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### Publication Date

2016

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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

Feminisms, Political Mobilization, and the Transnational Sex Trade:  
Contestation over Categorizing Social Reproductive Labor

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements  
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

Vanessa Jane Lodermeier

Committee in charge:

Professor David Pedersen, Chair  
Professor Nancy Grey Postero  
Professor Saiba Varma

2016



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2016

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to the community of scholars with whom I have worked at the University of California, San Diego. I thank my advisor, David Pedersen, for both his guidance and time in engaging on this thesis topic with me and for always pushing my critical thinking further. I am grateful to Nancy Grey Postero who provided enthusiastic mentoring and genially conducted the Master's Writing Practicum in Fall 2015. Nancy's direction and support made completing this thesis a much more manageable project. My thanks also go to Saiba Varma, who provided further, dependable support.

To the 2014 Anthropology graduate student cohort and the 2015 Master's Writing Practicum participants, I extend a heartfelt thank you. Collaborating with you has been both simulating and rewarding. In particular, I would like to thank Alexia Arani, Rachel (Emerine) Hicks, Nicole Letourneau, Belinda Ramírez, Annika (Adamson) Stone, Marianinna Villavicencio, and Hua (Miranda) Wu for their support. I also thank the Critical Anthropology Workshop and the Gender and Global Migration working group for their feedback on this project. Kristen Goodrich deserves special acknowledgement for her scholastic and kindred communions.

To my family and friends in Canada, thank you for your encouragement, which I continued to receive, despite the distance. I am especially grateful to my mother, sisters, and nephews who are graciously tolerating my absence. To RR, I thank you for your constant love and support. I would not have been able to do it without you.

## ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Feminisms, Political Mobilization, and the Transnational Sex Trade:  
Contestation over Categorizing Social Reproductive Labor

by

Vanessa Jane Lodermeier

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2016

Professor David Pedersen, Chair

Numerous scholars and activists attempt to define what the transnational sex trade is and what it should or should not be. Each of the groups involved in this struggle to categorize sex labor channel different representations of the category, or discourses. This paper analyses how three feminist scholars, of varying perspectives, define transnational sex labor, and despite their widely different viewpoints, marshal similar conceptual categories. Their discourses rely on notions of or attempts to police women's "appropriate" labor and/or comportment and human rights and workers' rights discourses. While the authors do not identify their works as such, I argue they are all part of a wider conversation of defining the realm of social reproductive labor. Throughout these three scholar's writings, the category of social reproductive labor is

silent, but represents another way of understanding and interpreting both transnational sex labor and political mobilization, contextualized within capitalism.

## Introduction

“Women seeking to migrate are not so easily ‘duped’ or ‘deceived,’ and are often aware that most jobs on offer are in the sex industry.”

-Jo Doezema (2010:9)

“Viewed from a human rights perspective, trafficking is a crime against migrants in which women’s desire to migrate is preyed upon.”

-Janice Raymond (2013:loc.3901)

“Generalisations about ‘sex work’ and ‘prostitution’ can only mislead.”

-Laura María Agustín (2007:68)

Presented here are three quotations from feminists who write on commercial sex and migration. Each of these extracts represents a different view of the international sex trade. Debates over prostitution— whether it is conceptualized as violence against women or as viable labor option – rage on, and when migration concerns are included, disputes turn starker. Of late, numerous and diverse scholarly, governmental, and charitable groups have focused on studying and intervening in transnational sex labor. These myriad perspectives and practices concentrating on the sex trade span a wide political spectrum. Those studying the sex trade in the San Diego-Tijuana region include biomedical scientists intent on harm reduction and preventing the spread of venereal diseases and HIV/AIDS (see Rusch et al. 2010, Sirotin 2010, and Strathdee 2015). Justice and immigration scholars aim to understand the quantitative extent of sex trafficking (Carpenter and Gates 2015). Local journalists report on incidences of what is common-sensically interpreted to be sex trafficking and so is presented as such in newspaper articles (Adams and Nguyen 2014, Chen 2015). Official state apparatuses combat and suppress sex traffickers (Walker et al.

2015) and several non-governmental organizations attempt to free, support, and rehabilitate victims of sex trafficking (see Bilateral Safety Corridor Coalition, Alabaster Jar Project, Generate Hope, Survivors for Solutions, Abolish Human Trafficking). In a similar vein, college students in San Diego, particularly young Christian women, routinely desire to organize charitably motivated awareness-raising or fundraising events related to victims of sex trafficking.

As demonstrated, numerous different factions concentrate on the sex trade, sex trafficking, or migration for prostitution, as it is variously labeled. I ask, Why is so much attention, from diverse sources, projected onto this phenomenon and a particular group of women? What results from this significant amount of study and surveillance on those who have been labeled as “trafficked victims” or “migrant sex workers”? The categories generated by these representations are historically and geographically contextual and are consequential for political mobilization. These categories and labels can be described as discourses. I consider discourses to be forms of classificatory representations, which may take the form of not only language, but also visualizations and practices. Therefore, I ask, what do various discourses on transnational commercial sex make possible? Which relations do these concepts illuminate? Which features do they emphasize? Conversely, what does each of these accounts miss or obscure about the phenomenon in question?

What are the results of the immense study on the sex trade?

Each of the aforementioned groups sheds light on a segment of migrating for sex labor and privileges certain aspects of the phenomenon over others. The

considerable surveillance of and discourses around sex labor can be interpreted as exercises in making sex labor “legible.” These accounts produce and reproduce information about what sex trade *is*, constructing how people think about sex labor, increasing its legibility. In doing so, these representations establish a mainstream definition of the sex trade, which becomes accepted and therefore difficult to contest. In Foucauldian terms, this study of sex labor by numerous parties is a form of disciplinary power, exercised especially over the subjects under study: migrant sex workers and sex trafficking victims.

A close examination of Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1978) provides insights to better illustrate this point. In this work, Foucault explained how the immense documentation of “aberrant” or “non-natural” sexualities disciplined the sex of the bourgeois family. Drawing on historical records from nineteenth century France and England, Foucault traced the relationship between sex, power, and the economy. He noted, “[s]exuality was carefully confined; it moved into the home. The conjugal family took custody of it and absorbed it into the serious function of *reproduction*.... [in] the parents’ bedroom” (Foucault 1978:3, emphasis mine). Foucault showed that the sequestering of sex within the home as a strictly fertile and utilitarian act was popularly seen as part of the Victorian era’s sexual repression.

While supposedly part of the “repression hypothesis,” Foucault argued that all the taboos, rules of nonexistence, and silence applied to sexuality actually incited people to speak of sex incessantly, to obsess over it, and to police it, through confessions to priests, psychoanalysts, doctors, teachers, and/or judges. This extreme

focus on sex coincided with shared assumptions that took sex to be a murky, clandestine, and dangerous topic. “Sexual repression” discourses first regulated the bourgeoisie's sexuality, differentiating “natural” and “perverse” sex, and making people aware of the dangers of the latter. Foucault described how most knowledge was produced about those labeled the subjects of “abnormal” bourgeois sex: the hysterical woman, the onanistic children, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult. The delineation of these practices as “unnatural” reinforced procreative, heterosexual sex within marriage as “natural.” The rise in discourses of sexual repression corresponded with what Foucault referred to as biopower, or population management. At the dawn of the industrial revolution in Europe, when “productive” capitalist advances (or exploitations) were being made of human’s potential labor capacities, the opportunity of the strict biological reproductive capabilities of sex could not be squandered on bodies and pleasures. This opportunity had to be harnessed in a useful fashion: to biologically reproduce labor capacity in the form of children that would grow up to be future, productive laborers.

Thus brewed a *public* interest in what could be assumed a private matter – sex. It became taken-for-granted that a population’s fertility rate had be maintained for the nation to grow wealthy and powerful. As such, sex became an economic and political concern, not just a moral one. Sex had to be managed and policed for the good of the nation and the economy. However, Foucault cautioned against simplistic, functionalist arguments, which contend the control of sex is solely to reproduce the labor force. Foucault saw the deployment of sexuality not just as beneficent to capitalism on

strictly economic terms, but also as a way for the bourgeois ruling classes to ensure their continued political ascendancy, by maintaining healthy bodies, free from the dangers of unbridled sexuality, particularly deadly venereal diseases. As such, the deployment of sexuality “was a question of techniques for maximizing life. The primary concern was.... the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and the descent of the classes that ‘ruled’” (Foucault 1978:123), i.e., ensuring the bourgeoisie family’s power, via capable and vigorous bodies. Therefore, the bourgeoisie’s power came from their triplicate authority of political rule, economic control, and sexual dominance.

While the sexual repression discourse explained the creation of “natural” and “unnatural” sexualities, it left out the “other Victorians.” Quoting Steven Marcus, Foucault referenced the “other Victorians” – those in brothels and mental hospitals. Such spaces and the people within them – particularly prostitutes - were tolerant of illegitimate sexualities and had their own specific, contained locations to enclose their “unnatural sexual proclivities” (1978:4). Foucault explicated that what was made to appear as “unnatural sexual proclivity” was sex outside of marriage, because those forms of sex did not conform to the larger aims of bourgeois order – neither control over labor reproduction nor the maintenance of “healthy bodies.”

Thus, in tracing Foucault’s historical examination of the deployment of sexuality, I consider how the “other Victorians” – those who fell out of the intense disciplining of bourgeois sex – still had their own sex controlled. Sex becomes an indispensable site for exercising power and managing life because it represents an

intersection between disciplining the body and controlling the population (Foucault 1978:145-7). In outlining the vast amount of study applied to sex workers, a similar disciplining occurs. While sensationally posturing forced prostitution and sex trafficking as a dark secret of “modern” society,<sup>1</sup> experts and professional care workers alike powerfully produce ever more knowledge about the sex trade – endless statistics on prevalence, HIV/AIDS rates of female and male sex workers, incarceration rates of perpetrators, and numbers of victims rehabilitated and reintegrated.

The mechanisms of the modern state and science, which, in an earlier era helped circumscribe what constituted appropriate sexuality, for the good of bodies and the management of the population, including apparatuses of medicine, psychiatry, law, and the courts, still discipline sex workers’ lives today. Miriam Ticktin (2011) similarly argues that in regimes of care, as exemplified in France via anti-trafficking and humanitarian programs, “armed love” develops. This type of care, produced from extensive projects dedicated to victims of sex trafficking and illegal immigrants who are gravely ill, simultaneously increases surveillance on these non-citizen subjects, especially those working non-citizens who are neither sexually violated nor terminally sick, and who incidentally constitute the majority of immigrants in France. As such, armed love contributes to “anti-immigrant politics, [and] an increased regime of policing and security” (Ticktin 2011:181). Moreover, Ticktin argues that relying on

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<sup>1</sup> A 2010 University of California San Diego public lecture by the Department of Medicine's Division of Global Public Health was entitled: “Sex Trafficking: A dark and neglected corner of gender-based violence and HIV risk.”

humanitarian discourses of saving suffering bodies from morally sanctioned misfortunes is anti-political, because it attempts to present itself as a universal good.

Many technologies of surveillance and control exist for making the bodies of sex workers and victims of trafficking legible, such as recurring medical testing for sexually transmitted infections, police raids on brothels for sex workers without official migration papers, often believed to be trafficking victims, and confining sex workers to certain areas of cities, or tolerance zones, to practice their trade. The body and sex of the hysterical woman, in Foucault's terms, had to be medicalization for "the health of... [her] children, the solidity of the family institution, and the safeguarding of society" (1978:146-7). Similarly, the body and sex of the prostitute must be policed, for her sex falls outside of the realm of the "appropriate" biological reproductive labor of sex within marriage.

