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The Price of Freedom:

Moral and Political Economies of the Global Anti-Trafficking Movement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Sociology

by

Elena Shih

2015

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Price of Freedom:

Moral and Political Economies of the Global Anti-Trafficking Movement

by

Elena Shih

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor Ching Kwan Lee, Chair

The global concern around human trafficking has provoked a transnational justice movement formally spearheaded in 2000 by the passing of the United Nations Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons. In 2008, the People's Republic of China and the Kingdom of Thailand introduced landmark policies that scripted the international language of human trafficking into their domestic legal frameworks. However, the difference in state-society relationships between post-socialist authoritarian China and free market democratic Thailand create a theoretically compelling comparison to answer my central research question: *How do transnational social movements establish, institutionalize, and bridge power over relatively autonomous political authorities, markets, and over movement subjects? How do different factions of the movement mobilize resources in relation to the state and the market and how does the nature of institutional embeddedness affect whether they succeed, according to their stated objectives, or to the perceptions of their subjects?*

Based on 40 months of ethnographic participant observation with an anti-trafficking

evangelical Christian social enterprise and global governance project in each country, this dissertation argues that despite global justice goals, faith-based and secular anti-trafficking organizations reproduce women's global subordination in different ways. American evangelical Christian rescue groups offer vocational training in jewelry making as alternative employment to sex work, and sell this jewelry as a slave-free commodity in the United States. The labor processes of vocational training are unique in Beijing and Bangkok due to disparate political economic circumstances in each country: vocational training in China embodies the character of the authoritarian state, while the working conditions in Thailand resemble those of free market firms.

In the Chinese secular case, state control emerges as the primary mechanism of anti-trafficking intervention through the creation of a government ministry to address human trafficking. Global governance institutions like the United Nations must work exclusively through selective partnerships with Chinese government organs, which causes the transnational movement to strengthen state control over labor, gender, and migrant rights. In Thailand's free market and democratic monarchy, international pressures to forge an aggressive anti-trafficking response to sex and labor trafficking have resulted in a multi-tiered rescue industry involving the private sector, NGOs, transnational advocacy networks, and new government anti-trafficking entities. The transnational rescue industry in Thailand similarly subjects low wage women workers to new and unregulated forms of scrutiny, surveillance and forced detention alongside the government's support of sex tourism and aquaculture exports as primary engines of growth. Overall, the transnational anti-trafficking movement has embodied the characteristics of authoritarian state power in China, and the free market in Thailand.

The dissertation of Elena Shih is approved.

Elizabeth Bernstein

Gail Kligman

William Roy

Ching Kwan Lee, Chair

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2015

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Chapter 1: The Price of Freedom

Since 2010, the annual pop-up *Freedom and Fashion* show in Los Angeles has attracted over a thousand patrons and features social entrepreneurship organizations that aim to combat the global problem of human trafficking. Tickets to the event range from \$60 for general admission, to \$250 for red carpet VIP entrance, and it is attended by a mix of patrons brought together through interests in fashion, social entrepreneurship, human trafficking, and the myriad intersections of these commitments. Doors to the two hour-long fashion show open early, as ticketholders are encouraged to peruse the array of anti-trafficking and “slave free” vendors that have assembled to share their work and sell their products.

Alongside hundreds of other attendees—predominantly middle class White and Asian American women ranging from 16-60 years of age—I circle the hallways of the non-denominational evangelical Christian church in Orange County, California where the fashion show is being held. Exploring the orbit of over thirty organizations that have gathered, I pause in front of each vendor’s table and listen as organizational representatives earnestly share narratives of their work to combat human trafficking: what region of the world they work in, what aspect of slavery or exploitation their interventions address, and most urgently, how the purchase of products that are displayed assist the rescue, rehabilitation, and repair of trafficked persons.

The vendors reveal a minefield of entrepreneurial creativity fueled by a common ambition to combat human trafficking. A portable clothing rack displays brightly colored pajamas, made by *International Princess Project*, an organization that works in India “to create pathways of freedom for women escaping the ravages of the sex industry” (IPP Website 2010). A giant rubber tire swings above the table for a non-profit organization that recycles rubber car tires from South Africa and repurposes them into handbags, providing “alternative employment for sex trafficking

victims.” *Urdenet* displays cashmere scarves that come from Mongolia, the proceeds from which aim to combat the geographic isolation and cultural practices that make “women and children vulnerable to sex trafficking” (Urdenet pamphlet 2010). Several organizations feature jewelry that is made by former sex workers, labeled “survivors of human trafficking,” whom the organizations claim have been rescued from red light districts around the world and offered new employment. Two such organizations selling jewelry made in Beijing, China and Bangkok, Thailand boast similar narratives of rescuing victims of sexual exploitation, through providing alternative employment opportunities.

Working in disparate settings throughout the globe, these projects are bound by the fact that they are all founded and run by American citizens, registered as 501(c)3 non-profit organizations in the United States, and sell their products to a largely American clientele through churches, anti-trafficking and fair trade fairs, school fundraisers, consignment shops, and the Internet. Elizabeth Bernstein (2007b) has observed that these organizations are a large and growing faction of the global social movement to combat human trafficking as they bring the transnational cause of human trafficking into US citizen consciousness—what has been colloquially celebrated as “thinking globally and acting locally.”

Walking among the vendors selling different products in the name of combating human trafficking, the similarities between the organizations are abundant. The brief glimpses into organizational life offered by the vendors—usually themselves volunteer activists for the different organizations—focuses on a consistent narrative that frames a universal depiction of human trafficking, and most typically, *sex* trafficking. This archetypical tale involves a woman or child dealing with poverty and inequality faced with limited migration opportunities who ends up working as a sex worker. Despite the diverse geographic representation of these projects, the

explicit focus on the nation-state contexts in which they operate is notably absent. The projects do not, for instance, discuss the unique challenges for combatting human trafficking in particular parts of the world, and instead frame their sales pitches around the traction “human trafficking” has received as a universal global concern. In crafting these transnational narratives, social movement actors from the Global North have had the greatest voice in shaping the contemporary anti-trafficking movement to date.

The global concern around human trafficking has cultivated a transnational social movement organized around gender, migration, and labor rights. “Human trafficking” has been articulated in the international human rights agenda since the 1949 United Nations *Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Persons and of the Exploitation and Prostitution of Others*. This early convention was passed one year after the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, and was the product of a feminist abolitionist struggle that marked prostitution a form of slavery that oppressed women (Limoncelli 2010). Transnational efforts to combat human trafficking were formally codified in 2000 by the passing of the United Nations *Palermo Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*. This Protocol was the first international convention to outline a set of international anti-trafficking guidelines, which include a set of concrete legal suggestions as well as a general framework for anti-trafficking activities to be pursued by individual nation states. The Protocol falls within the 2000 UN *Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime*, and classifies trafficking as the “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud. . . for the purposes of exploitation” (UN Palermo Protocol 2000: Article 2).

In order to hold individual nation-states accountable for what was increasingly seen as a global problem, the Protocol urged the passing of concrete domestic anti-trafficking laws prosecuting trafficking as a criminal offense and specific measures intended to prevent and protect victims of trafficking. The attempt to mobilize international anti-trafficking laws across nation-states took shape at the end of 2003 when the UN formally recommended the “integration of a human rights perspective into international, regional, and national counter-trafficking laws and policies” (UN CATOC 2003). The UN also asked that protection efforts take an international dimension in the way that nation-states strengthen border restrictions—by enhancing cross-border law enforcement and communication between neighboring states (2000 Palermo Protocol) through bilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and through regional accords like the Southeast European Co-operative Initiative’s Security Pact between Eastern Europe and Asia.

In 2000, following the aforementioned UN Palermo Convention, the United States introduced the “Trafficking Victims Protection Act” (TVPA 2000), landmark legislation that brought human trafficking into the mainstream US political agenda. While human trafficking had developed an agenda amongst feminists and activists working at international conferences under the rubric of “Violence Against Women,” the anti-trafficking agenda did not fully reach the American mainstream until the US vested political interest and funding into anti-trafficking work in 2000. The UN Palermo Protocol and US TVPA have been used collaboratively for over a decade to govern a transnational social movement to combat human trafficking.

Since 2003, an annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report produced by the US State Department monitors 188 countries’ progress towards conducting anti-trafficking work and ranks them on a four-tier system according to their compliance with international human trafficking

standards.¹ Since the problem of human trafficking entails the forced movement of people between and across international borders, its response must involve the global cooperation of sending, transit, and receiving countries of trafficked persons (TIP Report 2009). Following these global governance pressures—or what legal scholar Janie Chuang has alternatively labeled “global sheriff” (Chuang 2006a)—many countries in the Global North and South have subsequently adopted anti-trafficking laws and robust anti-trafficking responses.

The legal incorporation of anti-trafficking legislation in diverse national contexts raises important theoretical issues for the study of transnational social movements. While anti-trafficking advocacy organizations largely ignore the vast differences in political and legal frameworks in their advocacy efforts, the distinctions between migrant sending and destination states present unique challenges and opportunities for the transnational anti-trafficking movement. Thailand and China – both understood as key origin, transit, and destination sites of human trafficking – serve as cases to investigate, and therefore frame the focus of this project. These two countries constitute important comparative cases because they reveal how transnational social movements are shaped by contrasting local political economies, and state and civil society relationships.

In 2008, both countries introduced landmark policies that scripted the international language of human trafficking into their domestic legal frameworks. However, the differences between authoritarian China and free market democratic² Thailand are considerable, raising

¹ Tier One represents the highest ranking, followed by Tier Two, Tier Three, and Tier Three Watch List.

² Thailand became a Western style constitutional democratic monarchy in 1932, characterized by free elections for its Prime Minister, but the nation has also been governed by periods of military rule sprung from its contentious history of political coups. Most recently, since 2006, Thailand has been plagued by a series of political coups that have

² Thailand became a Western style constitutional democratic monarchy in 1932, characterized by free elections for its Prime Minister, but the nation has also been governed by periods of military rule sprung from its contentious history of political coups. Most recently, since 2006, Thailand has been plagued by a series of political coups that have overthrown two Prime Ministers: Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006, and Yingluck Shinawatra in 2014. This contentious political environment reveals deep-seated divide between Thailand’s rural and urban populations as discussed at

important questions about the efficacy of these anti-trafficking strategies in such different contexts. The distinctions between Thailand and China create a theoretically compelling comparison to answer my dissertation's central research question: *How do transnational social movements establish, institutionalize, and broker power over relatively autonomous political authorities, markets, and over movement subjects in diverse contexts? How do different factions of the movement mobilize resources in relation to the state and the market and how does the nature of institutional embeddedness affect whether they succeed, according to their stated objectives, or to the perceptions of their subjects?*

This dissertation is a global and multi-sited ethnography of the transnational social movement to combat human trafficking through state- and market-based approaches to managing low-wage labor migration and women's work. Empirically, this project compares faith-based and secular approaches to anti-human trafficking work in China and Thailand, as well as transnational connections through global governance institutions in each country and activist efforts in the United States. From 2008-2013, I completed 40 months of ethnographic participant observation at an evangelical Christian vocational training center and secular anti-trafficking governance projects in Beijing and Bangkok respectively, and sites of movement organizing and activism in Los Angeles. Inspired by the research design of a double-paired case comparison, the project is structured around four cases of transnational social engagement: faith-based and secular transnational social movement responses in both China and Thailand. By studying multiple sites across this movement, the project dissects the global *connections*, as well as *disconnections*, between transnational social movement activists, global governance institutions, states, markets

length in Chapter 4. While these uprisings were most recently met with authoritarian-style military repression, this dissertation's interest in state-society relationships interprets such uprisings as evidence of a relatively open political environment. Furthermore, as is discussed in Chapter 4, such civil unrest has had limited impact on the range of anti-trafficking activities undertaken in Thailand, which further underscores how even in the face of political upheaval, commerce, tourism, humanitarian interventions, and the rescue industry remain relatively untouched.

and movement subjects—low wage women workers, including those who are and are not identified by movement actors as “trafficked.”

One overarching argument of this project is that transnational social movements assume the political and economic characteristics of the contexts in which they operate. While this is a simple and perhaps obvious premise, it is one that has been largely ignored by literature on global social movements (Tarrow 2005; Della Porta and Tarrow 2007; Keck and Sikkink 1998), which depict transnational activism as a force that has blurred the lines of state and market power. Interested primarily in the how transnational action is mobilized, global social movements scholarship highlights the mechanisms of transnational social contention, but is seldom attune to: (1) variation of transnational social movement action across political and economic contexts; (2) variation of transnational social movements between secular and faith-based ideological frameworks; and (3) dimensions of power and hierarchies of inequality between movement activists in the Global North and their alleged subjects—in this case “victims”³ of trafficking—in the Global South. Overall, this research reveals key empirical differences in the cases of faith-based and secular anti-trafficking organization in China and Thailand: in China, social movement engagement is governed by, and even bolsters, authoritarian state power, while in Thailand, interventions take on the characteristics of the free market. The following sections provide a literature review of Global Social Movements frameworks, followed by an overview of scholarship on the Global Movement to Combat Human Trafficking.

³ Criminologists have demonstrated that the term “victim” is a socially constructed category and throughout this research, this label was celebrated, contested, and appropriated by different actors (Bumiller 1992; Mawby and Walklate 1994). In the conceptual framing of the dissertation, I use “victim” to refer to two cohorts of social movement subjects: in the faith-based cases, it refers to former sex workers who have entered vocational training rehabilitation programs; in the secular cases, it refers to a broader cohort of low wage migrant workers who are both identified or unidentified as victims of trafficking, but whose lives are nonetheless shaped by the movement.

Global Social Movements

Global social movement frameworks find that political power has shifted from the state and dispersed across global governance institutions, trade organizations, NGOs, and the market. Whereas earlier social movements were rooted in specific social identities (Melucci 1989; Somers and Gibson 1994), or particular sites of contention (Tilly 1978; McAdam, Tarrow, Tilly 1996; Guidry, Kennedy and Zald 2000), contemporary social movements seek to address global problems of neoliberal political governance and resource distribution. Environmental justice movements address global warming and carbon emissions as a significant organizing concern of the past several decades. Another key example is the global movement for water, which embodies a naturally transnational character because rights and access to water tend to traverse the national boundaries across which water is often situated (Conca 2005). The proliferation of the precarious global migrant labor force has also increased the salience of transnational attention to human rights, which also transverse political borders (Sassen 2006; Soysal 2012). These issue-based concerns of the day have been characterized as “counter-hegemonic” (Evans 2005) in that they are caused by hegemonic systems of global capitalism and neoliberalism. As such, they present opportunities for key actors to engage in moments of counter-hegemonic globalization, as they utilize the tools and technology of globalization to promote global justice goals.

Sidney Tarrow’s transnational social movement (TSM) paradigm emerged as an important framework to understand social movements that are concerned with access to global resources and transcendent human rights, and theorizes transnational activism as arising from interaction between the state and civil society (Tarrow 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Della Porta and Tarrow 2005). Tarrow (2005) and Keck and Sikkink (1998) identify “transnational activism” and “transnational advocacy networks” as unique forms of collective action through which “local”

concerns, typically grievances in the Global South, gain recognition and support in a wider sphere, the Global North. Keck and Sikkink's "boomerang pattern" (2005: 13) exemplifies the archetype of transnational social movement engagement. It theorizes that when a human rights-resistant state blocks mobilization and redress by the part of non-governmental organizations operating within national borders, a "transnational advocacy network" presents the greatest leverage to consolidate pressure from intergovernmental organizations and norm compliant states onto the offending state. This formulation has not considered how state participation in transnational social movements may reproduce state interests and power; or alternatively, how the transnational market is leveraged to address social concerns.

Global social movements literature has focused on the mechanisms of contention whereby actors and organizations make claims to or against the state. Social movement scholars have theorized how international norms are incorporated in different nation states (Hafner-Burton and Tsutsui 2005). In particular, Meyer's theory of "norms diffusion" (1992) suggests that global norms originate in the West, and are dispersed across social movement organizations in developing nations. These theorizations of transnational norm diffusion offer a simplistic and unidirectional depiction of norms transmission: norms typically originate in the West and wash over the developing world.⁴ Meyer provides the example of the pervasive culture of transnational education norms as emanating from "standardized worldwide visions of social and educational progress" (Meyer et al. 1992: 2).

Prior studies of international human rights regimes suggest that the type of political regime should have an effect on the domestication of global rights norms. Countries with positive human rights attitudes are characterized as "liberal democratic states;" the prioritization of human

⁴ Distinct from social movements literature, a large body of development studies scholarship has modeled this same effect (see, e.g., Lewis and Mosse 2006).

rights is fundamentally embedded into the definition of liberal democracy. By contrast, authoritarian regimes are classified according to their lack of attention to individual citizen's rights, as is commonly measured according to: the rule of law, political participation, and free speech. In the case of anti-human trafficking efforts, repressive governments often have no political will to pursue human rights agendas, and may only "adapt to normative pressure for instrumental reasons" (Risse-Kappen, T, Ropp, S, Sikkink, K. 1999: 14). The cases in this study, of authoritarian China and Thailand's democratic monarchy with strong military domination, integrate this typology of political regime by representing contrasting modes of localizing human rights norms. Theories would project that the Chinese state would be resistant towards adopting anti-human trafficking practices, while Thailand would be more amenable due to transnational pressures. Uniquely, both China and Thailand have acquiesced to pressures from the global movement to combat trafficking, and this study provides a unique opportunity to advance understandings of contemporary global movements in the contexts of state power in China and market power in Thailand.

The scholarship on global *justice* movements (Della Porta 2007) and counter-hegemonic globalization (Evans 2005) builds a normative optimism into theoretical frameworks, starting from the premise that these interventions align on the basis of "the shared goal of advancing the cause of justice (economic, social, political, and environmental) among and between peoples across the globe" (Della Porta and Marchetti 2011: 429). The literature on global justice movements presupposes the possibility of unified objectives to counter hegemonic projects. The goals are admirable, and as Della Porta and Marchetti describe,

A cosmopolitan framework built from below would serve as a facilitator of egalitarian and reciprocal encounters. It would provide the necessary overall framework for a potential reciprocal enrichment rather than for a homogenizing process. Only by beginning from the local can transnational

solidarity be built through the formation of transnational and overlapping communities (2011: 436).

However, this notion of transnational solidarity is abstracted from any analysis of power—including the varying power of states, global governance institutions, markets, non-governmental organizations, and the race, class, gender, and national hierarchies that are embedded within them.

Such optimism has limited critical interrogation of transnational social movements and fails to consider literature on the “non-profit industrial complex” (Swidler and Watkins 2009), or from critical development studies, which suggests that “development is itself an arbitrary concept rooted in meta-narrative, which, in turn, reflects the interests of its practitioners” (Rapley 2004). This literature also fails to consider what author Teju Cole (2012) has recently dubbed the “white savior industrial complex,” referring to interlocking sources of race, class, and national power that inform contemporary humanitarianisms.

Further, transnational social movements literature ignores movements that turn to the market, and can benefit from prior studies of fair trade; for instance Daniel Jaffee’s (2008) interrogation of how market power is embedded in the fair trade coffee movement, or Frederick Wherry’s (2008) ethnography of handicraft production as a mode of cultural and tourist development. Finally, this dissertation extends Elizabeth Bernstein’s attention to the contemporary melding of for-profit interests with humanitarian endeavor—what she has termed “redemptive capitalism” (Bernstein 2013, 2014, 2015) by engaging this concept across political economic contexts. Exploring the intersecting issues of race, capitalism, and nationalism that underscore and shape the spread and success of the transnational anti-trafficking movement, I aim to render these distinct sources of power visible in this study of a global social movement.

The Global Movement to Combat Human Trafficking

Popular American slogans that demand an end to “modern-day slavery” embody the seemingly straightforward and unified objective to combat human trafficking; however, recent scholarship reveals multiple sources of conflict within the movement. The diverse actors who comprise the transnational movement against human trafficking have divergent understandings of what constitutes women’s work and labor exploitation. Some groups focus exclusively on sex trafficking, framing all commercial sex work as inherently exploitative, while others frame human trafficking more broadly, and acknowledge sex work as one of many other legitimate forms of women’s work (Agustín 2007; Doezenia 2010; Bernstein 2008; Chapkis 2003). Focusing primarily on the labor classifications of women’s work under trafficking has limited the degree to which scholars have interrogated alternative working arrangements *after* trafficking, or what alternatives vocational training programs may provide to alleviate exploitative working conditions.

Within the anti-trafficking movement, Bernstein (2007b) has noted exceptionally unique “strange bedfellows coalitions” uniting unlikely partners. In particular, her work has documented a growing contingent of evangelical Christian organizations, which co-opt the anti-trafficking movement to promote the sexual politics of “new abolition”—merely reframing a long-standing moral objection to sex work and prostitution within the newer lens of human trafficking.⁵ Uniquely, such religious politics align with those of radical feminists, posing a challenge to a singular “sex panic frame” by demonstrating how new sexual politics are an area of convergence for diverse groups—despite their formal allegiance as religious or secular. This “new abolitionism” around prostitution and sex trafficking converges in broad-based political

⁵ Notably, former President Bush’s White Council on Faith-Based Initiatives to combat human trafficking created after the TVPA, allocated an unprecedented amount of funding to faith-based anti-trafficking organizations.

campaigns, which target “the linked phenomena of sex, money and migration” (Bernstein 2008: 2; Cheng 2008; Soderlund 2005). These evangelical Christian interventions meld profits with humanitarian endeavor, and have also created pathways for the consumption of anti-slavery goods. This research however, does not identify how distinct global political economies shape these markets for anti-trafficking goods, nor does it interrogate the labor processes that are involved with the production of such commodities.

Abolitionist organizations⁶ tend to focus exclusively on sex trafficking while excluding a consideration of labor trafficking more generally; these groups find the sale of a woman’s body to be distinct from other kinds of work because it is either morally corrupt or else fundamentally exploitative (Raymond, Hughes and Gomez 2001). Critics have advocated seeking justice for victims of all forms of labor exploitation—including commercial sex work as just one type of labor—hoping to advance a broader goal for justice vis-à-vis labor rights (Parreñas 2011; Doezema and Kempadoo 1998; Kempadoo, Sanghera, Pattanaik 2005; GAATW 2012).

Transnational feminist scholars argue that the exclusive focus on sex trafficking is detrimental to the broader anti-human trafficking movement for two main reasons: (1) it promotes an agenda that often eclipses cases of labor-based exploitation and trafficking (Chacón 2006; Jordan 2002); and (2) strips workers of agency by claiming that Third World women are ineluctably victimized by religious, ethnic and cultural difference, and depravity (Doezema 2001; Kempadoo 2001).

Finally, legal scholars have critiqued state policies⁷ that relegate citizenship or residency rights to those deemed victims of human trafficking, alongside the simultaneous crackdown on smuggling and irregular migration (Chuang 2006b, 2010; Kim and

⁶ This dissertation adopts the definition of abolitionist organizations as those which “consider all commercial sex work to be tantamount to slavery” (Bernstein and Shih 2014: 459).

⁷ See in particular, the creation of the T-Visa (trafficking visa) provision in the 2003 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVRPA), which grants legal permanent residency to those whom the court determines are “victims of human trafficking” (TVRPA 2003; Chuang 2006).

Hreshchyshyn 2004; Chacón 2006, 2010). These critiques argue that the humanitarian policies that anoint a select few human trafficking victims as deserving of state assistance create exclusionary pathways for migration and citizenship for non-victim categories—typically men, or victims of labor (as opposed to sexual) exploitation. Other scholars have traced the rise of the human trafficking rescue industry alongside the size and privatization of the deportation industry (Chacón 2006; de Genova and Peutz 2010; Plambech 2014).

The transnational cohort of First World anti-trafficking activists has been studied by a body of critical scholarship on the global anti-trafficking movement. Laura Agustín (2007) has written that the global movement to combat human trafficking is best characterized as a “rescue industry,” whereby the profitability of the anti-trafficking movement lends itself to generate nefarious circuits of social control veiled as helping. Similarly, anthropologist Nicola Mai (2013) has labeled new strains of activism as “sexual humanitarianism,” which maintain an air of social protection under dubious motives of disciplining sexual minorities—including sex workers, non-heterosexual/gender conforming individuals, and others at the margins of society. Such critical frameworks identify and explain transnational interests and structures of power, however, they fail to ask under what political and economic contexts rescue industries and sexual humanitarianism may thrive, or fail.

This dissertation builds off transnational and post-colonial feminist scholars who argue that US anti-trafficking policy reflects a victimizing ideology reflective of essentializing and nativist discourses. Doezenia (1998) asserts that mainstream agendas are racialized discourses that all too often portray Asian sex workers as innocent victims; these portrayals of victimization underscore underlying racist and classist implications, which “refuse to respect the choice of a woman from a developing country” (1998: 46). Doezenia notes that the US and First World

feminists alike still hold moral objections to prostitution, however, they use policy as a way to “cloak moral indignation in terms of ‘victimization of women.’” This insight draws attention to the ways victimization is strategically employed as a method of reinstating First World moral hegemony (Kempadoo and Doezema 1998: 127), and I apply this critique to understand anti-trafficking interventions in this dissertation. Over a decade after Doezema’s insights on mainstream US political agendas, the findings of this dissertation reveal how both grassroots faith-based social enterprises and global governance projects tactically use the victimization of trafficked persons to pursue social, political, and economic power.

Additional critiques charge that the US’s “global sheriff” positioning with regards to human trafficking ignores US complicity in trafficking, as well as trafficking of US citizens that occurs within American borders (Chuang 2006a). Given the inextricable links between big business, labor exploitation and demand, some scholars advocate a complete reinvention of trafficking discourse as it deals with “coercion,” where economic coercion can be applied to cases of trafficking, given the dominance of global capitalist restructuring (Kim and 2007). The implications of legacies of economic restructuring and militarism are particularly salient in the case of Thailand, whose contemporary political economic landscape was significantly shaped by US military presence during the Indochina wars, and its reliance on IMF and World Bank debt following the Asian financial crisis.

Many critical scholars have demanded that human trafficking be understood as a byproduct of global income inequality, increased migration, and in particular, the feminization of labor migration (Chuang 2006b). Chuang has identified human trafficking as a “migratory response to current globalizing socioeconomic trends” (Chuang 2006b: 137), and has called specific attention to a transnational study of low wage labor. Similarly, nation-specific case

studies of anti-trafficking efforts are needed to further understand how such global socioeconomic trends impact low wage migrant workers in different locales. This dissertation fills this gap through an in-depth study of the transnational movement in two countries.

Methodology⁸

Driven by an interest in how global movements are shaped and transformed by local political economy, this project focuses on transnational faith-based and secular anti-trafficking interventions in China and Thailand. These countries offer ideal sites of comparison because of their different political economies and state/civil society relationships. Under Chinese authoritarian state governance, social movement organizations experience significantly more oversight relative to Thailand, where the state-society relationships are characteristically more democratic, and where the government is particularly amenable to international organizations. At the same time, they share a similar experience of heightened American intervention in anti-trafficking arrangements in each place. Comparison across transnational engagement in two countries allows the project to unpack the importance of local political economies for two main reasons: 1) the relation between national industries of tourism, commercial sex, aquaculture, and manufacturing to labor exploitation in Thailand and China, and 2) how the private sector and social enterprise have been recently engaged as social movement strategies. Finally, this comparison is apt because Thailand and China are both located in the Asia Pacific region, and share some of the same migrant worker populations and migrant work industries. While Thailand and China provide sites for comparative analysis of the moral and political economies of the anti-

⁸ Expanded Methodological Appendix attached.

trafficking movement, the US and UN are featured throughout this dissertation to reveal the global constellations of transnational social movements.

A second, within-country comparison between a faith-based and a secular organization in each case allows for further investigation of how movements are embedded within particular power structures, and whether movement organizations are achieving their social justice goals of “liberating victims of modern day slavery.”⁹ The significance of the secular and faith-based case comparison highlights the convergence and divergence of mobilizations strategies between ideologically distinct actors, which have rarely studied in a comparative social movement framework.

The approach of this dissertation is inspired by Burawoy’s extended case method (1998), and global ethnography (2000) practices, which encourage the matching of macro-historical and theoretical frameworks with fine-tuned ethnography in different sites according to specific cases. The pairing of the extended case method with global scale ethnographies challenged foundational understandings of ethnography to move away from its tradition of “committed localism” (Marcus 1995: 99). Burawoy has suggested that global ethnography is essential in the contemporary era because globalization has fundamentally altered the social world so that global “forces, imaginations, and connections” operate at the global and local levels, and in between. He advocates methodological approaches that extrapolate the global within the local, finding the “invisible threads” that bind state, supranational, local, and civil societies as interrelated units of analyses. Whereas sociologists may have formerly been invested in the nation-state as a unit of analysis, Burawoy suggests a shift to “transnational connections” as a better lens of inquiry (Burawoy 2000: 34).

⁹ This is not a direct quote from one organization, but rather a common trope used across many American anti-trafficking organizations.

This multi-sited global ethnography attempts to understand the “global connections,” as well as disconnections, between transnational social movement activists, states, the UN, and consumers and producers of jewelry. Working across four cases in two countries—faith-based and secular in China and Thailand—I advance transnational social movement (TSM) theories by showing how movement outcomes are shaped by diverse political opportunity structures in authoritarian China and in the democratic monarchy of Thailand. By situating my ethnography across the different locales of the movement, this project illuminates the ways that the opportunity structures provided by globalization—both in the sites of production in Asia, and their corresponding sites of consumption in the United States—reproduce inequalities despite the movement’s intent to combat the problem of human trafficking.

Between 2008-2013, I completed a total of 40 months of ethnographic participant observation at sites of the human trafficking movement in China, Thailand, and their global sites of activism. I began this project conducting fieldwork at several anti-trafficking conferences and fairs in Southern California, where I first encountered vendors that sold jewelry marketed as made by trafficked women in China and Thailand. I subsequently conducted four years of ethnographic fieldwork with two independent Christian vocational training projects that sold this jewelry: Thai Red Light Ministry (TL) in Bangkok, and China Star Project (CS)¹⁰ in Beijing. During the summers of 2008, 2009, and 2010, I served as a full-time volunteer at TL and CS for four weeks in each city, each summer. During the workweek at CS in Beijing, I helped translate for English-speaking groups that visited, and helped organize leisure activities after the workday, such as craft activities and different education workshops in the dormitory. Additionally, I would accompany workers to prepare meals, go shopping, go to the Internet café and would sometimes take

¹⁰ Throughout this dissertation, I interchangeably refer to these organizations in short hand by their initials (TL) and (CS), or abridged names, “Thai Light,” and “China Star.”

extended weekend trips away from the office with them. At TL in Bangkok, my volunteer duties were more formal, because of TL's institutionalized international volunteer and missionary program, which hosts about 4-5 short-term missionary volunteers per year. Having previously volunteered over 400 hours at TL's sites of inventory and sales distribution in Los Angeles, my volunteer duties in Bangkok included: processing online sales orders, taking inventory, and occasionally assisting with English language class.

In both cities, I spent about four hours of each day making jewelry, cooking, and participating in worship alongside the workers, and the other half of the day assisting activists with administration, programming and outreach. Within this time frame, I have conducted roughly 60 informal and 15 formal interviews with different individual actors involved in the movement, including: activists, consumers, producers, and other social movement actors. The remainder of the ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the sales offices of both organizations in Los Angeles.

Between 2010-2012, Thai Light, but not China Star, also began hosting outreach opportunities to identify and rescue victims of trafficking in Southern California. Through Thai Light outreach efforts, and through a local Los Angeles anti-trafficking task force comprised of non-profit organizations, faith-based groups, and law enforcement, I learned of outreach and rescue operations conducted by another evangelical Christian organization. Project Rescue LA was a student group affiliated with a local Southern California evangelical Christian university and its constituents consisted primarily of young men. In sum, I conducted ethnographic participant observation at over twenty-five human trafficking outreach efforts in Los Angeles with Thai Light LA and Project Rescue LA. In addition to attending training and weekly outreach,

I also attended monthly awareness raising events that each group held to recruit new members and raise funds for their efforts.

As the global movement to combat human trafficking in China and Thailand grew, it became clear to me that these two American evangelical Christian rescue projects represented just one facet of a larger terrain of political engagement. During my fieldwork, I noticed several moments of convergence between the Christian groups and other anti-trafficking actors—most notably between police or government agencies, and the United Nations and NGOs in each city. To explore these convergences, I conducted an additional 12 months of ethnographic fieldwork at secular anti-trafficking organizations in both cities. In China, between September 2012 and February 2013, I was a researcher at the United Nations Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking in Beijing. As a member of the UNIAP research staff, I had regular encounters with numerous anti-trafficking actors, including academics, activists, provincial and central government officials, international NGOs, and human trafficking survivors in China. During my research tenure, I assisted with three projects: a program that trained the New Migrant Worker Band (*xin gong ren yishu tuan*), a band affiliated with a well-known Chinese labor rights NGO, to compose and perform songs about human trafficking; a nation-wide shelter improvement project; and a regional study of reintegration for victims of trafficking.

My dissertation fieldwork on the transnational human trafficking movement across sites in Beijing and Bangkok offers me an implicitly comparative theoretical agenda that seeks to understand the links and disconnections between the Chinese anti-trafficking movement and its counterparts at the regional and transnational levels. This regional purview of the movement, which includes six months of additional ethnographic participant observation on the anti-trafficking movement in Thailand, has granted me formal access to attend both the 2012 and 2013

Senior Official Meetings on Human Trafficking (in Hanoi, Vietnam and Bangkok, Thailand respectively). These regional meetings offered the opportunity to observe the Chinese and Thailand anti-trafficking ministerial delegations, in their interactions with other countries in the region.

For the purposes of consistent research design, I had intended to complete a parallel six months as a researcher at the UNIAP Office in Bangkok, however, due to significant structural changes within UNIAP during that time, my research on the secular anti-trafficking response became more dynamic and multi-sited. Having operated as an independent and temporary project for 5 years, UNIAP underwent a large-scale program evaluation in 2013, which determined that the organization needed to be folded under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Its name changed to UNACT, and the evaluation demanded an overhaul of its entire management team.

I arrived in Bangkok in 2013 during the UNIAP transition and was graciously granted office space at the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), where I shared space with an intelligent, thought-provoking group of international feminist activists working with anti-trafficking, migrant labor, and women's rights organizations in the region and throughout the world. As a hub for trafficking, migration, and labor rights mobilization for the Southeast Asian Region, Bangkok was an ideal geographic location to facilitate frequent meetings with staff from international organizations like the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers and Save the Children, and various UN agencies that worked on the issue of human trafficking.

Interested in the growing critical response to trafficking from Thai sex workers rights organizations, I also spent three non-consecutive months as a volunteer at one of GAATW member organizations—the *Empower Foundation* in Chiang Mai, a local Thai NGO that is the

oldest and largest sex worker rights organization in Thailand. At Empower, I participated in outreach activities, taught English, and sometimes Chinese, and facilitated different workshops on different craft-related activities. Additionally, in August 2012, I attended, with Elizabeth Bernstein, a “Human Trafficking Reality Tour” to Bangkok and Chiang Mai, co-organized by an American tour company and an anti-trafficking organization.¹¹ These disparate sites comprise my “secular” case in Thailand and granted me purview into state, market, and social movement relationships in each, broadening the political economic contexts of the initial fieldwork on evangelical projects. In the following section, I provide a brief overview of how certain political economic characteristics shape the anti-trafficking movement in China and Thailand, and offer an overview of a transnational history of the movement.

Political Economies of Human Trafficking Rescue in China and Thailand

China

The growing prevalence of cross-border and internal migration in China is increasingly filtered through the transnational framework of combating human trafficking, outlined in the 2000 Palermo Protocol. Contrary to theoretical expectations of authoritarian regimes, and anomalous from its record for other human rights issues, China ratified this Protocol in 2009; it had signed its first 5-year National Plan of Action to combat human trafficking in 2008. Despite its public acquiescence to international treaties and party to regional cooperation initiatives like the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) process, China has yet to adopt the international definition of human trafficking, acknowledging only the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of *forced prostitution, forced marriage and child*

¹¹ A separate co-authored paper was published based on this research (Bernstein and Shih 2014).

kidnapping. The trafficking of men and trafficking for the purposes of labor exploitation are notably missing from the Chinese definition of trafficking (China NPA 2008).

The People's Republic of China (PRC), founded in 1949, is a one-party state ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by President Xi Jinping. China's transition away from socialist rule began in 1978, when Deng Xiao Ping led the nation through a decade of economic reforms. This period of economic reform, moved China from a predominantly agricultural economy towards one that encouraged growth in domestic manufacturing production, and opened China's economy to global markets, foreign direct investment, and export opportunities (Whyte 1985; Huang 2008). The effects of economic reform play out into the contemporary period, where the reliance on migrant labor for industrialization, coupled with widening rural-urban income disparities has caused one of the largest waves of migration in world history (Gaetano and Jacka 2013).

The contemporary rural and urban divide is attributed to two state policies. In 1950, in order to properly distribute land following land reforms between 1949-1953, the CCP instituted two forms of categorization either as: permanent urban residents or permanent rural residents. The *hukou* system of family registration institutionalized these categories by assigning persons either agricultural or non-agricultural residency status. This dramatically impacted citizen's land rights, for example, only those with non-agricultural household status can obtain housing or residence in towns and cities. Currently rural migrants to Beijing have limited rights to social resources like education, and do not have the ability to purchase property (Walder 2002). The women workers in this study are part of this migrant workforce to Beijing, and experience the aforementioned challenges in addition to difficulties identifying decent employment opportunities.

The Chinese Communist party's resistance towards adopting the transnational definition

of human trafficking is characteristic of China's resistance to global human rights norms. The Chinese government's authoritarianism, for instance, is characterized by a state-controlled civil society, which is notoriously intolerant of dissent and mobilization (Friedman 2009; Lee and Shen 2009). In particular, China's particular form of state-led capitalism, which Yasheng Huang (2008) has termed "capitalism with Chinese characteristics," is protective of capital interests in labor, and thus excluding labor exploitation from the national definition of human trafficking is part of a longer tradition to stymie labor unrest of any kind. The narrow definition of human trafficking built into the 2008 Chinese National Plan of Action—and the way in which it is subsequently implemented in practice—illustrates how the Chinese state wields power over this transnational movement.

China has established its hub of counter trafficking work through the Ministry of Public Security's Inter-Ministerial Office Against Trafficking (IMOAT), which, according to the mandates of the 'public security' department, focuses primarily on prosecuting and policing trafficking, rather than on victim protection or prevention. China's secular anti-trafficking response is characterized by "strategic partnerships" between state entities, global governance, and local and international NGOs, which create a mechanism for state control over the movement. China's state interest in advancing its economy distances the problem of human trafficking from labor markets, branding it as a criminal issue that can be addressed through different state-led anti-trafficking projects including shelter improvement projects, awareness raising campaigns, and baseline research initiatives. In light of China's efforts to appear amenable to partnerships, the global community has enthusiastically engaged the Chinese government's commitment to anti-trafficking efforts on state-mandated terms as is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Recent research on social unrest in China provides further context for the possibilities

for social movement mobilization within contemporary Chinese authoritarianism. Guobin Yang has explored the how the Internet has revolutionized communication, allowing Chinese citizens to build movements, influence public opinion, and protest for change in a variety of social arenas (Yang 2005). While Hildebrandt (2013) and Wang (2006) discuss the unique social movement strategies that LGBT rights and environmental justice advocates have used to leverage change from the Chinese state. Responses to human trafficking have emerged within this growing landscape of social unrest, and labor rights and migrant rights are a core concern of the anti-trafficking movement. However, the anti-trafficking movement is unique primarily because it is mobilized “from above,” through transnational norms and pressures as opposed to citizen or civil society protest.

The Chinese government’s participation in a transnational movement governed through United Nations norms is unique under a regime that has typically resisted pressure to abide by universal human rights norms. Though a large body of evidence depicts Chinese authoritarianism as particularly oppressive, nuanced research has also sought to understand the more insidious and invisible tactics of state control. Illustrated by trends in rural peasant land expropriation (Chuang 2014), and the government’s co-option of the process of grievance petitioning (Minzner 2013), Lee and Zhang (2013) theorize that contemporary Chinese state power is maintained through the rote process of “bureaucratic absorption,” in which state entities formalize power through putative collaborations with aggrieved populations. Together, these distinct accounts of emergent social protest and state absorption of protests in China provide a rich body of literature in which to understand social movements under authoritarianism. Building off these two bodies of research, my dissertation shows how the state absorbs transnational mobilization rather than represses it.

Thailand

While secular anti-trafficking efforts in China are marked by state controlled “partnerships,” the Thai anti-trafficking efforts exhibit diverse and fractured anti-trafficking functions. Housed within the Ministry of Human Development and Social Welfare, and coordinated amongst numerous other government entities, the Thai governmental response is significantly less centralized than in China. While UNIAP has a central coordinating function in China, the UNIAP-Bangkok office has a more diffuse role in managing governance between the Thai state, international and local NGOs. The multi-sectoral and inter-agency partnerships reflect civil society dynamics of Bangkok, where numerous global governance institutions have chosen to house their regional Asia Pacific management offices.¹² These foundations, ranging from the International Labor Organization, International Organization for Migration, Save the Children, Red Cross, and MTV Foundation, are attracted to Bangkok for its relative political stability in the area, appealing cosmopolitan lifestyle, and because it is a transportation hub in the region. The prevalence of international aid agencies, which occupy some of the highest rent real estate in Bangkok, has generated a market for humanitarian infrastructure, making Thailand a ripe setting for the proliferation of the human trafficking rescue industry—an environment which does not similarly exist in China.

The prevalence of commercial sex tourism—which many faith-based and abolitionist groups argue is the primary source of demand for human trafficking¹³—illustrates the relationship between human security and economic development in Thailand. While the sale of sexual services is currently illegal in Thailand, the Thai government does little to curb the sex tourism

¹² The UNIAP Regional Management Office of UNIAP and the UNIAP Thai Country Office are both housed in the UN compound in Bangkok.

¹³ This is a moral and ideologically based argument that has been refuted by numerous studies on the ground (See, e.g., Agustín 2007; Empower Foundation 2011a, 2011b, 2012).

industry, aside from raids on sexual entertainment establishments for the purposes of nominally enforcing the law and meeting police quotas. In fact, the government has historically supported sex tourism due to its military and economic positioning in the area. US military presence during the Vietnam Wars, including the stationing of American troops in Thailand, and the flow of other foreign troops for “Rest and Recreation” (R & R) bred one of the earliest infrastructures for tourist exchange and commercial sex tourism in the world (Enloe 1989; Cohen 1996; Wilson 2004).

The Kingdom of Thailand is a constitutional monarchy, and has been a constitutional democracy since 1932. The King, Bhumibol Adulyadej, is the head of state, while the Prime Minister, Prayut Chan-o-cha, is the head of government. Thailand’s meaning translates to “land of the free,” and Thai people are proud of being one of the only Southeast Asian nations to have not been colonized. The lack of colonial history means that Thailand holds onto one of the strongest religious traditions in Southeast Asia. Thailand is officially Buddhist, and many national holidays rooted in Buddhist spiritual practices.

Bangkok is Thailand’s capital and the hub for economic activities, infrastructure and investment occur in Thailand; Bangkok contributes 50% to the nation’s GDP, despite housing only 10% of the population. The majority of Thai people living below the poverty line have traditionally been agricultural workers in Thailand’s rural areas. During the 1970’s, as Thailand transitioned from an agricultural to industrial economy, rural to urban labor migration experienced an upsurge. In 1997, following the Asian economic crisis, many migrant workers lost their jobs in cities and moved back to rural areas. However, once back in the rural area, they found that the shift away from an agrarian economy in the previous decades made agricultural work unsustainable. The large rural-urban income disparity continues to the present day, causing

a steady stream of migrant workers from all parts of Thailand who seek low wage employment in Bangkok (Baker and Phongpaichit 2014).

