarian protection, while, say, the migrant who is forced to work under threat of deportation, is left out of the discourse. As I explore in this chapter and Chapter 2, this focus on the woman victim of sexual exploitation correlates to neoconservative federal anti-trafficking policies, such as the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and reflects the influence of prostitution-reformers or “neo-abolitionists,” who view all prostitution and sex work *as* trafficking and exploitation and advocate for the criminalization or “abolition” of prostitution as the key solution to trafficking.

Drawing attention to these biased representations is important, as NGOs offer the most readily available information on trafficking, including educational resources for the public, hotlines for witnesses and victims, and donation opportunities. When an individual is interested in learning more about the trafficking issue, NGO websites are often an initial and key educational resource, yet are only portraying a limited scope of a much larger issue. Additionally, NGOs often advise U.S. policy-makers, lead programs that train law enforcement, draft anti-trafficking legislation, and are the primary providers of services to trafficked individuals. Without a more inclusive, informed understanding of trafficking, its causes, and the individuals it affects beyond “sex trafficking,” governments and NGOs will continue to limit outreach to a select few and fail to properly address trafficking.

Restrictive trafficking narratives also add to the uncertainty about the scale and nature of this already clandestine, complex global issue. It is difficult to separate attempts to understand the scope of trafficking from the awareness efforts led by NGOs, as trafficking research is heavily reliant on data and definitions from organizations engaged in anti-trafficking advocacy.

NGO websites commonly stress that “sex trafficking” is the most prevalent form of trafficking in the United States. However, scholars have argued that trafficking outside of the sex sector, commonly deemed “labor trafficking,” is more prevalent than “sex trafficking” but has been comparatively under-detected so far and is underrepresented in official statistics (Zhang 2009, Goodey 2008). Take, for example, the Polaris Project, a leading anti-trafficking organization based in the U.S. that reported in their “2019 Data Report,” that of the 22,326 “victims and survivors” they identified through the National Human Trafficking Hotline, 14,597 fall into the category of “sex trafficking,” while only 4,934 fall into the category of “labor trafficking.” Their report, however, includes a crucial disclaimer that “trafficking situations learned about through the Trafficking Hotline likely represent only a small subset of actual trafficking occurring in the United States.” This is the reality of the issue, especially when there is a very limited public concern or research on rates of trafficking outside of the sex sector. Organizations that focus primarily on sex trafficking and sexually exploited women as victims often skew statistical representations of trafficking and trafficking experiences (O’Brien 2012, 3). To gain support for their specific cause (the criminalization of sex work), organizations will exaggerate qualitative data, rely on inflated figures, or only include the most horrific examples of trafficking (Weitzer 2007, 447-75). However, it is nearly impossible to locate any reliable, consistent data on rates of trafficking, both in and out of the sex sector (Zhang 2012). Even the Department of State, despite narrowly defining trafficking as the use of “force, fraud, or coercion to compel another person to work or engage in a commercial sex act” and not even recognizing migrant smuggling as a form of trafficking, states on its “About Human Trafficking” page, that “it is hard to find reliable statistics related to human trafficking” and urges “all public awareness and outreach efforts should remain consistent with research and cite accurate sources” (U.S. Dept. of State, 2020).

Without reliable data, American perceptions of trafficking are largely shaped by NGO and government-funded public awareness campaigns, which the United Nations considers an essential part of any comprehensive legal framework against trafficking (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime 2008, 16). As a result, the American public adopts a similar, misinformed moral outrage against solely trafficking within the sex sector, and by extension, prostitution.

As pointed out by several scholars, definitional ambiguity within the anti-trafficking field is just as damaging to inclusive, unified efforts to end trafficking (Schwarz 2019; Chuang 2009; Anderson and Andrijasevic 2008). Kempadoo points out that “trafficking” was originally formulated at the UN level to refer to the crossing of borders for purposes of exploitation, but that the U.S. has equated “trafficking” to any type of forced labor, hence the term “modern-day slavery,” a term organizations commonly use interchangeably with “trafficking” (Kempadoo, 3). We can locate this phenomenon in the U.S. government’s definition of human trafficking, which anti-trafficking organizations frequently adopt as their own; first stated in the 2001 Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the TVPA defines trafficking as “a commercial sex act induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform the commercial sex act is under 18 years of age, or the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.” The consequence of this conceptual confusion is the understanding of forced labor as an effect of trafficking, when it is, in fact, the other way around. Focusing on “trafficking” as the main issue at hand rather than the need for exploitative labor as the driver of trafficking, leads to a push for immigration restrictions as a solution to trafficking. Additionally, shifting focus away from the forced labor, which the TVPA definition is largely referring to rather than the actual “trafficking,” leads to the strict distinction

between “labor trafficking” and “sex trafficking.” This divide allows organizations to pick and choose sex trafficking as the more severe of the two and appropriate more resources towards sex trafficking, effectively ignoring individuals exploited in sectors out of the sex sector. In reality, the exploitation that occurs in both instances of “trafficking” - coercion, force, and fraud - is the same.

The Neo-abolitionist Framework

Organizational and governmental definitions of trafficking are informed by two dominant, opposing frameworks: the pro-sex framework and the neo-abolitionist framework. Scholarly research in North America predominantly exists within the neo-abolitionist framework, which upholds that sex trafficking is a form of “globalized prostitution” and advocates for anti-trafficking policies and programs that address both organized prostitution and domestic trafficking as the same (Territo and Kirkham 2010, 11). Neo-abolitionists assert that no person can truly consent to sex work due to the general lack of physical security in the industry, the unequal power dynamics between johns, pimps, and their clients, and the lack of economic alternatives available to women that enter the sex industry (Farley 2003). Neo-abolitionists do not support the decriminalization and legalization of sex work for claims that these efforts only increase the demand for the sex trade, leading to the increased recruitment of sex work. Instead, neo-abolitionists support trafficking policies based on the notion of protecting the innocent, unwilling “victim” of sexual slavery while simultaneously punishing the undeserving: i.e. prostitutes. My research does not aim to deny or excuse the human rights abuses that occur within the sex industry, as sex workers, especially transgender men and women, face high levels of violence, stigma, and discrimination. However, a scholarly field dominated by a discourse on exploitation that fails to acknowledge the physical and economic exploitation that exists in

virtually every labor sector around the world exposes a trafficking framework driven by society's indignation and moralization of sexuality rather than exploitation. Additionally, the neo-abolitionist approach fails to recognize the diverse experiences of sex workers, many of whom engage in sex work consensually as a source of income.

Scholars have identified roots of the neo-abolitionist narrative in the nineteenth-century "white slavery" hysteria and early efforts to eradicate prostitution and other sexual activity through sex trafficking and immigration legislation (Grittner 1987; Doezema 2000; Kempadoo 2012). The mass migration of single women traveling to the global North in search of work opportunities produced anxiety amongst the American middle-class and elite over the enslavement and forced prostitution of primarily white, European women at the hands of the "uncivilized, non-Western Other" (Kempadoo 2015, xii). "Social purity reformers," as Doezema calls them, capitalized on these anxieties to push a "social purist campaign" in favor of chastity with a shared concern over "youthful sexuality" and prostitution (Doezema 2000, 27). The image of the "white slave," characterized as youthful, white, innocent, and unwilling, struck down the barrier between the voluntary and involuntary prostitute, characterizing all sex workers as victims and nullifying the justification for regulation of prostitution rather than abolition (Doezema 2000, 28). White slavery narratives influenced the passage of the 1910 Mann Act, otherwise known as the White-Slave Traffic Act, which banned the transportation of women for the purpose of prostitution or "any other immoral purpose." According to Kempadoo, legislation such as the Mann Act was a part of a campaign to abolish the "social evil" of prostitution through the control of women's movement and sexuality (Kempadoo 2015, xiii).

Today, the neo-abolitionist framework remains the dominant discourse in U.S. trafficking legislation and NGO mission statements; hysteria over “white slavery” has reappeared as hysteria over “trafficking in women,” as both produce cultural myths about the stereotypical “trafficking victim” and are used to legitimize social purity campaigns. The trafficking victim, as displayed in government and NGO-led campaigns and on NGO websites, often bears little resemblance to the majority of women who migrate for work in the sex industry. O’Brien and Wilson argue that the re-emergence of human trafficking discourse among the global community in the 1980s and 90s correlated with a global boom in economic migration for women, particularly in formal and informal commercial sex work (O’Brien and Wilson 2016, 32). The increased policy interest that began to emerge in the United States in the 90s, as I discuss in the following chapter, appears to positively correlate with increases in women’s migration. This suggests that the neo-abolitionist representation of human trafficking as an issue primarily involving the sexual victimization of women may function to politically restrict the increasing global movement of women. Additionally, research shows that sex workers, not America’s coerced and innocent youth, make up the majority of trafficked and exploited women in the sex sector. Trafficking cases often involve women that were knowingly migrating for sex work or already, consensually working in the sex sector, but were lied to about the conditions of the work or the pay.

Scholars have criticized the abolitionist framework for blurring the lines between captivity and freedom, and rescuers and captors. Since the Bush administration, law enforcement-led brothel raids have emerged as the primary means through which U.S. organizations interfere with sex workers both domestically and internationally. Gretchen Soderlund links increased brothel raids to the post-9/11 alliance formed between the Bush

administration and evangelical Christian anti-trafficking NGOs that support “state-sanctioned law-and-order campaigns against commercial sex workers” (Soderland 2005, 68). Such an increase in brothel raids and closures has pushed sex workers to move their services further underground to avoid forced rescue, rehabilitation, and detention in shelters or government facilities (66). Sex workers that reject rescue and rehabilitation efforts and go to more dangerous lengths to avoid capture by enforcement officials, put into question the abolitionists’ proclivity to deem every sex worker a slave and victim held against their will inside of a brothel. Instead, the rescuers become the captors, and the safe houses become a form of imprisonment and captivity. We also must consider the fact that sex workers forced out of sex work will likely turn to a life of factory work or employment in the low-paying service sector, where they may be subject to even worse exploitation and human rights abuses that are ignored by the government and organizations.

The “Ignored Exploitation”

Scholars have deemed labor trafficking in the United States “the ignored exploitation”- a status exacerbated by the political and societal focus on trafficking involving sexual exploitation. “Labor trafficking” refers to the forced or coerced movement and exploitation of people for the purpose of labor outside of sexual exploitation; this definition includes trafficking within agriculture, construction, domestic work, manufacturing, and a variety of other businesses such as restaurants, hotels, food processing, forestry, the fishing industry, and more. Trafficked individuals are exposed to unregulated and underground sectors of the economy, where employers routinely commit wage, safety, and health violations. Like all forms of human trafficking, the clandestine nature of this issue and the prevalence of organizations skewing or

exacerbating data makes it difficult to obtain reliable rates of labor trafficking in the United States. Nicole Littenburg and Susie Baldwin highlight the connection between trafficking and immigration, referencing a 2006 study carried out by the National Institute of Justice which estimated that 46,849 individuals are trafficked across the U.S./Mexico border annually and a 2003 study that found an estimated 31% of undocumented Spanish-speaking migrants in San Diego worked in conditions that met the legal definition of trafficking (Littenburg and Baldwin 2017, 68). Additionally, the International Labor Organization, which definitionally separates trafficking into three areas of distinction: exploitation in the private sector, sexual exploitation, and forced labor imposed by state authorities, estimates that the largest number of trafficking victims, some 16 million people, are those exploited in the “private sector,” including domestic work, agriculture, and construction.

Despite the existence of a clear and urgent issue, labor trafficking is not prioritized in U.S. policy or law enforcement measures. In Farrell and Pfeffer’s research sample, officers admitted to focusing on the identification of situations of sex trafficking involving domestic minors, as this group was believed to be the most vulnerable. Farrell and Pfeffer connect this discrepancy to a lack of political consensus about what constitutes “human trafficking,” and the conflation of human trafficking as “sex trafficking” in U.S. policy (Farrell and Pfeffer 60, 2014). The Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), which provides the national framework for the federal response to trafficking presents the “international sex trade” as a primary and distinct issue of trafficking, mentioned separately and before any mention of forced labor, labor violations, or human rights standards. In the following chapter, I will take a closer look at how U.S. trafficking policies such as the TVPA fail to address the complexity of trafficking and

forced labor, predominately characterizing trafficking through narratives of sexual exploitation as the most severe form of trafficking.

While the underlying social and economic conditions of “poverty, racism, and violence” are fundamentally the same in both instances of “labor trafficking” and “sex trafficking,” the conflation of trafficking with commercial sex has led to the “preferential interest” in sex trafficking over a wider focus on all labor exploitation (Littenburg and Baldwin 2017, 68). Whether the trafficking in question is occurring within the sex sector, domestic labor, factory labor, etc., it is not the work itself that violates the individual’s human rights, but the conditions of deceit, fraud, blackmail, forced movement, limited freedoms, and debt bondage, etc. For example, a pro-sex worker’s rights framework that recognizes an individual’s right to sexual determination does not consider prostitution or sex work to be “trafficking” in the absence of exploitative conditions (Outshoorn 2015). Therefore, when policies and NGO’s prioritize “sex trafficking” with little to no discussion of the similar human rights violations occurring within trafficking outside of the sex sector, they are utilizing an abolitionist framework that is driven by moral indignation of sex rather than the goal of ending exploitation.