The effect of all this study on sex workers, I argue, is yet another way to police the sex of all women. The sex trade is set up as an immense, shadowy underground, and yet it is ever-present and so all women, everywhere, are at risk of being made its victim. In these fear-based discourses, the gravest of dangers and at most risk are the daughters of respectable (read: wealthy) families (Shah 2014). This runs counter to evidence that women from lower socioeconomic classes are more likely to sell sex than those from middle and upper classes, and that those who already sell sex are at most risk for sex trafficking (Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). Thus, every woman and girl is in peril of not only being a trafficking victim, but also simultaneously being labeled as a whore or prostitute, by her very association with the sex trade. These two

subjects of (innocent) trafficking victim and (guilty) sex worker simultaneously co-exist, while garnering abhorrence and pity for the former and condemnation and ridicule for the latter. Discourses of sex trafficking and sex work can instill fear in women, as a form of surveillance, and such fear causes women to self-discipline their actions, as well as the actions of other women. One simple form of this disciplining is evident in casual conversations overheard between women, adjudicating whether another, third woman, perhaps viewed from a distance, is dressed “slutty” or “like a whore”— these characteristics are marked by, among other things, her height of shoes, length of skirt, and neckline of shirt. Thus, this disciplinary gaze is not just exerted over sex workers, but over all women.

Much like representations of Others reflect a separate self that is never named (see Said 1978; Trouillot 1991; Coronil 1996), generating knowledge on and over a subject of “sex worker”/“trafficking victim” simultaneously creates a “non-sex worker” persona. This “non-sex worker” subject becomes reified as belonging to the “natural” realm without ever having to name it as such [a woman safely ensconced within and practicing heterosexual sex in marriage]. However, unlike the unnamed “Western” self exposed by Said, Trouillot, and Coronil, the nameless or natural entity in this sex worker/non-sex worker dyad, is still not of her own making, but represents another “other” to an explicitly *male* self. The “non-sex worker” subject is structured and policed at least as much as the sex worker, if not more so, because women constantly have to assert and prove their “respectability” – via how they speak, dress, with whom they associate, and where they work.

This rhetorical structuring divides women into two groups: the righteous and the dishonorable. An illustration of this division comes from Patty Kelly's ethnography, *Lydia's Open Door: Inside Mexico's Most Modern Brothel* (2008). When Kelly first arrived to study the *Zona Galatica* (Galactic Zone), a state-regulated brothel just outside Tuxtla, Chiapas, a secretary who worked there insisted Kelly buy a white lab coat to wear while in the *Zona Galatica*. The secretary told her it would help her *evitar manos* (to avoid hands). Kelly explicitly states the article of clothing separated her from other women (sex workers) in the brothel, and marked her status as a "decent" woman (who did not sell sex) within the brothel (Kelly 2008:xvi). Membership in these dualistic groups of "decent" women and women of "ill-repute" often depends on women's relations to men – whether women consent to sex with men within the heteronormative confines of marriage or garner a wage from such heterosexual relations. Thus, the sex worker subject represents a double othering: first, the othering of bad woman to good woman, and second, the more general "othering" of woman to man. By becoming an object of study, the sex worker reifies the unobjectified, unacknowledged realms of (relative) privilege and power – both of those who do not sell sex (good women) and those who have the power to study the bad women and police the good women (authoritative men and women of science or do-gooders of charity).

## Feminist representations of the transnational sex trade

Having reviewed how the study of the global sex trade itself divides women into differently morally valued groups, even as it disciplines all of them, I now consider, of the many groups studying the sex trade, how feminists' specific categorizations produce particular knowledges. I examine how their representations of the sex trade and the women within it invite and constrain certain possibilities for political mobilization. I do not judge which of these categorizations or approaches to the sex trade is "correct," as each perspective represents one aspect of a wider phenomenon, which encompasses numerous different forms. As such, evidence exists to support many viewpoints. Understanding the wider picture necessarily involves moving beyond black and white terminology, such as the "prostitution as sexual exploitation" and "sex work as labor" approaches. Following linguistic ideology, which explains how words powerfully comprise and reflect particular realities, language and terminology become indispensable in analyzing representations of sex labor. Further, when considering the role of ideology in language, one must not assume a certain ideology is naturally superior or "truer" or less "distorted" than any other (Woolard 1998).

To achieve their political goals, actors utilize differing terms for commercial sexual labor, with divergent connotations. If a group supports exchanging money for sex, understood as a form of labor, the term "sex work" is often used, but if groups oppose this notion, then "prostitution" may be used. Moreover, the various feminists involved in these discussions may similarly argue for gaining recognition of women's

rights, but from different viewpoints: the right to sell sex for money and the right to not have to sell sex for money. As such, the various feminist perspectives I present can be classified, roughly, according to their interpretation of what prostitution “is.” Generally, approaches toward sex labor fall on a continuum ranging from abolition on one end to prohibition, regulation, legalization, and decriminalization on the other. This spectrum intersects with other factors such political affiliations, immigration policies, and economic climates.

I examine three authors’ works, loosely representing decriminalization, abolitionist, and pragmatic viewpoints. Corresponding with the aforementioned viewpoints, I summarize the works and provide a critical commentary of each of the following: Jo Doezema’s *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* (2010); Janice Raymond’s *Not a Job, Not a Choice: Myths About Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade* (2013); and Laura María Agustín’s *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labor Markets and the Rescue Industry* (2007). Each discourse, as presented by these authors on the sex trade, represents a particular reality. By generating certain discursive forms, the authors I study illuminate certain aspects of the sex trade, which are useful for their political aims.

A significant struggle exists between these authors’ labels and the worlds they try to instantiate. As such, the representations within these discourses, like all representations, are partial. While debates over the sex trade are far from determined, the definitions and categories used on each side of the debate are durable. The scholars I review struggle to define the same group of people. I critically attend to how these

authors' discourses on sexuality entangle with dominant rights discourses, evaluating their intentions and unintended consequences. This entails tracing 1) struggles over what constitutes women's appropriate sexual comportment and employment, according to various moral and legal codes that act to police women and 2) how concepts of human rights and workers' rights are marshaled to accomplish particular political goals. For the first two authors these tenets are especially salient, less so for the third. I consider how these feminist scholars differentiate themselves from one another, constructing particular worldviews, and, despite appearances, I also analyze how they are more similar than different.

I argue all these authors' works can be seen as part of a larger effort to define the realm of "social reproductive labor." Social reproductive labor is identified as the work usually completed within the "private" or "domestic" sphere that is necessary to sustain laborers. This includes cleaning, cooking, caring, and all the acts that go into preparing one to go to "work." Social reproductive labor has been historically and contemporarily, highly feminized and devalued as non-productive labor in the informal sector, "outside" of formal capitalism. I argue sex labor can be considered a form of social reproductive labor, falling, under the rubric of care-provision. The accounts of the sex trade considered in this study do not explicitly evaluate sex labor as a ghettoized form women's social reproductive labor in capitalist systems. Considering sex work as a type of social reproductive labor enables us to see how women's labor is either continually ignored or denigrated in formal capitalist systems, yet remains indispensable to it.

### A word on migration and sex labor

Given that women who sell sex tend to do so in communities in which they were not born and do not have family members (see Kelly 2008, Agustín 2007), most sex workers could be seen as “migrants,” as a variant of degree, if not type. Even if a woman is not an immigrant to a certain country per se, she is still unlikely to be a local of the city or town in which she sells sex. As such, migrant involvement in sex labor is a common occurrence and I consider the sex industry itself as part of a globalized economy, with laborers from diverse national backgrounds. Nevertheless, the presence of immigrant women involved in sex labor may be represented as particularly problematic because of its supposed potential links to sex trafficking.

### Sex Work Decriminalization: Curbing violence and marginalization through human and workers’ rights for sex laborers

#### *Book Summary*

In *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: the Construction of Trafficking* (2010), Jo Doezema examines current societal alarm in Europe and the United States over sex trafficking of women and children. Doezema holds a PhD from the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex and she identifies as a sex worker rights activist, actively campaigning for decriminalization of sex work. Her scholarly research combines close analysis of historical documents with contemporary ethnographic investigation at international anti-trafficking conferences. Doezema analyzes the discourses employed historically and contemporarily in discussions about white slavery and trafficking in women, considering how and where certain discourses

are employed and reproduced, and their effects. She traces the myth of the “white slave” in historical documents from Great Britain and the United States during the late 1800s and early 1900s to present-day sex trafficking stories, which abound in print and visual media.

Doezema contends that the current concern over trafficking in women is actually the modern descendent of the panic over “white slavery,” a form of the white slave myth reborn. Throughout both concepts of the white slave and the trafficking victim (which could be seen as two sides of the same coin), Doezema argues the antiquated discourse of the virgin/whore dichotomy plays out in the “consent” or lack thereof of women who sell sex under various exploitative working conditions. She notes that women who choose to sell sex supposedly “freely” are villainized, while women who are forced to sell sex are victimized. Doezema critiques this discourse, which she sees as the hegemonic trafficking narrative framework. She finds the immigration institutions that accompany trafficking discourses, such as detention centers, anti-crime units, and deportations, limit the mobility of women to migrate for the purposes of selling sex, and such restrictive policies threaten the rights and wellbeing of sex workers the world over. Doezema’s own political project becomes apparent in her book and is based on her scholarly work. She appeals to rights discourses to avoid victimization rhetoric and to more effectively gain respect for sex workers, as a “politics of *liberation*” (Doezema 2010:176, emphasis mine). I analyze the discourses Doezema employs, including both those of human rights and workers’ rights, and I argue that her use of human rights discourses, in particular, can limit political

mobilization, as it also may generate a victim-subjecthood and may entail recourse to government or state powers for remedying wrongs. In the next sections, I show in detail how Doezema develops her critiques, while I also examine her argument and the limits of her own discourses.

### *Doezema's Arguments*

#### Trafficking in Women as The New White Slavery

To support her main contention that knowledge about “trafficking in women” is constructed through a reiteration of discourses on the “white slave traffic,” Doezema reviews anti-prostitution abolition campaigns of the late 1800s and early 1900s, including those of Josephine Butler and William Stead. She notes these campaigns, similar to current concerns about “trafficking in women” rely on the virgin-whore dichotomy, which can be read as a discourse. The subject generated by this discourse is the white slave historically and the sex trafficking victim contemporarily. Both of these subjects must be perfectly innocent in order to receive (state or non-governmental) protection and rehabilitation. This contrasts with those labeled “willing prostitutes,” who must be kept in line, as their apparent sexuality destabilizes existing sexual mores, mainly ascendant male desire. As such, many early abolitionists, and some today, see the prostitute as bringing physical disease and social death. She must be policed, both physically and metaphorically, so she does not spread disease or corrupt the morals of the young (Doezema 2010:58, 127).