Following the formal exit of US military troops from Southeast Asia in the early 1970s, the commercial sex industry has remained central to the Thai tourist industry's expansion. Scholars of Thai political economy note that the Thai state explicitly pursues an export-driven economy—planned and funded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans—which privileges exports, tourism, and corporate expansion, primarily in Bangkok (Wilson 2004: 75; Truong 2000; Phongpaichit and Baker 2002; Skrobanek, Boonpakdi, and Janthakeero 1997). Bangkok's rapidly developing economy, alongside Thailand's relative political stability compared with the neighboring countries of Cambodia, Myanmar and Laos, has also initiated significant waves of undocumented migration from these regions (Feingold 2003; Huguet and Punpuing 2005). Thailand's recent political unrest and aggressive military crackdowns of civilian protest have not significantly altered Thai political economic stability, and its economy remains relatively unscathed by political unrest. Within Thailand, disparities in wealth between rural and urban regions have led to successive patterns of internal migration to Bangkok for a range of low wage service sector opportunities. Alongside other jobs such as waitressing, domestic work, and retail sales, commercial sex work is one of the most prominent forms of employment for female labor migrants within Thailand (Empower 2012; Wilson 2004; Jeffrey 2002; Molland 2012).

Because the Thai Trafficking in Persons Act (2008) recognizes forced labor (unlike China) as one dimension of human trafficking, the state must also balance capital interests in developing export industries with the transnational concern over labor trafficking. In recent years, human trafficking activism has called for increased attention to cases of labor trafficking involving undocumented Burmese and Cambodian fisherman in the deep-sea fishing industry.

However, the prevalence and visibility of the commercial sex industry in Thailand has made sex trafficking the focal priority of American rescue projects.

Transnational Spheres of the Human Trafficking Movement

In addition to the specific national characteristics of the movement in China and Thailand, a global context of the anti-trafficking movement is helpful to understand the sources of transnational power and influence. Transnational human rights efforts organized through the United Nations often reflect significant US ideological influence and are supported by US funding and resources (Chuang 2006a, 2010; Gallagher 2006). The relationship between the US and UN is convincingly evidenced through shared language and linked enforcement mechanisms between the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act and UN Palermo Protocol. Notably, countries that are low-ranked in the US Trafficking in Person's Report (TIP Report) are subject to sanctions by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). The varying mechanisms of economic and political power that connect the US with the UN question whether "transnational global governance goals" are merely an extension of US political interests. As many scholars have critiqued and observed, the UN largely serves as a proxy for Global North interests, and manifestations of American power and interest throughout the world (Chuang 2006a; Goodman 2005; Harvey 2003).

Several international engagements with human trafficking have pre-dated the UN and US laws in 2000. During international women's conferences in the 1980's, feminists convened to discuss trafficking under the broader rubric of violence against women. The *Coalition Against Trafficking in Women* (CATW) was founded in 1989, following the "Trafficking in Women" conference in Manila. CATW boasted its status as the first international anti-trafficking NGO and gained consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in

1989. CATW's founders included several American feminist groups such as: Women Against Pornography and Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt (WHISPER). Many CATW opponents charge that these leaders brought their existing anti-prostitution agenda to the anti-trafficking movement (CATW 2008).

Disagreeing with what they felt was the prioritization of the *sex* trafficking agenda, a separate group of feminists founded the *Global Alliance Against the Traffic in Women* (GAATW) in 1994. GAATW claims to take a distinctly "human rights approach," which they distinguish for its acknowledgement of and attention to sex worker and migrant worker rights (GAATW 2008). GAATW founders were keen to point out differences in power between CATW activists and their subjects, claiming that their position as First World feminists caused them to devalue lived experiences of Third World women: "[we] acknowledged that the vision of global sisterhood is fraught with numerous tensions – including those of class, race, sexuality and nationality - and began to understand that they need to listen before speaking on behalf of other women" (GAATW 2014).

While human trafficking had developed an agenda amongst feminists and activists working at international conferences under the rubric of "Violence Against Women," the anti-trafficking agenda did not fully reach the American mainstream until the US vested political interest and funding into anti-trafficking work. In early 2000, senators Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Paul Wellstone (D-MN) formed an unlikely cross-party coalition to rally support for the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA). This landmark body of legislation brought human trafficking into the mainstream US political agenda, and has since been used as a tool to spearhead US anti-trafficking campaigns throughout the world.

The TVPA symbolized a US commitment to abolish human trafficking globally, specifically by addressing situations of trafficking from foreign nations to the US. Passed by the 107th US Congress in 2000, the TVPA is the first comprehensive federal law that seeks to protect victims of trafficking and prosecute traffickers (TVPA 2000). The TVPA established the US's "comprehensive and integrated" anti-trafficking policy framework; a strategy that is similar to the international Palermo framework and is based on what the US coined the "three Ps" of anti-trafficking work: 1) prevention; 2) protection; 3) prosecution. The first P establishes the need to take proactive measures to prevent human trafficking overseas, the second P calls for protection of victims to help them rebuild their lives in the US with the assistance of federal and state support, and the last P calls for prosecution of traffickers accompanied by stiff federal penalties (TVPA 2000).

In 2003, the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVRPA) introduced the T-Visa, which offers three years temporary residency to "victims of severe forms of trafficking" (TVRPA 2003). The T-Visa was introduced after claims that successful trafficking prosecutions were impossible without physical victims to serve as material witnesses. Earlier reports had found that trafficked persons often did not seek help because they feared deportation by the US government; in the case of trafficking, these early deportations were regarded as instances of "double victimization"—victimization at the hands of their traffickers and the state (TVRPA 2003: 2). The T-Visa hopes to address both prosecutorial and protective prongs of the "three Ps" approach; they have been deliberately intertwined because "prosecutions are virtually impossible if trafficked women do not receive protection and support so that they can overcome their legitimate fears and be witnesses" (US Congressional Subhearing 3/2000).

The T-Visa application measures eligibility on four grounds, by requiring applicants to submit measures of proof that they are: 1) *victim(s) of a severe form of trafficking*; 2) *submitting a law enforcement agency (LEA) declaration*; 3) *physically present in the US on account of trafficking*; 4) *fear (they) suffer extreme hardship involving unusual and severe harm upon removal*. Since the inception of the visa policy in 2003, the US State Department has allocated 5,000 T-Visas per year to victims of trafficking, however, in the decade that the T-Visa has been available, less than a total 1,000 T-Visas have been issued (Haynes 2004).

Born from the conservative Bush-era political regime, Bernstein (2008) and Zimmerman (2013) have argued that the TVPA reflects conservative sexual politics that were uniformly folded into early US trafficking policy. The prioritization of an anti-sex trafficking agenda is partly governed by funding allocations to specific counter-trafficking programs; for example, the “anti-prostitution pledge” that prevents any organization that advocates for sex worker rights and safety (as opposed to the abolition and exit from sex work) from receiving US financial assistance (Masenior and Beyrer 2006; Kinney 2006).

The conservative posture towards sex work has generated a focus on sex trafficking as distinct from labor trafficking; for example, the majority of US human trafficking visas (T-Visas) have been made available to victims of *sex* trafficking, despite ongoing research that concludes that cases of actual labor trafficking far exceed those of sex trafficking (Agustín 2003). The focus on the morality of sex, and immorality of prostitution, forms the moral background behind the abolitionist stance against prostitution. The focus on sex trafficking: (1) obscures the larger problem of labor trafficking as indicated by statistics, and (2) fundamentally does not recognizes

commercial sex as a form of legitimate work.¹⁴ Following extensive critique from researchers, journalists and US government regulatory bodies like the Government Accountability Office (GAO), the language and practice of the TVPA have shifted to focus equally on labor, as well as sex trafficking (GAO 2006, 2007; Chacòn 2010; Parreñas 2012).

In addition to differences between labor and sex trafficking, human trafficking has faced contentious distinctions between smuggling, undocumented, and other forms of irregular migration. Through various policy instruments, human trafficking has been distinguished from smuggling, which involves the intent to cross borders illegally and the voluntary participation in illegal crossing once in the destination country. Following much debate about the close links between trafficking and smuggling, many anti-trafficking activists and policy makers argued that a victim could begin his or her journey with the intent to cross a border illegally, but the situation could become human trafficking if the migrant was subject to coercion, or debt bondage during the migration process. Typical forms of debt bondage include: forced labor for repayment of transportation fees, or threats to family members.

Since the TVPA's inception, the US has spent approximately 100 million dollars per year domestically and overseas to end "modern day slavery" (TVPA 2011).¹⁵ The immense popularity of anti-trafficking efforts may be attributed to Bernstein's (2007b) aforementioned analysis of the unique and strange bedfellow coalitions that have joined efforts to combat human trafficking. Narratives of "modern-day slavery" resonate with an American specific history of transatlantic slavery, though "modern-day abolitionist" efforts are often blissfully unaware of how anti-trafficking rescue projects reproduce race, class, and gender inequalities (Woods 2013).

¹⁴ Sex worker rights activists and advocates globally challenge the explicit shift in focus to labor trafficking because commercial sex is still not recognized as a form of legal work, with needs ranging from wage regulations, benefits and to occupational safety.

¹⁵ Funding for international anti-trafficking efforts have consistently been higher (75%) of all funding, relative to domestic efforts (25%). <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CRPT-112srpt96/pdf/CRPT-112srpt96.pdf>

China and Thailand have both been ranked by the Trafficking in Persons report since its inception. Since 2003, China has been ranked a Tier 2 country (several times on the notorious Tier 2 Watch List) for failing to provide evidence for increasing efforts to combat trafficking. The report has found that there is a “significant level of corruption and complicity in trafficking by some local government officials,” and that this has hindered efforts to punish trafficking crimes and protect victims (TIP Report 2008). From 2003 to 2009, Thailand was consistently rated a Tier 2 country for making sufficient efforts to comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. The Thai Parliament passed a domestic anti-trafficking law in 2008, and has made efforts to train law enforcement officials in implementing this law. However, in the most recent 2010-2013 TIP reports, Thailand’s ranking was lowered to the Tier 2 “Watch List” because “the government’s overall effort to address forced labor and forced prostitution of foreign migrants and Thai citizens did not make adequate progress” (TIP Report 2010). As in the case of China, the TIP Report finds that the Thai government is plagued by corruption and complicity, and noted that “while corruption is believed to be widespread within the Thai law enforcement community, the government did not report investigations into any trafficking-related cases” (TIP Report 2010). Most recently, the 2013 TIP report demoted China to a Tier 3 ranking, and the 2014 TIP report demoted Thailand to Tier 3, unprecedented and rare changes that I discuss in Chapters 3 and 4. Given these similar rankings in China and Thailand, the US context is an important site that allows me to view the efforts of these anti-trafficking movements abroad and domestically.

The Central Argument

In the dissertation’s two faith-based cases, American evangelical Christian missionary organizations recruit sex workers in Beijing and Bangkok to work as jewelry-makers and then sell

this jewelry on the strength of the thriving anti-trafficking movement in the US. Former sex workers “rescued” by the social entrepreneurship organizations featured at the *Freedom and Fashion* events described at the beginning of this introduction often do not consider themselves victims of trafficking who are, or ever were, in need of rescue. However, the American non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that employ them have applied the “trafficking” label to these women workers because they consider all sex work to be inherently exploitative, and thus indistinguishable from human trafficking. This fundamental disconnection between *employees* and *employers* regarding what exactly constitutes human trafficking reflects on a small scale the larger schisms within the global movement to combat human trafficking. State legislators, global governance institutions, activists, NGOs throughout the world have so far failed to reach a consensus on formal legal definitions of human trafficking or policies to mitigate it. Situated where ideology, spirituality, theology, personal rights, and funding intersect, the transnational movement to combat human trafficking is fraught with debates surrounding how the status of irregular migrants, women, children, and sex workers within the overarching mission of the movement.

Arguing that jewelry represents a proxy commodity for freedom from enslavement and a virtuous wage, these faith-based rehabilitation programs create a *transnational moral economy of low wage women’s work*, where traditional exchanges of wages for labor are replaced with affective commitments between First World rescuers and their purported victims in the Global South. Within such rescue programs, manual labor is embedded with the tactics of moral reform, collapsing transnational moral panics about sexuality and gender-based rights. The labor processes of reform work are often contested by workers within these programs, who object to the individual moral reform requirements of such organizations, but are largely invisible in sites of

movement organization in Los Angeles, where a new cohort of “consumer activists” optimistically champion the goals of transnational mobilization through the market, as a means of creating political identities through consumption. Following the central argument of the dissertation, the labor processes of vocational training are unique in Beijing and Bangkok due to disparate political economic circumstances in each country: vocational training in China embodies the character of the authoritarian state, while the working conditions in Thailand resemble those of free market firms.

As an empirical counterpart to these faith-based cases, this project also explores two disparate secular anti-trafficking interventions in China and Thailand: the Beijing office of the *UN Inter-Agency Project to Combat Trafficking (UNIAP)* and in Bangkok *the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW)*. These global governance institutions operate in between the state, global, and local civil society to promote anti-trafficking projects in each country. Similar to the faith-based cases, the ethnography in both places provides insight into the institutional situation of states, NGOs, and transnational actors across the global movement to combat trafficking. Secular and faith-based transnational movement responses in China and Thailand graft existing state institutions of labor, migration, and gender rights onto the framework of human trafficking, discursively shaping transnational norms within the interests of each nation state.

Within the Chinese secular case, state control again emerges as the primary mechanism of anti-trafficking intervention through the creation of a government ministry to address human trafficking. The Inter Ministerial Office Against Trafficking—founded in 2008 and run out of the Ministry of Public Security—has secured the Chinese government institutional space and legal authority for the policing and deportation of undocumented migrants and sex workers. Global

governance institutions like the United Nations must work through selective partnerships with Chinese government organs—through the IMOAT—which causes the movement to strengthen state control over labor, gender, and migrant rights.

In Thailand's democratic and free market monarchy, international pressures to forge an aggressive anti-trafficking response have resulted in a multi-tiered rescue industry involving the private sector, NGOs, transnational advocacy networks, and new government anti-trafficking entities. This uniquely 'crowded' civil society similarly subjects low wage women workers to new and unregulated forms of scrutiny, surveillance and forced detention. In Thailand, the global market has fostered a vibrant humanitarian anti-trafficking rescue industry, which is seldom attuned to the voices of victims. Chapter Four pays particular attention to Thai sex workers rights organizations, which have taken a bold stance against the anti-trafficking movement in recent years, demonstrating how state and civil society anti-trafficking measures have led to the unwarranted and unwanted detention of many migrant sex workers. Despite sex workers' advocacy efforts for increased sex worker protection as opposed to punishment—"rights not rescue" is the common rallying cry—the global market and movement to combat trafficking in Thailand continues to grow alongside the Thai government's vested economic interest in commercial sex tourism.

Finally, transnational engagement in Thailand, but not in China, actually strengthens the anti-trafficking movement in the United States—a process once again facilitated through the market. For example, while US consumption through jewelry purchase occurs for both the Thai and Chinese jewelry social enterprises, American anti-trafficking organizations operating in Thailand also offer human trafficking reality tours to Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and vigilante rescue opportunities in Los Angeles, activities that equate consumer consciousness with activist

commitment. New consumer activists who participate in human trafficking's markets for rescue partake in new modes of engagement, craft novel understandings of expertise, and institutionalize extra-legal modes of surveillance and anti-trafficking work in the domestic US context.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2, “Moral Economies of Low Wage Women’s Work in the Transnational Anti-Trafficking Movement” examines two American evangelical Christian anti-trafficking organizations that run vocational training programs for former sex workers in Beijing (China Star) and Bangkok (Thai Light). This chapter argues that by transforming sex work into manual labor for jewelry production, such organizations create a *transnational moral economy of women’s work* that trades one form of intimate labor for another form of menial labor that is heavily regulated and limited by anti-trafficking activists. Transnational Christian anti-trafficking organizations have turned to the market to raise funding and awareness about human trafficking, however the different state and society relationships in China and Thailand shape the experiences of “rehabilitated victims of trafficking.”

China’s authoritarian governance over foreign and local NGOs causes China Star, operating in Beijing, to impose an authoritarian workplace structure onto its workers. Born alongside other low wage jobs in China’s post-socialist economy, workers understand mandatory shelter and other benefits as an extension of the *danwei* (socialist work unit) system. Only after living and working in these vocational training centers do former sex workers understand these forms of social control to be an extension of the transnational human trafficking rehabilitation regime they are working for. By contrast, Thailand’s free market democratic monarchy allows Thai Light, operating in Bangkok, to embody the characteristics of free market enterprises. Thai

workers are allowed to live off site and many hold part-time jobs; they also experience wage and hour infractions for violating social and sexual behavioral contracts as they would working in non-social enterprises.

While Chapter 2 examines two private, faith-based transnational anti-sex-trafficking organizations operating within China and Thailand, Chapters 3 and 4 focus on secular responses (state and market-based, respectively) to the more generalized problem of labor trafficking -- which includes sex trafficking—in each country. **Chapter 3**, “Transnational Solidarity Meets Authoritarianism Under China’s Response to Labor Trafficking” is devoted to secular and state responses to labor trafficking in China. Based on six months of ethnographic participant observation as a research assistant at the United Nations Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking in Beijing, this chapter analyzes the mobilization of transnational human trafficking norms through a “Migrant Worker’s Band Project” that is co-funded by the Chinese government, United Nations, International Labor Organization, and several international NGOs. Selected and trained to compose and perform songs about human trafficking, this transnational collaboration reveals unresolved contradictions between United Nations definitions and norms regarding labor trafficking, and Chinese migrant worker NGO realities. The discord in definitions of labor trafficking are amplified under the authoritarian Chinese state, which has largely managed to shape transnational norms within the interests of the nation state, implementing anti-trafficking initiatives that punish undocumented migrants, marriage migrants, and sex workers.

While Chapter 3 reveals how transnational anti-trafficking efforts and the state work together to exclude labor organizing from the movement, **Chapter 4**, “Global Circuits of Morality and Commerce Across Human Trafficking Rescue in Thailand” uncovers practices of “market-based humanitarianism” in Thailand, as demonstrated through the lenses of anti-sex trafficking

versus anti-labor trafficking interventions. Both are discussed as instances of human trafficking, unlike in China, which does not recognize labor trafficking. Since the end of the Indochina wars, Bangkok has marketed itself as a cosmopolitan environment hospitable to capital in all forms from foreign investment, to humanitarian aid, to mass tourism and as anthropologist Ara Wilson (2005) has demonstrated, the “market” has penetrated most aspects of Thai life. As argued by Bernstein and Shih (2014), the combined market forces of sexual commerce, tourism, and the human trafficking rescue industry have made Thailand a ripe site for market-based interventions against human trafficking. To illustrate the tensions between state interests in capital and the transnational human trafficking movement, this chapter examines how circulations of sex, commerce, and tourism are powerful forces within the new American consumer interest in combatting human trafficking. American consumer interests, which include anti-human trafficking organizations, help feed a Thai economy that is also supported by the sex industry, which abolitionist anti-trafficking organizations uniformly define as sex-trafficking.

Finally, **Chapter 5**, “Consuming the Carceral in American Human Trafficking Rescue” returns to the United States in order to situate new forms of human trafficking rescue within the US politics surrounding gender, sexuality, and immigration. Since 2003, the United States Department of Health and Human Security’s Campaign to “Rescue and Restore” victims of human trafficking has disseminated posters urging civilians to “Look Beneath the Surface” to identify victims of trafficking. Based on two years of ethnographic fieldwork with two Southern California rescue efforts, this chapter analyzes how a mostly donations-based version of activism has begun to translate into individualized “vigilante rescue” outreach efforts, where citizen volunteers take to the streets to look for potential “victims” of human trafficking in local neighborhoods. Civilian vigilantism, carried out in the name of humanitarianism, morality and

rescue, easily masks the state's carceral motives for controlling immigrant workers, and such outreach projects participate—unwittingly or otherwise—in surveilling working class immigrants in Los Angeles.

Like the transnational faith-based organizations in Beijing and Bangkok, and the secular interventions in trafficking movements in China and Thailand, US civilian anti-trafficking initiatives serve to police and oppress already-marginalized individuals in the name of a larger social justice anti-trafficking movement. While China and Thailand are parallel sites of engagement throughout this dissertation, the US functions as just one site in a transnational social movement circuit, which at once breeds consumer activism and civilian justice agendas. Linked to Chapter 4, these circuits are particularly strong across different forms of rescue and reality tourism in Thailand, but relatively absent in China due to restrictions that I argue may be attributed to how Chinese authoritarianism forecloses transnational social movement connections.

Conclusion

This four case comparative framework reveals a critical finding: despite global justice goals, both faith-based and secular factions of the human trafficking movement reproduce through different mechanisms women's subordination at the discursive and labor process levels. These findings provide an important addition to the literature on transnational social movements, as they illuminate how certain models of transnational justice and Western liberal feminism operate in the service of the state or the mark, thus reinstalling the very practices of power they seek to deconstruct.

At the intersection of labor, gender, and migrant rights, this global ethnography of the human trafficking movement integrates theoretical frameworks concerning transnational

feminism, gender and sexuality, critical social movement studies, and labor analysis into human trafficking research in three countries. The comparative dimensions of this dissertation offer unique insights into how the transnational human trafficking movement and labor transnationalism are articulated and mobilized under democratic and authoritarian political economic regimes. Ultimately, in the chapters that follow I uncover the new ways in which transnational movements in different contexts have refashioned social and political engagement, blurring the lines between the public and private, states and social movements, secular and religious, democratic and authoritarian.

Chapter 2: Moral Economies of Low-Wage Women's Work in the Transnational Anti-Human Trafficking Movement

Each Tuesday and Friday night in Bangkok's Cowboy red light district, a group of American missionaries embark on human trafficking outreach ministry and ask the Holy Spirit's guidance in identifying "broken women" who might need their assistance. This group of female activists is comprised of tourists, expatriates, and full-time missionaries from the Global North. They patronize go-go bars, where Thai women, adorned in everything from bondage gear to frilly lingerie and who are identified primarily by numbers taped to different parts of their body, dance on a maze of platforms. Outreach participants purchase one non-alcoholic drink for the dancer in order to "buy her time," and then they engage her in casual conversations about her work, personal life, and migration history. Over the course of the conversation, they inform the dancer about an alternative employment opportunity making jewelry. If a dancer is interested in leaving her job at the bar, she can submit an application to work at the *Thai Red Light Ministry* (TRLM)¹⁶, a socially entrepreneurial business that sells and markets jewelry made by "survivors of human trafficking" through church networks and jewelry parties in the US.¹⁷ Once her application for employment is accepted, the new employee is ceremoniously handed a uniform, which she will be required to wear to work each day of the week: a black polo shirt with the Thai Red Light Project emblem embroidered on the chest, and the Thai word for "freedom" stitched across the right arm.

In Beijing, Chinese and expatriate missionaries visit massage parlors and hair salons in two commercial sex districts and befriend Chinese massage parlor and salon workers through

¹⁶ The names of organizations have been changed at the request of organizers to protect the anonymity of their operations.

¹⁷ While "human trafficking" is a claim used by activists to market this jewelry, this chapter illustrates how this term is contested in practice. These activists enact "abolitionist-oriented" politics [see Bernstein 2007b], labeling all sex workers as "victims of trafficking," without any attention to the narratives that these sex workers have personally constructed or accepted for themselves.

promises of English lessons, health education, and friendship. Through the same methods used in Thailand, commercial sex workers are recruited to become jewelry makers at the *China Star Project* (CSP), where they will be offered a monthly salary in exchange for jewelry production, as well as mandatory shelter housing and spiritual rehabilitation.

Jewelry from both social enterprises is sold 7,000 miles away through the bustling anti-human trafficking movement in the United States. The *China Star Project* and *Thai Red Light Ministry* are just two of a growing number of anti-trafficking projects that have turned to the market in order to raise funds and awareness around the issue of human trafficking. Jewelry is just one of the numerous commodities sold as part of the anti-human trafficking movement, as a growing subsection of this movement focuses on leveraging the marketplace to raise funds and awareness about the issue of human trafficking.

This turn to the market is not a path exclusive to faith-based organizations. In the Asia Pacific region alone, MTV corporate has launched a social responsibility project to “End Exploitation and Trafficking” (MTV EXIT), which hosts large anti-trafficking rock concerts in popular shopping malls to raise awareness about the issue. Google has recently partnered with an international NGO to launch a regional anti-trafficking hotline, and finally, the US government and USAID collectively spend about 10 million dollars per year on anti-trafficking efforts in the Asia Pacific region. As argued by Bernstein (2013, 2014, 2015), competition for these funds has created a veritable market for humanitarian action, ranging from micro level social entrepreneurship to corporate social responsibility projects to social justice tourism.¹⁸

This chapter examines two American evangelical Christian human trafficking rescue projects in Beijing, People’s Republic of China, and Bangkok, Thailand, in addition to their sites

¹⁸ Elizabeth Bernstein collectively refers to these market-based efforts as a form of “global corporate governance” stemming from a regime of “redemptive capitalism” that resutures public and private realms of anti-trafficking intervention (2015).

of consumer activism in Los Angeles, California. These organizations claim to rescue victims of trafficking, who themselves identify as sex workers, by offering them alternative employment as jewelry makers. This jewelry is sold to consumers and movement activists in the United States, generating transnational circuits of commerce, affect, and morality around the promises of freedom from enslavement and virtuous wages for “victims of human trafficking.” As central questions, this chapter asks why and how two transnational social movement organizations thriving under drastically different state structures in China and Thailand have turned to the market. More substantively, it inquires into how local political economies and state and civil society relationships in Thailand and China shape whether these transnational interventions, when they turn to the market, are successful according to their organizations’ goals, or according to the individuals and communities they wish to assist.

This chapter argues that evangelical Christian anti-trafficking vocational training centers in both sites mobilize resources through the church and market by constructing a *transnational moral economy*¹⁹ of low-wage women’s work in which activists sell jewelry as a proxy commodity for fair trade, dignified labor, and ethical consumption. These anti-trafficking programs ostensibly revise but in actuality reproduce the nature of low-wage women’s work in the market processes of production and consumption, obfuscating the exchanges of sex, labor, and capital. Shaped by the local political economic contexts in which they operate, these global human trafficking interventions absorb the characteristics of Chinese authoritarian state oppression, and the Thai free market reproducing women’s subordination at the discursive and labor-process levels.

¹⁹ E.P. Thompson (1971) and James Scott (1977) have used the “moral economy” concept to describe the norms and ethics that characterize social and economic exchange amongst peasant and working class individuals in agrarian societies. More recently, Gilroy’s (2010) revitalization of the concept in relation to DuBois’ seminal works, has integrated an analysis of race and globalization to the moral economy framework. I build off these prior theorizations to extend the “moral economy” lens to understand the circuits of affect and sentiment that circulate amongst transnational movements activists as they construct both labor and consumption as righteous, dignified, and just.

While organizations in both sites mobilize resources through the transnational moral economy of low wage women's work, the labor processes of vocational training are unique in Beijing and Bangkok. Following the central argument of the dissertation, vocational training in China embodies the character of the authoritarian state, while the working conditions in Thailand resemble those of free market firms. The Chinese organization, the *China Star Project*, imposes an authoritarian workplace onto its workers because of fear of government censorship, and employs labor control strategies that resemble the collective working arrangements of the post-socialist *danwei*, or work unit. By contrast, workers at the *Thai Red Light Ministry* see jewelry making as equivalent to many other low wage jobs and experience greater independence in terms of housing, and access to other part-time jobs. In Bangkok, labor control strategies like per minute wage deductions for tardiness to Christian worship represent new ways in which such organizations blend tactics of labor management with moral reform.

Mobilizing the Transnational Moral Market of Rescue

A 2010 *Annual Review of Sociology* article discussed the contentious social potential of markets due to their ties to political stability and their impact on consumer-led commodity chains (King and Pearce 2010: 249). Movements that turn to the market often “bypass the state” and have emerged as a venue for many aggrieved populations ranging from farm workers (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; Ganz 2000), to environmental justice advocates (Walker, Martin and McCarthy 2008), to the gay and lesbian rights movement (Chasin 2001) who turn to the market as a result of decreased state accountability, the emergent dominance of global capital over state power, and the hope of creating alternative political identities through consumption. The turn to the market, however, raises another set of concerns, as market dynamics have the power to co-opt counter-

hegemonic interests, as Chasin (2001) explains with respect to the gay and lesbian movement. For instance, by branding a rights-based identity movement around gays and lesbians as *consumers*, the market re-inscribed hierarchies based on class and race, catering to the market demands of predominantly white upper-middle-class gay men.

Studies of transnational social movements can be enhanced by theories of economic sociology, which discuss how morals are embedded in consumer markets, creating what Viviana Zelizer has termed “moral markets” (1994). The fair trade food movement, in particular, exhibits parallels to the commodities-driven anti-trafficking movement. Proposed as an alternative development model, fair trade practices are both heralded and critiqued because of their pursuit of being both “in and against the market” (Goodman 2004: 892). Goodman’s analysis of the fair trade movement has identified the process of commoditisation as the key factor to a movement’s success in bridging consumers in the Global North with producers in the Global South. However, Goodman identifies a mutually constitutive relationship between the market and the movement: “Fair trade’s moral economy rides the tension between the ethical relationships it fosters and the need for the wily characteristics of enterprise in the construction of transnational trade networks” (Goodman 2004: 891).

Other authors suggest that the movement and the market may be more mutually exclusive. In particular, Jaffee’s (2007) ethnography of the fair trade coffee movement suggests that the market and the movement may be distinct from one another. Jaffee’s analysis places the fair trade coffee movement on a continuum of “marketness” and embeddedness, suggesting that “fair trade, through its attempt to place a value on the social conditions of production, offers us at least the possibility for re-embedding production into those social and ecological systems” (Jaffee 2007: 26). One of the primary ways that the fair trade movement has succeeded in embedding morality

into the market process of consumption is through the standardisation of fair trade norms and the adaptation of the universal fair trade seal.

While the universal fair trade seal communicates a commitment to fair wages and regulated working conditions, there are also markets for other transnational moral goods, which are not as easily embedded with moral meaning. The case of ethnic handicraft goods, for example, contains no universalising seal, and Wherry's (2008) comparison of handicraft markets in Costa Rica and Thailand reveals the subjective processes of framing that generate an "aura of authenticity" around the artisan and their handicraft product. Wherry's ethnography finds that subjective interpretations of authenticity are shaped by the deliberate motivations of the tourist sector. The choice to create a government-sponsored handicraft market, tour bus routes, and the descriptions that tour guides offer all determine what goods a consumer will buy. Wherry argues that this creates a moral niche market in which "the artisan's identity and that of his or her place of work become part of the object's brand" (Wherry 2008: 140). The case of jewelry made by trafficked women is similar to both cases of fair trade coffee and ethnic handicrafts goods because it exists in between the poles of a fully unregulated and fully embedded market.

Theorizing Human Trafficking as a Case of Transnational Social Movements

The global commodity chain of goods made by trafficked persons is part a transnational social movement, whose actors have drastically divergent understandings of what constitutes women's work and labor exploitation. Important empirical research into reintegration programs for victims of trafficking have illustrated specific issues of concern—in particular, a critical consideration of shelter housing as residential assistance (Surtees 2008), and a multi-country study on experiences and challenges in the reintegration of trafficked persons in the greater

Mekong sub-region (Surtees 2013). This critical body of scholarship problematizes why some victims decline assistance (Brunovskis and Surtees 2007) and systems of after-trafficking “assistance” that deny victims the right to refuse such services (Empower 2012).

Scholarship on human trafficking rescue and reintegration has yet to theorize how moral concerns and moral panics govern daily life after rescue, through the interests of vocational training, rehabilitation, and reintegration into after-trafficking life. Akin to both historical and contemporary forms of rehabilitation through labor, ranging from state-sanctioned re-education through labor programs under communism (Hung 2002; Tucker, Ren and Sapio 2010), to forced labor within the American prison industrial complex (Davis 2001, 2011; Weiss 2001), and ‘alternative’ prison programs for female offenders (Haney 2010), this contemporary *rehabilitation regime* is significant not only for its connections to disciplinary labor, but because it generates a justice-oriented, and much celebrated, global commodity chain around the products of rehabilitative and “rehabilitated”—though ultimately still low wage women’s work.

The Transnational Anti-Trafficking Movement and the State: China and Thailand

Highlighting social movements’ turn to the market, this chapter explores how new targets of social justice movements challenge traditional modes of social engagement that primarily target the state. The endurance and success of such market-based actions reveal the increased potency and possibilities of market-based interventions under global neoliberal capitalism. While the state is not the target of social action, differences in state power and interest in China and Thailand shape how workers, activists, and consumers understand the moral economy of low wage women’s work, as well as how global movements are reciprocally shaped by local politics around gender, sexuality, migration, and rights.

The differing political-economic relations in China and Thailand shed light on how market-based social movement organizations mobilize resources within different political environments. Unique state-society and state-market relationships in these two political economic contexts shape in-country understandings of and transnational mobilizations around human trafficking. Thailand's favorable environment to foreign economic and political capital—through tourism, foreign direct investment and humanitarian aid, and international foundations and NGOs—presents a political economic landscape that is hospitable to transnational social movements. By contrast, the Chinese authoritarian government's tight control over local and global civil society and the free market create a more challenging environment for transnational social movement responses. Social movements scholarship can benefit from increased attention to how counter-hegemonic forces either subvert or reproduce state power under different political regimes.

The Thai Red Light Ministry and China Star Project – Managing Dual Identities

TL Ministry and CS Project were both independently founded in 2005 by American Christian missionaries, and at the time when I began this research in 2007, neither organization was aware of the other's existence, though similarities across organizational practices and motives are abundant. Both organizations conduct bi-weekly “outreach ministry” to red-light districts in Bangkok and Beijing to identify sex workers—whom they universally label as victims of human trafficking—who wish to leave the commercial sex industry, to become jewelry makers. Workers are paid wages that are marginally higher than minimum-wage service-sector jobs in both cities, and in both cases, workers are compensated not only for the jewelry they produce, but also for an hour of Christian worship daily, weekly bible study, and Christian life-counseling.

The fact that both organizations arrived at this mode of intervention despite previous ignorance of each other's existence can be understood within the rise of evangelical Christian social action *as* missionary work and the increasing commodification of humanitarian intervention (see Bernstein 2007b, 2010, 2015; Vrasti 2013). The founders of both organizations are connected to different non-denominational evangelical Christian churches in Los Angeles that are attended mainly by young people ages 15-40, and which have an explicitly "social justice" goal in their mission.²⁰ Similarly both organizations believe that it is the power of Christians around the world to step into social justice spaces, because the state cannot be relied upon to restore true justice. This argument is particularly resonant when working in the Global South, for instance in China, under an authoritarian government that stifles religious and other minority forms of expression, and in Thailand, where government and police corruption are widespread. In these situations, evangelical social justice advocates have found that the state and law enforcement have lost their legitimacy as actors that can uphold justice.²¹

Evangelical Christian leanings towards market-based responses as a way to achieve social justice goals point to two significant organizational dynamics: 1) as faith-based organizations they are ineligible for certain forms of public and foundation assistance (because proselytizing is an explicit organizational goal, which operates through and alongside the broader agenda to end human trafficking); and 2) the emergence of consumer-led social movements, such as the

²⁰ See for example, *Expression 58* "A Ministry of Revolution and Renaissance" <http://expression58.org/> and *Social Justice Ministries* in Los Angeles <http://www.mccla.org/serve-others/social-justice/>

²¹ This sentiment was shared with me by many different Christian activists working in China and Thailand, who pointed to numerous instances in which the state did not uphold its duties to protect citizens. It is a pervasive call to step into the space of government actions, best articulated on the website for World Vision, an international Christian organization that works in both China and Thailand (and whose work I discuss in Chapter 3); their mission statement reads: "We are members of an international World Vision Partnership that transcends legal, structural and cultural boundaries . . . We recognise that values cannot be legislated; they must be lived. No document can substitute for the attitudes, decisions and actions that make up the fabric of our life and work. Therefore, we covenant with each other, before God, to do our utmost individually and as corporate entities within the World Vision Partnership to uphold these Core Values, to honor them in our decisions, to express them in our relationships and to act consistently with them wherever World Vision is at work." <http://www.wvi.org/vision-and-values-0>

movements for fair trade products, has demonstrated a demand for such socially embedded commodities.

The unprecedented levels of US government funding for Christian anti-trafficking trafficking NGOs discussed in Chapter 1 (see, e.g., Bernstein 2007b, 2008a; Zimmerman 2013) have primarily been allocated to Christian organizations working in the United States. US State Department funding has rarely been awarded to American Christian organizations working abroad, preferring to award grants to local NGOs. Thai Light did submit a proposal to USAID in the early years of their operations, and the director expressed frustration that secular and government funding agencies required a 2-year turnaround for vocational training. Speaking with the former USAID program manager, he explained, “We expect vocational training programs to have a maximum 2-year term so that recipients do not become reliant on such programs;” by contrast, the director of Thai Light explained, “These grant requirements are unrealistic because they fail to realize that there is no form of vocational training that will give our women better jobs after they leave. These local economies are broken, and I wanted to create a viable alternative to the unsatisfactory low wage work in this area” (Fieldnotes 6/2009). Both China Star Ministry and Thai Red Light Project cover a majority of organizational costs through church donations and missionary support organizations, and they supplement their work through jewelry sales. Turning to the market for funding has provided liberating possibilities for running their programs without the administrative and regulatory oversight of secular development guidelines.²²

Since the time of their founding in 2005, such socially-conscious entrepreneurial

²² Uniquely, religious organizations have become so adept at seeking funds through the market that several secular anti-trafficking NGOs have now partnered with evangelical social enterprises for funding. For instance, in 2013, the *Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking*, partnered with a small Christian ethical business suits company named “Gallant Suits.” The suit company held a fundraiser in which they sold handmade men’s suits at a price tag of about \$1,000 a piece, a wardrobe that promised to “usher in a new era of masculinity” that was not predicated on “sexual exploitation.” Male models wearing the suits, posed alongside CAST’s Survivor Advocacy Caucus, as CAST director eagerly accepted donations from the proceeds of the event.

organizations have grown exponentially, perhaps best highlighted by the multinational organization *Not For Sale*, which boasts a “Freedom Store” that sells goods made by trafficked persons across the globe (Not For Sale 2012). As Bernstein’s (2007b, 2008b, 2015) work reveals, there is a growing trend towards making a purchase the way to intervene, yet an obvious irony behind recent approaches to trafficking that celebrate “purchase” as a way to stop trafficking. She further argues that there is no better visual illustration of this juxtaposition than the “Freedom Store” on the *Not For Sale* website. Consumers are told that they can stop trafficking by buying fair trade goods over a range of user-friendly internet sites: “Evangelical anti-trafficking efforts thus extend activist trends that are also increasingly prevalent elsewhere, advocating a form of political engagement that is consumer- and media-friendly, saturated in the tropes and imagery of the very sexual culture that it aims to oppose.” (Bernstein 2007b: 140) This often happens without adequate recognition to the ways in which these acts of consumption and purchase perpetuate a system of capitalist commodification and exploitation that override the trafficking problem—in this case turning victim identity into capital.

Navigating the dual identities of social enterprise, both organizations straddle the line between private enterprise and public service by registering as both non-profit organizations in the US and as private corporations in Thailand and China. While dual registration is an excellent illustration of the tenuous boundaries between profit and charity, this organizational arrangement points to different state-civil society relationships, and the political economies of aid in each place. For instance, the structurally onerous nature of foreign NGO registration requirements in China (Hildebrandt 2011) enable government control over social organizations, and prohibit

nearly all NGOs from formal registration.²³ Thailand does not have a formal legal NGO registration category and many foreign NGOs choose to register as a local foundation. This is significantly easier than in China, but does require several administrative hoops, and a “charitable donation” of 200,000 baht (\$6,000 USD) in a local Thai bank account (Pangsapa 2011; Chaitanat and Leeds 2013). Alongside the curious similarities that allow two organizations with similar ideological missions to emerge in two drastically different political environments, several crucial differences illustrate how market humanitarianism and moral economies are shaped by local political understandings of sex, work, gender, and religion.

The “Company”—Rehabilitation under the Free Market in Thailand

As sanitation workers sweep up beer bottles and trash and night vendors have just about finished taking down stalls in the Cowboy²⁴ commercial sex and tourist district, Thai workers at TL begin arriving at work, or what they refer to simply as “the Company.” Workers huddle around a time-punch clock, eager to clock in by 9 AM, and then hurry over to the nearby church to begin the workday with Christian worship. A single sheet of paper sits in the back of the worship hall where workers can sign in if they arrive late. Latecomers log their names and indicate the times they arrived at church; each worker is penalized 2 baht (10 cents USD) for each minute she is late.

After one hour of church worship led by the in-house pastor, who is a longtime American missionary and the spouse of the TL CEO and founder, the workers return to the production building to begin the day’s jewelry production. Eight to ten workers sit around long rectangular

²³ Instead, many choose to register as private enterprises or use existing organizations as fiscal conduits for their operations.

²⁴ This area gained this name due to the history of American military servicemen who frequented this area during R and R throughout the Indochina wars.

tables in the jewelry production room, the largest working room in the facility. Elsewhere, smaller groups of workers package and ship orders, as well as manage inventory and supplies. Lunch is served at noon, by rotating groups of workers who are responsible for preparing, cooking, serving meals, and cleaning dishes. At 1 PM, workers resume their respective tasks, and each afternoon at around 3 PM, workers pause for a rotating schedule of English lessons, games, and Christian life counseling. At the close of the day at 5 PM, TL workers clock out and disperse across the vast Bangkok metropolis. Some share rooms in high-rent apartments nearby, while others travel as far as two hours away to more affordable housing. Rather than returning home, other workers commute to part-time jobs in the service/tourist industries in order to earn additional money if their TRLP salaries do not sufficiently cover their living expenses.

During its first year in operation, TRLP recruited 40 women as workers, and this number quickly doubled by its third year of operation. As of April 2009, TL employed 80 women, ages 17-58, and by 2012 the company's staff had grown to over 100 workers. By June 2012, the staff said that the organization had reached maximum capacity and that there was a "waiting list" of people who had applied to work there. The majority (roughly 70%) of the women are from the *Isan* (Northeast) part of Thailand, the largest migrant sending region in Thailand. The majority of these workers had migrated to Bangkok through networks of friends and family, and they had found commercial sex work to be the most lucrative work opportunity amongst limited low-wage job opportunities.

TL employees are compensated with both salary and benefits. The first three months of employment mark a probationary period during which the employee makes a trial salary of 7,500 baht a month (230 USD). Upon completing this probationary period, her salary is raised to the standard 9,000 baht a month (280 USD), which is anywhere from one-fifth to one-third of the

salary she formerly earned while working as a sex worker. Workers also receive health insurance, vacation days, and holidays for Thai national holidays as well as Christian religious observance. Formal medical insurance, weekends off, and vacation days are welcome benefits that are not systematically provided through sex work establishments and in other intimate and informal labor arrangements. As a result of accepting this salary cut—which is considerable despite the benefits they receive— TL workers who have left sex work to become jewelry makers find that they must make significant sacrifices.

As a condition of employment, TL workers must sign a contract agreeing that they will no longer sell sex and will no longer patronize any of the bars where they used to work. The requirement that TL workers no longer see friends or visit environments in which sex is being sold—even if they are not selling it—is intended to prevent the women from, as one activist claimed, “recidiv[ism] into the sex industry.” Speaking of sex and sex work as addictions, activists mobilize the transnational moral panic against sex by pathologizing sex work as a disease that may be conquered through wage labor, good taste, and appropriate Western femininity.

The transnational racialization of Asian women’s errant sexuality has been charted by numerous ethnic studies scholars (see, e.g., Shimizu 2007; Le Espiritu 2001; Okazaki 2002);²⁵ however, these scholarly accounts have not documented Western activists’ strategies for taming such deviant sexuality. As a tool of both instruction and correction, jewelry is the perfect antidote for “lost women”—a broad label that includes sex workers, the homeless, drug and alcohol addicts, and the indigent—because as one activist noted, “the act of making beautiful jewelry restores femininity to where femininity has been lost” (Interview with TL Activist 8/2009). Such

²⁵ For a corollary discussion of Black and Latina women’s hypersexualization, see, e.g., Miller-Young 2014; Brooks 2010.

“rescue” organizations inextricably weave their rehabilitation narratives with that of monolithic sexual victimization, which never lets their employees define for themselves their former jobs as sex workers—whether it was voluntary or not.

