

Taking Better Account: Contemporary Slavery, Gendered Narratives, and the Feminization of Struggle

Women are taking leading roles in redefining social concepts and global policy issues in areas such as development, democracy, human rights, world security, and the environment. This means not just looking at what have been called “women’s issues”—a ghetto, or separate sphere that remains on the margins of society—but rather moving women from the margins to the center by questioning the most fundamental concepts of our social order so that they take better account of women’s lives.¹

Not just “victims” but perpetrators and responders, too, are characters whose stories and personal details convey the gendered character of human rights reporting. Accepting this fact and considering that male responders and perpetrators feature in human rights narratives more often than female, it also follows that male as well as female gender constructs are encoded in human rights narratives. These principles—that gender is a salient dimension of the construction of all three figures in Makau Mutua’s triumvirate of “saint, savage and victim,” and that preconceptions about masculinity as well as femininity give texture and emotional depth to human rights representations—are the starting point for my reading of the gender of human rights narratives.²

A feminist reading, following Charlotte Bunch’s words in the epigraph, means not just looking at “women’s issues” but questioning fundamental aspects of the social order. Are there aspects of the global social order that, when taken for granted within human rights discourse, work in tandem with assumed aspects of small-scale social orders to relegate women and derogated minorities to silence and passivity? I present evidence that such exclusionary effects are real but operate subtly—blanket critique of human rights is not what I seek and it is not my point to style human rights the handmaiden of a new imperialism. Without gainsaying errors of commission, the focus deserves to be just as much on errors of omission.

By examining narratives of rescue that dominate antislavery discourse today, I make the case that rescue stories are guided by a masculinist politics, in which men but never women can stand up for their rights. In miniaturized form, rescue stories reflect a global human rights *Machtpolitik*: a benevolent West (the rescuer writ large) is discursively positioned as the world’s sole possible force for justice, as antislavery

narratives omit or at best skip lightly over evidence that members of communities afflicted by coerced exploitation are organizing in defense of their own rights. Emplotting antislavery solely as rescue, then, slights the initiative of the oppressed and ignores their activist agenda. Facilitating that error are two commonly voiced human rights activist aspirations which may seem thoroughly benign even to many political progressives: the first is that might can be made to make right, through lobbying the world's powerful states to pressure less powerful states into conformity with human rights norms; the second is that the North American and Western European target audiences of human rights denunciations are capable of acting out of morally enlightened benevolence. Nothing per se is wrong with these aspirations. Indeed, it is often only through publicly demanded international pressure that human rights progress is possible. Yet the resulting blend of a citizen-driven politics of persuasion and principle, on one hand, and an international relations power play, on the other, can squeeze other approaches—based on dialogue and, quite often, woman-led—to the margins of human rights discourse, resulting at times in misapplications of international pressure and negative outcomes that could have been averted.

I signal recognition of the global reach of these concerns by beginning the main body of this essay with analysis of a fictionalized realist portrayal of sex slavery in Nepal and India. From that point, I develop my concerns through a reading of journalistic reports, feature-length dramatic films, and video documentaries concerning one case, which I have been studying as an ethnographer for years: that of human rights mobilization in favor of migrant and minority rights for people of Haitian ancestry in the Dominican Republic. Even as new abolitionist activists depict the employment of Haitian nationals and Haitian-ancestry people in the sugar cane fields of Haiti's Caribbean neighbor, the Dominican Republic, to be one of the world's most amply documented cases of contemporary slavery, enslavement is not the only prevalent diagnosis of this oppressed minority's situation. The frontline human rights activists, headed by leaders who are themselves Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry (whom I refer to collectively as "Haitian-Dominicans" or "Haitian-ancestry Dominicans"), make little or no mention of contemporary slavery in their public statements. They prefer to portray their minority group's predicament as one of undefined national citizenship and incipient statelessness. This contrast, between a group of activists who cry "slavery" in international fora and a group that seeks to mobilize Haitian-Dominicans behind the banner of national citizenship, coincides not only with the activists' degree of proximity to the wronged communities but with the gender coordinates of each side's narratives, rights agenda, and activist personae.

