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FROM PANIC TO PITY: CIRCUITS AND CIRCULATIONS OF THE CONTEMPORARY
ANTI-TRAFFICKING CRUSADE

by

JULIANA RAMÍREZ RODRÍGUEZ

Under the Direction of Amira Jarmakani, PhD

ABSTRACT

The creation, implementation, and ratification of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), as well as the growth of parallel private initiatives against human trafficking, have emerged from a neoliberal political agenda that focuses on redefinitions of labor, sexuality, securitization of humanitarian campaigns, and immigration policies. In this thesis, I explore some of the meanings and effects of those redefinitions by focusing on the affective registers of pity and panic in their ability to mobilize publics toward restrictive forms of assistance to real and imaginary victims of the so-called phenomenon of “modern-day slavery.”

INDEX WORDS: Anti-trafficking crusade, Affect, Panic, Pity, Trafficking Victims Protection Act.

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Georgia State University

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2015

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 2012 I volunteered with an Atlanta-based non-profit organization that focuses on providing assistance to immigrants who have been subjected to human trafficking, domestic violence, sexual assault and/or exploitation. During my training and volunteering period, and later on when I conducted qualitative research there, I had the opportunity to comprehend some of the tensions, connections, and contradictions between the theoretical framework of the U.S. anti-trafficking law, its applicability and practicality, the actual assistance and support that NGOs are able to provide to victims of human trafficking, and the expansion of a neoliberal approach to human rights issues. Many organizations working with survivors of human trafficking, including the one with which I had the opportunity to volunteer, argue that the creation of a legal framework that was non-existent before 2000 has allowed them to receive federal resources, create networks with the community and law enforcement agencies, and expand their capacity for action. I became curious about the material ways in which the law was implemented and how it affected subaltern bodies and non-normative rationalities. In one of the interviews that I conducted with the anti-human trafficking program coordinator at this organization, she expressed her satisfaction with the passage in 2000 of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA), and referred to it as an unprecedented legal structure that aims to institutionalize and expand a holistic approach to the crime of human trafficking.

Certainly, the TVPA has played a pivotal role in the creation, expansion, and support of strategic legal and political guidelines regarding the trafficking of persons for the past 15 years. With the purpose of “combating trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude,” the TVPA has provided a discursive framework worth exploring, insofar

as it has enabled the creation of unusual alliances and coalitions between activists, scholars, religious groups, elites, military forces, and humanitarian organizations, as well as policies that oscillate between some forms of aid and some forms of dispossession and abandonment (TVPA 2000). Some of these fluctuations have been identified by multiple actors, including some of those who claim to have benefited from the implementation of the TVPA, such as the anti-human trafficking coordinator at this Atlanta-based organization who (simultaneous to her support for the TVPA) also expressed concern about the broadening of racial profiling and anti-immigrant initiatives that jeopardize the ability of immigrants to denounce acts of violence, including trafficking, labor exploitation, and domestic servitude, and prevent them from seeking help from authorities.

Similarly, she and other case managers and coordinators reflected on the difficulties that immigrants face when applying for immigration relief policies, such as the U-Visa (that provides lawful status to “victims of certain crimes who have suffered mental or physical abuse and are helpful to law enforcement or government officials in the investigation or prosecution of criminal activity”), arguing that obtaining this type of assistance is a complicated process, often exacerbated by political fluctuations, negligence, and legal restrictions, and that the limited number of U-Visas issued by the government reflects just how strenuous the whole application process actually is (U.S. Department of Homeland Security). Some of these concerns were discussed informally with members of the organization, who recognize that they are cornered by bureaucratic limitations and that voicing those concerns outside of the organization could compromise their partnership with authorities and governmental organizations, and ultimately jeopardize their funding. While volunteering there, I was assigned to work with the outreach coordinator and my job assignments

were mostly administrative. Within a few weeks, though, I was asked to help the anti-trafficking coordinator and started having access to sensitive files and eventually had the chance to speak with some of the clients. The experiences of this vulnerable immigrant community reveal a double victimization: first, the violence inflicted upon them by traffickers, employers, partners and/or family members, and second, the state violence reflected in the lack of protection and further discrimination within the criminal justice system.

At the beginning of this research, I was not sure where to situate my findings and my own perceptions about them. On one side, I was able to see how the TVPA “effectively operated” by allowing some people to have access to limited legal resources and assistance programs. Nonetheless, after looking more carefully into the TVPA, the mission statements of anti-trafficking organizations, and different campaigns circulating in the media, I engaged with a more nuanced critical analysis of the anti-trafficking crusade, which stems from what I consider a dangerous endorsement of conservative values such as the preservation of the nuclear, heterosexual family, the impulse to condemn and abolish prostitution, the support of the Prison Industrial Complex, the imposition of unilateral foreign policies, and the growing nationalism that cultivates distrust and hate toward a particular kind of immigrant. The close relationship between anti-trafficking campaigns and right-wing evangelism has negative implications for the most vulnerable in the long term. Rigid binaries of freedom/oppression, victim/aggressor, and rescuer/dispossessed are part of the contemporary anti-trafficking language that help to secure and justify the state's military interventions and abuses, political destabilization, and the reenactment of moral codes. My hope is that this research will contribute to keeping the discussion about the growing surveillance of sexuality, labor and migration in the context of neoliberal humanitarianism open and fluid, so that

approaches to the issue of human trafficking continue evolving both in theory and practice.

Despite the local and global efforts of governmental agencies, non-profit organizations, and international entities, the protection of and assistance to victims of trafficking, especially in communities of color, continues to be limited and to exhibit fundamental flaws and limitations. The purpose of this thesis is to examine anti-trafficking discourses in the U.S., focusing in particular on the connections between conservative evangelical narratives and neoliberal approaches to human rights issues. For this research I am interested in exploring the entrepreneurial component of neoliberalism that creates particular forms of subjectivities around contemporary principles of humanitarian protection. Throughout this thesis, I will look at different discourses centered on the moral policing of gender norms and the corresponding punishment of sexual perversions. I will also examine how the categories of the pitiable victim, the hyper-masculine terrorist, and the western progressive savior cluster around particular forms of governmentality and narrow humanitarian practices.

When employing the term neoliberalism, I am not exclusively referring to its economic component (upward redistribution of wealth, in the words of Lisa Duggan, reduction of the welfare state, unregulated markets, privatization, imposition of structural adjustments by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other transnational institutions, etc.), but also to a political rationality that, in the words of Wendy Brown, “carries a social analysis which, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject, to education policy, to the practices of the empire” (Brown 39). Such political rationality involves a reconfiguration of the punitive and paternalistic role of the state and its allies and the production of actors that help to sustain the marketization of life. These include subaltern victims of human trafficking who cannot

easily get rid of their disposable status, because even within the framework of rescue strategies proposed by their western saviors, they constitute a pool of replaceable commodities that the neoliberal system is not willing to give up. By tracing the effects of this neoliberal culture on the shaping of new modes of governmentality and growing NGOization around issues of human trafficking, I aim to explore rearticulations of citizenship that orbit around questions of moral authenticity, consumerism, and social respectability. This research aims to build on some of the scholarly literature that examines the ways in which market rationalities have transformed the welfare state into a carceral state, where surveillance of the subaltern is indispensable. In this scenario, the rescued victim is either scrutinized, criminalized or pushed into a migratory limbo, or if lucky, led toward some form of morally accepted labor (although not necessarily of non-exploitative nature). Meanwhile, her distant advocate --who has recently learned that slavery has not yet been abolished-- decides to engage in action by praying for her, wearing anti-trafficking t-shirts from a fancy NGO, using lipstick from Radiant Cosmetics to “kiss slavery goodbye,” sipping fair trade coffee from an unpronounceable African village, and innocently, perhaps, wishes for the best (Radiant Cosmetics).

The creation, implementation, and ratification of the TVPA, as well as the growth of parallel private initiatives against human trafficking that this research seeks to investigate, have emerged from a political agenda that focuses on redefinitions of labor, sexuality, securitization of humanitarian campaigns and immigration policies. I intend to explore some of the meanings and effects of those redefinitions by looking at the affective registers of pity and panic that are being mobilized to consolidate a neoliberal project based on the reenactment of morality, the protection of fit citizens, the control of borders, and the criminalization of those perceived as dangerous and

deviant. I argue that pity and panic occupy a central place in the current anti-trafficking crusade, and complement each other in order to create a collective form of sentimentality around the phenomenon of human trafficking. While panic produces a common “global enemy” category (where any suspicious subject can easily fit), pity individualizes victimhood. As I observe in my second and third chapters, the fear of a common enemy serves to capture people's attention, while the construction of a pitiable subject functions as a means of individualizing the issue of human trafficking by convincing the public that the pitiable subject is a victim of one of the evil perpetrators from the “enemy” category, but not of a larger system of abuse and dispossession sustained by the imperatives of the market.

1.1 Literature Review

This literature review attends to some of the main stances that currently evolve around the issue of human trafficking. Some of them stem from early representations of victims within white slavery narratives, while others reflect a neoliberal partnership between anti-trafficking radical feminists, anti-porn crusaders and evangelical Christian discourses. The dynamics of this partnership are materialized in the TVPA, as well as in a vast array of humanitarian campaigns worldwide. I also examine counter narratives and critiques to contemporary forms of rescue that conflate sex work and human trafficking, animate moralistic responses to these two issues and promote the restriction of migration and the toughening of criminal justice systems.

1.1.1 Constructing the Trafficked Victim Image

One of the most common stances regarding human trafficking springs from a parochial perception of the phenomenon as exclusively related to the forced sex of women and girls. This stance is grounded in the construction of a universal trafficked subject: an innocent, virginal, ignorant, manipulable, and poor female figure with no agency over the politics of her body and no

control over her rationality and her fate. The sorrowful look on her face is depicted in pictures that often circulate in magazines, newspapers, official reports, and NGOs' web pages, often accompanied with captions such as “Jane' was rescued off the streets of Portland, Oregon, two years ago when she was just 15” (Cheen) or “Can there be anything more devastating to a child’s body and spirit than the combination of physical and psychological torture ... the humiliation and degradation and isolation pimps and traffickers use to control them? The answer is NO” (Abolish Child Trafficking).

While there is no doubt that vulnerable women and girls are in fact victims of human trafficking and often subject to violence and exploitation of all sorts (Aronowitz), the reckless use, fetishizing, and appropriation of a universal trafficked subject as an emblematic figure that leads the global spread of a sensationalized anti-trafficking crusade, leaves very little mental space available to discuss the complexities of trafficking and the deficiencies and ambivalences of laws and campaigns. When encountering these images, we are led into patterns of feeling (often panic and/or pity) that only allow us to look momentarily in the direction of a constructed pitiable victim and away from the structural circumstances that prompted her unfortunate fate, or to blatantly ignore the realities of trafficked subjects who fail to represent the emblematic figure of the vulnerable girl and agency-less woman. The expansion of a universal sexual agenda that focuses exclusively on unveiling the harm caused by individual pimps, social misfits, and traffickers, helps elide uncomfortable questions about the role of the state in the creation of the conditions that lead to violence, poverty, inequality, and trafficking. In his book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, Kevin Bales argues that the “explosion of concern” and the “people's deeply felt desire to end slavery” has led to the creation of groundbreaking initiatives such as the TVPA,

which, according to the author, is an ideal tool for the dismantling of human traffic networks. Bales asserts that the Trafficked Victims Protection Act has been effective in so far as it:

Increases the penalties for human traffickers, brings new protection to victims, and orders government departments to take action. This law has led to many initiatives and increased support for groups helping people who have been trafficked into the United States (6).

Again, challenging institutional power and the role of the state in the preservation of inequality, the expansion of the carceral system, and the marginalization of poor communities of color becomes a difficult task when initiatives like the TVPA are seen as ideal and not only remain uncontested, but are reinforced in part through the circulation of the trafficked subject image and the manipulation of language. Bales optimistically asserts:

No one wants to live in a world with slavery, and today we are, in many ways, closer to its final eradication than ever. This could be the generation that brings slavery, after five thousand years, to an end (12).

Similar statements based on the idea of collective moral principles and a global sense of unity in the tackling of crime and slavery are deployed throughout local and transnational campaigns that serve as fruitful ground for initiatives such as the TVPA to thrive. The fact that many victims of human trafficking have been denied services under the TVPA, as authors like April Reiger argue, tends to be overlooked within idealistic discourses like that of Bales. Simultaneous to these buoyant narratives, alarming unofficial estimates of human trafficking also circulate, reinforcing the idea that only through strong alliances between institutions, corporations,

and fit citizens, can the epidemic phenomenon of trafficking be eliminated. In this case, optimism and paranoia are not contradictory, but complement each other as nodes supporting a shared discursive web. According to the Polaris Project, for example:

There is no official estimate of the total number of human trafficking victims in the U.S. With 100,000 children estimated to be in the sex trade in the United States each year, it is clear that the total number of victims nationally reaches into the hundreds of thousands when estimates of both adults and minors and sex trafficking and labor trafficking are aggregated.