All workers understand the contractual obligation against sex work as a condition of employment; however, rumors circulate about certain women continuing to see clients on the side because their TL wages are too low to cover basic living costs. The passage of a recent Thai minimum-wage law in 2012 to 300 baht per day (Thai Labor Law 2012) revealed that the TL salary of 9,000 baht per month is just barely above the national minimum wage, even though workers receive medical insurance and weekends off, unlike the majority of low wage migrant workers. To enforce the contract provision that prohibits sex work, TL has recently begun demanding the Facebook passwords of all of its workers in order to monitor their sexual activity online. Historically, the policing of deviance has been documented across a wide range of offenders—substance abusers, alcoholics, homosexuals, and transgendered individuals, to name only a few—but arguably what is different from the cases of earlier deviant-reformation is the human trafficking rescue industry’s veneer of humanitarianism, protectionism, and profit from the work of prior offenders. As a result, the activists’ claims of rescue and protection go largely uncontested by funders, donors, and consumers of jewelry.

Factory of God—Rehabilitation under Chinese Authoritarianism

Similar measures link wage labor and moral transformation through vocational training in Beijing, however they are justified and amplified through the authoritarian regimes tight control over civil society organizations—and in particular, international religious organizations working on the issue of sexual commerce, which is illegal in both China and Thailand. To keep a low

profile away from government censorship, China Star is remote, in a small Beijing suburb about an hour away from the city, where employers can maintain close control over their workers, both during and after the working day.

Outside the fifth ring road in Beijing, amidst dusty roads leading to the remote Beijing Capital International Airport, twelve to fourteen women assemble around a table in a room that has a smoky glass door that cannot be peered into nor looked out of. The sound of beads and metal shuffling around the table are punctuated with small conversation as workers make jewelry throughout the course of an eight-hour workday. To pass the time, workers used to play music on their cell phones, but after concern that too many workers were singing along to popular Chinese love songs with “unsavory” messages, the director banned any secular music from being played during the workday, claiming that it led to distraction and decreased productivity.

Workers at CS can produce upwards of 300 pairs of earrings per day, and a white board sits in the front of the room to remind workers of the speed at which they must work under a strict quota production system. Unlike at Thai Light, Chinese workers must produce jewelry with greater speed and in larger quantities because the majority of the company’s distribution occurs through wholesale outlets, a direct result of Chinese impositions on the “free market” for international companies and NGOs. Whereas sales in Bangkok are driven by a highly sophisticated inventory system that matches individual orders with individual production, Internet sales are difficult to coordinate under China’s Internet firewall, and numerous restrictions against international and religious organizations.

Separated into categories A, B and C, the workers quotas and speeds determine their wages. In the jewelry production room, a white board lists each worker’s name and the number of pieces she completes every hour. The business director says that this is a needed strategy because:

“many of these women haven’t worked in ‘traditional’ workplaces, they do not have good work ethic, and this board keeps them on track, at least in relation to their co-workers.”

While the white board draws attention to their speed of production, it also gives evokes competitive sentiments between the participants. Soon after praising merits of the white board, the business manager gripes, “morale has been very low amongst the women. They often ridicule their co-workers who don’t work as fast as they do...this makes certain employees feel bad, and we do not know how to increase morale.” When I suggested taking breaks throughout the day to engage in group icebreakers or movement exercises the business director responded: “This might be a good solution for evening activity; unfortunately, the girls cannot have that kind of distraction during the work day because when we did this in the past, we saw a large decrease in productivity” (Fieldnotes 8/2009).

While some workers are more dexterous with pliers and wires thus increasing their production speed, most of the women support each other around the table, because they know that there are no rewards to be gained by finishing first. One worker tells me: “If we finish all three hundred earrings before the day is over, we are not allowed to leave early, so there is no incentive to be fast. At the same time, if we don’t finish three hundred, then we have to stay late and are not paid overtime. Basically we don’t want to work too hard or too slow, we just want to barely do enough in the time allotted.” This creates a sense of excitement and frenzy during the last half hour of work, where workers assess how much quicker or slowly they must work in order to just met the quota—the most successful employee is described to me as the worker who produces the closest to three hundred without exceeding her quota, lest the group quota be increased in the future.

Unlike in Thailand, Christian missionary work is illegal in China, causing China Star activists to feel as though they must conceal the religious aspect of their work. The Chinese government opposes organized religious activity, and Christianity in China is subverted to private home churches. Expatriates living in Beijing can attend church services at Beijing International Christian Fellowship, which is where China Star founders met, however this official church requires a foreign passport to enter. While the number of Chinese Christians is unknown, largely because of the clandestine nature of their worship, the World Christian Database believes that 111 million Chinese are Christian, of whom 90% are Protestant (Wesley 2004).

In addition to being subversive about the faith-based aspect of their work, China Star also identifies government sensitivity to prostitution and sex work. While Bangkok has an established sex tourist sector, with several unofficially recognized “red light districts,”²⁶ female migrant workers in Beijing face a considerably smaller and dispersed commercial sex industry. While the majority of women who migrate to Bangkok take positions working in the red light district, Yang and Guo (1996) found that the majority (63%) of Chinese women migrants work in the food and beverage sectors. The Starfish workers fit this profile as all of them first took jobs as waitresses and other low wage service positions, before discovering that they could earn significantly more by working in a massage parlor or hair salons.

Starfish activists claim that because the commercial sex industry is dispersed in Beijing, the government can turn a blind eye to the problem. They charge the Chinese government with neglecting the prostitution issue out of a need to “save face.” They claim that this is evidenced by the government’s treatment of prostitutes during the Olympics. As was the case with other low wage migrant workers, prostitutes were “sent home,” in other words subject to high levels of

²⁶ For expansive scholarship on sex work in China, see the work of Zheng 2009a, 2009b; Jeffreys 2004.

surveillance so that they could not continue with normal business practices. The Olympic crackdown caused Starfish to limit their outreach, which usually happens twice a week, and change their formal mission statement from “rescuing victims of trafficking and sexual exploitation in China,” to “rescuing at-risk women in Asia” to anonymize their operations during the Olympics.

Demonstrating its fear and respect for government censorship of its work, the organization produces two identical catalogues, one for in-country and one for international use. While the international catalogue notes that the project works with victims of human trafficking in China, the Chinese catalogue merely states that the project works in exploited women in “Asia.” These restrictions in sales and marketing suggest just one of the possible reasons why the Beijing organization has grown more slowly—in the past year employing at most 14 women at a time—as they lack outlets to the free market, and are not able to tap into state’s recent support of foreign firms because they are Christian.

China Star workers also start the workday by clocking in with an analog timestamp machine at 9 AM. Employees are paid 1,600 RMB per month (250 USD), also equivalent to minimum wage jobs in Beijing. While workers in Bangkok rent independent apartments, housing in China Star’s on-site dormitory is mandatory, which to workers initially seem like standard post-socialist “iron rice bowl” provisions, where employers typically provide meals and housing. Uniquely, China Star activists *reframe* the iron rice bowl, not as an “offering,” but as a requirement.

In the NGO’s promotional materials, the dormitory is referred to as a “victim shelter,” where workers sleep 6-8 in a room, so that activists and managers may patrol their moral behavior.

Dorm life is managed by “house moms”²⁷ who are typically Chinese Christians with at least a high school education; however, they are paid only several hundred RMB above the former sex workers they are hired to patrol, a low salary that they accept as a testament to their sacrifice and the limited numbers of jobs for Christian workers under China’s intolerant religious environment. House moms enforce a nightly curfew at 10 PM, for which workers are penalized 1 RMB (.15 USD) for each minute they are late. These programs reveal that overcoming victimhood is a fragile process: it requires a delicate balance of enforced order and personal choice.

Like in Thailand, workers must also sign a behavioral contract, which includes basic rules about non-violent behavior, cleanliness, and vigilance about turning off the gas valve after cooking. This housing contract also forbids commercial sex work, pre-marital sex and abortion. All infractions are assigned monetary fines, and the infractions concerning social behavior are punishable by termination from the program. There is, of course, no clear way to patrol the private and personal activities in which workers engage during their free time on weekends; thus, workers are encouraged to contact staff and directors if they learn of contractual trespasses committed by any of their peers. Such reporting is unofficially rewarded through an opaque bonus structure (as I describe below), and as one participant described, reminiscent of cultural revolution-era Communist Red Guard policies that encouraged children to “expose their parents

²⁷ Maternalist language labeling activists and bosses to “mothers,” and all sex workers “girls,” no matter what their age, pervaded both organizations. Disavowing family economic pressures as a third world problem also opens up opportunities for activists to invoke new maternalist discourses in their rehabilitation schemes. For instance, in China’s shelters, shelter managers who patrol a 10 PM curfew, safety, and social behavior are called “housemoms;” and when referring to jewelry producers, activists from both organizations overwhelmingly referred to former sex workers as “our Girls.” This infantilizing and possessive label always seemed somewhat out of place because-- and referring back to that idea of the retirement scheme--some of the workers were upwards of fifty years old. Maternalist language nonetheless was a daily tool of dominance, strategically invoked to delegitimize the family decision-making strategies of such workers, and to deny them any right as care workers of their own. It is these new arrangements around social entrepreneurship that Global North activists enact their own versions of care work, which I term humanitarian investments.

for anti-communist thoughts” in order to gain favor with the Party (Fieldnotes 7/2010).

During the Spring Festival each February, CS workers are awarded annual bonuses based on their performance reviews. In February 2011, one by one, workers were called into the manager’s office to receive their bonuses, and as workers sat eagerly and nervously awaiting their bonus announcements, I spoke with Ling, who had just exited her meeting. As the oldest participant and one of the earliest participants in the program, Ling was shocked to receive only 300 RMB (45 USD), which was not enough to pay for a round trip train ticket to her home province of Fujian for the Chinese New Year celebration. With only \$45 dollars in hand, and this is less than the cost of one bracelet that she make, and she can make about four such bracelets in an hour--she made a quick mental calculation that rather than return home for the new year, she would remit all the money back to her son, age 9, who she has left behind since his infancy—a choice that many Chinese and migrant laborers globally make (Biao 2007; Chang, Dong and MacPhail 2011). As with other employees, the manager instructed Ling not to tell other workers about the amount that she had received, so as not to create ‘sinful’ sentiments of envy or greed. However, rumors naturally circulated amongst the small staff, and it soon became known that many of the newer participants had received bonuses of up to 600 RMB (90 USD), bonuses similar to what Ling had received when she first arrived at CS five years ago.

Ling speculated that her bonus had nothing to do with her production or performance, but rather with her hesitance to embrace Christianity (Interview with Ling 2/2011). Furthermore, she expressed that she shared the same sense of futility with the Foxconn workers who had figured prominently in the media for their protests of workplace abuses—including 14 worker suicides in protest (Su 2012; Chang 2011).²⁸ Ling somberly stated that “Sometimes, I also think about

²⁸ See Chapter 3 for an extended description of the labor protest at Foxconn within a period of labor unrest in China in the past decade.

jumping off this building” as she expressed her frustration with a coercive bonus system that was responsible for “luring” newer workers to stay at CS while refusing to similarly reward older employees who had fewer employment alternatives.

Another veteran worker, Yan, showed me a “self-assessment form” that workers are required to fill out each year. In addition to assessing their production, leadership, and teamwork skills, the form also asked workers to select—on a scale of 0-5—their commitment toward living the teachings of Jesus Christ, as well as their belief in Christ’s teachings. Yan had marked a 0 for belief in Christ’s teachings, but was torn about what to indicate for her commitment towards Christ’s teachings, noting, “I won’t say that I am Christian just so I can get promoted. There are some people here who pretend to believe in Jesus, and they receive all kinds of opportunities. I think the fact that I won’t lie to get in good favor with the management is ‘living the teachings of Christ.’”²⁹

The monetary incentives for conversion and proselytizing to co-workers make the requirements of moral labor difficult for workers in the rescue industry in China. CS activist missionaries are more emphatic about Christianity than their counterparts in Bangkok because missionary activists run greater risks in China. Packing a bible and “smuggling” it through Chinese customs is still regarded as a subversive religious act (which many CS volunteers take great pride in doing as they travel between the US and China), while Thailand grants over 150 missionary visas per year. The contrast suggests that Christian missionaries in China have troublingly adopted authoritarian religious regulations into their own workplace practices.

In addition to restrictions placed on religious expression, CS activists internalize and replicate the logics of fear and repression from the Chinese government of foreign NGOs and of

²⁹ Activists provide more opportunities for upward mobility (for instance, extra salary for monitoring dormitory chores, and participating in outreach) for participants who comply with worship because they say that those workers share the goals of the organization, and that Christ’s teachings have fostered more docile and kinder employees.

government intolerance to prostitution, as exemplified by their remote location, isolation from others, and co-option of socialist work unit systems as a way of asserting moral control over their subjects. Though Chinese state-owned enterprises have long provided benefits and securities like food and housing to workers, CS frames these offerings within the contemporary rights-based *rehabilitation regime* for trafficked persons. Secular efforts that claim ‘rights-based’ approaches to seeking justice for trafficked persons call for rehabilitative services that encompass: shelters, counseling, vocational and life skills training. Under the guise of victim protection, or more specifically what Jennifer Musto refers to as “carceral protectionism” (Musto 2011), mandatory shelter housing and wage labor both are mandatory parts of a sex worker’s path to ‘freedom.’

The Disputed Framing of Freedom

In addition to twisting metal, burning rope, and threading beads, CS and TL workers also affix finished products onto the promotional cardboard that sells the jewelry. Because the jewelry is made with an international and specifically American clientele in mind, all promotional materials are in English and most sales (for both organizations) are made either online or through trafficking-related fair trade shows in the United States. This means that while jewelry producers finger through the pamphlets on a daily basis—attaching earrings to promotional cardboard, or stuffing jewelry bags with small cards that tell you “About This Purchase...”—jewelry producers in Beijing and Bangkok did not always know the meaning of the content of these promotional materials.

While working alongside CS workers packaging jewelry one day in Beijing, I was asked to translate the English content on the promotional materials. I read aloud and translated the story about “Xiao Li,” text which appears on all earring sales:

Xiao Li was raised in an impoverished family. With only enough money to educate one child, her brother was chosen to attend school. As a young girl, Xiao Li was forced to work. When she was only seventeen, her parents sent her out into a life on the streets. She was desperate and without hope until she was rescued by volunteers from the China Star Project.

(China Star Project Brochure 2010)

A growing discomfort swelled amongst the group. I asked them what was wrong, and they said that this narrative represented “distorted parts of some of their lives,” and furthermore, that there really isn’t anyone named “Xiao Li.” Rather, they explained, the presented narrative was a mass-amalgamation of different kinds of challenges each of them faced growing up in rural farming communities. Despite the de-personalized nature of this narrative, the name, age and photographs with blocked out eyes that adorn all promotional materials attempt to offer the consumer a voyeuristic window into what CS claims are symptoms of “human trafficking.”

This prompted me to ask the workers how they understood the term “trafficking,” which in Chinese is officially translated as “*guai mai*,” literally meaning “kidnapped and sold.”³⁰ The four women workers I sat with were shocked to learn that this term was being used to describe their situations. As they told me more about the different reasons they came to Beijing, I learned that they had all voluntarily migrated to the city seeking different forms of low-wage employment. Many started off working as restaurant employees and later learned that they could earn significantly more money working at hair salons or massage parlors, where they would provide sexual services. They insisted that no one had forced them into those situations and that

³⁰ The pure linguistic and definitional inconsistencies between definitions in Thailand, China and other countries that have adopted transnational law reveal further confusion between transnational, and local legal and colloquial understandings of “human trafficking,” “freedom,” “exploitation,” and “slavery”—terms that frequently surround public discourse around human trafficking. Recent work has complicated the use of modern day slavery within historical discourse of the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Bravo 2007; Patterson 2013; Woods 2013), and elsewhere I have discussed complexities around the Chinese concept of “labor exploitation” (Shih 2013); however, ongoing definitional ambiguities suggest room for further research.

they could have left whenever they wanted but chose not to because of a self-imposed sense of responsibility to send money home to their families, and a limited set of opportunities available to workers.

Cooking dinner with a China Star worker named Lili at the shelter one evening, I learned a bit more about the complex processes of decision-making that migrant women make given the set of opportunities available in Beijing. I first met Lili during her second year at China Star, just after her 19th birthday. At that time, she was amongst one of the youngest employees, and though characteristically shy, her young age also made her deferential to other workers. Making jewelry during the workday, Lili was diligent, quiet, and withheld from participating in the raucous gossiping and teasing that the more veteran employees engaged in to pass the time. Save for the occasional moments when she stood up for herself if she was ever the target of playful teasing, Lili was a perfect employee by China Star standards. This consistently earned her small opportunities for advancement, promotions, and salary increases over the years; and by 2012, five years into her employment, she was promoted to the quality control and production management. By this time, most of the other veteran employees had quit to seek other opportunities, but in those early years between 2008-2010, they would frequently insist to me that Lili was different because she had never worked as a sex worker. They explained that she was referred to China Star by an older cousin, a sex worker who had met China Star activists during outreach. This cousin referred Lili to China Star shortly after she arrived in Beijing from Inner Mongolia, because she felt her personality—“shy, cautious, and well-behaved”—wasn’t suited for sex work.

Though China Star and Thai Light make universal claims to serve victims of trafficking, the workers actually comprised a diverse array of former occupations. Both social enterprises employed workers who were former sex workers, who were not sex workers, and who had

worked in sex work establishments, but had not performed sex work. In China, the distinctions between who has and has not worked as a sex worker are important as the organization frequently equated disobedience on the shop floor with qualities learned from sex work. Yang Yu, arguably one of the most dignified workers for the manner in which she constantly questioned management practices, explained to me “we developed a thick skin in that kind of work, a certain way of interacting with people, we learned that we needed to protect ourselves, and all of a sudden they want us to come here and be well-behaved.” Noting a contradiction between the importance of their identities as former sex workers for their social marketing, and the realities of a sex worker’s ability to be a wage laborer, she continued, “they want to say they do so much to change us, but then they go and promote someone who wasn’t even a sex worker. I don’t have anything against Lili, but it’s not right that they spend all this time telling us how what we did was wrong, and then they give the promotions to workers who have never had those experiences.”

By 2014, Lili became one of the most veteran employees and saw this position as a long-term career choice. As we were cooking, I asked her what job she would want if she left China Star. This was a question that I didn’t often ask throughout my research because I didn’t want to introduce the imagination of leaving vocational training unless workers brought it up, which they seldom did because of the abyss of opportunities that seemed to exist. Without skipping a beat, Lili said, “I would love to work at KFC.” Surprised at the specificity of her answer, I asked why KFC? She told me that the American fast food restaurants had a good reputation for being some of the best service sector jobs available in Beijing. They pay significantly more than the minimum wage, come with benefits, and have adopted a Western model of customer interface and human resource management. After explaining the appeal for such a job, her response quickly sobered, and she added “but I would never be able to get a job there. Even KFC requires a high school

degree....there are very few opportunities for people like me who are middle school dropouts.” Earning a high school equivalency degree was not ever offered as a vocational training opportunity at China Star, because China does not have a nationally recognized high school equivalency exam similar to the American GED.³¹ Faced with limited employment opportunities in the local labor market, China Star presents the best opportunity for job stability for Lili.

Rather than discuss these complex aspirations and barriers to upward mobility, CS activists justify the victim narrative they present to their clients through claims that overt gender discrimination is rooted in the notoriously high rates of female infanticide resulting from China’s “one-child policy.” The organization claims that these systemic cultural biases cause rural families to invest their limited income on education for boys. While portrayals of victimization and extreme hardship glorify tales of salvation and make for compelling marketing materials, these portrayals may not necessarily represent the actual conditions of the subjects—the “victims” that the activists purport to represent. For workers like the fictional Xiao Li at CS, the choice to work in the sex industry must be understood within limited opportunities related to gender inequality and poverty; however, such difficult social and economic realities need not come with the lens of abandonment and absolute despair that the activists insert into these workers’ narratives.

Consuming Jewelry, Consuming Salvation

Selling jewelry alongside China Star activists at a secular anti-trafficking conference in Pasadena, California, I listened as volunteers were boastful about the transformative effects of

³¹ Significantly, many middle school students from rural areas, recognizing limited educational and workforce opportunities, enroll in private Chinese vocational training schools in fields of computer training, design, and nursing. These are the same student training programs that are currently under scrutiny in the Foxconn and other student labor exploitation cases, as further discussed in Chapter 3.

jewelry making, and were eager to share that “our girls are ‘not required’ to participate in bible study.” Hearing this, the secular audience gladly opened their pocketbooks to “Buy for Freedom,” but what the activists failed to mention is that workers are required to make jewelry throughout the hour if they choose to skip bible study. Thus, all attend for the break in manual labor it provides—though none of the women in China has converted to Christianity. This convenient, and I argue strategic, obfuscation of religious objectives amongst secular consumers, allows evangelical Christian organizations to be indistinguishable from the now hundreds of anti-trafficking organizations that frequent monthly anti-trafficking conferences, fairs and symposiums in the US.

Activists deliberately frame the problem of human trafficking to appeal to their consumer base. Framing helps to achieve what Viviana Zelizer (1994) calls “circuits of commerce,” where the acts of buying and selling allow movement activists and consumers to “create connected lives by differentiating their multiple social ties from each other, marking boundaries between those different ties by means of everyday practices and sustaining those ties through joint activities” (Wherry 2008: 146). Thus, these particular acts of global framing involve often contradictory processes of “creating ties” and “marking boundaries between those ties.” China Star and Thai Light activists need to both ‘mark boundaries’ between the United States and the Third World to constitute the practice of human trafficking as inherently “other,” while simultaneously “sustaining those ties through joint activities,” in this case creating solidarity between First-World women activists and consumers (Wherry 2008: 146).

Drawing on a host of symptoms related to the vulnerability of Asian women—for instance, gender discrimination, poverty, unequal education— American organizations equate third world poverty with human trafficking, and a pervasive skepticism that Third World

women's choices can be dignified if they are made within constraints. These narratives garner sympathy and financial support for NGOs, but do little to raise workers' salaries beyond the minimum wage.

Thai Light and China Star jewelry is sold through a variety of venues, including anti-trafficking fairs like the one described above, but primarily through jewelry parties, where a female host invites members of her congregation to her home. Thai Light offers jewelry party 'Samplekits' which are available for purchase and include a promotional DVD, jewelry catalogues and sample pieces. These kits range in price from US\$100 to US\$300 and offer consumers the opportunity to host jewelry parties anywhere in the country. A website instructs consumers how to host their own jewelry parties:

Want to go all out for your jewelry party? Have a Thailand Theme. Wear beachy (sic.) clothes, invite someone from a massage school to give massages, eat Pad Thai and Cashew Chicken, light some candles, have specific prayer time for sexually exploited women in Thailand ... or in your own city.

(Thai Red Light Project website 2009)

During these home parties, consumers watch the organisation's DVD, which highlights in sensationalist form, the indignities of what is described as "modern day slavery" and captures testimonials of workers who describe their experiences working in the commercial sex industry. The DVD quickly shifts to portray the hope and optimism that occurs after women are employed at Thai Light or China Star. At jewelry parties that I have observed as an attendee or volunteer salesperson, this DVD summarily triggers an emotional and teary-eyed response from many in the audience, who appreciate the opportunity to see what one jewelry party patron describes as, "what slavery looks like first-hand."³² The DVD suggests that any audience member can immediately do

³² The similar claim to see "what slavery looks like first-hand" is also marketed by reality tour agencies described in Chapter 4.

their part to stop modern-day slavery by purchasing a piece of jewelry, made by one of the women in the video (Fieldnotes 2008).

When consumers ask why the organizations chose to focus on jewelry making, a similar answer is given by both organisations. Activists claim that jewelry is beautiful and innately feminine. The fact that the majority of this jewelry is made *by* women, *for* women celebrates the innate feminine character that jewelry possesses. However, the universal bonds of sisterhood extend only so far; rather than celebrate any innate therapy in the creative or artistic process of making jewelry, women workers in both organisations are given back issues of *Vogue* magazine to learn about Western women's tastes.

Consumers also frequently ask whether the women workers design the jewelry themselves, and a similar answer is delivered from many different activists in both organisations. The response typically includes an eye roll, a chuckle and an expression of frustration that these workers have not cultivated the aesthetic to understand what looks good; for example, one complaint is that Thai workers find glass beads prettier than pearls and prefer to make creations with glass beads. The *Vogue* magazine is supposed to instruct them in the value of pearls over glass; an activist explained: "We're a business, they need to learn the value of their product, our consumers just aren't going to pay as much for glass beads as they will for pearls."

The sales director at Thai Light's office in Bangkok recounted another example of cultural misunderstandings in jewelry design:

Well, we let them dabble in designing some of the jewelry one time, and we ended up with all these pieces that were this ugly combination of yellow and purple. I mean what a truly hideous combination of colors. At the same time, we didn't want to hurt their feelings so I put those pieces to one side just thought hmm, maybe I can sell these on the street at a Lakers game once I'm back in LA?

(Fieldnotes July 2009)

These comments of patronizing frustration and pity mark a bond of solidarity and shared aesthetic sensibility between activists and their consumers. These venues for the sale of victim-produced jewelry not only bring the plight of former sex workers into middle class American living rooms but activists also sell the converse idea that Western values and aesthetics are being taught to indigent Third-World women. Rarely is there an attempt to understand local aesthetic meanings; for instance, that yellow and purple, in addition to being the uniform colours of the Los Angeles Lakers, are also the colour scheme of the prominent Siam Commercial Bank and are frequently used to portray humility and reverence to the Thai King (Arms 2012).

Global framing in this movement is also founded upon portraying a distinct distance between cultural values and norms in the First and Third Worlds, a distance that transnational feminist scholars have adeptly illustrated “others” the norms and values of the Third World (see, e.g., Spivak 1988, 1999; Trinh 1989, 1999; Mohanty 1991). This type of what Tarrow calls “distance framing” serves to condemn deviant sexuality, victimization, and sexual exploitation as a Third World problem. Movement activists appeal to First World Christian morality while demonizing cultural and religious practices in the Third World.³³ In order to claim parity to the broader human trafficking movement, which defines trafficking in the United Nations’ terms of “force, fraud and coercion” (UN Palermo Protocol 2000), these organizations claim that their employees are victims of *cultural* coercion. Activists frequently claim that sex workers are drawn to prostitution because of dire economic circumstances *endemic* to specific cultural, religious, and economic constraints of the Third World.

For example, TL activists claim that the origins of gender inequality and the feminization of low-wage migrant labor are caused by Buddhism. One of TL’s brochures claims:

³³ Such practices mirror missionary work historically, but what is arguably distinct about the evangelical Christian missionary organizations discussed in this dissertation is how proselytization is accompanied by wage and labor arrangements.

In Thailand, the daughter is culturally obligated to care for her parents once she is of age. The sons fulfill their duty by becoming a monk for a period of time. In doing this they make merit for their parents' next life. Sons are not expected to provide financially for their parents. Daughters, however, take this role very seriously. When they find an opportunity to work in the city they feel relieved that at whatever sacrifice to themselves, they can meet their parents' demands to send money home.

(Thai Red Light Project brochure 2008)

The suggestion that religious and cultural norms cause women to enter the commercial sex industry suggests that women working in Bangkok's red light districts are passive victims of 'bad culture.' This narrative ultimately obscures the broader role that local and global political economies play in the feminization of labor migration, the vulnerability of groups at the margins, and the exploitative power of global capitalism. Framing migration as forced and victimizing also ignores the pride that many migrants express for making these difficult decisions to support their families.

While many commercial sex workers recognize sex work as "hard work"—including one TL worker who showed me scars on her arms from years of self-mutilation as a means of coping with sexual abuse and violence encountered during sex work—they see their new position as jewelry makers as just another low-wage job within the limited economy. In fact, many consider the job of lesser status as well, finding the rote character of wage labor and the consistent monitoring of social behavior of considerably less dignity and autonomy than characterized their experiences with sex work (see, e.g., Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2007a; Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck 2010; Shah 2014). They regard the decision to be jewelry makers as a calculated move that is particularly beneficial to them because wage labor can be easier under certain

circumstances—for example, for older sex workers, pregnant sex workers, newer ‘unskilled’ sex workers, or sex workers who enter long term relationships with clients.³⁴

Some workers profess they and their families enjoy the considerable social capital that comes with working for a foreign company. Affixing price tags to jewelry each day, workers also see how much money individual jewelry pieces sell for, and unlike in corporate factories where an assembly line separates different parts of the manufacturing process, jewelry makers often create, package, and price finished products. Because the organization is a social enterprise, there exists a nebulous hope that workers may benefit from profits as the organizations grow—a sense of profit sharing that entirely does not exist among the majority of low wage factory workers throughout the world. When workers are proud of their choice to leave the commercial sex industry, then, it is an acknowledgment of making that choice for themselves more than a celebration of choosing the abstract concepts of freedom or dignity, that activists’ promotional materials suggest.

The realities of limited low wage opportunities in the global workforce have been highlighted through numerous forms of international sex worker activism against sex trafficking abolition. Faced with the onslaught of vocational training programs, as “exit” programs for sex work, the *Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers* and Thailand’s *Empower Foundation* have designed banners, t-shirts, art installations, and social media campaigns around “Rights Not Rescue,” and pleading for “No More Sewing Machines,” efforts I describe in Chapter 4. When faced with abolitionist individuals or organizations, sex worker activists pose rhetorical questions,

³⁴ These are the prevalent reasons discussed by sex workers at both programs. Employee respondents at both locations also describe the decision to leave sex work for reasons due to violence, social stigma, unhappiness, loneliness, and general curiosity about work opportunities available under foreign bosses. I feature the former in the text to highlight unheard narratives and to illustrate the stark contrast between activists’ framing and lived reality.

such as this comment that a sex worker activist from Rhode Island posted on a Facebook forum about organizing a workshop concerning exit programs for sex workers:

I really do wonder why those people who are so concerned about us poor hos having an opportunity to 'exit' sex work are not equally concerned about women in so called 'menial labor' jobs who may not be able to continue to work as domestic servants as they age, due to physical problem such as bad backs, arthritis and allergies (from chemical fumes from cleaning fluids?)

(Robinson 2014)

In China and Thailand, it is primarily gendered forms of low wage work that are alternatives to jewelry making and sex work, including waitressing, garment factory, and domestic servant work. In fact, many sex workers have told me that they chose sex work specifically because of the higher wages and particularly abysmal working conditions in garment factories and as domestic workers.

Doing Emotional Work

Aware of their status foremost as workers, employees in both organizations commit to different forms emotional labor expected of them. This includes knowing exactly how to carve out spaces of freedom and when to demonstrate acts of grace or redemption. One Monday evening during summer 2009, I was seated in the China Star shelter's living room in a large circle of about 15 workers, volunteers, and activists. A mysterious roll of toilet paper was passed around the group, and each participant was instructed to rip a sheet of toilet paper of any length. None of the participants has any idea what activity was about to follow, and the participants pulled sheets of varying lengths. As the roll of toilet paper made its way around the complete circle, we awaited instructions, and Anne, a peppy 30-year-old volunteer from Australia, told us to count the number of squares on our sheet of toilet paper. This number she exclaimed, will determine how many

questions each person must answer in front of the group. Participants who have pulled particularly long rolls gasp and sigh in exasperation of the embarrassment and scrutiny that lay ahead. This response is not surprising after Anne targets a series of questions to each person:

- 1) What are you most ashamed of in your life?
- 2) What is the most important thing that you have lost?
- 3) Who has hurt you the most in your life?
- 4) What are your dreams?

Following many of these questions there are awkward pauses. They are an extremely personal set of questions intended to illicit a particular response. During the activity, when workers are silent, or simply respond with “I don’t know,” or “I don’t remember,” Anne pushes them a little further using intermediate-level Chinese, and the Chinese manager Lu takes a more aggressive approach, bringing up specific parts of someone’s past or personal information to jar their memories. Pushed to the brink, many participants ended up crying, which seemed to be the ultimate goal of the exercise. The demonstration of crying indicated to activists that workers were coming to terms with their sins, and only after they “willingly addressed the shame of their past” can they truly receive moral transformation.

At the time, Yang Yu was 33, and was China Star’s oldest employee. Before she left the organization in 2011, she assumed a natural leadership role over the younger participants, and offered advice on everything from jewelry making, to food preparation, to budgeting skills. She was keenly aware of China Star’s strategies for moral reform, and while resentful of them, knew when and how to perform redemption because such demonstrations of emotional labor are a part of her wage. She told me:

Everyone hates the Monday night group sessions because they always ask weird questions, and it’s as if they’re not satisfied until you cry. Only after you cry do they think you are really doing something good for yourself. I know this makes them happy, so sometimes I just cry to make it go quicker. (Fieldnotes 7/2009)

Starfish activists see crying as a form of redemption in which workers confront their past as sex workers, and Yang Yu like some other workers, often strategically performed such visible acts of redemption as inexorable parts of their wage labor.

The High Cost of Freedom: Substituting Worship for Sex

Social movement organizations like China Star and Thai Light purport to provide “freedom” to victims of trafficking, yet they perpetuate the same forms of injustice that they aim to challenge by interweaving racism and classism with labor discipline and new-abolitionist morality. Despite the differences across political regimes in China and Thailand, the interventions staged by both CS and TL reproduce inequality by re-inscribing low-wage workers into the global orbit of capitalist production. These workers’ victim identities are inseparable from their alleged freedom—and their past labor as sex workers—and through the presumption that their freedom can be bought, through clients’ consumption of the workers’ now-virtuous wage labor.

In Bangkok and Beijing, workers see labor migration as the articulation of choice within limited employment options. CS and TL activists frame workers as “victims of trafficking” in order to mold them into docile humanitarian subjects of the global movement and to themselves, though almost none of these workers self-identify with the same term. Rather, despite the moral economy that surrounds their crafts, all participants regard themselves foremost as workers. How these women conceive of their own work, both formerly in the sex industry and now at rehabilitation programs, drastically differs from the victimizing narratives that activists tell to fit their employees into the anti-trafficking movement. Just as joining the commercial sex industry is about choice, so is the decision to leave the commercial sex industry and join TL and CS as jewelry makers. Significantly, all TL and CS employees agree that workers can only make the

decision to accept jobs as jewelry makers once their financial circumstances allow them to leave the commercial sex industry. The worker's decision to freely join a 'rehabilitation' program at any time itself illustrates one of the largest and most convenient fictions created by these 'rescue' organizations.

Workers who succeed in these 'rehabilitation' programs remain there because of another calculated choice. In their eyes, freedom is the ability to make choices—though unfortunately, their autonomy over decision-making drastically decreases after they enter these programs. For instance, Nan, 43, celebrates her choices because they have allowed her to provide for her family. Of all the TL workers, Nan lives the closest to TL's office in a costly high-rent area—even closer to the office than some of the international missionary staff. She rents a 9-foot by 10-foot room in a hotel, which she shares with her sister, who is a hairdresser in Bangkok, and they each pay 5,000 baht (166 USD) per month in rent. This is expensive by most low-wage and some middle-class workers' standards, many of whom choose to commute up to two hours by public transportation in order to find affordable rent, which is typically around 2-3,000 baht (66-100 USD) per month. I ask Nan why she pays so much for rent, and she responds: "I spent my whole life taking care of my children and my parents; this is my reward to myself. I like it here, it's close to work, I save time and money with transportation."

Nan's proximity to TL's office, and thus the red-light district in which it is located, poses frequent conflicts with her employers at TL. She often socializes with the same friends that she made while working in the beer bar, so she has to be careful about whether members of the missionary team see her during their weekly outreach. These restrictions are particularly frustrating for Nan on her forty-third birthday, as we try to decide where to go to celebrate. We decide to visit a pool hall nestled amidst go-go bars in Bangkok's Cowboy red light district,

where she worked as a sex worker for over ten years. Walking through the crowded street, our eyes dart back and forth cautiously before we reach our destination, and once inside, we choose a table in the furthest corner of the bar to avoid being seen by her current employers. Once settled, Nan shakes her head and points to her right shoulder where the Thai word for *freedom* was stitched neatly on her uniform. She remarks sharply, “I must wear this uniform to work every day, but my boss doesn’t let me choose where to celebrate my own birthday...do you think this is freedom?”

Nan likely does not mean this as a gesture of resignation, but rather as an ironic statement made in her characteristically blunt and facetious tone, because she never really lets the restrictions of her contract dictate where she goes and whom she sees. In fact, the next morning, she tells me that she will sleep in and miss church worship altogether—accepting the 120 baht (4 USD) deduction in pay that month as a birthday present to herself—because she is not Christian and thus considers worship as one more form of labor.³⁵

Nan’s ability to carve out spaces for her own freedom are shaped by the openness of the Thai political environment to civil society, commercial sex work, foreign NGOs, and lastly, openness to Christian missionary presence and religious diversity. This relatively democratic environment enables TL to present jewelry-making as a job, despite the numerous moral and disciplining conditions concomitant with it. Perhaps this state of affairs is communicated most clearly by the fact that the workers refer to TL as simply “The Company” and report to work only between the hours of an 8-hour workday. In China, the distinctions between manual labor and

³⁵ Nan and her family are Catholic, reflecting the great diversity of religious practice throughout Thailand. In February 2013, I had the opportunity to attend Catholic mass with her family in her hometown of Ubon Ratchathani, northeast Thailand. The Sunday mass attracted a group of about 200 participants from the community, who saw the church as a spiritual haven, community resource, and gathering point. Proud of her faith, Nan has two large colorful tattoos of Mary and Jesus on her breastbone, which often elicit comments of impropriety and requests to “cover her cleavage” by evangelical Christian missionaries who struggle with her Catholicism.

reform work—essentially the divisions between the social and the entrepreneurial—are significantly more difficult because they live on site, and there are fewer hours in a day when they can escape the eye of their employers.

Conclusion

Vocational training and rehabilitation projects for sex workers aim to address human trafficking through generating economic alternatives to sex work. However, the focus on moral transformation through vocational training as the animating force of social mobility ignores the complex labor hierarchies that exist within the low wage workforce, and how labor is systemically exploited to advance capital interests. Interventions in both China and Thailand relegate migrant sex workers to low wage work while maximizing profits and consolidating social capital for the actors who design and consume them. These blueprints for life after trafficking do not redistribute capital or increase the work/economic prospects of migrant workers, but rather maximize a “rehabilitation regime” of expertise for which migrants themselves may rarely benefit.

Several key differences between Thailand and China illustrate the possibilities and constraints of mobilizing transnational resources in a democratic versus authoritarian context. In Thailand, vocational training work embodies the nature of the neoliberal free market, while in China, labor relations absorb the authoritarian character of the state. The distinct character of vocational training in each place is attributed to differing political economic contexts of low wage labor relations in China and Thailand, yet these are important distinctions that are invisible across movement organizing in Los Angeles, and reveal how anti-trafficking rehabilitation projects are experienced by victims in different national contexts. This attention to the political economic

contexts of the anti-trafficking movements in China and Thailand is the focus of the following chapters of this dissertation, where nation-state characteristics also distinctly influence the dissertation's secular cases.

Given these differences, there are also general similarities across how such socially entrepreneurially interventions control women's sexuality and low-wage women's work across both organizations. By transforming the sale of their sexual labor to the sale of their manual labor, these social entrepreneurs inculcate Third World women workers into another orbit of capitalist production. While the market may provide an alternative to the state, it only survives by imbuing the movement with its own sense of Western Orientalist morality that profits off the deviance and difference of the Asian woman worker. This problematic moral economy has a serious impact on participants in these programs who, in numerous instances, expressed that their freedom and empowerment are restricted by rescue projects through different means of coercive discipline. Most importantly, the majority of participants in these rescue projects did not even consider themselves to be trafficked; rather, they continually spoke with dignity of their experiences as commercial sex workers and as the proud choices of women workers living within the limits of their local economies and global capitalism.

Chapter 3: Transnational Solidarity Meets the Authoritarian State in China's Response to Labor Trafficking

On a bright Sunday afternoon in December 2012, an audience of roughly five hundred men, women, and children gathered on a cement basketball court in a large migrant worker community on the outskirts of Kunming City, the capital of Yunnan Province. Primarily low-wage workers in Kunming's construction, garment, and service sectors, residents curiously awaited a rock concert on the subject of "human trafficking." Audience members squeezed into the community gathering space, in front of a makeshift stage with a large banner spread across it announcing the concert's agenda: "Returning Home: New Migrant Workers Band Anti-Trafficking Concert." Front and center, amidst the swelling audience, some of whom had scaled peripheral fences to get a better view of the commotion, proudly sat two middle-aged communist party representatives—the Chairperson and the Vice Chair—from the Yunnan Province All China Women's Federation, who emphatically sang along, and pounded their fists in the air along to lyrics that called for increased protection of worker safety and rights. Coordinating the event backstage were the Beijing-based *New Migrant Worker's Band*, the local NGO that runs a migrant community center in Fude township, and the three co-founders of the project: the United Nations Inter Agency Project to Combat Human Trafficking, the International Labor Organization, and the international Christian organization World Vision.

This idyllic pastiche of transnational solidarity surrounding the theme of "combating human trafficking," and in particular *labor* trafficking, is unprecedented and unexpected in authoritarian China. The "Migrant Worker Band Project," which lasted a total of 18 months and included five other performances like the one described above, demonstrates the unique partnerships that have emerged in China's response to human trafficking. Recent global

governance mechanisms ranging from the US Trafficking in Person's report to critical journalists' accounts have critiqued prevalent anti-trafficking responses that focus disproportionately on *sex* trafficking of women and children, often to the exclusion of forms of labor exploitation that affect both men and women. The lack of attention to labor trafficking is particularly apparent in China, where the government refuses to recognize labor exploitation as a form of human trafficking—or more broadly, as a social concern at all. Thus, the mere existence of the “Migrant Worker Band Project” as an anti-trafficking intervention is particularly puzzling because the band's lyrics advocate a culture of labor pride and solidarity under a political regime that has aggressively stymied labor protest, rights, and activism.

Six months following the launch of this concert, in June 2013, the US State Department released its annual Trafficking in Persons report (TIP Report), which demoted China to the lowest tier, Tier 3, for the first time in the decade long history of the report. The rationale for the downgrade cited lack of Chinese government transparency, limited government cooperation with Inter-Agency commitment, and foremost, China's reluctance to address labor trafficking within its 2008 Human Trafficking National Plan of Action. The TIP report's comments on China's lack of accountability to labor trafficking follows a general shift in the focus of US anti-trafficking engagement from a highly-critiqued sensational focus on sex trafficking towards a more sober engagement with the broader issues of labor trafficking. The international community has followed this shift, increasingly using the language of “modern day slavery” to apply to a range of situations of labor exploitation.

This chapter situates the transnational human trafficking movement—which focuses on sexual as well as other forms of labor—within the local Chinese politics of labor rights by asking how transnational social movements and global governance institutions either reproduce or

subvert state power in local sites of the global counter-trafficking movement. What are the implications of the transnational human trafficking movement's call for solidarity amongst laborers within an authoritarian state? This chapter argues that the unique alliance of Chinese state actors, global governance institutions, and local and international NGOs to address human trafficking represents a Chinese government model of transnational "bureaucratic absorption" (Lee and Zhang 2013) in which transnational pressure and normative optimism around anti-trafficking response cause transnational social movements to reproduce state power.

Despite its public acquiescence to international treaties and its regional cooperation with the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) process, China has yet to adopt the international definition of human trafficking—acknowledging only the trafficking of women and children for the purposes of *forced prostitution, forced marriage, and child kidnapping*. The trafficking of men and trafficking for the purposes of labor exploitation are notably missing from the Chinese definition of trafficking. Given the discord between the Chinese legal framework and the transnational anti-trafficking definitions, these interventions have little impact on the ground; for instance, after attending the concert, the residents of Fude expressed limited greater comprehension of how human trafficking or labor exploitation can be managed or prevented in their daily lives. Rather, this collaborative pastiche generates an illusion of transnational solidarity, while obscuring a complex web of cooption, absorption, and misallocation of both state resources and foreign aid. As international resources seek to fund the fight against labor trafficking in China, they simultaneously ignore ongoing decade-long legacies of local labor mobilization.