To explain this organizational focus on “sex trafficking” as more severe than “labor trafficking” despite clear exploitative commonalities between the two, I draw on Foucault’s first volume of *The History of Sexuality*, specifically his theory of de-sexualization and Chloe Taylor’s Foucauldian reflections on prostitution. Foucault argues that in the modern West, we conceive and thus construct our sexuality as central to our identity. We tend to believe that we are each born with an individualized personal sexuality, that directly influences our self-understanding and happiness (Foucault 1978). Therefore, what we do with our sexual bodies plays a significant role in all aspects of our lives and how we view ourselves. From this, it would

make sense why anti-trafficking advocates view sexual exploitation as more severe than other forms of exploitation; sexual exploitation is viewed as harmful to an individual's identity in the way non-sexual exploitation is not. From an even broader perspective, Taylor argues that the perception of sexuality as integral to our self, would explain why sex work, in general, is not viewed on par with other kinds of work, and why anti-trafficking organizations commonly conflate all sex work with exploitation; regardless of coercion, force, and fraud, sex work of any kind is of consequence to our very essence (Taylor 2013). It is crucial to Foucault, however, that we view this perception of sexuality as problematic. The sexualization of identity leads not only to the stigmatization of sexuality but the stigmatization of the entire being. He proposes that we must separate sexuality from our identities in a process of de-sexualization (Foucault 1978). De-sexualization would end the conceptualization of sex as something different or distinct from other experiences the body goes through. De-sexualization in this context would remove sexual exploitation from a level of severity higher than other forms of exploitation. Simultaneously, society would no longer view sex work as different from other kinds of work, thus invalidating the harmful separation of trafficking into two distinct categories of "labor" and "sex," and promoting a unified effort to end all forms of exploitation and trafficking.

Taking Michel Foucault's call for de-sexualization into account, my definition of "trafficking" does not draw a line between "sex" and "labor," as doing so extracts the issue of "sex trafficking" from its existence within a larger global market economy of labor exploitation and implies that sex work does not hold the same legitimacy as other labor-intensive jobs. My working definition of trafficking pulls from the UN General Assembly's Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, which defines trafficking as "the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons by threat or use of force, coercion,

abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim for the purpose of exploitation.” This perspective focuses on the exploitation and abuse of workers within the labor sector, especially the unsafe working conditions of migrants and marginalized communities. While I acknowledge that exploitation occurs within legal workspaces and does not always involve coercion or force, in the context of this thesis, “exploitation” refers to instances of forced labor; I use the terms “forced labor” and “exploitation” interchangeably to refer to “all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (ILO 1930). Unlike many of the NGOs referenced in this thesis, my definition does not conflate trafficking with sex work, as not all sex workers are trafficked and trafficking does not solely exist within the sex sector but encompasses a variety of modalities of forced labor affecting an estimated 24.9 million people around the world (ILO 2017, 9). I reject the neo-abolitionist framework and argue that its corresponding policy and NGO representations harm sex workers and migrants, limit victim access to rescue and rehabilitation efforts, and fail to address the systemic causes of human trafficking.

A Neoliberal Framework

I situate the rise in egregious abuses of human and labor rights and trafficking in forced labor within a global neoliberal order forged by the Washington Consensus. During the Reagan Era, there was a shift in economic aid and developmental strategy, culminating in the so-called “Washington Consensus” that governed global economics in the name of free trade and the free market. Endorsed by international institutions that largely protect the economic interests of the “developed” world - the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade

Organization - the Washington Consensus promoted massive privatization, deregulation, and fiscal austerity abroad. Through the promotion of neoliberal policies across the globe or neoliberal globalization, nations in the Global South are pushed to remove subsidies and tariffs, roll back social protections, reduce anti-poverty redistribution, and privatize public goods, leading to deepening inequality, widespread poverty and unemployment, and weak labor and social protections for workers (LeBaron et al. 2019). Rising poverty and shrinking opportunities for employment mixed with an unrelenting demand for cheap labor in destination countries has led to the increased migration of workers, particularly women (Sassen 2000, 505). It is also in the face of increased migration that destination countries have tightened their borders, and migrants are more likely to seek third-party help, such as smugglers, to cross borders. With greater immigration restrictions, risks and costs of smuggling also increase, pushing smugglers to engage with trafficking and reap additional profit by exploiting migrants' labor postmigration (Chuang 2010, 7). Neoliberal globalization, and the corresponding degradation of labor protections and immigration restrictions, is the context in which we see a growing number of humanitarian efforts aimed at reducing victims of widespread trafficking and exploitation. The neoliberal NGO-fication of human trafficking, together with a neoconservative agenda to reinstate a moral authority, has led to the social exclusion, and disempowerment of individuals at the hand of misguided anti-trafficking NGOs.

Outline of Thesis

This thesis examines how U.S. policy, and as an extension, anti-trafficking organizations, leave out survivors by addressing human trafficking through selective cases of women's sex trafficking, effectively framing trafficking as an issue of sexual morality rather than a product of

oppressive political, legal, and economic systems that create vulnerability. I frame the exclusionary language and imagery used by anti-trafficking NGOs against a backdrop of deep and expanding neoconservative ideologies and policies in the United States, as well as a larger neoliberal framework. In Chapter 2, I discuss the emergence of neoconservatism as a political culture and its rise to political power in the Bush administration through an analysis of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the Trafficking in Persons Report, presidential speeches, and funds allocated towards NGOs. I show that the Bush administration, by adopting an anti-prostitution approach to trafficking, increased the power and influence of neo-abolitionist, evangelical coalitions, who have used the anti-trafficking movement to unfurl a moral agenda across the globe. In Chapter 3, I reconstruct and analyze the role of two central anti-trafficking narratives - the creation of individual deviants and deserving victims, and the colonial gaze of western anti-trafficking advocates upon non-western women. I frame these narratives against broader political and policy agendas, specifically addressing how these reductive narratives promote a criminalization approach that targets prostitution rather than addressing the root causes of exploitative labor. I embed definitions, excerpts from “rescue stories,” and publications found on NGO websites into my project, alongside voices from my interviewees and voices of those negatively impacted by NGO work abroad. Chapter 4 calls for a paradigm shift within the anti-trafficking field. I introduce a labor approach to trafficking, which situates the issue of trafficking and forced labor within a perspective of labor, labor migration, and a gendered labor market, and rejects the criminalization of immigration and sex work. I analyze the implementation of a labor approach within more progressive international networks, such as La Asociación Civil de Derechos Humanos Mujeres Unidas, Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina,

or The Association of United Women, Migrants and Refugees in Argentina and The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe.

Chapter 2: Neoconservatism and Neo-Abolitionism in U.S. Trafficking Policies

In order to highlight the limitations of the current anti-trafficking movement, this chapter provides an overview of the U.S. government's stance on trafficking and how policies and the ideologies they produce influence the relationship NGOs and foreign nations have with the federal government. I argue that the role of neoconservatives in advocating for and helping draft trafficking legislation has led to policies that align within the neo-abolitionist framework, which in turn, influences NGOs to reproduce a similar narrative in their campaigns. I draw from Wendy Brown's concept of the "phenomenon of neoconservatism" and its creation of a political culture and political subject in the U.S. Brown attributes the emergence of a distinct neoconservative political culture to the Bush administration, as policies were driven by angst over the declining or crumbling status of morality in the West (Brown 2006, 696-697). According to Brown, neoconservatism is based on the belief that it is the responsibility of the state and the law to set and guide the moral-religious compass for society; this includes conserving certain ways of life, regulating desire, and rejecting the vulgarity of mass culture. Therefore, in the face of increasing sexual liberation, neoconservatives must steer the U.S. public back onto a straight and narrow path. This chapter observes the role of neoconservatism in the creation and implementation of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the annual Trafficking in Persons Report, and the anti-prostitution pledge as established in the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003. This chapter also traces and discusses the allocation of federal grants to religious, abolitionist national, and international organizations to outsource the Bush Administration's anti-prostitution initiative.

NGOs do not act alone in disseminating restrictive trafficking narratives, as they are often influenced by or working in conjunction with the U.S. government. Although NGOs are

voluntary organizations that, by name, operate outside of government affiliation, many anti-trafficking groups are designated and maintained by the federal government, and therefore adopt and reproduce governmental anti-trafficking practices. The government, for example, provides extensive funding to hundreds of anti-trafficking NGOs, conducts trafficking research alongside NGOs, and partners with NGOs on national public awareness campaigns. Jennifer Lynne Musto, in her discussion of anti-trafficking NGO-ification in the U.S., links the misrepresentation of trafficking victims to NGO dependence on federal funding, which influences NGOs to adopt the government's neoconservative position on trafficking. Lynne Musto argues that when an organization receives funding from the U.S. government, "NGOs must align their internal policies and philosophies with the views of their funders. In doing so, they must implicitly distinguish between voluntary economic migrants and involuntary trafficked persons, where the latter are given shelter and protection and the former are arrested and deported" (Lynne Musto 2008, 10).

It is possible to better understand the policies and political debates surrounding the anti-trafficking issue, including the rise of neo-abolitionism, through a richer understanding of early neoconservative thought. In addition to the rise of neoconservatism as a political power under Bush, it was also a significant cultural movement that first emerged with the publication of *The Public Interest* magazine, founded by Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol, commonly deemed "the godfather of neoconservatism." The magazine criticized Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society programs, specifically the ambitious expansion of the welfare state. Early neoconservatives who originally identified as left of center, found themselves at odds with the new, radical liberalism of the 1970s that rejected the anticommunist and interventionist policies that neocons embraced (Baumann 2015, 1). In response to this 'new liberalism,' Kristol published "Two Cheers for

Capitalism,” claiming that “The Moral Authority of tradition and some public support for this authority is needed” (Kristol 1978, xi).

Frustration with the Democratic Party’s established liberalism led to a strong neoconservative-support of Ronald Reagan’s 1980’s campaign and a welcome into the Republican party. It was also during this period that neoconservatism became closely aligned with social conservatism, critique of social policy, human rights, and promotion of “private social qualities” such as two-parent families and religion (Baumann 2015, 2-3). They sought to reorient American minds that had become too open by harnessing the traditional moral teachings of right and wrong as outlined in Judeo-Christianity. They felt it was their duty to guide American society, and later the world through neoconservative foreign policy, back to their senses. During the Clinton administration, neoconservative pundit Norman Podhoretz claimed that neoconservatism was no longer distinguishable from the Republican Party (Baumann 2015, 2-3). After the 9/11 attacks, however, neoconservatism re-emerged with the Iraq War as its emblem of influence. In 2003, Kristol described the three central pillars of neoconservative foreign policy as: a strong, central belief in patriotism; a rejection of world government as a catalyst of ‘world tyranny’; and the view that statesmen should, above all, distinguish friends from enemies (Kristol 2003). These pillars are closely aligned with the belief that it is the responsibility of the U.S. to use its power toward upholding a common, global morality. This would become clear in the Bush administration’s War on Terror, and the subsequent war on sexuality.

Scholars commonly identify the post-9/11 Bush administration as the most influential and notorious age of neoconservatism (Steinfels 2013; Correa, Petchesky, Parker 2008). It was also under Bush that the U.S. adopted its most influential anti-trafficking policies and practices. After

9/11, the term “neoconservatism” became nationally recognized, as neoconservative figures such as then-Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz attributed the attacks to tyrannical rule and dysfunctional societies in the Middle East and advocated for the promotion of better governance as a necessary response (Baumann 2014, 2). The promotion of better governance abroad relied on the maintenance of a positive status of the West, leading to social policies aimed at upholding the morality of American society. These regressive social policies- abortion bans, the A-B-C program (abstain, be faithful, use a condom) to prevent HIV/Aids, support of the Federal Marriage Amendment to prevent same-sex marriage, and the anti-prostitution pledge- all revolved around sexual politics and sexual morality. This faith-based war on sex is a key component of the neoconservative agenda to project an image of the U.S., both domestically and internationally, as a nation that upholds Christian righteousness. Projecting this image of the U.S. was especially important during the ‘war on terror,’ in order to pit “Christian crusaders” against “Islamic jihadists” (Corrêa, Petchesky, and Parker 2008, 38). Corrêa, Petchesky, and Parker argue that Bush’s “obsession” with sexual morality perfectly diverted society’s attention away from the “lies and failures of the Iraq War and increasing social inequalities” (2008, 38).