An example of this policing of sex workers comes from Doezema's own ethnography. Recounting her experiences at the 2000 Vienna negotiations for the

United Nations (UN) Trafficking Protocol, Doezema explains that her status as a known, self-identified former “sex worker” created increased surveillance on the clothing she wore to the negotiation meetings. At the Trafficking Protocol negotiations, sex worker activists worked with the Human Rights Caucus,<sup>2</sup> a liberal feminist lobby group. However, Doezema explains that tensions emerged between these two factions, as the Human Rights Caucus (HRC) did not want to be identified with sex worker rights activism. These tensions manifested on a personal and symbolic level for Doezema, as some members of the HRC were concerned about the way she dressed for the Protocol negotiations. Doezema recounts:

One of the senior HRC members was worried that it [how Doezema dressed] was ‘too sexy’, and she suggested changes of outfit a number of times. It wasn’t said, but I experienced her fear as meaning that I looked too much like a prostitute. While I agree that lobbying in fishnets and mini-skirt would not have been a good idea, my sober grey trousers and long-sleeved top seem to me to be entirely appropriate lobbying garb.... Nonetheless, I felt a real pressure to change my appearance.... It seemed to me that the pressure on me was an instance of the stigma of sex work reaching into our own lobby group (Doezema 2010:153).

Doezema’s status even as a *former* woman of “ill-repute” threw her choice of dress under increased scrutiny by other women at the negotiations. Despite Doezema not actively working in the sex trade, she was still treated as though tainted by her past involvement in it. While she does not cite him, I see Goffman’s concept of stigma operating in Doezema’s experience. Doezema, as someone who is physically marked (by her appearance) of a past “dark stain,” must continually negotiate how others’ see and interpret her and how she looks, due to her association with an occupation outside

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<sup>2</sup> This lobby group is examined below in the section, “Human Rights Discourses.”

of what has been defined as “normal” (Goffman 1963). Doezema notes that when publically campaigning for sex workers rights, sex worker activists often use the accouterments of their trade (fishnet stockings, high heels, feather boas, bustiers, corsets, riding crops in the United States<sup>3</sup>) to attract attention to their demands, actively asserting the stigmatized symbols of their trade. While Doezema herself acknowledges that in the formal negotiation chambers of the United Nations, such trappings would have been out of place, even her modest dress was nevertheless viewed suspiciously given her so-called “status” – or lack thereof – as a former sex worker. This is because other women in the lobbying group feared association with such a stigmatized group as sex workers, and believed it was necessary to monitor Doezema’s choice of clothing, to ensure a “professional” appearance for their lobby group; professional here meaning garb one would wear in an occupation within the formal economy.

#### Consent and the Forced-Voluntary Dichotomy as the Virgin-Whore Discourse

The virgin-whore discourse is also present in contemporary discourses of “forced or voluntary” sex work. Doezema explains the difference between voluntary and forced prostitution (or trafficking) hinges on consent, much as the virgin/whore discourse does: “The notion of consent runs through these conceptions of the victim/whore, marking the dividing line between those deserving of rescue and those deserving condemnation” (2010:13). The two mythological characters [virgin/victim and whore] represented by this dichotomous discourse are ideal types, shaping reality.

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<sup>3</sup> What is considered “accouterments” of the sex trade varies by time, region, and culture.

In this dyad, Doezema explains virgins are presented as upstanding and morally conscientious, refraining from sex until after they are married and whores are variously defined as women who show desire, engage in pre-marital sex, and/or exchange sex for money. Doezema argues that this discourse underpins sexual double standards between genders, effectively punishing women who engage in behaviors similar to stereotypical male standards regarding sex.

Regarding the forced/voluntary discourse of sex labor, Doezema contends that the experiences of those who sell sex cannot be so neatly delineated into two categories, as the lines between when women choose or are compelled to sell sex vary on specific contexts, including time and place. While acknowledging that not all sex labor is violence against women, Doezema maintains the forced/voluntary dichotomy still recapitulates outmoded moralist ideals, as this viewpoint necessarily puts the rescuing and protecting of trafficking victims above assuring the violated rights of voluntary sex workers. Moreover, the forced/voluntary discourse assumes we can ever make truly “free” choices, when most everyone's options are limited in practice (Doezema 2010:23). This viewpoint also risks valorizing the choices of , “Western” women over women from the global south who are besieged with labels such as developing, poverty-stricken, and lacking in industrialization, which throws their decisions to sell sex into question.

#### *Analysis of Doezema*

While Doezema critiques discursive formations, such as the virgin/whore and forced/voluntary dichotomies, which police women’s sexuality and appropriate roles,

she nevertheless also posits boundaries for women. Clear in her self-identifying as a sex worker rights activist, Doezema is highly invested in “sex workers’ rights” and is familiar with sex worker activists’ efforts to have their human rights respected (Doezema 2010:173, 175). She argues the sex worker rights movement requires “a politics of *liberation* that moves beyond victimization” (2010:176, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, the very concept of “sex workers’ rights” necessarily dictates that women accept or identify as being a sex worker – an identity many migrants who sell sex may be reluctant to take on for the sake of maintaining anonymity. Thus, explicitly campaigning for sex worker rights may exclude those who would rather not publically assume a “sex worker” persona, given its historical and contemporary stigmatization. Not all who sell sex envision themselves as long-term sex workers; rather the job may be merely that – a temporary employment option for fast cash. Thus, Doezema’s rendering may exclude or overlook those who do not fit into her subject identity class of “sex worker.” Despite Doezema’s calls for a politics of liberation, predicating the gaining of workers’ rights on the public presentation of a sex worker identity may nevertheless be constraining and coercive to some who sell sex.

#### Human rights discourses

In her campaign for sex workers’ rights, Doezema employs human rights discourses. Doezema traces the “white slave” narrative to present-day articulated concerns about sex trafficking at the Vienna negotiations for the 2000 United Nations (UN) Protocol To Prevent, Suppress And Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially

Women And Children.<sup>4</sup> She looks at how two lobby groups each treat the concept of consent, and as an extension, how they rhetorically treat sex workers. The two lobby groups she studied both referred to themselves using the language of human rights, and thus, each of their names contained the words “human rights,” creating confusion, as the two groups lobbied for opposite goals.

The first lobby group in the Trafficking Protocol negotiations called itself the International Human Rights Network (IHRN), and was headed by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women. This group treated trafficking in women specifically, and all commercial sex generally, as violence against women and sexual exploitation. To them, sex labor is something to which no one can ever consent. In this subject rendering, those who are taken advantage of in commercial sex are always women. The second lobby group called itself the Human Rights Caucus (HRC) and was headed by the International Human Rights Law Group and the International Human Rights Network. This group accepted mainstream trafficking rhetoric, but also worked with sex worker activist projects and accepted that not all sex work is coerced. While both groups had the term “human rights” in their titles, Doezema reserved the “human rights” label for the Human Rights Caucus (HRC) only, and referred to the International Human Rights Network (IHRN) as the “CATW lobby,” not acknowledging the group’s own preferred name of the International *Human Rights* Network (emphasis mine). While she may make this linguistic change to keep the two groups straight in the reader’s mind, she nevertheless makes a strategic decision to

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<sup>4</sup> Hereafter referred to as the Trafficking Protocol negotiations.

reserve the human rights label for the group she sympathizes with more, rather than for the abolitionist group. Moreover, Doezema was frustrated with the Trafficking Protocol Negotiations, despite the names of the lobby groups, for not taking a more explicit human rights approach. Because the Trafficking Protocol fell under the wider United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime, it focused on implementation of anti-trafficking laws and punishment for orchestrators of human trafficking. Doezema saw the Protocol as focused on heavy-handed enforcement approaches intended to discourage perpetrators from offending, as opposed to ensuring the human rights of sex laborers.

Doezema identifies that “in the international policy arena, human rights remains the most prevalent discourse for articulating struggles around oppression and freedom,” (Doezema 2010:20), and despite her criticisms of the sometimes “Western,” liberal imposition that accompanies human rights, she still utilizes human rights language to express her social justice concerns regarding sex workers’ rights. She does this despite the fact that those who hold positions contrary to her rely on the exact same notion of violated human rights to support their own political aims.

Moreover, human rights discourses channel their own world-views and particular subjects. The present human rights regime was created via processes, which unfolded over time and involved many tensions. Among these tensions is that between collective and individual rights, with the former being associated with membership in a group – such as citizenship in a nation-state and the latter being associated with human rights (Moyn 2010). Human rights are not due based on membership in a

political entity, but are due rather on someone simply being part of the human race. While this may seem like an all-encompassing discourse, it inadvertently results in individualistic focus on the violated rights of a singular person. In the cosmopolitan human rights discourses of the present day, the individual is seen as sovereign.<sup>5</sup> The current human rights regime holds a kind of religious sentiment, whereby the individual is imbued with sanctity. This represents an overlap of human rights discourses with humanitarian ideals (which focus on alleviating the pain of suffering human bodies), which appeal to morality, rather than politics for their authority.

Thus, those who employ human rights discourses today risk characterizing their paradigms as unspoiled by politics, only focused on attaining retribution for rights that have been violated, as a way to reassert human dignity for all. Doezema, like many other activists of the time, relies on human rights discourses as the presently-popular way of agitating for acknowledgement of her political cause; nevertheless, the opportunities for joint political action remain moot when the main tenet of their movement individualizes life experiences.

More than representing an individualistic approach to politics, some have argued human rights discourses are actually apolitical. Because of their focus on reinstating the rights of violated victims, especially those with physically wounded bodies, via punishing the responsible perpetrators, as opposed to systemic concern on unequal economic and power relations, these discourses are more moral than political (Meister 2011). Relying on moralistic notions of rights and wrongs, human rights advocates do

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<sup>5</sup> This notion can be traced back to Émile Durkheim's meditation on the Dreyfus Affair (Durkheim 1969).

not have to engage with “the contestable, culturally relative notions of good on which politics might otherwise rest” (Meister 2011:5). Therefore, when sex workers advocates demand human rights, they may risk taking their demands to a less political arena.

Special considerations are necessary, however, when it comes to migrants’ access to human rights, as their ability to lay claim to rights remains weak, if not nonexistent. This inability relates to both their uncertain legal status as non-citizens, as well as class and racial discrimination. Dembour and Kelly argue human rights, in particular, may be “so intrinsically individualistic and capitalist in their logic that they fail to account for the structural political and economic process[es] that make migrants vulnerable” (Dembour and Kelly 2011:11). As such, anyone, not just irregular migrants in the informal sector, may find accessing justice via human rights unfruitful. Thus, concepts of workers’ right may be more apt; nevertheless, widening the concept of workers’ rights for migrants in the commercial sex industry necessarily involves resolving, or at least compromising on, complicated issues of immigration policy regarding labor circulation and legal status.

Makau Mutua (2001) provides a last warning as to why sex worker activists might be cautious of over-reliance on human rights. Mutua argues human rights discourses, as primarily inspired by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, are actually a metaphor of Euro-US American imperialism. This discourse produces three subject-characters: savages as human rights violators; victims as those whose human rights have been violated; and saviors as those who rescue victims and punish savages.

Mutua argues such human rights discourses are entrenched in fundamentally “Western” concepts, predicated on colonial notions of superiority and inferiority and perpetuate the notion that more developed states must rescue “others” victimized by “backwards” cultures and autocratic states. In place of the classic anthropological terms of savage or native, in the sex trade analogy, we see men (savages) preying on abused prostitutes (victims), who need rescuing by either charitable organizations or the state (saviors). This generates associations of desecrated bodies, evil violators, and all-powerful saviors, propelling black and white renderings of morality.