Labor Trafficking and Labor Transnationalism

It is within the context of growing labor migration globally that we see the emergence of the preconditions that drive human trafficking—the increased porousness of borders to goods and people, increased demand for cheap labor, displacement caused by war and natural disasters, and intensified networks of human mobility for profit (Zolberg 2003; Castles 2003; Salt and Stein 1999). These global flows, both legal and illegal, threaten nation-state sovereignty in the global order, and a government’s ability to control its borders and the rights of its citizens has shifted from the individual nation-state toward transnational governance institutions—most notably, the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, and multinational finance institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Tarrow 2005; Kay 2005; Seidman 2007; Conca 2005). Given the distinct contexts of migration and human trafficking in countries throughout the world, as well as the unique national laws that govern nation-state boundaries, it is crucial to understand how transnational anti-trafficking policies and practices are mobilized within specific national contexts.

Critiques of the anti-trafficking movement’s prioritization of sex trafficking have initiated a concerted shift by nation states and global governance institutions towards prioritizing labor trafficking. However, grassroots NGOs, like the ones described in the previous chapter, have not been swayed to derail their focus on sex trafficking, and stand their ideological ground that sexual forms of exploitation represent the greatest contemporary affront to human rights. Following criticism that too much attention may have been paid to sex trafficking in the earliest years of the US government’s response (GAO 2006), in 2009, the US State Department installed a new Director of the State Department’s Office to Combat Human Trafficking, Ambassador Luis CdeBaca, whose background as a federal prosecutor positioned him to be explicitly tough on

labor trafficking. The 2012 TIP Report, indicated that the US began responding to more cases of labor trafficking than sex trafficking (TIP Report 2012:360), and globally, the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that in a global study of 18.7 million forced laborers exploited in the private economy (by individuals or enterprises), 4.5 million (22%) are victims of forced sexual exploitation, while a much larger 14.2 million (68%) are victims of forced labor exploitation (ILO 2013:130).

Contemporary scholarship on transnational social movements looks away from the state as a significant agent of social change and has identified “transnational activism” and “transnational advocacy networks” as unique forms of collective action through which “local” concerns—typically grievances in the Global South—gain recognition from and support in a wider sphere—the Global North (Tarrow 2005; Keck and Sikkink 1998). Transnational advocacy networks, including groups of activists, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), transcend nation-state boundaries by bringing international pressures to bear upon individual nation-states. This “boomerang effect” theorizes that when local NGOs operate in “norm violating” countries, they may appeal to international NGOs (INGOs) to leverage pressure on the offending regime (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

Seidman (2007) and Kay’s (2011) research on different forms of labor solidarity and transnationalism argue that the state still plays a significant role in mobilization around labor rights. Kay finds that labor movements cannot rely on the forms of disruptive politics previously studied in other social movements; rather, labor movements must work through the state and state mechanisms because labor transnationalism “benefits from institutional access to power, and guarantees a kind of state protection” (Kay 2011: 28). Thus, efforts to combat human trafficking, if viewed as a kind of labor movement, must work through states precisely because the global

movement asks nation-states to create new legal rubrics under which to understand existing issues around labor, migration, and prostitution.

These theories of social movements have had limited applications in authoritarian contexts, where civil society is tightly controlled by the state. The Chinese Communist party's resistance to adopting the transnational definition of human trafficking is characteristic of China's resistance to global human rights norms. Chinese authoritarianism, for instance, is characterized by a state-controlled civil society, which is notoriously intolerant of dissent and mobilization (Friedman 2009; Lee and Shen 2011). China is now the world's leading recipient of foreign direct investment, and astronomical rates of rural to urban labor migration have made China the largest manufacturing workforce in the world. The strains of global capitalism place unprecedented pressure on Chinese workers, yet the Chinese government refuses to address decreasing standards of occupational health, safety, compensation, and basic labor rights, taking any opportunity to stymie labor unrest. In particular, its "state-manipulated market economy" (Harvey 2005: 122) is notoriously protective of capital interests in labor; thus, China's exclusion of labor exploitation from its definition of human trafficking is part of its ongoing practice of denying labor unrest. While Kay finds that NAFTA has strengthened labor transnationalism because it created new transnational power structures and institutions that are independent of the state, my research argues that anti-trafficking global governance institutions actually strengthen state power—particularly in the Chinese authoritarian context.

The emphasis on *transnational* dimensions of contentious politics celebrates transnational activism as the victor of globalization and assumes that transnational cooperation and solidarity that operate outside of the state abide by a general notion of "equality, liberty, peace, tolerance, and emancipation" (Waterman 2001: 235-236). Driven by the spirit of "anti-globalization"

movements, social movement scholarship has been overwhelmingly optimistic about the potential for transnational solidarity—and a firm belief in the counter-hegemonic interests of NGOs and transnational activists (Evans 2005). Prior social movements scholarship obscures the tensions between transnational agendas and local mobilization because it has looked primarily to the mechanisms that build and sustain a movement rather than to how these mechanisms are rooted in and between traditional hierarchies of power and how they are negotiated, reenacted, and transformed in practice. The case of the anti-trafficking movement in China reveals instances of solidarity and mutual co-option where global governance institutions, the state, and NGOs each possess unique motives and interests. As international resources fund the fight against labor trafficking in China, they simultaneously ignore ongoing local labor mobilization.

Earlier academic work has examined the incompatibility of transnational mobilization with local circumstances (Desai 2007; Bob 2001; Maney 2000), finding that transnational policy agendas receive more visibility because of unevenly distributed resources and power. As Bandy and Smith argue, “centralized circumstances with greater resources tend to reinforce power imbalances among organizational participants, such as those occurring between men and women, racial groups, or national organizations” (Bandy and Smith 2005: 11). Human trafficking has proven to be such a “centralized circumstance” attracting significant funding from states, global governance institutions, and NGOs, while reproducing inequalities based on nation, gender, and class. Similarly, Ethel Brooks’ study of the transnational movement against child labor in Pakistan finds numerous disconnections between the transnational and local social fields of understanding:

The core failing of the transnational campaign against child labor was the continued exclusion of disempowered workers from dialogues about what policy changes would improve their living conditions. By viewing children as outside of power, US activists and politicians

framed the debate as one among adult, white people about children in the developing world. The debate as it is currently framed precludes a discussion of the challenges faced by entire urban communities in the Global South, and of the communities' own responses to challenges. The child-labor focus of the campaign also downplayed the very real and systemic economic deprivation faced by the families that are forced to send their kids off to work in the first place (Brooks 2007:136).

The human trafficking concert similarly illustrates some grave incompatibilities between transnational agendas and local realities. By addressing only the worst cases of labor exploitation or child kidnapping that occur, concerts that focus on human trafficking do little to recognize the diverse forms of migrant exploitation or of decision-making that inform migrant laborers' choices, or the lack of community resources in migrant communities to promote child safety.

The UN Palermo Protocol in China

Housed within a more comprehensive UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, the Palermo Protocol is primarily a crime-prevention framework, as opposed to a human rights or protection tool (Gallagher 2001, 2010; Jordan 2002). When mobilized under an authoritarian regime such as China, the Protocol's punitive approach amplifies the power of the authoritarian state. In the Asia Pacific region, the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) acts as a liaison between transnational legislative entities such as the United Nations and local actors like government ministries, international organizations, local non-governmental organizations, and activists. Founded in 2000, this UN regional project works in Vietnam, Myanmar, Cambodia, Laos, China, and Thailand to increase government accountability to transnational anti-trafficking goals as stated in the Palermo Protocol. Its regional stature offers a unique empirical framework to contrast with Thailand, as both countries are party to the COMMIT process, and UNIAP has offices in both places.

The UNIAP and the US TIP report have been critical of the Chinese government's anti-trafficking efforts. The most significant point of contention from these "global sheriffs" (Chuang 2006a) has been the Chinese government's lack of attention to labor trafficking and refusal to recognize the trafficking of men. This is particularly problematic given the scale of low wage migrant worker grievances in recent years, as China deals with an unprecedented scale of migration and labor manufacturing globally. Traditionally unrelated to anti-human trafficking advocacy, labor rights organizations have vociferously argued for increased attention to worker safety and recognition, in a contentious recent period of labor unrest spanning the last decade.

The UNIAP China office is tasked with liaising between the UNIAP Regional Management Office in Bangkok and the Chinese government's anti-trafficking offices. Following the global focus on multi-sectoral collaboration—marked by the "Inter-Agency" label in the organization's name—various local and international NGOs have come to the fore as partners in China's response to human trafficking.

China centralizes all of its state-led counter-trafficking work through the Ministry of Public Security, whose Inter-Ministerial Office Against Trafficking (IMOAT) founded in 2008, focuses primarily on prosecuting and policing trafficking, rather than on victim protection or prevention (China National Plan of Action 2008). IMOAT claims considerable success, particularly to international media outlets, boasting that 24,000 women and children victims of human trafficking were rescued in 2011, and 49,000 were rescued in 2012 (BBC 2012). Reports of such "rescues" give far more details about the prosecution of traffickers than reports on victim protection or rehabilitation, a phenomenon that exists throughout the world (see, e.g., Brennan 2014). When asked directly about the quality of protection and rehabilitation services, government officials are quick to use trafficked victims' vulnerability as a justification for

limiting transparency over protection and rehabilitation practices (Fieldnotes 5/2012).

The UNIAP China office is run autonomously in a one-bedroom apartment in one of Beijing's diplomatic residence compounds. The office shares a floor with a diplomatic family from Malawi, and other apartments in the building house expatriate families working for different foreign embassies, multinational corporations, and international NGOs. Few other global governance organizations have offices in these buildings, and UNIAP's placement in the residential quarters reflects its liminal placement amidst larger institutions within the UN. Initiated as a temporary project, UNIAP has lacked a formal affiliation with a larger umbrella UN entity, such as under UNESCO, UNDP, or UN Women.

The office convenes monthly interagency task force meetings for a select group of international organizations and government officials who come to the office for monthly meetings. UNIAP Regional Management Office staff from Bangkok visit about once every two months depending on the different projects the office is working on. During my six-month tenure as a research assistant, the office worked primarily on several projects that divided evenly across three areas of work, which they outlined clearly in a work plan document located on our shared drive, and frequently updated for the RMO: 1) regional scale projects, 2) national government projects, and 3) special projects, a category for programs outside the scope of formal government functions, and usually in collaboration with local and international NGOs.

One example of a regional scale project was a six-country comparative victim of trafficking reintegration research study coordinated through the UNIAP RMO in Bangkok, and the first study of its kind in the region. The completed study was based off in-depth interviews conducted with over 250 respondents throughout the six countries. While government officials and NGOs in countries like Thailand, Vietnam and Cambodia presented UNIAP researchers with

over forty survivors of trafficking, the UNIAP China office was only able to collect six interviews for the study. Unlike in other countries, the China office was reluctant to receive victim referrals from NGOs, fearing the government had not verified their accounts. Though not outright resistant to international research, the IMOAT refused to give any referrals to any of the 49,000 victims it claimed to have rescued in 2012, and were quick to use trafficked victims' vulnerability as a justification for limiting transparency and research into over protection and rehabilitation practices (Fieldnotes 5/2012).

The large national project undertaken during my research tenure was a shelter improvement project co-funded by UNIAP and the Chinese government's Ministry of Civil Affairs (MOCA). This program was run through existing government shelters, and focused on three shelters in Kunming, Guangxi, and Guangdong provinces, which like most shelters throughout the country, have long histories as penal institutions—functioning as alternatives to prison for a range of indigent populations including the homeless, the mentally ill, and victims of domestic violence. Research on the experiences of victims who use these services is still scant under a political regime that holds tight control over research production, or funnels research through government-led research think tanks. The shelter improvement project brought international consultants to the three shelters to train on tools for victim identification and victim care, and trained local shelter staff on the special needs and vulnerabilities of trafficked persons. Most shelter coordinators and staff were unsure who exactly a victim of trafficking was, and explained that many of their residents had experienced different forms of poverty, violence, exploitation, and vulnerability. To the dismay of international experts, all shelters also claimed that they took no measures to separate “trafficked populations” from the rest of their residents, because they lacked the staff resources to do so, and again, because they were unsure what exactly

constituted human trafficking. Such ambiguity around who a trafficked person is, and what specific services they might need reveal the challenges of mobilizing new international victim categories within existing penal institutions. The attempt to transform shelters for indigent populations into rehabilitative institutions marks a significant feature of the Chinese state-led anti-trafficking efforts—not just initiated by the Ministry of Public Security, but also filtered through government institutions that have traditionally emphasized carcerality and confinement as opposed to rehabilitation services.

Finally, the Migrant Band Project was the focal “special project” in 2012-2013. Though all of the aforementioned projects underscore the level of governmental cooperation with UN anti-trafficking program, the subsequent discussion focuses on the Migrant Worker Band Project as an instance of transnational activism in the Chinese context. This anti-trafficking intervention reveals the ways in which transnational actors bend to the Chinese state, and how the Chinese state reciprocally benefits from such flexible transnational engagement.

Transnationalism Meets the Authoritarian State

Each year the Chinese anti-trafficking ministerial office joins ministers from six countries in the Greater Mekong Subregion for the Senior Officials Meeting (SOM) on Human Trafficking organized by the United Nations Inter Agency Project to Combat Trafficking in Persons (UNIAP). Gathered in early 2013 at a five star conference venue overlooking Bangkok’s Chao Praya River, I interviewed the Director of the Chinese Ministry of Public Security to ask why labor trafficking is still not included in the country’s human trafficking definition. I asked this question because it is still the most alarming point of contention and outrage from the international community. He remarked:

The international community insists that labor exploitation is a problem, but as the director of IMOAT, I can guarantee that labor is not a problem. What people outside of China don't understand, is exactly how strong Chinese workers are. We have a kind of culture of work here—as such, it's not likely that a case of trafficking will involve labor (Chen 2013).

This reasoning, which embeds nationalist logics and gendered assumptions about the strength of Chinese labor, allows Chinese state actors to align themselves with the transnational anti-trafficking movement by discursively shaping transnational rights within the interests of the nation state. This state agenda stems from a highly organized central government, which prioritizes “harmony,” quelling civil society unrest, and developing its national economy. Following economic reform in the 1980's, undocumented migration, human rights protests, and ethnic minority disturbances have increased; yet have been swiftly stifled by public security forces. Chen's rhetoric also follows a socialist legacy in which the working class is heralded as the primary engine of growth for the state (Yang 2010; Walder 1984).

During a lunch break at the meeting, over an elaborate buffet-style meal in the hotel's banquet hall, documentary filmmakers from MTV's project to “End Exploitation and Trafficking,” colloquially known as “MTV EXIT,”³⁶ requested that I translate an interview between MTV and the Ministry's Director of Trafficking.³⁷ In an email before the meeting, an MTV Exit project manager told me that they regrettably didn't have a Chinese speaking staff member on their team of filmmakers from the US and UK. As we sat down for the meeting, the

³⁶ MTV Exit, an independent foundation affiliated with MTV Europe, was founded to raise awareness about human trafficking across the Asian Pacific Region. They hire popular regional bands to perform concerts at shopping malls in “second-tier cities,” where crowds of young people gather, more enticed by MTV's branding and the projections of “the Hills” and Punk'ed” on the projection screens than on the message against human trafficking. It is unclear how effective this program has been in anything but increasing MTV's presence in its “emerging markets” in Southeast Asia, but their efforts continue to be funded by a combination of private and some foundation grants.

³⁷ The fact that I, a UNIAP-China representative, was asked to provide translation points to certain structural characteristics of the transnational anti-trafficking movement happening in the region: 1) that transnational movement organizations in the region frequently do not speak the local languages of the areas in which they work; 2) the UNIAP is frequently called upon to serve as the literal translator between transnational civil society and the state.

team explained that they were working on a multi-country documentary series called “Enslaved,” and were eager to highlight one case of cross-border labor trafficking from China. Director Chen listened intently and was startled. “Labor exploitation!?” He furrowed his brow, sternly shook his head, and remarked:

It’s very unlikely that we have any cases of labor exploitation; my office certainly has not heard of any of these. Maybe in brick kilns with physically and mentally disabled workers. But it would not be advisable to film a case of labor exploitation because this would not give a very complete picture of trafficking in China.

The assertion that labor exploitation only happens with disabled persons, who are unable to fight for their rights, confirms his earlier assertion that able-bodied workers, and particularly male laborers, ought to exemplify *good* strong workers—exemplary of the Chinese state.

Zaloznaya and Hagan’s (2012) recent work on human trafficking’s governance in Belarus theorizes a model of “selective compliance” whereby “selective tight coupling rather than decoupling from on-the-ground policies enables the simultaneous compliance and worsening of authoritarian repression” (346). They argue that the Belarussian government pursues certain social protection policies in the name of human trafficking to gain merit on the transnational stage, but that this form of legitimacy affords greater authoritarian power over subjects of human trafficking. Similar to the Belarus case, and as this chapter attempts to illustrate, the transnational pressure to engage in “inter-agency” efforts to combat human trafficking offers the Chinese state an opportunity to monitor and oversee all labor trafficking efforts—even though it excludes labor exploitation from its own definition of human trafficking.

Bringing Labor Trafficking to China

Despite the Chinese government’s efforts to ignore labor exploitation, the US Trafficking

in Persons report had expressed significant critiques of the country's lack of attention to labor trafficking. Even before receiving the damning Tier 3 ranking in 2013, China had spent two years on the Tier 2 Watch List, a ranking given to countries that serves as a “warning” of their pending downgrade to the third tier if their interventions did not step into alignment with US protocol.³⁸ The UNIAP Regional Management Office (RMO) in Bangkok had also renewed regional efforts to focus on labor trafficking in the wake of international attention to cases of slavery-like conditions involving Cambodian and Burmese fisherman migrants in the Thai deep-sea fishing industry.³⁹ Alongside the global conversation's shift to labor trafficking (Mahdavi 2013; Parreñas 2012), the RMO aggressively advocated for all COMMIT countries to shift their priorities to the examination of labor trafficking. This took shape in different ways across the region—in Cambodia, a multi-sectoral conference convened to discuss the different definitions of labor exploitation and to investigate gaps between domestic definitions of and international laws concerning trafficking. Elsewhere, the Thai government has required the fishing industry to set up certain mechanisms to monitor the labor abuses of particular firms in the fishing industry (UNIAP 2013).

In early 2012, the UNIAP RMO issued a directive for the UNIAP China office to undertake a “Labor Trafficking Baseline Study,”⁴⁰ the first study of its kind in China. The first task of the project was to identify a researcher, and distribute the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the position throughout UNIAP's email network. Numerous applications poured in, many from

³⁸ The 2003 TVPRA warned that a Tier 3 ranking would be accompanied with economic sanctions, however, this has not proven to be as significant a deterrent for China given its relatively low reliance on aid. China's manufacturing and export economy was not punished following its Tier 3 Ranking (Ponnudurai 2014).

³⁹ In addition to transnational pressures, the regional pressures of the Greater Mekong Subregion Project, were particularly present in Thailand and China, the two largest economies in the region and largest recipients of migrant workers.

⁴⁰ “Baseline studies” are considered to be less threatening to the Chinese government. Preliminary in nature, such reports reflect a governmental interest in understanding social concerns, with the hope that findings cannot shed too much light on negative outcomes. Following up on baseline studies, or evaluation studies of progress, are more likely to be censored by the government.

English-speaking researchers eager to participate in the first study of its kind in China. Unbeknownst to the public, a separate *targeted* TOR was sent to a handful of government-approved Chinese academics, requesting a brief research proposal describing how they planned to investigate labor trafficking. Nearly a dozen researchers responded, affiliated with higher education or research institutes throughout the country, detailing innovative research methodology that merged their personal expertise, for instance with labor migration, or with vulnerable youth, and detailing interview and survey techniques to learn about labor trafficking amidst these populations. Though they possessed expertise spanning interdisciplinary traditions, and diverse geographical perspectives, none of the candidates was selected.

Instead the selected researcher was an academic who had recently won the trust and good favor of the Ministry of Civil Affairs as the researcher and trainer in the separate, aforementioned, UNIAP- and government-run “Human Trafficking Shelter Improvement Project.” Though this researcher had no prior experience in labor studies, her allegiance to the government, or what the UNIAP National Program Coordinator referred to simply as “safety,” was of primary significance. Likely due to the researcher’s concern for government interests, this labor trafficking baseline study has still not been completed—nearly two years after the TOR was distributed.⁴¹

Because progress on the “Labor Trafficking Baseline Study” was at a standstill, UNIAP looked for other ways to engage with the problem of labor trafficking. UNIAP Regional Management Officers from Bangkok decided to pursue a “Migrant Worker Band Project” that would fund a migrant worker band to write and perform songs about human trafficking. They considered this strategy—organized around the innocuous songs—to be the least offensive to their

⁴¹ This assessment was based on observations and data collection over the course of my full time six month long research tenure at the UNIAP China Office.

government partners. Co-sponsored by the multinational Christian foundation World Vision and the United Nations, this project first needed to train the band on the definitions of human trafficking, as they previously had been working without this vocabulary.

Founded in 2004, the *Migrant Worker's Home*, a local NGO that had grown out of the “New Migrant Worker’s Band,” established a growing profile in the NGO community in Beijing. Known for performing concerts about migrant pride to migrant worker communities throughout the country, the band had well-established mechanisms for delivering messages about safe labor practices. While their concerts are largely uncontested by the government, the NGO’s work in convening an annual conference of labor NGOs at their headquarters in Beijing is subject to government censors—their recent appeasement of censors changed the focus of the conference from “labor strategizing” to “celebrating labor culture.” Noting the seemingly benign yet effective existence of the band’s previous concerts, the UNIAP China office agreed to pursue collaboration with the “New Migrant Worker’s Band.”

The 18-month project was funded at over \$100,000 USD by UNIAP and World Vision, an American Christian organization, which is one of the primary international NGO actors in China’s limited anti-trafficking movement. World Vision, the multinational Christian foundation, which collects money from Christians in the Global North to promote “rights and democracy in the developing world,” and one of the larger anti-trafficking funders in China, should be an unlikely partner in staunchly secular China. Elsewhere Hildebrandt (2013) has written about the unexpected coalitions between the Chinese government and faith-based organizations to promote social movement goals. One significant reason for World Vision’s unmitigated participation may be that their financial contributions to government anti-trafficking efforts come with very few regulations. In addition to paying for various anti-trafficking programs that gain it merit amidst its

global funders, it also endears itself to the government by paying for things like the Minister's first class airplane upgrades to attend UN meetings, because that is a cost that was not covered by either the UN or government budgets.⁴²

World Vision was likely motivated by the promise of *guanxi*, a system of relationships and reciprocity that are regarded as necessary in Chinese social, economic, and secular political arrangements (Gold, Guthrie, and Wank 2002; Xin and Pearce 1996). Following a lunch meeting at the UNIAP office, I remarked on how unique it was for WV to have a seat amidst government anti-trafficking conversations in China. The director told me that WV has been operating in China for over a decade, and that its success is due to "prioritizing cooperation opportunities." (Fieldnotes 11/2012) The organization has chosen to mask its Christian priorities, evidenced by strategically different language in the international and Chinese versions of their website. While the Chinese version of the site states: "World Vision is a relief, development, and advocacy non-governmental organization," the World Vision International page states "World Vision is an international partnership of Christians whose mission is to follow our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in working with the poor and oppressed to promote human transformation, seek justice and bear witness to the good news of the Kingdom of God."⁴³ Hints of Christianity are also buried across different versions of the website, for instance the English language version requests a church affiliation in a job application cover letter, while the Chinese language version omits the request, though WV workers in China are mainly Christians as the office requires staff to engage in daily group prayer (Fieldnotes 12/2012).

⁴² This assessment was based on observations and data collection over the course of my six month long research tenure at the UNIAP China Office. As a small office of only three full-time staff members, the entire office was called upon to assist with conference planning, travel logistics, and communications involving regional meetings.

⁴³ <http://www.wvi.org/vision-and-values-0>

World Vision has achieved a favorable relationship with the Chinese government through its generous funding of governmental anti-trafficking projects. This has paved the way for it to run its own projects with relatively little oversight. For instance, the organization runs a children's shelter in the suburbs of Kunming in Yunnan Province housing over one hundred homeless, orphaned, handicapped, and runaway street youth. The organization's other projects focus on poverty alleviation, education, and children's rights. The organization claims no proselytization over its beneficiary populations, however the organizations' offices hold Christian worship every day and employees consider faith an important motivation for their professional endeavors (Fieldnotes 11/2012). Given the organization's international stature as a large global Christian non-profit organization at the helm of Christian anti-trafficking efforts globally, WV's executive director frequently gives public talks about human trafficking, most recently at the 2014 Freedom Conference, a gathering of evangelical Christians about social justice in Los Angeles (Fieldnotes 2/2014).

In addition to the UNIAP and World Vision partnership, the project required a government partner to be in compliance with government requirements for oversight. The All China Women's Federation filled this role; this governmental organ occupies an interesting position in China because it is not housed within the government ministerial infrastructure, but serves as a liaison between civil society and the government, a particular category that has been labeled a "Government Organized NGO" (GONGO) in China (Jie 2006). The regional UN "Inter-Agency" focus is easily adopted to accommodate the Chinese government's model of "partnership" as oversight in all non-governmental work.

Such mandatory and often stifling governmental oversight is considered a serious a problem for many non-profit organizations and foundations in China, which persistently struggle

with government compliance and censorship. For instance, cumbersome registration regulations allow only a select number of organizations to register as non-profit organizations through the Ministry of Civil Affairs. Many non-governmental organizations evade these requirements by registering as for-profit entities or as social enterprises. While this alleviates some of the restrictions for government oversight, these regulations complicate issues like funding and donations. UNIAP complies strictly with government partnerships because the formality embedded in the COMMIT process requires governmental participation.⁴⁴

The government's Inter-Ministerial Office Against Trafficking (IMOAT) oversees the UNIAP China office to administer counter-trafficking work domestically and to control the information flows between China and the UNIAP Regional Management Office in Bangkok. The IMOAT permits anti-trafficking projects to be conducted only if the projects have a government partner—for example, UNIAP must partner with a government-approved researcher to conduct trafficking research of any kind, and research findings are reported straight to IMOAT before they are disseminated publically. The intent of such vertical relationships has directed research, data, and practice toward the state policy of ignoring labor exploitation. It also alienates a number of civil society organizations that conduct anti-trafficking work by giving the government unique control over the movement's access to resources. While these mechanisms of global governance intend to hold states accountable to the UN, they simultaneously create channels for the UN and other interagency partners to be accountable to and be scrutinized by the state—inadvertently carving out mechanisms that *strengthen* governmental oversight of counter-trafficking activities.

⁴⁴For a discussion of the Chinese government's oversight over NGOs, see Hildebrandt 2011, Deng 2010; Yang 2005; Shieh and Deng 2011; Ma 2002; Saich 2000.

Despite China's evasion of universal standards for achieving global human rights,⁴⁵ the Chinese state has embraced the problem of human trafficking through its strategically selective response. However, the celebratory focus on the punitive dimensions of human trafficking's governance in China obscures countless human rights abuses that have occurred in the name of combating human trafficking. In addition to labor abuses that typically go ignored, the Chinese state has also failed to protect the rights of Burmese victims of forced marriage, choosing instead to mandatorily deport marriage migrants under the anti-trafficking framework of repatriation (even if they have children in China). Fear of such systematic deportation has made stateless and Burmese victims of forced marriage less likely to seek assistance after they are trafficked (Palawan 2011).⁴⁶ Additionally, recent published research by Human Rights Watch has found that once arrested, Chinese sex workers are sentenced to mandatory "re-education through labor," referring to a system of labor reeducation common during the Cultural Revolution. Ongoing sex-worker participant research coordinated with the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers has found some cases where part of a detained sex worker's reeducation involves memorizing some of the country's new anti-trafficking laws (HRW 2013).

Contention, Convergence, and Cooperation

The "Migrant Worker Band Project" kicked off with a three-day workshop, held in the UNIAP Beijing offices, that was intended to train the band on the definitions of human trafficking so that they could compose effective lyrics on the topic. Seated in a small conference room in a high-rise building in a diplomatic compound in Beijing (entry is only granted to foreign passport

⁴⁵ See for instance, China's response to human rights issues involving Tibet and Xinjiang autonomous prefectures, land rights, and the 1989 Tiananmen square massacre (Foot 2000; Kent 2011; Dwyer 2005; Hess 2010; Walker 2008).

⁴⁶ The spurious conflation of deportations as "humanitarian repatriations" is not unique to the Chinese context and has been demonstrated in Sine Plambech's (2014) work on the deportation of Nigerian migrants from Western Europe, and throughout global contexts in the work of Nandita Sharma (2005).

holders, or through an extensive registration process), eight members of the band were seated around a table, where they listened to presentations from the UNIAP, the ILO, and the All China Women's Federation. The national project coordinator of the UNIAP China office, a charismatic forty-year-old former government employee and member of the elite youth communist party league, gave a formal presentation about the Chinese government's stance on human trafficking and on four select cases of trafficking that have occurred—though not one was a case of labor trafficking.

Though the words “labor exploitation” floated across numerous PowerPoint presentation slides, not one of the ‘expert trainers’ articulated the specific kinds of labor exploitation that may be considered human trafficking offenses in China. This gap exists because China does not recognize labor trafficking; however, these trainers included discussions of labor exploitation because: 1) they are constantly negotiating the gaps between international and Chinese working definitions of human trafficking, and 2) the implicit agenda of this meeting was to train a labor rights band/NGO on the issue of human trafficking as a way of merging the labor and trafficking frameworks.

Periods of curiosity, confusion, exasperation, and sheer boredom washed over the group, as many whispered comments about the unnecessary formality of the training. On about the fifth PowerPoint slide, which ceremoniously flashed the words “labor exploitation” on the screen (the slide was about how the UN Palermo Protocol includes labor exploitation as one type of human trafficking), the founder of the band raised his hand.

Band Leader: I don't understand what you mean by “labor exploitation.” Our (labor rights) NGO and community center meets clients on a daily basis who have many different kinds of problems, from unpaid wages, bad working conditions, faulty contracts, so you are saying that we can file these as human trafficking cases?

UNIAP: Not really, this protocol is really talking about *extreme* cases of labor exploitation.

Band Leader: Well, then the word “labor exploitation” is unclear. This is a concept that we really need to understand if we are to write songs about it, and if workers are supposed to be able to understand these songs.

Band Member 1: (interrupts) Yea, I mean, we all know that we are essentially all exploited as workers...<chuckles>...I mean, some could say that you, the UN, is exploiting us right now. Or that you, too, are being exploited.

ILO: (intervenes) It’s basically to say, the *worst* forms of labor abuse that occur.

Band Member 2: What would that entail? Does that include what is going on at Foxconn right now?

ILO: If those cases deal with children under the age of 16, then yes.

UNIAP: That’s right! China has a child labor law, which prohibits any child under the age of 16 from working—any child who works is a victim of human trafficking.

ILO: I also want to let you know that ILO takes this problem very seriously and is beginning a baseline study into the student labor problem next year.

Bang Member 3: Ok, so I want to write one of these human trafficking songs about the serious problem of student labor abuses that are happening at Foxconn as a problem of human trafficking.

UNIAP: Ok...but you need to make sure it is clear in the lyrics that it’s about children under the age of 16.

Foxconn is a Taiwanese-owned electronics manufacturing company that employs thousands of workers in tech manufacturing factories throughout China, with its largest factories located in Southern China’s Guangdong province. It has recently come under global scrutiny after 14 workers committed suicide in protest over the factory’s maltreatment of workers, hazardous working conditions, and exploitation of student labor. Though certainly not the only factory guilty of such labor abuses, it has gained the most international notoriety due to its connection to American suppliers. The concern over worker’s rights reached American shores as activists and journalists revealed that Foxconn is one of the largest producers of Apple, Dell, and Hewlett Packard products, asking for consumer pressure upon such popular brands to address labor exploitation in their supply chains (Chan and Ngai 2010; Chan 2014).

Noticing that the problem of exploited student labor might gain some traction with the trafficking community, Du Juan, the youngest band member who was also the only female band member, was excited to have found a concrete point of overlap between the labor and human

trafficking agendas. However, she was quickly told that only student workers who are under 16 could be considered victims of trafficking. Aligned with the Palermo Protocol, the Chinese definition of trafficking encompasses any form of child labor, however, such an offense is already illegal under labor law. However, the actual mechanics of exploitation, or what Yihui Su has called the “dual commodification of education and labor” (Su 2012)—including the mandatory completion of unpaid, unsafe, and extensive hours of work at the behest of “vocational training schools” that withhold identity cards and diploma certificates until the “internship” period is complete—are not considered trafficking, despite the extremely exploitative nature of such vocational training programs. In the interaction above, and at other points during the training, the band members felt uneasy that UNIAP and ILO representatives both were so quick to dismiss the widely-publicized incidences of labor abuse at Foxconn and cases of labor abuse that they manage on a daily basis. UNIAP and ILO staff members took this position on labor abuse because as global governance agencies working closely with the Chinese government, their priority is the government’s definition of trafficking. Any flexibility in interpretation would challenge the future of their work and collaboration with the government.⁴⁷

The Foxconn labor crisis is an interesting case to understand the situation of labor exploitation within human trafficking activism in China. This labor crisis was generally ignored in the UNIAP office because China’s National Plan of Action did not encompass labor exploitation, and they assumed these problems to be an issue exclusively managed by the Ministry of Labor. That the band would recognize an opportunity to advocate for student workers

⁴⁷ The Ministry of Public Security’s IMOAT instituted mundane surveillance of the UNIAP China office. One part time staff member was hired purely to translate all English language reports into Chinese to send over for Ministerial approval. Such documents often went back and forth through several rounds of review delaying the office’s regional work plan. In one instance, I had created a human trafficking referral sheet for potential victims, and was required to submit it to the MPS. I was asked to reformat the document that displayed a checklist for different services offered by referral agencies (for instance, legal aid, psychological counseling, housing, etc.) Government officials asked that the check marks be removed because they provided a visual—and somehow more quantitative—assessment of the amount of trafficking services available. Instead, I was asked to list each of the services by word.

is a clever interpretation of the UN human trafficking laws. Advocating the inclusion of labor rights into human trafficking activism certainly mirrors the US' and UN's interest in pressuring the Chinese government to recognize labor trafficking; however, as this chapter demonstrates, using transnational human trafficking protocols to mobilize labor activism is easily co-opted and absorbed by authoritarian state interests.

When I interviewed labor rights activists, lawyers, and NGOs about their thoughts regarding the mobilization of labor rights into anti-trafficking activism, respondents were either entirely confused or wholly agnostic on the matter. Many did not know the definition of human trafficking, and my attempts to explain the differences between the Chinese and UN definitions often devolved into a confusing and ineffective dialogue similar to the interaction described above. Debbie Chan, the director of Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM) a Hong Kong-based labor rights and advocacy NGO that has fiercely advocated for Foxconn workers' rights, explained that labor activists were already embroiled in a decades-long battle using labor law and pressuring for supply chain accountability. Chan explained,

We have not worked with the anti-trafficking protocols because they don't seem to be very strong in China. We have a difficult time enough enforcing the provisions of a labor law that has been around for decades. To derail such efforts doesn't make sense with our advocacy strategies, and we already don't have enough manpower.

Chan's response was particularly neutral, she did not necessarily see a problem with using the anti-trafficking protocols, but she and other labor activists did not see the connection between the glossiness of human trafficking on the global agenda—which predominantly represented it as a problem of *sex*—and to a certain extent, did not trust its newness.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Criticism of the “newness” of anti-trafficking activism is a sentiment shared by sex worker activists who have argued that the sudden rise of human trafficking as the celebrated cause of the day takes attention away from longer standing human rights abuses.

In his ethnography of the World Bank, Michael Goodman uncovers the manner in which this global governance institution generates expertise around economic development in the Third World. Relying on expert testimony and particular international expertise, (frequently this refers to English-speaking consultants who have completed schooling in Western countries), local and indigenous knowledge is often ignored (Goldman 2005). The training of the migrant band should have been an opportunity for exchange given the band's decade-long experience operating a community center for migrant laborers living outside Beijing. In addition to their direct service to migrant populations, they recently opened a migrant worker museum, the first of its kind in China, with plans to take a travelling exhibition to the Museum of the Chinese in America in New York. Their experience with the changing concerns and composition of migrant labor in China is invaluable for informing appropriate songs about labor exploitation, yet this first-hand knowledge was not afforded any recognition throughout the training.

Rather than use their on the ground experience as a resource, transnational actors—in partnership with the Chinese government—asked the labor rights NGO to re-define labor within the rather distorted interests of trafficking. Shaped by the Chinese state, this definition labels labor trafficking as the “most severe” instances of labor exploitation, which ends up defining human trafficking offenses by their *exceptionalism*, thereby marginalizing everyday widespread labor abuses. This is a critique that is shared by sex worker activists, however it is a critique that has yet to be fully developed in response to labor trafficking, which continues to grow as a focal priority of global anti-trafficking activism.⁴⁹ Rarely have such transnational efforts, even in other

⁴⁹ See Bernstein 2009, 2015; Agustín 2014.

contexts, looked to existing labor rights organizations and activism, instead founding new organizations, or coopting existing ones to address the newer issue of labor trafficking.⁵⁰

Performing Transnational Ambiguity

Setting aside the difficulties and discrepancies working through competing definitions of human trafficking, and what makes labor trafficking distinct according to Chinese definitions of trafficking, the band composed ten songs in the assigned six-month period of time. UNIAP and World Vision planned concerts in five cities throughout China, including Beijing, Guangzhou, Suzhou, Jiangsu, and Kunming, and published around five-hundred copies of the band's CD for dissemination. The Kunming site mentioned in the introduction to this chapter was selected because, since 2004, the All China Women's Federation has worked with the International Labor Organization to support a local NGO that provides services to migrant workers in the community. This NGO's modest community station in Fude has a staff of about ten and works on issues like health, education, legal right, and houses a library and drop-in center for young children.

Throughout their performance, band members narrated the concert and explained the meaning behind the different songs, often linking lyrics to concrete laws intended to protect migrant workers. For instance, during the introduction, the band leader commanded the audience's attention and orated in the style of a modern-day emcee: "You may have heard of trafficking, and you may have heard that this is a problem relegated to women and children, but the United Nations has just noted that trafficking can include labor exploitation." Throughout the concert, they maintained consistent with their labor message and mentioned cases of brick kiln

⁵⁰ The case of the Thai labor NGO the Labor Protection Network, briefly described in the following chapter, illustrates an instance in which the global anti-trafficking's attention to a labor rights NGO entirely eclipsed their existing work on expansive labor protection, to one that exclusively focuses on the most extreme cases of labor trafficking.

workers and underage child labor—pointing primarily to the exceptional cases that the Chinese government has deemed trafficking.

Just as it was not entirely clear what the practical and material message of “labor trafficking” was during the band’s own training, it was not clear to the audience how the human trafficking framework presented by the band would address their day-to-day labor grievances. Alongside the band’s focus on labor abuse and other forms of trafficking, one song highlighted a missing girl who had been kidnapped on her way back from school. During this song, a volunteer was approached by a local resident of Fude, a middle-aged woman dressed in clothes whose colors were significantly muted by what appeared to be excessive wear, dust, and sun. With tears streaming down her face, she clutched a photograph, explaining that her eight-year-old daughter had not returned home from school two weeks prior. The volunteer pushed through the crowd and brought the audience member to the organizers, who recorded the general information about the case and photographed the image of the missing child. Later on during the concert, the emcee, a full-time staff member at the local partner organization, took the stage to report the missing child case on stage. As the audience hushed and the mood significantly dampened, the emcee quickly assured the audience that a song later in the program would be sung in honor of this lost child. UNIAP officials later jumped in proudly and said that they posted the girl’s photo on the anti-trafficking director’s micro-blog site about human trafficking, proudly proclaiming that the site has over 500,000 followers. Though this is the director’s personal *weibo* site, this platform has been widely shared as an instance of the Chinese state’s response.

Despite the participation of “local” actors, the messages about labor trafficking were just as confusing to the public as they were in the UNIAP conference room during the band’s training. Without regard to the needs of the local population, the purpose of the concert was never to learn

about the unique problems faced by different migrant communities, but rather to teach communities about international understandings of human trafficking, and the conceptual move to include labor trafficking in China's definition of trafficking.⁵¹ For the audience, however, the most powerful and resonant part of the concert was the first-hand testimony of child-kidnapping—a phenomenon that community members agreed occurs far too often because of long parental, working hours, absence of community and educational resources for migrant youth, and lack of political will for police to track down lost children.

Celebrating Gangnam Style: Transnational Interest and Optimism in Practice

After convening for the requisite banquet-style wrap-up dinner following the concert, the inter-agency group of organizers gathered over a campfire and locally-brewed Yunnan beer at the local NGO community center, where small barbeque grills ingeniously rested atop small steel water bins typically used for washing vegetables. The local NGO had prepared buckets of chicken wings to barbeque in their courtyard and the All China Women's Federation Vice Chair offered a long and moving speech to close the event. She spoke fondly of the NGO, volunteers, funders, and, most proudly exclaimed that she—a party official—was so fully committed to the spirit of partnership that she joked that she often considered herself a “part-time staff member” of the International Labor Organization *and* the local NGO because she had spent so much time overseeing this project. On the one hand, a testament to inter-agency partnership, this new relationship also reveals the ongoing control that Chinese government officials wield over transnational projects. No longer are authoritarian censorship organs put in place to detect and

⁵¹ In my earliest trip to rural Yunnan in 2005, accompanying a research team from the Chinese University for Nationalities, one could already see the influence of global anti-trafficking protocols. A local women's federation representative guided us to a rural elementary school that was labeled a “special pilot school” for anti-trafficking prevention, where a chalkboard displayed the Chinese transnational of the UN Palermo Protocol in bright colored chalk.

report instances of wrong-doing, rather surveillance has become naturally built into the personnel of such transnational projects, and celebrated as a model of inter-agency partnership.

Yet despite Chinese control over international anti-trafficking projects, or its low Tier 3 ranking, the MPS-IMOAT Director Chen was recently awarded an international “Social Media Engagement” award for his anti-trafficking *weibo* site, a microblog platform (similar to *Twitter*) that allows users to report cases of trafficking directly on the page. This site promises that local public security bureau resources will be allocated to addressing all posted cases. IMOAT enthusiastically reports that many cases have been pursued and solved through this platform, cases that predominantly deal with school-aged children who have been kidnapped on their way to school—a crime that is not typically treated as a trafficking offense in other countries. The Ministry of Public Security conveniently labels child kidnapping a crime of human trafficking, allowing it to cite cases of child kidnapping as a demonstration of their anti-trafficking efforts.

Amidst the closing celebration—during which the vice chair also led a raucous group dance of the popular South Korean pop song “Gangnam Style”—I asked the concert’s emcee about the prevalence of child-kidnapping cases in the community. The NGO employee told me, “There are many cases like this, and you can’t really do much about it. Kids go missing all the time. We can file a police report, but so many of these migrant workers are so mobile that it’s hard to know if the kid hasn’t run away or tried to go home.” Most of the time, he noted, these missing persons are reported through secondary responders: “we hear these stories, but they are very difficult to pursue.” The local NGO was committed to visiting the mother who had shared her case at the concert earlier in the day; they planned to submit a full report to the police, but

shared that they were skeptical of any favorable outcome because of the large number of such cases and limited response capacity of their small staff.⁵²

The concert was considered a success by the project's donors, local NGO partners, and band performers, though celebrations seemed to treat the musical performance as unique from its objectives for raising awareness about human trafficking, or assisting with cases of human trafficking on the ground. By assessment measures, the concert had met its goal of gathering hundreds of people to listen to lyrics about human trafficking. However, amidst the congratulations, when pressed, most organizers could not ignore the enduring futility of the cases of child kidnapping that the audience had mentioned.

Aligning Motivations and Interests

As the barbeque disbanded, the band separated from the government officials, and international partners and continued on to a karaoke bar to end the day singing amongst themselves. Exhausted from the day's activities, I asked the bandleader how he maintains energy for the band's rigorous travel and performance schedule. Nonchalantly, he responded: "This is nothing compared to when I used to work in a factory making and setting electrical wires. We would work two days and two nights without rest, because the wires needed to be set and sealed with rubber and then left to dry." Other band members shared this sense of pride in their class backgrounds as migrant factory workers, an identity and experience that they feel creates great solidarity with the migrant worker audiences they perform for. This solidarity is the most

⁵² In 2009, the MPS started a DNA database for missing Chinese children. This has been the focal point of much of their reporting to the United Nations, in which they outline their achievements to combat trafficking in persons. Those who report missing children are asked to provide DNA samples, so that once a child is found, a DNA match can ensure return. While a meaningful contribution to the return of missing children, this particular intervention steers clear of discussion of child labor, focusing only on child kidnapping.

important aspect of their work, and they strive to make sure there are limited barriers between their music and their message.