While the majority of the policies I discuss in this chapter occurred under the Bush Administration during the peak of neoconservatism’s political power, it is important to establish the formation and passing of the initial Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), passed under Bill Clinton on October 6, 2000. While the TVPA did not contain an anti-prostitution pledge until its reauthorization under Bush, a coalition of neoconservatives, religious leaders, and neo-abolitionist feminists advocated for the passage of the TVPA. Neoconservative Michael Horowitz of the Hudson Institute originally formed this coalition to lobby over the passage of the Religious Freedom Act; the coalition’s lobbying campaign revolved around the conflict in

Southern Sudan, as “it was a good left/right issue”- liberals focused on the genocide and peacemaking aspects of Sudan, while conservatives focused on religious persecution and enslavement. After the successful passage of the Religious Freedom Act, the coalition turned to the trafficking issue, as it also had the potential to harness support from liberals (Bromfield and Capous-Desyllas 2012, 255). Conservatives easily capitalized on the preexisting ideological rift over prostitution between liberal feminists and radical feminists; liberal feminists that ascribed to the neo-abolitionist framework had broken away and allied with the evangelical conservatives to push U.S. trafficking legislation that equated prostitution with human trafficking (Bromfield and Capous-Desyllas 2012, 13).

Despite pushback from the Clinton Administration, the TVPA of 2000 was a modest victory for neo-abolitionists. The coalition worked closely with republican Representative Christopher Smith to draft an anti-trafficking bill; the initial bill reflected the neo-abolitionist viewpoint and exclusively focused on the trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation as innocent and involuntary victims. The Clinton Administration, however, favored a competing bill that shared a broader trafficking definition consistent with the U.N. Trafficking Protocol (Chuang 2010, 1678). Reaching a consensus with Representative Smith, the accepted bill defined “Severe Forms of Trafficking in Persons” as a two-pronged issue:

(A) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or

(B) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery. (8)

The TVPA continues on to define “sex trafficking,” outside of “severe forms of trafficking” as the “recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act,” thus strategically omitting the element of “force, fraud, or coercion” required in order to elevate the act to a “severe” form of trafficking (8). Therefore, while the definition of “severe forms of trafficking” was broadened to include instances of trafficking outside of the sex sector, neo-abolitionists secured a victory in the inclusion of a separate definition of “sex trafficking” that excludes the notions of choice and consent and includes all commercial sex acts.

Additionally, neoconservatives secured a victory with the Clinton-opposed TVPA provision that allows the U.S. to economically sanction foreign governments failing to meet the U.S.-created anti-trafficking standards; this imperialistic provision allows the U.S. to impose moral standards on other nations while punishing those that do not abide. This provision allows the U.S. to promote its anti-trafficking, and more specifically, its anti-prostitution agenda abroad. The TVPA of 2000 provided the initial language and provisions that Bush then expanded upon with his evangelical, neoconservative anti-trafficking crusade.

The Bush Administration not only adopted anti-trafficking as a central humanitarian issue but was a powerful ally to the neo-abolitionist base, promoting anti-prostitution both domestically and internationally. In a 2002 National Security Presidential Directive, Bush stated that U.S.-trafficking policy “is based on an abolitionist approach,” and therefore, the U.S. “opposes prostitution and any related activities, including pimping, pandering, or maintaining brothels, as contributing to the phenomenon of trafficking in persons.” The directive goes on to state that prostitution and related activities “should not be regulated as a legitimate form of work for any human being”. As foreign nations risked economic sanctions for failing to comply with

the U.S.-trafficking standards under the TVPA, the newly announced anti-prostitution stance of the government complicated the requirements other nations and international NGOs had to follow. Additionally, 2001 was the first year the Office to Combat and Monitor Trafficking in Persons carried out its annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, in which the U.S. ranks nations on their ability to comply with the “3 P’s”; the Prevention of trafficking, the Prosecution of traffickers, and the Protection and assistance of victims; this paradigm largely focuses on the criminalization of trafficking, but also encourages the creation of programs that rescue, rehabilitate, and repatriate trafficked persons. Tier 1 countries fully comply with the TVPA standards; Tier 2 countries are making significant efforts to comply with the standards; Tier 2 “watchlist” countries fall into Tier 2 because they are making efforts to comply, but the number of victims of severe forms of trafficking are significantly high or increasing, or a country has failed to provide evidence of increasing efforts from the previous year; and Tier 3 countries do not comply with the minimum standards of the TVPA (Department of State 2001, 5). Nations that, according to the U.S., have failed to demonstrate adequate effort in adopting U.S.-created anti-trafficking measures and are placed on the Tier 3 list, face economic sanctions. Through the TIP reports, the U.S. not only glorifies itself as a model of human rights for the world to follow but acts as a global police officer.

Scholars have argued that the nations ranked in Tier 3 are often those that have poor political relations with the United States (Mezler 2005, Kempadoo 2005). Mezler argues that the Tier 3 ranking is more reflective of a nation’s refusal to adhere to the U.S. program than their efforts to prevent human trafficking. Nations that are commonly defined as socialist or non-compliant states, such as Cuba, Iran, and Venezuela, are almost always categorized as Tier 3. A 2015 Reuters investigation in the State Department’s assessment of nations revealed that

Cuba's advancement to the Tier 2 Watchlist from 2015-2018 was directly related to the rapprochement between the U.S. and Cuba in 2014 and the reestablishment of each other's embassies. China similarly advanced to the Tier 2 Watchlist from 2014-2017 despite opposition from the U.S. State Department human trafficking expert team, evading damaging economic sanctions (Szep and Spetalnick 2015). Additionally, predominately Muslim nations, such as Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Sudan, Turkey, and Afghanistan are largely ranked as Tier 3 nations. What The Department of State describes as an "evidence-driven" and "unbiased" assessment, is more or less a reflection of diplomatic and trade relations between nations (Department of State 2019, 9). Human rights scholar, Anne T. Gallagher, who has closely tracked the trafficking policy developments of the UN and the U.S. since 1998, has criticized the TIP report for its inherent politicization and generalization. Gallagher states that "Many governments are deeply offended at the US taking on the role of global sheriff in relation to an issue as complex as human trafficking," as "a poor ranking automatically puts them under a black diplomatic cloud and renders them subject to a range of economic sanctions" (Gallagher 2015).

Perhaps the most powerful of the Bush administration's neo-abolitionist trafficking policies is the "anti-prostitution pledge," as it directly influences both foreign and domestic NGOs to adopt the U.S.'s stance on trafficking. The "anti-prostitution pledge," a requirement first enacted in the U.S. Leadership Against HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria Act of 2003 (GAA) and later sustained in the 2003 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA), bars any international or domestic NGO that supports legal, state-regulated prostitution or the protection of sex workers from receiving U.S. grant funds. The GAA goes as far as to say that "prostitution and other sexual victimization are degrading to women and children" and that "it should be the policy of the United States to eradicate such practices" (U.S.

Congress 2003, 117). The TVPRA furthers that no funds may be awarded to any organization that “has not stated in either a grant application, a grant agreement, or both, that it does not promote, support, or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution” (U.S. Congress 2003, 12). Therefore, in order to receive federal funding under the TVPRA, an organization is not only barred from advocating for the protection of regulated, safe, and consensual prostitution but must explicitly state that it does not promote the practice of prostitution. This gag rule limits the resources available to socially progressive NGOs while influencing other organizations to support claims that decriminalized/legalized prostitution leads to increased rates of trafficking, and financially rewards them. Organizations that receive federal funding are then bound to narrow, biased interpretations of trafficking, and therefore must limit their services to only those trafficked persons who fit proscriptive profiles. Additionally, when selecting language and images for public campaigns, organizations receiving funding may strategically use narrow representations of trafficking in the sex sector, such as images of women chained and beaten.

The allocation of the Bush Administration’s funding to combat trafficking was not only limited to organizations that outwardly oppose prostitution but largely went to Faith-Based Organizations (FBO’s). The Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003 allocated more than \$200 million towards combating trafficking; under the TVPRA, the U.S. government can fund both international and domestic anti-trafficking programs and provide funding for NGO research (The Department of State 2003). The International Justice Mission (IJM), a controversial evangelical Christian anti-trafficking organization based in D.C. received \$50,000 under the TVPRA of 2003 to improve their trafficking prevention programs, such as increased hiring of criminal justice investigators and seasoned law enforcement professionals (Department of State, 2003). A number of human rights and sex workers’ rights organizations,

such as the International Union of Sex Workers, have criticized the IJM for their use of brothel raids, which heighten the potential for police brutality against women and girls and lead to the seizure, involuntary detention in shelters, and potential deportation of adult sex workers (Thrupkaew 2009). Investigative journalist Noy Thrupkaew states that the funding of interventionist approaches to trafficking was “congruent with Bush’s foreign-policy stance” and applied despite the fact that law enforcement and criminal justice systems “are more likely to be part of the problem than the solution” (Thrupkaew 2009). Additionally, on July 16, 2004, at the first-ever National Training Conference to Combat Human Trafficking, the Bush Administration announced the allocation of \$4.5 million toward anti-trafficking organizations to assist victims, improve training resources, and form new task forces. In an act that the ACLU would later claim violated the Establishment Clause, the Bush Administration awarded more than \$785,000 to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops to provide subgrants to religiously based anti-trafficking organizations (Department of Justice, 2004; ACLU v Michael O. Leavitt 2009). Meanwhile, organizations such as the International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe, which promotes the inclusion of sex worker’s voices as a central feature to promoting safe, consensual prostitution, are not eligible to receive U.S. funding.

The Bush administration’s passage of the anti-prostitution pledge, prohibiting anti-trafficking NGOs that receive federal funding from “promoting, supporting, or advocating the legalization or practice of prostitution” along with the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2003 and 2005, exemplifies a neoconservative, abolitionist effort to utilize the anti-trafficking movement as a joint anti-prostitution campaign. These efforts have proved largely successful, as the largest anti-trafficking NGOs in the United States, such as the Polaris Project, which operates the National Human Trafficking Hotline, and Shared Hope

International have promoted an anti-prostitution agenda and produced harmful campaigns of women trapped in “sexual slavery,” effectively shaping public understandings of the issue. The U.S. government, and by extension, NGO-control over the definition of trafficking, has significantly influenced how anti-trafficking interventions, such as raids, are constructed and implemented both domestically and internationally.

The U.S. government, in the spirit of Irving Kristol’s three pillars of neoconservative foreign policy, uses its power and privilege to force moral standards upon other nations, reinforcing a global power hierarchy between Western and non-Western nations and inequalities domestically and abroad. Repressive anti-trafficking strategies are in accordance with neoconservative agendas, such as immigration control, and maintaining women’s sexuality and morality. By accepting the neoabolitionist framework on trafficking, the realities of those mainly affected by trafficking, such as migrants, sex workers, and other marginalized communities, are ignored and stripped of agency. This brings into question the TVPA’s stated goal of “protection.” Rather than truly prioritizing the protection of individuals affected by trafficking and forced labor, the U.S. government is using the trafficking issue to advance a larger, neoconservative agenda. Because NGOs are overwhelmingly, if not exclusively, dependent on federal funding, and run the risk of being stripped of their funding if their frameworks do not align with U.S. policy, the government has effectively pushed the same agenda onto anti-trafficking organizations, shaping an anti-trafficking field that is more concerned with policing the sexual morality of the nation than ending human trafficking.

Chapter 3: An Analysis of Two NGO Anti-Trafficking Narratives

This chapter develops a critique of the common trafficking narratives adopted and reproduced by anti-trafficking NGOs based in the United States that further the harmful prioritization of sex trafficking, limiting outreach to a select few, and framing the issue of trafficking through a biased lens. The previous chapter outlined the relationship between the U.S. government, federal anti-trafficking policies, and NGOs, in which the government uses federal funding to reward anti-trafficking organizations that align with the neo-abolitionist framework while refusing to grant funding to organizations that promote, support, or advocate the decriminalization or legalization of prostitution. The U.S. government additionally funds trafficking prevention programs, such as brothel raids, which often lead to further harm and suffering, as I discuss in this chapter. The U.S. government, therefore, has strategically bolstered the campaigns and agendas of NGOs focused on curtailing sex trafficking in women. This leaves us with an anti-trafficking field dominated, both in terms of funding and influence, by organizations that typically interface with only those trafficked persons that fit proscriptive profiles, leaving all other individuals affected by trafficking out of awareness campaigns, research, and outreach.

I organize this chapter into two main narratives that dominate the anti-trafficking field - The Deserving Victim and Individual Deviant, and the Colonial Gaze - and consider the politics that arise from each narrative. I argue that these narratives, while successful in evoking emotions, rage, and donations from the American public, are ultimately misguided and harmful; they reproduce an evangelical, neoconservative agenda that prioritizes specific cases of sexual abuse and exploitation, and frames trafficking as an issue of individual immorality that must be solved through aggressive criminal justice approaches. Although these narratives are distinct in the

language and imagery and are used to advance different approaches to the eradication of trafficking, when put together, they reveal a larger consensus in their politics of gender, sexuality, and the role of Western NGOs in the global anti-trafficking field.