The sum of trafficked bodies constitutes a monolithic mass of vulnerable others in desperate need of *rescuing* and *protection*; two strategic words often used by anti-trafficking agencies to explain mission statements, methodologies, and operating procedures. Such an example can be found in the International Justice Mission webpage that summarizes in two sentences the extent of their benevolent interventions. “Rescue Thousands, Protect Millions” reads the home page of their website, next to a colorful picture of recently rescued women who are given the chance of liberation and empowerment. The rescue narrative is central to a wide variety of anti-trafficking campaigns, but it often ignores the structural conditions of violence that create the necessity of rescuing vulnerable others in the first place. Placing all the attention on the rescuing of homogeneous victims globally restrains the critical analysis of issues such as labor exploitation, corporate greed, lack of investment in education, militarization of borders, and criminalization of immigrants locally. Christian ethics professor Yvonne Zimmerman argues that:

To truly work to end violence against women, children, and subordinate men,

it is not enough to enhance the virtue of the vulnerable. The social conditions, social messages, and social relationships in which such violence thrives and proliferates must be challenged and reordered (10).

Even some activists who tend to paint sexual exploitation with a broad brush and find it difficult to differentiate sex work from sexual exploitation, have argued that the rescue narrative is limiting at best. In 2012, GEMS founder Rachel Lloyd claimed during her TEDxUChicago that in the midst of the current transnational attention to human trafficking, “arresting men and saving girls sounds like a good concept, but rescue is not a long-term sustainable method of addressing folks' needs.” The rescue narrative is aligned with an understanding of human trafficking as a transnational shadow market, a global epidemic of sexual exploitation, and most importantly, an alarming situation of modern-day slavery. The narrative of the white slave scare that spread ideas of abduction of women and girls for the purpose of prostitution during the Progressive Era has been re-adopted to justify the regulation of female sexuality, reaffirm the role of the state in the fight against public immorality, and craft unusual alliances around the issue of human trafficking. Christopher Diffie asserts that:

Unlike other Progressive Era issues concerning working hours or occupational safety, white slavery threatened to upset the basic framework of classical liberalism—the division of society into distinct private and public spheres. For if evil could penetrate into the home and steal away its most precious goods, was not the state obligated to leave the public sphere and enter into the hallways and bedrooms of the home to ensure every young girl's safety? (411).

The appropriation of the white slave narrative serves to portray the state's intervention in the regulation of sexuality and its understanding of prostitution as a “social evil” as indispensable for the stability of the nation and the well-being of its citizens. Jo Doezema explores the construction of the contemporary anti-trafficking narrative as a cultural myth that displays some of the same anxieties around sexuality that clustered around the white slave panic at the turn of the century. According to Doezema,

The myths around 'white slavery' were grounded in the perceived need to regulate female sexuality under the guise of protecting women. They were indicative of deeper fears and uncertainties concerning national identity, women's increasing desire for autonomy, foreigners, immigrants and colonial peoples. To a certain extent, these fears and anxieties are mirrored in contemporary accounts of trafficking in women.

Supporters of the abolitionist stance who continue deploying early narratives of white slavery argue that strict control over sensitive societal issues such as immigration and female sexuality is imperative to stop the phenomenon of human trafficking. As I examine in my third chapter, a passionate emotional language is deployed to describe the hardships of prostitution, the total absence of freedom, choice, and agency from those who participate in any kind of commercial sex, the necessity of governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations to dismantle sex work networks, and the importance that good citizens continue supporting the anti-abolitionist cause as a way to counteract anti-American values that threaten the stability of the nuclear, heterosexual family, the status quo, and the nation. Alex Smolak examines some of the

implications of conflating sex work and slavery. He asserts that

When sex work is contextualized as white slavery, the “saving women” approach can seem justified since their participation is perceived as being actively forced rather than indirectly forced by various contextual factors (i.e., political economy and gender norms).

Overlooking what Smolak calls the contextual factors facilitates the applicability of a fragmented theoretical framework in the understanding and management of non-normative subjectivities.

1.1.2 Anti-Porn Feminists Take up Trafficking

Scholars and activists who claim that prostitution and sex trafficking are inseparable, and recognize prostitution as a mere act of exploitation and sustained violence, argue that all forms of prostitution are in essence dehumanizing, as they are, according to these activists, always marked by unequal power relations, lack of choice and eroticism, objectification of vulnerable bodies, and persistent degradation of sexuality. In her book *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, Catharine MacKinnon asserts that there is no freedom in the negotiating of sexual pleasure. According to MacKinnon, under male supremacy there is no such power for women to be free (153). In some of her later work, she specifically refers to the practice of prostitution, arguing that

The coercion behind it, physical and otherwise, produces an economic sector of sexual abuse, the lion’s share of the profits of which goes to others. In these transactions, the money coerces the sex rather than guaranteeing consent to it, making prostitution a practice of serial rape (274).

Similarly, a video titled *Supply and Demand*, produced by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, cleverly displays the following sign: “prostitution is the end point of sex trafficking.” Both MacKinnon's and CATW's claims are part of a larger conversation among a considerable number of feminists and other actors who support the abolition of prostitution as the most effective strategy to counteract the violence that is believed to be inherent to its practice. In this context, decriminalization will never be an option. In the words of women's studies professor and anti-trafficking activist Donna Hughes, the “decriminalization of the sex trade will do nothing to help women escape; instead, it will ensnare them more tightly” (Hughes). It is worth noting that the anti-prostitution stance is supported by a diverse group of activists, academics, celebrities, politicians, religious leaders, and legal scholars, (among other actors) and thus, resonates across domains, giving the impression of immanence and common sense.

Probably the most pressing void that one can think about within this discussion is the absent voice of those who voluntarily participate in commercial sex activities and who instead of expecting rescue in the form of abolition are looking for legal protection and for the improvement of their civil and labor rights. Of course one should not oversimplify prostitution, nor romanticize it, by overlooking the strenuous living conditions that lead many people to choose it as a source of income. Scholars who have extensively investigated the complexities of prostitution within the anti-trafficking discourse, such as Marta Lamas and Elizabeth Bernstein, assert that prostitution can be both oppressive and liberatory. However, the abolition narrative that focuses exclusively on its oppressive element fails to recognize both the different levels of agency of the people who participate in the sex industry, and the systemic conditions of violence and poverty that turn prostitution into the best survival option available.

Since the abolition narrative has reemerged from a neoliberal agenda, it avoids investigating and challenging unequal relations of power, racism, classism, and other pervasive social conditions grounded in transnational policies that depend upon the production of disposable bodies. Michael Horowitz, one of the salient figures of the contemporary anti-trafficking movement who considers that “the Bush administration defended female dignity like no administration before it -- yet another reason the left disdains his presidency,” also asserts that the critique of the socio-economic model in which initiatives such as the TVPA are created is nothing but

Liberal utopianism at its worst -- the belief that until all poverty and all exploitation of the weak has ended, targeted efforts "merely" to ameliorate such "symptoms" as the mafia-conducted destruction of millions of girls and women in the sex trade are distractions from the need to eliminate "root causes."

Horowitz's statement clearly disconnects “the goal of ending poverty and exploitation of the weak” from the emergency of mafias and the growth of the sex trade. This disconnection seems to be necessary to consolidate a neoliberal model which relies on the global production of poor and disposable bodies, and the fantasy of a common racialized enemy. Ignoring the “root causes” and focusing on the rescuing of innocent and agency-less women and girls from ruthless mafias has various implications that are worth examining. One of them is the social recognition and legitimization of the state's participation in the perpetration of some “acceptable” forms of violence and criminalization of individuals and communities that are deemed as incorrigible and uncivilized. Military interventions and paternalistic initiatives are easier to justify when a whole

culture is accused of perpetrating abuses toward its most vulnerable population. As Kamala Kempadoo asserts:

The image of criminal, non-Western men who have no regard for the well-being of women, and who are incapable of conducting their own affairs in a 'civilized' fashion, justifies global relations in which the United States and Western Europe are seen to hold the moral high ground in matters of gender and sexuality (49).

Another implication is the perpetuation of the myth that the exploitation and trafficking of women is only cause, but not consequence, of gender inequality, violence, and economic disparities. Lastly, Horowitz' remarks help to eclipse the difficulties and abuses that non-sexual victims of trafficking face, such as migrant workers who find little to no support in anti-trafficking policies that support the monitoring, control, and punishment of irregular immigration.

1.1.3 Who Are the Outcasts?

As I already stated, the powerful image of the universal trafficked subject that is strategically deployed to raise awareness, gain support, and market public policies, is restrictive and partialized at best, insofar as it ignores different degrees of agency among the individuals it targets by abruptly placing those who seem to “meet the criteria” in the victim category, even if they do not consider themselves victims. The image also helps to obscure (or deem as suspicious or less critical) the stories of individuals and communities who have been victims of trafficking but remain outside of the rigid universal category, such as undocumented farmers and domestic workers. The moral principles that circulate in anti-trafficking initiatives are aligned with narratives of control and criminalization of immigration, which might prevent victims of labor

exploitation from seeking assistance, since their lack of legal status inevitably marks them as dangerous others. In states where policies such as racial profiling, threats of deportation, militarization of borders, and denial of medical services to undocumented immigrants are part of an anti-immigrant rhetoric that constantly circulates in schools, neighborhoods, workplaces, institutions and mass media, victims of labor trafficking avoid denouncing their abusers, as the main discourses around immigration are built on such a hostile ground.

Authors such as Nandita Shanda seek to investigate whether the goal of abolishing human trafficking is intertwined with the state's hope to regain control over immigration and female sexuality. Shanda explores the role of anti-trafficking campaigns that are based on nationalistic ideals and support the restriction of mobility for undocumented immigrants, arguing that immigrants are "almost (if not) always better off at home." Shanda uses her investigation of the illegal migration of 599 Chinese asylum seekers to Canada in 1999 to ground her analysis of the relationship between so-called victims of modern slavery and their supposed traffickers, arguing that some events of economic migration -- like the one she investigated -- are characterized by businesslike transactions between migrants and smugglers, and do not necessarily include the use of force or coercion. In this particular case, migrants consented to the conditions and arrangements related to their transportation. The Canadian government's response to this episode of mass migration is helpful to understand the logic behind the state's marginalization of ethnic others who are perceived as a threat to the material and virtual boundaries of the nation. On the one side, portraying these immigrants as victims of human smuggling was helpful to support the claim that more punitive measures were needed to combat the trafficking of people. On the other side, the arrival of the immigrants triggered sentiments of fear and racial hysteria that translated into the state's xenophobic measures including detention, criminalization, and deportation. Most of the 599

immigrants spent more than a year in a criminal facility, only 30 were given refugee status, and 330 were repatriated (most of whom were sentenced to jail and fined upon return).

Following this line of thought, Margaret Franz examines the multiple ways in which discourses of fear and paranoia are intertwined with meanings of citizenship, and serve to warrant the exclusion and marginalization of ethnic groups from the biopolitical framework of the nation-state. Franz's work is useful to understand the broader logic of the U.S. anti-immigration rhetoric that influences the production of legal frameworks such as the TVPA. Wendy Chapkis moves in a similar direction as she analyzes the categories of bad and good immigrants under the anti-trafficking legislation in the U.S., asserting that vulnerable victims of sexual exploitation are considered innocent and deserving of limited rights, while economic migrants are assumed as takers and criminals and thus, undeserving of protection under the law. Chapkis problematizes this separation between “good and bad” immigrants, arguing that

The (anti trafficking) law makes strategic use of anxieties over sexuality, gender, and immigration to further curtail migration. The law does so through the use of misleading statistics creating a panic around 'sexual slavery', through the creation of a gendered distinction between 'innocent victims' and 'guilty migrants,' and through the demand that aid to victims be tied to their willingness to assist in the prosecution of traffickers (923).

Likewise, anthropologist Leo Chavez explores the obstacles that undocumented immigrants face in the U.S. by questioning the effectiveness of a justice system and a cultural set of beliefs underpinning the discourse of the “good vs. bad” immigrant. Chavez expands on the

influence that emotion plays in the stratification of immigrants' labor, and the spread of fear and paranoia towards undocumented immigrants, arguing that

Tension appears to be growing over issues related to the way we think of ourselves as a nation and as a people. Indeed, the proponents of restricting immigration view today's immigrants as a threat to the 'nation' that is conceived of as a singular, predominantly Euro-American, English speaking culture. Proponents of immigration reform often target immigrants as the new threat to national security and the national identity, filling the void left by the loss of the old enemies after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (190, 192).