As karaoke subsides, and we sip on the remaining beers, the band begins to evaluate the day's performance, debating the merits of whether they should perform with a more complicated base recording with more instruments and layers for their next performance. One of the primary singers and guitar players said that Chairman Mao also dealt with this issue: "Whether it is more important for people to understand our message, or for our message to sound good...and are these mutually exclusive?"

Marked as one of the more progressive of the non-governmental organizations in China, the Migrant Worker's Band has gained the respect of workers' rights organizations throughout the country. They claim that what sets them apart from other organizations is a sense of class solidarity: they all were, and still are, migrant workers. At the same time, they toe a line with the government as their input in policy debates around labor rights has become more important given their extensive work on the ground. Paradoxically, the "Migrant Labor Band Project" represented the greatest challenge to that premise, because an international agenda and international funding stream largely determined the messaging for the album.

When asked why they participated in this project, and whether they regarded it as a success, one band member responded: "We were skeptical about what it would be like to work under the UN. But ultimately, they let us write our own songs, and that is what we love to do. What matters most to us is that audiences can take away a basic message about being proud to be migrant workers." Other band members agreed that they did not see this project as drastically different from their ongoing series of concerts for migrant workers. This opportunity presented a way for their creative work to gain more recognition with a broader audience of migrant

workers—and it provided a comfortable amount of compensation and covered travel expenses with which to do so.

UNIAP and World Vision also had very realistic notions of the efficacy of the project, in particular, because there were limited opportunities to assess and evaluate the program's success. Undeniably, however, a successful partnership with the Chinese government is in and of itself an achievement, which demonstrates to donors and the international community that efforts to combat human trafficking in China exist. Similarly for the Chinese government, its participation in and support of the “Migrant Labor Band Project” draws attention away from its ongoing refusal to legally recognize forms of labor exploitation as serious concerns.

Conclusion

Since China's ratification of the Palermo Protocol in 2008, human trafficking has remained a contested area of concern amongst global governance institutions, nation states, activists, scholars, and service providers. Governing human trafficking in China reveals how global counter-trafficking movement goals are reciprocally shaped by distinct state interests—in China, the prevention of labor unrest amidst one of the largest migrant workforces in the world. Global human trafficking social policy is actively constructed and contested locally vis-à-vis national anti-trafficking laws, government ministries, bilateral and regional memorandums of understanding, and collusion with or exclusion from peripheral movements related to gender, sexuality, labor, migrant and human rights.

Under Chinese authoritarianism, new mechanisms of rights censorship—including the creation of a government ministry to address human trafficking—have secured the government institutional space for policing and deporting undocumented migrants, and allowing the ongoing

exploitation of migrant workers.⁵³ However, these moments of contention rarely get noticed because the UNIAP and other partners are keen to develop “Inter-Agency Partnership” as a mechanism for government inclusion under authoritarianism. Though they are used to government oversight and control, these partnerships have made China appear amenable to transnational interests and has earned it consistent Tier 2 rankings on the US State Department’s Trafficking in Persons Reports before the recent downgrade, which mainly cited the Chinese regime’s persistent refusal to recognize labor trafficking. At the transnational level these partnerships, despite their controlling nature, have earned the Chinese government political and social capital in appearing to engage the human trafficking issue.

Recent critiques of global anti-trafficking efforts have heralded the shift to labor trafficking as a panacea for how the human trafficking frame can address global justice more broadly. The case of the “Migrant Worker Band Project” reveals how the transnational move towards recognizing labor trafficking can have detrimental consequences for local organizations and local labor solidarity. In closing, this chapter cautions that global solidarity can sometimes create spaces of local exclusion, both for labor organizations which find the definitions of human trafficking too exceptional for the vast majority of commonplace labor grievances, as well as for those organizations which find the abundant resources that are available for “human trafficking” to represent a gross misallocation. The recent turn to advocate for a framework of labor trafficking in China occurred without recognition of local labor politics and organizing; these transnational frameworks were mobilized by a mutually complicit network of actors with unique

⁵³ As Plambech (2014) has demonstrated in the European context, the Chinese government has used the framework of “repatriation” as a measure of its anti-trafficking activism. Large anti-trafficking actions in 2013 included the rescue and repatriation of youth from Burma. Alternatively read, such repatriation is arguably just the deportation of undocumented migrants, however, the government allowed no interviews to be conducted with such victims to make any further assessment of this possibility (Fieldnotes 2/2012).

motivations and interests, ultimately demonstrating a unique case of transnationalism without local solidarity.

Chapter 4: Global Circuits of Consumption and Commerce Across Human Trafficking

Rescue in Thailand

Each summer, since 2009, the multinational non-profit anti-trafficking organization *Not For Sale* (NFS)⁵⁴ has hosted a “Free2Play Camp” at their children’s home in northern Thailand, located about 70 kilometers from Thai-Burma border at Chiang Rai. The organization provides an opportunity for over a dozen American volunteers to teach, play, and dance with the nearly 150 children who live at the home, while promising self-supporting volunteer participants an opportunity to learn about human trafficking. The organization refers to the youth at the home as “vulnerable to human trafficking” in their promotional materials. Recently, several members of the 2013 trip entered a funding competition sponsored by the Brees Dream Foundation, a charity created by NFL New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees. Volunteers submitted a video⁵⁵ narrated by NFS co-founder and president David Batstone’s high school-aged son Caelin, who shares the motivations behind and activities planned during the summer camp:

Me and my fellow volunteers go to Thailand and spend a week with these kids and play basketball, dance, sing songs, and really just get to know these kids. It gives them the opportunity and the hope that they can dream and be whoever they want to be. They don’t have to be beggars or slave kids, but they can be NBA stars and professional dancers, and that’s what every kid deserves in life, and that’s how it should be.

(Brees Dream Foundation Website 2014)

In January 2014, the foundation announced that this video was selected as the winner and earned the NFS Thailand project a \$5,000 donation; the NFS website enthusiastically reported: “A

⁵⁴ NFS, described in Chapters 1 and 2, is an American anti-trafficking NGO that conducts direct service and awareness raising projects to combat “modern day slavery” throughout the world. Founded in 2005, it is the largest formally secular anti-trafficking NGO that has integrated faith-based communities into anti-trafficking activism—primarily young evangelical Christian women.

⁵⁵ “Friends and Family Not for Sale 2159”

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DozoN7wOsJ8&feature=player_embedded

different kind of football victory- to benefit children in Thailand- to report just in time for Super Bowl Sunday.”

This headline references the significance of Super Bowl Sunday as an allegedly important American sex trafficking destination of recent years. Fueled by moral concerns around sexual slavery, abolitionists contend that large-scale sporting events like the Super Bowl, World Cup, and Olympics, are a breeding ground for sex trafficking because they bring money and visitors into competition cities. Advocates have called for increased surveillance and a crackdown on sex work during such events (McCain Institute 2014). The juxtaposition of domestic concerns about trafficking at the Super Bowl, with the funding of the NFS Thailand campaign by a celebrated Super Bowl quarterback, represents the unique convergence of moral preoccupations around sexual commerce with transnational humanitarian investments.

This chapter is particularly interested in why and how Thailand functions as a pivotal destination for American human trafficking rescue, and situates transnational anti-trafficking endeavors within Thai political and economic history. Following Bernstein's attention to the contemporary melding of for-profit interests with humanitarian endeavor--what she has termed “redemptive capitalism” (Bernstein 2013, 2014, 2015)—I highlight how the transnational human trafficking movement in Thailand has created new forms of market-based humanitarianism extending far beyond the grassroots religious social entrepreneurs discussed in Chapter 2. Focusing primarily on the secular responses to trafficking, this chapter reveals two types of market-based interventions: 1) the commodification of what Nicolas Mai has called “sexual humanitarianism” (Mai 2013) through American human trafficking reality tours to Thailand;⁵⁶ 2) the United Nation’s engagement with the private sector regarding labor exploitation in the Thai

⁵⁶ See also Bernstein and Shih (2014).

Deep Sea Fishing Industry. These two cases illustrate the hierarchical and different dimensions at which labor and sex trafficking interventions operate. Both sex trafficking and labor trafficking responses are dispersed across global governance institutions, the Thai state, and multinational corporations, however sex trafficking additionally engages the international—and specifically American—general public’s concern and activism around a purportedly universally regarded moral evil. These varying levels of transnational engagement with sex versus labor trafficking in Thailand reveal different moral orientations towards different gendered forms of labor—with sex work representing an intimate, vulnerable, and feminized form of labor, while fishing represents its more public, corporate, and masculine counterpart.

These two cases exemplify new modes of transnational engagement with human trafficking; though the motivations and interests behind addressing sex trafficking and labor trafficking differ significantly, these empirical cases reveal significant instances of what Elizabeth Bernstein refers to as “corporate social governance” and “redemptive capitalism.” These disparate forms of engagement—both in the scope of trafficking cases they consider, and the extent of their multi-sectoral partnerships—reveal a considerably larger and significantly more diffuse anti-trafficking response than exists in China. Theories of state-society relations characterize Thailand’s democratic monarchy as more conducive to civil society action than is possible under authoritarian regimes like China. This chapter frames Thailand’s vibrant transnational civil society against the backdrop of a booming global tourism industry, legacies of military imperialism and Western-led development schemes, and within the past decade, contentious and violent struggles for state power situated between state sovereignty and market governance. The following sections outline features of the Thai political economy, paying particular attention to economic policies that Pasuk Phongphaichit has characterized as “neoliberal populism” (2006).

The attention to practices of market based governance under both Thaksin regimes aims to offer context to the Thai government's response to trafficking in persons, in addition to the transnational anti-trafficking movement, and American rescue industry interests in Thailand.

Thai Political Economy

Since the end of the Indochina wars, Bangkok has marketed itself as a cosmopolitan environment hospitable to capital in all forms from foreign investment to humanitarian aid, and development to mass tourism. An influx of foreign capital, both from private corporations and in the form of development assistance, reached record high levels after the Asian financial crisis in 1997, and in the past decade has helped Thailand climb to one of the strongest economies in Southeast Asia. In the past decade, Thailand's rapidly escalating gross domestic product and foreign direct investments have transformed Thailand from an aid recipient country to a donor country in the Asia Pacific region (Manning 2006). Sharing a physical border with several poorer nations—Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—Thailand is also the recipient of large flows of migrant worker and refugee populations from the area (Phongpaichit and Baker 2002).

Thailand was a focal destination for military Rest and Relaxation (R & R) during the Indochina Wars in the late 1960's and early 1970's. Located near active combat zones in Vietnam, the Thai government was encouraged to provide numerous forms of leisure activities including bars, hotels, dance halls, and massage and other intimate services. The market for intimacy in these "pleasure belts" generated a new moniker among the many American military servicemen who frequented the areas; rather than "R & R," they proposed the more accurate "I & I," referring to "Intoxication and Intercourse" to more specifically describe the activities enjoyed during time away from combat. After the formal exit of US military troops from Southeast Asia in the early

1970s, the commercial sex industry remained central to the Thai tourist industry's expansion. The Thai export-driven economy—planned and funded by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans following the 1997 financial crisis—privileges exports, tourism, and corporate expansion, primarily in Bangkok, and has created large wealth disparities between Bangkok and the other 22 provinces of Thailand. Currently the majority of the nation's wealth is consolidated in the nation's capital, with 42.3 % of GDP accounting for Bangkok alone (CIA 2013; Wilson 2004; Truong 2000; Skrobaneck, Boonpakdi, and Janthakeero 1997). In addition to migration from neighboring countries, within Thailand, disparities in wealth between rural and urban regions have led to successive waves of internal migration to Bangkok for a range of low wage service sector employment opportunities (Feingold 2003; Huguet and Punpuing 2005).

State interests in Thailand have prioritized economic development as a key path to providing human welfare. As anthropologist Ara Wilson (2005) has demonstrated, the “market” has penetrated most aspects of Thai life; the merging of markets and intimacy is evident everywhere from mass retail to medical tourism, and from private homes to public go-go bars. For many of the same reasons that it is hospitable to tourism, Thailand has succeeded in attracting foreign direct investment and is the regional hub of numerous global governance and humanitarian aid organizations ranging from the United Nations, International Labor Organization, Asia Foundation, International Organization for Migration, Red Cross, and Save the Children.

Thai economist Pasuk Phongpaichit has labeled Thailand's economic policies of the past two decades as those that exemplify “neoliberal pluralism” (2006), in which global market-driven policies that aim to favor the rural masses are the foundational premises of Thailand's economic development and its democracy. The political struggles of the past decade have oscillated

between populist strategies to win over the rural majority and Bangkok-centered development schemes that appeal to the urban elite, what TIME magazine referred to as a deep-seated division between the “country’s northern rice bowl and the entrenched urban elites.”⁵⁷

The market’s penetration into Thai politics is best exemplified by former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra’s controversial reign as Prime Minister. His economic development policies introduced microcredit lending and infrastructure to rural areas as well as universal healthcare, which drastically decreased rural and urban inequality following the Asian financial crisis. A businessman, Thaksin created numerous corporations, primarily in the technology fields and by calling on political connections, developed these businesses through consolidating monopoly market share. His AIS cellular phone corporation was given preferential military contracts in the ‘90’s, and is now the largest provider of cellular data throughout Thailand. His extended family’s numerous companies and investments throughout the world have also contributed to his fame as a prominent international business tycoon with ties to international capital. Though his policies paved the way for significant economic progress in rural areas, and grew the Thai economy at a speed that allowed the nation to repay its 1997 financial crisis IMF debt two years early, his policies have been criticized as corrupt, with evidence of payoffs and special government contracts that benefitted his personal corporations or those of close friends and family members. Finally, the Shinawatra family’s generally exuberant displays of wealth and excess are criticized as enormously distant from the majority of rural poor who make up his support base—commonly referred to as the “red shirts,” in contrast with the “yellow shirt” opposition led by the People’s Alliance for Democracy, and who claim to represent the King’s interests (Phongphaichit and Baker 2004; Pathmanand 1998; Pye and Schaffer 2008).

⁵⁷ <http://world.time.com/2013/07/12/how-thailands-botched-rice-scheme-blew-a-big-hole-in-its-economy/>

Thaksin was overthrown in a military coup in 2006 and was replaced by his younger sister, Yingluck Shinawatra, through democratic elections; she remained the Prime Minister until April 2014, when another military coup ordered her resignation. In line with the Shinawatra regime's reputation for turning to the private market to promote economic development, in 2013, PM Yingluck embarked on a daring "rice pledging" scheme that attempted to withhold Thailand's rice supply from the global market in order to create a global shortage that would drive up rice prices. At the time, the Thai government purchased 17 million tons of rice from rural farmers at 50% above the market price. Had the plan worked as intended, the inflated cost that the government paid to rice farmers would be offset onto export countries at inflated prices due to the global shortage in supply. However, while rice is Thailand's number one export, it provides only 30% of the global rice supply, and did not have enough power to influence global market prices. The global shortage that was created by Thailand's manipulation was quickly absorbed and filled by rice stores from India and Vietnam, and throughout 2013, millions of tons of excess unmilled Thai rice built up in storage warehouses throughout the country. Agitated farmers soon began reporting that the unmilled rice had started to mold and rot, physical evidence of the program's failure, which public reports estimate have already cost roughly \$4 billion USD (Sawasdiapakdi 2014; Permani and Vanzetti 2014).

Many allege that corruption has also played a big role in the scheme, with some government buyers refusing to pay farmers the entire inflated subsidy, claiming that their rice was of substandard quality. The inflated subsidies denied to farmers have reportedly been absorbed into the pockets of provincial level bureaucrats who were in charge of administering the plan throughout Thailand's rice producing regions. Other reports assert that false documents were

created so that the millions of tons of rice already stored in warehouses could be sold over and over again between corrupt provincial officials (Hewison 2008; Dalpino 2012).

During PM Yingluck's rule, Thailand experienced the most political unrest since the democracy movement in 1973. The Thaksin family's wealth is consistently a subject of public debate regarding ties between local politics and global capital. In February 2014, Thailand saw its largest and most violent political protests in the past decade, and Prime Minister Yingluck was ousted from her post in April. To date, a new ruling party has yet to be elected. In the midst of the political turmoil, rice farmers' economic prospects have deteriorated rapidly.⁵⁸ It is in this context of market-driven development and persistent rural poverty, that the stage for transnational market-based anti-trafficking efforts in Thailand has been set.

Thai Government Response to Trafficking in Persons

While secular anti-trafficking efforts in China are marked by select government controlled "partnerships," the anti-trafficking movement in Thailand features diverse instances of collaboration, competition, and contestation between the state, market, and civil society. Housed within the Ministry of Human Development and Social Welfare and coordinated among numerous other government entities, the Thai governmental response is robust and it rarely partners with many of the international agencies present in Thailand. For instance, its nine national human trafficking shelters are fully run and funded by the Thai Ministry of Social Development and Human Security. About five years ago these shelters were upheld as best

⁵⁸ Thailand has not yet been able to "re-enter" the global rice market, but the government has held off on any further "rice buying" because of the ongoing political conflict and because of escalating debt in the already failed program. Expressing the economic concerns of rural agriculture and pointing to the rice buying scheme as one of a string of unfulfilled promises made by the government, many farmers have also joined the protests, forming just one contingent of the tens of thousands of people who gathered in Central Bangkok over the course of February and March 2014. To date, twelve farmers have committed suicide protesting and expressing futility over existing economic conditions in rural areas (Sawasdiapakdi 2014).

practices in the region, because so few governments in the region funded shelters devoted exclusively to assisting trafficked persons. China, for instance, was one of the worst cases in the region, continuing to house trafficked victims in government shelters that primarily exist to serve a range of indigent clientele; these shelters, as discussed in Chapter 3, are regarded by many as essentially de-facto detention centers. Recently, however, and as will be seen later on in this chapter, the Thai government shelters have become the sites of numerous documented rights violations, creating new tensions between the Thai government and global governance institutions working in Thailand.

While UNIAP has a central coordinating function in China, the UNIAP-Bangkok office has a more diffuse role in managing governance between the Thai state, international, and local NGOs. Like China, UNIAP-Thailand hosts Inter-Agency task force meetings, but these are held in public venues, frequently attracting over 100 participants from public, private, and government sectors. The openness of these task force meetings partly reflects the dynamics of Bangkok, where numerous global governance institutions house their regional Asia Pacific management offices. These foundations, ranging from the ILO, IOM, Save the Children, Red Cross, and MTV, are attracted to Bangkok for what until recently has been its relative political stability⁵⁹ in the area, appealing cosmopolitan lifestyle, and its convenience as a transportation hub. The prevalence of international foundations and organizations, which occupy some of the highest rent real estate in Bangkok, has generated a market for humanitarian infrastructure, making Thailand a ripe setting for the proliferation of the human trafficking rescue industry (Agustín 2007).

⁵⁹ Significantly, the political unrest, including violent protests were contained to Lumpini Park, a park in Central Bangkok, and never seemed to pose imminent danger to Bangkok residents. On the handful of days when protest expanded to the streets of the busy Sukhumvit area, many international NGOs continued working, or instructed workers to work from home. Tourism also continued through the months of the conflict.

Transnational Anti-Trafficking Movement and American Interests in Thailand

The American interest in human trafficking in Thailand is expansive and borders on obsession. The country receives more dedicated chapters in monographs on trafficking than any other country in the world, ranging from Kevin Bales' *Disposable People*, David Batsone's *Not For Sale*, Rachel Lloyd's *Girls Like Us*, and Siddharth Kara's *Sex Trafficking*, and was recently the destination of a human trafficking exposé by the television show *Vice*—all accounts that overwhelmingly focus on the prevalence of *sex* trafficking in Thailand. Bales' popularly celebrated *Disposable People*, published in 2005, calls readers to action through his depiction of rampant sexual slavery in Thailand, a form of modern day slavery that he abstractly links to the nation's values:

Thailand is a country sick with an addiction to slavery. From village to city and back, the profits of slavery flow. Once authorities and businesspeople become accustomed to this outpouring of money, once any moral objection has been drowned in it, a justification of slavery is easy to mount, and Thai culture and religion stand ready to do so (Bales 2004: 78).

Bales' remark, and those of other authors who have echoed similarly essentialist sentiments about the Thai character of slavery, seemingly refers to economic inequality, rural to urban migration, government corruption, and corporate labor exploitation—features that are hardly specific to Thailand. Thus, this chapter is motivated by a puzzling concern over the transnational community's abundant, exceptional, and persistent focus on combating human trafficking in Thailand, an interest of convenience that I suggest has been facilitated by the comforts of a hospitable tourist destination, the legacy of the American military's enjoyment of sexual services, the visibility of commercial sex as a proxy for sex trafficking, and the government's acquiescence to transnational treaties and hospitality towards foreign capital.

Thailand is home to over thirty different non-governmental and global governance

projects listed on a public directory⁶⁰ of anti-trafficking organizations, and dozens more grassroots organizations that claim to work on the issue. Organizations span a range of functions from advocacy, awareness and fundraising to direct action. One American evangelical Christian organization in Northern Thailand claims to rescue male sex workers from sexual slavery with the catchy motto: “Boys cannot be baht;”⁶¹ MTV’s project to End Exploitation and Trafficking “EXIT” is housed in central Bangkok and produces anti-trafficking awareness concerts in six countries in the region; the global secretariats of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW) and End Child Prostitution And Trafficking (ECPAT) both direct regional efforts from Bangkok, as do the regional management offices for the UNIAP.

Anti-trafficking operations in Thailand have become so appealing, and arguably profitable, that an Australian organization founded under the name “The Grey Man” was exposed for being a fraudulent anti-trafficking organization in Fall 2012. Founded by a former military special operations officer, and funded by donations from Australian citizens, “The Grey Man” facilitated former Australian soldiers and policemen’s rescue missions of victims of sex trafficking in Thailand. The organization claimed to work with the Royal Thai Police, however a local journalist discovered that none of the organization’s claims were true. They were later investigated by the Thai Department of Special Investigations after allegations of “false rescues” were posted on the Internet, and their operations in Thailand have been suspended to date.⁶²

As these disparate projects illustrate, the international community’s urgent concern with human trafficking in Thailand has united global governance institutions like the United Nations, International Labor Organization, and state and non-state actors in the United States, Western

⁶⁰ See list of anti-trafficking NGOs with offices in Bangkok in the appendix.
http://www.humantrafficking.org/countries/thailand/international_orgs

⁶¹ The baht is Thailand’s national currency.

⁶² http://www.andrew-drummond.com/2012/01/akha-and-grey-man-we-find-rescued_7.html

Europe and Australia. In 2013, the Global Slavery Index ranked Thailand as the 26th worst offender of slavery—earning it a spot in the top 10% globally—reporting that in a country of nearly 67,000,000 residents, an estimated 472,811 were victims of modern day slavery (Walk Free 2014). A new ranking mechanism funded by an Australian NGO and designed by UN consultants and in partnership with the International Labor Organization, the Walk Free report reveals the explicit alliances between global governance institutions and certain Western state and non-state actors. Widely cited amongst and heavily disseminated throughout UN and ILO channels, the Global Slavery Index reflects a transnational sphere in which “global governance” represents the interests of Western economic powers.⁶³

The nation has also been the subject of intense scrutiny given its ranking in the US State Department’s Trafficking in Person’s Report. In the early years of the TIP report, 2003-2009, Thailand was consistently ranked a Tier 2 country, a middle tier status assigned to the majority of countries on the list. Beginning in 2010, Thailand received a sudden downgrade to Tier 2 Watch List status, a special category for countries that do not comply with anti-trafficking efforts as outlined by the US State Department. After being on the Watch List for 2 years, the nation faced an automatic downgrade to Tier 3, which would be matched by economic sanctions. However, in 2012, the Thai government submitted a concrete plan for actions to improve its anti-trafficking response and was granted an extension, allowing them to remain on the Tier 2 Watch List.⁶⁴ The 2013 TIP report stressed that despite an increase in trafficking investigations (83 in 2011, and 305 in 2012), Thailand did not prosecute enough human trafficking cases, with just 27 prosecutions in

⁶³ This is merely an extension of the same phenomenon outlined by Chuang (2006), which problematizes the United States Trafficking in Person’s report’s relationships with binding economic sanctions from multilateral lending institutions the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Additionally, for critiques of the Global Slavery Index, see Anne Gallagher’s (2014) recent op-ed in the *Guardian*: “<http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/nov/28/global-slavery-index-walk-free-human-trafficking-anne-gallagher>

⁶⁴ In the same year, Azerbaijan, Congo Brazzaville and Iraq were promoted to Tier 2, while China, Russia and Uzbekistan were downgraded to Tier 3. Malaysia and Thailand were the only 2 countries granted the unique extension allowing them to remain on the Tier 2 Watch List.

2012, compared with 67 the year prior.

The outcome of Thailand's TIP tier rankings were so eagerly anticipated that a group of international anti-trafficking practitioners in Bangkok facetiously started a "betting pool" to see whether Thailand would receive a downgrade from the Tier 2 Watchlist. Though Thailand was scheduled to receive a mandatory downgrade, many believed that the US would not exert the political will to drop Thailand to Tier 3 and enforce economic sanctions, with such an influential trading partner. Critiques of the TIP report have argued that Tier 3 rankings have only been assigned to "rogue" governments, which the US has no political and economic relationships with, including Syria, Qatar, and Burma—China is a recent exception to this, which was discussed in the prior chapter.

Anticipating the threat of a Tier 3 downgrade in the 2014 TIP report ranking, Thai government ministers frequently took to public fora to make statements, in English, about the country's efforts to combat trafficking; one minister commented, "law enforcement officials in Thailand such as the police, prosecutors and judges have acted quickly during legal cases to bring human traffickers to justice" (Tansubhapol 2014). In order to improve perceptions of its rankings, in late 2013, the Office of Commercial Affairs at the Thai Embassy in Washington DC hired a DC-based law firm named Holland and Knight (H&K) to assist with a legal public relations campaign regarding Thailand's anti-trafficking efforts and rankings. The eight-month long program cost a total of \$408,000, and though little public information has been made available about the partnership, the Thai government seemed to rely on the firm's legal expertise and political clout in Washington DC to advocate for the country's anti-trafficking activities. H&K provided press releases, public comments, and lobbied on Capitol Hill at different congressional

hearings on behalf of Thailand.⁶⁵

Despite these efforts, in June 2014, the much-anticipated TIP report ranking demoted Thailand to the lowest ranking, citing Thailand's lack of attention to cases of labor trafficking in the deep sea fishing industries and lack of attention to the rights of Rohingya refugees⁶⁶ from Burma. Following the announcement of the demotion, Ambassador and Director of the White House's Office to Combat Human Trafficking Luis CdeBaca commented: "The recent investigations [focusing on slavery and trafficking issues] in Thailand were fortuitous in their timing because, as we were doing our diplomatic job, these pieces of work have created a conversation around serious issues of trafficking in global fisheries."⁶⁷ This attention to the fishing industry and the commodity chains of fishing have led many actors to emphasize the role of markets and consumer accountability, and mirror the transnational communities' shifting interest towards labor trafficking, as described in Chapter 3. At the press conference for the launch of the 2014 TIP report, Secretary of State John Kerry highlighted the importance of consumer responsibility in regulating forms of labor trafficking in exploitative industries, noting, "It is for each of us to make sure the goods we buy are free from forced labor" (Kerry 2014).

As a Tier 3 nation, Thailand risks loss of development aid, economic sanctions, and potential ostracization by other countries that do not want to do business with noncompliant governments. As of 2014, Thailand and China are the only two countries in the Asia Pacific region to have received such low rankings. Malaysia was also recently demoted to the third tier,

⁶⁵ Globally, Thailand is not the only country to use American firms to promote their attention to social issues. Following the recent kidnapping of more than 250 teenage girls by alleged Islamic militants from middle and high schools in northern Nigeria, the Nigerian government hired an American public relations firm for a reported \$1.2 million dollars to bring global attention and funding to the issue, and to promote its social media campaign #BringBackOurGirls (Kristof 2014).

⁶⁶ The Rohingya are an Islamic ethnic group who live predominantly in Burma. The United Nations has named them one of the most persecuted ethnic groups in the world. They face displacement from Burmese military junta rule, and religious discrimination. An estimated 100,000 Rohingya live in refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border (United Nations High Commission on Refugees 2014).

⁶⁷ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2014/jun/20/thailand-qatar-downgraded-human-trafficking-report>

but I exclude it from analysis because it does not participate in the UNIAP COMMIT process.

The transnational concern around human trafficking in Thailand has focused primarily on sex trafficking and labor trafficking in the Deep Sea Fishing Industry (DSFI). This next portion of the chapter outlines how responses to sex and labor trafficking have integrated the market in difference ways, representing new modes of transnational social movement engagement in between and in collaboration with the state and market. The following section provides ethnographic data from each of these two cases, which were selected because of their uniqueness to the Thai case. As discussed, labor trafficking is notably absent from China's national definition of human trafficking, and opportunities for human trafficking reality tourism to China do not currently exist under the communist regime.

Sex Tourism and Anti-Sex Trafficking Tourism⁶⁸

A group of 20 undergraduate students from South Dakota disembark from a large tour bus to arrive at the Can-Do Bar, a sex worker owned and operated bar run by the Empower Foundation in Chiang Mai. The group is led by two middle-aged white American men, one a professor from their home university in South Dakota and one the director of foreign exchange programs at Chiang Mai University, a long time expatriate who organizes such visits for numerous student groups. The group of 20 juniors and seniors were on the tail end of their two-week journey to understand human trafficking in Thailand, an extended spring break as part of their semester-long course on human trafficking. In the days leading up to their visit to Empower, the group visited a variety of anti-trafficking organizations including the Not for Sale project, and other American abolitionist leaning organizations fighting against sex trafficking. The visit to Empower would be their last NGO visit before they wrapped up their Spring Break with an extended weekend in Krabi island, one of Thailand's famous beach resort destinations in the south.

As the students took their seats across the variety of chairs, stools and benches in the Can-Do bar, Liz, a fulltime Empower staff member of nearly 20 years takes to the front of the room, and begins to introduce the group of five sex workers who have gathered to speak with the students. Immediately, Liz is

⁶⁸ The co-presence of these phenomena in the Thai context is discussed in Bernstein and Shih (2014).

interrupted by the professor leading the group, who informs her that he has already asked one of his students to prepare a presentation to introduce the organization. A blonde-haired petite college junior named Sophia goes to the head of the room and reads from an 8.5x11 sheet of paper that she has prepared with notes from Wikipedia and Empower's website. Taken aback, Liz translates what is happening to some of the non-English speaking sex workers who have gathered to speak with the group, and confusion quickly spreads. Why, they ask, did this group of American students travel so far to give their own presentation to an organization they are visiting? As the student presenter wraps up her 5-minute presentation of the organization, Empower proceeds with their intended itinerary and screens a film, "The Last Rescue of Siam,"⁶⁹ a satirical recounting of common injustices experienced during a police raid of a beer bar.

The film opens with a common day at work in a bar. A woman and her male client, who happens to be a police officer, are sitting sharing drinks. The second scene cuts to the "War Room" in which a "hero NGO," policeman, and social worker are "planning a daring rescue." During the rescue, the inter-agency task force that has convened drives through town bypassing other more serious crimes, such as a theft, motorcycle accident, and violent dispute on the street. The "inter-agency" actors arrive on the scene, and what ensues is a mismanaged comedy of errors as they try to arrest a sex worker as part of their plan to rescue her. Many of the sex workers on site flee but the rescue team captures one person and brings her in for questioning.

Once the "victim" arrives back at the "War Room," the detained worker is asked her age and discloses that she is 19 years old. Speaking through a well-meaning translator and social workers, the rescue team decides that she is actually 16 years old so that she may be deemed a victim of trafficking, because Thai law states that sex workers under the age cannot choose to participate in sex work. Once determined under age, and a victim of trafficking, she is sent to the government trafficking victims shelter where she is put to work with a sewing machine, a common strategy of rehabilitation for government, secular and faith-based anti-trafficking organizations alike. In the final scene, the able and empowered worker sews herself a ladder to escape from her captors and her "rescue" that has been forced upon her.

(Fieldnotes 3/2013)

⁶⁹ This film is just one of a number of artistic interventions that sex workers rights organizations have conducted into anti-trafficking work. In 2013, Empower Foundation launched an art show at the Bangkok Art and Culture Centre featuring artwork by sex workers from Malaysia, Philippines, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, Timor Leste, and Singapore. Named "SWASEAN," or Sex Workers of ASEAN, referring to the prominent political and economic coalition in the area, this annual art celebration aims to harness the political and economic relationships of the Southeast Asian region, by bringing sex workers together to share advocacy tools and strategies. Cultural forms of activism in Thailand have a rich history dating back to the democracy struggles in the 1970s.

This satirical silent film is based upon years of Empower's direct encounters with and assistance to sex workers whose lives and working conditions have been negatively impacted by the anti-human trafficking movement. Despite efforts aimed at protection, many sex worker rights organizations globally have demonstrated that anti-trafficking surveillance, through police raids and increased prosecution of clients has led to a decrease in overall safety and other working conditions. In 2012, Empower published a groundbreaking report entitled "Hit and Run," that documented the collateral harm experienced by sex workers at the hands of the anti-human trafficking movement in Thailand. Paired with this report, Empower also constructed a 25-foot long scroll, hand-stitched to reveal over a dozen sequential "scenes" of a human trafficking rescue attempt in Thailand. One of the goals of the scroll was to provide visual depictions of the research report for sex worker and migrant workers who are not fluent in Thai, English or in written script, who constitute a significant group of their beneficiary population.

Liz unrolls the scroll and the student group looks on as Liz describes the content and findings of the research report. Once the students have perused the different scenes, Liz asks the group if they have any questions. During the Q and A, student participants reveal a common reaction from such groups that visit. Initially, they are quiet and seem to be managing conflicted feelings—at once confused, skeptical, and shy to ask questions, as much of what they have just heard directly negates the prevalent perspectives presented by the anti-trafficking organizations they had visited earlier on their trip. As a participant myself in a reality tour only six months prior to this visit, I had experienced numerous presentations from mainstream anti-trafficking organizations that the tour company organized. Such presentations typically outlined the problem of human trafficking in dire yet simplistic parameters, which frame the organization's interventions as undeniably positive and necessary

Slowly a few students raised their hands and asked the following questions:

- 1) If you had the opportunity to work somewhere else, would you still do this?*
- 2) Isn't there still a lot of stigma; like, can you go home and tell your families that you do this work?*
- 3) But aren't there still real victims of sexual exploitation out there?*

Empower sex workers welcomed the honest skepticism from students and earnestly answered their questions. They shared that many of them had worked other jobs as domestic workers and in garment factories, but that they chose sex work because of the higher wages and relatively better working conditions compared to low wage service sector work. They asked the students to understand that there should be the same level of stigma cleaning stains off someone's toilet as there is performing erotic labor. And finally, they shared that the most effective way to identify and assist sex workers who are in crisis is to have a close connection with sex worker communities, and to advocate for sex worker's ability to work safely, without police recourse, and to be able to demand pay.

I sat towards the back of the room helping Empower take photos to document the event, as Li, a sex worker in her late 30's described her decision to be a sex worker, amidst a work history of other low paid jobs including house cleaning, jewelry making, and factory work. One female student who sat in the back of the room leaned over and whispered to her friend: "Do you think these are really sex workers? I mean, they don't look like sex workers." Her friend responded by nodding her head, turning it to the front of the room to scan the sex workers who were seated in front of her, and returned her gaze back to her classmate simply shrugging her shoulders.

Once the Q and A had finished, students were invited to walk through the bar and look at different artifacts, pictures of the history of sex work in Chiang Mai, a number of Empower's publications that had been displayed, a small sex museum arranged like an altar in front of a stripper's pole, and a smattering of graffiti-colored walls that mark different supportive and spunky messages from Empower visitors. I began rearranging the chairs and tables in a way that they could be used later on that evening when the bar opened for customers, and L, cleaned up the scattered fact sheets about Empower that the student had prepared, and that others had left behind. "Look at this," she waved the sheet at me and shook her head, "Why do they even come here when they don't want to hear from sex workers?" As if she had read the interaction that had happened between the two female students in the back of the room, she said, "I know they think that I don't look like a sex worker, because I am not thin, young, wearing makeup—they don't think I'm beautiful—but," she smiled, "they have no idea how well I do my job."

(Fieldnotes 3/2013)

Empower was founded in 1985 and had been operating long before the anti-trafficking movement so robustly entered the Thai political and legal infrastructure. It provides a range of

community support services to sex workers throughout the country and has recently begun coordinating the Sex Workers of ASEAN (SWASEAN) meetings, an annual gathering of sex workers from the 10 ASEAN member countries that cleverly co-opts the ASEAN political economic cooperation to create regional solidarity amongst sex workers. Despite Empower's extensive first-hand experience in providing outreach, direct service, and advocacy to and by sex workers for the greater part of 30 years, it frequently finds itself as the "last stop" on study tours of human trafficking. Groups usually arrive armed with skepticism and curiosity as they attempt to reconcile the grave tales of sexual slavery that other organizations have reported to them with the contrasting accounts that Empower workers share. Empower's position, one that advocates everyday rights over glorified rescues, does little to generate funding for or attention to the organization's work.

Empower's communication to visiting groups focuses on explaining the different types of sex work that exist in Thailand, noting that precarity within the trade is, like other types of low wage work, based on the labor relations of each. For instance, Thai sex workers can work in a variety of entertainment establishments ranging from beer bars where they serve cocktails to customers in order to make connections in which customers pay to leave the bar with the waitress, to go-go bars, where dancers perform until they are called to sit with customers based on numbers affixed to their dancing attire, to fishbowl situations, in which dozens of women sit behind a glass enclosure and clients choose which woman they would like to leave the establishment with. In all cases of indoor sex work, the "bar fee," only the fee charged to buy the worker out of her shift at the establishment that evening, is paid to the bar owners, while all subsequent transactions regarding payment of other intimate acts are arranged between the worker and client privately.

The bar fee is a flat rate, typically 200-500 baht (6-18 USD), and is not calculated as a percentage of total services provided.

Forms of outdoor street prostitution, primarily undertaken by foreign or transgender sex workers who lack more organized arrangements within entertainment establishments, are considered more dangerous because street-based prostitutes lack support systems and are more vulnerable to client and police violence. Across both indoor and outdoor sex work, Empower notes that Thailand's robust history of military sexual commerce has fueled one of the most regulated sex industries in the world. Throughout their weekly outreach to sex work establishments across the country, Empower focuses primarily on educating sex workers about their rights, addressing what they see as the most prevalent issues: non-payment of wages, maltreatment by entertainment shop owners, and the random police raids and forced detention of sex workers in the name of "combating human trafficking." Through their outreach, Empower has identified the most vulnerable populations as sex workers who are undocumented, primarily from Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar, or stateless hilltribe persons in Thailand; lacking citizenship, they are more subject to abuse from employers and clients because they have no grounds on which to seek assistance from Thai police.

The detailed explanations of sex work as a complicated and diverse terrain of labor relation is meant to demonstrate to anti-trafficking students and tourists that sex work in Thailand is not uniform in practice. Those who are Thai citizens choose to be sex workers, not because it is the worst job available, as many anti-trafficking abolitionists suggest, but because it is one of the best jobs for internal and foreign migrant women to Bangkok amidst a limited low wage work force. Li's point that tourists don't understand how well she does her job is an assertion that sex work requires a high degree of skill, which not just any migrant worker possesses.

This university class's visit to Empower as part of a larger trip to Thailand to study human trafficking is not rare, though such touristic adventures are unheard of in China. Empower fields numerous such requests, and hosts anywhere from 3-5 student groups or tourists per month who ask the organization to provide a specific lecture dedicated to the topic of human trafficking. As compensation for the time and work needed to host such visits, Empower now charges 2,500 baht (roughly \$85 USD) for a typical 2-hour visit. More prevalent, however, are the growing numbers of human trafficking themed tours that do *not* visit the Empower Foundation; in the name of providing a first-hand look into modern day slavery, such tours primarily focus on painting a picture of rampant sexual slavery and the heroic campaigns that aim to curtail them. Such tours are offered by diverse outlets ranging from churches to adventure expeditions, to paid volunteer opportunities and even a weeklong photography course that takes human trafficking as its object.

As a participant in a weeklong human trafficking reality tour to Bangkok and Chiang Mai in August 2012, I experienced the marketing and mediation of a commercial tourist product with the humanitarian expectations of its participants (Bernstein and Shih 2014). The discussion below builds upon the analysis presented in Bernstein and Shih (2014), and contextualizes the rescue tour within other transnational visiting engagements with human trafficking in Thailand. For many of these reality tours, Empower's dissenting narrative, which critiques the collateral harm that anti-human trafficking efforts have had on sex workers, complicates a landscape of abolitionism in which the act of simply attending a tour is understood as a meaningful form of anti-trafficking activism. Following such trips, participants demonstrate their commitment to the larger social movement by hosting fundraisers and awareness parties at home, composing informational Facebook posts, urging friends and family to take an interest, or to become long term volunteers with the organizations that they meet on such trips (Fieldnotes 9/2012).

The 7-day human trafficking reality tour, which I attended with Elizabeth Bernstein and eighteen other American participants, was co-hosted by two non-profit organizations, one that sponsors reality tours to destinations throughout the world, and the other that focuses on advocacy and awareness of human trafficking. The trip cost \$1,300 USD, excluding airfare, a fee that promised:

- Accommodation in 3 star and above hotels
 - In-Country transportation
 - Expert tour leaders and guides
 - Two meals per day
 - Donations to organizations
 - Learning effective strategies for undermining slave rings, and experience first hand how victims rebuild their lives
 - Meeting with activists in the fight against Human Trafficking
 - Visiting different NGOs working directly with victims of Human Trafficking
- (Global Justice Projects 2013)⁷⁰

For nearly all participants on this reality tour, the interest in sex trafficking was the most commonly expressed motivation for attending the tour. However, when we received our itineraries, only on the 2nd day of the 7 day trip,⁷¹ curiously only one visit to a sex trafficking organization, City Light, was included. City Light claimed to rescue young men—whom the

⁷⁰ To maintain their anonymity, I use pseudonyms to refer to the Reality Tour provider and all organizations encountered during the reality tour. These pseudonyms are consistent with those used in the article that also describes this tour (Bernstein and Shih 2014).

⁷¹ Preparations and administrative matters on the trip were consistently late, and inadequate. Early on, several participants lodged formal complaints to the organization's headquarters about the seemingly haphazard preparations, and were told: "This is Thailand. Things are constantly unpredictable, and sometimes people are unreliable. We ask your patience in going with the flow of the customs in the place where you are visiting." Similarly, while the website promised 3 star hotels, the group was placed in backpacker hostels that cost \$5 USD per person/per night. When I confronted the guide about the inaccurate description on the organization's website, he explained once again "Don't forget that this is Thailand, still a poor third world country, and these accommodations are the equivalent of 3 star-hotel in Thailand." Other tourists seemed pleased with this explanation, eagerly nodding in agreement, seemingly applauding their ability to "rough it," and understand and experience local realities. Kimberly Hoang describes this phenomenon as a fascination with "Third World Poverty," through her ethnographic accounts of Western men's "benevolent remittances" to Vietnamese sex workers, whom sex tourists assume to be "virtuous" third world subjects (Hoang 2015). Not a single reality tourist questioned where the excess funds had gone, a disparity between promised and actual accommodations, an excess that seemed only to point to the company profits, though no public information about accounting is available.

organization's activists universally refer to as "boys"⁷² though they are over the age of 18—from sex work in Chiang Mai. Significantly, the guides actually refrained from visiting the Thai Red Light Project, the organization discussed in Chapter 2, explaining that previous participants complained that TRLP focused *too* heavily on the issue of sex trafficking, and they wanted to provide an experience with which all participants were happy.