My analysis draws on self-conducted face-to-face and email interviews with NGO spokespeople, past interviews sourced on NGO websites, anti-trafficking campaigns, NGO-produced reports, and the videos, definitions, and stories as featured on NGO websites. This analysis began with the selection of self-identified “anti-trafficking” NGOs (organizations that consider themselves to be a part of the anti-trafficking movement in the United States) that have an ongoing role in the current anti-trafficking movement. My analysis excluded broader humanitarian-focused organizations, such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch, that carry out projects and programs focused on human trafficking but do not address human trafficking as a part of their day-to-day operations or self-identify first and foremost as anti-human trafficking organizations. Additionally, as this section aims to critique the most readily available information on anti-trafficking, I selected the top-identified organizations from a general “human trafficking” google search. This included Polaris Project, Shared Hope International, the International Justice Mission, Faith Alliance Against Slavery and Trafficking, Operation Underground Railroad, The Exodus Road, Abolition Now, and the Daughter Project. While my interview material was limited to only those organizations that had the time and capacity to conduct face-to-face or email interviews, organization websites offered me an abundance of materials. However, it is important to analyze the information available on NGO websites, as this material is available to the public, and plays an undeniable role in educating individuals on the identified causes, effects, and solutions of trafficking.

The Deserving Victim and Individual Deviant

Awareness and prevention campaigns often represent the root problem of trafficking as simply put: bad people doing bad things to good people. This relies on a simplistic dualism that distinguishes between the innocent, naive victim and individual deviants. NGOs commonly evoke such characterizations through their biased focus on trafficking for sexual exploitation, which dominates the majority of anti-trafficking awareness-raising efforts. The public, upon seeing such representations, assumes that the naive victim is first and foremost the female victim of sexual exploitation, while the sole deviants are the evil traffickers that lure and deceive young women into migrating abroad, the pimps that commodify women, and the amoral men - johns - who pay for sex. Such a narrow understanding of trafficking victims and individual deviants not only disregards the complex experiences of trafficked persons, boiling the “trafficked victim” down to a powerless object of sympathy but shifts focus away from the structural causes of trafficking, such as anti-prostitution policies or restrictive immigration regimes that contribute to the individuals’ vulnerabilities. Instead, policies may focus on the criminalization of individuals and curbing demand to alleviate the issues of trafficking and prostitution. It is important to note that in this research, my purpose is not to question the validity or diminish the severity of trafficking victims’ experiences or suggest that traffickers, pimps, and johns are devoid of blame. My purpose is to consider how the representation of deviants and victims in awareness campaigns contributes to public understanding of human trafficking, and thus influences policies that do not acknowledge the true scope of the problem.

Victims

The most glaring issue in such a dualistic representation of human-trafficking is the depiction of an “ideal” or “deserving” victim. The deserving victim, as portrayed frequently in

stories and general rhetoric featured on NGO websites, is most commonly a young, innocent, and powerless woman or girl exploited for sex by the individual deviant. She is blameless and naive, and only enters the sex industry against her will. NGOs characterize these materials as “educational,” as they portray, what they deem, the most crucial realities of trafficking. Through such exclusive and often unrealistic portrayals, the deserving victim emerges as the only individual affected by trafficking who is worthy of government protection and public sympathy. Drawing on Nil Christie’s theory of the ideal victim, she argues that a weak, blameless, respectable victim, oppressed by a powerful, indomitable offender generates the greatest public sympathy by appealing to popularly conceived conceptions of injustice (Christie 1986). Meanwhile, those who do not fit this description, specifically men and boys affected by trafficking, are excluded from trafficking statistics, rescue and rehabilitation efforts, and general public consideration.

It is important to note that the majority of the organizations included in my analysis have moved away from the use of sensationalized images - chained, bound, powerless, or “enslaved” young women - in visual campaigns and recognize that such depictions are counterproductive. This is likely due to strong pushback from anti-trafficking scholars and advocates (Mielke 2015; Stanley 2009; Andrijasevic 2007), and even some criticism from non-academic news sources, such as the Huffington Post (Hobbes 2020). Organizations such as Shared Hope International and the Polaris Project, two of the largest and most influential anti-trafficking organizations in the U.S., have a history of producing sensationalized campaigns; in 2014, the Polaris Project’s partnership with the Ohio Human Trafficking Task Force facilitated the installation of hundreds of billboards and posters featuring a frightened girl with a man’s hand on her shoulder and the large, red words “Sold for Sex.” In 2011, Shared Hope International launched a national

billboard campaign that featured a young girl hugging her knees on a bed with bold, capital letters that read “TRAFFICKED AND TORTURED NIGHTLY” (Jean Green 2011). However, one NGO spokesperson when asked about the sensationalization of trafficking victims in campaigns and website images stated,

We weren’t always mindful... But I think most people who have been in the industry for a while realize that [the sensationalization in trafficking campaigns] is not accurate. They realize that it is hurtful to victims and causes people to believe sex trafficking is and looks like something it isn’t.

While NGOs have generally moved away from pictorial depictions of “victims,” they still portray those affected by trafficking as weak and blameless in general rhetoric or through “rescue stories” featured on NGO websites. NGOs use these descriptions to characterize the realities of trafficking and exploitation to the public, and most commonly evoke the weak and blameless victim trope in the characterization of “sex trafficking,” where the victim, always a young girl, is sold into sex by the deviant. Take, for example, Hope for Justice, an organization dedicated to ending modern slavery “by preventing exploitation, rescuing victims, restoring lives, and reforming society.” A quote from the CEO featured at the bottom of their ‘Modern Slavery’ tab reads:

Hope for Justice works with all victims of human trafficking. Whether it’s a young girl sold for sex again and again in the city where she grew up or a father who’s traveled overseas trying to support his family at home, we believe in the incredible value of every life.

Notice the different language the speaker uses to talk about a victim of sexual exploitation - “a young girl” sold for sex over and over again - versus a man, migrating with full agency to support his family; the speaker likely uses the father in this characterization to refer to an individual affected by “labor trafficking,” a term used to refer to trafficking outside of the sex

sector. Similarly, Operation Underground Railroad (OUR), an organization focused on ending sexual exploitation and trafficking proclaims in the large, capitalized letters in their “O.U.R. Stories” tab, that “TRAFFICKING VICTIMS DIDN'T CHOOSE THEIR LIFESTYLE.” The proclamation continues,

They've been lured, groomed, manipulated, and coerced. Oftentimes they don't even realize what's happening to them and fail to see that there is hope for a better future.

Out of the 16 rescue stories presented in the “Survivor Stories” section on O.U.R’s website, ten detail stories of young, naive, and innocent girls sexually victimized by traffickers, one story details an instance of forced marriage of a young girl, three tell stories of young boys trafficked for drugs, within the food sector, or unspecified exploitation, and one story details the sexual exploitation of a teenage boy. These stories predominately stress the youth, innocence, and vulnerabilities of the trafficked girls with phrases such as: “[she answered] the questions from the judge, calmly and accurately...at 11 years old”; “he would come by to talk with her and gain her trust, taking advantage of her vulnerabilities”; “thousands of predators online looking for vulnerable children to exploit.” Two of the stories attribute the victim's vulnerabilities to dysfunctional families or the lack of a father figure growing up, stating “he continued to groom her, and she liked the attention since she did not have a father figure in her life.” The single story that details the sexual exploitation of a teenage boy is the only “Survivor Story” told in first-person; where he is able to tell his own story, many of the young girls are sentenced to disturbing, irrelevant characterizations of their vulnerabilities.

On Shared Hope International’s “Stories of Hope” page, all 19 stories detail the sexual victimization of a woman or girl; thirteen of which stress the youth of the girl. The single story

that does feature a young boy, using his picture and name as the thumbnail, is actually about the sexual victimization of his mother. While this story in particular is meant to detail the ramifications trafficking has on more than just the individual involved, which is undoubtedly an important conversation to be had, men and boys affected by trafficking and exploitation are completely left out of these representations. These stories again focus almost exclusively on the young, naive, and innocent girl sold for sex; stories reference one girl's "fragile body," and describe other girls as "friendless and terrified," "vulnerable and innocent," and "naively, lured away from family and friends ... and into a strip club." One story characterizes the young girl as a "'good girl' from a stable, two-parent home," not only stressing her innocence but making note of her stability prior to her victimization to stress that anyone, even those who aren't from dysfunctional families like the girls above, is subject to trafficking.

The representation of young women and girls as the primary subjects of anti-trafficking awareness campaigns contributes to a gender-specific and gender hierarchic field, where male victims of trafficking and forced labor are rendered invisible or portrayed solely as workers. Of course, we could expect such a gender hierarchy in a field that prioritizes trafficking and exploitation in the sex sector over other forms of trafficking. The sex-focused and gendered rhetoric and stories effectively overlook male victims in both the sex industry and other sectors. Furthermore, in campaigns that address trafficking and forced labor outside of the sex sector, men and boys are largely absent from the narrative (O'Brien 2013). And while existing statistics show that women do make up the majority of those affected by trafficking and exploitation (ILO 2017), research suggests that organizations play a significant role in skewing data and underrepresenting men and boys as they are mainly focused on young, girl victims of sexual exploitation (Andrees and N.J. van der Linden 2005, 56; Gozdziaik and Collett 2005, 117; Lee

2005, 175; Piper 2005, 217). Past research also shows that many cases of trafficking involving men and boys are often strictly recorded as cases of labor exploitation, emphasizing men as workers, solely exploited through labor, while women are victims, exploited through sex (Piper 2005, 211). Not only does this raise questions about how we define and understand exploitation and trafficking, which I discuss in Chapter 4, but it results in the over-representation of women victims trafficked for sexual exploitation. Additionally, any explanation of why women are made more vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation is largely missing from the discourse.

In addition to the underrepresentation of men and boys in “victim” representation, NGO rhetoric emphasizes the young, girl “victim” having no agency or power and undoubtedly entering the sex sector against her will; her age and gender are repeatedly stressed as indicators of her vulnerability. These representations garner public sympathy and support. The same NGO spokesperson who shared her disapproval of the sensationalization of trafficking in awareness campaign imagery, admitted,

to be completely honest, [realistic depictions] don't fundraise as well. The donors want their heartstrings pulled on.

While it is likely the case that stereotypes are adopted in order to present a more sympathetic face to trafficking for public and political support, the choice of solely or primarily including explicitly weak or vulnerable young girls in awareness material supports problematic assumptions that physical weakness, as represented by age and gender, are the main precursors to trafficking. In reality, these factors are largely irrelevant to the issue of trafficking and lead to misconceptions about trafficking that hinder governments from properly addressing it. For example, a migrant man's physical strength will not necessarily protect him from trafficking and exploitation if he is made vulnerable by structural factors. As stated by O'Brien, “Power

imbalances between migrants and citizens, economic imbalances between worker and ‘employer’, and the virtual necessity to migrate for work in order to survive, contribute significantly to the vulnerability of an individual” (O’Brien 2013, 7); much more than assumptions of physical strength based on gender and age.

Deviants

While the bulk of the research on trafficking prevention campaigns has focused on the creation of the “ideal victim,” which is no doubt a problematic practice that creates a paradigm of those who are deserving of intervention and those who are not, O’Brien argues that prevention campaigns equally create an “ideal offender.” The ideal offender is “socially undesirable, and not themselves a victim” (O’Brien 2013, 208). They are often portrayed as social deviants, manipulative and crafty beyond compare, lurking in the shadows and preying on young, unassuming women. The creation of ideal offenders as individual deviants - traffickers, pimps, and buyers - alleviates all blame from government policies, interests of corporations, and neoliberal economies, and unifies everyone - governments, businesses, NGOs, and the American public - in a fight against bad people to protect innocent victims. This scenario falsely assumes that we can eradicate trafficking by simply locking away all the deviants and rescuing every good, innocent victim. Additionally, the presentation of trafficking deviants as individuals that can appear anywhere facilitates the idea that trafficking can happen to anyone, anywhere, at any time. This is simply not the case, as structural factors, such as poverty, unemployment, gender-based inequality, racism, restrictive immigration legislation, and inadequate social problems make certain populations significantly more vulnerable to trafficking. The perception

that we are all equally susceptible to trafficking effectively erases the root causes of trafficking from the solution.

While pictorial depictions of offenders in campaigns or on NGO websites are extremely rare, they are primarily constructed through stories and trafficker-characterizations used in awareness-centered material. Take, for example, Abolition Now's publication, "The Nefarious Con Artist," that warns of "predators... growing craftier and more brazen, stalking and deceiving and luring unsuspecting girls [for commercial sexual exploitation]... even from tight-knit faith communities." Or Shared Hope International's "Stories of Hope" tab, which details stories of young girls "enslaved by a bar owner who sold girls for sex," or duped by the crafty and manipulative man they loved who promised them a better life. Other stories tell of "good girls" from stable, two-parent homes - the "ideal candidate" - "naively lured away from friends and family and into a strip club." In 2017, The Polaris Project published a story titled "From 'Great Guy' to Trafficker," which graphically details the story of a romantic interest-turned- trafficker. The Faith Alliance Against Trafficking and Slavery's (FAAST) resource "How to Spot a Trafficker" characterizes the deviant as a master manipulator. Although the report states that traffickers cannot be identified solely by their age, appearance, or gender, it warns that "traffickers will trick you into believing they are your 'boyfriend' and shower you with gifts," insinuating that a trafficker is a man, and his victim is a young girl. The report also warns that traffickers are commonly found "online," first and foremost, "and any place there are lots of young people."