The rigid conditions and requirements that foreign victims must meet in order to receive protection and assistance are also addressed by authors like April Reiger and Denise Brennan, who argue that in many cases the state neglects and re-victimizes subjects who fail to meet certain requirements or prove the veracity of their oppression. Although the government estimates that between 14,500 to 17,500 persons are trafficked into the U.S. each year, very few visas directed to migrant victims of human trafficking have been issued in the past 15 years (U.S. Department of State). Brennan states, for example, that “fewer than 4,000 men and women have been formally designated as trafficked to the United States [between 2000 and 2014]. This number obscures not only the tens of thousands of forced labor victims whose cases go unreported, but the millions of migrants who face comparable abuse—just not enough to fit the legal definition of trafficking” (Brennan). One segment of the population that also remains invisible within the anti-trafficking

rhetoric is the one constituted by those who challenge the stereotype of the innocent and naive young female who has been forced into prostitution, whether it is the strong prostitute who stands for herself and fights for her labor rights, or the disobedient queer subject who challenges social codes of conduct. In the words of Yvonne Zimmerman,

One of the things that falls out of this altogether is the significant amount of sexual minority, transgender, and intersex persons who sell sex globally – global migrants who sell gay, lesbian, and transgender sex. They're completely invisible. There's so few studies about them. Because they haven't registered as a population that would even make sense as victims of trafficking (*Patheos, 2013*).

The exclusion of bodies that somehow contradict the conservative narrative of human trafficking is based on the anxiety that these bodies produce with their alarming contestation of white, heterosexual codes of conduct.

1.1.4 Counter-Narrative or the Contestation of Institutional Rhetoric

Critics of the current institutional efforts against human trafficking have focused on exposing the flaws of initiatives such as the TVPA and assessing the most significant ways in which routinized procedures of heteronormativity and reinforcement of moral values may undermine agency for the subaltern. For scholars such as Jo Doezema, Melissa Ditmore, Kamala Kempadoo, Moshoula Capous Desyllas and Elizabeth Bernstein, the law is not designed to protect poor people of color and immigrant subjects, but instead is responsible for reaffirming a neoliberal logic that sustains the production of bodies with no access to personhood.

As Margaret Franz explicitly argues with regard to undocumented immigrants, “'illegal' people are not just cast out of the nation-state, but instead strategically included only in order to

foster a racialized class of tractable labor”(21). In a similar way, the production of a particular kind of agency-less victim is useful to exert control over the unwanted, spread the state's moral panic and racialized principles of exclusion across borders, and sustain a social class of compliant poor bodies. Kamala Kempadoo's analysis of the ways in which the anti-trafficking crusade reflects an “attempt to control global flows of labor and women's sexuality” is useful to understand the uncontested support toward the current anti-trafficking cause (51). Kempadoo observes that a Western/Euro-American middle class understanding of women's sexuality and ideals of womanhood permeates contemporary anti-trafficking discourses that continue focusing almost exclusively on the bodily integrity of women who participate in the sex industry, while ignoring other pressing social justice issues that should be central to the anti-trafficking discussion, such as the exploitation of undocumented labor by corporations, businessmen, militaries, and elites.

Scholar Elizabeth Bernstein offers a compelling analysis of the apparent agreements in terms of humanitarian agendas between diverse groups of activists from various and even opposed political and religious stances, arguing that such alliances are marked by a “commitment to neoliberal solutions to contemporary social problems,” where militarism is widely supported as one of the most effective procedures to achieve social justice. Simultaneous to her critique of the notions of humanitarianism and progress that cluster around neoliberalism, Bernstein analyzes the current support of a carceral system that has been proved to be ineffective as a method of rehabilitation, reform, and reintegration to society. She argues that anti-trafficking campaigns are leaning toward more punishment, criminalization, and warehousing of victims, and avoid dealing with the structural conditions that make individuals vulnerable to exploitation, violence, and trafficking in the first place. In most cases, these conditions have been systematically arranged by

the neoliberal model in which the anti-trafficking campaigns operate. Authors like Jo Doezema expand on the critique of humanitarian initiatives linked to human trafficking, asserting that contemporary anti-trafficking discourses are based on a cultural myth that insists upon the restoration of sexual integrity by portraying innocent virgins as the main victims of exploitation. She argues:

The construction of a 'victim' who will appeal to the public and the policy makers demands that she be sexually blameless. The real concern for public and policy-makers is not with protecting women in the sex industry, but with preventing 'innocent' women from becoming prostitutes.

Yvonne Zimmerman asserts that the overlapping of cultural, social, political, and evangelical Christian sensibilities within the anti-trafficking movement in the U.S. might explain the excessive attention to “authentic” sexually exploited women who should be protected from the aberration and immorality intrinsic to the sex trade industry. Some authors, such as Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, Maria Cecilia Hwang, and Heather Ruth Lee, have focused on the flaws of the UN definition of trafficking that is used worldwide. The 2000 UN Palermo Protocol defines trafficking in persons 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, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for

the purpose of exploitation.

According to the mentioned authors, the broadness of this definition fails to consider important issues such as the blurriness between migration and smuggling or exploitation and slavery. Also, these authors analyze the reduction of human trafficking to its exploitative component, arguing that “many trafficking pundits ignore the fact that trafficking by definition must also include the transportation of a person, as well as deception or coercion” (1016). The absence of reliable data is another problem that these scholars have addressed, arguing that “the supposed inaccessibility of trafficked victims is often used to justify unsubstantiated claims of trafficking and the development of solutions that are not based on the experiences of trafficked persons”(1016).

1.1.5 Trafficking in Affect

The difficulty of measuring the real magnitude of human trafficking allows for the magnification and manipulation of limited existing data, the adoption of inefficient political measures, and the circulation and reaffirmation of panic and paranoia. The concept of statistical panic addressed by Kathleen Woodward is helpful to explain how the experience of uncertainty around a particular situation allows for the manipulation of facts and restricted information. The difficulties related to assessing the real magnitude of human trafficking create the ideal conditions for statistical panic to thrive. According to Woodward, the concept of statistical panic refers to the use of terrifying data that is strategically disseminated to make us feel at constant risk, “a structure of feeling associated with the postmodern society of risk, one that produces risk as a commodity and then offers goods and services to assuage that same sense of panic” (216). The links between statistical panic and market-based strategies to stop human trafficking are not hard to find. These

links have a concrete effect on the restoration of a national identity and the cohesion of different initiatives around particular issues threatening U.S. national security.

The circulation of the trafficked victim image with its explanatory narrative and terrifying data is a technology of power rooted in an emotional climate of pity and panic that relies upon the preservation of the neoliberal model, and serves to both attract support and potential donations from companies, organizations, and good citizens, and to revitalize sentiments of resonant nationalism. Sara Ahmed's examination of emotion (how it is organized, "globalized," and performed) is useful for understanding the formation of perceptions and stereotypes that define who enters the narrative of rescuing and protection and who should be left outside of it. Mobilization by fear is informed by an imagined national body that needs to be protected from becoming the new white slave.

Ahmed explores the dynamic configuration and circulation of emotions that legitimate collective responses to particular social and political issues. These responses accumulate value over time, by reaffirming symbols and encounters, demarcating spaces for love and hate, and creating a moral disposition that justifies violence and hate in some cases, and peace, pity or empathy in others. Ahmed's analysis of the role of emotions in the shaping of "surfaces' of individual and collective bodies" is valuable to understand how unusual alliances are formed around anti-trafficking issues, and why these alliances are sustained over time (1). The critique of wound culture developed by Lauren Berlant tells us something valuable as well about the prominent language of pain, and the necessity to display the monolithic trafficked subject image, as a tactic for mobilization, support, and bonding. The homogenization of victims, the fantasy of national invasion, the insistence upon the urgency to govern females' sexuality, the censorship of

dissidence, and the monitoring and punishing of trajectories of bodies of color could be a result of what Berlant defines as “a state of feeling, as opposed to a regime of power” or what Ahmed calls the “fetishising of the wound as proof of identity” (636, 58). This “wound” of others fosters a culture of sentimentality marked by panic. Fearing the wound, the transgression, and the violation of a nation that adopts a feminized body serves to connect multiple subjectivities around the issue of human trafficking, and to consolidate rigid imaginaries regarding the protection of borders that “need to be threatened in order to be maintained” (Ahmed 87). The contemporary discourses of human trafficking that I am interested in analyzing often deploy the idea of vulnerability (of the trafficked subject, and the feminized nation) and panic (of an aggressor that can take many shapes and forms) to secure affective bonds and create collective responses.

1.2 Methods

My research examines the construction, circulation, and support of conservative evangelical narratives permeating anti-trafficking discourses in the U.S. I focus on three organizations that address the phenomenon of human trafficking from a moral perspective and operate with a neoliberal agenda, in which the protection of the heterosexual nuclear family and the support of carceral politics hold a central place and demarcate what Foucault calls a “regime of truth.” I look specifically at the organizations' websites, which function as a vital political platform for their campaigning, and also as a fluid space for interaction, communication, and awareness-raising. Although each of the three organizations focuses on different angles of human trafficking, and uses diverse strategies to achieve their goals, the three of them share two relevant conditions: their visibility and their explicit support of conservative values.

The first organization is the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW), which was

founded in 1988, being one of the first non-profit organizations to address the issue of human trafficking. The CATW has received continuous support from national feminist groups, including Women Against Pornography, and international organizations such as the Enslavement Prevention Alliance of West Africa and the Women's Front of Norway. These and other collaborating organizations that are part of the CATW or support it in different ways buttress the belief that the criminalization of commercial sex is an effective and necessary strategy to combat human trafficking. The second organization is Exodus Cry. Its work is also grounded in an abolitionist philosophy and it focuses on awareness, prevention, intervention, and restoration of victims of sex trafficking, throughout four major strategies: prayer, legal reform, donations, and production of films. The third organization is called Focus on the Family, and its goal is to “help families thrive” by giving advice about marriage, parenting, and faith, and raising awareness about a diverse array of social issues, such as abortion, gambling, euthanasia, and human trafficking, among others.

I will use a critical visual methodology to understand the social and cultural effects of images that, as Gillian Rose asserts, are not “innocent or transparent windows onto the world, but instead they interpret the world; they display it in very particular ways; they represent it” (2). This interpretation, display, and representation of visual images is central to postmodernity and reflects the ways in which the dynamic “nature” of technology and information permeates most aspects of our lives and to an important extent defines relations of power. The construction and circulation of the trafficked subject image is a form of institutional mobilization of “specific forms of visibility to see, and to order the world” (Rose 10). A visual methodologies analysis is therefore useful to understand how certain ways of seeing the world are erased by dominant visualities. In addition to those three organizations, I will also examine the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in

order to map out the political context in which programs, campaigns, and human rights organizations are expected to operate. I am interested in examining the contemporary evangelical narrative of human trafficking in the U.S., and the ways in which it becomes materialized for people whose meaning and social value awaits definition by the compulsory categorization of institutions. I employ discourse analysis to investigate the production process of anti-trafficking narratives that serve to identify the “authentic” trafficked subject worthy of rescuing, and simultaneously to spread the idea of sealing and protecting borders from the invasion of “inauthentic” victims or dangerous others. I use a post-structural analysis of discourse, which allows me to explain the cohesion of conservative narratives that circulate throughout the NGO websites.

Sara Mills argues that discourse is a regulated practice that occurs in dialog; it privileges and naturalizes certain ways of knowing, while restricting and excluding others (12). Her interrogation of the uses of discourse to homogenize groups of people is particularly useful to understand the construction of trafficked subjects as a monolithic mass of vulnerable bodies who are situated outside of history and deprived of cultural context (122). In her examination of Barthes' and Foucault's discourse analysis, Mills argues that discourses “emanate from particular institutional settings” that function to exclude some rationalities while producing and reaffirming certain subjectivities (49). Foucault's description of discursive practices within relations of power is informed by the disciplinary properties of language that give meaning to subjects and objects. I look at the ways in which moral principles and disciplining institutional practices are reaffirmed within the framework of the current anti-trafficking agenda. I also examine the entrepreneurial language of evangelical and secular anti-trafficking campaigns as each “has its own rules,

constraints, and its own determining effect on the way that individuals think and express themselves” (Mills 8). A further concern will be the affective weight of words such as slavery, victimization, innocence, and exploitation, which serve to imprison people into restrictive approaches to the issue of human trafficking, and/or to mobilize them into action, which often translates into the ability to financially support a social cause, in this case, the rescuing and protection of victims of human trafficking, and the criminalization of those who benefit from it. This culture allows citizens to feel empowered through donations, while remaining at a safe distance from the social issues that their dollars are trying to reach.

I use affect theory to examine the multiple ways in which narratives of victimization are produced, as well as collective feelings of fear and paranoia toward a particular kind of unfit immigrant that help to reaffirm and spread a neoliberal marketization of social relations and humanitarian aid. Affect theory allows me to investigate the rationality behind the creation of myths that help to sustain tropes of imperial power with its indispensable tales of panic and imperative rescuing narratives. The paternalistic and xenophobic “management” of the human trafficking phenomenon is grounded in these tropes. I also use affect theory to examine how victims of human trafficking are imagined through a political organization of emotions that work to redefine and/or erase personhood for those who are considered lacking in social value and cultural capital. I look at the ways in which the process of naming, creating, identifying, and rescuing victims of human trafficking is situated at the center of an imagined national identity that requires the exploitation of panic and the production of moral regimes.