In-depth familiarity with the Haitian-Dominican case, then, permits me to read a handful of today's antislavery stories with careful attention not just to the content of the texts but the contexts of their telling. While today's antislavery narratives are too numerous and diverse, in geographical locale, social setting, and genre, for me to be able to offer anything more than a reading situated from my particular angle of approach, the very ubiquity of contemporary slavery allegations underscores the importance of developing critical approaches to today's antislavery discourse.

The Stories We Tell

Slavery is back. Perhaps it never went away. Or so we are being asked to believe, by scholarly, activist, and journalistic exposés of new slavery and other egregious violations of human liberty—human trafficking, child labor, debt bondage, and forced labor.³ It no longer suffices to denounce slavery one place at a time, recent publications assert, because slavery has become so pervasive in our everyday milieus. It follows that ordinary citizens ought to feel the responsibility “to fight forced labor,” a struggle to be waged in large part by suburbanites looking for signs of the presence of “the slave next door” (the title of a 2008 book co-authored by the new abolitionism’s leading scholar-activist, Kevin Bales).⁴

These tacit understandings of how we may combat slavery today, fighting for right or sleuthing out hidden wrongs, coincide with modern antislavery discourse’s dominant chivalric and legal-forensic imaginaries, the first expressed through narratives of heroic rescuers confronting absolute evil, the second in implicit emplotments of human rights investigation as a prosecutorial “bringing to account” of wrong-doers, whether in actual tribunals or before the “court of world opinion.” The narrative expressions of both of these imaginaries come freighted with gender representations. If every human rights investigation involves projecting a narrative forward and backward in time—providing an account of why one individual or entitled social group is mistreating another and envisioning a path through which justice may be achieved—then the narratives that go with the representational paradigm of contemporary slavery cast the responder in the role of either a rescuer or a prosecutor.⁵ What are the gender and global cultural political implications when, in today’s antislavery narratives, the responder’s heroic actions cast a shadow of passivity over the sufferers and that responder is invariably Western or Western-educated and usually a male?

To be sure, there are other possible imaginaries, narratives, and paths to justice within the broad domain of human rights. Of particular importance to the argument that I develop here is the “agentive imaginary.” This prescribes another mode of responding to coerced exploitation, shifting outsiders’ roles from rescuer or prosecutor to supporter of poor people’s movements. There is a genuine reason to worry that narratives framed around the representational paradigm of contemporary slavery routinely erase the voices and the agency of protagonists of freedom struggle, who emerge from among communities afflicted by coerced exploitation, in favor of preserving a role, as rescuer or prosecutor, for an outsider with an obligation.

Fully formed stories of enslavement, resistance, and rescue, with character development, background stories, description of settings, and scenes, feature centrally in antislavery publications in a variety of textual and visual genres, including academic studies,⁶ reports of governmental, inter-governmental, and non-governmental organizations,⁷ memoirs and journalistic exposés,⁸ newspaper and magazine investigative reports,⁹ novellas and graphic novels,¹⁰ movies,¹¹ public exhibits,¹² photo-essays,¹³ and documentary films.¹⁴ Clearly, the growing diversity of the wrongs, subsumed under the terms “contemporary” or “modern” slavery, exceeds what any one regional expert can encompass, and the multiplicity of media and genres through which coerced exploitation is represented challenges any one interpreter’s disciplinary tools. Even so

I aim to project a broad agenda by considering what kinds of history and sociology are being conveyed by today's slavery stories and seeking new kinds of stories, subject positions, and solidarity options for concerned northern citizens through a greater appreciation of coerced workers' capacity for self-liberation and a fuller knowledge of the historical origins and sociological contexts of the wrongs.

Who Is a "Slave"?