Recently, in the age of technology, NGOs have shifted attention towards warning young social media users of "creeps online." Shared Hope International's new "Internet Safety" program, found under their "awareness" tab, provides parents, teachers, and youth workers with

the tools to protect young children from the “traps predators lay” to attract their children and ultimately sell them for sex. The toolkit includes tips on how parents should talk to their children about online interactions, how to effectively monitor children online, warnings on the dangers of sexting, and how predators use popular apps and gaming platforms to “groom possible victims.” Organization founder and former Republican Congresswoman Linda Smith stated that the program helps “invade the darkness of the online world where the predators are communicating with our kids.” The Polaris Project’s 2019 report “Looking for Love Online this Valentine’s Day?” claims that through social media, “sex traffickers have long learned its benefits for tricking young people into sexual exploitation” (Polaris Project 2019). The report centers around deviants who “fake love” online through what they call “boyfriending”; boyfriending refers to a deviant’s manipulation of romantic interest through extreme flattery, promises of gifts and life advancements, and fake care. Boyfriending, according to the report, culminates in the online deviant purchasing travel tickets for the potential victim, meeting with the victim face-to-face, and ultimately selling them for sex.

The buyer of sex, or the john, is another commonly portrayed deviant in anti-trafficking awareness campaigns and materials. NGO representations of johns as deviants arise from the idea that buying sex is morally wrong and the solution to trafficking is the criminalization of the purchase of sex, or the “Nordic Model.” This is particularly evident in Abolition Now’s publication on “Who Buys Sex,” which approaches sex buying as harmful behavior. The report details that men who buy sex “are more tolerant of cheating on a significant other,” “differ markedly from non-buyers on measures of impulse control,” “are less likely to say that prostitution is a crime ‘where someone is harmed’,” and “normalize beliefs” that women enjoy the act of prostitution. The report lists policy solutions as moving law enforcement efforts away

from arresting prostitutes and towards arresting buyers, prohibiting the purchase of sex under any circumstances, and creating increasingly severe penalty structures for repeat buyers.

Additionally, Shared Hope International, an NGO that supports the decriminalization of prostitution, but the criminalization of demand, frame buyers as deviants in rescue stories along with traffickers and pimps. One story describes the buyer of sex,

[he] is just the average man—it can be anyone—from janitor to CEO, and he is usually a married man with a family. He’s not looking to leave his family, so he justifies what he does by looking at her as an object to be used instead of a human being. I wish people would just see the little girl.

Other stories make more subtle references to the buyer of the deviant, such as, “they never did anything to help me and I stopped hoping that anyone ever would” or “out of her mouth came the words that assured the buyer she was like the girl he had seen on the porn he devoured.”

By constructing the deviant as the buyer of sex, organizations are also furthering the idea that the demand for sexual services is the root cause of trafficking; notice, NGOs are not calling to criminalize the demand for trafficked labor or even a demand for trafficked sex, but the general demand for sexual labor. This failure to differentiate between the two is rooted in neo-abolitionism or the ideological belief that all prostitution is coercive. While evaluating the personal motivation and character of the individual who buys sex is beyond the scope of this thesis, negative characterizations of the “buyer of sex” as someone who is more prone to cheating or holding misogynistic views towards women, are targeted towards the commercial sex industry as a whole rather than exploitation and trafficking that occurs within it. Additionally, regardless of whether or not prostitution is criminalized, decriminalized, or legal, buying sex is largely considered taboo. Therefore, when organizations focus on the buyer of sex as the main

deviant, organizations are putting the blame of trafficking on consumption that is already socially condemned.

It is important to note that all of these stories and sentiments build an understanding of the “ideal offender” as the root cause of trafficking; these representations blur the real issue at hand and incite fear that anyone and everyone is equally susceptible to falling into the hands of traffickers. Notice the deviants in these stories are not just recruiters and transporters of trafficked women, but bar owners, boyfriends, and online friends; they are often driven by ill-will towards the victim and are incomparably cunning and able to deceive even the most secure and protected individuals. While these stories are intended for awareness or even lessons in hope and perseverance, they stir fear in the reader; fear that those we come across in day-to-day life or on the internet have hidden agendas to traffic and exploit us. Ultimately, this fear is misguided. By locating all social harm into the hands of individuals, all blame is alleviated from corporations, the state, and the police, and they are reconfigured as allies. All responsibility for trafficking is then shifted away from structural factors and into individual, deviant men.

Additionally, the motivations of the trafficker are never extensively discussed in the material beyond their malice, leaving it up to the reader to draw conclusions about what incentivizes trafficking. They are often lurking in the shadows of these stories, disguised as lovers, solely motivated by immorality. While my purpose is not to deny the horrific abuse and violence that undoubtedly occurs at the hands of individuals, relying on the assumption that “evil traffickers” are the root issue behind trafficking makes it easier to focus on “victim” rescue rather than challenging the existing anti-trafficking framework currently backed by U.S. policy. It also sets the “helper” or “savior,” at center stage, which I discuss in the following section. The

Operation Underground Railroad's "O.U.R Promise" tab speaks directly to the evil deviant, promising,

"And to those captors and perpetrators, even you monsters who dare offend God's precious children, we declare to you: Be afraid. We are coming for you."

While positioning the individual affected by trafficking as a "victim" at the hands of an evil deviant trafficker, pimp, or john, may be understood as the most effective way to rally public sympathy, support, and donations (Kapur 2001, 5), the depictions of the evil deviant as an immoral man, primarily engaging as both a facilitator and consumer of sex, "offending God's precious children," perpetuates the idea of the "deserving victim" as an inherently powerless, unwilling, young girl who fell victim to manipulation as a product of her age, gender, home life, and overall vulnerability and ignorance.

In an interview with a Faith-Based Organization, the founder reiterated the idea of inherent evil, stating,

[Sex trafficking] exists because of the natural desire for all of us, as humans, to be selfishly motivated. Some people are overwhelmed by their desires for money, power, control and sex so that it preoccupies them constantly.

These trafficking characterizations reduce the causes of trafficking to the moral decline of the population - a core component of the neoconservative base. In a similar way that Irving Kristol called for the institution of a "Moral Authority" to protect American society from liberalism, or Bush instituted a gag rule on organizations that do not outwardly condemn prostitution, many anti-trafficking FBO's link trafficking to immorality - greed, lust, selfishness; as stated by the spokesperson above, the capability of committing unspeakable evil "exists because [our] natural desires." The only remedy, in this case, is the establishment of a religious,

moral authority, which manifests in the form of oppression and criminalization. On the other hand, to characterize the issue of trafficking as one exacerbated by neoliberal policies that cause widespread poverty and unemployment and facilitate the increased migration for work calls for a complete restructuring of our current political and economic systems that so perfectly serve the neoconservative base. In the words of Janie Chuang, “nobody wants to view trafficking as embedded in how our global economy is structured. It’s more convenient to view it as the product of individual criminal behavior” (Hobbes 2020).

As represented in the above examples, NGOs almost exclusively evoke the victim and deviant identifiers in relation to sex, sexual victimization, the purchase of sex, and sex trafficking, supporting the theory that the solution to trafficking is the criminalization of the commercial sex industry. Not only does the use of victims and deviants solely in *sex* trafficking awareness imply that sex trafficking is the only form of trafficking severe enough to warrant the creation of an ideal victim and ideal deviant, but that victims of trafficking are predominately victims of sex trafficking; such representations go against a large body of research that recognizes the absence of a clear measure of the respective scope of trafficking both in and out of the sex industry (Zhang 2012). Additionally, characterizing johns as deviants implies that any commercial sexual activity is inherently exploitative and harmful, voluntary prostitution is impossible, and that those who purchase sex are accomplices in human trafficking. Together, the implications from the victim and deviant campaigns, stories, and awareness materials provoke the criminalization of all sex work, furthering the neo-abolitionist base.

The Colonial Gaze

The second common narrative I recognized in my analysis is the construction of the non-white, non-Western “trafficking victim” that needs saving by Western morality. Organizations frequently represent women from non-Western countries as disempowered, naive, impoverished, and unable to make the consensual, uncoerced decision to join the sex industry or other exploitative work. Post-colonial and transnational feminist theorist Chandra Mohanty coined the exploitation of the helpless non-Western woman in humanitarian campaigns as the “colonial gaze” of Western feminism. Such a colonial gaze groups the Non-western woman or “cultural Other” into homogeneous groups “characterized by common dependencies or powerlessness” (Mohanty 1984, 9). Chandra Mohanty draws on Michel Foucault’s criticism of the “juridico-discursive” model of power to explain the “colonial gaze” phenomena. The juridico-discursive model of power assumes that power is inherently repressive and one-sided; there is a source of power (in this case, men) and a reaction to that power (oppressed women). This model of power classifies all social struggles into binary structures- those that yield the power and the powerless. This classification assures that non-Western women never rise above their “object” status. Western feminists then judge the legal, economic, religious, and familial structures of non-Western women by Western standards, placing them into categories of “underdeveloped” or “developing” (Mohanty 1984, 20). Westerners then self-present themselves as symbols of liberation and self-determination that must intervene, rescue, and rehabilitate the helpless “Other” and exploit their suffering to a Western audience that legitimizes this exploitation as humanitarian and altruistic.

There is, additionally, an element of white supremacy at play in not only the facilitation of brothel raids but the more general outsourcing of humanitarian aid and rescue in non-Western

countries by white, Western NGOs. White supremacy rests upon the structuring of the interests of white societies as superior to others and on the systematic exploitation of other racialized societies. Kempadoo argues that white supremacy is not always steeped in racist ideologies or hatred for the “Other”; in fact, when white supremacy is structured within neoliberalism, unequal power relations can translate into the Westerner’s desire to “help” the “cultural Other” (Kempadoo 2015, 13). We can examine this rescue fantasy in relation to evangelical neo-abolitionists who regard themselves as moral saviors and view the rescue of mostly poor, non-white, “prostituted” women and girl “victims” from the evil clutches of sex trafficking as their moral obligation. The production of rescue narratives, as discussed in both this section and the previous section, provides the perfect platform for white NGO founders and spokespeople to bolster themselves on a platform of altruism, selflessness, and humanitarianism. However, this desire to “help” appears as a desire to serve the self.

The “Colonial Gaze” and white supremacy are evident within the anti-trafficking operations and campaigns of U.S.-based NGOs that outsource their humanitarian efforts to non-Western countries. The International Justice Mission, for example, is one of the world’s largest and most widespread evangelical Christian anti-trafficking organizations that received hundreds of thousands of dollars in grants from the federal government under Bush and is well-known for carrying out “raid and rescue” missions or brothel raids alongside the local police in their countries of operation. IJM is based in Washington D.C. but operates field offices in Cambodia, the Philippines, Thailand, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, the Dominican Republic, Bolivia, Guatemala, and South Asia. Despite being based in the U.S. IJM does not take cases in the United States, and pledges “a very specific focus on partnering with local governments in

the developing world.” Founder, Gary A. Haugen, represents the evangelical neo-abolitionist, sharing in his book “Terrify No More,” what motivated him to launch IJM,

Over time, having seen the suffering of the innocent.... More and more I find myself asking not, *Where is God?* But, *Where are God’s people?*

Any volunteer or member of IJM must submit a “Statement of Faith,” pledging their commitment to Christian faith and practices. Their website proclaims under the FAQ “Why does IJM require applicants to submit a Statement of Faith?”

“As Mother Theresa did in Kolkata, IJM seeks to provide a common platform for all people of goodwill to serve the needy, while also building a core community who share her fundamental convictions of Christian faith and practice.”

Under the FAQ “You are a faith-based organization. What does that mean?” IJM responds,

IJM's staff members are Christians from a variety of traditions who are motivated by the Bible's call to "rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow."

It is clear that members of IJM view themselves as moral saviors alongside Mother Theresa, juxtaposing themselves as the “people of good will” and “God’s people” with the “needy,” “oppressed,” “suffering” and “innocent” victims of the developing world that they are morally required to rescue.

Their interventions, however, are anything but “godly.” Brothel raids, similarly carried out by other evangelical anti-trafficking organizations such as The Exodus Road and Operation Underground Railroad, involve collaborations between NGOs and local law enforcement in carrying out aggressive sweeps of establishments suspected of trafficking, forcibly removing all

“victims,” and arresting and prosecuting their abusers. While interventions of these sorts have undoubtedly led to the rescue of individuals facing serious human rights abuses, a number of investigations and interviews have exposed the damage and destruction left in their righteous path. An investigation of IJM’s raids carried out by Noy Thrupkaew, revealed that brothel raids are incredibly traumatizing for the individuals involved, heighten instances of police brutality, and subject both sex workers and individuals affected by trafficking and exploitation to possible deportation or forced stays in NGO-run shelters or government rehabilitation centers. Thrupkaew interviewed Ping Pong, a Thai sex worker who was subject to a 2003 IJM raid. She recalled,

They were so startled, and said, ‘We don’t need rescue. How can this be a rescue when we feel like we’ve been arrested?’ All their possessions were taken away, they were photographed by the media and some of them couldn’t leave for quite a long time. The women who get rounded up usually wind up back here and doing sex work again—but this time with more debt from having to make the journey or be re trafficked again.... We wrote a report critiquing the raid, but then IJM accused us of supporting brothel owners—so we never talked to IJM again (Thrupkaew 2009).