The existence of such a reality tour in Thailand fits into Thailand's fertility for multiple forms of tourism: sex tourism, mass tourism, alternative tourism, medical tourism, eco-tourism, slum tourism, volunteer tourism, and now rescue tourism.⁷³ Illustrative of the opportunities made available by the Thai market and vibrant civil society, no such human trafficking tours exist to China, though during a phone interview with the director of the Global Exchange Project's reality tours, he did ask me for advice on how one would go about setting up a reality tour in China, as his preliminary efforts seemed to be met with skepticism by local NGO partners and travel agents. He mentioned that he was on his way to the China-North Korea border, to visit different American organizations that he understood rescued victims of human trafficking from North Korea. To date, he has not been able to establish relationships to begin the tour, and cited the Chinese government's sensitivity over North Korea as a potential barrier to the physical safety and political security of potential participants.

I asked the tour company if it needed to secure the support of the Thai government. The director responded that they did not formally need to register because the Thai tourist sector is large. The fact that there are nearly 10 other educational or recreational tours that concern human trafficking demonstrates the possibilities of Thailand over China as a site of international humanitarian action and commerce. In addition to two primary guides and visits to "anti-

⁷² This is a language parallel to the reference to former sex workers as "girls" in Chapter 2.

⁷³ For examples of the aforementioned instances of tourism, see, e.g., Parreñas 2012; Bloul 2012; Vvasti 2012; Steinbrink 2012; Linke 2012).

trafficking experts,” the tour employed only one local Thai guide, who was accredited by the national tourist agency. This individual was the only Thai-speaking guide on the entire trip, and shouldered the burdens of translating for all 20 tourists. For his work, our Thai guide was paid the local Thai tour guide salary of 1,000 baht (30USD) per day, a sum less than the 3,000 baht (100 USD) donations that the tour agency gave to the selected organizations we visited.

Our primary guide, a Cambodian American expat living in Phnom Penh with a decade-long career as a consultant for USAID, UN organizations, a large American anti-trafficking NGO, and several other development projects, said he hoped to deliver a balanced portrait of the issue of human trafficking. The resulting itinerary included trips to visit organizations that dealt with a range of important development issues, though links between such issues and human trafficking were never clearly articulated. It amassed a general feeling of the country’s vulnerability to trafficking, shown primarily through the lens of poverty, ethnic minority disenfranchisement, and non-profit intervention strategies. When visiting the tour sponsoring organization’s flagship project in Northern Thailand, we were told of tragic stories of stateless mothers from Myanmar who were addicted to drugs. While mothers were detoxing,⁷⁴ a large group home for youth provided housing for children, “saving them from begging on the streets.” During their residence at the respective care programs, the organization’s director shared that both children and adults were taught the craft of jewelry making, so that they could earn supplemental income, and generate income to support the organization.

On a different visit to the Echo Foundation in Northern Thailand, we were taken to an Akha ethnicity village, the destination of numerous popular “hill tribe trekking eco-tours,” and

⁷⁴ Fathers were not a beneficiary population to such “anti-trafficking” services. In fact, several of the organization’s comments about fathers suggested that Burmese men were part of the problem, subjecting their wives and children to the cruel fate of poverty and temptations of drugs and crime. The organization’s many references to creating “home” and “family” for mothers and children encouraged the escape from the deficient families they were born into.

had the opportunity to speak with the village chief. Eager participants in the group asked the village head about the presence of human trafficking, through an independent interpreter provided by the organization, and the village head repeated numerous times that trafficking was not an issue precisely because the village's location near a prominent national park created job opportunities close to home.

In the absence of formal visits to sex worker rights organizations, the sample itinerary promised a “visit to nightclubs and bars to observe activities.” Our guide provided us with two opportunities to participate in evening walkthroughs of “red light districts” in Bangkok and Chiang Mai. The guide explained that these areas were quite busy and dangerous, so there would be no formal tour or commentary, rather it was important we make our own observations of what we saw. Several people voiced concern over the safety and the ethics of walking in the red light district—staunch in their abolitionist politics, they did not want to be near the sale of commercial sex, thus perhaps supporting it in some way. In response, the guide simply remarked: “In order to understand human trafficking here, you really need to just see the red light districts” (Fieldnotes 8/2012). Speaking in such abstract and elusive ways about commercial sex did serve to maintain its allure; yet, this never provided reality tourists with contemporary or historical contexts of sex work and sex tourism in Thailand. It is this perpetual mystery surrounding sex in Thailand—so ubiquitous that it obviates the need for definition—that makes it such an ideal destination for abolitionists and reality tourists alike. A formal visit to a sex worker rights organization would have painted a more complicated picture of sex commerce, police corruption, and human trafficking.

The prevalence and visibility of sex work—which many faith-based and abolitionist groups argue are the primary source of demand for human trafficking—illustrates the relationship

between human security and economic development in Thailand. While the sale of sexual services is currently illegal in Thailand, the Thai government does little to curb the sex tourism industry, aside from raids on sexual entertainment establishments for the purposes of nominally enforcing the law and meeting police quotas. In fact, the government has historically supported sex tourism due to its military and economic positioning in the area. US military presence during the Vietnam Wars, including the stationing of American troops in Thailand, and the flow of other foreign troops for “Rest and Recreation” (R & R) bred one of the earliest infrastructures for tourist exchange and commercial sex tourism in the world (Cohen 1996; Wilson 2004; Enloe 1989). Speaking of US militarism in South Korea, Sealing Cheng (2011) and Hae Yeon Choo (2014) have also demonstrated the presence of sexual humanitarianisms in former and current US military bases throughout South Korea, revealing the force of geopolitical power within contemporary migrant worker lives, and the humanitarian campaigns that hope to discipline them.

The Thai government has launched a particularly aggressive effort to creating government shelters for victims of trafficking. While such shelters were previously upheld as best case practices, they have recently become a hotbed of negative attention illustrating numerous rights abuses in the name of victim protection. Empower recently published a report which identifies numerous rights abuses inflicted on sex workers working in Thailand. The focus on quantifiably increasing arrests, investigations, and prosecutions, correlated with the demands of the TIP report, has caused excessive surveillance and detention of sex workers.

During my own visit to the government run human trafficking shelter for boys in Bangkok, many of the findings present in Empower’s *Hit and Run* report would not have been immediately evident in a tour around the premises. For years, the primary government shelter for women and girls, *Baan Kredrakarn*, was heralded as a best-case shelter by the Ministry of Human

Development and Security and allowed a steady stream of foreign volunteers and international visitors. However, following critiques that have emerged in the past few years, the shelter has closed its doors to public visitors. I gained access to *Baan Phumvet*, the shelter for boys, through meeting the shelter manager at a United Nations training on human trafficking in South Korea's Jeju Island. This two day training convened several members of "civil society" to discuss strategies to deal with human trafficking. I attended as a researcher with the United Nations Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking China Office, and other participants from countries throughout East, Southeast and South Asia included journalists, lawyers, and academics—significantly, the representatives from Thailand were the only government officials present at the training, an indication of how the Thai government may have considered its role integrated into transnational civil society.

During my visit to *Baan Phumvet*, I was taken on a tour of manicured shelter grounds in a five building compound, which was lined by a peripheral twenty-foot white steel fence that had spokes that faced inward. The shelter was located about one hour from downtown central Bangkok via public transportation and the street that housed the shelter featured a large portrait of the Queen, and different placards for the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security's numerous shelters, including shelters for the blind, the deaf, for infants born with mental and physical disabilities, and orphans. The director told me about different programs provided in the shelter, including food, counseling and daily education.

The shelter director shared that residents included Thai boys under the age of 18, as well as undocumented migrants from neighboring countries, most of whom were victims of labor exploitation or child begging. Baan Phumvet typically holds anywhere from 10-50 residents at a time. I asked if education was offered in the languages of all shelter residents and the director

explained that they did not have the resources to offer education in the other languages. She noted that this was not a cause of concern because those who cannot attend school due to language barriers are given vocational training in different crafts.

In addition to what was reported in the “Hit and Run” publication (Empower 2012), I learned of another instance in which the shelter’s lack of capacity to house non-Thai victims created a crisis that ended in two victims’ hospitalization. In 2010, Thai Light participated in an inter-agency taskforce to rescue two victims of sex trafficking from Uzbekistan. UNIAP had fielded the initial data on this case and organized the first responder team, which included the Royal Thai Police, UNIAP, and Thai Light as the NGO partner. When asked why Thai Light was an appropriate NGO partner, a UNIAP representative recalled that “they have been working with several cases of Uzbek trafficking victims,”⁷⁵ and though they did not speak Uzbek, their enthusiasm and expertise gained through weekly outreach to the Nana red light district to recruit jewelry makers, earned them a spot in the first responder team.

After “extraction” from the site of their captivity, details for which I was told were confidential, the Uzbek women were transported to the government shelter. After spending several days at the government shelter, without any language assistance, the UNIAP representative recalled that the victims began “acting out” and the government shelter demanded the victims be transferred. Lacking language-specific shelter provisions, the government sought other civil society shelters that could house the Uzbeki women. Thai Light happened to have available bed spaces in an extra residential property that sometimes housed volunteers, held

⁷⁵ TL has recently discovered cases “trafficking” of Uzbek and Ugandan migrants through their weekly outreach into red light districts. TL partners with the IOM, which funds repatriation of these victims, and Thai Light will offers temporary housing, and sends victims home with bibles and jewelry kits. Some sex worker activists and TL staff believe that these women are not victims of trafficking, but resourceful migrants who are having trips home funded by the rescue industry. An interview with the IOM country director revealed that, “We have endless amounts of money for repatriation, but the truth is, there aren’t enough cases of trafficking being discovered.”

church worship, served as a daycare facility, and was sometimes referred to as a shelter. After staying at Thai Light for several days in this de-facto shelter, the residents reported feeling unhappy with what they later described as a “weird” and “controlling space,” and broke a mirror in the bathroom and cut themselves in an apparent suicide attempt (Interview with Matt Friedman 6/2011). The act of self-harm ended them up in a Thai hospital to wait out the days until their repatriation.

In this section, I have juxtaposed the overwhelmingly simplistic pre-packaged tales that are sold to American reality tourists with the complex realities of service provision to victims of trafficking in Thailand. My discussion of the failures of the Thai government’s response has been limited to research and observation of government shelters, though given the TIP report’s long list of Thailand’s inadequacies, this remains an incomplete picture of the government’s response. Building off arguments in Bernstein and Shih (2014), my analysis of the reality tour phenomenon argues that this strategy turns to American consumers to raise funds and awareness about human trafficking, selling a version of human trafficking that generates social capital for tour participants, tour operators, and the expert NGOs who craft the tales of trafficking on the trip. Opportunities to hear alternative perspectives of human trafficking rescue, such as those that the Empower foundation has assembled—through text, film, and even embroidery—dangerously challenge the simple powers of consumer activism. Yet, the prioritization of certain actors, voices, and accounts, and the silencing of others, is an important reminder that transnational social movements are power-laden networks of institutions in which dissenting narratives have little value.

Deep Sea Fishing Industry (DSFI)

The main conference room in Bangkok's Royal Orchid Sheraton Hotel has undergone a large transformation turning it into a judiciously appointed hall fit for the annual meeting of the Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative Against Trafficking (COMMIT) process' 2013 Senior Officials Meeting. In the center of the room, tables are organized in the shape of a U, and placards neatly arranged to display the different country delegations that are present: Cambodia, China, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. Two microphones are provided for each delegation at the main table, and rows of chairs are lined up behind each country's formal perch to seat the remainder of the delegation. In a separate part of the room are several hundred seats for the general audience, lined in rows, and positioned in between six booths that house the twelve translators necessary for this event.

Over the course of two days, different thematic sessions on topics ranging from Education to Labor policies are chaired by different country delegations, and each country is asked to deliver prepared statements on the themes. On the third day of the meeting, government delegates are relieved of their duties in facilitating the event, and the COMMIT Secretariat takes over. Comprised of a team of international experts, the Secretariat is staffed by the UNIAP Regional Management Office staff who are based in Bangkok and oversee the networking of all six country governments. For the 2013 event, the secretariat introduces a new focal theme: "Engaging the Private Sector." A consultant for the project, an Australian man in his early fifties takes to the podium and delivers a powerpoint presentation highlighting successful instances of private sector collaboration in the region. The presentation praises efforts to engage the deep sea fishing industry in Thailand, an industry that has come under great scrutiny for exploitation and debt bondage of undocumented Cambodian, Burmese and Laotian migrants. The speaker wraps up his presentation and asks for questions. The government delegates remain largely silent. Following this presentation, there is a palpable shift in energy in the room, from a political process, which for the greater part of a decade has focused exclusively on government accountability for trafficking, towards a new agenda of state and civil society partnerships with transnational corporations.

(Fieldnotes 2/2013)

Since 2008, media and NGO attention has brought international focus to the issue of human trafficking in Thailand's deep-sea fishing industry (DSFI) as one of the crudest forms of labor exploitation that exists globally (UNIAP 2009; Environmental Justice Foundation 2013; Guardian 2014). Due to the extreme nature of abuse and isolation that fisherman face on fishing

boats in the high seas, groups have mobilized around this as a primary case of labor trafficking. Globally, the movement has been less successful in advocating that other forms of labor abuse (domestic work, factory work) should be categorized as human trafficking, as they are not as moving as cases that pertain to sexual forms of exploitation.

Thailand's rapid economic growth has been facilitated by an aggressive export regime in the seafood industry, which is Thailand's second largest export market totaling \$7.3 billion in 2011. The US is currently Thailand's largest consumer market. The industry provides primarily shrimp, but also other kinds of seafood are also shipped around the world. Firms in the DSFI are owned entirely by Thais, and because of the lucrative nature of the DSFI, the Thai government has yet to organize a cohesive response to this problem. Due to the harsh working conditions, including long hours and extended periods away from home at sea, the industry experienced a labor shortage in 2009. Since then, it has relied heavily on undocumented migration from Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar to fill the labor-intensive demands of the fishing and aquaculture industry (UNIAP 2009).

Due to the vulnerability of Thailand's agricultural economy, notably its financial dependence on a limited number of primary commodities, including rice, rubber, tin, and teak, Thailand has pursued policies of economic diversification through industrial development and increased agricultural production. The diversification strategy also led Thailand to invest heavily in its fishing industry, rapidly growing its seafood exports in the 1980s and 1990s. In the past two decades, the Thai Department of Fisheries has dedicated resources to building an aquaculture system comprised of large shrimp farms. Almost all shrimp caught at sea and through aquaculture farms is for export.

Questionable working conditions within the DSFI primarily concern undocumented Burmese, Laotian, and Cambodian fisherman who are sent out to sea for several weeks at a time, and experience severely precarious working conditions on small cramped boats (HRW 2014). A 2011 International Organization of Migration report called attention to 18-20 hour working days, 7 days a week, and documented numerous instances of physical violence (IOM 2011). A 2009 UNIAP study reported that 59% of all interview respondents reported witnessing the murder of a fellow crewmember. Such murders are common for workers who fall ill and cannot continue working, or those who protest working conditions or make demands for payment of wages or overtime compensation, they are simply thrown overboard. A 2013 report by the Environmental Justice Foundation found that fisherman are recruited through brokers who demand high fees that subject workers to debt bondage, and also documented instances of government corruption in such cases. For instance, during a rescue of undocumented fisherman in southern Thailand in March 2013, victims were held in a local jail and were visited by their labor broker, who was reputed to be a friend of the police chief (EJF 2013). On another occasion, fisherman rescued from sea were required to work without pay painting jail cells in the local police station, and supplying labor to a local rubber plantation whose owner had close ties to the police. Labor exploitation has also been discovered in shrimp peeling factories ashore in Thailand (EJF 2013).

The fishing industry, as noted, now represents Thailand's second largest export after rice. Since the deep sea fishing industry exports 70% of fish to US retailers, including Walmart and Costco, it is one of the primary targets of a "supply chain management" strategy, which attempts to leverage the buying power of consumers to impact labor conditions at distinct points along a production chain. There have been several globally significant supply chain actions ranging from the California Supply Chain Transparency Act of 2010, to a mobile app called "Made in a Free

World” created by an American anti-trafficking non-profit organization and funded by the US Department of State that allows consumers to calculate “How many slaves work for you?” (Bernstein 2014, 2015)

Labor trafficking in the DSFI became a UNIAP priority in 2010 and in 2011; at a 5 star riverfront conference room in Bangkok’s Amari hotel, the UNIAP task force convened one of its monthly meetings for anti-trafficking stakeholders in Thailand. These meetings have grown in scale since their inception in 2008, and this latter event was packed—attended by over 100 participants, including journalists, government officials, international NGO representatives, and members of various global governance organizations. The diversity of the crowd, and the accessibility of the conference—it is open invitation—are a far cry away from the closed door task force meetings at UNIAP in Beijing. Because the agenda focused on the issue of the labor trafficking of Cambodian and Burmese migrant workers into fisheries in the Samut Sakhon province, several members of the fisheries trade association were also present.

Taking a primary leadership role for the meeting was the Labor Protection Network (LPN), a Thai NGO founded in 2004 that has received significant international attention for addressing the problems of severe labor exploitation within the Thai fishing industry. LPN has also received a steady stream of funding (mainly from the US and UN) to pursue research, advocacy, and direct interventions in human trafficking. At the meeting, LPN introduced a new anti-trafficking model for Thailand, which focused on prosecuting brokers based on the logic that “if the supply chain is broken, the supply cannot continue.” The plan outlined the need for accurate worker registration in the fishery industry, which is often difficult because many workers are at sea for up to two years before setting foot on Thai soil (Fieldnotes 10/2011).

Though it may appear unusual for an NGO to present a country-level government strategy, this has been a growing trend for Thai NGOs which receive the backing of the US Trafficking in Person's office.⁷⁶ LPN delegated tasks to specific government entities, which led to a fifteen-minute argument between the Department of Special Investigation, which was assigned to lead this new effort, and the Royal Thai Police, which questioned the appropriate ways of administering this program. The aggressive argument reflected concerns over jurisdiction, and proceeded in bouts of screaming and yelling for another twenty minutes, in front of the large international audience who were seemingly intrigued, though unfazed, by such a public display of intra-governmental conflict.

In a subsequent event in June 2012, UNIAP convened a large conference focusing on ethical supply chains for fishing, which invited members of the Thai commerce ministries, fishing unions, the Thai frozen food association, individual fisheries, and large multinational retailers like Walmart and Beaver Street Fisheries, leading suppliers of seafood in the USA. In a public statement and press release for the event, David Henry, Walmart's Senior Manager for Ethical Sourcing Compliance, stated:

We are excited to partner with UNIAP in their critical initiative to explore innovative ways of eradicating human trafficking from seafood supply chains in Thailand. This multi-stakeholder engagement is an important step in developing collaborative solutions to the challenges faced in the Thai seafood industry. We look forward to continued engagement with UNIAP and other stakeholders in the region as we work together to help people in the supply chain receive the respect, dignity and opportunity they deserve by creating a truly innovative, ethical and sustainable supply chain that protects both our planet and the communities we touch (UNIAP 2013).

Soon after noting Walmart's involvement with UNIAP's efforts to address human trafficking within the DSFI, the American labor organization *Change to Win* incorporated Walmart's issues

⁷⁶ The director of LPN was awarded a 2010 US State Department Trafficking in Persons "Hero Award," and other Thai NGOs have claimed that he is in the "pocket of the US government." These NGOs have criticized LPN for "selling out" its own focus on labor to the interests of the global human trafficking movement.

with the shrimp supply chain with ongoing organizing against Walmart's labor abuses in US and Mexican stores, including lawsuits against gender discrimination and dangerous working conditions. Walmart has largely remained silent about workers rights in its US stores while their enthusiastic engagement against exploitation in the global fishing industry demonstrates the transnational anti-trafficking movement's power to garner attention towards human trafficking. Indeed, absent the frame of trafficking, the model of public-private partnerships and corporate social responsibility have proven less effective than when labor unions and organizers seek to find private sector accountability.

Despite Walmart's enthusiasm, in the past year since the conference it has made contradictory public statements regarding: 1) its vigilance in interrogating the labor conditions of its subcontractor Narong Seafood, while later claiming that 2) it never sourced products from Narong seafood, leaving it immune to the allegations that are affecting the recent set of strikes and lawsuits against Narong (International Labor Rights Forum 2013). The slippery nature of Walmart's accountability reveal just how and why "supply chain management" is a difficult strategy to implement effectively. Through subcontracting to numerous Thai fisheries, the global fishing industry exemplifies vertical de-integration and fragmentation that are typical of neoliberal global markets and commodity chains. Walmart can easily dissociate itself from singular problematic cases like the Narong Seafood plant, while continuing its relationship with the Thai Frozen Foods association, a government lobby. Finally, of the 2,000 shrimp processing operations in Thailand, only 400 are registered with the TFFA revealing a terrain that is decentralized, unenforced and difficult to monitor (EJF 2013).

In time for the 2014 TIP ranking evaluation, the Department of Fisheries Ministry of Labour and Fishery Association of Thailand introduced several changes. It established worker

centers in seven provinces to facilitate the registration of fishing trawlers and crew members from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia. The registration process would aim to prevent child labor. Additionally, undocumented workers are encouraged to register for visas, and were granted amnesty until May 31, 2014 to allow them to register—police were also instructed to stop arresting undocumented workers before the May 31st deadline. The Thai Department of American and South Pacific Affairs director-general Songsak Saicheua said the next step would be to establish a mechanism to coordinate the use of labor in the fishery industry as well as improve the welfare of workers. Thai processing facilities have also opened the door to inspections, however, labor organizers have emphasized that unannounced inspections are the only way to ensure consistent compliance with labor laws. Of note, the underlying causes of labor’s vulnerability in the sex and fishing industries is the same: the precarity of undocumented migrant workers, who arrive in Thailand seeking work. The transnational anti-trafficking movement has done little to address this underlying fact.

Though many popular campaigns—in particular, the popular “Made in a Free World” app—champion the power of consumer power, there is in fact very little that the consumer or the market can do to decrease labor exploitation. The focus on supply chains does little to support labor organizing. Following the brutal Bangladesh garment industry fires in 2013, labor organizers worked not only for the accountability of multinational retail outlets, but more significantly, for an adjustment of local labor laws that included: rights to labor protest, organizing, and the right to safe migration. These rights are never the targets of market-based interventions, and trying to control labor rights through the top of the supply chain can rarely penetrate the layers of de-integration that characterize neoliberal commodity markets.

Conclusion

The combined market forces of sexual commerce, mass tourism, and a large aquacultural export sector have made Thailand a ripe site for the human trafficking rescue industry. To illustrate the tensions between state interests in capital and the transnational human trafficking movement, this chapter has examined how circulations of sex, global commerce, and tourism align with new American consumer interests in combatting human trafficking.

Relative to China, secular and faith based anti-trafficking responses are more closely related in Thailand where the state, global governance, NGOs, faith-based organizations and even corporations compete with one another for a stake in the anti-trafficking rescue industry. Because the Thai Trafficking in Persons Act recognizes forced labor—which China does not—as one dimension of human trafficking, the state must also balance capital interests in developing export industries with the transnational moral outrage at human trafficking. Because Thailand is more transparent about problems in various labor sectors, global governance institutions have targeted much more scrutiny and criticism at the Thai government than at the Chinese. This has created contentious relationships between the Thai government, the UN and the US Department of State, painting a picture of profound crisis that is simultaneously profitable for rescue organizations.

This chapter has also illustrated how the transnational anti-trafficking movement navigates engagement between the state and the market. The Thai government and transnational anti-trafficking interventions have *both* turned to the market in the past year—through supply chain management of rice and shrimp respectively—hoping that private sector engagement will afford some leverage that state policies alone cannot achieve. However, though the state and transnational civil society share similar tactics, their connections remain largely disparate, perhaps illustrating why it is so appealing for transnational organizations to work in Thailand, as they

operate with minimal government oversight. This gap between transnational anti-trafficking projects and regulation from state actors has led Ara Wilson to critique some contemporary scholarship on international anti-trafficking NGOs to be absent and unaware of Thai political economy.⁷⁷ However, this critique in and of itself may point to a significant finding—the particularities of the Thai political economic situation are often of not significant considerations to those involved in the transnational anti-trafficking movement.

Each time I return to Thailand after periods away, armed only with news reporting of escalating violence and political instability, I am shocked by the limited influence political instability has had on transnational anti-trafficking operations. For instance, in May 2014, just as a state of martial law had been imposed by the military, which positioned armed guards in front of government buildings and state owned TV towers in Bangkok to prevent protestors from encroaching, MTV Exit was still aggressively planning the launch of a rock concert to raise awareness about human trafficking in the northern Udon Thani province on May 27th. In the past decade of political upheaval, there was only one week in which the offices of the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women closed its doors early, shutting promptly at 5 PM to abide by a weeklong curfew instituted by the Royal Thai Police. Protests never seem to be discussed as demonstrations of deep social discord or expressions of fundamental social inequalities that might drive human trafficking, and in fact, always seem to be spoken of as merely an afterthought, or as an inconvenience to transnational anti-trafficking work.

The recent farmer suicides, first somberly described to me by a staff member at Empower, whose family members have fallen victim to the rice-pledging schemes, is one of the most significant domestic issues related to the issue of “human trafficking.” Thailand’s rural poor have

⁷⁷ Personal correspondence with Wilson (2014).

been systematically left behind by economic development policies that favor the development of Bangkok's urban core. Such urban-peripheral inequalities drive low wage migration in a range of service and manufacturing positions, and Thailand's relative wealth to neighboring countries drives undocumented labor migration from countries throughout Southeast Asia. These forms of mobility shed light on the motives for migration, and systematic struggles that may create human trafficking; however its preferred abstractions and refractions through red lights, commercial sex, and undocumented migration represent the conventional and popular ways in which human trafficking in Thailand is understood and consumed.

Chapter 5: Circuits of Carceral Consumption in American Human Trafficking Rescue

In Culver City, California, a group of 25 middle class women have gathered in a private residence for an anti-trafficking jewelry party. Brought together through their local non-denominational evangelical church, and in anticipation of the night ahead, the women share their reasons for attending. Several participants state the importance of human trafficking issues as they have learned about them through print media articles and films, offering that they understand it is a serious problem, and are eagerly seeking an opportunity to get personally involved in anti-trafficking efforts. Once most of the attendees have arrived, the director of the non-governmental organization that is hosting the event goes to the front of the living room to describe her NGO, which rescues victims of human trafficking by providing alternative employment as jewelry makers. She screens her organization's brief promotional DVD where several Thai woman, whose eyes are blurred for anonymity, tell their stories of migration and sex work—a fate that the NGO has deemed indistinguishable from “modern-day slavery.”⁷⁸

Consumers wipe tears from their eyes, emotionally struck by the depiction of life as a poor, sexually exploited, migrant worker, and amidst acknowledgement of the indignities of modern-day slavery, ask what they can do. Almost immediately, they are directed to a jewelry table showcasing different earrings, bracelets, and necklaces made of pearls, stones, glass beads, and silver, made by the women they have just heard from on the DVD. Attendees eagerly make their purchases, some buying the organization's trademark pendants that proclaim they are “Not For Sale,” others buying matching pendant's for their husbands and boyfriends that are etched with the phrase: “Not Buying.” As the event draws to a close, several attendees linger and chat as the other missionary volunteers and myself begin cleaning. We have sold over \$1,000 in jewelry for the 2-hour event, and a patron who alone has purchased over \$200 worth of jewelry tells us: “I am so moved by the stories of these Thai women, but I am also passionate about stopping sex trafficking in the United States. Is there anything else I can do to get involved?”

(Fieldnotes 11/2010)

From the Pocketbook to the Pavement

This chapter addresses the manifold forms of consumer activism that transnational American abolitionists undertake in the name of combatting the *local* problem of human

⁷⁸ This NGO was described at length in Chapter 2.

trafficking in the United States and beyond. In particular, I analyze how a mostly philanthropic version of activism has begun to translate into individualized outreach efforts, where volunteers head to Los Angeles' streets to look for potential "victims" of human trafficking in immigrant neighborhoods. In 2009, in addition to jewelry sales, Thai Light's Los Angeles operations began offering weekly outreach activities in order to identify human trafficking in several of LA's prominent immigrant neighborhoods. In 2010, an unaffiliated, evangelical Christian organization run primarily by young men also began hosting bi-weekly outreach activities to identify cases of sex trafficking in Southern California. Based on these new outreach efforts, this chapter asks how such vigilante rescue efforts comprise new forms of "consumer activism" (Banet-Weiser 2012; Mukherjee and Banet-Weiser 2012) in the US. How do the outreach and rescue strategies that take place in the US learn from transnational norms and practices of human trafficking rescue abroad?

Situated within this dissertation's broader interests in links between faith-based and secular social movement engagement with states, markets, and social movements, this chapter argues that global neoliberal market logics have emboldened a new cohort of activists consumers to seek meaningful experiences in direct rescue. In pursuing rescue efforts in the US, transnational anti-trafficking activism comes full circle, whereby global strategies used to identify and assist sex workers in Asia are deployed in a US context. Akin to the international rescue tours described in Chapter 4, the new forms of civilian rescue in the United States described herein are distinct because they work directly with US law enforcement to enact rescue efforts in Los Angeles. Also notable is the fact that civilian rescuers draw primarily from anti-trafficking rescue fantasies created by the Thai organization, though not the Chinese one.

While surveillance and policing efforts have typically been in the realm of formal law

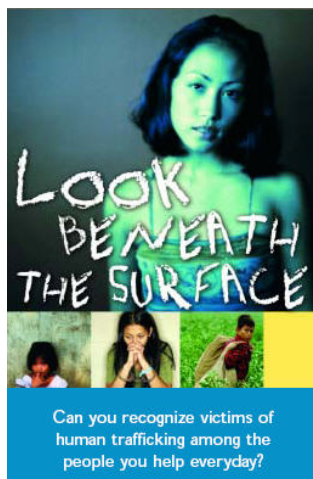
enforcement, these new forms of civilian and vigilante patrol suggest new modes of activist engagement, in which US citizens and predominantly white middle class rescuers create meaningful opportunities for direct rescue. Though they lack formal authority to conduct such rescue and policing efforts, the strategies used by these different non-state actors bind civilian vigilantism with the state through the ways in which they distribute government anti-trafficking paraphernalia and formally report to local police forces. This binding of state and non-state action, allows everyday citizens to consume experiences in what Elizabeth Bernstein has termed “militarized humanitarianism” and “carceral feminism,” (Bernstein 2007b, 2010, 2015) concepts used to describe forms of non-state surveillance and policing that take on the benevolent veneer of feminism. This chapter elaborates on how new modes of civilian vigilantism carried out in the name of humanitarianism, morality and rescue easily mask the state’s carceral motives for controlling immigrant workers. Civilian vigilantes mobilized in such outreach projects participate—unwittingly or otherwise—in surveilling working class immigrants in Los Angeles.

Civilian Vigilance in Victim Identification

The early years of the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA)—between 2000-2003—focused on international cases of sex trafficking, and were heavily critiqued for their ignorance of human trafficking cases happening in the United States (GAO 2006). The 2003 Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA 2003), a renewal of the 2000 TVPA, introduced a campaign to identify victims of human trafficking in the United States. Launched by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the “Campaign to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking” was a public awareness building effort that focused

on raising public awareness of human trafficking, and encouraging victim identification by vigilant American citizens.

The program began in Spring 2004 in three pilot cities—Phoenix, AZ, Atlanta, GA, and Philadelphia, PA—and has since spread throughout the country. It promotes the American moral imperative to “rescue” victims of trafficking through educating the public about the legal provisions and social policies available to trafficked persons.⁷⁹ Posters compel viewers to “Look Beneath the Surface,” and feature photos of men and women of color—presumably recent immigrants as the corresponding text suggests—in a range of working situations including agricultural work and dishwashing. One campaign poster simply presents an Asian woman walking in public space with the same cautionary tale to the public: “A victim of human trafficking may look like many of the people you help everyday.” The poster campaign highlights a 24-hour human trafficking telephone hotline that provides referrals to law enforcement, or local non-profit organizations that provide services to victims of trafficking.



Photos from US Department of Health and Human Services, Campaign to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking

⁷⁹ In addition to many scholars who have discussed the role of “moral panics” in US anti-trafficking response, see in particular the language in John Miller’s 2003 induction speech, then Director of the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (<http://2001-2009.state.gov/g/tip/rls/rm/18200.htm>), and his 2005 op-ed in the *Free Lance Star* titled “High Moral Imperative: To Fight Against Slavery, 21st Century Style.”

This federal policy initiative⁸⁰ has been matched by non-state sponsored efforts focusing on civilian identification of cases of human trafficking in the United States. In 2009, the San Francisco-based organization *Not For Sale* launched a campaign advocating “backyard abolitionism,” and offered a paid course to train citizens to seek out and identify victims of human trafficking in their neighborhoods, near their homes and places of work.⁸¹ Though they espouse public safety and humanitarian assistance goals, these efforts, like others described in this dissertation, are, in their own right, profitable commercial undertakings.

The Not For Sale abolitionist academy, available in over six cities throughout the US, offered five courses:⁸² Strategic Investigation, Just Market Supply Chains, Active Faith Communities, Innovative Aftercare, and Effective Healthcare. Used together, these five modules claim to empower civilian community members who have no background in human trafficking or social services, and provide an opportunity to pursue hands-on and engaged activism. The course on strategic investigation promised students education in “how to identify and document public cases of modern-day slavery by examining the anatomy of human trafficking cases,” and “how to work with fellow abolitionist to eradicate slavery in your own backyards.” Not For Sale generated a considerable amount of income from such efforts; Li’s (2009) study of the academy writes that the Not For Sale Backyard Abolitionist Academy in Georgia brought in over \$20,000 for the 2-day activity, which resulted from workshop fees, donations, and NFS merchandise.

Such civilian efforts to find and rescue victims of human trafficking have been pursued internationally for the greater part of a decade, undertaken by the evangelical Christian social entrepreneurships described in Chapter 2, controversial groups like the International Justice Mission, and by individuals like *New York Times* journalist Nicholas Kristof, or self-proclaimed

⁸⁰ This policy initiative was modeled on NIMBY (Not in My Backyard) policies discussed earlier in this chapter.

⁸¹ Victims of trafficking identification is a key issue for law enforcement officials, let alone civilians (Musto 2011).

⁸² The “Abolitionist Academy” stopped operations in 2012, in order to focus on its international activities.

‘slave hunter’ Aaron Cohen.⁸³ These rescue efforts have typically assembled “self-styled American posses to fill the vacuum left by local law enforcement” (Soderlund 2005: 64) exemplifying the renegade character of such rescue efforts for pursuing rescue outside of the law. Not For Sale’s executive director David Batstone finds that such opportunities to engage direct action through rescue harness the momentum and interest around human trafficking to “marry movement with intelligent action”⁸⁴ (Not For Sale 2012).

The methods of victim identification outlined by the HHS “Rescue and Restore” campaign were inspired by several early cases of human trafficking in the US that were identified by “good Samaritans.” Among the best known is the famed 1995 El Monte sweatshop case,⁸⁵ in which 72 undocumented workers were held in a Southern California garment factory under conditions of extreme labor exploitation, and with threats of debt bondage. Located in a primarily residential area outside of LA County, this case was exposed because of a local resident, who reported suspicious and unusual behaviors to local law enforcement. Building on the prior efforts of concerned citizens, the language of “backyard” rescue establishes the boundaries of the US community (the consumer activist at home) in opposition to the foreign figure of the trafficked “Asian” woman.

The national human trafficking hotline is run by the *Polaris Project*, a non-profit abolitionist organization that receives full government financial support for the hotline, and its

⁸³ For accounts of civilian-led raid and rescue, see, Kristof, Nicholas D. "Raiding a brothel in India." *New York Times*, May 25 (2011); Cohen, A., & Buckley, C. (2009). *Slave hunter: One man's global quest to free victims of human trafficking*. SimonandSchuster.com.

⁸⁴ This is part of a larger slogan coined by Batstone and used in a Not For Sale campaign: “Its no longer enough to think about change, Its no longer enough to talk about change, its time to shift gears; marrying movement with intelligent action.” <http://209.68.62.130/content/08/10/03/not-sale-i-am-not-sale-you-are-not-sale-no-one-should-be-sale-become-abolitionist>

⁸⁵ This case is often described as the one that motivated the founding of the *Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking* (CAST), California’s oldest and largest anti-human trafficking non-profit organization (CAST 2014).

other anti-trafficking programs.⁸⁶ In 2008, the hotline logged just over 5,000 calls, but by 2010, the number of calls escalated to over 19,000 per year. On January 27th 2014, the total number of calls reached 100,000—though fewer than 1,000 human trafficking crimes have been pursued by local law enforcement since the hotline began.⁸⁷ This gap, that only 1% of hotline calls have resulted in follow-up by law enforcement, should raise questions about the perceptions of human trafficking and its reality on the ground. While the *Polaris Project* monitors the hotline’s call logs and produces data on types of calls received (Polaris 2013), research has only begun to question the impact of rescue efforts in communities where they are undertaken.⁸⁸ This is an important part of a larger national conversation about racial and gender profiling by police, in particular surveillance and arrests that target racial minorities, sex workers, and trans people (Ritchie 2014).

The escalation of calls to the national anti-trafficking hotline has accompanied a shift away from a good Samaritan model of identification in which a citizen *happens* across a case of exploitation, towards targeted outreach trips in which groups throughout the country take to the streets to actively seek and find cases of human trafficking—similar to the reality tourism model used in Thailand. Faith-based organizations in particular have stepped into the space of civilian rescue, articulating new forms of social activism outside of the state, made possible through vast networks of social and material capital that facilitate the organization of such activities.

Bernstein and Shih (2014) argue that the human trafficking reality tours described in Chapter 4 are a new form of humanitarian consumption, notably one that is embedded within legacies of touristic and sexual commerce in Thailand. In this chapter, I argue that vigilante

⁸⁶ <http://www.polarisproject.org/what-we-do/national-human-trafficking-hotline/the-nhtc/overview>

⁸⁷ “Human Trafficking Trends in the United States: National Human Trafficking Resource Center 2007-2011.” Washington DC: Polaris Project. 2013. p. 9

“https://na4.salesforce.com/sfc/p/#3000000006E4S/a/6000000004TLG/f7PldVCtt4Irtx_iljKxiGsERUTm6PUfmNxj9ijA6Sg=

⁸⁸ See, e.g., Bernstein 2010; Soderlund 2005; Cheng; Ritchie 2014 and numerous community based organizations that advocate against police profiling on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation including: Streetwise and Safe, BreakOUT, and the National Coalition of Anti-violence Programs.

rescue may be understood along the same parameters, though reality tours claim an educational goal above an explicit rescue agenda. Within the United States, rescue efforts in Los Angeles do not traverse national borders but represent intrusions into unfamiliar immigrant spaces deemed suspect and criminal. The practices of human trafficking outreach reveal new ways in which militarized humanitarianism and carceral feminism are enacted by first world activists and rescuers. Informed by circuits of transnational activism that narrate tales of sex trafficking and its rescue in Asia, civilian outreach and rescue efforts in Southern California are embedded in nativist, racist, classist, and gendered stereotypes of who trafficked persons are and the inevitability that they must be saved.

Project Rescue LA and Thai Light LA

Since 2010, two Christian anti-trafficking NGOs—Project Rescue LA, and Thai Light LA⁸⁹— have embarked on monthly outreach on the streets of Los Angeles. Each organization aimed to “step into the gap” between anti-trafficking laws and their enforcement by taking to the streets to identify instances of human trafficking. Thai Light LA was a branch of the organization of the same name that I describe in Chapter 2, where I have conducted ethnographic participant observation as a volunteer between 2008 and 2013. It was comprised primarily of female participants who were drawn to the activity after purchasing some of the organization’s jewelry. By contrast, Project Rescue LA was affiliated with a local evangelical Christian university in Southern California, and its members were primarily male students from the university.

Situating human trafficking rescue within the extant literatures on human trafficking and carceral feminism, I analyze rescue practices and interactions with perceived victims and law

⁸⁹ The names of organizations, and participants have been anonymized to protect privacy.

enforcement in Los Angeles. Like others before me, I argue that despite their status as non-state actors, anti-trafficking rescue workers enforce and extend state goals of surveillance and policing of immigrants and sex workers (Soderlund 2005; Musto 2011; Bernstein 2010; Kempadoo and Doezema 1998; GAATW 2012; Empower Foundation 2012). Anti-trafficking efforts have created a unique space for American citizens to enact surveillance and patrol over what are publicly deemed to be dangerous or victimized bodies. These outreach projects mobilize the language of human trafficking rescue to justify civilian vigilantism and surveillance over predominantly working class immigrants in Los Angeles. These practices reflect an underlying pathology of what urban planners have called NIMBY-ism (“Not in my Backyard” syndrome), an effect that describes community aversion to undesirable elements—in this case, crimes associated with immigration, low wage and informal work, and errant sexuality (Dear 1992; Wilton 2002; Maney and Abraham 2008; Burningham 2000).

Global Genealogies of Sex Trafficking Rescue

In 2005, Gretchen Soderlund published a feminist analysis of US raid and rehabilitation campaigns, eloquently arguing that the tactics of sex trafficking rescue in the US had a direct correlation to Bush-era conservative sexual politics domestically and abroad. Under the Obama administration, attention to modern-day slavery has remained a funding priority and has grown alongside heightened attention in media, global governance protocols, and through non-governmental organizations. While the US government anointed a new anti-trafficking ambassador Luis CdeBaca in 2009, signaling a shift in focus to labor trafficking, the majority of cases brought to US court, and the number of trafficking visas (T-Visas) allocated have overwhelmingly been for victims of sex trafficking (Chacón 2006; Chapkis 2003; Haynes 2006;

Bernstein 2012). Nearly a decade since Soderlund's article on rescue, US-based sex trafficking rescue efforts have expanded tremendously, both globally and within US borders, and have expanded from manifestations of state power under the Bush administration and have diffused across a range of non-state and civilian actors.

The enthusiasm around this brand of civilian vigilantism is arguably a novel feature of the penal state. As numerous scholars and practitioners have noted, the majority of these efforts have had the consequence of policing and punishing sex workers and immigrants. This is the case both within the United States and globally, as the US Trafficking in Person's ranking regime pressures different nations into adopting stringent legal mechanisms for addressing trafficking. More often than not, these laws exclusively strengthen prohibitions against sex work, as opposed to exploitative labor or other rights (Cheng 2011; Sharma 2005; Shah 2014; Bernstein 2012), and policing and surveillance have primarily extended to these populations.⁹⁰

Elizabeth Bernstein's concept of "carceral feminism" outlines the different ways in which anti-trafficking activism has amplified state power and criminal punishment for sex workers. Bernstein argues that under new configurations of neoliberal power and feminist governance, non-state actors frequently serve the interests of the state. One of the trademarks of carceral feminist efforts are that "carceral politics and a securitized state apparatus [are] antitrafficking feminists' preferred political remedies" (Bernstein 2010: 54). These interests happen to align with "heteronormative family values, crime control, and putative rescue and restoration" (Bernstein 2010: 63) along with classist, and nativist ideologies around sex, migration, and work.

⁹⁰ California's controversial Proposition 35, drafted in the name of combatting human trafficking is a prime illustration of laws that continue to punish sex workers. Colloquially named the "Case Act," the law was proposed by Californians Against Sexual Exploitation, a non-profit organization founded by concerned citizens. The law was proposed as a ballot initiative and was passed in 2012, however, since its passage, several lawsuits have contested the law's constitutionality. The law introduces various new penalties including: increased prison terms and mandatory sex offender registration for those convicted of sex trafficking. It expands definitions of sex trafficking in a manner that criminalizes all sex work, and penalizes sex workers' family members as beneficiaries of human trafficking (Almendrala 2012).

Additionally, Jennifer Musto's engagement with "carceral protectionism" reveals how even the most extreme and punitive forms of law enforcement policing and control are always discussed within the putatively benevolent interests of protecting victims (Musto 2010, 2011). Musto argues that "multi-professional alliances" between law enforcement and different members of civil society diffuse power across various agents of carceral protectionism (Musto 2011).

My contribution extends these aforementioned engagements with the carceral state by situating civilian vigilante rescue as a form of transnational activism and consumption. US civilians arrive at rescue efforts only after learning of the strategies and tactics of other modern day abolitionists who have enacted rescue across the Global South. For many of these participants, outreach and rescue are no different from other aforementioned forms of social engagement described in this dissertation, including purchasing jewelry, serving as volunteers for anti-trafficking rescue projects, or participating in human trafficking rescue tours. Building upon prior critical feminist engagements with these issues, this chapter addresses the various ways in which consumer activists have become carceral actors, and in turn how acts of carceral surveillance and rescue become meaningful acts of consumption for civilians who pursue them.