The appeal to a “higher power” – usually a liberal, democratic government – to receive or reinstate rights that have been violated may be a cause for pause for some activists. Doezema, critical of feminists’ political projects that suggest women should turn to the state for protection from violence (2010:133), herself relies upon human rights discourses that often compel the user to appeal to the state for recourse. By placing emphasis on states providing reparations for violations or damages done to victims, human rights discourses do not encourage an independent community-based organizing, but require activist groups call upon state actors to “save the day,” or to “make things right.” As such, they do not engage with systemic economic and political inequality. States may have (in)vested interests in maintaining the status quo, so finding recourse in the state may necessarily lead to limited societal reorganization, particularly for sex worker advocacy projects, as they represent a stigmatized (and in some cases, criminalized) group demanding attention, respect, and resources from formal state institutions. Despite their preponderance in the campaigning of sex

worker advocates and prostitution abolitionists (explored in the next section) alike, the individualizing, moralistic, apolitical, and victimizing associations that accompany human rights discourses result in decreased utility for wider and more radical political struggles.

### Workers' Rights Frameworks

As sex workers and their advocates resist being categorized as “victims,” human rights discourses may be inappropriate for their political goals, as they tend to produce victimizing narratives. How might focusing exclusively on workers’ rights help or hinder the political project of increasing respect and safety for sex laborers? Workers’ rights movements have a long history globally (Foner 1988, Heron 2012, Rhys et al. 2002). Doezema sees sex work as “a profession, and that women and men who chose prostitution should be recognized as workers and given labour rights” (Doezema 2010:113). A pivotal part in her struggle for sex workers’ rights includes campaigning for the decriminalization of sex labor. Doezema contends, “all sex-work-specific offences should be removed from criminal law, and no new ones created. Instead... existing laws covering sexual violence and workers’ rights should be applied to sex work” (2010:148). Here, Doezema attempts to “get inside” the workers’ rights framework, and have sex work, as opposed to being categorized as that which is outside the realm of normal occupational employment, mainstreamed alongside other professions.

Using language of workers’ rights focuses on the sex industry as deserving of fair wages, safe, just, and favourable working conditions, unemployment protection in the

case of disability and old age, and the ability to form trade unions, much like any other job. Yet, other intimate, informal employment labor exists, such as caring and cleaning, and those who perform such labor also have difficulties in attaining such workers' rights, given they are part of social reproductive labor. I argue that campaigning as a larger group of women, organized around recognizing social reproductive labor, would create a wider and stronger movement for women's rights. Nevertheless, such cross-fertilizations of mobilization depend on those in categories marked as "appropriate women's work" (i.e., tending homes, and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly) associating with those who have been labeled "deviant" (i.e., those tending to sexual desires). Moreover, by calling to action all who sell sex to fight for sex workers' rights, Doezema may inadvertently exclude migrant women who have no desire to claim a sex worker subject-persona or to publically campaign for sex worker rights, much as they may greatly benefit from such rights.

Prostitution Abolition: Ending female sexual victimization and violence by opposing demand for sex labor

*Book Summary*

Janice Raymond's 2013 book, *Not a Choice, Not a Job: Exposing the Myths about Prostitution and the Global Sex Trade* is the object of my next analysis. Her book represents an abolitionists' perspective regarding transnational sex labor. Like Doezema, Raymond is also an activist, not for sex worker rights, but rather for the complete cessation of prostitution globally. She opposes both decriminalization and legalization of sex labor. From 1994-2007, Raymond served as the co-director of the

non-governmental organization, Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). As part of her work for CATW, Raymond has stated, “[o]pposing sex trafficking, the system of prostitution and the sex industry doesn’t make you a conservative, a moralist, or an apologist for some political party or group. It helps make you a feminist and a human rights advocate” (Raymond 2005). Raymond couches her political grievances against sex labor in terms of feminism and human rights, marrying the concepts in such a way as to make those who support sex labor anti-feminist violators of human rights.

While not an ethnography, Raymond draws her analyses of prostitution from her own experiences as an activist working with survivors of sex work, and she primarily relies on testimonial and interview information. Additionally, Raymond’s analysis of prostitution relies heavily on comparisons, comparing sex labor to fattening foods, assault rifles, war, and cigarettes, among other things (Raymond 2013:loc 1042, 705). Through such comparisons, Raymond suggests a structural affinity between prostitution and the undesirable things they are compared to. Most of these comparisons are mentioned in passing and not substantiated in longer claims, so are somewhat incomplete. One comparison Raymond develops in closer detail, analyzed below, is that of sex labor to black slavery, primarily in the US.

### *Raymond’s arguments*

#### Prostitution as Male Violence Against Women

Much as the title of her book suggests, Raymond’s main argument is that prostitution is “*Not a Choice, Not a Job.*” Rather, prostitution is always violence

against women and damaging to women, irrespective of their choice to sell sex. Her book reviews and debunks “common arguments that promote prostitution and sex trafficking and the mythmakers who invent them” (2013:loc 125). She states her book is overt “feminist abolitionism,” putting women’s liberation and freedom foremost (2013:loc 568). Given the “forced/voluntary” dichotomy, with which Doezema also struggles, Raymond argues consent can be rendered pointless amid “poverty, predatory recruiters, deception, and [the] gross exploitation<sup>6</sup> [that] mark[s] their alleged choices” (2013:loc 91).

As part of her work as an abolitionist, Raymond supports the Nordic model of sex labor legislation, in particular the Swedish law criminalizing the purchase of sex, because “the Swedish law clearly articulates that prostitution is men’s violence against women[.]... a human rights violation, and a crime” (2013:loc 2064; 2050). The Nordic model goes hand-in-hand with human rights language, seeped in notions of prostitution victimizing and violating women. For Raymond, prostitution is *inherently* exploitative, and represents the “final stronghold of sexualized male dominance” (2013:loc 183). As such, to Raymond, gender inequality trumps class inequality. Raymond’s argument of prostitution as violence against *women* is a structural one, whereby man (the perpetrator) takes advantage of woman (the victim). While this structure incidentally meshes with Matua’s metaphor of human rights, it does not consider men who sell sex and women who buy it. Rather, Raymond reiterates,

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<sup>6</sup> Raymond uses the term “exploitation” not to refer to the exploitation Marx saw as inherent in all wage labor, but as a specific form of gendered exploitation. Others refer to this type of exploitation as sexual domination.

“prostitution is not a human right but a violation of women’s human rights” (2013:loc 198). Thus, she holds the debate in distinct, contrasting terms.

#### Abolitionism in sexual and racial slavery

The comparison Raymond develops in relatively more detail is that between prostitution and racialized slavery, particularly that in the United States. Raymond, as an anti-trafficking advocate, explicitly refers to herself as an abolitionist, as she fights for the complete end of prostitution globally. Considering prostitution sexual slavery, Raymond explains that sexual slavery is “not always the slavery of those in physical chains who have been brutally forced into prostitution but a more complex form of slavery in which women are subjected to prostitution through deception, fraud, abuse of their vulnerabilities, or abuse of power” (2013:loc 434). She believes that “like race slavery, sexual slavery is socially and politically constructed ‘out of men’s dominance and women’s subordination’” (2013:loc 518). Her abolitionist discourse focuses on women’s structurally weaker positions in society vis-à-vis men, concerning both economic and physical power.

A similar debate between abolitionism and regulationism raged over race slavery, as it does with sex labor, Raymond argues: “[r]ather than abolish the system of slavery, regulation advocates proposed controlling slavery as a state-sanctioned ‘economic sector’” (2013:loc 440). She compares this to a 1998 International Labour Organization (ILO) report which called for economic regulation of the sex industry (2013:loc 440). Further, Raymond suggests that calling “trafficked women” “sex

workers” is akin to “pro-slavery strategists in the West Indies who wrote, ‘Instead of SLAVES, let the Negroes be called ASSISTANT PLANTERS’” (2013:loc 508; emphasis in original). Thus, Raymond sees the linguistic change in the discourses of sex worker activists as only cosmetic. However, because such categorizations are so important, she vehemently challenges this language, presenting her own discourses as true. Not differentiating between the various types and circumstances of sex labor, Raymond interprets them all as slavery. Both race and sex slavery relate to labor given to others, under varying degrees of coercion, and as women who sell sex receive compensation (sometimes in the form of food or money) for their services, some slaves in the United States also received compensation (sometimes in the form of food or money) for their labor.

#### *Analysis of Raymond*

##### Abolitionism in sexual and racial slavery

While Raymond believes both race and sexual slavery are predicated on male dominance and female subordination, she does not substantiate how race slavery was also predicated on gender inequality, as black women and men alike were held in slavery during the antebellum era in the US. As mentioned, in this debate, definitions are paramount, because labels, as part of reality, also have the power to shape reality. Rather than considering the role of intersectionality, Raymond exclusively focuses on gender discrimination and women’s marginal position in society. In doing so, she conflates patriarchal gender relations with racism and economic discrimination, instead of investigating the complex ways race, gender, class, and other factors

interact with one another. Her argument is not focused on capitalist exploitation per se, but rather on male control of the capitalist system. Thus, Raymond's concern is not on economic inequality, but on gender inequality. Raymond's employment of the discourse of "prostitution as slavery" precludes the possibility of women who consent to and choose to sell sex. As such, she fights for the abolition of something others fight for the right to do.

Scholars writing on slavery and emancipation in the Americas, such as Rebecca Scott (2005) and Thomas Holt (1992) have noted that just as much as, if not more so than, self-proclaimed abolitionists, the enslaved themselves were the ones that acted to end black race slavery, by publically exercising their political voices and will. Thus, if Raymond's comparison between racial and sexual slavery were to be continued, women who sell sex themselves would be the ones to end prostitution, not necessarily self-proclaimed abolitionists. As examined via Doezema's work, self-identified sex workers, and those who consider their labor "work," endeavor to gain workers' rights, as opposed to ending the industry altogether.

Addressing how language crucially shapes the debate over prostitution, Raymond rejects terms such as "sex work" and "sex workers," which "mask what is essentially a grim, sordid, and dangerous industry, obfuscating the pimps, the prostitution users, and other perpetrators" (Raymond 2013:loc 615). She does not use these terms because they normalize prostitution as work. Frequently referring to "sex worker advocates" as "pro-prostitution"<sup>7</sup> and "sex work apologists," Raymond uses

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<sup>7</sup> This is reminiscent of the labeling of pro's and anti's in abortion rights debates.

quotation marks around “sex work” and “sex workers,” to linguistically separate herself from the terms, as well as to cast doubt on the reliability of the terms. Acknowledging that sex worker advocates define prostitution as “work” and as a “right,” Raymond attempts to create different knowledges and representations of the world. She labels prostitution as sexual exploitation, prostitution users as abusers, and brothels as spaces where women are controlled and “kept in check” (2013:loc 645). She constantly counters words used by sex worker advocates (e.g., labor, clients, business transaction) as categorizations are fundamental to controlling knowledge. All parties involved in the spectrum of approaches to prostitution recognize discourses powerfully create worlds; thus they struggle over how to define prostitution and the women involved in it. Raymond’s specific linguistic choices, down to the use of the passive versus active voice, are vital in her discourse, which defines the women, and especially female migrants, who sell sex. Because she interprets sex work as inherently harmful to women, Raymond refers to women as being “trafficked” (2013:loc 70, 228, 1892) and “prostituted” (Raymond 2013:loc 74, 97, 206), employing the passive voice. Framing her statements thus, women are objects, acted upon, “prostituted.” They are not represented as actively being sex laborers. This language, following a discourse of male sexual domination, makes women into docile bodies, upon which others act, but which do not independently act of their own accord.