I have always been curious about the transit of people across borders. Perhaps because I am a brown immigrant myself and went through an exhausting process of “proving my worthiness”

to qualify for the “gift of citizenship” in the U.S., I tend to think often about how migration is regulated, what it entails affectively and politically, what voids it creates, how it is negotiated, punished, contested, altered, and felt. By looking at the issue of human trafficking in its relation to migration and through the affective lenses of pity and panic, I hope to contribute to the analysis of the trafficking of people as a complex social phenomenon that is embedded in the logic of neoliberalism and traverses a multiplicity of political and cultural domains.

2 PANIC

Starring Irish actor Liam Neeson as Bryan, a retired “badass” CIA agent, the Hollywood action-thriller film *Taken* (the first of the *Taken* trilogy) was released in U.S. theaters in January of 2009, earning an impressive \$145 million total. The movie tells the story of 17-year-old Kim (Bryan's daughter) who travels with her best friend Amanda to France, following the rock band U2 on their European tour. But just as Bono wholeheartedly sings in the U2 song “The Refugee,” anticipating Kim's fate, “she's a pretty face, but at the wrong time, in the wrong place.” Upon the teenagers' arrival in Paris' airport, they meet Peter, a charming French young man, who (upon learning where the girls are staying) invites them to a party and promises he will pick them up at their place later on. But instead, Peter, who is actually a member of an organized ring of sex traffickers, notifies an Albanian mafia of the girls' existence. A few hours later, a group of large, vicious men with thick accents and dark clothes kidnap the girls, drug them, and make the necessary arrangements to auction them off. Not surprisingly, perhaps (taking into consideration Hollywood's obsession with the Muslim world), the buyers are deviant Arab brown men, who are willing to pay tidy sums to own virgin American girls. Perhaps instead of providing a clear motive for this choice, the producers of the movie were more interested in creating a loose “terrorist category” where Arabs, Muslims, Middle Easterners and every other suspicious subject can easily fit.

Using his CIA superpowers, contacts, and extensive knowledge of how criminal minds operate, Bryan sets off on a mission to rescue his daughter Kim. By the time he finally tracks her down, after finding Amanda's dead body and killing 35 racialized criminals with spectacular precision and fierceness, he finds an Arab sheikh holding a curved knife (a karambit to be more

precise, that certainly contributes to the exoticism of the scene) to Kim's throat. Bryan shoots the sheikh in the head, rescues his daughter, and together they return to the United States where Kim is ready to put the past behind her and pursue her dream of becoming a singer. The reviews of the movie varied from those who found it generic but entertaining, or plainly dull and xenophobic, to those who praised it either for its action scenes and Neeson's impressive set of skills, or for its apparent ability to raise awareness of the phenomenon of human trafficking. Within this last group of fans, one reviewer asserted that “the movie is right about the strong desire amongst the sex trafficking industry for American girls. Not just American girls, but young American girls” (Neil). On the message board of the Internet Movie Database (IMDb), one reviewer commented that “people got involved in this movie because you know is [sic] something that happens in the real world and is happening right now ... by watching this movie you **want** to see every trafficker in it get killed brutally, and that is satisfying to watch” (Tilj). Public fear for the fate of our beloved innocent children, paired with a blunt desire to annihilate their orientalized abusers, is based on the assumption that the movie's portrayal of victims and terrorists is an accurate representation of reality.

On the website Metacritic, some reviewers stated that the reason they connected with the movie is the fact that as parents they can identify with the pain and anger of Neeson's character. User reviewer Michaeli posted, “The movie was excellent! Especially 'i will find you scene' [sic]. Maybe you got to be a parent to understand it!,” while user RobC commented, “I related to this movie so much as I have a daughter and felt the real emotion.” Deborah Sigmund, a former member of the U.S. Mexican Chamber of Commerce, also finds the film enlightening and has praised it on several occasions. In a 2015 interview Sigmund stated that *Taken* has been

“instrumental in educating the public and letting them know that this [issue of human trafficking] could really happen and that it is a true story” (Sigmund). What makes her assertion worth examining is the fact that Sigmund herself is the founder and director of Innocents at Risk, an influential Washington-based anti-trafficking organization, which has the mission to “educate citizens about the grave issue of global and local human trafficking” (Innocents at Risk). Sigmund's glorification of this Hollywood tale as a valuable learning tool helps to galvanize an anti-trafficking discourse based on the configuration and control of a collective sense of panic. The visual representation of victims and victimizers in *Taken*, as well as its description of the act of traveling without the supervision and protection of a male figure, serves to reinvigorate previous historical anxieties around females' sexuality. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the concept of vice was already being linked to different forms of defiant sexual expression and females' independence that challenged long-held assumptions of ideal womanhood.

With the rapid process of urbanization taking place at the turn of the nineteenth century, young, unmarried women moved to cities in search of adventure and labor opportunities, but their determination to actively participate in the promises of a burgeoning capitalism was illegible for many progressives and deemed as threatening to the established civic values and decent public spaces (Schreiber 166). A sense of collective fear was exacerbated through a “plethora of cultural productions, including journalistic exposés and melodramatic novels and films” that validated the myth of the “kidnapping of girls into a life of forced prostitution” (Schreiber 163). Kim's story can be understood as a continuation of those early productions that helped to reaffirm stereotypes about white females' naivete and vulnerability, and to project a deviant form of otherness, embodied in this particular story by the Albanian and Arab slavers. Furthermore, Kim's devastating

experience abroad helps to reinstate the “white scare paradigm,” in which inevitable risks await women who dare to trespass the boundaries of the home and the nation.

Although a fictional story, *Taken* is recognized by Sigmund and other supporters of the movie as a valid example of the phenomenon of human trafficking. I argue that rather than being valid or real, the narrative presented in *Taken* is, above all, a well-crafted configuration of panic that resonates with discourses of exemplary womanhood and domesticity, as well as anti-trafficking awareness initiatives worldwide. Katie Titus from *Iowa State Daily* asserts, “nobody is safe from trafficking” while Benjamin Nolot from Exodus Cry informs us that “there are tens of thousands of women all over the world who are being forced into lives of systematic rape, generally in the form of prostitution, in an industry that shows no signs of abating.” Similarly, faith-based organizations such as the Salvation Army, Free the Slaves, Focus on the Family and Concerned Women for America, resort to the management of panic to approach the issue of human trafficking and garner public support to their work against it.

The similarities between *Taken* and the documentary *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls* (examined in the third chapter), make one wonder if the Hollywood tale served as an inspiration to Exodus Cry's production team. In both films, the dystopian visual landscape is constituted by the same rigid gender roles. Victims are female and naïve, while the perpetrators of the crimes against them are often hyper-masculine foreign subjects, whose uncivilized excessiveness is reflected in their preying on the most vulnerable. Furthermore, both productions depict female migration -- or any movement across borders, including touristic -- as a dangerous endeavor that can very likely end in sexual abuse and exploitation.

2.1 A Bonding Experience: Panic as a Collective Sensorial Alertness

When felt in mass as an affective attunement, a bonding experience, or as a form of intense collective discomfort, panic helps to galvanize regimes of truth. It plays a pivotal role in the construction of a common enemy, the production of boundaries and the eliciting of (sometimes contradictory) responses to what is perceived as dangerous. According to Brian Massumi, these responses can take many forms. When panic arises, we “locate” ourselves somewhere in the spectrum between numbness and extreme violence. Regardless of our individual responses, though, similar feelings of irritability and nervousness emerge among the panicked. As Massumi observes, “jacked into the same modulation of feeling, bodies react in unison without necessarily acting alike” (32). Panic activates a sensorial alertness, a certain consciousness of what Sara Ahmed defines as the *ontology of insecurity*, in which in order “to justify the imperative to *make things secure*, it *must be* presumed that things are not secure” (76). I argue that this presumption of insecurity is a common element in contemporary anti-trafficking narratives. Furthermore, it is *through* this presumption that a cohesive discourse is formed and revealed to the public in the form of images, utterances, laws, projects, and NGOs’ mission statements.

My research investigates how panic *and* pity are arranged in ways that validate a neoliberal explanation of social justice in general and the issue of human trafficking in particular. While a constellation of emotions such as anger, horror, depression, guilt and hate is also an integral part of a current state of “networked jumpiness” or a collective “modulation of feeling” around the issue of human trafficking, I am particularly interested in examining pity and panic, which I consider central to the work of contemporary evangelical anti-trafficking campaigns in the United States. (Massumi 32). If pity is mostly deployed to solicit aid, as I assert in my third chapter, panic

serves as a formidable hook to capture people's imaginations. Echoing Naomi Klein's analysis of the configuration of collective shocks (due to natural or induced disasters) as opportunities to remake the world, I will examine the ways in which the “period of deep disorientation and regression” after 9/11 was exploited by Bush's administration to focus on the necessity to preserve moral values, boost a militarized political agenda, and advocate for a culture of war in most aspects of social life (16). These include humanitarian projects and campaigns, many of which were led or had strong ties with an evangelical right that secured its redemption in the political arena (as well as an important flow of federal resources) during Bush's years in the White House. In this chapter, I analyze how, through the use of panic (and with renewed access to governmental resources), evangelical anti-trafficking organizations have had the ability to steer the public into a particular understanding of human trafficking and promote restrictive ways of combating it.

Although the Trafficking Victims Protection Act was passed in Congress almost exactly a year before the attacks of September 11, its later implementation by prosecutors, investigators and non-governmental agencies primarily as a law enforcement tool and less as an organic strategy to assist all victims of human trafficking, is influenced by a post-9/11 socio-political climate. In the aftermath of the Twin Towers' attacks, panic created an ideal scenario for the logic of surveillance and annihilation to thrive. Policies like the USA Patriot Act reflect some of the material ways in which this logic was decisive in the crafting of official discourses centered around shared notions of panic. The tragic events of September 11 were used to reaffirm a militaristic discourse that exacerbated the mythology of us (the civilized, the patriotic, the morally enlightened, and the free) versus them (the irrational, the barbaric, the extremists and the totalitarian). This discourse circulated with undeniable success among agencies, organizations, corporations, and the intimate

lives of the American people who had entered a phase of unsettling suspension after 9/11, and whose panic allowed for a belligerent order of things to gain momentum. The interpretation and application of the TVPA in the aftermath of 9/11 did not escape the military impetus and call for the restoration of moral values of a fortified right wing. In fact, an important number of evangelical organizations, including two of the three that I am examining for this thesis, share almost identical views on how to morally assist “authentic” survivors, how to discipline “brown” perpetrators and where to concentrate our efforts to restore a mythical American democracy.

The fact that assistance to victims is dependent on a complex process of certification by an inter-agency force (that includes the Department of Health and Human Services and, interestingly enough, the Secretary of Homeland Security) in which victims are expected to “assist in every reasonable way in the investigation and prosecution of severe forms of trafficking in persons,” demonstrates the extent to which survivors are only recognized as such insofar as they have proof of being severely trafficked and are willing to validate official discourses and practices through their cooperation with law enforcement, even if this translates in further risk or trauma for them (TVPA 2000). The Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women contends that

Decisions about whether and when to provide assistance to a trafficked person are based on factors that are not related to the person’s rights, such as resource constraints or the best way to achieve a particular criminal justice result. For example, to ensure cooperation of trafficked persons, law enforcement agents might delay certifying cooperation for the purposes of a T-visa until a trial or investigation is completed, or not provide this certification because investigation or prosecution is not being pursued at

that moment” (Huckerby 247).

There have been reported cases of federal prosecutors and ICE investigators who used a subpoena to force foreign children to testify against their traffickers, although the TVPA does not consider cooperation with investigation, in the particular case of children, as a requisite to provide assistance (Bump). In an effort to supposedly protect the nation from the threat of terrorism, undesired migration and vice (and receive some good publicity in the process), the state, as well as the organizations it endorses, have often failed to acknowledge the complexities of human trafficking and failed to provide sustainable aid to its survivors. The overemphasis on strengthening criminal justice systems has effectively diverted the attention away from issues like poverty, corruption, labor exploitation, and inequality within the system of capitalism (in which the state plays a leading role) that are inseparable from the phenomenon of human trafficking. As I explain in more detail on my third chapter, the connections between board members of anti-trafficking organizations and industries (like the international garment trade) that rely on and perpetuate women's poverty around the world demonstrates that the obsession with tackling females' exploitation is in many cases unidirectional and simplistic.

A social worker from the International Justice Mission (IJM) asserts, for example, that “blaming poverty for crimes like this is convenient -- it seems to make trafficking a problem beyond our control, but trafficking still exists because an effective public justice system doesn't.” The claim (coming from a worker of an organization that in 2013 had a budget of \$47.95 million, of which \$25.83 million were used for case work expenses) can be interpreted within the framework of a neoliberal logic that propels a development paradigm where poverty is just unavoidable and unresolvable (IJM annual report 2013). This, despite the fact that international

economic organizations such as the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) “allocates a total of about USD 120 million each year to ‘combat modern slavery internationally’” (3). On its website, the IJM states that through their work “instead of violence against the poor being commonplace, the poor are protected,” which raises the question of how they can protect the poor without tackling poverty too. According to the IJM, violence is a direct consequence of “broken, corrupt, and dysfunctional public justice systems” rather than a result of ubiquitous neoliberal principles and exploitative market mechanisms that promote the impoverishment and disposability of people of color.