The stories of two teenage girls—Lakshmi, a sex slave as portrayed in a recent work of fiction, and *Elimé*, a twelve-year-old Haitian-Dominican girl who defies soldiers' orders to abandon her family's home—illustrate two poles of the agency exercisable by people whom today's antislavery activists categorize as "slaves."

Lakshmi

In Patricia McCormick's young adult novel *Sold*, a thirteen-year-old Nepali girl named Lakshmi is sold into sexual slavery by her impoverished stepfather, behind the lie that she would get a job as a maid in an Indian city. Through short chapters of intermittent first-person testimony and third-person descriptions of her life's desperate circumstances and downward spiral of degradation, the character of Lakshmi combines all the criteria of deserving victimhood established in the Western imaginary by a succession of fables of rescue and redemption traceable to nineteenth-century abolitionism and colonial moral reform movements: femininity, youth, innocence, passivity, gullibility, and an experience of recruitment into bondage entirely through deception.¹⁵ All these make Lakshmi a pure victim, in no way culpable for her predicament and stripped of all free will and agency by her captors. With the innocence, weakness, and passivity of a child, she experiences recruitment by deception followed by captivity under the most terrible mistreatment and exploitation, exemplifying perfectly the kind of character and plot that scholars have understood to typify "white slavery" and colonial reform narratives and justly condemned for their propensity to reduce nonwhite, nonbourgeois women to dependent nonsubjecthood.¹⁶

McCormick does not close her eyes to other contributing factors behind modern slavery. In *Sold*, poverty seeded with ignorance is slavery's perfect growth medium. That message is brought out with evocative concreteness from page one of *Sold*, through the image of the added protection, comfort, and convenience that village families other than Lakshmi's gain from a possession as simple and modest as a tin roof: "A tin roof means that the family has a father who doesn't gamble away the landlord's money playing cards in the tea shop. A tin roof means the family has a son working at the brick kiln in the city. A tin roof means that when the rains come, the fire stays lit and the baby stays healthy."¹⁷

Yet poverty alone does not a slave make. In the book's pivotal scene, an American antislavery activist infiltrates the brothel where Lakshmi is being kept, and through the medium of Lakshmi's thoughts it is reiterated that she is a captive, pure and simple. In a move that repeats many an earlier sentimental novel's evocation of an entrapped young woman catching a fleeting glimpse of freedom, mention of

Lakshmi's physical confinement is reiterated just as the words of the American evoke the possibility of her just walking away:

The American man whispers. His way of speaking my language is hurried now as he reads from a battered Nepali wordbook. [. . .]

“What the fat woman does here to you is bad,” he says. “Very bad.”

I nod.

“She cannot force you to do these things.”

The American is not so magical after all, I decide.

He doesn't know about Mumtaz's leather strap.

And the goondas.

And the chain on the door.

“I will come back for you,” he says. “I will come back with other men, good men, from this country—fathers and uncles who want to help—policemen who are not friends of Mumtaz. We will take you away from here.”¹⁸

The alacrity with which McCormick erases any possibility that Lakshmi might liberate herself suggests a choice on her part to avoid engaging constraint of any but the most literal and physical kind. The hint that something other than physical restraints might hold Lakshmi in place (“She cannot force you to do these things”) sends McCormick into a mode of “paradigm repair work,” the effect of which is to reestablish that market constraints, skill deficits, and gender bias cannot make a slave; only a door locked from the outside can.¹⁹

Critique of the simplifications and outright distortions involved in equating sex workers with slaves emerged early in the current upsurge of public and scholarly concern about contemporary slavery, coming mainly from advocates of sex-worker rights who denounced the paternalistic and moralistic premises of antitrafficking activism.²⁰ Considering that gender stereotyping of the sex slave as a passive captive as exemplified by the figure of Lakshmi in *Sold* not only lives on but still characterizes the majority of stories told about slavery today, such feminist critique of the gender politics of rescue and redemption narratives remains timely and necessary.