Sex work = sex slavery

Unlike Doezema who struggles with the “forced/voluntary” dichotomy, Raymond entirely does away with the issue of consent by arguing all commercial sex

labor is slavery. Raymond develops the argument that prostitution can never be a choice, as even women who originally consented to prostitution “cannot be said to remain there by choice when the sex industry and its legions of pimps, brothel owners, and buyers hold women in a vise of control, violence, debt bondage, and drug-induced endurance” (2013:loc 1049). Relying on dramatic rhetoric, Raymond ignores the voices of sex workers who themselves say they have chosen to sell sex – whether temporarily and sporadically or otherwise. Rather, Raymond states, most women “comply” with prostitution because of limited options (2013:loc 1064). Categorizing women’s experiences of selling sex under three narratives (“Violence,” “Good Guy,” and “Denial and Recognition,” [2013:loc 1522-1625]), Raymond describes mostly negative experiences of sex labor, retelling degrading and dehumanizing stories (2013:loc 1560).

Any positive comment women made about selling sex Raymond justifies as irrelevant because women who sell sex are dependent on men for money, food, and security (2013:loc 1605). Thus, material dependency and poverty make the words of women who sell sex unreliable: “women in prostitution develop protective mechanisms, sometimes built on denial, that allow them to separate themselves from the humiliation, violence, and degradation experienced. It is not until most women leave prostitution that they admit the damage that has been done to them” (2013:loc 1626). Raymond’s discourse does not account for sex worker subjects, so she must explain them away. In her discourse of sex labor as violence against women, Raymond expounds that any woman who states she chooses (let alone enjoys) selling sex, is

employing a coping technique of denial to face her sordid reality. Thus, Raymond renders the words women speak about their own lives and experiences invalid because they have not yet realized their own oppression. Not accepting what women who sell sex say about their own lives reinforces the notion they are “damaged” and their words and own comprehensions of reality cannot be trusted.

Regarding the involvement of women from developing countries in migrating for sex work, Raymond states, “sex workers claim that foreign women who end up in local prostitution industries have ‘migrated for sex work,’ as if poor women, most from financially ravaged countries, paid their own way and obtained their travel documents for the trip” (2013:loc 878). Thus, Raymond questions not only the desire of women from the Global South to migrate, but their ability to do so at all. Similarly, she takes the appearance of women from countries other than the Netherlands working in the sex industry in Amsterdam as evidence that “trafficking appears to be rampant” (2013:loc 2601). With this statement, Raymond subtly suggests that women from developed nations, such as the Netherlands are not as likely to be victims of sexual slavery, but women from “other countries” are. Much as Raymond attempts to focus on the voices of sex industry survivors, her discourse of violence and sexual domination inherent in prostitution generates a victim-subject. Doubting the desires and abilities of poor women from the Global South to work in the international sex trade covertly assumes they are less able to make decisions than women from developed nations, which could be seen as a rendition of the “white man’s burden,” as Raymond views some women as more capable of making life choices than others.

In her discourse of male violence against women, only violence, abuse, and degradation exist. While all of these undoubtedly may occur in the lives of women who sell sex, by exclusively focusing on those experiences, Raymond's singular rendering of sex labor makes impossible positive experiences with selling sex, or otherwise rationalizes them away. Accounts such as those provided by Delacoste and Alexander (1998) and Jeffrey and MacDonald (2006) present the risks, abuse, and violence that may come with selling sex, as well as the affection, enjoyment, and pleasure. Such stories provide a more robust interpretation of the experiences of those who sell sex.

Regarding Raymond's discourse construction, she differentiates between "sex workers" and "survivors," separating those women who advocate for the sex industry and "those who struggle against it" (2013:loc 652). Raymond argues survivors "understand prostitution as violence against women and oppose the commodification of women inherent in the sex industry" (2013:loc 650). While Raymond uses the term "commodification" in the quotation above, her emphasis remains on *women's* commodification by men, as opposed to commodification per se. Raymond's analysis of sex worker advocates presumes sex worker advocates promote the sex industry. Yet, this contrasts with Doezema claims that sex workers want to gain rights, respect, and increased work safety, and decrease the stigmatization accompanying sex labor when it is seen as distinct from other kinds of work.

### Subject construction

Emphasizing survivors' voices, to prevent their exploitation from becoming normalized as mere labor exploitation, Raymond thereby keeps sex labor unique from other kinds of labor that may also be exploitative (2013:loc 427). As a result, she creates and polices strict boundaries between women who sell sex – those who see it as violence, “survivors,” and those who see it as a job, “sex workers.” In her rendering, no space exists for a middle ground. She also declares the voices of survivors as “the authoritative voices of women in prostitution” (2013:loc 4255). In this discourse the subject of “sex worker” is not denigrated, it is made impossible. As the experiences of women who sell sex are diverse, no one voice should be claimed as the voice of all. However, Raymond does exactly that by stating the voices of survivors are “authoritative” over those of women who do not identify as victims of sex labor. In so doing, she encircles only a subset of a wider group of women with which she is willing to collaborate in her struggle for female emancipation. Given this closing in on who is seen as an “appropriate” collaborator, Raymond reduces her own ability for greater political action and collective claims making.

The supposed strict boundary between survivors and sex workers is likely more blurry than Raymond presents it, as women may variously define their experiences at different times and places as both “work” and unfair or manipulative. Raymond's discourses regarding this group create and sustain supposed differences between a similar group of people – women who sell or have sold sex. This disciplinary separation polices women into two categories: brave survivors who resist

male sexual domination and deviants who have sold out to the patriarchy. Further, Raymond does not clarify whether women who currently sell sex, but see it as violence against women, can also be “survivors,” or if this label is only reserved for those who have left the industry.

Raymond’s divide between sex workers and survivors is similar to the divide between trafficking victims and migrant sex workers; however, Raymond chooses the term survivor to avoid victimization rhetoric. Though, Raymond still challenges those who suggest not all women in prostitution are victims, stating sex worker advocates are “victim deniers [who] locate agency not in women’s resistance but in their conformity to the sex industry” (2013:loc 1340). She points to the increased likelihood of women who sell sex on the street to being killed compared to other women as evidence of their victim-status (2013:loc 1308). Focusing on the mistreatment, violence, and suffering sex laborers experience, Raymond denies sex work can be empowering, because she sees the sex industry as inherently commodifying and sexually objectifying women (2013:loc 1325). Thus, her concern with women’s victimization is two-fold, resulting from both their economic inequality – as commodities, as well as their sexual inequality – as dehumanized objects.

Nevertheless, Raymond attempts to counter accusations of her promotion of victimizing rhetoric by stating, “the point is not to deny a prostituted woman’s agency but to locate agency in the right places—in surviving and opposing a dehumanizing sex industry” (2013:loc 1331). Regardless, not only does her linguistic structure, using the term “prostituted woman,” remove agency, her focus on dehumanization works to

create a suffering female body that is exploited through sexual commerce. Because Raymond presents her case in rigid either/or, true/false statements, she reduces complex relations to a simple dichotomy, of which multiple signs and forms exist to represent such relations. Her structural rendering of all sex labor as exploitative violence against women buttresses the notion women who sell sex are victims.

#### Authority of knowledge

Raymond asserts the data she uses is derived from her experiences as an abolitionist and maintains that researchers who obtain access to women through agencies that provide services to “prostituted and trafficked women conduct the most reliable evidence-based studies” (loc 97). She explains when such agencies first contact women who sell sex, the women “will deny the exploitation and violence that has happened to them” (2013:loc 101) and will relate quite different stories after trust has been established over time. More time with participants undoubtedly helps to establish increased trust; this premise is similar to the one on which anthropologists operate. Nevertheless, Raymond does not take seriously the claims of the women themselves. If receiving benefits and services from anti-trafficking organizations is predicated on speaking the language abolitionists use, perhaps, after months of working with such organizations, women who sell sex have come to use the expected language to gain potential benefits of cooperating with organizational requirements – legal papers for migrants, money, security. This is not a judgment on sex workers who take advantage of opportunities to advance themselves, but rather is another possible answer to Raymond’s assertion of why women “change their stories” over time. I

wish to highlight, as other scholars have shown, that such caring non-governmental organizations have their own political agendas and are also constrained by institutional requirements (Ticktin 2011, Krause 2014), and thus, may not believe or listen to the women who do not conform to their pre-conceived rhetoric. This is a subtle way abolitionists police women's conduct, by compelling women who sell sex to accept their discourses of prostitution as sexual exploitation and violence against women. Any women who deny this, abolitionists conclude, must be deluded, misguided, or severely damaged. Categorizing women thus, questions the ability of women who sell sex to make their own choices and undermines their personal autonomy by discounting the reasons they provide for making their labor decisions.

#### Human rights discourses and the Trafficking Protocol negotiations

Raymond affirms the human right of every woman "to be free from sexual exploitation and not to be sold as a sexual commodity or service" (2013:loc 579). As Raymond locates "male demand, male violence against women, and lack of economic opportunity for women" as responsible for prostitution (2013:loc 586), human rights discourses provide a seamless avenue for her to put forth her concerns about women's victimized status. While economic factors are noted in her analysis, Raymond zeroes in on male control prostitution systems and the sexualization of women in prostitution.

The Trafficking Protocol negotiations, as for Doezema, also represented a key opportunity in defining terms for Raymond. Although for Raymond this was an occasion to advance her feminist struggle for the abolition of sex slavery. Focusing on the specific wording of the Protocol, Raymond notes whether women were called

“victims of trafficking” or “trafficked persons,” represented two fundamental different perspectives of how women who are forced to sell sex may be conceptualized, reflecting her structural view of the world. Raymond argues the more “neutral term” of trafficked persons removed the exploitation in trafficking (2013:loc 938). Rather, she believed a “human rights definition of trafficking should focus on exploitation, which is the core of the crime” (2013:loc 1089). Thus, including the word “victim” (of trafficking or prostitution) was key to her feminist project.

Raymond argues that an approach to sex labor that interprets trafficking as occurring “with or without the consent of the victim” is one “grounded in a human rights approach to trafficking” (2013:loc 1094). However, in deeming women’s consent negligible, a women’s illegal entry into a country becomes predicated on another person orchestrating their international movement, a point Doezema also makes (Doezema 2010:126). Women are made incapable of choosing to illegally migrate and are presented as victims who’s human rights have been violated and who need saving. As explored above, reliance on human rights discourses may inadvertently generate a victim-subject. Applying Mutua’s concept of the human rights metaphor of savages-victims-saviors, the violators of women in Raymond’s structuralist argument almost necessarily become men who buy and sell the bodies of women. This is a colliding of narratives that constrain and police women’s ability to elect to migrate illegally for work of their own choosing with human rights discourses about the seemingly inherent “victim” status of women who migrate informally.

Both Raymond and Doezema end up disappointed that a “human rights” approach was not taken at the Trafficking Protocol negotiations. Nevertheless, their ideas of what constitutes a “human rights” approach drastically differ. Despite such antithetical political agendas, each feminist activist/scholar appeals to human rights discourses. Recognizing that those who argue for decriminalizing sex work also use human rights language, Raymond still does not shy from using such discourses herself. During the present period, the appeal to human rights is too strong not to. Rather, Raymond insists abolitionists must fight against both the sex industry itself as well as “human rights organizations infected by pro-prostitution myths and mythmakers. Many human rights advocates, intentionally or not, lend support to the sex industry by supporting its goal to normalize prostitution as work” (Raymond 2013:loc 827). Thus, Raymond attempts to delegitimize others’ use of human rights discourses, while bolstering the idea that “more and more people are recognizing that prostitution is not a human right but a violation of human rights, especially of women’s human rights” (2013:loc 677). Even as her feminist rivals use the same language as she does, Raymond nevertheless strives to define what prostitution and trafficking are, according to her own categorizations of women’s sexualized victimization by men. Given human rights discourses association with individualized victims whose rights have been violated, Raymond's employment of human rights discourses conforms fittingly with her rhetoric, perhaps even more so than for sex workers advocates, who actively reject a “victim” subjecthood.