Vigilantism and the State

While earliest research on vigilantism has been interested in social action outside of or in antagonism to state power (Brown 1975; Abrahams 1998; Johnston 1996), this chapter provides empirical evidence that anti-trafficking vigilantism extends a state agenda formed through moral concerns with sex work, immigration, and the visibility of these intersections in public space. The carceral motives for controlling immigrant workers are masked by the larger claims to humanitarianism and rescue that belie present-day anti-trafficking sentiments. While prior

chapters have addressed the efforts of US-led rescue and rehabilitation efforts in China and Thailand, this chapter uses the theoretical framework of vigilante justice to explain the merging of state and non-state actors in human trafficking rescue within US borders.

The emergence of vigilante justice is found within discussions of community policing. Following a post-1970's era of heightened police corruption and brutality in urban areas across the US, methods of community policing were introduced as more democratic models of patrol and control (Herbert 2001; Bucqueroux 1990). Such community partnerships refer to a range of relationships: "police, organized residents and, at times, other relevant government agencies [come] together to develop problem solving projects as a fear reduction and crime prevention strategy" (Muniz 2011: 332). However, critical research on such community policing measures has revealed that despite their efforts to run checks and balances over police power, community groups become co-opted by state actors to serve the interests of the carceral state (Crawford 1997; Garland 2001). Within models of community policing, vigilantism is not a goal, rather *partnerships* with law enforcement intend to explicitly dissuade vigilantism (Johnston 1996).

Walker (2007) and Conaway (2004) have examined "border vigilantism" on the US-Mexico border, finding that minutemen and other vigilante groups mobilize conservative panics around migration and crime in order to justify policing and violence at the border. They gain their authority through harnessing media attention to portray borders as the "locus of criminal and terrorist activity" (Walker 2007: 45). Research on minutemen situates vigilantism within strains of nativism that can certainly be applied to the anti-trafficking context. Because the crime of human trafficking stereotypically targets poor immigrant women, victim status is perceived to be visible by these markers of gender, class and nationality.

Vigilantism has typically emerged outside of the state, in relation to areas where the state has chosen not to pursue certain lines of investigation, or where resources may not be sufficient. What is unique about human trafficking rescue from other forms of vigilantism is how civilian outreach forms partnerships with local law enforcement—not at the sites of encounter and rescue, but through extensive documentation and mapping that vigilante rescue groups deliver to law enforcement. Law enforcement authorities do not sanction these activities, and may not rely heavily on evidence provided by vigilante groups as they have their own established means of surveillance; however, vigilante organizations repeatedly invoke their communications with law enforcement as testament to the legitimacy of their outreach efforts.

It should not be shocking that human trafficking outreach has become popular, as sex-related crimes have historically been sites of public patrol, most notably, the public's control over sex offenders through the mandatory institutionalization of publically accessible sex offender registries, and citizen's arrest of sex offenders in public space.⁹¹ Vigilante justice is generally about physical containment of foreign bodies that are perceived to be dangerous to themselves—and by extension to the harmony of society at large. Such surveillance over sex work harkens to global research that has identified abolitionist moral panics around sex as conduits for contagion, disease and a threat to public health (Limoncelli 2010; Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck 2010).

Recently, Johnson (2011) has expanded on studies of border vigilantism by examining what such civilian policing looks like for female minutemen. Similarly interested in a discussion of gender and vigilantism, my analysis of two cases of rescue efforts led by men and women

⁹¹ California's contentious Proposition 35 mobilized moral and social panics around sex offenses by labeling all trafficking related crimes sex offenses. All individuals arrested for sex work, or related "crimes of human trafficking" would be placed on a sex offender database. This could include children of sex workers who use parents' earnings from sex work to pay school tuition, and voluntary sex workers who are arrested as victims of trafficking (Case Act 2012, Almendrala 2012).

looks at how racial, ethnic, and gender-based difference inform vigilante resources, access, and authority in anti-trafficking rescue in the US.⁹²

Average Abolitionism

I had been hearing a lot about human trafficking, and wanted to get involved. I tried to get involved with the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking,⁹³ but they kept telling me that the best way to get involved was to fundraise for their organization. Fundraising is fine, but when every organization tells you to fundraise, you feel like you aren't making an impact. I really wanted a way to get my hands dirty, and make a real difference.

(Jim, 20-year-old outreach participant and college student)

The rescue industry's (Agustín 2007) attention to human trafficking through journalism, films, and NGO advocacy has encouraged a new cohort of enthusiastic activists willing to offer time, resources, and personal skills towards the goal of ending modern day slavery. As demonstrated through the pages of this dissertation, varying acts of consumption have come to constitute acceptable forms of public engagement. Project Rescue LA's mission was attuned to such volunteer fatigue sentiments as the one described by Jim above. Their mission statement read:

As it stands, there is a massive gap between professional abolitionist organizations and abolitionist activists. While the professional abolitionist organizations are doing amazing work, there is often little opportunity for the average abolitionist activist to join in these operations beyond fundraising and awareness building. The result of this gap is a massive waste of resources with thousands of potential justice seekers standing idle at the sidelines.

(PRLA website)

⁹² The interest in racial and ethnic difference in particular, are drawn from the larger transnational movement's attention to human trafficking in the Global South, as evidenced through the US Department of Health and Human Service's human trafficking identification toolkit discussed on page 136.

⁹³ The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking is the largest anti-trafficking organization in the Los Angeles area. Volunteering requires extensive background checks, and an investment in 20 hours of training before one can attend. Often times the mis-match between available and needed skills, and wait lists to participate in volunteer training makes wait times over a year, posing a barrier to the types of volunteer engagement citizens seek.

Echoing David Batstone’s call to marry “movement with intelligent action,” or what he has alternatively coined “open source activism,” human trafficking rescue outreach opportunities give the average abolitionist an opportunity to participate in and enact abolitionist politics (Not For Sale 2012).

Every two weeks for about two years (the project shut down in 2012), Project Rescue LA gathered a group of 8-10 college-aged men to take to the streets for “Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Sweeps,” referred to simply as “TIP Sweeps.” The catchy name embodied the bold aspects of their work: the technical jargon “TIP,” short for Trafficking in Persons that the US State Department uses in its human trafficking reports, and “Sweeps,” common law enforcement terminology, provided the group with a necessary combination of authority and allure to welcome its civilian rescuers. TIP Sweeps appealed to a large volunteer base of young men who wanted to become involved in human trafficking, which required limited commitment and no training—save for a 30-minute debriefing session before each sweep.

PRLA’s two male directors, recent graduates of the local evangelical university that housed the project, spent their weekdays perusing erotic services fora in order to identify the locations of each week’s “sweep.” The directors created user profiles and searched online erotic services forms, ranging from Craigslist,⁹⁴ redbook, troothsayerz, and the erotic review, among others. On their own, they would each patronize a select number of the sites⁹⁵ to visit individually,

⁹⁴ There has been significant public debate about how Craigslist erotic services and Village Voice backpage sections may serve as brokers for human trafficking. Numerous abolitionist groups called for craigslist and the Village Voice to abandon the erotic services section of their website. The debates over periodicals’ erotic services sections has dovetailed with increased attention to commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) a growing subsection of the movement against trafficking (see, <http://www.villagevoice.com/sex-trafficking/>). In June 2014, the FBI shut down redbook.com claiming it was under investigations for facilitating child sex trafficking. The San Francisco Bay Area Sex Worker Outreach Project (SWOP) responded with a statement asserting that the increasing censorship of online venues for sex work makes sex workers more vulnerable to violence and unsafe working conditions.

⁹⁵ Their perusal and easy access to such sites is part of the growing accessibility, and in turn consumption, of rescue acts, similar to the human trafficking reality tour detailed in Chapter 4.

and report back to the group. If they discovered suspicious activity, they would designate the site the location of a future group TIP Sweep.

Describing one visit to a massage parlor in the Mid-Wilshire area of Los Angeles (a primarily commercial district with many high-rise buildings), one of the organization's directors Matt, a 22 year-old white male and recent graduate from the local evangelical Christian university, recounted this typical outreach effort:

I found this massage parlor on one of the erotic services sites. Clients kept mentioning it, and sharing prices they had paid for sex, along with really graphic reviews of sexual experiences—I mean you don't want to see what some of this stuff said about these girls. I decided I wanted to check this place out for myself and went last Wednesday around 8 o' clock. I walked in pretending I just wanted a massage and tried to talk to the receptionist about the different services they offered. She really wasn't friendly and mainly seemed interested in what I was going to buy. I realized that I would just have to pay for a massage if I wanted to talk to anyone. I saw on the menu that the massage cost \$70, and I paid. The receptionist took me back past numerous other closed doors. I tried to listen and peek inside any of the doors, but I couldn't hear anything. She brought me back to a room and introduced me to a young girl...couldn't have been more than sixteen (years old). After she closed the door, I told the girl that I didn't want a massage, and I just wanted to talk. She seemed really relieved, but her English wasn't that great, so we couldn't really communicate. I think she was from Vietnam and she said that she was 18, but trust me, she looked a lot younger than that. We tried to make small talk, but after about 20 minutes that wasn't really working, so I shared with her the brochure about human trafficking, and gave her my cell phone number in case she ever needed it.

(Fieldnotes 11/2010)

Matt's disappointment at the limited information he gained from this visit was over shadowed by his adamant skepticism over the worker's age, the only concrete indicator that would allow him to mark this as a case of human trafficking. As sex worker rights organizations in Thailand have critiqued, many human trafficking first responders refuse to believe a sex worker when she shares her age because they either long for the fantasy of discovering a case of human trafficking, or because they face pressure to produce human trafficking victims and

prosecutions—and under many nation’s laws, sex workers under the age of 18 are automatically classified as victims of trafficking by law (“The Last Rescue of Siam” 2012; Fieldnotes 3/2013).

Like others before him, John saw a virtuous behavior in entering a room through the premise of an intimate commercial encounter, but disavowing the sex industry by indicating to the massage worker that he just wanted to “talk.” Journalists like Nicholas Kristof, who has conducted a series of exposés, raids and rescues of alleged child sexual exploitation in Cambodia, and elsewhere, have used this method of paying for intimate and sexual services only to use the time to conduct interviews, or as the premise for extractions. Commonly, such consumers believe that they are doing sex workers a favor by paying, though not requiring them to engage in sexual intercourse, however, sex worker advocates in Thailand, well accustomed to such tactics from a wide range of students, clients, journalists and researchers, now request that such clients pay double or triple the amount of time needed for such an “interview,” as it requires a greater emotional investment than other sex acts (Fieldnotes 8/2011).

When recounting these individual outreach efforts, the two directors warned outreach participants not to take such rescue efforts lightly, and mentioned threats to personal safety, and the potential criminal networks that facilitate human trafficking rings. Prior to embarking on these outreach trips, participants were required to attend a mandatory two-hour training session, in which the organization’s directors explained the safety issues and repeated to the group, as a testament to the seriousness of the issues, that the project worked closely with local law enforcement.

With the sufficient allure of danger surrounding these rescues, PRLA convened bi-monthly surveillance events at different locations mentioned on the erotic services websites to conduct surveillance of illicit activities. One winter evening in 2011, a group of eight male

college students and myself gathered in Santa Monica, a predominantly white, upper middle class neighborhood in West Los Angeles. We were instructed to profile a massage shop, which was identified only by a small sign in neon purple lights that read “MASSAGE” in the window. Easy to miss amidst high-end restaurants, grocery and numerous other stores, the organizers were eager to point out how deceptively human trafficking can “lurk where we least expect it.”

Crouching behind garbage cans, and underneath construction scaffolding, the outreach director instructed our group to record the number of people who entered the establishment, their race/ethnicity, gender, age, and how long each individual stayed in the building. A separate group of outreach participants was in the back of the establishment, with a view of the back door, hoping to observe and record any suspicious activity in the back of the establishment. Just before outreach began, the directors reminded us of a list of suspicious behaviors that are delineated in the US Department of Health and Human Service’s “Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking” Toolkit for Identifying Victims of Trafficking:

A victim of trafficking may look like many of the people you help every day. You can help trafficking victims get the assistance they need by looking beneath the surface for the following clues:

- Evidence of being controlled
- Evidence of an inability to move or leave job
- Bruises or other signs of battering
- Fear or depression
- Non-English speaking
- Recently brought to this country from Eastern Europe, Asia, Latin America, Canada, Africa or India
- Lack of passport, immigration or identification documentation

(Department of Health and Human Services 2013)

Providing this context to our outreach team, the leader cautioned us to look for suspicious behaviors in the parking lot. He explained, “We are looking for women who get out of a car together to see if they may be coerced as they are coming and going.” Another experienced

outreach worker chimed in: “Don’t forget to note if you see someone who looks underage; women under the age of 18 are definitely victims of trafficking.”

Small groups of 2-3 “teams” dispersed around the establishment in order to obtain a 360-degree view of who was coming and going. Outreach efforts were always held for an hour, typically between 8-10 PM, when the sun had already set, so that the surveillance would not be conspicuous. However, this also meant that the darkness made it fairly difficult to discern details about activities witnessed. Across several months of outreach notes, characterizations of these events were always blurry. For instance, when trying to list details about patrons of the establishment, participants often had a difficult time profiling certain racial demographics, resulting in recurring annotations, such as: “Dark bald man, Arab (maybe), entered massage parlor for 33 minutes;” “Dark man, probably Hispanic, entered brothel, did not exit” (Fieldnotes 4/2010).

Typically college age white males, these participants modeled their vigilante efforts after other men who accessed the rescue field through their identities as potential consumers to penetrate spaces of commercial sex without arousing suspicion. These forms of human trafficking outreach were facilitated primarily through gender difference and consumer identity as males who accessed the space with equal parts titillation and fantasy over rescue.

Partnerships with Law Enforcement

For the past two decades, the Los Angeles Police Department’s Vice Unit, and police departments across the US have conducted similar “undercover” operations to expose street based prostitution as well as prostitution in select indoor venues (see, e.g., Musto 2011; Bernstein 2007a; Weitzer 2010; Brents, Jackson and Hausbeck 2010). Prior to the introduction of the US

Trafficking Victims Protection Act, and the subsequent creation of the Los Angeles Task Force on human trafficking, the LAPD vice unit was primarily focused on cracking down on prostitution as one of the other “vice” crimes lumped into a category with drugs and gangs. In 2006, following a shift towards human trafficking as a unique crime, and a trend in “inter-agency commitment,” the US Department of Justice awarded the LAPD a \$450,000 grant to develop and implement a series of mandatory trainings for first responders to identify victims of trafficking (LAPD 2007: 3).

The efforts to include law enforcement in anti-trafficking intervention shifted the LAPD’s surveillance of vice from a lens of punishment towards a rhetoric of protection. These parameters of what Musto (2010) calls “carceral protectionism” have been ever more expanded to shape the LAPD’s engagement with victims of commercial sexual exploitation of children—a focus of anti-trafficking activism that has grown so prominent that it is popularly just referred to simply by its acronym “CSEC.” As debates over what constitutes human trafficking have come to the fore of public policy and discussion, CSEC has arrived as the most universally acknowledged form of human trafficking. While the decision-making, agency, and victimhood of adult sex workers may always be subject to interpretation and debate, the protection of sex workers under the age of 18—minors— has gained nearly unanimous support and now serves as the driving engine of support for anti-sex trafficking activism.

In 2008, amidst the LAPD’s trafficking victims law enforcement trainings, I interviewed a 30-year vice unit veteran detective after he came to UCLA to deliver a talk to an upper division level Sociology. During the presentation, he shared the different ways that his unit identifies prostitutes, manages pimps, and works with different social service agencies in order to facilitate the rescue of prostitutes and victims of sex trafficking. As with many social service providers and

on the ground responders, the Detective's reference to "prostitutes" and "sex trafficking victims" was often used synonymously. When I asked him to clarify the difference between the two groups, he mentioned that the numerous "repeat offenders" who are repeatedly busted for solicitation of prostitution "clearly are not victims." Additionally, he added, "victims are often difficult to identify because of the complex criminal gang networks that exert control through pimps and criminal gangs."

This Detective also shared that the LAPD vice unit also seriously considered the gender of male police officers who conducted such undercover operations, noting the ways in which gender affects policing. He disclosed that when recruiting officers for the vice squad, he is especially cautious about hiring men because many of the younger prostitutes are "falling in love with the officers who rescue them." He explained that this dynamic also existed between himself and victims, but because of his age, approaching his late-fifties, they saw him more like a father figure—stemming from what he refers to as a "daddy complex." Offering his reading of the situation, he explained: "I mean, this is the first time that many of these girls have had someone take care of them...most of them grew up in broken homes, didn't have a father around, or were abused, and this causes them to get very attached to the first person who seems to advocate for them." He went on to share that one victim whom he "rescued" from street based prostitution and later sent to "Children of the Night" a North Hollywood-based social service organization that provides training and services to homeless sex workers under 18, came to him after graduating from the organization's GED program and gave her a copy of her diploma. He commented that he found this "adoration" phenomenon particularly true with his younger attractive male cops: "I'll have a victim come by all the time and ask how Detective X is doing," It's obvious what is happening, they are falling in love with the cops that rescue them."

Following each ‘TIP Sweep,’ PRLA male outreach participants are asked to submit notes documenting their observations. These notes were eventually compiled into a report that contained over 400 different locations of sexual service in Los Angeles, and were presented to the LAPD in 2012. This report provided the following information about the following categories: Name, Address, Hours, Happy Ending,⁹⁶ Full Service, Age Range, and Ethnicity. The majority of locations listed featured Chinese, Korean, Thai, and Latino employees. The organization’s promotional materials describe their methods:

Once PRLA has finished with its observations, a detailed report is created describing the situation. PRLA then ranks the likelihood of trafficking at the location and delivers the report to the local anti-trafficking division at the police. The goal of these observations and reports is to gather enough indisputable evidence that the police will be able to accurately move on the situation, rescue the girls and arrest the perpetrators.

(Project Rescue Los Angeles Website 2011)

The report included a visual map that located “brothels” amidst different locations, and was posted and made publicly available on the organization’s Facebook page. At each outreach and publicity event, the PRLA organizers were proud to note that their mapping materials and the products of outreach were “useful to the LAPD.” However, other members of the Los Angeles County Inter-Agency Task Force Against Human Trafficking disagreed with Project Rescue LA’s methods. The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST), the largest formal NGO partner of the LAPD, derided Project Rescue LA’s operations as dangerous, uninformed, and underscored that they “jeopardize existing long-term investigations into places of possible exploitation” (Fieldnotes 4/2011). In response to such criticism, Project Rescue LA maintained that they had a direct connection to one of the LAPD vice officers—this connection was always anonymous to protect the secrecy of the operation—and they accused CAST of being

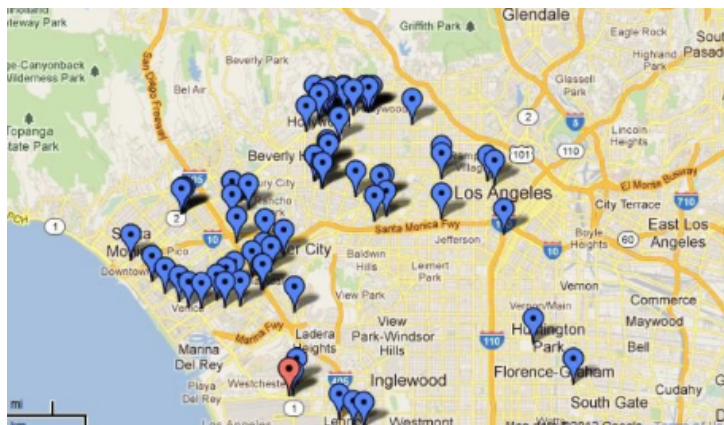
⁹⁶ “Happy endings” refer to manual sexual stimulation, whereas “full service” typically refers to vaginal sexual intercourse.

“gatekeepers” of activist efforts in LA, allowing very few opportunities for concerned citizens to make a difference.⁹⁷

The organization frequently celebrated the fact that information garnered from outreach was “assisting the LAPD with *several* anti-trafficking cases in progress,” however when I asked for details about such cases on multiple occasions, I was told that the nature of the “information was confidential because of the sensitive nature of human trafficking.” It was clear through the kinds of materials documented, that any case the LAPD would have pursued, would have inevitably involved immigrant sex workers. However, after multiple attempts to speak with LAPD officers and detectives in the vice unit, I was not able to verify if the LAPD used these documents in their investigations.

Demonstrating the organization’s links to the LAPD assured PRLA formal legitimacy and in late 2011, as a demonstration of their close ties to the LAPD, they launched a social media campaign to “Help Save the LAPD,” whose human trafficking and prostitution vice crimes unit were in danger of being shut down due to lack of funding.

⁹⁷ This was the same organization that I initially had attempted to secure access to at the beginning stages of this dissertation. The delays in receiving access to serve as a volunteer deterred many eager citizens seeking to become involved in anti-trafficking work. The organization maintained that such bureaucratic hurdles to selecting volunteers ensured that their volunteers had the highest skills and most sincere time commitments to volunteering.



Human Trafficking Rescue as Surveillance; Carceral Vigilante Coalitions; Images from Project Rescue LA's Facebook page

Mobilizing Rescue Through Ethnic Difference

While young men who directed and participated in Project Rescue LA efforts relied on their gender identities as potential male consumers to gain access to sites of commercial sex, Thai Light's rescue workers were unable to assume client identities because their outreach team was comprised almost exclusively of female participants. Each Thursday evening at 8 PM, a group of fifteen to twenty women assemble at the Coffee Bean on Wilshire and Western in Los Angeles' Koreatown, a transportation hub that sits at the nexus of several working class immigrant neighborhoods. Organized through Thai Light's Los Angeles office, this all-female group learned of the outreach opportunity through the organization's primary function as a rehabilitation and vocational training program for sex workers "rescued from human trafficking" in Bangkok.

In 2009, Thai Light introduced a strategy that expanded US activist efforts beyond mere consumption and purchase of jewelry. It offered the opportunity for the organization's supporters in Los Angeles to become closely involved in activists politics "on the ground," and offered weekly human trafficking outreach opportunities as a "more direct" way to become involved in anti-trafficking activism. This opportunity appealed to these consumers of jewelry, for while wearing the jewelry was meaningful because it demonstrated a commitment to abolitionist politics, participating in actual human trafficking rescue promised an additional opportunity to "live" abolitionist politics through direct rescue.

Los Angeles' Koreatown and MacArthur Park, respectively Asian and Latino working class immigrant neighborhoods, are the primary targets of Thai Light's outreach. Each week, rescue participants map outreach routes, break up into groups, and pray before setting out to an hour of civilian patrol on the streets. The organization called the outreach "Tread;" the organization's director explained the biblical and missionary origins of tread: "it means that whenever you step foot somewhere, you claim the land" (Fieldnotes 3/2010). Small groups of about four to five people typically dispersed onto a 10x10 block radius in Koreatown and around MacArthur Park to claim justice and "bring light" to these supposed places of darkness and human trafficking.

Equipped with neither language skills in Spanish or Korean, the two primary languages spoken in these densely populated immigrant neighborhoods, outreach volunteers are taught to look for suspicious activity, which has included everything from homeless individuals sleeping at bus stations, a group of migrant workers huddled together in front of a taco truck, or most perilously, an attractive Asian or Latina woman walking alone – a not unusual sighting in what Anna Kim describes as a highly popular "entertainment enclave" (Kim 2012). Following every

outreach, each group is responsible for filling out a form that documents: 1) the route they had chosen, 2) any unusual behaviors present, 3) any suspicious establishments to keep an eye out for in future weeks' outreach efforts, 4) individuals encountered, and 5) where, to whom, and how many pamphlets were given.

During one Fall evening outreach in Koreatown, just after finals had finished at UCLA, an outreach group witnessed an Asian woman standing alone on Wilshire and 7th Street near a prominent "booking club," a Korean owned club where a process of formal negotiation allows men to buy the company of women through drinks and other forms of commercial exchange. A discussion ensued, and the outreach group speculated the possibility that the woman was a victim of human trafficking based on her dress and appearance. Wearing a tight fitting mini-skirt, high heels, and an equally snug-fitting tank top, the group collectively mulled over their approach:

- A: Look at what she's wearing...and she's standing alone, what should we do?
B: It might be dangerous, her trafficker might be in that club, we've profiled it before on outreach. Some really shady stuff happens in there.
C: Well we should really do something because, I mean, she's tiny! She must be freezing.
B: Look [points to woman], She's getting on her phone.
D: Well maybe one of us can go over and give her some of these pamphlets.
[pamphlets that provide information about the emergency hotline for identifying victims of trafficking].
B: Ok, good idea, but be very, very careful.

As outreach participants gathered the pamphlets that the organization had ordered from the Department of Health and Human Services website in the language they assumed this potential victim needed (Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese, and English language pamphlets were chosen), a silver Honda Civic drove up, the window rolled down and some indistinguishable voices shouted back and forth. The woman got in the car, and as the car drove away, the outreach group was shocked and stimulated by the possibility that they had just witnessed an instance of street prostitution. They looked to one another and then quickly settled down from their arousal to begin musing about the unimaginable and undesirable fate that was awaiting this woman. What they did not take note of however, was a back seat filled with college-aged men and women, a UCLA license plate and UCLA parking tag hanging off the rearview mirror.

(Fieldnotes 6/2010)

To other familiar observers who were not intent on discovering human trafficking, this scene would plausibly seem like a group of Asian-American college students going out to celebrate the end of finals week. As the car pulled away, I mentioned that the parking hangtag looked familiar to me as a UCLA graduate student, and suggested to the group that this may have been a group of students out for a celebration after finals. After a contemplative pause, the group's director said that she would pray that was the case, but that it was hard to know because of the "dark spirits that rule over this area." Another member nodded and added, "even if she was a student, she still could be a victim of exploitation. I have heard of students that go to these clubs and become victims of exploitation." The director closed out the discussion by remarking that our objective was to reach as many people as possible in hopes that our efforts made a difference.

Details that suggested observed phenomenon were not cases of human trafficking were frequently ignored or discarded, as the outreach group had already determined human trafficking was present in Koreatown, due to its high density of immigrants, and reputation as an entertainment enclave with karaoke, bars, massage parlors, and booking clubs. As the target of outreach drove away, all that was left to do in her absence was to indicate in the outreach notes that we may have potentially witnessed an act of human trafficking. These notes are mandatorily completed after weekly outings, and as with the case with PRLA, and were systematically given to the LAPD every few months in the name of assisting law enforcement.

As outsiders in these communities, I suggested that Thai Light collaborate with local area non-profits and community based organizations. The organization's director responded with hesitation: "We don't really know which organizations we would reach out to, and we don't have enough resources. Plus, we check in with the police⁹⁸ after each rescue opportunity, so someone in

⁹⁸ I did not have the opportunity to interview any Los Angeles Police Department members about their experiences with vigilante rescue groups.

the community does know what is happening.” The organization did partner with a local Korean American church during one sermon that focused on trafficking, however failed to liaise with some of the larger well-established community based organizations like the Koreatown Immigrant Workers Alliance. Had they gotten in touch with these community based organizations (CBOs), this outreach team would have likely run into the same critique that the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST) made of Project Rescue LA. Uninformed about their surroundings, or local threats or community resources, the group of outreach volunteers was unaware of the challenges and constraints for immigrant workers in Koreatown.

On a different outreach occasion, I was encouraged to engage a Chinese speaking older woman at a busy bus stop on Wilshire Blvd. The outreach group observed Asian script on her shopping bag, and asked me if they were Chinese—I replied that they were, and all were enthusiastic that our team would have the opportunity to conduct outreach in a non-English language. I approached the woman and introduced myself with the script we were instructed to use translated to Mandarin:

“Hello, my name is Shi Linlin⁹⁹ and I am a volunteer with a non-profit organization here in Los Angeles. I was wondering if you had ever heard of human trafficking?”

This brazen introduction was almost always met with a startled pause, a dash of skepticism, quickly followed by what seemed to be annoyance with the solicitation. Accustomed to such a disinterested response, outreach teams were always heavily armed with anti-trafficking pamphlets from the Office to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking. My teammates on outreach eagerly handed several Chinese language brochures to me. I held the pamphlets in my hand and continued in our typical manner of engagement, “Here is some information about human

⁹⁹ Speaking in Chinese, I used my Chinese name.

trafficking. It is a really important problem in the United States, and there are laws that can protect people you may know.”

The woman scanned our group, looked back at me, looked down at the pamphlets laying in my extended hand, and shook her head and in Mandarin curtly replied: “*Bu yong, bu yong*” (“No need, no need”), warding off the unwanted brochures. As an outreach team, we encountered this response frequently, and had prepared a response: “Even if you don’t need it for yourself, perhaps you know someone else who does? Please take one and give them to friends or people you work with.” At this moment, I held back from delivering this final retort, which seemed unrealistic given that the woman’s bus was arriving and she had already turned her back to us to position herself to board. Her hands were also fully occupied with the grocery bags that had allowed us to identify her as a likely Chinese speaker in the first place. A second best option, our group left pamphlets at the bus stop bench with hopes that future travelers might find them useful.

Outreach participants frequently interpreted pauses or looks of confusion as affirmations of the importance of their work. A response of confusion was met by assurance that this community was unaware of the perils of human trafficking, while a response of pause or recoil was met by confirmation that the subject herself could be a victim of trafficking, whose “pimp” was watching nearby. More often than not, it seemed that many of those we approached did not speak English, did not have the time to read through the materials as they were in a hurry to get home or to work, and did not want to be bothered by a group of young and exceedingly bubbly women clutching informational pamphlets and lattes from Coffee Bean. The fact that the outreach populations did not speak English and were often busily in transit, provided the sole affirmation that outreach teams needed—that of the subject’s immigrant status, evidenced by skin color, clothing, and language skills. This conflation of women’s immigrant working class status with

victimization was prompted by the Rescue and Restore Campaign's cues to find victims of human trafficking among "immigrants" and "non-English speakers."

In 2011, Thai Light began partnering with the Salvation Army's Initiative Against Sexual Trafficking (IAST), which employed a Spanish-speaking minister to co-lead Thai Light's monthly outreach activities in Spanish speaking areas. Outreach typically took place in Los Angeles' MacArthur Park, a busy public space with a circumference of about half a mile surrounded by shops, informal food vendors, families on picnics and pedestrian passers-by in a primarily Central and Latin American neighborhood. Outreach participant groups to MacArthur Park were warned about the dangers that lurked beneath the surface at the park, noting public media reports of cases of violent crime, muggings, and drug dealings. In light of its dangerous reputation, for safety reasons, most outreach to MacArthur Park happened on weekend afternoons in broad daylight.

While outreach in Koreatown was prioritized by identifying potential victims, outreach workers in MacArthur Park seemed more intent on observing and recording markers of illicit or underground economic activity. As a result, the notes focused on single Black and Latino men who appeared to be idly standing by, with "no apparent purpose" in the Park. Outreach workers marked these men as potential pimps, traffickers, drug dealers, gangsters—a wide array of possible identities fitting the general category of criminal. They surveyed and documented what activities such men were involved in, and submitted their findings monthly in a portfolio to the LAPD.

As a teaching assistant in the department of Sociology at UCLA, I have had the opportunity to instruct and mentor many students who grew up in the neighborhoods surrounding MacArthur Park. In a course on immigrant assimilation and acculturation, a quarter-long

assignment asked students to conduct weekly ethnographic fieldwork of immigrant neighborhoods. One undocumented female student, who was born in El Salvador and grew up in Los Angeles, chose to conduct her neighborhood ethnography at MacArthur Park. During her eight weeks of ethnographic observations at the park, she noted that many of the informal vendors standing idly by were not the criminals that police, local media, and concerned onlookers were so intent on finding, but were rather individuals who assumed different roles in assisting immigrants. She forged relationships with an agent who helped provide false social security cards to undocumented immigrants, who needed the cards as a formality to gain employment. She and many of her classmates had used these cards to access minimum wage jobs around UCLA to pay for tuition and living expenses. Though outside the law, she and other undocumented students relied on these informal services that have facilitated immigrant integration for decades. In her unpublished final paper for the course, she revealed a productive network of informal services and support, ironically those that assist migrants in accessing jobs with *more* security and formality. The findings of her paper would never be as readily consumed by law enforcement officials and outsider rescuers who sought so deeply to enter MacArthur Park to “make a difference” (Barrera 2010).

Existing methodological insights into the challenges of researching human trafficking are instructive for methods of street outreach. Pointing out the difficult methodological issues in studying trafficking in persons, Liz Kelly has written that research on human trafficking allows the researcher to “find anything you want” (Kelly 2005). Because it is allegedly “hidden beneath the surface” as the popular Health and Human Service campaign claims, researchers, activists, journalists, and concerned citizens are equipped with the justification to imagine the horrors and possibilities of human trafficking, lacking substantive evidence. In two years of outreach with

both organizations, I never encountered a situation of human trafficking with outreach teams. However, for outreach participants, *not* seeing what they set out to identify week after week, simply served as confirmation that they needed to take to the streets more frequently, and look deeper beneath the surface to uncover the realities that had been presented by political and cultural scripts about human trafficking.

Within rescue efforts in the US, moral panics around sexuality and human trafficking become an extension of pervasive panic around irregular and undocumented immigration. MacArthur Park and Koreatown are ideal foci for outreach efforts because their residents are primarily working class immigrants, whose racial and ethnic difference is marked by their class status. Most interactions encountered through outreach were unusual, the smells, sites, and sounds of these areas—which is why in both MacArthur Park and Koreatown, “Tread” always began at a Coffee Bean, or Starbucks.¹⁰⁰

The forms of US anti trafficking rescue described within this chapter operate under assumptions of what Mohanty classifies as “Third World difference,” defined as a “stable, ahistorical something that apparently oppresses most if not all the women in these countries” (Mohanty 1988: 63). US rescue efforts differentiate themselves from this Third World condition in their own “backyards” by designating themselves with a “moral obligation” to combat trafficking. Many US/Third World feminists have challenged these methods by which First World feminists engage with gender-based solidarity activism through difference. As Mohanty (1991:9) notes, these Western humanitarian interventions are “predicated upon assumptions about Western women as secular, liberated, and having control over their own lives.”

¹⁰⁰ Notably, rescue efforts in Thailand frequently meet at a McDonalds, a symbol of American familiarity and corporate sterility amidst the red light districts in Bangkok.

The presence of the outreach worker's mobility is never publicly questioned or contested in these immigrant communities. However, when black and brown bodies move through predominantly white neighborhoods, they are almost always marked, for instance, the profiling of Latino recyclers by West Los Angeles neighborhood watch groups, the profiling of graffiti and gang behavior, and on a national scale, through the persistence of racism and acceptable vigilante and community "justice" directed at undesirable populations—nationally recognized in the 2012 murder of Trayvon Martin, an African American teenager killed by a former Latino police officer, and neighborhood watch member conducting civilian surveillance (Lawson 2012; Golash-Boza 2012; Yancy and Jones 2013).

National Scales of Rescue

Outside of Southern California, organizations in cities spanning from Oklahoma to New Orleans have created pathways of civilian intervention to supplement and replace law enforcement efforts. Recently, the Cincinnati-based *Imagine Foundation* conducted three months of research profiling different erotic services advertisements on the Internet. The completed report found that commercial sex occurred along prominent interstate highways and mapped all the areas in which commercial sex was being sold (Imagine Foundation 2014). The organization conveniently elides any distinction between sex work and human trafficking, and highlights connections to human trafficking by partnering with the Underground Freedom Museum in Cincinnati, Ohio, which has recently dedicated a wing of the Museum to an exhibit on "Modern Day Abolitionism and Human Trafficking." At the press release of the report, the NGO met with local law enforcement, stating: "We are going to share more specific information with law enforcement, such as exact phone numbers and places, so they can investigate it if they want

to."¹⁰¹

In addition to inciting law enforcement activity, this organization's recent research findings advocated increased engagement by social groups, faith-based organizations, and individual citizens in identifying sex trafficking. At the close of the press conference, the organization's director shared: "We see this all the time. There are cars in and out of a house all the time and nobody bothers to report it." Compelled by similar calls to action, civilian groups everywhere from Nevada, to North Carolina, to New Jersey enter strip clubs and commercial sex establishments to distribute awareness-raising material about human trafficking. A 2014 effort undertaken by the *National Council of Jewish Women Los Angeles Division* is working on a campaign to mandate all businesses to put up signs about human trafficking.¹⁰² Such opportunities for rescue share notable similarities with the transnational organizations that sell human trafficking reality tours discussed in Chapter 4, though their presence in the United States demonstrates how popular understandings of human trafficking rescue circulate transnationally.

Conclusion

Contemporary rescue efforts in the US combine moral concerns around sexuality and human trafficking with larger panics around unregulated immigration, work, and criminal activity. Activist rescue efforts mirror those that have been spearheaded and celebrated in places like Beijing and Bangkok, and are replicated in Los Angeles for citizens who seek to consume and experience direct rescue once "at home." These rescue efforts are largely uncontested because they are mobilized through gender, consumption, and class mobility, supported by government

¹⁰¹ Imagine Foundation 2014. "The Cincinnati Backpage Report: An Analysis of Commercial Sex and Sex Trafficking in Cincinnati, Ohio." <http://imaginefreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/cincinnati-backpage.pdf>

¹⁰² <http://ncjwla.org/our-programs/advocacy/human-trafficking-outreach-project/>

and NGO campaigns that call for increased citizen participation in victim identification, and institutionalized through cooperation with local law enforcement.

Ten years since the introduction of the US Campaign to Rescue and Restore Victims of Human Trafficking, there exists a moral imperative to question the forms of vigilantism that have emerged, particularly as they are linked to carceral policing and punitive state agendas. Anti-trafficking outreach volunteers move into communities in which they have no stake in or any claim to, measuring victimhood and vulnerability through markers of ethnic, racial, and class difference. Thus, the term “backyard abolitionism,” an ethic that undergirds many of these rescue projects, is perhaps an incorrect moniker, as much of the policing is happening in *other* people’s backyards, typically neighborhoods of working class immigrants.

This chapter suggests that vigilante rescue through human trafficking outreach extends the same modes of consumer activism that characterize the purchase of jewelry, and participation in other forms of abolitionist activism described in this dissertation. Connected to other chapters in this dissertation, these empirical cases suggest another way in which contemporary anti-trafficking activism is created and consumed between the interests of a global neoliberal market and a punitive global state order. Like the transnational faith-based organizations in Beijing and Bangkok, and the secular interventions in trafficking movements in China and Thailand, US government-sponsored anti-trafficking initiatives serve to police and oppress already-marginalized individuals in the name of a larger social justice anti-trafficking movement.

Chapter 6: Conclusion: Transnational Movements and Possibilities for Justice

In the decade since the passing of the United Nations Palermo Protocol and the United States Trafficking Victims Protection Act, human trafficking has rapidly risen to the top of global human rights agendas and has drawn unparalleled interest from global governance institutions, transnational civil society, nation-states, and civilian activists alike. The prioritization of human trafficking as a social concern that engages faith-based and secular groups in democratic and authoritarian nation-state contexts has made the global movement to combat human trafficking a pivotal transnational social movement of the past decade.

Shedding light on how power is embedded in social movements through different institutional resources—the state and/or the market— offers explanations about how, when, and why counter-hegemonic globalization (Evans 2005) is possible, and when its opportunities are foreclosed. Additionally, a multi-sited ethnographic study of a global movement across three countries, and through the lens of different movement actors, gleans insight into the inter-subjective motives, agency and experiences of the people that design, consume, and benefit from global social action.

The global movement to combat trafficking has embedded new forms of state power across the China and Thailand. Stemming from UN Protocols, global governance compliance pressures, and codified through national law, the carceral state now works with non-state actors in novel ways, causing the tenets, morals, and actions of the anti-trafficking movement to reproduce the subordination of women globally. The unique ways through which states wield power over global social movements differs across China's authoritarian and Thailand's democratic nation-state contexts. The movement is beholden to authoritarian state interests in China, which trades access to organizational survival for government partnerships and oversight. This has largely

stifled the creation of a human trafficking rescue industry (Agustín 2007) in China, relative to other parts of the world. In the more democratic context of Thailand, the movement is less beholden to political power, but to global market power, in which “free market humanitarianism” (Chapter 4) parallels the political economic priorities of tourism and foreign investment as engines of Thai economic growth. The large market for global human trafficking rescue parallels state investment in tourism and sexual commerce revealing how economic development and humanitarian rescue are co-constituted. The orientation of these two nation states has paved way for the interrogation of a “political economy of rights” within the global movement to combat human trafficking. Efforts to understand how the anti-trafficking social movement mobilizes rights in distinct nation-state contexts have been limited and this dissertation strives to fill this gap.

Layered within this variegated political economy of rights thrive ideologically distinct factions of the anti-trafficking movement. In addition to secular responses, this dissertation has also focused on faith-based actors whose engagement with the anti-trafficking movement stem from fundamental moral commitments towards global hetero-normative gender, sexual, and labor relations. The role of ideology and morality is vital to theorizations of power within global social movements, and several empirically puzzling phenomena have demanded further inquiry into what explains the convergence between faith-based and secular modes of anti-trafficking engagement. Extending the work of Elizabeth Bernstein (2007b), this project focuses on the American evangelical Christian faith community, which has been the largest contingent of faith-based anti-trafficking actors to date (Bernstein 2007b, 2010, 2015; Zimmerman 2013), though Catholic, Jewish, and Buddhist¹⁰³ interventions exist across the globe.

¹⁰³ Some notable examples include: the US Sisters Against Human Trafficking (<http://bakhitinitiative.com/>), the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines

Forms of state and market power embedded in the global movement to combat human trafficking have empowered Global North activists to join the global movement to combat human trafficking, and have refashioned consumer and citizen activism by transforming civilian activist engagement into extensions of state and market power both in the US and abroad. Bernstein's (2010) concept of "carceral feminism" is particularly instructive for revealing how the anti-trafficking movement has perpetuated the penal state agenda within the benevolent guise of First World feminism. This dissertation has explored how carceral feminism sits between the state and the market in two different national contexts. I have illustrated how it extends both state and market power through enabling the consumption of rescue through jewelry, reality tourism, and backyard abolitionism.

Human trafficking rescue is now a project undertaken by everyone from law enforcement to citizen interlocutors, creating spaces of civilian vigilantism outside of the state but voluntary in its interest. The proliferation of renegade civic engagement parallels the abundant rise of socially entrepreneurial movement responses, which illustrate the convergence of public-private, state-non state, and secular-faith based efforts (Bernstein 2010). As we have seen through my discussion of the Chinese and Thai cases, and their transnational connections through the United Nations and sites of activist organizing and consumption in the US, this has occurred despite differences across political economic contexts, though the movement has taken on the characteristics of authoritarianism in China and the free market in Thailand.

(<http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/story/373060/news/nation/network-of-nuns-helping-fight-human-trafficking-in-phl>), Buddhist nuns in Nepal (<http://www.tricycle.com/blog/buddhist-nuns-take-human-trafficking-nepal-interview-ven-dhammavijaya>), Catholic nuns participating in brothel raids with the police in the UK (http://www.theguardian.com/law/2014/nov/30/nun-helps-police-raid-brothels?CMP=share_btn_fb), and the National Council of Jewish Women's partnership with the Polaris Project (http://www.ncjw.org/content_11240.cfm?navID=218)

Counter-Hegemonic Globalization and Social Movements

This project was motivated by a fundamental concern with how and why counter-hegemonic movements can reproduce the same hegemonic power structures that they aim to combat. Transnational social movement theories obscure a highly stratified organizing base that purports “counter-hegemonic” (Evans 2005) intentions while simultaneously reinforcing and reproducing existing hegemonic structures. Evidenced by their inherent contradictions, the transnational anti-trafficking movement supports Michael Burawoy’s (2010:7) critical assessment of the “false optimism” embedded within social movement scholarship. Burawoy and many labor movements scholars have demanded that social movement scholarship be more attuned to state and market power (Lee 2007; Seidman 2005; Silver 2003). Within this dissertation, I have illustrated the ways in which the Thai and Chinese state and global markets facilitate or absorb the goals of the anti-trafficking movement; at the same time, I also pay attention to the race, class, nationality, and gender identities of Global North rescuers, as these identities inscribe additional forms of power, motivation, and interest across the movement.