Does this mean that there is no reality to contemporary slavery outside of the fevered imaginations of the storytellers? That seems like an overly simplified conclusion and is questionable in light of what experts know about the amplitude of today's crisis of human smuggling and trafficking.²¹ Whether or not the prevalence of contemporary slavery can be reliably determined, little reassurance is gained if the cause of sex-worker rights is dropped in order to wish these strategizing agents best of luck in finding their niches in the global economy.

A second problem with dismissing antitrafficking campaigning as a new moral panic is that, even as feminist critics of the discourse around “trafficking” accurately denounce the disproportionate attention given to sex trafficking by both activists and law enforcers, there remains a need to consider those contemporary slavery allegations that do not involve sexual exploitation.²² As more varied forms of slavery are catalogued across today's global landscape, a greater measure of experimentation in character and plot seems to be entering into stories told about slavery today—some of

which do momentarily or completely dispense with the stereotyped grounding figure of a passive, innocent, young female victim.

Elimé

In a report available on the Haiti Support Group website concerning the recognition of Sonia (Solange) Pierre, head of the Haitian immigrant rights advocacy group *Movimiento de Mujeres Dominicano-Haitianas* (Haitian-Dominican Women's Movement, or MUDHA), as the recipient of Amnesty International USA's 2003 Ginetta Sagan Fund Award, a snippet of resistance narrative is provided as background.²³ In that fragment of a narrative, a twelve-year-old Haitian-ancestry girl named Elimé defies soldiers' orders to abandon her family's home on the outskirts of the Dominican Republic's second-largest city, Santiago, and be sent to a "homeland" in which she has never set foot:

Elimé Gonzales stands facing the four Dominican soldiers. "I am not going to leave," she says. The soldiers say nothing. [. . .] 12-year-old Elimé continues her defiance. "I will not leave. I go to school here. I belong here and it is my right to be here. You go. Leave us alone."

The young girl's outburst and the presence of witnesses worry the soldiers. They change their mind about deporting Elimé and her family. "Let's just leave them," they mutter and walk off, away from the small river bank community in Santiago. Elimé says they have never been back.

With the benefit of a supportive and mobilized community organization, the protagonist of this particular antislavery narrative takes a hand in shaping her own fate. Her story concludes in a strikingly different and more positive manner than a more conventional slave narrative would allow.

Elimé's story poses an interpretive dilemma that coincides precisely with the source of ambiguity that McCormick and uncounted other new abolitionist storytellers seek to avoid when she provides a hint, and quickly hides it again, that it takes more than physical restraint to make a person a slave. Elimé, like Lakshmi, is young, female, impoverished, and, if left on her own, would unquestionably be vulnerable to coercion. Yet backed as she is by vigilant neighbors and coached in her rights by fellow Haitian-Dominican community activists, she is the opposite of a pure victim who stands passively in need of rescue from coerced exploitation. Her assertiveness raises the simple and obvious sociological question, of the kind nearly every new abolitionist storyteller today tries to shield us from asking: Is she, like Lakshmi, a "slave"?

Is It "Slavery"?

The situation of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic stands widely accepted as one of the most amply and convincingly documented cases of contemporary slavery in the world, and the accuracy and utility of this diagnosis remains unquestioned by pro-Haitian-Dominican rights activists both within and outside the Dominican Republic. Yet even if the allegation of sugar slavery has elicited few objections internationally, there is a notable unevenness among the Haitian-Dominican

community's friends overseas about how much emphasis should be given to the slavery allegation.