### Similarities between abolitionists and pro-decriminalizationists

Despite their drastically different viewpoints on the “nature” of prostitution, abolitionists and sex worker activists actually hold similar stances on multiple issues, although, they arrive at those stances via different pathways. Raymond argues consent obscures male domination and is impossible in the context of unequal gender relations. Citing the 2007 “Prostitution in the Netherlands Since the Lifting of the Brothel Ban” report, Raymond argues, “research shows that there is no clear boundary between those who are forced or trafficked and those who ‘consented’ to prostitution” (2013:loc 1223). To give the benefit of the doubt to victims of forced prostitution, Raymond argues we should thus interpret all instances of sex labor as slavery. While Doezema sees consent, as it functions in the forced/voluntary dichotomy, as drawing a line in sand, subjectively separating “good” girls who need saving from “bad” girls who deserve punishment, ignoring the actual contexts under which women consented to work and their present working conditions. Thus, their divergent analyses bring them to a similar point: consent can be a poor standard to determine whether or not abuse occurs in commercial sex.

Abuse, violence, and harm are also concerns of both sex worker advocates and abolitionists alike; however, Raymond disagrees with this notion, arguing that those who support sex worker rights focus on “*consent rather than exploitation and harm*” (2013:loc 503, emphasis in original). However, sex worker advocates do focus on eliminating exploitation and harm from sex labor. The mission of the Sex Workers Outreach Project, a support network of and for sex workers, with numerous locations

across the US, is “dedicated to the fundamental human rights of people involved in the sex trade and their communities, *focusing on ending violence* and stigma through education and advocacy” (Sex Workers Outreach Project 2015, emphasis mine).

Moreover, abolitionists and sex worker activists alike are concerned with legalization of the sex industry. While abolitionists fear legalization of sexual slavery will harm women’s rights more than help them, they also distrust the increased regulation and surveillance mechanisms that come with prostitution legalization. This coincides with a main concern of decriminalization advocates – that official state sanctioning of prostitution will lead to increased, invasive, and degrading inspection of women’s bodies and places of work, due to regulatory requirements.

Raymond’s expectations for the human rights of women who sell sex include: safety, security, services, dignity, respect, and equality (2013:loc 968). These are notions that decriminalization advocates purport to desire for women who sell sex. Raymond notes she works toward a “framework of freedom from exploitation, justice, human dignity, and bodily integrity” (2013:loc 993). Given her abolitionist mindset, references to “freedom” and “liberation” follow logically; nevertheless, sex worker activists also refer to such freedom-based notions. Specifically, Doezema references “a politics of *liberation*” and how sex worker advocates need new “emancipatory” narratives that will replace the white slave/trafficking victim myth. As such, abolitionists and pro-decriminalizationists have similar languages for their vastly different desired outcomes for women. These words originate from politically opposed positions, nevertheless, they ironically use the same discourses of human rights and

liberation. For abolitionists, women who sell sex cannot have dignity, respect, and equality because the act of exchanging money itself is stigmatized, as evidenced in Raymond's reference to the "personal degradation of body and spirit" (2013:loc 968). However, one reason women may find sex work degrading is simply because they are told by abolitionists it is stigmatized labor. Thus, women's roles are constrained, not only by circumstance, but also by what other women state constitutes women's "appropriate labor."

### Summary

Raymond's strict rendering of all sex labor as exploitative limits possibilities of work and behavior for women. She denies or rationalizes what women who sell sex say about their own lives and experiences. Thus, she treats women as passive bodies who have things done to them, complying with their own sexual slavery. The boundaries between appropriate sexuality, work, and relations between women and men are proscribed in Raymond's black and white definition of all sexual commerce as exploitative of women. Accepting sexuality and commerce may intertwine in multifaceted ways means to struggle *with* blurred lines. Yet, Raymond struggles *against* such blurred lines. Presenting a black and white dichotomy between women who sell sex, and are therefore exploited, and women who do not sell sex and are therefore respectable and respected, Raymond's viewpoint oversimplifies a complicated phenomenon.

Moreover, Raymond's reliance on human rights discourses purports that sex labor insults bodily integrity, and thus, is a violation of the sacrosanct individual

woman. This morality-based view of sex labor engenders a subject-victim that requires rescuing or restoring by a more powerful, able, or enlightened third party. As an individualized conceptualization of human suffering, Raymond's argument does not consider all forms of labor exploitative, in an anti-capitalist rhetoric. Instead, she focuses on sex labor as an extraordinary kind of exploitation, which occurs exclusively against women. This viewpoint, ignores not only men who sell sex, but the ways in which other similar forms of low-status social reproductive service labor may also be exploitative

Pragmatic Workers' Rights: Improving sex workers' lives by ameliorating labor conditions

*Book Summary*

The third book considered, Laura María Agustín's *Sex at the Margins: Migration, Labour Markets and the Rescue Industry* (2007), does not neatly fit on the decriminalization-abolition spectrum regarding sex labor. As such, Agustín resists categorizing and policing women's conduct more so than the previous two authors reviewed. Less of an activist, Agustín does not campaign on behalf of sex workers for "human rights," but rather she is interested in how migrant workers in the informal economy may practically gain workers' rights. Author of the blog, *The Naked Anthropologist*, Agustín provides accessible reflections on migration, sex labor, and feminism; she also links to her speaking engagements, interviews, and publications. While not currently holding a formal university appointment, she has numerous publications.

*Sex at the Margins* challenges many stereotypes about migration, service industries, and what she calls the “rescue industry.” Based on 15 years of ethnographic fieldwork in various locales, including Spain, Mexico, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic, Agustín argues the lives of those who travel to sell sex cannot be defined within the phrases “victims of trafficking,” “migrant sex workers,” “forced migrants,” or “prostituted women” (Agustín 2007:2). Attempting to avoid polarizing debates, she interprets the women and men who leave their homelands to sell sex as forming part of the global commercial economy, traveling, as many do, to provide services, not unlike domestic or caregiving workers. Moreover, looking at wider questions of migration and the service sector, Agustín argues the “rescue industry,” including non-governmental organizations, is just as responsible for the victimization of migrants who sell sex as are others (2007:5). She contends those who work in such caring organizations may be motivated by colonial assumptions of “knowing best” - that is, assuming their perspective for organizing life is superior to others’ (2007:194). Moreover, like Doezema, Agustín is concerned that non-governmental and governmental protection schemes for trafficking victims promote isolationist immigration policies.

#### *Agustín’s Arguments*

##### Women and migration, work and pleasure

Investigating why women's decisions to travel are not normalized as are men's, but seen as something that needs explaining, Agustín argues women's decisions to travel are not only motivated by desires for family reunification, but include mixed

motivators of pursuing work and pleasure alike abroad. Agustín troubles the distinction between clearly demarcated lines of “work” and “tourism, leisure, and pleasure” and suggests that “in transit,” they are more similar in process than in identity (2007:13). A distinction exists whereby tourists leave regular jobs behind for a period to consciously engage in “not working.” In this rendering, tourism is experienced as capitalism’s other. However, “unless [tourists] are wealthy, they need to make money if their travels continue long enough” (2007:15). Engaging in work while touring abroad is common, hence the class of “working holiday” visas, available in numerous countries spanning the globe, including Australia, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan, South Africa, and Uruguay. Although, bilateral agreements dictate which nationalities are accepted for such applications, and, typically, “developing” nations are not as often the beneficiaries of such arrangements as are developed nations. As such, the stark classification between “labor migration” versus “tourism” maps onto racialized assumptions about developing and developed nations. This colonial assumption is also linguistically apparent in the labeling of those from developed nations “ex-patriots” and all others “migrants.” Moreover, Agustín argues that even when people specifically engage in travelling to work, as opposed to travelling for “pleasure,” they may also experience pleasure, the thrill of seeing a new place, and partake in “tourism” activities.

Agustín reviews gendered trafficking discourses and addresses taken-for-granted notions from migration studies: “men are routinely expected to encounter and overcome trouble [when leaving home], but women may be irreparably damaged by

it” (2007:39). Similarly, women who cross borders have long been viewed as deviant (2007:40-41), and deviant can easily be construed as sexually deviant (2007:41). Agustín considers the perceptions and desires of migrants crucial; yet, she neither denies structural conditions, nor does she hold individuals over-responsible for their own fates (2007:41). Rather, she considers flows of people, information, and money, focusing on flexible (female) labor, often involving unfair working conditions (2007:43). She wagers that migrants are not necessarily “ripped from their homes,” but can be included in discourses on transnationalism and cosmopolitanism, as others have explicitly done (see Chin 2013). By emphasizing flexibility and mobility over identity and location, Agustín argues people, particularly those who are poor, can figure themselves as something other than victims. Agustín especially challenges the myth that “travel to sell sex is different from all other travel” (2007:30). She notes that many observers are more concerned about profit-making third parties involved in migration for sex work, than they are about the charitable organizations that also may profit from their projects aimed at helping such migrant sex workers (2007:29-30).

#### Women and (in)formal labor markets

If the attempt to separate labor and leisure failed, Agustín argues the attempt to classify formal and informal economies is even less clear (2007:20). When “illegal,” “black,” or “informal” markets are considered, the focus is often on sensational commodities: drugs, sex, and guns, but not other mundane underground economic activities, such as selling knock-off scarves and sunglasses and contraband food products. When sex is involved, Agustín maintains recognition and control of a special

victim story exists in many renderings (2007:11). Dichotomies abound regarding such classifications: legal and illegal workers, formal and informal sectors (2007:19). Considering the informal economy, Agustín sees that “the regular economy of capitalism” is not wholly formal (2007:20) and the informal economy is an “outgrowth of advanced capitalism” (2007:22).

Noting that industrialized countries’ economies of late tend to be focused in the service sectors, in which women predominate, Agustín contends service jobs are stereotypically feminized as “women’s work.” She explains women “are disproportionately represented in informal sectors worldwide, predominating in domestic service, sweatshop labor, home piecework, export processing zones, caring jobs and commercial sex” (2007:22). Agustín observes such informal, feminized work as sex, domestic, and care labor is generally ignored from government regulation. The exclusion of intimate female labor from “formal” markets means the income generated from these occupations is not officially counted and included in government estimates of gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, the number of workers in the sex sector is also often uncounted due to its “informal” status. Demand for informal female labor continues to rise, especially as women enter formal occupational spheres in huge numbers (Agustín 2007:76; Wolf 2013). Thus, Agustín’s concern with the ghettoization of feminized labor is that it is excluded from formal labor markets, and thereby not counted, surveyed, or regulated by state governments.

### Working in the sex industry

Agustín acknowledges that while commonly demonized from those on the outside, when workers in the sex industry are asked about their jobs, their responses regarding how they feel about their work range from toleration and enjoyment to disgust and shame. Agustín, along with others (Chapkis 1997), note that sex work, while often corporeal, also involves emotional and mental labor (Agustín 2007:62-3). Agustín warrants that if no one kind of sex or sexuality is more natural or superior to others, it follows sex (and other caring) services can be exchanged for money at the same time as they may include intimacy, humanity, and reciprocity, despite overarching systems of patriarchy and capitalism (2007:62).