In the cases of faith-based activism through the market—inclusive of the commodity chain of slave free jewelry and human trafficking reality tourism—ethical consumption appears to be impossible where the labor relations of production and tourism respectively, are still bound by the features of neoliberal global capitalism. In the cases of secular activism through the state in China, and market in Thailand, social justice based on the demands of local activists and migrant workers appears to be incompatible with inter-agency efforts to build transnational solidarity.

Most social movements struggle with inherent contradictions and inconsistencies because they must appeal to a range of audiences and include a great number of constituents—in social movement language, they must develop a set of common grievances that are embedded within

networks of solidarity, and frame these grievances in a culturally resonant way (Tarrow 2005). This need for a coherent frame may make divisions and dissent within these social movements illegible; in other words: what may be considered problematically hegemonic varies significantly within a global movement. While many social movements have targeted the state to demand change, others find that any sort of state engagement cannot be detached from the penal and carceral dimensions of nation state power. Alternatively, growing numbers of social entrepreneurs, microcredit lenders, and consumer activists find the market an appealing resource and target given the dominance of global capital. Yet, the stated beneficiaries of such social programs—who are also often the producers of commodities that fuel entrepreneurship—report subordination through labor practices and unequal labor relations. How such inequality is distinct from traditional labor arrangements of global capital appears to be through the varying moral and social requirements that exist alongside labor requirements, but ultimately, not in how capital is distributed.

By many accounts, the global movement to combat trafficking is considered a success to stakeholders in the Global North who have contributed to its design, funding, and propagation. Within the US alone, most college campuses have at least one human trafficking awareness club, over 4,000 faith communities have joined together for an annual “Freedom Sunday” of worship each April, and in 2010, President Obama anointed January “National Human Trafficking Awareness Month” (The White House 2010). On January 11th of this past year, commemorative activities included everything from a 5K Stiletto “Freedom Walk” to raise awareness about gender inequality, a human trafficking film festival, and numerous fundraisers for American anti-trafficking organizations working domestically and abroad. Such heightened advocacy campaigns and awareness efforts have inspired a decade of social engagement spanning consumption of

slave free goods, international human trafficking reality tours, and vigilante rescue operations in working class immigrant and racial minority neighborhoods in the US.

By many other accounts (Agustín 2007; Bernstein 2010; Doezema 2010; Empower Foundation 2012; Gallagher 2012; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2005; GAATW 2007; Parreñas 2011), the global movement to combat human trafficking has been marked by failure, especially in its impact on the “trafficked” women the movement purportedly helps. These failures, most often attributed to ambiguous goals, and unclear definitions and organizing tenets, have consistently led to the surveillance and patrol of low wage women workers globally. As a strategy that turns to American consumers to raise funds and awareness around human trafficking, this market-based strategy of humanitarian assistance sells the version of human trafficking that generates social capital for tour participants, tour operators, and the expert NGOs who craft the tales of trafficking on the trip—and receive donations from tour revenues (Bernstein and Shih 2014). Opportunities to hear alternative perspectives that are explicitly critical of human trafficking rescue, such as those that the Empower Foundation in Thailand has assembled—through text, film, and even embroidered artworks—challenge the simple narratives that facilitate consumer activism. Scholars of transnational advocacy networks have long recognized that a coherent frame that focuses on “practices that result in bodily harm to vulnerable individuals” (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 195) is the surest route to transforming a particular human rights concern into a justice movement that is broadly appealing. By invoking simple narratives of slavery and rescue from it, the human trafficking movement has successfully mobilized universally-recognized rights violations, and by so doing, has managed to bypass most critiques that the movement is Western-biased and imperialist.

Complicated narratives from supposed trafficked women that reveal that the slavery framing is flawed or false threaten the entire premise of the movement, and are a dangerous challenge to the activists that have propelled the issue of human trafficking to international prominence. These competing narratives have the potential to impose material, reputational and ideational costs to these movements – endangering their funding, legitimacy and accumulated social capital, and their own understandings of themselves as moral actors. These high stakes underlie the silencing of these voices; as Arundhati Roy reminds us: “There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless.’ There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” (Roy 2004).

This dissertation is particularly invested in how social movement subjects regard the movement—“victims” of human trafficking as they are often ubiquitously labeled by anti-trafficking activists and the movement at large. In addition to victims—formally or informally identified by anti-trafficking laws or marked as such by large anti-trafficking NGOs—this dissertation argues that an additional cohort of social movement subjects exists amongst migrants and sex workers who have become the targets of human trafficking interventions ranging from state surveillance and detention, to NGO reeducation through labor.

The subjects of anti-trafficking rescue efforts on behalf of both faith-based and secular, governmental and non-governmental anti-trafficking efforts include many individuals who do not identify as “victims of trafficking.” Nonetheless this label provides enormous political and social capital to anti-trafficking activists. Under an anti-trafficking global governance regime that prioritizes and rewards quantifiable measures of “prevention, protection, and prosecution,” nation-states are evaluated by the quantity of cases identified and numbers of victims assisted. The US State Department’s low Tier 3 TIP rankings most recently assigned to China and Thailand have been attributed to low numbers of prosecutions and protection. Detaining greater

numbers of “victims of trafficking” within government shelters in Thailand, or the “repatriation”—which is not similar to deportation—of undocumented Burmese marriage migrants are two strategies that appear to result in quantifiable improvements in the Thai and Chinese government’s metrics with respect to human trafficking.

In addition to political capital, tremendous social capital is accumulated by Global North anti-trafficking activists and rescuers as they claim to represent human trafficking victims and connect with larger transnational advocacy networks and funding streams. In practice, this social capital is converted into economic capital as anti-trafficking activists trade often fabricated stories of victimized women and tales of rescue operations for organizational funding and justification for product mark-up. Within this dissertation, I have documented this empirical phenomenon by examining the rise of a cottage industry of “victim repair” through vocational training. Currently, many NGOs—both faith-based and secular—working in Thailand, Cambodia, Nepal, India, Mexico, Moldova, Uganda, and the United States¹⁰⁴ now focus on selling wares made by trafficking victims to raise funds and awareness about human trafficking.

The niche market around the products of the labor of former human trafficking victims—“buying for freedom” as it is frequently marketed—is based on deceptively simple narratives of human trafficking that are created by the organizations that sell these products. In China, the branding of the slave-free product relies on the stereotype of an innocent young woman forced into sex work because of Chinese cultural pressures for women to support their families, and the cultural subordination of women as exemplified in the government’s one child policy. In Thailand, consumers are told that Buddhist ideals encourage Thai families to send male children off to be monks to incur good karma, leaving women with the financial responsibilities of the

¹⁰⁴ For more on these projects see the websites for Not For Sale (<http://notforsalecampaign.org/global-initiatives/peru/>); Fair Girls (www.fairgirls.org); Nomi Network (<http://www.nominetwork.org>); and iSanctuary (<http://www.isanctuary.org>)

home. These culturally essentialist narratives garner sympathy and support for the NGOs, but rarely do these stories reflect the complex decision-making processes of women who willingly, or unwillingly, enter sex work.

Social movement organizations like China Star and Thai Light purport to provide “freedom” to victims of trafficking, yet they perpetuate the same forms of injustice that they aim to challenge by interweaving racism and classism with labor discipline and new-abolitionist morality. Despite the differences across political regimes in China and Thailand, the interventions staged by both CS and TL reproduce inequality by re-inscribing low-wage workers into the global orbit of capitalist production. These workers’ victim identities are inseparable from their alleged freedom—and their past labor as sex workers—and through the presumption that their freedom can be bought, through clients’ consumption of the workers’ now-virtuous wage labor.

If they reject the label of “victims of trafficking,” what identities do the alleged subjects of this movement choose? Consistent with a growing body of research, I have found that they have self-identified as migrant laborers, sex workers, immigrants, parents, lovers, activists, and organizers (Bernstein 2007a; Shah 2014; Cheng 2011; Agustín 2007). Their unique individual experiences as the subjects of the global movement to combat human trafficking express a collective fatigue due to the increased surveillance and patrol of their lives with little tangible efforts to change their lived realities as people living at the margins of political power and appropriate heteronormativity. This fatigue is further exacerbated by the fact that subjects are consistently excluded from anti-trafficking movement building conversations by policy makers, NGOs, and activists. Subjects of the movement have shared that when they are asked their perspectives it is either through interviews with journalists and researchers, or for books and articles that rarely yield any tangible benefits for migrant workers’ rights (Fieldnotes 2/2013).

Global Resistance: “Rights Not Rescue” & “Don’t Talk to Us About Sewing Machines”¹⁰⁵

Rather than rescue, sex workers across the globe have long asked for enforcement of policies around employer accountability, measures for health and safety, and protection from police abuse. Sex workers and working class immigrants have become the unwitting victims of the anti-trafficking movement and throughout this dissertation, nowhere are such efforts as audible as in Thailand, where sex worker and migrant worker rights organizations have launched aggressive campaigns against rescue and rehabilitation efforts by both government shelters and non-governmental organizations. These interventions—including research about sex workers by sex workers, transmitting legal knowledge into the hands of the sex workers, and arts-based responses to injustice—represent the formidable models of counter-hegemonic movements, because they use the strategies of the carceral state to demonstrate means of survival within it. Two examples of such activism include the creation of a legal manual that explains anti-trafficking laws to sex workers (including strategies for how to articulate that you are not a victim of trafficking), and building off the ASEAN political economic process to form a political activist entity called “SWASEAN,” Sex Workers of ASEAN, which convenes sex workers throughout Southeast Asia for annual advocacy and strategy events.

Organizations like the Empower Foundation struggle with sustainability, organizational autonomy, and survival. The hard line of withdrawal of USAID funding from organizations that support sex work as an occupation represents just the tip of the iceberg in a long-standing global funding regime that prioritizes prostitution’s abolition over the health, safety, and rights of sex workers. To understand the enduring manifestation of the stigmatization of sex work in the contemporary era, one need not look much farther than the Freedom and Fashion conference, a

¹⁰⁵ These are two prominent slogans used by the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers, and Empower Foundation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CfYvmGIZRE>)

New York Times article, or the latest sensationalist Hollywood exposé that points to sex trafficking as the issue requiring the most advocacy, attention, and financial support in the fight against modern day slavery. Significantly, the sensational and moral focus on sex—and the emphasis that sex work is not dignified work—silences important discussions of pervasive global labor exploitation.

The labor rights of global migrants continue to be a missing piece of the global movement to combat human trafficking despite the fact that transnational UN Protocols include labor and sexual forms of labor in their definition. The discussions of 1) vocational training as rehabilitative labor for sex workers; 2) the co-option of a labor rights NGO to write songs about trafficking; and 3) the disparate global activist politics around sex versus labor trafficking in Thailand in Chapters 2, 3, 4 respectively, aim to bring a critical analysis of labor rights into understandings of the global movement to combat human trafficking. Chapter 5 takes a different look at migration and labor politics by examining how American civilian rescue of working class immigrants and women of color in the United States emerges from the instances of global activism described in prior chapters. In sum, these chapters collectively illustrate how different forms of transnational action through the state, market, faith-based and secular groups lead to the global subordination of low wage women workers. Ultimately, such transnational action is shaped by political economic opportunity structures and constraints in China, and Thailand, and governed by the motives of nation states, global governance institutions, NGOs, and activists, yet rarely the low wage migrant workers whom anti-trafficking interventions aim to assist.

If the Empower Foundation's sex worker activism in Thailand challenges the hegemonic social movement agendas described throughout much of this dissertation, what of a similar response in China? Searching for this answer, I often came up empty handed during my research

in China, where the government has actively suppressed sex worker and labor rights organizing. This past June, Chinese sex worker rights activist Ye Haiyan was forbidden from exiting the country to attend the International AIDS Conference in Melbourne, Australia because of Ye's reputation for sex work and HIV advocacy on *twitter* (Lau 2011; Yu 2014). . Because Chinese sex worker activists see government corruption and abuse as their primary target, the Chinese sex worker rights movement has maintained little connection to the global anti-trafficking movement.¹⁰⁶ Similarly China's labor movement has not looked to the global anti-trafficking movement as a potential source of solidarity or competition. This incompatibility between local labor movement activism and the global anti-trafficking movement is best highlighted by the collaboration between the Migrant Worker Artist Troupe, global governance institutions, and the Chinese state as described in Chapter 3. Despite the successful launch of five anti-trafficking rock concerts, and a public CD, the primary facets of the NGO's actions to raise awareness about labor safety and migrant worker rights are still seen as deeply problematic, sensitive, and destabilizing of government authority.

Amidst this sea of pervasive state repression, the global movement to combat trafficking occupies a precious position, as the coveted terrain in which China can demonstrate political capital through selective compliance with transnational human rights. The benign position that human trafficking has attained within China's Ministry of Public Security—and the narrow definition of trafficking in Chinese law—has limited the extent to which an international anti-trafficking rescue industry has developed in China. Notably, while the authoritarian state has precluded vibrant opportunities for counter hegemonic organizing, it has *not* foreclosed

¹⁰⁶ For instance, sex worker activists in China recently campaigned against the Chinese Ministry of Public Security's public shaming tactics whereby arrested prostitutes were paraded barefoot through city streets after their apprehension. In July 2010, the MPS officially banned the use of such tactics, asking that police act in a "rational, calm and civilized manner." (<http://www.ipsnews.net/2010/08/china-a-parade-less-a-step-forward/>)

opportunities for sex workers to become inculcated into American rehabilitation programs in Beijing—suggesting the potency of social entrepreneurship under authoritarianism.¹⁰⁷ This asymmetry between sex worker rights and labor rights organizing in China and Thailand reveals the unique distinctions that political economies bring to global social movements. Overall, I have argued that the global anti-trafficking movement in China has taken the character of the state, while the movement in Thailand takes on the character of the free market.

Future Developments

I have suggested that the state and market are unique institutions through which transnational social movements broker power in local contexts. Across both faith-based and secular cases, the global movement to combat trafficking has absorbed the characteristics of the authoritarian state in China, and the global free market in Thailand.

New forms of market governance abound in anti-trafficking efforts, and Elizabeth Bernstein's work on global corporate governance in anti-trafficking efforts points to new alliances between markets, capital, corporate firms, and nation states. Additionally, recent efforts from labor activists, corporations, and even governments have asked for the increased accountability of corporate global supply chains (Bernstein 2007a; 2010; 2012; 2015). For instance in 2010, the California Supply Chain Transparency Act (SB 657) was the first US Senate Bill passed of its kind. It requires corporations with global profits in excess of \$100 million to provide disclosures and formal action plans that “disclose their efforts to eradicate slavery and human trafficking

¹⁰⁷ In a recent interview with an Asian American Christian social entrepreneur in Southern California, I learned that Christian businesses-as-mission have long seen business as a strategy for evangelism in authoritarian contexts that are closed to missionary presence. Tutti Frutti, a popular frozen yogurt chain based in Orange County, CA—that is also a Christian business as mission enterprise—boasts most of its global satellite franchises in authoritarian or non-Christian locations, in countries such as Bahrain, China, United Arab Emirates, Myanmar, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. http://tfyogurt.com/home/locations_other/

from their direct supply chains for goods offered for sale.” To date, Walmart, Calvin Klein, Pepsi Co, and Apple¹⁰⁸ have all issued public statements that outline measure to ensure that “human trafficking and slavery” do not exist in their supply chains, typically statements drafted by the Corporate Social Responsibility departments in each firm. Research has yet to evaluate the efficacy of such measures, and future questions may ask how such state driven efforts for market governance impact labor conditions on the ground.

Transnational labor activists have also asked for private sector corporate accountability following several disastrous labor rights tragedies of the past decade. The 2013 Rana Plaza building collapse, in which 1,129 workers were trapped and killed inside a building that housed over 5,000 garment workers is an excellent example. Primarily suppliers for global retail brands, including Walmart, Benetton, and The Children’s Place, victim advocates and labor rights groups sought compensation for death and injury and better worker safety and protection measures moving forward. Two global unions, UNI and IndustriALL, came together to negotiate the Bangladesh Accord, which requires workplace safety inspections, reports, and legally binding measures for compliance (Anner, Bair, and Biasi 2013). When a handful of corporations refused to sign, advocacy groups launched naming and shaming campaigns; for instance, several viral Internet videos pressured companies like H&M and the Gap into compliance with the Bangladesh accord.¹⁰⁹ By making such efforts visible to Global North consumers, and through naming and shaming of companies that do not comply, the shifts towards supply chain accountability reveal a new way in which the private sector is being leveraged to engage labor rights and consumer activism.

¹⁰⁸ <http://corporate.walmart.com/global-responsibility/ethical-sourcing/california-transparency-in-supply-chains-act>; https://www.pvh.com/legal_ca_transparency_act.aspx ;http://www.pepsico.com/Download/CA%20Transparency_PEP%20disclosure.pdf

¹⁰⁹ http://www.avaaz.org/en/gap_enough_fashion_victims_global

The integration of corporate private sector accountability through supply chain management in the global movement to combat human trafficking will bring the issue of labor more concretely into the anti trafficking movement. The incorporation of struggles for labor justice has long been a demand by those critical of sex trafficking's abolitionist history, however, the case of China in Chapter 3 suggests that the global anti-trafficking movement may be incompatible with ongoing struggles for labor justice. While sex worker activists have used the advocacy platform of "sex work as work"¹¹⁰ for some time, research has yet to uncover how Global South labor unions and activists outside of the sex sector view sex work—are they embedded in the same moral tropes about sex work as global anti-trafficking efforts? Further, given the precarious positioning of labor unions in authoritarian China where labor unions are run by the government, and in Thailand where only a small and select group of industries have a union, will sex work labor organizing fundamentally run into problems of state control and censorship given its illegal and quasi-legal status in China and Thailand respectively.¹¹¹

Low Wage Women's Work

Connecting the threads of this dissertation, from vocational training program to state sponsored awareness campaigns, to government shelters and global activism, and across spirituality, morality and politics, one central question connects most actors: What constitutes

¹¹⁰ See the Toronto Sex Worker's Action Project (<http://maggiestoronto.ca/about>); Sex Work Activists, Allies, and You (<http://www.swaay.org/store.html>)

¹¹¹ China's only labor union is the government-sanctioned All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), whose leadership consists of Party officials and whose primary goals have been to promote an increase in labor law and labor contracts. At both the central and provincial levels, union federations maintain close relationships to management and union organization within workplaces is weak (Friedman 2013: 57). By contrast, the Thai Constitution protects the right to form unions and to collective bargaining, but only 1.5% of 40 million workers in Thailand belong to unions (Napathorn and Chanprateep 2001).

good work?¹¹² Posing this simple query across different levels of the movement reveals the contrasting institutional and moral commitments that different actors hold. Evangelical Christian activists suggest the frame of dignified work, which to them means work that aligns with morally acceptable Western notions of family, gender, and sexuality. Global governance institutions like the United Nations align with nation states and stand behind legal parameters of work and decent working conditions as delineated through national laws and law enforcement. Low wage women workers and migrant laborers (including men) appear to be consistently caught between limited opportunities, oppressive morality, and unsatisfactory laws.

In closing, I share one additional formulation of good work, spoken to me by Yu, age 39, whom I met seven years ago when she was an employee at the China Star project. Yu migrated to Beijing from Anhui Province when she was 18 and became a sex worker after dissatisfaction with working conditions and pay in restaurant and sales work. In 2005, during China Star's first year of operation, she accepted vocational training and became a jewelry maker. By 2009, she began dating a man on the Internet, became pregnant, and was encouraged to have the child and get married because of the Christian organization's hard line stance against abortion and extra-marital sex. The organization even offered to pay for her wedding, which Yu refused because she found pride and self-respect in paying for her own wedding, and skepticism over what she might owe the organization—this was Yu's understanding of "dignity."

After her wedding, Yu moved in with her husband to an apartment located 2 hours away from China Star's office, and was no longer unable to show up to work, bible study, and small group sessions because of the commute. She asked if she could earn the same monthly salary

¹¹² Grappling with a similar question, the ILO has labeled "*Decent Work*," as a framework for achieving globally sustainable goals for labor. In its "Indicators to Measure Decent Work" it outlines a set of general norms that accommodate differences across political economic contexts, and industries (http://www.ilo.org/integration/resources/mtgdocs/WCMS_115402/lang--en/index.htm).

making jewelry at home. The organization frowned upon her inability to show up on site because it limited Yu's participation with other workers in the different work of moral discipline and social control. Reluctantly, they decided to pay her 10 RMB (\$1.70) for each piece of jewelry that she made off site—pieces that sold for anywhere from \$15-40 in the US—and 100RMB (\$17) for each piece that she designed—and they refused to pay for pieces that she designed that were not accepted for production or sale in their catalogue.

For a year, Yu was the sole caretaker of her child, and designed and made jewelry from home, earning barely more than 1000 RMB (\$160 USD) each month. Faced with the diminished economic opportunities and lacking Beijing *hukou* or residency requirements to obtain social welfare provisions for her daughter in Beijing, she ultimately decided to move back to her hometown near Hefei City the capital of Anhui Province. Leaving Beijing and China Star demarked a clear shift in Yu's identities: formerly a sex worker, then labeled a victim of human trafficking by the China Star project, and finally, after she decided to leave her rescue program, yet again becoming a low wage migrant worker.

I visited Yu in her hometown of Hefei in 2013, 3 years after she left China Star and 2 years since she left Beijing. She was working for her older sister, at a factory that made laces and rope for shoelaces, drawstrings, and lanyards and sold these pieces to large-scale suppliers of shoes, clothing, and bags. Her daughter had just turned 3, and her husband had become depressed and abusive because he was having a difficult time finding and keeping a job as a migrant worker to Anhui. She sat behind an industrial loom where brightly colored threads were frenetically being stitched together producing the literal threads that bind global commodities. Her reflections articulate the major failings not only of heroic efforts to replace sexual labor with manual labor, but of the limited local political economies for migrant workers across the Global South:

When I first moved back to Anhui, I tried making jewelry to sell everywhere: I walked stall to stall at the market, created a small online shop, and I even tried selling jewelry on the street. I saw how much Americans paid for the pieces I designed and made at China Star. I tried for months...and no one was interested in buying. Reflecting back, I know why we were able to ask for such high prices, they [China Star] told Americans all these tragic stories about our lives, and people felt bad for us. I don't think they needed to say it was horrible as "human trafficking," they could have just said it the way it is, we have hard lives. We used to work difficult jobs. I've done everything; I used to be a construction salesperson, a waitress, and a sex worker, and jewelry making was just a different kind of work for me, its all just different kinds of work. . . . Looking back, it was a lost period of my life. Look at me now, with only enough skills to work for my sister. I still can't make a stable living, and I just need a job that will allow me to give my daughter better opportunities in the future.

(Wang Yu, Hefei City, Anhui Province, 2013)

The realities that Yu and her daughter face frame a narrative that is frequently missing from anti-trafficking freedom festivals and movement advocacy throughout the United States. Her account provides a stark contrast to the urgent and optimistic portrayals of victimhood and saviordom that pervade the global anti-trafficking movement. The gap between representation and reality is one core failings of the transnational human trafficking movement, and causes the movement to miss the needs of migrant workers globally—choosing to define low wage workers within transnational tropes of anti-trafficking victimhood and rescue, rather than as agents who experience global capitalism, inequality, and state repression in disparate and distinct ways.

Methodological Appendix: Multi-Sited Global Feminist Ethnography

My father was a Chinese immigrant to Rio de Janeiro. Though he failed the eighth grade in Brazil, he insists that everything he needed to know about the social world was learned on the volleyball court. Volleyball served as an important assimilation tool as he immigrated once again to New York City, where I was raised on the sidelines of concrete volleyball courts in Manhattan's Chinatown. Each weekend, I watched and later joined this weekly gathering of immigrant volleyball players, comprised of New York's dishwashers, waiters, postal workers, teachers and engineers, who taught me about various immigrant struggles, and equipped me with the skills—the ability to listen and the capacity of empathy—to be an ethnographer.

This genesis of this project spans ten years, though this dissertation is drawn from forty months of ethnographic participant observation between 2008-2013. Growing up in a Chinese immigrant household in New York City engendered my commitment to personal and political struggles for immigrant justice, women's rights, and the myriad intersections of these vectors of marginalization. In 2003, I took a leave from Pomona College and worked as a Mandarin intake counselor for the *Asian Pacific American Legal Center*, providing legal assistance to victims of domestic violence under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). In addition to the VAWA and domestic violence cases, 2003 marked the first year that T-Visas (trafficking visas) were available due to the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of that year. I assisted attorneys with several T-Visa petitions during this time, for victims of labor trafficking from Indonesia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Through the rote and abundant legal paperwork, one jarring disconnect was clear: the onerous standards for proving trafficking victimhood failed to match the ways that migrant petitioners told their stories. As legal counselors, we often found ourselves negotiating with client's legal testimonies, asking them to reframe certain aspects of their

memories to meet the checklists for ascertaining victimhood required by the T-Visa legal petition.

In 2004, seeking to explore issues of women's rights in a transnational context, I received a Fulbright Fellowship to conduct research at the *Beijing University Center for Women's Legal Aid*, the first women's legal aid organization in China. Founded after the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women, this legal aid organization trained me to understand the mobilization of gender rights within the Chinese communist state. When I arrived at the *Beijing University Center for Women's Legal Aid* (now named *Zhongze Legal Aid Center* following a 2010 crackdown by the government, which forced the organization to register under a different name), a group of generous legal aid practitioners taught me to conduct legal intake counseling with clients. Our cases fell into two categories: domestic violence and migrant worker wage theft issues. In 2005, the Legal Aid won the first public interest litigation course on sexual harassment in the workplace and this was regarded as the most tremendous gain of the year. Clients and lawyers did not care to speak of human trafficking, though they did entertain my stated research interests and provided me access to a limited number of government documents that were being produced on the topic. Amongst this preeminent group of women's legal aid workers, "human trafficking" was understood by its literal Chinese translation "kidnapping and sold," and did not resonate with any of the cases we worked with.

My Chinese colleagues were also genuinely curious and interested to learn about legal mechanisms like the T-Visa in the US, and offered me several opportunities to present on what they thought was a curious legal provision. The public interest lawyers and NGO workers I presented to often joked that the T-Visa seemed like a promising immigration loophole, and several joked that they would be willing to migrate to the US and endure a few years of hard labor if it meant they could access US citizenship.

In 2007, I entered the PhD program in Sociology at UCLA with an interest in understanding the disparity between global human rights agendas and their seeming disconnect with practitioners working on the ground in specific nation-state contexts. In Winter 2008, as a first year graduate student at UCLA, I enrolled in a required 20-week ethnographic methods course, and spent the several weeks of the course negotiating access at a human trafficking victim shelter at the *Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking* (CAST), a large, anti-trafficking NGO in Los Angeles. At the time, due to human trafficking's increasing profile as a critical social issue, CAST was inundated with requests from volunteers ranging from students, teachers, social workers, and religious community leaders, to name a few. It took a total of three months before CAST offered their mandatory 10-hour volunteer training that is required of all volunteers.

As I awaited the volunteer training to gain access to the trafficking shelter, CAST assigned me to a project that I could complete "off site." They asked me to assist with the early stages of a project on "Capital Development Strategies," to expand their housing resources for victims of trafficking. Because their shelter only offers emergency residence for single women, CAST was finding it difficult to meeting the growing needs of populations they could not accommodate. As family members are brought over on T-derivative visas, offered to the spouse and dependents of trafficked persons, CAST sought to expand measures to provide long-term transitional housing for families. Their shelter coordinator, who was my primary contact in the organization, provided me a list of local social service organizations that serviced a wide range of client populations, and tasked me with setting up meetings to learn about what other programs did. The meetings that were the most helpful for their housing needs were with organizations like the *Little Tokyo Service Center*, a community development corporation that works with a number of real estate

developers in downtown LA lobbying them—often with the help of tax breaks—to allocate low income housing provisions in new developments.

The delay in gaining formal access to CAST’s shelter also led me to search for other publicly available “sites” of counter human trafficking activity and activism. I joined the “Los Angeles Fight Human Trafficking *Meetup*” group (<http://www.meetup.com/trafficking-51/>), an online community of concerned citizens who met once a month to discuss and plan different activities to promote “human trafficking awareness” in Los Angeles. These events included everything from fundraisers, to speakers’ series, to art exhibitions, to volunteer opportunities with different anti-trafficking related organizations. During the two years that I was an active member, the *Meetup* group was run by a PhD Student in Communications at the University of Southern California, who used the *Meetup* group’s website as a database for local anti-trafficking activities. Needing to furnish eight single-spaced pages of fieldnotes for the methods course assignment each week, I traveled throughout Los Angeles, Orange County, San Bernadino, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Oakland, and San Francisco counties attending disparate anti-trafficking events, as I awaited access to CAST’s human trafficking shelter. Halfway through the ethnographic methods course, I still lacked one coherent site of ethnographic analysis, but had accumulated a broad view of the diverse communities and actors that made up the anti-trafficking communities in California.

Among the different events I attended have included human trafficking Freedom Walks, Church Seminars, Academic Conferences, Art Shows, Public Lectures, Movie Screenings, Music Concerts, and numerous Anti-Trafficking Fairs. Typically, these fairs were held in large public parks and featured several dozen vendor’s booths lining the periphery. The horseshoe setup of anti-trafficking vendors usually surrounded a bandstand, which provided a stage for organizers to

explain the importance of the event, offer general information about the vendors that had gathered, and usually featured a few musical acts—many of whom wrote dedicated songs about human trafficking to perform at the events. The vendors usually fell in one of four categories: non-profit organizations seeking funding or volunteers to support their direct service work, social entrepreneurs that sold various crafts made by victims of trafficking, state or federal agencies that shared promotional brochures and paraphernalia that discussed their activities, and finally, academic institutions that offered bachelors and master's degrees in fields broadly oriented around social justice, or academic and private tour companies that offered tourist experiences in human trafficking—generally sold as experiential learning.

Week after week, I began to recognize some of the same vendors, and in particular two different organizations that sold jewelry made by formerly trafficked women in Beijing in Bangkok. Thai Light, the organization in Bangkok, had an office staffed by two paid employees and numerous volunteers in a middle class enclave in East Los Angeles. I inquired about volunteer opportunities at their offices in Los Angeles, and disclosed to that I was a graduate student at UCLA working on a Master's thesis on human trafficking activism. The organization's director was immediately supportive, and told me that there were many other full time students participating in summer-long or semester-long internships. Unlike the large anti-trafficking organization that I had spent the better part of two months awaiting volunteer opportunities with, these organizations were eagerly soliciting volunteers at the different fairs and welcomed volunteers despite prior experience or knowledge. The fact that so many organizations offered opportunities for concerned citizens to become involved has paved way for new kinds of transnational social movement engagement, a phenomenon that I describe at length in Chapter 5.

Thai Light's Los Angeles office was installed in the basement of the director's home. The office had a desk with a computer and printer, bookshelves filled with binders of inventory, past orders, and boxes of brochures, and floor to ceiling shelves filled with jewelry inventory—over one hundred small plastic bins impeccably labeled according to their style and line. Volunteers were in high demand for the twice-monthly large jewelry sales held at various venues. Each quarter, the LA office would perform a large inventory analysis of what pieces they had on hand, in order to communicate what pieces were needed from the Bangkok office. On a weekly basis, many volunteers also met for bible study that focused on human trafficking, a human trafficking street walk outreach to identify trafficked persons, and also attended church together at the same worship at a social justice oriented non-denominational evangelical Christian church in Los Angeles.

Starting in February 2008, I became a weekly volunteer at both China Star and Thai Light for about twenty non-consecutive months over the course of four years, assisting in the office once a week, participating in outreach, attending church services, and meetings, and selling jewelry at various venues. TL's office in Los Angeles is a base for shipment, sales, and marketing, and it also runs several anti-trafficking awareness and outreach programs in Los Angeles. I assisted with all matters relating to the business side of operations, including collecting inventory; packing and shipping jewelry orders; liaising with customers and the Bangkok office; organizing and hosting jewelry sales; and participating in local outreach activities. CS did not have a formal office in Los Angeles; however, its main operations director was based in Los Angeles and organized home jewelry sales, advocacy, and awareness events. I also volunteered for three consecutive years at the Los Angeles based "Freedom and Fashion" festival, a two-day long annual event that showcases fashion, jewelry, household items, and other consumer products

that are either made by victims of human trafficking, or whose proceeds go to support anti-trafficking causes. As a volunteer for both organizations and with “Freedom and Fashion,” I have attended over forty different formal sales venues, primarily at local churches, large anti-trafficking conferences, and fair trade craft fairs.

In June 2008, I travelled to Bangkok and Beijing to be a full-time volunteer at Thai Light and China Star’s offices in Thailand and Beijing. I arrived to find myself in the company of several other short and long-term volunteers organized through churches as mission trips. Unlike other missionary volunteers, I gained access to both organizations given my prior volunteer work for the organizations Los Angeles offices, and also through my experience establishing an arts program for ethnic minority youth and migrant street youth on the China-Burma border, as well as through my ongoing research on human trafficking.

In both cities, I spent about four hours of each day making jewelry, cooking, and participating in worship alongside the workers, and an additional four hours assisting activists with administration, programming, and outreach. I continued this pattern for a total of three summers, in 2008, 2009, 2010, and since 2010, I have stayed in contact with workers from both programs; some have retired, others have moved to other jobs and cities, and others still remain in the vocational training programs.

During the workweek at China Star in Beijing, I helped translate for English-speaking groups that visited, and organized leisure activities for workers after the workday, such as craft activities and different education workshops in the dormitory. Additionally, I would accompany workers as they prepared meals, shopped, went to Internet cafés, and sometimes took extended weekend trips to visit their hometowns. At TL in Bangkok, my volunteer duties were more formal because of TL’s institutionalized international volunteer and missionary program, which hosts

about 4-5 short-term missionary volunteers per year. Having previously volunteered over 400 hours at TL's sites of inventory and sales distribution in Los Angeles, my volunteer duties in Bangkok included processing online sales orders, taking inventory, and occasionally assisting with English language classes.

My identity as a non-Christian Chinese-American woman set me apart from other volunteers and activists, who were primarily North American or Western European White Christian women with extensive prior missionary experience. This created a bond between me and many of the workers, who on numerous occasions expressed feelings of solidarity based on our shared identities as Asian women, despite differences in class and nationality. I openly disclosed the fact that I am not Christian, and though I would attend daily church worship alongside workers, I chose not to engage in proselytizing or prayer circles. In Los Angeles, I regularly attended church worship at several of the Los Angeles-based churches that these projects were affiliated with, and in February 2014, I participated in a 12-week social justice training with one such church to understand the sources of social justice within theology and religious practice for.

Due to my long-standing presence as a volunteer and researcher—I maintained contact for all the years of my dissertation—there were moments when I met new activists, volunteers, and workers who assumed that I was Christian because this is what drew most of the activists together. If there was no clear-cut occasion to address the fact that I am not Christian, I made no effort to change their perceptions, and interpreted their assumptions as part of the religious social field in which I participated. The fact that I am not Christian did create some problems with the activists with whom I interacted more closely. These individuals consistently asserted that my

faith, or lack thereof, posed a barrier to my interpretation and understanding of their beliefs, actions, words, and spirituality, as well as of their role in the anti-trafficking movement.

Many authors have discussed the dynamics of studying conservative Christian practices as a non-religious researcher. For instance, Tanya Erzen's ethnography of sexual and Christian conversions in the American evangelical church details research access and fraught interactions when the researcher does not ascribe to Christian beliefs. At New Hope church, Erzen's genuine curiosity, continued presence as a volunteer, and technical skills as a web designer earned her access to a religious community that she was very much an outsider of, and I similarly traded different forms of labor to maintain my research access at China Star and Thai Light. I offered translation skills, as well as hundreds of hours of work related to marketing, inventory, and jewelry sale and distribution. Like Erzen, I also experienced episodes where I became the subject of religious conversion techniques (Erzen 2006:7); though unlike Erzen who also became the target of gay conversion techniques, my class background and nationality shielded me from the behavioral expectations and social control that is exerted on former sex workers.

Researchers have discussed the moral dilemma that arises for some ethnographers who research activity that is, at least on the surface, "morally or ideologically reprehensible" (Kraska 1998:89). Throughout my research, I was consistently guided by Katherine Blee's research on women's participation in anti-Semitic and racist groups like the Ku Klux Klan. Her reflections reveal methodological insights about how to manage emotions when you fundamentally disagree with the group that you are studying. Blee maintained professional and fruitful relationships with her respondents by taking a stance that was "distant but not neutral" (Blee 1993: 385). A critical researcher of Korean American proselytizing missions, Ju Hui Judy Han (2009), suggests that researchers are "neither friends nor foes," and can achieve objective observations through

“empathetic proximity” and “critical distance.” These terms reflect fundamental tensions that exist in conservative religious spaces, and Han argues that “it is precisely the tension in-between that has the potential to generate most revealing insights about the complex social worlds that we all inhabit” (Han 2009: 14).

Operating within this liminal and tense space as a participant observer, I fully engaged with a diverse range of “rescue” activities that I discuss in this thesis, even though I often found myself personally conflicted and ideologically opposed to such methods of engagement. As demonstrated in numerous fieldnote excerpts herein, for instance when I explain my fieldwork with civilian vigilante rescue efforts in Los Angeles in Chapter 5, I have directly participated in vigilante rescue efforts to immigrant workers as part of my ethnographic encounters. As one of the only non-white outreach participants, and one who can speak Chinese and some Thai, outreach participants were always hopeful that my language skills would come in handy. It is these particular forms of social capital—my race, nationality, and language skills—and my work with human trafficking programs in China, Thailand, and the US that may have made me an acceptable volunteer at these organizations and civilian member of outreach team despite the fact that I was not Christian. Significantly, however, prior work experience migrant workers, or language skills were never prerequisites for American Christian missionary volunteers in China and Thailand.

Throughout my three years of fieldwork with the evangelical Christian anti-trafficking social entrepreneurship, the anti-trafficking movement in China and Thailand grew, and it became clear to me that these two cases of American evangelical Christian rescue projects represented just one facet of a larger terrain of social engagement. There were several distinct moments of convergence, or lack thereof, that struck me. In Thailand, Thai Light had collaborated

with the United Nations and International Labor Organization to conduct raids and fund repatriations of trafficked people, while by contrast, the Chinese organization isolated itself from any other foreign or Chinese NGOs, primarily as a way of maintaining a low radar away from government control. Interested in how the secular dimensions of anti-trafficking activity connected with the faith-based groups, I moved on to conduct an additional twelve months of ethnographic fieldwork at secular anti-trafficking organizations in both cities.

In China, I was a full-time researcher at the United Nations Inter Agency Project on Human Trafficking in Beijing between September 2012 and February 2013. During my research tenure, I assisted with a program that trained the New Migrant Worker Band (*xin gong ren yishu tuan*), a band affiliated with a well-known Chinese labor rights NGO, to compose and perform songs about human trafficking.

For the purposes of consistent research design, I had intended to complete a parallel six months as a researcher at the UNIAP Office in Bangkok, however, due to significant structural changes within UNIAP during that time, my research on the secular anti-trafficking response became more dynamic and multi-sited. Having operated as an independent and temporary project for 5 years, UNIAP underwent a large-scale program evaluation, which determined that the organization needed to be folded under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), its name changed to UNACT, and demanded an overhaul of its entire management team.

I arrived in Bangkok in 2013 during the UNIAP transition and was graciously granted office space at the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, where I shared space with an intelligent, thought-provoking group of international feminist activists working with anti-trafficking, migrant labor, and women's rights organizations in the region, and throughout the world. As a hub for trafficking, migration, and labor rights mobilization for the Southeast Asian

Region, Bangkok was an ideal geographic location to facilitate frequent meetings with staff from international organizations like the Asia Pacific Network of Sex Workers and Save the Children, and various UN agencies.

Interested in the growing critical response to trafficking from Thai sex workers rights organizations, I spent three non-consecutive three months as a volunteer at the Empower Foundation in Chiang Mai, the oldest and largest sex worker rights organization in Thailand. At Empower, I participated in outreach activities, taught English, and sometimes Chinese, and facilitated different workshops on different craft-related activities. Lastly, in August 2012, I attended, with Elizabeth Bernstein, a “Human Trafficking Reality Tour” to Bangkok and Chiang Mai, co-organized by an American tour company and an anti-trafficking organization. These disparate secular sites comprise my “secular” case for the Thai context and granted me purview into state, market, and social movement relationships in each case, broadening the political economic contexts of the initial fieldwork on evangelical projects.

Throughout my fieldwork amidst faith-based and secular movement organizations in Beijing, Bangkok, and Los Angeles, I aimed to uncover the subjective motivations and tactics of the different actors involved. Conducting participant observation as a volunteer in different organizations facilitated my access to different actors in the movement—the state, the UN, consumers, NGO workers, activists, trafficking survivors.

My mobility through these different sites has required critical assessments of my positionality, and I have drawn from the foundational premises of reflexive feminist ethnography, which demands researchers address and acknowledge fundamental power inequalities between researchers and research subjects, in search of an “ethical field relationship” (Berik 1996). Feminist ethnographers have the responsibility to take an active role in creating a more egalitarian

research relationships: “Discussions of feminist methodology generally assault the hierarchical, exploitative relationship of conventional research, urging feminist researchers to seek instead an egalitarian research process characterized by authenticity, reciprocity, and inter-subjectivity between the researcher and her ‘subjects’” (Stacey 1988:22). Earliest scholarship of feminist ethnography framed critiques in relation to the fact that most research was conducted by women of privilege, about research subjects with considerably less race and class privilege (Wolf 1996).

Women of color and Third World researchers contributed to these debates by discussing methodological issues of “insider” versus “outsider” status. Zavella’s (1993) identity as a Chicana, and thus ethnic insider, allowed her unique access to and first-hand knowledge about her research subjects: “insiders are more likely to be cognizant and accepting of complexity and internal variation, are better able to understand the nuances of language use, will avoid being duped by informants who create cultural performances for their own purposes, and are less apt to be distrusted by those they study” (Zavella 1993). At the same time, the insider deals with another set of political and ideological biases; in other words “with one’s insider status comes the responsibility to construct analyses that are sympathetic to ethnic interests” (Wolf 1993:139).

As an educated middle class Chinese American sociologist, I was at once an insider and outsider across the different sites in this research, and similarly have framed my approach as one that transcends “studying up” and “studying down,” aiming to “study across” the intersubjective layers of anti-trafficking movement. This approach is motivated by a belief that the practice of global ethnography offers many possibilities to studies of transnational social movements.

Feminist reflections on researcher positionality are useful for explaining how global ethnographic approaches are appropriate to studying transnational social movements. Mies (1999) argued that a researcher’s ethnic or class identity is not as significant for good research as is one’s

outlook, and advocates “dropping down” in class status to gain a “view from below” (Wolf citing Mies: 28).

Seeking to resolve power inequalities between researchers and their subjects, feminist ethnographers advocated a shift towards “studying up” as opposed to “studying down.” Shifting the research agenda in this manner hopes to examine how power is created and maintained (Nader 1972; Yanagisako 1995). Studying those in positions of power, hopes to reveal the underlying structures that create and sustain ideologies of dominance. While “studying up” resolves some ethical dilemmas regarding power dynamics between researchers and subjects, Tsing (2005) points out that studying up in isolation does not necessarily “de-colonize” the center as some have hoped, but rather deeper ensconces power as a static and unfixed object. Rather than study up or down, my global ethnography of the transnational anti-trafficking movement has attempted to study across particular positions within a transnational movement—to see how power is relational and mutually constructed and contested.

In closing, my ethnographic research was characterized by an embodied negotiation of tradeoffs and tensions. I often traded my personal skills and labor to gain research access to organizations. In addition to the tradeoff of my labor for access to social movement organizations, I also accumulated a serious debt to share the accounts of the numerous low wage women workers who generously confided their experiences with me. These ethnographic possibilities and responsibilities have been facilitated by my mobility, class standing, and other privileges. The fluidity of my access to such different people, perspectives, sites, and stories across this movement is a consistent reminder of my responsibility to shed light on structural power and inequality that privilege certain voices and prevent others from being heard. I have attempted to do justice to these accounts within this dissertation.

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