For some, slavery is *the* issue, while for others it is not an issue at all. The division closely follows institutional lines. Independent filmmakers and a number of concerned academics and community members approach the Haitian-Dominican case as an opportunity to rally people around the new abolitionist cause.²⁴ Leading international human rights monitor organizations and legal clinics finesse the publicity-grabbing allegation of enslavement by neither repudiating it nor endorsing it, even as their reports no longer make any mention at all of new slavery and give emphasis instead to more pervasive problems of deprivation of citizenship to Haitian-ancestry Dominicans and denial of legal residence status and due process rights to de facto permanent resident Haitian nationals.²⁵

An inescapable background fact is that Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. As a consequence of this proximity and Haiti's fame as a nation of black rebels, Dominicans have for generations seen themselves challenged to say who they are to the world by conceptual opposition with Haiti and things Haitian. Dominicans' expressions of antipathy to Haiti, as the literary scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant observes, must therefore be understood against the context of a racist nineteenth- and early twentieth-century world order, in which acceptance or rejection from representatives of "civilized" Western European and North American nations hinged on whether Dominicans chose to portray themselves as brownish Spaniards or scarcely whitened Haitians.²⁶

Dominicans' Europhilic collective self-representations have met perhaps their greatest challenge in the Dominican Republic's longstanding dependence on seasonally imported migrant labor from Haiti for the harvest of its sugar cane. Here again, agents from overseas were essential in bringing Dominicans and Haitians into quotidian contact on the sugar estates, thus adding a new level of complexity to Dominicans' definitions of themselves by opposition to Haitians. Following the American military invasion and seizure of power in the Dominican Republic in 1916, a labor recruitment system was instituted under U.S. watch, one much like that now being denounced as slavery. It involved the dispatch of Haitian Kreyòl-speaking touts into the Haitian countryside to bring cane cutters directly to agents of particular sugar estates, was regulated through a series of U.S. military government ordinances, and was run primarily for the benefit of U.S.-based multinational sugar companies and their international creditors.²⁷ The post-1916 mechanism of recruitment continued with only a few temporary interruptions after the Americans relinquished rule to the Dominicans in 1924; it continued even as another, official bilateral labor recruitment treaty also brought Haitian seasonal workers by the thousands each year between 1952 and 1986, and recruitment of seasonal workers in Haiti by company touts continues into the present.²⁸

In 1978, when the earliest international report appeared denouncing the recruitment and employment of Haitian men as seasonal cane cutters in the Dominican sugar industry as a new form of slavery, the official seasonal labor contract was the focus.²⁹ Following the suspension of that treaty, with the fall of Haitian president Jean-Claude Duvalier in 1987, allegations of contemporary slavery were retro-

fitted by human rights investigators to focus on the older, informal labor recruitment scheme. The essential fact to highlight here is that the allegation of Dominican sugar slavery today is a revenant: prior to the wave of documentary and fictional films exploring variants on the sugar slavery theme, set in motion by the release of the documentary film *The Price of Sugar* in 2007, it had been fifteen years since any report on the Haitian-Dominican situation by a major international human rights monitor organization had taken contemporary slavery as its focus.³⁰

Key events had occurred during those fifteen years, on both the international and domestic fronts, to take the contemporary slavery allegation off the activist priority agenda. In 1996, the report by the human rights investigator Patrick Gavigan, *Beyond the Bateyes*, revealed that, beyond the international concern focusing on the allegedly enslaved *braceros* (seasonal sugar-cane workers), the Dominican Republic also hosted substantial populations of Haitian immigrant women and Haitian-ancestry settlers, each with its own set of grave human rights problems that had gone unmentioned in prior international exposés.³¹ *Beyond the Bateyes* (the word refers to company compounds for agricultural workers) set in motion something like a paradigm shift, in which international monitors' perceptions of the Haitian-Dominican rights situation were suddenly reorganized to conform to a more encompassing scenario than contemporary slavery.