Although considerable resources have been channeled toward the unveiling of how trafficking operates, who the actors and forces are behind it, and how to combat it the narrow representation of this phenomenon as “an aggregation of individual acts of deceit, criminality, abuse and rescue rather than a direct consequence of a neoliberal system” continues to permeate the work of many anti-trafficking organizations (Sharapov 23). I argue that this narrow representation still circulates with success due to the manipulation of a collective sense of panic. Also, it seems easier to vigorously condemn tangible, individual subjects as the absolute perpetrators of crimes against humanity, than to dislodge abstract systems of power that are invested in the formation of criminal subjectivities and benefit from the abuse of the most vulnerable. In my third chapter, I explore how this narrow representation allows for the construction of pitiable subjects who are portrayed as victims of an evil person or act, but not of systemic oppression. As a result of this construction, peculiar forms of activism and networking are presented as necessary and ideal in the context of the neoliberal marketplace.

2.2 White Slave Scare Rebooted: Paranoia in Motion

In order to examine the elaboration of an evangelical Christian definition of human trafficking and the shaping of subjectivities around it (the pitiable victim, the vicious victimizer, and the progressive savior) that deploy images and discourses of panic, I answer two of the questions asked by Sara Ahmed in her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. By thinking about “what makes us frightened? and who gets afraid of whom?” we can unveil the dynamics of the current anti-trafficking crusade and examine its connection with former moral configurations of evangelical Christian narratives orbiting around social justice issues (Ahmed 62).

In their examination of the relationship between the white slave scare of the 19th century and contemporary initiatives against human trafficking, scholars such as Elizabeth Bernstein, Jo Doezema, Thaddeus Russell and Yvonne Zimmerman have concluded that to some important extent, the moral discourses that determined the work of early abolitionists have remained frozen in time. Russell asserts that “the contemporary movement against 'human trafficking,' also described as 'modern-day slavery,' is strikingly similar to the crusade against white slavery a century ago, both in rhetoric and in implications for individual freedom and state power.” Similarly, Zimmerman argues that “although the racial identity and/or region of origin of the quintessential victim have changed, the discursive foundations of ‘white slavery’ remain remarkably intact in present day depictions of human trafficking” (571).

According to the mentioned authors, the early anti-trafficking narratives of evangelical Christian reformers in the late nineteenth century emerged as a strategy to reaffirm Victorian moral values in an era of rapid socio-economic changes linked to the expansion of industrial capitalism. These changes threatened to disrupt long-held assumptions of women as naturally pious and pure,

and to sever ideals of females' domesticity, spatio-temporal submissiveness, nuclear families, and heterosexual norms. As Bernstein, Doezema, Zimmerman and Grittner have asserted, the fear of 'white slavery' was more of a fabricated myth to counteract women's sexual liberation and sexual practices of both women and men whose bodies, desires, and ways of being in the world contradicted the values of Protestantism. Disruptive forms of sexuality became sites of unwelcome openness threatening to destroy the status quo and the 'traditional' gender norms on which it relied.

Public support for the fight against white slavery was based on a collective understanding of white women's bodies as part of a national treasure that had to be protected from crazed immoral men. Furthermore, whiteness (in a broader sense) was a fundamental part of the nation's puritan identity, and thus, required to be guarded from prostitution and other perceived forms of corruption. As opposed to the chattel slavery of Africans and African descendants (an institution defended by many Christian slaveholders), protecting defenseless white women did not encounter much resistance. When compared to the slavery of black bodies, white slavery was perceived as a much more insidious issue that required categorical rejection of fit citizens and concrete legal actions against it, as the introduction of the *Mann Act* in 1909 demonstrates. Also known as the *White-Slave Traffic Act*, this law was designed to criminalize the transportation of women across state lines “for the purpose of prostitution, or debauchery or for any other immoral purpose” (Mann Act).

The fear of corrupting women's bodies and minds was linked to particular notions of exemplary citizenship. While white female bodies were representative of an ideal national identity (including white foreign women from France, Sweden, and other European countries who migrated to the United States for the purpose of prostitution and were deemed worthy of rescue,

reform and ultimately citizenship), black men's subjectivities were more of a paradox. On the one side, black men were regarded as “inherently slaveable” and presented as the quintessential marker of a commodified labor structure that was vital for the maintenance of a white ruling class (*Color of Violence* 67). On the other side, they were perceived as naturally dangerous, lascivious, and inclined to vice, and thus, in constant need of punishment, surveillance and control.

By looking carefully into the legal measures taken during the white slave scare, one can assert that these initiatives were mediated by a long-held fear of blackness and other forms of undesired otherness that (while necessary for the burgeoning economic system) were often seen as a threat that promised to break apart the social norms through which white privilege was constituted. The conviction of black boxing champion Jack Johnson of a Mann Act violation in 1912 for taking one of his girlfriends across state lines exemplifies the extent to which the contestation of conventional moral codes by black men was punished. Johnson's luxurious lifestyle and non-apologetic openness about his preference for white sexual partners were perceived as threatening to the mainstream hierarchy of power. Similarly, the legal punishment of Jews, Asian, and Latino men who engaged in sexual activities with white women demonstrates the racialized and gendered nature of the early production of victims and aggressors that is latent in today's evangelical Christian fight against the trafficking of people.

Many of the prominent scholars whose work I examine in this thesis assert that the patriarchal order that informed the work of early abolitionists persist in today's new crusade against vice. It is unquestionable that the current Christian right's monopoly of panic goes hand in hand with a historical fascination with policing female bodies, whether we are referring to black slaves whose darkness “provided white men a different access to sexuality,” white women who had to be

protected from vice and disruptive forms of labor, or brown immigrants whose racial complexity, illegible agency and problematic citizenship threatens to drag the nation into promiscuity and chaos (Berlant 556). Yvonne Zimmerman asserts that the current anti-trafficking work has been “framed by the 18th- and 19th- century abolitionist movements where the role of Christian convictions in shaping the moral sensibilities of abolitionists is often highlighted” (569). The appropriation of the white slave rhetoric in the contemporary fight against human trafficking is most evident, perhaps in the perception of the phenomenon as inherently linked to sexual exploitation and the description of prostitution as a social ill that particularly affects young virgins. The moral landscape of anti-trafficking political speeches, fundraiser galas, international treaties, and NGO statements in recent years derives from an old urge to protect and discipline women's sexuality. On the other hand, authors like Jakobsen and Bernstein argue that there is a trend amongst contemporary evangelical and secular alliances against human trafficking, to market the monogamous heterosexual marriage as a moral ideal, which stems from a Protestant heritage that frames sexual ethics under the institution of marriage.

David Kyle Foster, a contributor to the organization Focus on the Family, invites his readers to recognize heterosexual marriage as a paramount form of intimate communion. In his article *The Divine Order to Marriage*, Foster asserts that since “woman was originally a constituent part of man, she must return to become one with him again, so that the full expression and design of God's image in human beings can be revealed.” His assumption of heterosexual marriage as universal, sacred, and immovable (a vision shared and promoted by the organization as a whole) reflect, as Jakobsen and Bernstein point out, a continuation of the moral underpinnings of a Protestant nineteenth century. Moreover, anti-prostitution initiatives and restoration programs that

rely on sensationalist propaganda and receive support from a diverse array of both evangelical and secular anti-trafficking organizations demonstrate that the alertness, nervousness and obsession with certain forms of female sexual expression have been floating across time and space with relatively little variation. By describing prostitution as the most grotesque, violent, and degrading form of exploitation, organizations like the Coalition Against the Trafficking of Women (CATW), Focus on the Family (FOC) and International Justice Mission (IJM) have reinstated the nineteenth century's social panic around sexual deviance that helped to either infantilize or criminalize women who chose to participate in the sex industry, and to render their agency as incomprehensible and their behavior as reformable.

2.3 Panic Evolves: Challenges and Transformations in the Current Global Order

As I have examined so far, both the white slave scare of the nineteenth century and the current anti-trafficking movement have important elements in common. Both emerged during complex geopolitical times, where intense episodes of migration took place, subaltern others were read as dangerous and intrinsically delinquent, and the white ethnocentric paradigm was facing exceptional challenges. However, the particularities of our current historical time should be carefully examined in order to understand how new fears and responses are being crafted and normalized, as the world continues to shift with full speed toward the uneven political and economic interdependence of a globalized marketplace.

If protecting society from urban ills (like prostitution, indecent public amusements, drinking, and chastity offenses) and restricting the implementation of an anti-segregation agenda were some of the priorities of the white slave narrative, what is the political angle that the current anti-trafficking crusade has taken in recent years? What is it in particular that makes us frightened

today? Certainly, the concern with sexual morality is central to evangelical Christians who consider that it is within the framework of marital sex that a man and a woman get closer to God and become ready to honor his plan for ideal, complementary intimacy. Their interest in the issue of human trafficking is intertwined with a long-held preoccupation about female bodies being “denied” the experience of marital sex and patriarchal family values.

Today, however, with the imperatives of globalization, these concerns have evolved and new responses have emerged. Perhaps one of the most prominent features of this era of enhanced globalization is the complex movement of people across borders. Although migration has been fundamental for our evolution and survival, and thus, a phenomenon as old as the human race, with the implementation of a neoliberal model, the tragic legacies of colonialism, the bursting of wars and conflicts, the appearance of new forms of technological power and new forms of exploitation, and the widening of class gaps among other peculiarities, migration has acquired new meanings and has prompted new actions and responses.

The current anti-trafficking crusade reflects some of the paradoxes of state apparatuses' responses to migration. On the one side, the fear of a certain kind of unfit immigrant (not the rescuable European prostitute, but the illegible third world subject) that threatens to invade, destabilize and take advantage of the nation, continues to foster xenophobic legal actions, ultra-conservative discourses and militaristic responses against the flow of undesirable others. Anti-trafficking efforts have been co-opted by this narrative of invasion that equates the national body to a feminized one, and persuades the public to continue bolstering a deceptive pathos of fear. Within this narrative, we become fearful of both the potential attack of the barbaric foreign male subject representing the quintessential villain and trafficker, and/or the intrusion of the vulnerable

foreign female victim and carrier of terrible diseases, who will most likely end up “sponging a living off of federal welfare programs paid for by our tax dollars” if we allow her to perceive the nation as porous and the anti-trafficking law as unrestrained amnesty for undocumented subjects (Snyder).

On the other side, the disdain for the ultimate dangerous migrant does not imply that the threat of his presence has not become vital for the maintenance of the status quo and the expansion of a corporatist state. On the contrary, the events of September 11 proved that people's fear of otherness, if well used, can be exceptionally profitable. After the attacks of 9/11 new markets related to counterterrorism blossomed with remarkable success. Naomi Klein explains how, from optical scanning and biometric IDs, to surveillance cameras, military infrastructure overseas, and the hiring of freelance interrogators, the homeland security industry has prospered during the past 15 years as never before. Increased feelings of nervousness and anxiety help to foster a culture of preparedness and paranoia that helps to justify the militarization of social life.

The goals of enhancing security and protecting national borders have permeated the work of U.S. evangelical anti-trafficking organizations, many of which concentrate their efforts in curbing migration from countries with long histories of poverty, recession, and political unrest, like Cambodia and Thailand. These organizations' operational plans reflect the TVPA's emphasis on combating the “international trafficking in persons, including the trafficking of foreign citizens into the United States,” by adopting harrowing rescue strategies that often involve some form of scrutiny and punishment, paired with a narrative of panic around potential traffic, and its corresponding message that it is better to “stay at home” (Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act 2005). The devastating effects of these techniques of control are particularly

felt by voluntary sex workers and irregular migrant women, whose identities have been stigmatized and conveniently placed under the victimhood category. The Thai sex worker organization *Empower* boldly claims that

We are forced to live with the modern lie that border controls and anti-trafficking policies are for our protection. None of us believe that lie or want that kind of protection. We have been spied on, arrested, cut off from our families, had our savings confiscated, interrogated, imprisoned and placed into the hands of the men with guns, in order for them to send us home... all in the name of “protection against trafficking” (Hit and Run 2012).

Stemming from a bizarre combination of moral entrepreneurship, Hollywood extravaganza, and the effective management of panic, the current war against human trafficking, with its anti-prostitution raids and campaigns, restoration programs, conversion techniques, sensationalist propaganda and misleading awareness initiatives, materializes “a contemporary imperialist move that involves 'the West' saving 'the rest'” (Kempadoo 2015). Within the paternalistic economy of the evangelical movement against the trafficking of people, our exemplary foreign victim becomes trapped into what Laura Agustín calls the “rescue industry,” and soon discovers

that in the name of protection she can be confined to a shelter under conditions which are no different from detention, or packed off ‘home’, back into the very same environment that she wished to leave behind, with its joblessness, poverty, conflict, abuse, or even a not-so-dire middling situation, which to her offered neither promise nor possibility of realising

her life's full potential. (Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women 8).