Younger women swept up in raids are automatically deemed “trafficking victims” due to their age and are placed in government rehabilitation centers for months, even years while awaiting their mandatory court hearings. Thai law, at the time of the 2003 IJM operation, did not grant trafficking victims legal documentation, meaning the girls were not allowed to leave the shelter grounds. Thrupkaew’s investigation revealed instances in which women held in rehabilitation centers tied sheets together to escape out shelter windows; one individual, in particular, fell while attempting to escape and was hospitalized for back injuries (Thrupkaew 2009).

NGOs such as IJM operate individual rescue operations in non-Western nations, yet it is clear that many of these individuals are never truly rescued, and instead experience greater

suffering as a result. The majority of these issues arise out of this “colonial gaze,” upon the “oppressed” non-Western prostitute, in which neoconservative perceptions of the sex industry are embraced by anti-trafficking NGOs and culminate in operations like brothel raids. When organizations do not differentiate between voluntary prostitution and forced sexual labor, they enter a brothel and view everyone as a victim. However, even if a sex worker says she doesn’t enjoy the work she’s doing, this does not automatically mean she is trafficked or being subjected to forced labor. It is not uncommon that workers in precarious sectors are unhappy with their work environment; however, this does mean they are in need of rescue. Christa Crawford, after serving as IJM’s country director in Thailand in 2001 and ‘02, expressed that American perceptions of trafficking led to policies centered on eradicating brothel prostitution and “rescuing innocent pre-pubescent girl victims who had been kidnapped or tricked.” While this does happen, she explained, anti-trafficking organizations should be more concerned with “labor laws, migration laws and the situation in [each community].” If a young woman is having to make the decision between dying in poverty or being paid to do commercial sex work, the issue at hand is not the brothel or prostitution, but a failed system.

Through visual dissemination of brothel raids in non-Western nations, NGOs tokenize individuals affected by trafficking and exploitation to carry out their global neo-abolitionist agenda. The Exodus Road, an anti-trafficking organization based in Colorado Springs, CO operates their Search+Rescue program in “India, Thailand, and Latin America,” and shares dramatically edited footage on their website. For example, an edited video of an undercover operation in India, coined “Operation 100 Rupees,” includes shaky footage of blurred women synced to intense music, with text that reads “Undercover operative gathers evidence of rural brothel via covert gear,” implying the women were unaware that they were being filmed.

Similarly, Operation Underground Railroad (OUR), as cited on their website, “paves the way for permanent eradication of child sex trafficking through ‘coordinated rescue’ or brothel raids, and is particularly well known for the production of intensely cinematic and bold depictions of brothel raids. OUR’s Youtube channel features several videos of edited footage from undercover raids in Thailand, Haiti, and India; two of the videos include scenes of armed officers and uniformed military men bursting into bars and brothels, synced to intense music. The actual audio is edited out, so the viewer is unaware of the conversations occurring. A video titled “BREAKING NEWS: Operation in Haiti” includes blurry footage of an arrest, including text that reads “Last night a rescue operation took place in one of the darkest corners of the world” (OUR, 2019).

It is interesting to note a particular “white savior” narrative playing out in OUR’s “rescue operations.” Operation Underground Railroad (OUR) invokes the transatlantic slave trade in name, equating their rescue operations to the network that helped transport fugitive slaves from the American south to the north in the nineteenth century. OUR’s website “The Underground Railroad” likens their work to end “modern slavery” as a continuation of the 1800’s abolitionist movement. In 2018, OUR founder, Tim Ballard published the biographical book *Slave Stealers: True Accounts of Slave Rescues – Then and Now*, drawing comparisons between OUR’s rescue operations and the story of the 19th-century abolitionist Harriet Jacobs, who was born into slavery and escaped through the underground railroad. Members of OUR, Tim Ballard in particular, see themselves as leading a moral crusade against an evil comparable to the transatlantic slave trade in which they are the abolitionists on par with those that operated the underground railroad. Ironically enough, OUR has faced extensive criticism for fabricated and

sensationalized rescue operations, their “aggressive, muscular, faux-military” raids, and their unclear handling of donations (Marchman, and Merlan 2020).

Videos sensationalizing brothel raids are problematic for a number of reasons. Portrayals of brothels in non-Western nations as “the darkest corners of the world” to a Western audience perpetuate the colonial gaze, in which blurry, powerless non-Western women are in need of rescue by Western organizations such as OUR. These videos, by nature, are only able to depict an incredibly narrow characterization of trafficking, where blurred women are lumped together as powerless victims of sexual exploitation. This tokenization carries the risk of victimizing/re-victimizing individuals by forcing them into roles that they did not necessarily consent to play. Depictions of officers and activists “rescuing” women, potentially against their will, suggest that organizations are more concerned with how well the exploited individual can properly serve the movement rather than adhering to their true needs; in this case, sex workers or exploited women are forced into a narrow role of “sex trafficking victim.” These depictions leave little room for the lived realities of these individuals the organizations claim to serve and force them into narrative spaces they did not necessarily give consent to join. This is even more concerning considering the history of anti-trafficking organizations using these narratives to influence anti-trafficking policy in the U.S. and abroad to the very detriment of exploited and trafficked individuals.

Despite clear evidence of the damaging consequences perpetuated by brothel raids and their visual representation, the raid approach remains popular because it is consumable to a Western audience. When the rescues are filmed and photographed, donors get a glimpse into the horrific reality of trafficking abroad. Sociologist Elizabeth Bernstein, who specifically addresses IJM’s brothel raids, calls these rescue operations “media-friendly militarized humanitarianism.”

They offer a glimpse into the underground, dark, and dangerous world of trafficking, complete with music to intensify the action, and uniformed, heroic rescuers. Western audiences are able to see first-hand, a real-life rescue of trafficking “victims” of non-Western nations, “reinforcing their own perceived freedom and autonomy as Western women (Bernstein, 63). They are able to engage from afar, gazing upon the “third-world” victims and virtually entering the brothels situated in the “darkest corners of the world,” all without directly threatening their “first-world” moral status.

Chapter 4: A Labor-Approach to Anti-Trafficking

In the previous chapter, I outlined the narrow, harmful, and misguided trafficking representations commonly produced by NGOs. Characterizations of victims and deviants in “rescue stories” disregard the complex experiences of trafficked persons and ignore the structural causes of trafficking apart from the “evil” trafficker. The construction of the non-Western “victim” of sexual exploitation, powerless and in need of rescue facilitates harmful practices such as brothel raids, that NGO founders and spokespeople to them film and exploit to bolster themselves on a platform of altruism, selflessness, and humanitarianism. Meanwhile, a Western audience gazes upon these non-Western women to reinforce their own moral authority. Both narratives depict how anti-trafficking organizations leave out, disempower, and exploit survivors by addressing human trafficking through selective cases of women’s sex trafficking, effectively framing trafficking as an issue of sexual morality rather while ignoring oppressive political, legal, and economic systems that reinforce vulnerability domestically and abroad. After showing the damaging effects of this widely adopted rhetoric and practices, it is clear that the anti-trafficking field, on both the organizational and federal level, is in need of a more inclusive approach to trafficking that is focused on forced labor. This chapter challenges the mainstream “human-rights” approach to trafficking and discusses the implementation of a labor approach. The labor, as used by international organizations and alliances such as AMUMRA and ICRSE, recognizes the exploited individual first and foremost as an exploited worker and therefore primarily addresses the individual’s main vulnerabilities to market exploitation.

A Labor Paradigm

Anti-trafficking scholars and advocates have called for a reconceptualization of human trafficking within a broader framework of globalization, labor migration, and sex workers-rights

(Kim and Chang 2007, Shamir 2012, Andrees and N.J. van der Linden 2005). This discourse questions the effectiveness of current anti-trafficking policy and practices in serving all victims of trafficking, as the current focus on sex trafficking obscures governmental and organizational responsibility, whether strategic or not, in causing further harm among already marginalized communities. A broader approach would recognize the coerced migration and forced labor that occurs within diverse markets that often employ migrants, including but not limited to manufacturing, construction, agriculture, domestic service, and sex work. Therefore, it is crucial that a broader approach includes the voices of sex workers and migrants in their frameworks, rather than operating through a moral lens that marginalizes people.

The broader framework laid out in this section draws on a labor paradigm that prioritizes the individual's rights as a worker. Hila Shamir draws distinctions between the labor paradigm and the current framework, or the "human rights approach" (Shamir 2012). Shamir refers to the current anti-trafficking approach as a "human rights approach." While, of course, it is important to prioritize the human rights of individuals trafficked and exploited and no human-trafficking approach is complete without a human rights framework, this terminology refers to the current organizational prioritization of individual rights and individual "rescue and rehabilitation." The human rights approach, which the majority of the anti-trafficking NGOs in the United States currently employ, is situated within the human rights movement, whereas the labor paradigm pulls from the labor movement. Shamir states that "the labor movement has focused on the power of the worker or "labor" versus the employer or "capital," and has culminated in the form of trade unions that emphasize class struggles and social and economic issues (Shamir 2012, 95)." While the two movements overlap in key ways, as do the corresponding approaches, the human rights movement in the U.S. has historically focused on

bolstering the power of the individual in relation to the state; this includes a focus on “civil and political rights, universal values and entrenching human rights in national constitutions and legislation” (Shamir 2012, 95). In the anti-trafficking movement, this has translated to an overemphasis on certain individual human rights post-rescue, such as access to safe shelters, counseling, work permits, temporary visas, etc, with little emphasis on addressing the root causes of trafficking and forced labor. Within the trafficking movement, a labor approach focuses on transforming elements of the law that facilitate unequal power relations within labor markets. It transcends individual rights and harms towards the economic and social conditions that make the individual vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. At the organizational level, this is seen through political advocacy, collective mobilization, and programs to provide vulnerable populations with the legal mechanisms to resist exploitation.

In part because of funding and the narrow and biased prioritization of sex trafficking discussed in Chapter 3, the dominant anti-trafficking frameworks lack comprehensive labor approaches but instead utilize an individualistic, victim-centered approach that severely limits their reach and fails to address the underlying causes of exploitation and trafficking. Although a human-rights framework stresses the importance of providing assistance to severely exploited victims on an individual basis, which is no doubt a necessary part of any comprehensive anti-trafficking framework, it is limited to the post-exploitation situation without providing any tools on improving the social, economic, and legal conditions in labor markets. Additionally, this framework assumes that exploited individuals must be removed from their work situations in all cases and receive physical and psychological rehabilitation. While a therapeutic approach emphasizes rehabilitation, which is no doubt important, it tends to ignore the factors that led to the exploitation of forced labor in the first place. Psychological and physical rehabilitation is

hardly useful if the individual remains vulnerable to an exploitative labor market post-rehab. In ignoring and omitting material challenges, the human-rights framework on its own has little to offer exploited and trafficked individuals who wish to improve their work situation rather than be removed from it entirely. Take, for example, a sex worker that wishes to continue working in prostitution post-rescue; there is simply no room for this possibility within a framework that solely views exploited peoples as victims who need rescuing. Therefore, the anti-trafficking field must shift to a greater emphasis on transforming labor markets that profit off of forced, abusive labor.

The current human-rights approach has a narrow impact when employed alone, as resources are allocated towards assisting victims on a case-by-case basis. Because NGOs exclusively focus on victim assistance and rehabilitation rather than addressing trafficking and exploitation at its root, their efforts reach an alarmingly small number of trafficking victims. A labor approach seeks to not only assist victims who are removed from instances of trafficking and exploitation but to transform the structure of those labor markets that are prone to severe exploitation and human rights abuses. In this way, the labor approach reaches more victims by eliminating the power disparities between traffickers and laborers and transforming the social and economic conditions that make individuals vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. A labor approach views trafficking more as an issue of exploited labor rather than a human rights issue; doing so shifts away from the hopeless victim narrative that is currently so prominent in the anti-trafficking field, and prioritizes a framework that empowers the worker and recognizes their agency potential.

The labor approach recognizes the exploited individual first and foremost as an exploited worker and therefore primarily addresses the individual's main vulnerabilities to market

exploitation. After all, the majority of trafficking victims migrate voluntarily for work and are only exploited once they arrive in their country of destination (*Anti-Slavery International* 2003, 3). This suggests that most trafficking victims are principally concerned with economic security and finding non-exploitative jobs. Accordingly, in addressing the individual's subjection to forced labor, the labor approach considers the individual's lack of power, the harmful working conditions, and the individual's lack of rights rather than solely focusing on the post-exploitative situation. The International Labor Organization, a primary basis for a comprehensive labor approach, recognizes poverty, lack of employment, and inefficient labor migration systems as the root causes of forced labor (ILO 2008, 2). Additionally, belonging to a racial or national minority, having an undocumented status that limits access to legal protections and resources, limited market mobility, the absence of community resources, or working in a sector with limited or unregulated employment or labor laws are key factors that determine a worker's vulnerability. These factors arise out of particular legal regimes - immigration, labor, employment, etc, and the labor approach recognizes that these regimes underlay the power disparities that facilitate trafficking and exploitation. Therefore, labor approaches would surpass a human-rights approach primarily concerned with rescue and rehabilitation and focus on transforming the social, legal, and economic causes of worker vulnerability.