A second crucial change followed soon after, in 1997, when newly elected Dominican president Leonel Fernández suppressed the involvement of the Dominican armed forces and national police in the forced relocation of undocumented Haitians to the sugar estates, thereby ending the most flagrant rights infringement that remained at the core of the Dominican sugar slavery allegations. Then came the Dominican sugar industry's near catastrophic economic decline. By the moment when allegations of Dominican sugar slavery broke again, in 2006, the country's total sugar production stood at less than one-third of its former peak level of the late 1970s, even though sugar exports to the United States had experienced an uptick in 2005 with the Dominican Republic–Central American Free Trade Agreement.³²

After years of downsizing and reprivatization of the country's state-owned sugar emporium imposed by the International Monetary Fund, the main threat to the workers' well-being today stems not from American support for the Dominican sugar industry but from the growing redundancy of that industry's product in international markets. One positive consequence has been that the sugar companies' grip over their workers has relaxed to the point where company guards and *batey*-level supervisors now circulate without firearms and leave plantation residents free to come and go as they wish, and plantation residents now feel more free than before to organize self-help groups.

The initiative of the oppressed, as people of Haitian ancestry mobilized in defense of their rights across the Dominican Republic, stands at the crux of both the 1990s shift of human rights reporting away from the Dominican sugar slavery construct and today's tacit disagreement about the continued relevance of "slavery," which constitutes an unspoken divide between institutionally anchored and independent international activists. It is not coincidental that *Beyond the Bateyes* took first steps toward redefining international perceptions of the Haitian-Dominican agenda and was the

first major international report to cite interviews with Haitian-ancestry rights activists, giving a place of particular textual prominence to Sonia Pierre, lead coordinator of MUDHA, a woman who would become an international symbol of her people's rights struggle. If Haitian-Dominican activists had not been signaling the way first, it is questionable whether international advocates for Haitian-Dominicans' rights would have deemphasized the new slavery allegation, as they did in such opportune ways in the mid-1990s.

In shifting the international focus toward issues surrounding repatriation of Haitian nationals without due process and the denial of citizenship rights to Dominicans of Haitian ancestry, Gavigan's report, and even more prominently a *Human Rights Watch* report of 2002 titled "Illegal People," aligned international human rights advocacy with priorities defined by Haitian-Dominican partner organizations. That trend gained even stronger momentum and more significant results, from the mid-1990s through the next ten to fifteen years, with the presentation of claims before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) by MUDHA, in collaboration with the international human rights law clinics of the University of California-Berkeley and Columbia University and the Washington-based Center for Justice and International Law. Important as that regional court's rulings in favor of specific injured parties have been, it is of comparable significance that international advocates began coordinating their agenda with Haitian-Dominican rights organizations rather than defining activist priorities on their own.³³

Foremost among the complexities that led leading international human rights institutions to soft-pedal if not repudiate the Dominican sugar slavery allegation is that contemporary slavery is not the priority for Pierre or for any other leader of a Haitian-Dominican rights organization. Their stated priorities include rights of citizenship for the Dominican-born children of Haitian nationals; rights of residence and due process for undocumented migrants; and rights for women to live in security, with sexual autonomy and freedom from the most degrading effects of poverty. As recently as March 2009, I spent an hour and a half interviewing Sonia Pierre, and during that time she never once mentioned the words "esclavitud moderna" (contemporary slavery) or any concept resembling new slavery. In that interview, she repeatedly brought forward evidence and described recent developments underscoring just how serious an attack appears to be coalescing to deny citizenship documents to any further children of Haitian ancestry and to revoke the Dominican citizenship of even those Haitian-Dominicans who have bona fide legal identity papers.

The Onion of Oppression

Pierre and MUDHA are remarkable not just for partnering with U.S.-based human rights lawyers in international litigation against the Dominican state but also in the broad spectrum of their activist portfolio. MUDHA spun off from the pioneer Haitian-Dominican rights organization, the Centro Cultural Dominicano-Haitiano (Haitian-Dominican Cultural Center, CCDH) in 1983. But it was not officially incorporated as an organization until 1992. MUDHA's mission is to defend and promote the rights of female Haitian immigrants and to attain rights of full citizenship for their Dominican-born children. MUDHA's mission statement defines these rights in the

widest terms: “civil, political, economic, social, cultural and human.”³⁴ If international human rights monitor groups have focused on wearing away the most obvious and flagrant abuses, then Haitian-Dominican activists have sought to pierce all the layers of injustice, exclusion, and abuse of oppression’s onion by simultaneously militating for economic development, women’s empowerment, cultural revitalization, and constitutional rights.