Through a calculated management of collective panic, these paternalistic interventions remain uncontested, as we let ourselves get dragged by horrific images of women and children in chains, and unfounded statistics presenting human trafficking as “the world's fastest global crime” (Stop the Trafficking). In the midst of the anxiety and disorientation that panic produce, we have let the self-called experts convince us of the existence of what Paul Amar defines as “politically disabled 'victim' subjects that must, essentially, be constantly protected or rescued by enforcement interventions regardless of their consent or will to be rescued” (17). The construction of this agency-less victim helps to preserve and validate other myths in regard to migration, risk, patriotism, and national security. By creating an infantilized, feminized, and politically disabled other who must prove (through a quiet acceptance of the caricaturesque portrayal that rescuers make of her and of those implicated in her trafficking, and particular forms of protection and assistance that might be detrimental in the long term) her authenticity as the quintessential victim, the contemporary war on trafficking based on neoliberal forms of governance, securitization, and social control, continue to be imposed and celebrated as an imperative of modernity.

It is through panic and the stories that it legitimizes, that we have, ultimately, let Liam Neeson's character in *Taken* become a reliable informant about the apparent violent nature of brown men and the inevitable risks of (especially white) women's migration and movement across borders (including tourism), while the structural forces that facilitate human trafficking are never addressed or challenged. The Arab and Albanian slavers constitute the enemies of the civilized world, while Kim and Amanda fit the category of the “innocent victim.” Their young bodies are sites of fantasy and purity, and thus, their abduction reveals the kind of incommensurable pain that

can only be inflicted by a marginal ethnic other, whose backwardness represents, in a larger sense, a foreign threat to the American way of life. Similarly to actual brothel raids and other spectacular militarized interventions conducted by networks of anti-trafficking NGOs and law enforcement agencies in the Global South (that include cameras, guns, and infiltrated spies, and are marketed as necessary actions for the eradication of trafficking), movies like *Taken* help to consolidate the myths of women-as-always-mute, always at risk, and always needy, as well as a collective form of sentimentality that recognizes the protagonist's revenge as heroic, necessary, and even comforting.

3 PITY

Pity, in a man who lives according to the guidance of reason, is evil of itself, and useless. - (Spinoza 225) -Benedict de Spinoza

“Travel to four countries to expose the global sex trade. There is hope” reads the trailer of *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls*, the last documentary produced by the anti-trafficking Christian organization Exodus Cry. Designed to “unveil the global sex industry to expose the injustice hidden in the shadows,” the movie plays a pivotal role in the organization's awareness initiative and focuses on testimonials by subjects connected to the sex industry in different ways. Pimps, johns, former prostitutes and trafficked survivors, scholars, psychologists, and NGO founders make up this diverse group of individuals who, through their participation in the movie, seek to contribute to the education of the public regarding the global phenomenon of sex trafficking. Whether set in Moldova, Amsterdam, Las Vegas, or Cambodia, the same narrative of affliction permeates all stories. It proceeds from the belief that “21st century slavery has reemerged with a force and brutality that rivals anything in history,” and depicts sex trafficking as the current form of slavery that needs our most urgent attention. In fact, according to the organization's founder and movie producer Benjamin Nolot, “human trafficking itself is a convenient euphemism to guard us from the intensity of what is really occurring which is sex slavery.” Unsurprisingly, other forms of trafficking are not mentioned in the film, as they apparently cannot rival the force and brutality of sex slavery.

Throughout the movie, the audience is informed about highly sophisticated mafias in Eastern Europe, corrupt governments in South Asia, lenient laws in liberal Amsterdam and broken families in the U.S. that contribute to the sex trafficking of women around the globe. The stories

and images depicted in the movie are distressing and the audience cannot but feel outrage about the violence that women and girls must endure as victims of sex trafficking. My goal is to engage with particular forms of evangelical dominant visualities in the movie *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls* in order to explain the construction of a racialized pitiable subject, and to understand some of the implicit meanings and effects of this construction.

During the movie, emotions such as anger, sadness, horror, and depression arise as we learn about subaltern others being subjected to extreme forms of violence and exploitation. It is the construction of a racialized pitiable subject, who has been deprived of all forms of agency and self-control, that holds these emotions together and sustains a bleak anti-trafficking narrative based on a Hollywood-style villains-vs.-victims dyad. It seems less challenging to convince the public to pity orientalized/silenced others and to financially engage with the rescuing of innocent women (lured into prostitution by hyper-masculine criminals), than to unveil the links between human trafficking and the current globalized economy. Furthermore, pity does not trigger a productive conversation about the necessity of protecting the rights of women who intentionally participate in the sex industry (in many cases as a result of neoliberal policies), to question the ways in which immigrants from the Global South working for U.S. subcontractors in military bases are subjected to abuse, or the ways in which xenophobic immigration laws are masked under the goal of ending slavery in the 21st century.

Pity serves the purpose of flattening the complexities of human trafficking by positioning the developed savior in opposition to the fetishized ethnic other. It is through pity that we can assume the “civilized” people of the West as benefactors and agents of progress, but rarely as contributors to the conditions that allow human trafficking to happen. Simultaneously, pity allows

us to imagine rigid categories in which exploiters and exploited can be conveniently placed.

Benjamin Nolot traveled to 19 countries with a team of concerned Christians searching for stories of sex trafficking and forced prostitution that should agitate, to say the least, even the most unsympathetic and uncaring of souls. The movie begins with the story of Stefa, a young female survivor from Serbia who is abducted by a gang of criminals and taken to a breaking ground house where women are “seasoned for the profession of prostitution.” Parallel to her testimony, the painful events of her abduction and imprisonment in the breaking ground house are reenacted by professional actors: muscular, tattooed and merciless Eastern European men playing the roles of pimps and johns, and fragile young women embodying the role of infallible victims. Very early in the movie, the spectator is compelled to believe that, regardless of socio-economic, geopolitical, or cultural differences, young girls and women constitute a mass of naïve and defenseless subjects who must be saved from the intrinsic immorality and apparently inevitable violence that surrounds the sex industry.

The possibility of agency for a prostituted body is easily disregarded as a manifestation of the Stockholm syndrome, in which the victim eventually identifies with her oppressor and develops an emotional bond with him. Naturally, we do not hear of “pimp-less” prostitutes managing their time and establishing their own labor conditions, nor of prostituted boys and men, other forms of labor exploitation besides forced prostitution, local initiatives oriented to assist victims of human trafficking, or the harmful effects of criminalizing sex work. Aligned with the TVPA definition of human trafficking as “a contemporary manifestation of slavery whose victims are predominantly women and children,” the victims in *Nefarious* are depicted as weak women and girls controlled by a male slaver. Simultaneously, pimps are described as foreign, merciless

individuals, johns as lascivious and violent men, liberators as Western, educated subjects, and prostitution overall as the most cruel form of violence against women.

Most of the survivors (from Serbia, Thailand, Cambodia, and other “remote” places in the Global South) who were interviewed for the movie, have their faces blurred or hidden behind curtains, so we can only listen to their traumatic testimonials (along with a mournful sound-track). Not surprisingly, these stories are almost identical. Coerced, abused, broken, and robbed of their dignity, these vulnerable women compose a disposable assemblage of profitable commodities who have lost all sense of self-love and self-respect. By disposable assemblage, I am not exclusively referring to a monolithic mass of expendable bodies within the oppressive dynamics of trafficking, but also to the profitability that comes from homogenizing all of those who participate in the sex industry as motionless, identical victims under the evangelical orchestration of pity.

Whether a deliberate choice or not, the concept of sameness that the obscured spaces in the film create is useful in the production of a pitiable subject who can only reclaim her value as a human being with the monolithic assistance of her white savior. One could argue that the darkness enclosing the testimonials represent a void to be filled by the spectator with evocative images of exotic foreign bodies. Furthermore, it is within this potential void that pity can easily emerge, as we are allowed to imagine ourselves as distant godparents of subaltern subjects (who ultimately become whatever we want to make of them). This shaping of both victim and savior in the realm of our imagination allows us to feel satisfied with any form of aid that we consider convenient to give, whether it is prayer, donations, or pity alone.

Interestingly, despite the trauma that they have been through, other survivors from Amsterdam, Las Vegas, and other cosmopolitan spaces of the Global North look urban and bold

while sharing their stories. These women have gone through similar experiences in their path to empowerment: they claim to have been liberated by the power of Jesus Christ, being in a stable heterosexual relationship, and being active members of the community, especially through their participation in evangelical anti-trafficking organizations. The contrasting images of backwards vs. more civilized victims seem to imply that whereas western victims are more likely to be saved through direct divine intervention and individual determination, poor women of color need a paternal white mediator between them and God's kingdom.

In a scene in Cambodia, Nolot and his team are shown visiting a shelter of the Agape International Mission. Founded by former Christian pastor Don Brewster, the mission focuses on “rescuing, restoring and reintegrating survivors of sex trafficking through Christ’s love and Gospel.” Shortly after their arrival, Nolot's team teach a group of “rescued” children an English Christian song accompanied by a dance in which all participate. This seemingly innocent encounter with the foreign children carries the subtle weight of a colonial past and the invasive logic of cultural imperialism; it implies that a message should always be delivered to the dispossessed and primitive even if they are not always able to interpret it. The scene resonates with early stories of Native American children in the U.S. sent to boarding schools, forbidden to speak their native languages and worship the ancestral deities of their communities and sacred lands. Furthermore, the scene reflects some of the asymmetries of power intrinsic to colonial paradigms. The voices of the uncivilized, the native and the victim of sexual abuse are amplified by the privileged savior, in so far as they propagate a well-crafted message of needed guidance and subordination. Nolot's team is not interested in listening and learning native songs from the Cambodian children, but instead focuses on teaching them how to properly worship an unfamiliar,

yet wondrous deity. As author Anne Elizabeth Moore observes, “In a traditionally Buddhist country with a growing Muslim population, this [work of anti sex-trafficking Christian missionaries] has severe and concerning implications” (“Sex Work or Human Trafficking”). Although Nolot and his team do not force the children to participate in the activity, one wonders what could happen to potential aid in the long term if conversion to Christianity is rejected.

3.1 Spectating in Pity

Examining the power and agency of visual images within psychoanalysis, Gillian Rose asserts that “our immersion in a certain kind of visuality and our encounters with certain kinds of visual images tutor us into particular kinds of subjectivity” (104). The audience of *Nefarious* is immersed in a form of visuality that delineates the spaces in which agency can and should be displayed. Perhaps as a strategy to inspire some action and reduce the fear of “otherness,” foreign subjects are depicted as having little to no agency, whereas less threatening victims are portrayed as strong survivors, with the ability to change the course of their lives and become agents of their future through tenacity and divine providence. Another element worth exploring in the shaping of the spectator's subjectivity is the gendered nature of the film's protagonists. Not only the rigid gender roles displayed in the movie contribute to the victimization of poor women of color, who are seen as inherently frail, but boys and men are excluded as possible victims of trafficking, since they are mostly perceived as natural perpetrators of violence. On the other side, the fact that Nolot's production team is mostly composed of men, inevitably affects the editing and interpretation of testimonials. The predominantly evangelical male gaze helps to articulate a patriarchal narrative of prostitution-as-exploitation. One could speculate that the obsession with rescuing the ever-present “fallen woman” throughout the movie is intertwined with a masculine neoliberal thought

that every so often places the seemingly monolithic victims' rationale at the periphery of the discussion and the unsophisticated savior's reflection at its center.

In one scene, for example, Nolot walks the streets of Amsterdam's red light district with his camera in hand and firmly states that, although videotaping is not allowed, he will still take the risk because the truth needs to be exposed. His statement could be read as an attempt to put himself in a position of power, that of the brave Christian observer who is willing to reveal the truth, but only through his benevolent gaze. In a different scene, Nolot happily walks the quiet streets of Sweden very late at night, because thanks to the country's criminalization of the buying of sex (and thus its apparently undeniable progress) he “can walk the streets with no fear.” In his enthusiastic declaration, Nolot fails to consider that his privilege as an American white male intrinsically protects him from many forms of danger --in ways that are unimaginable for an undocumented female sex worker from Moldova, even in harmonious and progressive Sweden.

The film attempts to examine some of the structural conditions that lead to the sexual exploitation of women and girls (lack of education and labor opportunities, gender inequality and the lucrative nature of the sex industry) and at times one can feel almost optimistic about the contribution of human rights advocates who participated in the movie. Luran Bethell, for example, cleverly defines human trafficking as the exploitation of vulnerability, while Don Brewster examines some of the systemic conditions that make rural parents in Cambodia prone to become complicit in the sexual exploitation of their daughters. However, the movie uncritically ends with Nolot and Brewster's declaration that the true causes of sex trafficking are spiritual deprivation and lack of Christian values.