The ILO recognizes the vulnerability of migrant workers- a feature that is key to any comprehensive labor approach, as migrant workers make up the vast majority of trafficking victims. The denial of citizenship to undocumented migrants keeps them effectively rightless and limits their access to legal, safe, and regulated labor markets. Fear of deportation keeps workers vulnerable and, thus, subservient to forced labor. As a result, undocumented migrants are attractive candidates for the underground labor market. Additionally, increasing border control

tends to also raise the cost immigrant workers must pay to labor smugglers, increasing their indebtedness and vulnerability to labor violations. Therefore, any anti-trafficking approach that emphasizes the criminalization of immigration, including enforced border control and increased deportation is counterproductive.

The labor approach similarly situates the issue of exploitation and trafficking in the sex sector within a perspective of labor, labor migration, and a gendered labor market. It is important to understand that women are disproportionately pushed to work in unregulated labor markets such as prostitution and the entertainment industry as a result of globalization. In 2017, women and girls made up an estimated 71% of the overall total of those affected by forced labor (ILO 2017, 10). Structural adjustment policies mandated by the IMF and World Bank require governments to undertake austerity policies and cut social services and benefits, forcing mostly poor women to seek out additional sources of income. In the resulting “feminization of survival,” in which households and communities are increasingly dependent on women to maintain the standard of living in places where jobs are rapidly disappearing (Misra 2019, 59). Consequently, many women must migrate, searching for work in unregulated markets, likely in nations in which they don’t have legal status. Therefore, from the perspective of the women affected, it is precisely the lack of job opportunities in their home communities and countries, a lack of legal migration opportunities and their illegal status in the destination country, the demand for work in the informal sector, and the failure of governments to regulate the work that is available to them, that pushes them into situations of forced labor.

It is, however, equally important to stress that although there are strong economic push and pull factors to a woman’s migration, migrant sex workers are not devoid of agency nor are they innocent, vulnerable, and naive victims. Sex work is a path to independence and autonomy

for many women, and migration for sex work is not always motivated by dire economic needs. In fact, for many women, working in the sex sector in another country is a viable alternative as opposed to other precarious labor sectors while lower pay, such as factory work (Kempadoo 2012; Agustín 2007; Doezema 2000). The hegemonic anti-trafficking discourse, as Kempadoo notes, is quick to label women migrants as “victims” in order to rob them of their agency. She points out the term “trafficked victim” can be counterproductive when it is assigned to migrant women deemed incapable of making the calculated choice to migrate for sex work (Kempadoo xxiv, 2012). In fact, these negative signifiers are strategically promoted by the NGOs examined in this Senior Thesis as part of the moral crusade against prostitution.

In contrast to them, the labor perspective toward trafficking and exploitation highlights the importance of recognizing informal sectors dominated by women, such as prostitution, as legitimate work, and recognizing sex workers as legitimate workers. This also means no longer separating “sex trafficking in women” as an issue separate from labor trafficking, and including women’s work and women-dominated sectors within existing approaches to trafficking and exploitation. Rather than excluding sex workers from the issue and ostracizing their work, a labor approach, which additionally views sex workers as first and foremost *workers*, asks the sex worker how they define the problem, and what they need.

Converging the two approaches also requires a reconceptualization of the relationship between exploitation and trafficking, as this is currently a deep ideological divide between the two. The dominant NGO and policy approach views exploitation as a distinct crime that occurs as a result of human trafficking; this conceptualization often places the issue of exploitation as second to that of trafficking. A labor approach regards trafficking as an instance of labor exploitation, shifting the focus away from the movement of the individual, which is not always

forced, and towards the structural inequalities that facilitate exploitation. These differences lead to different strategies; viewing exploitation as a characteristic of trafficking focuses on controlling the means of movement of individuals through the criminalization of immigration and stricter border controls while a labor approach does not call for the criminalization or deportation of trafficked and exploited workers but extends the enforcement of labor laws, regulations, and protections to all workers.

The ILO provides an observable framework for the reconceptualization of exploitation and trafficking. The ILO's estimated 24.9 million victims of forced labor do not differentiate between human trafficking and forced labor, as "human trafficking can also be regarded as forced labor" (ILO 2012, 1). After estimating the total number, the ILO breaks down forced labor into sectors, including forced labor in the private sector, by individuals or enterprises in agriculture, construction, domestic work or manufacturing, forced labor in the sex sector, and forced labor imposed by the state. Notice, the ILO's methodology does not differentiate between trafficked and non-trafficked victims of forced labor. This is important, as both those coerced at the outset of migration as well as those subject to coercion at later stages .. are victims of exploitation; governments and organizations should not make a distinction between trafficked and non-trafficked victims, as it does not matter when the coercion started, but that an individual was subjected to it at all. The ILO broadens the scope of the existing research on trafficking further by including estimates of forced labor within diverse labor markets; their methodology does not allow for a restrictive focus on sex work. Instead, the ILO identifies exploitation in the sex sector as a subset of forced labor, placing it on an equal level of severity rather than creating a hierarchy of exploitation.

NGO Employment of a Labor Paradigm

This section evaluates the application of the labor approach from a migrant-rights perspective and a sex workers'-rights perspective - two communities that are directly affected not only by trafficking and forced labor but the harmful repercussions of the current anti-trafficking approach. Although neither organization self-identifies as an anti-trafficking organization, both are a part of the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW); GAATW is an alliance of over 80 non-governmental organizations around the globe, including migrant rights organizations; anti-trafficking organizations; self-organized groups of migrant workers, domestic workers, survivors of trafficking and sex workers; human rights and women's rights organizations; and direct service providers. GAATW recognizes the phenomenon of human trafficking as "intrinsically embedded" within a context of migration for labor, and therefore does not primarily consist of "anti-trafficking" organizations (GAATW). Of course, any organization that focuses on upholding migrant workers' and sex worker's (and migrant sex workers') rights directly interacts with the issues of trafficking and forced, whether this is a stated intention of the organization or not. Both AMUMRA and ICRSE protect individuals from trafficking and forced labor by bolstering their rights as workers. While they work, in part, on an individual basis, the majority of their work is focused on tackling the legal regimes that increase migrant and sex workers' vulnerabilities to instances of trafficking and forced labor.

AMUMRA

La Asociación Civil de Derechos Humanos Mujeres Unidas, Migrantes y Refugiadas en Argentina or The Association of United Women, Migrants and Refugees in Argentina (AMUMRA) is a non-profit organization made up of migrant and refugee women dedicated to

helping migrants, refugees, and their families gain social, economic, and cultural global integration, with recognition of the historical and contextual inequalities they must overcome. While AMUMRA is not a self-identified anti-trafficking organization, they work to promote the socioeconomic rights of migrants and refugees - populations that are disproportionately vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation. AMUMRA is a part of the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, as their work to support migrant and refugee communities tackles the structural causes of trafficking. As discussed, undocumented status, which limits access to the legal system, limits market mobility, and limits access to alternative sources of income, severely increases a worker's vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation. These issues are structural, as they are created and upheld by federal or state immigration, labor, and employment policies of the destination country. The labor approach identifies these structural issues that lie at the root of trafficking and exploitation. AMUMRA is an example of a labor and human rights approach, as the organization is mainly focused on tackling the social and economic vulnerabilities of migrant and refugee populations that are commonly exploited for labor; this approach goes beyond individual rescue and rehabilitation efforts.

AMUMRA follows a three-pronged approach, including political advocacy, community strengthening, and counseling and accompaniment; this hybrid approach is dedicated to both assisting individual migrants and refugees and lobbying for comprehensive legislation. AMUMRA's political advocacy approach stresses the importance of constant surveillance of the changing situations of migrant communities, generating social dialogue and collective mobilization, and facilitating and maintaining connections between migrant organizations and the government. AMUMRA has participated in the passage of the 2003 National Migration Law, which protects the equal treatment and rights of individuals regardless of their documentation

status, including the right to decent work, social security, and free and equal access to education and healthcare; the 2006 Refugee Law, which prohibits rejection, discrimination and sanctions at the border, guarantees the processing of asylum claims, protects the unity of the family and facilitates access to documentation, education, health, and employment; the ratification of the 2006 Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their Families; and Argentina's 2014 ratification of the ILO Convention 189, which seeks to improve the working conditions of domestic workers worldwide.

Community strengthening refers to strengthening the socio-organizational capacities of migrant communities. AMUMRA sets up both permanent and mobile meeting spaces where migrants can access information on their rights and the organizational tools available to them and their communities. Community Strengthening is a necessary counterpart to political advocacy. As legislation changes, it is crucial that vulnerable populations, such as migrants and refugees know their rights. For example, while the passage of the National Migration Law, every individual, regardless of their legal status was granted equal treatment under the law. However, the process to then obtain a National Identity Document (DNI)- the document used to identify Argentine citizens and temporary and permanent residents in Argentina- can be confusing and complicated. Without legal status, workers are more vulnerable to exploitative work. Jonathan Urrea-Espinoza, a past intern for AMUMRA, worked directly with many migrants who had difficulties with the documentation process, were unaware of their rights as migrant workers, and the economic resources available to them. He helped operate mobile tents, in which AMUMRA members travel from town to town offering workshops on migrant and refugee rights (Urrea-Espinoza 2018, 6). As part of the counseling and accompaniment component of their three-pronged approach, AMUMRA members will assist migrants having difficulties processing,

understanding, and regularizing their immigration documentation. In addition, AMUMRA offers assistance, including counseling services, to workers who faced exploitation, discrimination, or any violation of their human rights in the workplace.

It is important to note that AMUMRA is an organization made up predominantly of women migrants and refugees of different nationalities. This dimension is what enables the members of AMUMRA to not only understand the diverse and complex experience of migrants but facilitates collective learning and transformation. Ana María Téllez Luque, scholar and AMUMRA member, states that although AMUMRA does not establish formal alliances with political parties, the promotion of AMUMRA as an institution aimed at transforming structural inequalities is inherently political, as are their instituted political projects discussed above. She shares that AMUMRA is a space of frequent analysis, discussions, opinion-sharing, evaluations, and strategy building around policies, institutions, political parties, and government leaders. Organizations tackling structural inequalities cannot exclude interaction with formal politics, and AMUMRA's active political participation has increased the membership of migrant women who otherwise felt they had no space in politics despite the fact they are directly affected by them (Téllez Luque 128-129).

AMUMRA's website, the main source of information about their activities, membership, and resources avoids the use of sensationalized imagery or bold statistics and instead focuses on laying out their main operations (political advocacy, community strengthening, and counseling and accompaniment) and disseminating crucial information and resources to migrants and refugees. Their tab "Información migrante" provides information about entering and exiting Argentina, including the types of documentation needed, how to start the documentation filing process, how to obtain refugee status, how to obtain an ID, how and where to make a travel

permit, where to pay for an exit license and more. For those currently residing in Argentina, the website provides information on obtaining a DNI, checking the status of the DNI, renewing a Certificate of Precarious Residence (which grants the holder permission to live temporarily in Argentina), how to obtain permanent residence, as well as general definitions of the different forms of residence, what is required for each, expiration dates, and costs. Each answer also provides links to the necessary government websites, information on navigating each website, and what selections must be made for each process. Because the documentation processes can be so off-putting to people, especially those who have migrated from a new country, and are unfamiliar with the requirements for citizenship and the resources available to them, the inclusion of this information on AMUMRA's website is potentially living-saving. Equipping migrants with clear, accessible information increases their bargaining power and makes them less vulnerable to precarious situations.

While AMUMRA is not a self-identified "anti-trafficking" organization, their employment of a labor approach with a specific perspective on migration actively combats trafficking and forced labor. The ILO reports that migrant workers, particularly women, are among the populations most vulnerable to forced labor and trafficking (ILO 2017, 31). Therefore, no comprehensive trafficking approach is complete without a migrant perspective. AMUMRA protects migrant workers from exploitation and forced labor by bolstering their agency first and foremost as workers; they promote their ability to enter the labor market legally and safely by lobbying for comprehensive immigration reform, offering easy and accessible immigration and documentation information and resources on their website, and traveling to largely migrant towns educating individuals on their rights as workers and as migrants or refugees living in

Argentina. While some of their work occurs on an individual basis and they offer assistance to individuals affected by exploitation, AMUMRA predominantly approaches migrant vulnerability to trafficking and forced labor by tackling the root causes of their vulnerability: restrictive immigration laws. When migrant workers are able to safely and easily cross borders, attain documentation, and enter legal, regulated labor markets, their vulnerability to trafficking and forced labor vastly decreases.