MUDHA’s methods go beyond the shaming tactics, litigation, government lobbying, and letter-writing campaigns used by international human rights monitor groups. Both CCDH and MUDHA work along the community-participatory lines first developed by the Brazilian educator and community activist Paolo Freire. These begin with meetings with local residents to determine what their needs are and to identify underlying problems. Through joint consultation, community members decide which of their many needs to try to address first. In each community project, CCDH and MUDHA organizers also attempt to promote consciousness of the wider social context. If a community group identifies a need for sanitary facilities, for example, group members are encouraged to reflect on the conditions that make it possible for employers and the state to neglect this basic need—for example, that because they are Haitians, they are expected to accept any work, anywhere, regardless of the conditions. As CCDH director Antonio Pol Emil summarizes, “In the *bateyes*, in the neighborhoods where we work, we promote the participation of Haitians and Dominicans, and in that participatory work, we carry out a labor of consciousness-raising, of struggle against racism, at the community level [*a nivel de pueblo*].”³⁵

CCDH and MUDHA have developed an alternative grassroots model of activism that aims primarily at building their constituency’s ability to promote and defend its own rights. Both organizations will take legal action and publicly denounce wrongs when circumstances, such as mass deportations or unjust detention, demand an immediate response. Their staff members are also called upon more or less constantly to intervene with the authorities on behalf of individuals or families in need of immediate legal or medical assistance. Outside of such emergencies, staffers of both CCDH and MUDHA prefer to avoid taking the responsibility for formulating an effective path of action out of the hands of the wronged parties. The preferred strategy is to accompany the sufferers of injustice along their chosen path of action, limiting intervention to encouragement and advice along the way. Rather than just getting a hearing from the competent authorities, rights claimants may thus grow in awareness and in skills that may be of use to them in confronting some of the many other problems in their lives.³⁶

It is precisely for this reason that controversy initially swirled among members of the Red Jacques Viau, the network of Haitian-Dominican rights activists that meets to harmonize priorities among Haitian-Dominican rights advocacy organizations, as they debated whether it would be advisable to partner with international human rights lawyers in litigation before the IACHR.³⁷ Doubts about the international litigation strategy centered on whether this would take leadership out of community members’ hands and divert finite organizational resources away from community mobilization. These doubts seem to have been assuaged partly by MUDHA’s maintaining a vigorous program of partnership with community-based groups, even during the most intensive

phases of the drawn-out litigation cycle, and have been largely put aside after Haitian-Dominican victories at the IACHR. International human rights litigation thus seems to have gained acceptance as one more front in a “broad-spectrum” struggle, even as consensus still reigns among Red Jacques Viau member organizations that patient, community-centered, capacity-building approaches stand at the center of the Haitian-Dominican rights struggle.

These approaches are premised on the idea that, in order to avoid the worst abuses, members of the downtrodden Haitian minority must be prepared to stand up for their rights, whether this involves resisting attempts by soldiers or the police to evict and deport them, demanding admission to schools or service at health clinics, or gaining the literacy skills needed to decipher a property deed or other legal document.³⁸ Presupposed by the Haitian-Dominican rights organizations’ grassroots, participatory model of intervention is a concept of the Haitian-ancestry targets of oppression that is substantially different from what the Dominican sugar slavery allegation would suggest. From the Haitian-Dominican advocates’ perspective, the immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry are sooner potential agents of change than beings who must be rescued from slavery-like conditions.

Who Is a “Rescuer”?