According to both Nolot and Brewster, human trafficking won't come to an end with

universal access to decent education or even the eradication of poverty. Instead, this problem needs to be “confronted in the spirit, by ushering in the supernatural dimension of God's power through prayer.” They observe: “from the closing of brothels to the restoration of young women who are now free, we have seen His powerful works in response to prayer.” The complexities around human trafficking are completely flattened here by a reductionist understanding of the phenomenon as a merely moral issue in which victims and oppressors become homogeneous subjects lacking of the righteousness that is only attainable through prayer and the acceptance of Jesus Christ in their hearts. This reductionist approach is fostered by an effective articulation of pity that hyper visualizes the monolithic image of agency-less subjects, and creates a social practice of illusory compassion that materializes in perhaps noble but unquestionably impractical actions such as prayer. The spectator is let “off the hook” from engaging in direct action, questioning the effectiveness of anti-trafficking programs, or reflecting on his or her own participation in the exploitation of the poor and vulnerable. All that is required from him or her is a distant involvement displayed in the form of either prayer or financial support. Pitying the racialized trafficked victim works as a feat of magic that helps to hide, among other things, the connections between exploitative legal industries and anti-trafficking efforts, while simultaneously guaranteeing superficial involvement of donors and sympathizers.

As I mentioned in my second chapter, the garment industry is one of the many that reflect the unjust labor dynamics in the context of neoliberalism. Interestingly, anti-trafficking NGOs operating in countries like Cambodia and Bangladesh (where workers' rights are either ignored or opposed by governments) support the recruitment of “rescued victims” of sex trafficking by the garment industry, although wages in this sector are not meant to improve the living conditions of

workers. Some organizations such as Half the Sky receive donations from corporations like Nike (that have contributed to and benefited from a gendered system of labor exploitation), while others like AFESIP (Acting for Women in Distressing Situations) train trafficking survivors in apparel manufacturing, and thus, contribute directly to what some authors define as the trafficking-to-garment pipeline. In their year-long investigation, writer Anne Elizabeth Moore and cartoonist Melissa Mendes unveiled the close involvement of multiple anti-trafficking executives with the garment industry. Some of those cases are the treasurer and secretary of Shared Hope International, Curtis Lind, who also works for Columbia Sportswear Company, Janet Rivett-Carnac, former board member of The Somaly Mam Foundation and Gap's VP of Global Sourcing, and Ken Peterson, CEO of clothing retailer Apricot Lane and board member of Don Brewster's organization, Agape International Mission. The vigorous effort to recruit workers for an industry that pays 80 dollars per month on average cannot be detached from the private interests of CEOs and influential members and supporters of anti-trafficking organizations operating in places like Cambodia, where apparel manufacturing constitute the country's third-largest industry.

Pity's feat of magic allows for the rescued victim to remain hidden and silenced. We feel “depressed” by the suffering of *Nefarious* protagonists, and can even feel how the trajectory of that suffering leaves a mark on us (although I argue that the mark serves as a reminder of our own privilege). Nonetheless, pity itself is never sufficient to eliminate their suffering. It leaves the audience stuck in the aesthetics of disturbing images and the simplicity of the discourses that derive from them, making it almost impossible to critically examine the complexities of trafficking, much less to elicit exceptional and sustainable action. One could suggest that there is actually one thing that pity effectively accomplishes, though, which is its apparent ability to raise awareness of social

issues that (if not for the manipulation and exposure of the pitied subject) might otherwise remain hidden from the public view. I argue, however, that this form of awareness based on uncorroborated data and the exploitation of poignant images of victims becomes a metonym for a gendered voyeurism that confines subjects (both spectator and victim) to unalterable positions of powerful and powerless. This fixed positions suppress the possibility of agency for the latter. Awareness, according to author Laura Agustín, “is by definition superficial and can only become deeper if followed up by curious investigation: wondering, reading, critique, talking with those more experienced, cogitating over ambiguities” (Agustín 2015). Evangelical anti-trafficking organizations concentrating their efforts on raising awareness and “becoming a voice for the victims” exploit pity to misinform audiences about the intricate forces playing out within the phenomenon of human trafficking. We are forced to look only in the direction of a pitiable victim who has been carefully constructed by these organizations to inspire a neoliberal form of aid and support, where individualization of humanitarianism is privileged and seen as ideal in the combating of human trafficking.

The “depressing effect” that Nietzsche and other influential thinkers of the 19th century assigned to pity, is also closely related to its paralyzing nature. According to philosophy professor Aaron Ben-Zeén, “Pity, which considers the other to be inferior, is related more to contempt rather than love. We can pity people while maintaining a safe emotional distance from them.” Furthermore, since pity allows for feelings of supremacy to emerge (through the misfortune of others we validate our own superiority) it seldom obliges us to challenge power imbalance, promote a substantial redistribution of wealth, help to dismantle institutions that are invested in the marginalization of the poor, or produce any dramatic change in most aspects of social life. The

paternalistic pity that emerges from our privileged gaze provides “the type of relief that orientalizes the Other and reinforces the superiority of the developed West in terms of its treatment of women -how lucky 'we' are not to be like 'them'” (Barberán Reinares 14).

If pity does not seem to produce significant change in the lives of those who are pitied, why is it then fostered by evangelical organizations in particular to draw attention to the issue of human trafficking and generate peculiar forms of public solidarity and support? To answer this question in a holistic way, we must first look at the centrality of pity in Christianity, most evident perhaps in the crucified figure of Jesus. As opposed to the vitality of hedonistic Greek gods and goddesses overindulging in all sorts of pleasures, suprahuman Native American deities, or indestructible Buddhist enlightened masters, the image of Jesus on the cross represents a form of agony and self-sacrifice that induces a pitiful, melodramatic gaze. Tortured and dehumanized, the figure of Jesus on the cross inspires a certain form of commiseration. Although there is nothing we can do to alleviate his suffering, we sympathize with Jesus every time we look at his tortured body on the cross. So meaningful is the figure of the cross as a moral compass, that it has been traced on Christians' foreheads since time immemorial as a gestural sign to symbolize righteousness, sacrifice, and spiritual purity.

Simultaneously, we should find solace and gratification in knowing that somehow our pain will never be comparable to his. Therefore, I argue that the harrowing image of the trafficked victim that mirrors the image of Jesus on the cross is needed as a reminder of our own privilege within the enslaved vs. free binary. Inevitably, this need precludes the possibility of completely eradicating the suffering, which to some extent validates our position as free individuals. On the other hand, if we look at the message of nonresistance predicated by Jesus, which materializes

most evidently in the acceptance of his crucifixion, we could argue that interpretations of misfortune and pain by evangelical human rights organizations are linked to a theoretical understanding of suffering as a necessary route toward liberation, and thus, a private struggle that can only be overcome by the power of the spirit when the time is right.

Besides this ontological premise, though, it is also important to consider the less abstract market component that informs the practices and *raison d'être* of a number of contemporary human rights organizations. By pitying the racialized victim of sex trafficking, we can divert our attention away from other forms of exploitation, some of which are proposed by organizations such as Agape International Mission as solutions to the incomparable brutality involved in the sex trade, such as the garment industry. In the particular case of market-investors or private agents, pity ensures a comfortable disconnection between them and the pitied subject, so that the tranquility of the donor and a steady flow of resources are secured. For secular organizations, the criteria that they must meet in order to have access to financial aid from governments, transnational institutions or private agents can actually mitigate their efforts or alter its route of action. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this reality is the denial of U.S. grants to anti-trafficking organizations that support prostitution as a form of labor, and thus, reject both morality and pity as apt forms of aid. The construction of a pitiable subject who has a subordinate position in relation to the neoliberal investor-liberator and spiritual mediator-coach, the restrictive criteria for aid allocations, and the convenient disconnection between private donors and pitiable subjects might explain to some extent why, despite the fact that substantial amounts of money are collected annually to continue the fight against human trafficking, the outcomes of these crusades are often invisible, unsustainable, or inconvenient.

3.2 Pity and Migration

One element of the disconnection between saviors and victims that is effectively articulated through pity is the masking and/or justification of practices and ideologies that deprive some subjects from basic human rights. I have examined how exploitative industries are presented by organizations managing the affective circulation of pity as a valid remedy to cure social ills. Pity also allows us to simultaneously partially feel the suffering and struggles that undocumented subjects face while ignoring or validating the ways in which the neoliberal system is invested in preventing and criminalizing some forms of migration. Awareness initiatives like the one crafted by the producers of *Nefarious* fail to address the role that the criminalization of migration plays in the expansion of human trafficking (as if victims could be abstracted from the dynamics of global capitalism and its mechanisms of social control), while some political figures blatantly link migration to illegitimacy, injure for the nation and risk.

Sarah Palin (who labels herself a “bleeding-heart compassionate woman and mother”) has publicly expressed her sympathy for “young illegal aliens flooding across our border into horrendous conditions” but continues to defend xenophobic immigration policies with reductionist claims such as “without borders there is no nation” (Palin). Likewise, conservative pundit Peggy Noonan asserts that “having an open heart, doesn't mean supporting open borders” (Noonan). In her statement, pity emerges as a hollow emotion that helps to infantilize the potential pitied subject who can benefit from our open hearts, but not from our open borders (even if migrating is the only concrete desire of the pitied subject and perhaps the only available route to survival). In a different article, Noonan goes as far as proposing that “we should close our borders. We should do whatever it takes to close them tight and solid ...We should make a list of what our nation needs, such as

engineers and nurses, and then admit a lot of engineers and nurses. We should take in what we need to survive and flourish.” The former statement was cited by evangelical executive and President of the Non-Profit Organization Focus on the Family, Jim Daly, and exemplifies the construction of worthiness that surrounds the issue of immigration in the U.S. As blogger Kali argues on her website *Brilliant Mind, Broken Body*, “When someone is pitied, they stop being a human being to the person who is pitying them. Instead, they are a thing – an object.” Certainly, in Noonan's statement the pitied immigrant becomes an abstract figure, a manipulable object that can be easily disconnected from the larger conditions informing its migration across borders. In his article *Immigration Reform is a Family Concern*, Daly “finds himself resonating with Noonan” and supporting her statement that

The American people would never accept evening news pictures of sobbing immigrants being torn from their homes and put on a bus. We wouldn't accept it because we have hearts, and as much as we try to see history in the abstract, we know history comes down to the particular, to the sobbing child in the bus. We don't round up and remove. Nor should we, tomorrow, on one of our whims, grant full legal status and a Cadillac car (qtd. in Daly).

Noonan's interpretation of the image of “sobbing immigrants being torn from their homes” both informs and is informed by a rhetorical organization of a social order that enhances the power of the American observer/citizen and suppresses it from the dispossessed child/immigrant. Noonan's description of the latter is only useful insofar as it reifies the moral virtue of the American people, who as an act of kindness and humanity won't round up and remove the pitied racialized

child. The fact that the immigrants' lack of legal status places them in a migratory limbo that adds tremendously to their suffering seems to be irrelevant to the author. What is important here is to show that despite our open hearts, or perhaps because of them, we cannot allow our nation to be a soft touch, a penetrable structure, a border that becomes porous and fragile with stories of sobbing immigrants posing an imminent threat to our national security.

The metaphor of the Cadillac reminds us of Linda Taylor, the African-American woman accused in the mid 1970's of collecting more than \$150,000 annually on welfare benefits by supposedly "using 80 names, 30 addresses, 15 telephone numbers to collect food stamps, Social Security, veterans' benefits for four nonexistent deceased veteran husbands, as well as welfare" (Reagan). The legendary con artist who wore fur coats, expensive jewelry, and drove her Cadillac car to the public aid department helped to construct the myth of the black welfare queen and to justify Ronald Reagan's cut to the social welfare safety net. Noonan warns us of the suspicious immigrant whom we should keep in check, so she will not become the new welfare queen who likes to get alcohol, cigarettes and fancy cars with the taxpayers' money. The dispossessed/sobbing immigrant has the dual identity of threat and victim, and hence, can become the subject of our pity but never the beneficiary of a luxurious life. Pity is a gift in itself and is offered to the immigrant under the condition that she remain static in the social status assigned to her. By accepting the gift, though, she is already in debt and obliged.

As Mimi Thi Nguyen observes, "The figuration of debt surfaces as imperial remains that preclude the subject of freedom from being able to escape a colonial order of things" (7). Once accepted, the gifts from the imperial power turn the immigrant into a subordinate debtor, insofar as the gift is not "entirely a gratuitous gesture but instead an *aporia*" marked by the impossibility

of full repayment and thus, an unalterable relation of governor and governed (8). The perpetual condition of debtor should foreclose any possibility of social mobility and access to wealth for the latter.