In terms of defining rigid roles for women – whether as laborers or carers in or outside of the home, Agustín problematizes taken-for-granted categories. She is concerned that overt campaigning for sex workers rights often predicates claiming a sex worker identity publically, which, as noted above, may be particularly troublesome for migrants (2007:72-3). Across Europe, Agustín reports, European sex workers want their industry legitimized, while migrants who work in the industry may be more focused on making money, and more concerned about their irregular legal status in a country if they do not have papers (2007:73). This compounds with the fact that many migrants, employed in various sectors, send large portions of their earnings to their families via remittances, contributing to a significant portion of some countries' GDPs (Pedersen 2013).

Attempting to debunk sex trafficking rhetoric, Agustín points to research showing that most migrants who work in the sex industry know before they migrate that their work abroad will be related to sex (Agustín 2007; Kempadoo 1998; Watenabe 1998). However, much as Doezema and Raymond contend, Agustín argues “‘knowing beforehand’ [or consenting] is a poor measure of exploitation and unhappiness” (Agustín 2007:30). She notes, along with others (see Watenabe 1998), that illegal immigration status in and of itself makes one more vulnerable to manipulation and mistreatment by employers who take advantage of workers’ lack of papers and this exploitation can be encountered in any line of work (Agustín 2007:31-2).

Moreover, as women are household heads, whose primary role is breadwinner, some concerns of women who sell sex are not about how exploitative sex labor is, which often pays better than other service jobs, but about other jobs they have held, such as factory labor where wages are low and sometimes withheld (2007:24). As such, Agustín explains sex labor may provide an effective way to support one’s family, paying better than other available jobs in the informal service sector, and offering more flexible hours. Agustín emphasizes that engaging in sex labor is about economic opportunities and lifestyle choices. When migrants who sell sex complain about their jobs, it is usually regarding working conditions, not about the fact the work is sexual (Agustín 2007:34). Related to migrants who acquire debt to migrate abroad for work in the sex industry, Agustín underlines that not all debts are equal and not all require working in a specific place or under oppressive working conditions. Since migrants often want to pay off their debts as quickly as possible and since sex work

may provide that possibility, some migrants chose to continue to work in the sex industry, even if they did not originally migrate to do so (2007:35).

### Critique of helping projects historically

Agustín traces a long history of helpers who create and sustain the “prostitution discourse” and place themselves as natural benevolent helpers (2007:7). She argues the rise of what she dubs “the social” – charitably-motivated caring projects - coincided in Europe, especially in France and England, with the enlightenment and increased interest in the art of government and the welfare of the governed via “population management” (2007:7), applying Foucault’s ideas of biopower and governmentality to these caregiving organizations. Agustín notes that population management, caring projects, and interventions were particularly aimed at people considered needy and unable to help themselves. Moreover, she explains that during the late 19th century, the impulse of middle and upper class women to care for and control working poor women (who may or may not have sold sex) was linked to middle and upper class women creating a public employment sphere for themselves (Agustín 2007:8). For women in helping professions, their “charitable” impulse went hand-in-hand with gaining their own autonomy, status, and money via independent work, outside the home (2007:98). In the course of wealthy women carving out their own employment sphere, they focused their energies on defining and managing the “work” of poorer women. Agustín explains such charitable ladies’ organizations declared prostitutes not as dangerous, carefree, pleasure-seekers, as they had previously been seen, but as victims of circumstances; this latter image of victim

has come to strongly predominate today (2007:108). Agustín warrants that the move from defining women who sell sex as threatening to victimized enabled onlookers to feel pity for such women, rather than fear.

With the increased policing of women who exchanged sex for money in the late 1800s and early 1900s, many other people gained jobs of inspection, control, and rehabilitation of these women's bodies and souls (2007:109). Bourgeoisie women's social work related to governing others, in order to make the "others" better laborers and better mothers, and was seen as part of the general improvement of society (2007:116). Despite the fact that the women doing the "rescuing" branded themselves as "good" and those they rescued as "pitiful," both groups of women worked outside the home, defying gender norms of their time (2007:121-122). While arguably both of these groups of women's projects were about acquiring liberty from men through the right to work outside the home for an income (2007:127), ironically, Agustín explains, the social organizers' public work, outside the home was predicated on preventing working-class women from attaining their own independence, through selling sex. Agustín suggests the legacy of such helping professions has been to deeply stigmatize women who sell sex (2007:135-140). Currently, fighting stigmatization is one of the biggest challenges sex worker rights advocates say they face.

#### Critique of helping projects today

Agustín's fieldwork analyzes the effects of such caring projects today, particularly related to migrant sex workers' support groups and anti-trafficking organizations. She does so through what she labels a "postcolonial framework." She

sees her analysis as postcolonial because it questions missions to "help" non-Europeans (2007:7-8). Agustín has previously written that feminists who reiterate paramount male violence against women perpetuate stereotypes when "the roles of 'perpetrator' and 'victim' are treated as *identities* rather than temporary conditions" (Agustín 2007:39; see also Agustín 2003, emphasis in original). One of Agustín's main claims is that those working in social organizations, non-governmental organizations, and caring professions, generally referred to as "helping professions," are not without their own motives and agendas. The idea that those in the rescue industry are merely focused on selflessly saving women from exploitative sex labor overlooks possible ulterior motives of social interventions and the sometimes negative consequences of "helping," particularly poor, people.

To illustrate the complicated relationship between "helpers" and sex workers, Agustín recounts ethnographic vignettes from her fieldwork, with analytical commentary. Even "progressive" social projects, which support sex workers' rights, can have unintended consequences, Agustín argues. The "Progresistas" in Spain, a nonprofit group who gives out condoms to sex workers, enforced a rhetoric of empowerment and contrived solidarity with sex workers. Agustín describes the Progresistas as "contriving" shared sisterhood because they did not openly acknowledge the power differentials between themselves, as citizens, "giving out" condoms as volunteers and sex workers as irregular migrants, deportable at any time (2007:154-157).

Agustín also recounts two conferences on sex labor and trafficking. She demonstrates that, regardless of the political leanings of the conference organizers, only voices sympathetic to their own causes are heard. At an abolitionist conference, Holland is frequently referred to as a “demon,” Agustín recounts and no Dutch speakers have been invited (2007:160). The lack of open dialogue is apparent and shuts down these helpers to hearing divergent viewpoints. This has negative repercussions, as Agustín describes research conducted by an NGO that compared the testimonies of sex laborers with that of domestic laborers was boycotted by its own funders who disapproved of the researchers’ comparison (2007:164). Creating larger organization across informal industries regarding workers’ plights and rights was against the funder’s narrative of prostitution as an exceptional form of labor exploitation.

Agustín contrasts her experience at the abolitionist conference with another conference focused on sex labor. High-profile speakers, including politicians and UN representatives, opened the conference and all condemned sex labor as trafficking. However, after these special guests left, a discussion around human and labor rights for sex workers ensued, which remained the conference’s focus. Agustín noted “as with the fundamentalist conference, the scope of discussion is narrow, most speakers making an argument for policy oriented around labor rights” (2007:180), and no one from Sweden, whose model of prostitution prohibition criminalizes the buyer, was invited.

While the sex worker rights activists may avoid overt moralizing, Agustín contends they still “certainly feel their proposals represent a superior morality: better justice toward workers, greater humanity toward clients, healthier understanding of sexual needs and desires, more understanding of how to prevent social and physical harm” (2007:182). Moreover, Agustín states the message at the latter conference is more complex than at the former, with the speakers and attendees recognizing that far from being the “free choice” of sex workers to elect this industry, within a patriarchal, capitalist economy, sex work is not always the most exploitative option, among many other low-wage opportunities (2007:182).

#### *Analysis of Agustín*

As outlined in the previous section, Agustín finds criticism within the helping groups of both abolitionists and sex worker activists alike. Thus, she challenges the aforementioned policing of women from both sides of the decriminalization and abolition debate. However, given her pragmatic approach to workers’ rights, Agustín’s most positive case study of “help” comes from Spain and includes an atypical collaboration between a male sex club owner, an abolitionist social organization, a migrants network, the police, and the Spanish labor ministry. The impetus for the collaboration started with the club owner himself, who had become quite wealthy from bringing eastern European women to work in his sex clubs in Spain. He approached several different social agents about how to get his workers legal work permits and social security protection, Agustín recounts (2007:184-5), which bypassed rhetorical road blocking, directly proceeding to acquiring legal status for migrant sex workers.

Her relative success story started with a capitalist entrepreneur, not someone looking to rescue someone else. As the entrepreneur had made so much money from the business, Agustín indicates the man almost felt guilty and wanted to improve the situation of his workers who had made him so wealthy, in a way saving his own conscience. This pragmatic solution got the sex workers rights, legal working status in the country, and improved their general situation. This change did not originate from the social sector, because if such carers accomplished what they say they work for - saving exploited women - they themselves would be out of a job, Agustín warrants (2007:185-7). Therefore, Agustín views the haranguing at feminist conferences as unproductive for achieving change in the lives of working women. As opposed to relying on human rights discourses as some feminist activists do, Agustín takes a pragmatic approach, focusing on solutions to ameliorate exploitative labor practices. Her research demonstrates “[t]hose who are to be helped may well not define... terms in the same way, but their opinions are rarely taken into account” (2007:192). Critiquing the tendency to consider social organizers’ actions more important than the actions of those who they purport to save, Agustín challenges the victim-savior metaphor and calls on social project workers to treat themselves and their caring projects with self-reflexivity (2007:187).

Notably absent in Agustín’s book is a critique of labor as exploitative in and of itself. While she supports cross-sector organizing for workers’ rights, across informal industries, her solution is focused on working inside of the confines of capitalism, such as gaining recognition of informal labor as “work,” earning workers’ rights,

attaining legal working papers, and demanding better working conditions. Agustín does not see sex labor as any more or less inherently exploitative than other jobs. While critical of the ways that social activism projects may have unintended consequences for the people they purport to help, Agustín, like the two other authors, does not develop an argument around generally exploitative labor practices. Rather, her pragmatic approach of working within the current system underpins her belief that women who sell sex should be seen as formal laborers. And, as such, these women are deserving of workers' rights, which will help improve their situation within capitalist societies.

What do these accounts of the transnational sex trade neglect?

The authors reviewed present particular representations of the transnational sex trade, from various feminist viewpoints, which enable specific political projects. They struggle to define the same group of people, via exercises in categorization and labeling, relying on empirical evidence to substantiate their claims. Their main questions ask, “Should there be a ‘sex trade?’”; “Under what conditions should there be the sex trade?”; and “How can we improve the existing sex trade?” Their answers to these questions rely on their assumptions about how the world should be. This contestation over determining the best ways of being in the world is never done; ongoing pressure is continually shaping these categories. As each author attempts to present her definition as authoritative, the struggle over these competing characterizations is great. Nevertheless, each competing category or frame remains well established, even as debate can destabilize its prominence.

In the discourses examined, sex labor is either established as something separate and abnormal from other kinds of labor, and so is sexually exploitative; or sex work is presented as any other kind of labor, deserving of workers’ rights. This latter no-nonsense approach to sex work attempts to gain official recognition within the formal realm of capitalism. Each of the authors’ projects is underpinned by her own views of what the sex trade “is.” The categories used to define sex labor are political, as well as historically and geographically contextual. As such, their concepts

emphasize certain relations over others. Each author illuminates particular features of a wider phenomenon, and, like all representations, theirs are limited. Doezema, Raymond, and Agustín make different arguments about what the sex trade is and what it should or should not be; yet, I argue these scholars are actually all part of a wider conversation of defining the realm of social reproductive labor. These authors' representations do not encapsulate commercial sex labor as part of traditionally circumscribed female labor per se, which usually occurs within the home. The taken-for-grantedness of socially constructed categories such as "private" and "public" obscures women's caring labor as unimportant, non-productive, *reproductive* labor. Nevertheless, sex labor appears at the conjunction of both reproductive and productive labor, as market relations enter the realm of social reproductive labor and those performing such work are compensated for their intimate, caring and sustaining labor outside the home.