ICRSE

The International Committee on the Rights of Sex Workers in Europe (ICRSE) is a network of sex worker-led organizations spanning 33 countries in Europe and Central Asia, and 150 individual sex workers, academics, trade unionists, human rights advocates, and LGBT rights and women's rights activists. The network, founded in 2004, aims to promote the inclusion and respect of sex worker's voices in social and political programs, raise awareness about the historical social exclusion of sex workers, and to protect the health and labor rights of sex workers at the community, national, and international levels; the ICRSE provides an example of the NGO employment of a labor approach to protect workers in the sex industry. The network strongly opposes the criminalization of sex work and the conflation of sex work with trafficking, and instead "[seeks] to put forward a labor rights' perspective of sex work, whereby the labour, health and human rights of all sex workers are recognized, protected and fulfilled by national, regional and international laws, policies and programme." Like AMUMRA, ICRSE does not identify as an anti-trafficking organization but is also a member of the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women. The ICRSE addresses the different forms of marginalization that create vulnerable populations.

Advocating for the removal of criminalizing laws that prevent the safe reporting of exploitation and abuse allows sex workers to work more safely, thus decreasing their vulnerability to forced labor and trafficking.

The ICRSE has two main approaches: building capacities of sex workers and sex worker-led organizations, and the political advocacy of sex workers' rights. ICRSE members coordinate both regional and national training and workshops to create spaces where sex workers can share their living and working conditions, discuss the national legal frameworks across European countries, and mobilize against criminalization. The ICRSE is especially focused on holding community mobilization and activism training in countries or regions with limited or no sex worker-led organizations or movements, such as Poland, Albania, and Romania. In 2018, ICRSE and the Sex Worker' Rights Advocacy Network (SWAN) hosted a 3-day training in Poland in coordination with a local coalition, Sex Work Polska (SWP), in which local sex workers discussed their working conditions, mapped out issues they wanted to mobilize around, and identified local allies that would partner with them for future advocacy. In Albania, where sex work is completely criminalized and sex-worker coalitions are rare, ICRSE hosted a 2-day training with Aleanca, an LGBT organization. The training was mostly attended by trans and male sex workers, most of whom are homeless or live in shelters, making them incredibly vulnerable to situations of violence and forced labor. The training focused on sharing resources in the area and access to justice in the case of human rights violations. ICRSE and SWAN presented their key programs and actions including support for sex-worker organizing, the development of a sexual health and legal support center, their documentation on international human rights and research on discrimination, the process of CEDAW shadow reporting, and running a decriminalization campaign (NSWP 2018).

At the political advocacy level, the ICRSE actively monitors policies affecting sex workers at the national level and EU level, and publically opposes and protests resolutions that seek to further criminalize sex work; the ICRSE identifies anti-trafficking organizations as a key player in furthering the criminalization and stigmatization of sex workers. In 2019, their publication titled, “A brief guide on collateral damages of anti-trafficking laws and measures on sex workers,” navigates the negative effects of current anti-trafficking policies by going through the “4 P’s Paradigm” (similar to the 3 P’s Paradigm that the U.S. TVPA follows) of Prevention, Protect, Prosecution, and Partnership. At the Prevention level, campaigns only try to raise awareness of trafficking without highlighting its root causes such as poverty, discrimination, lack of social services, labor rights, and migration. ICRSE argues that shifting prevention towards the specific causes of trafficking can “inform vulnerable workers about their rights, encourage the inclusion of marginalized communities or promote equality in workplaces” (7). At the Protection level, the ICRSE argues that even though many NGOs claim to operate under a “human-rights approach,” their protection measures, such as police raids, identification processes, and voluntary return programs, end up harming more people than protecting them; for example, the threshold for who qualifies as a “victim of trafficking” is high and narrow, and the state can remove ‘victim status’ if the person wishes to return to sex work. At the Prosecution level, prosecution-focused anti-trafficking policies often reward the number of prosecutions rather than the quality; the higher the number of prosecutions a nation has, the more points they receive from the international community. Additionally, without a clear or complete definition of “trafficking,” sex workers are too often prosecuted as traffickers, especially when the individual is working outside of their country of origin. This is why migrant sex workers face such a harsh barrier that prevents them from seeking legal help. At the Partnership level, ICRSE argues that

very few sex worker organizations, such as their member organizations, are a part of the existing anti-trafficking structures despite the fact sex workers are one of the key communities involved. The ICRSE calls for the inclusion of sex workers in trafficking discourse and for the implementation of a labor approach that ensures sex workers can enter, continue, and leave sex work without violence or coercion.

As of recently, the ICRSE has been pushing for European governments to include sex workers in COVID-19 financial and social aid. During the pandemic, sex workers were largely excluded from receiving government aid due to the “informal” nature of their work.

Co-chairwoman of the ICRSE, Sabrina Sanchez, explained that sex workers are increasingly vulnerable during the pandemic because they are not receiving support from their governments. Without financial support, many sex workers had no choice but to continue working despite lockdowns, putting themselves in risky, dangerous situations. The ICRSE, partnering with SWAN, published an assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on sex workers and their corresponding policy demands. The report, which demands immediate action from European Governments and lays out a long-term recovery plan for affected populations, states that,

[COVID-19] proved what sex worker activists have been echoing for decades: sex workers will be the last prioritized population when it comes to providing them with alternative income, despite the popular rhetoric of abolitionist governments stating the contrary and emphasizing the urgency of creating opportunities to ‘exit the sex industry.’ (1).

ICRSE points out a glaring contradiction that doesn’t solely apply to Europe, but brings into question all abolitionist frameworks that label sex work “trafficking” and sex workers “victims.”

COVID-19 exposed the ways in which sex workers, as a result of abolitionist rhetoric and punitive laws, have pushed sex workers into instances of forced labor without the financial and social protections enjoyed by workers in formal employment. In response, ICRSE called on governments to immediately provide social assistance to the informal workforce regardless of migration status, to give tax and social security deferral and exemptions to informal and self-employed workers, to alleviate the tax burden of small businesses owned by sex workers in countries where sex work is legal, to introduce a moratorium on evictions and the provisions of emergency housing options to decrease the homeless sex worker population, to grant temporary permits to those made undocumented or who have uncertain legal status due to the pandemic.

In the long-term, ICRSE first and foremost demands decriminalization of sex work in every nation and the creation of a comprehensive framework to assess the living and working conditions of sex workers and their human rights. This contradicts current trafficking paradigms that ignore and stigmatize sex workers and push for the criminalization of sex work. Their 2018 Intersectional Activism Toolkit declares that the criminalization of sex work increases instances of human rights violations against workers including violence, police violence, blackmail, deportations, and more. Criminalization-induced fear and marginalization push sex workers further underground, increasing the direct risk of force, violence, and abuse. Decriminalization is the first step in addressing the complex human rights violations sex workers face and eliminating the interconnected issues of xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, poverty, gender inequalities, and social exclusion (ICRSE 2018).

As stated in the ICRSE's guide to collateral damages in anti-trafficking law, anti-trafficking approaches are incomplete without a labor approach that includes the rights of sex workers as first and foremost workers. The ICRSE does just that by lobbying for the

inclusion of sex workers' rights in social and political programs. A main political focus of the ICRSE is the decriminalization of sex work in Europe. Decriminalization allows sex workers to work in a legal, safe, and regulated labor market, with increased access to worker's benefits, including healthcare and social security. When sex work is criminalized, sex workers are no longer protected by labor laws and are forced to work underground in more precarious conditions, rendering them extremely vulnerable to instances of forced labor. The ICRSE travels to areas where sex work is criminalized and creates spaces for sex workers to meet, learn about their rights, and take part in political advocacy, stressing the importance of collective agency in the labor approach. The ICRSE also works to actively combat the harmful effects of the dominant NGO and policy approach, which actively threatens the rights of sex workers as workers. The ICRSE argues that their "human-rights approach" harms more people than protecting them.

Both AMUMRA and the ICRSE offer insight into the implementation of a labor approach that protects those vulnerable to trafficking and forced labor at the hands of restrictive legal regimes. They focus on improving workers' bargaining power in the workplace and increasing their accessibility to legal, regulated labor markets. They tackle many of the root issues that underlay trafficking, such as strict border controls, inaccessibility to documentation and legal status, and criminalization of sex work; this directly counteracts the criminal justice approach supported by many of the main anti-trafficking NGOs in the United States. It is also important to point out that both AMUMRA and ICRSE are organized and operated by the very people they represent. This plays an important role in the accurate depiction of who is affected by the issues at hand and brings into question how different U.S. anti-trafficking organizations would be if they were organized and represented by individuals previously affected by

trafficking and forced labor, rather than predominantly white, evangelicals carrying out a moral agenda.

Conclusion

While there are no simple solutions to trafficking and exploitation, assessing the harmful impacts of current neoconservative, neo-abolitionist anti-trafficking policies and practices offer insight into more effective solutions. These insights call into question the current framework of anti-trafficking campaigns, rescue operations, and policies, that primarily address selective cases of women trafficked for sex. My research revealed the role NGOs play in misrepresenting the issue of trafficking and exploitation as a crime perpetrated by evil, immoral deviants against innocent, young girls sexually victimized and in need of rescue. The solution, according to this logic, is the increased criminalization of the facilitation and consumption of sex work, increased criminalization of the border, law-enforcement-led “rescue operations,” and a sole focus on rehabilitation for “deserving” victims. While I acknowledge that these practices have undoubtedly aided in the removal of individuals from heinous, dangerous conditions, we cannot simply ignore those victimized or re-victimized by brothel raids and subsequent forced detention and deportation in the name of rescue and protection. Additionally, as long as these rescue and rehabilitation efforts solely focus on individuals affected by “sex trafficking,” exploitation and trafficking occurring outside of the sex sector, predominately affecting more than just young girls, but migrant men and women, will remain underresearched, unrepresented in official trafficking statistics, left out of anti-trafficking policies and NGO approaches, and overall unimportant in the public eye.

NGOs and anti-trafficking policies currently separate trafficking cases into “labor trafficking” and “sex trafficking,” with a clear emphasis on the latter, and prioritize those individuals “trafficked” into forced labor over those who are not. While I argue that this separation is largely a product of stigmatized sexuality and the neo-abolitionist belief that sex

work is not a form of labor in the way, construction or agriculture work is, this logic underscores the need to address trafficking as a problem of forced labor, and ultimately limits outreach to a subset of individuals trafficked for sex. The TVPA currently divides its definition of “human trafficking,” into two parts, one addressing “sex trafficking” and the other addressing “labor trafficking,” yet both are defined as an act induced by “force, fraud, or coercion.” This is largely a characterization of forced labor rather than trafficking, and the conditions characterizing both labor and sex trafficking are the same. Adopting a labor approach, similar to that of the International Labor Organization, which includes sexual exploitation within its definition of forced labor, would ultimately expand organizations’ victim outreach.

The criminalization approach, sustained by NGO characterizations of deviants and victims, and rescue narratives, solely addresses the consequences of the trafficking phenomenon rather than its root causes. Trafficking and forced labor are not issues born from the inherent evil and immorality of men but are rooted in very real, and *replaceable*, restrictive immigration regimes that render undocumented migrants rightless and vulnerable, ineffective labor protections for poor workers, specifically migrant sex workers, and widespread unemployment and poverty, all exacerbated by neoliberal globalization. Stricter borders and increased policing of sex workers only push trafficking and forced labor operations further underground, making individuals harder to reach, and increasing the likelihood of exploitation. Instead, I call on anti-trafficking organizations to lobby for the government to adopt a migration perspective similar to AMUMRA’s that not only allows for the participation of migrants in trafficking discourse but advocates for the human rights of migrants, decriminalization of immigration, and easier pathways to citizenship. And while anti-trafficking organizations are effectively muzzled by current neo-abolitionist policies that defund organizations for advocating for the safety of sex

workers (although many organizations embrace and advocate for the neo-abolitionist framework regardless) I encourage anti-trafficking organizations to pay more attention to the socioeconomic conditions that promote sex work, listen to and include sex worker's in their frameworks, and lobby for the decriminalization of sex work.

I do not call on the complete dissolution of the human rights approach discussed in Chapter 4, which largely appropriates funds towards rescue and rehabilitation, but a merging of a human rights approach and a labor approach. Rescue and rehabilitation approaches that are also accompanied by social rights (access to housing and education) and legal immigration status are focused on upholding a trafficked persons' humanity and dignity, which is integral to the anti-trafficking field. If protecting and upholding humanity and dignity are a recognized goal, it is crucial that "rescue" does not further victimize or exploit trafficked and exploited persons. Additionally, an anti-trafficking approach is incomplete without simultaneously engaging with labor and employment law to reform conditions in labor sectors that are prone to trafficking and forced labor.

The neoconservative, neo-abolitionist approach to trafficking has simplified the complex issue of trafficking and forced labor into one exclusively revolving around the sex trafficking of women, turning an issue of unequal legal, economic, and political regimes, into an issue driven by moral indignation of sex. Forced labor and trafficking involve very real and heinous human rights abuses. However, the current anti-trafficking approach is also guilty of perpetuating human rights abuses. Individuals affected by trafficking and forced labor deserve a trafficking approach that does not exploit their abuses to advance a moral or political agenda but aims to reform restrictive trafficking, immigration, and labor policies and address the inequalities that sustain their abuse. Without the implementation of a labor approach that recognizes the exploited

individual first and foremost as an exploited worker rather than a sexually objectified victim, the widely shared goal of eradicating global trafficking will never come to fruition.

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