3.3 Ways of Becoming in Pity

A close look at the definition of human trafficking established in the Palermo Protocol, and included in U.S. legislation and law enforcement practices, forces the avid mind to question some of the interpretations of the definition that blatantly dismiss important aspects of it. Within a considerable number of evangelical anti-trafficking organizations, non-sexual forms of exploitation and abuse linked to quotidian episodes of migration are often overlooked, detached from the definition of human trafficking, or examined in a vacuum that allows the veracity of the stories and the good nature of those who endure them to be questioned. Simultaneously, it is not infrequent to find narratives of fear and aversion regarding sexual deviance, which is often depicted as responsible for the degradation of the family and the weakening of the nation. Law enforcement initiatives favored by these organizations have often ended in the criminalization of voluntary sex work in the case of local “victims” or in the repatriation of foreign bodies of color.

Such approaches of “tough-on-crime undergirded by Christ-like compassion” as Melissa Gira Grant defines them, can be found in initiatives such as Operation Gilded Cage in California that are supposed to assist and rescue Korean migrant women in massage parlors who, according to authorities in the San Francisco area, were smuggled into the U.S. and forced into prostitution through fraud and deceit. From the one hundred women found, less than twelve were certified by law enforcement agents as victims of trafficking. Nevertheless, the majority of the women were deported shortly after the raid, despite the fact that immigration authorities expressed sympathy

with the so-called victims. The logic of deportation behind the “rescuing of victims of human trafficking” resonates with similar procedures adopted in other countries that share a history of massive immigration influxes. In 1999, for example, 599 Chinese asylum seekers traveled to Canada and were portrayed by the government as victims of human smuggling but nonetheless faced criminalization and deportation. Similarly, law enforcement agencies in South Asian countries that have adopted a western approach to the issue of human trafficking (to avoid political tensions with the U.S.) such as Thailand and Cambodia, continue to this day to enforce a tough-on-crime regime that has resulted in the massive arrest of immigrants, including refugees and asylum seekers. In March of 2015, for example, about 300 Pakistani nationals living in Bangkok who fled religious oppression and persecution in Pakistan were arrested by Thai authorities and placed in overcrowded and unhygienic detention centers on the basis of protecting Thailand's national security and tackling the crime of human trafficking. This, despite the fact that almost all detainees have been recognized as refugees by the UNHCR. Through the systemic practices of criminalization and removal that deportation or the threat of deportation entitle, the structural conditions that contribute to the expulsion of people out of their countries is rendered invisible.

Simultaneous to the punishing of immigration, a compulsion to end the “*exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation*” can be found at the core of an important segment of the current anti-trafficking industry that continues to ignore other forms of trafficking deemed as infrequent or less abhorrent (Palermo Protocol). The International Labor Organization estimates that from the approximate 21 million victims of forced labor, about 78% are victims of exploitation (in economic activities such as agriculture, domestic work, construction, manufacturing, or state-imposed forms of forced labor). Despite this, many contemporary

organizations continue arguing that trafficking for sex is the most pervasive form of trafficking and human exploitation. They insist on deploying images of victims secluded within the sex trade to invigorate right-wing anti-trafficking discourses, consolidate a spurious definition of oppression, and animate meager discussions and futile measures to address the global phenomenon of human trafficking. Furthermore, they focus on constructing a very particular pitiable subject in order to create a distance between savior and victim and to elide any considerations of larger structural concerns, such as the many actors (besides johns and pimps) who benefit from the exploitation and disposability of vulnerable subjects.

Exodus Cry's organizers assert that one of their main goals is to “eradicate sex trafficking at its root causes and address the societal factors that allow slavery to exist,” which sounds like a clever and revolutionary purpose. However, some of the strategies to accomplish this goal are superficial and futile as long-term solutions. One of them, for example, is to offer to individuals that the organization has identified (with the cooperation of law enforcement agencies) as victims of sex trafficking “a black bag inscribed with white block letters: **HOPE**. Inside, the bag is filled with hygienic items, cosmetic items, a small Bible, a journal, a gift item, a non-perishable snack, and a handwritten note of support, love, and prayer.” There is no doubt that the bag (especially some of the items in it) might bring a smile to a lonely, hungry soul on a rainy day, but the measure is far from eradicating the root causes that create an unfortunate living situation for that person. We must ask the question of whether these kind of initiatives help to challenge the neoliberal system or to galvanize it, and to what extent framing human trafficking as a moral issue allows for these initiatives to be touted as adequate and exemplary.

The obsession with protecting women's sexuality as a means to preserve familial and

national values and to support the practice of surveillance that is unique to neoliberalism, is evident in the ways images become articulated and institutionalized to produce a unified discourse or regime of truth that validates the conceptual basis of evangelical NGOs. In her analysis of discursive constructions of women in Victorian Britain, Lynda Nead examines artistic representations of female prostitutes as outcast members of the society, observing that inescapable dual categories were ostensibly placed upon them. Either evil subjects or victims, the price for their sinful actions is always sickness or death, accompanied by the emotionless gaze of passers-by. The idea of disruptive femininity that is supposedly embedded in prostitution has accumulated value over time and continues to shape narratives of sexual containment and moral fundamentalism. Narrow images of the prostitute, the trafficked, the poor, the disenfranchised, and the undocumented subject that can be easily traced in NGOs and government portals and websites contribute to flatten the complexities of human adversity in an era of enhanced globalization. Distressing images of broken and prostituted bodies, obscure brothels, and hyper-masculine pimps are privileged in a vast array of contemporary evangelical anti-trafficking campaigns, and are efficiently organized to explain the inherent removal of agency involved in the sex trade.

This removal allows for pity to emerge as an affective register attuned to a patriarchal visuality based on the objectification of female victims. In her examination of the counter-trafficking initiative from the International Organization for Migration, scholar Rutvica Andrijasevic argues that images of female bodies deployed to warn “potential women migrants about the dangers of migration and prostitution, and as a means of empowering them to make informed choices concerning working and traveling abroad” are not necessarily beneficial for potential female migrants, insofar as the majority of those images portray women as “passive

objects of male violence and position them within the spaces of the home and the nation” (Andrijasevic 26). The message embedded in the images is that migration is fundamentally dangerous and should be avoided. Visual representations of women as lifeless dolls and puppets at the mercy of brutal abusers, or those of bruised ankles, wrists in chains, and brown hands holding fences, are meant to discourage women from searching for labor opportunities away from home. Not surprisingly, once dispossessed of all forms of agency after their arrival to the new destination, the only alternatives for victims to express their anguish and find comfort are either suicide or, if they are lucky, the advocacy and pity of a white savior. According to Exodus Cry's founder and CEO Benjamin Nolot,

Working in the anti-trafficking field, I am confronted with stories of execrable sexual abuse almost daily...Considering all the disturbing elements of [oppression] one of the most prevalent is the absence of an advocate.

Although most evangelical organizations assure that they serve all victims equally and that no one is denied services based on their legal status, sexual preference, or religious affiliation, some forms of advocacy and representation can be intimidating and restrictive at times. The goal of restoration, for example, (which is defined by Exodus Cry as “the reintegration of healthy relationships with community, God, and self,” and is widely used by other evangelical organizations) often includes some version of biblical studies and spiritual guidance. In some cases, participation of the victim in such programs is a prerequisite to qualify for some services or to avoid being criminalized by law enforcement agencies. Women referred to Christian-based organizations such as Sold No More (which partners with the influential organization Shared Hope

International funded by the State Department and the Department of Justice), must participate in the restoration program to qualify for release from the justice system (Grant).

Likewise, other global organizations with a strong base in the Global North such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, argue that most victims in the sex trade industry don't even know about their oppression until someone else clarifies it for them. The adverse effect of this approach is noticeable when looking at the shaming and lack of support that “non-traditional” victims of human trafficking must endure. In their examination of the ambivalent relationship between the Canadian sex worker support organization SWAN (Supporting Women's Alternatives Network), government agencies and private donors, grassroots organizers Clancey, Khushrushahi and Ham have observed that the global anti-trafficking movement “jeopardizes the rights of sex workers.” In their investigation, the authors concluded that “the moral crusade against sex work continues to conflate sex work and human trafficking in funding processes” (94).

One of the challenges of undisciplined subjects that break the mold of victimization and maintain revolutionary positions regarding what it means to be free and empowered is how develop sustainable humanitarian projects without endorsing some modalities of moral advocacy marked by the dominant construction of a pitiable subject. The insidiousness of pity is not exclusively related to its inefficacy in prompting sustainable change for its recipients, but also to the ways in which it legitimizes a neoliberal approach to social life, where surveillance of sexuality, market fundamentalism, expansion of racialized imprisonment, financial insecurity for the majority, and restricted circulation of a certain segment of the world's population across borders, operate simultaneously and in complementary ways with the support of a misinformed/panicked audience and the patronage of a security state apparatus. Overcoming pity as form of aid requires a critical

examination of the well-crafted image of the pitiable subject and the feelings that this image triggers in the spectator, as well as a thorough inquiry of the nefarious forces of neoliberalism that paradoxically remain hidden behind the haunting image of the default trafficking victim.

4 WHO IS DOING THE RAPING?

In a perfect display of xenophobic ranting, Donald Trump asserted during his presidential announcement speech on June 16 of 2015, that Mexico “has a lot of problems and they are bringing those problems with us [*sic*]. They are bringing drugs; they are bringing crime. They are rapists and some, I assume, are good people, but I speak to border guards and they are telling us what we are getting. And it only makes common sense” (“Presidential Announcement”). The Latino community and their supporters did not wait long to express their indignation, although most people acknowledged that Trump's remarks are certainly a demonstration of a long-held hate rhetoric against a certain class of immigrant and certain forms of migration, and thus, should not come as surprising. Some people such as Lisa Navarrete from the National Council of La Raza believe that such offensive claims can only be vocalized by “a man who has a pathological need for attention” (qtd. in Gabbatt), while other political commentators observe that the presidential candidate and millionaire businessman is “explicitly playing into an us-versus-them narrative that is not only factually dumb but divisive and dangerous” (Kohn).

From celebrities and political pundits, to comedians and immigrants from Mexico and most countries from Central and South America, an abundance of creative responses to Trump's claims have emerged. Dalton Ramirez is one of the artists who created a Trump piñata featuring the candidate's original hairstyle and overall appearance. He marketed his creation on twitter with the tag “now Mexico can get even with Donald Trump” (translation mine), and reported a tremendous success at his store in the city of Reynosa, Mexico (qtd. in PIX11). Known for his defense of a punitive approach as an ideal deterrent against immigrants (which in his view are mostly drug lords, rapists, and job-stealers “swarming the border”), Donald Trump felt anything but remorse

about his controversial comments during his presidential announcement. In fact, he has reiterated his preoccupation with the United States becoming a “dumping ground” for unwanted foreigners. On a CNN interview a few days after his presidential announcement, Trump claimed that “the statistics on rape, on crime, coming illegally into this country, they're mind boggling. If you go to Fusion you will see a story about 80 percent of the women coming in -- I mean, you have to take a look at these stories” (“Donald Trump”). When CNN host Don Lemon pointed out that the statistics Trump referred to from Fusion were of women being raped at the U.S.-Mexico border and not criminals entering the country, Trump fired back at Lemon, asserting, “somebody is doing the raping” (“Donald Trump”). Although the authors of the article in question indicate that along with coyotes and gang members, government officials are also perpetrators of sexual abuse against migrant women from Central America, Trump did not engage with this particular clarification. He believes that border patrol officers are “incredible people,” and thus, his remarks are meant to exclusively invoke the figure of a racialized thug, and sublimate the myth of his dangerous presence (McIntyre and Bonello).

Trump's anti-immigrant comments gravitate around the affective registers of pity and panic. The first remark in the interview was meant to transmit a message of fear in regards to a racialized other whose unlawful transgression marks him as a criminal and puts the nation at risk. Once the interviewer questioned his interpretation of Fusion's article, Trump was not a bit apologetic. Instead, he appealed to the use of pity to communicate a veiled “concern” about brown women being victimized by brown criminals. Regardless of whether or not Trump has a chance of becoming a real contender in the upcoming presidential elections, his anti-immigrant narrative should be examined as part of a larger neoliberal discourse that circulates around political spaces,

entrepreneurial practices, evangelical initiatives, anti-trafficking campaigns, etc., in which individual freedom is only really accessible to a global elite, while the rest of the population is subjected to surveillance and expected to accommodate to the naturalized inequalities of the marketplace. The construction of a loose category of suspicious others allows us to identify Mexicans, Albanians, Arabs, undocumented bodies, welfare recipients, irreverent prostitutes, queer subjects, and those who contest norms in other different ways, as the main source of our fear. By presenting these subjects as a homogeneous mass of dark enemies that threaten to overwhelm the nation, discourses of mistrust and surveillance techniques give shape to both criminal policies and rescue practices. In the particular case of human trafficking, the current crusade against it reveals that to some degree, not only the uncivilized trafficker, but also the racialized victim is perceived as suspicious and unworthy of the gift of freedom, which might explain why pity has emerged as the most frequent form of aid. In sum, a neoliberal form of governance proposed by wealthy entrepreneurs like Donald Trump and supported by less comical actors like Benjamin Nolot and other “modern evangelicals” necessitates the active circulation of fear to justify the imperatives of the global marketplace and the construction of subordinate neoliberal subjects.

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