Thus, sex labor can simultaneously be defined as productive work that is "reproductive," not because it has to do with sex – the sex of prostitutes often specifically avoids procreation – however, sex labor is reproductive because it is part of women's informal, caring or intimate labor, which is seen as necessary for the maintenance of both female and male laborers in capitalist production systems. This type of feminized labor is rarely recognized, for to formally acknowledge it would reveal part of the contradictions inherent within the system. Women (and men who perform these feminized labor forms) are compensated for such informal labor usually only when they perform it for other people, but not when it is done in their own

homes. Because women's social reproductive labor is taken for granted, the subject of "prostitute" comes under increased scrutiny, because she charges for a fee what wives are expected give away for free in the home, under the banner of social reproductive labor, and especially care-provision. It is this double presence of social reproductive labor, and especially sex (labor), as a site of potential sexual domination and economic exploitation that makes it so productive to study.

The discourses explored, which focus on either male sexual domination inherent in sex labor, or on sex laborers' gaining workers' rights, do not ask how and why women are pushed into or kept in the informal economy in the first place. Instead of being viewed as a moral question where female "victims" are dominated by men or a labor question where informal migrant workers are commercially exploited, sex labor can be viewed as feminized, social reproductive labor (often in the informal economy) that is simultaneously indispensable to society, yet routinely undervalued. This informal, feminized work regularly includes cleaning and caring labor, but can be expanded to include sex work as well, as a form of caring social reproductive labor. Considering sexual labor as part of what has become circumscribed as women's social reproductive labor challenges the trend of separating women into distinct groups, particularly of whores and wives. When questions are reframed thus, discourses of sex labor as male domination and a human rights violation, or of sex labor as work, deserving of both labor and human rights, only partially elucidate all the processes that produce such a category as "transnational sex labor." While discourses of labor rights and migrant rights may be well suited to politically campaigning for transnational sex

workers' rights, they do not explain why this category persists or attempt to transcend the system in which such workers' rights are necessary and relevant. In an effort to answer these questions, any discourses, violence against women, human rights, workers' rights or otherwise, must be economically and politically contextualized within the contemporary neoliberal era.

The present-day articulation of the production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services is just one manner of organizing life, and it is part of wider, ongoing, worldwide processes. During the mid-to late 20<sup>th</sup> century, older, more rigid forms of capitalist production, often characterized as Fordist, began transforming into more flexible labor systems. These transformations represent a historically and culturally specific capitalist form of state, market, and social organization (Kingfisher 2002), including an increase in "informal" labor, characterized by rapidly changing global markets, increased economic liberalization, and deregulation. These changes, alongside state austerity measures, decompose labor unions, destabilize workers' employment, jeopardize labor protections, and compromise working conditions, further skewing already unequal power relations between employers and laborers (Harvey 1989). Thus, workers' rights appear all the more important today, given the increasing "flexibility" of labor. Campaigning for (sex) workers' rights, a presumably progressive approach, nevertheless remains a form of political activism entrenched within the capitalist system, a system that valorizes (male) productive labor over (female) social reproductive labor. In this rendering, social reproductive labor supposedly occurs "outside" of the market, in the home.

My critique of this perspective is two-fold in that I draw on Karl Marx's contention that exploitation is inherent within the capitalist production system, and also Nancy Fraser's assertion, following Marx's, that while parading itself as independent from the "reproductive" realm, capitalism is, in fact, entirely dependent upon social reproductive labor to sustain systems of (formal) production. Marx investigated how capitalist systems made it appear natural that labor might be represented by the money-price of what it produces (Marx 1998). He viewed the relationships that abstract human's vast potentialities for creation under the label of "labor" and its various qualities and that reduce human's capacities to quantification in a labor-price as part of capitalism's insidiousness. These processes render an abstract quotient such as "human labor," which could entail a multitude of different activities, commensurable. Marx saw the category of "labor" in and of itself as exploitation. He expands upon this notion in a quotation, which simultaneously addresses sex labor: "Prostitution is only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the *laborer*" (Marx 1998:100, emphasis in original). Marx identified capitalism's deep contradiction of dependence on and expropriation of wage-labor to function. Thus, the first contention brings me to question workers' rights, which, while performing a needed role, seek only to redress inequities *within* the capitalist system.

Much as Marx identified the strict labor exploitation of the worker at the point of production to uphold the capitalist system, Fraser contends that capitalism silently relies on other, even more obscured realms. These realms, which appear "separate" from capitalism, include female reproductive labor, the natural resources of the earth,

and a political system sympathetic to capitalism and willing to sustain it. Therefore, a commodity's price is thus not only equivalent to the actual formal production time for creating the good, but also to the social labor time necessary for the reproduction of the humans who made the commodity in question. However, in most capitalist systems such reproductive labor is neither formally recognized nor compensated. Thus, my second contention, inspired by Fraser's work, zeroes in on capitalism's "non-accidental, structural imbrication with gender oppression, political domination—both national and transnational, colonial and post-colonial—and ecological degradation; in conjunction, of course, with its equally structural, non-accidental foreground dynamic of labor exploitation" (Fraser 2014:68). Viewing social reproductive labor as necessary for capitalist relations, Fraser notes, "[c]onstitutive of capitalism... is the institutional separation of 'economic production' from 'social reproduction'" (2014:67). Fraser contends that while these separations are artificial, these other realms become imbued with their own ontologies and normative ideals. As such, these realms are full of "critical political possibility" (2014: 69). Like Marx, Fraser identifies capitalism's contradictions of dependence and expropriation not only with the exploitation of wage-labor, but also with gender relations, the state, and nature.

Following Fraser's suggestion that general labor exploitation occurs under all iterations of capitalism, in various forms, sex labor might not be considered an exceptional form of exploitation, but part of a wider reliance of capitalist systems on female social reproductive labor, whether in the form of sex, love, child rearing, or

cleaning. Separate from Fraser's focus on the gendered capitalist system, where female labor is relegated to the realm of "non-economic," Marx lumped in women's labor outside the home in with other types of labor. His metaphor of sex labor to refer to the relationship inherent in all work, again echoed the notion that prostitution per se is not necessarily something discreet and separate from other types of work.

Thus, not only may all work be considered as exploitative as prostitution, prostitution is further devalued precisely because it is seen as women's social reproductive labor. This notion destabilizes the previous accounts reviewed of the transnational sex trade. As opposed to strict male domination or another economic realm that still needs workers' rights, all wage labor within capitalism could be considered as a type of prostitution. Moreover, prostitution itself is a form of social reproductive labor, on which capitalism also relies. I argue sex labor is all the more policed because it takes women's social reproduction of (potential) new laborers outside of marriage and the home and into the formal, productive economic realm, where sex it is sold a service to buyers, eschewing strict biological reproduction. Following Foucault's perception that the policing of sexuality occurs not only to ensure the reproduction of new workers for the state, but also to ensure the continuing power of ruling bourgeoisie, the sex of prostitutes is destabilizing because it occurs outside of marriage and carries a monetary price. We can understand feminists keen interest in sex labor, because of its gendered tendencies; nevertheless, capitalism is covertly sustained on numerous forms of women's labor, not just their sex labor. That capitalist production relies on vast swaths of primarily uncompensated social

reproductive labor could be grounds for wider political organization, beyond sex workers' rights.

Likewise, Nancy Fraser suggests that political campaigning to effect change should not focus solely on one realm of capitalism's dependence, but can come from uniting these realms, including the so-called "political" and "ecological," as well as "reproductive" realms. One way to think through these alliances could be in anthropological terms of nature is to culture as female is to male (Ortner 1974). While Ortner's classic piece is not without critique, we can consider the ways in which capitalist production exploits those closest to "female/nature"; this topic is also explored in the writings of eco-feminists (see Merchant 1980 and Plumwood 1993). Both the extraction of raw materials (e.g. of "virgin" forests and "untapped" oil) and the expropriation of (female) caring labor from the Global South to the Global North exemplifies nature/woman as a primary product supply, both in colonial times, and today. Hochschild writes that the love of nannies and sex workers is replacing older commodities removed from the Global South such as gold and silver (Hochschild 2002). Thinking beyond the separations predicated in capitalism between "domestic," "political," "ecological," and "economic," will be necessary to future emancipatory projects for social activists, as these realms are co-constituted, with aspects of the "reproductive" undermined in "productive" labor and vice-versa, with "productivity" being interpreted as a consumptive activity and vice-versa. In expanding our concepts of what premises political projects might be shaped upon, I argue sex labor can be

included in the wider category of social reproductive work, which in and of itself can be seen as an integral part of capitalist systems. The intense feminist debate over this category is part of an on-going struggle to reify and define the social reproductive realm. The overt campaign for formal recognition of sex workers' rights in fact shows the instability of the definition of sex work as "productive labor." Perhaps expanding the flexibility of these categories will productively unite struggles for women's rights with those for economic equality and environmental sustainability, all of which are intimately intertwined with the "formal" economic system. Perhaps joining such supposedly diverse realms will present new approaches for liberatory ways forward.

## Conclusion

This paper has reviewed various feminist representations of “transnational sex labor.” While the groups presented, specifically abolitionists and decriminalizationists, vehemently disagree on the moral and legal entanglements of involvement in the sex trade, they are similarly struggling to define what has been dubbed as the “reproductive” realm. The categorizations of these feminists variously rely on discourses of “labor,” “sexual exploitation,” “rights,” “slavery,” and “liberation.” While some of the feminist scholars employ human rights discourses to convey their (widely divergent) perspectives, other focus more pragmatically on workers’ rights. Moreover, when abolitionist, radical feminists refuse to recognize sex labor as work, their reasoning, while aligned with some ideas of commodification, does not view all labor as exploitative. They are more concerned with male domination of capitalist structures, and particularly the sex trade, seeing the exchanging of sex for money as inherently violence against women, whereas other “jobs” for women are better and less exploitative. Thus, their main criticism is not of capitalist and exploitative wage labor per se, but rather stems from condemnation of patriarchal power systems, where men exploit women. They believe women should perform *other* types of wage-labor to be free of reliance on men for money (from sex). For abolitionists who focus on saving individual, suffering female victims of prostitution, human rights discourses are particularly apt.

Those who campaign for sex workers’ rights often focus on gaining official recognition of sex labor as *productive* work in the formal economic market. Human

rights discourses, which may presuppose recourse to the state for protection are perhaps less aligned with sex worker rights advocates, as they do not see sex laborers as occupying an inherent victim-status. Nevertheless, some sex workers' rights activists still use human rights discourses, as they remain among the most powerful vehicles for social justice projects today. Sex worker rights activists attempt to distance themselves from a "victim" persona by advocating for overt autonomy and workers' rights, which nevertheless exclude those who may sell sex, but who do not publically identify with a sex worker subjectivity. Those championing sex *workers'* rights want into the capitalist labor-rights, wage-earning framework. They, like abolitionists, do not consider the ways in which feminized, social reproductive labor is exploited by capitalist modes of production, at the same time as capitalism depends on such social reproductive labor. This form of critique has the potential to unite not only concerns about women's liberation politics, but also apprehensions over ecological degradation and socio-economic inequality. Such a viewpoint may encompass political mobilization for championing diverse causes such as gender, environmental, economic, and political equality simultaneously.

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