But this community-based, human-capacity-building approach frequently risks being overshadowed by the kinds of interventions on Haitian-Dominicans’ behalf that had been celebrated internationally during the first international outpouring of human rights reports alleging Dominican sugar slavery from 1978 to 1992. The example of another media report concerning the award of a major human rights prize to a bona fide hero in the struggle for Haitian rights in the Dominican Republic suggests as much. Broadcast on the BBC World Service, the report recognizes the bestowal of an award by the London-based Anti-Slavery Society in 1994 to the Episcopal priest Father Edwin Paraison for his work with the “forced labor gangs” of his fellow Haitians who work on the sugar plantations of the neighboring Dominican Republic.³⁹

Trish Williams, a reporter, interviewed Paraison in the small city of Barahona, about an hour east of the Haitian border in the southwestern Dominican Republic. Speaking through a translator, Paraison explained how the forced labor system operates. The cane workers are recruited by employees of the state sugar plantations, at times with false promises of easy work at good pay. Once on the sugar plantations, the workers are trapped, without documentation, working under atrocious conditions, and earning barely enough to eat. Armed guards patrol the plantation. Children as young as nine are employed cutting cane, without health care or education. While a Dominican government spokesperson denied that modern slavery exists on the plantations, Father Paraison told of having “to undertake clandestine missions to rescue children from the *bateyes* and return them to their parents or church organizations in Haiti.” Paraison’s translator described these rescue missions as follows: “The practice was to start off at three o’clock in the morning when there wasn’t much vigilance (from the armed guards). There went a vehicle that clandestinely would go to the *bateyes* and get the people in the vehicle and take them to the border.” Williams: “Was there any danger?” Paraison, without waiting for translation: “Yeah, yeah.”

Such a diagnosis of slavery prescribes a remedy of rescue. Nothing in contemporary slavery discourse limits our outreach to rescue alone, but the imperative is that the slave must first be freed from the clutches of the slaveholder. The mode of solidarity is singular and heroic.

Beyond their common concern with infringements of the Haitian minority's rights, this report, like the one with Elimé's story at its center, is made compelling by featuring a child's predicament: Paraison's testimony about children as young as nine being forced to labor in the cane fields is echoed in Elimé's brave stand for her rights. In both reports, narrative also makes the allegations believable: we believe that Haitian children are being imprisoned as slaves because Father Paraison recounts sneaking onto the plantations under cover of night to rescue them; we believe that Haitian-Dominicans are standing up for their rights with the guidance and support of organizations like Pierre's MUDHA because, through the story of Elimé, we can envision even a child of twelve doing so.

But the similarities end there. The report featuring Father Paraison implicitly depicts the children as faceless and voiceless beings who must be rescued and extracted, by outsiders, from the remote setting of the sugar plantations. Elimé, by contrast, is a child with a face and a name, who speaks for herself and stands up for her rights. The boys whom Paraison speaks of rescuing from the *bateyes* need to be returned to their homes in Haiti where they belong. Having been born and schooled on the Dominican side of the border after her parents set down roots there, Elimé is already where she feels she belongs, and wishes to stay. This report also contrasts with the report on Paraison in showing valor to be possessed not only by the award recipient, Pierre, but to be widely shared among Haitian-Dominicans. The mode of action in this case consists of exercising the rights of a citizen and electing to stay put rather than accepting removal from a milieu that, while it no doubt exposes these people to potential mistreatment, also offers the basis of their livelihoods.

The two reports put on display different models of solidarity in the defense of human rights, reflecting the differing styles of activism represented by the awardees and more broadly charting, over the ten years or so that separated the two awards, a shift in the fundamental strategy of advocacy on behalf of Haitian descendants in the Dominican Republic. As a Haitian national, Paraison stands one degree closer to the coerced workers than most other former or current protagonists of slave rescue, but he is not a cane worker, whereas Pierre was born in the Dominican Republic and raised in a *batey*. Paraison's style of intervention, externally guided and paternalistic, implicitly positions the Haitian targets of oppression as beings incapable of extracting themselves from an abusive situation. Pierre's community-based and participatory approach is premised on the idea that, in order to avoid the worst abuses, members of the downtrodden Haitian minority must be able to stand up for their rights in confrontations with government authorities and other agents of concentrated power. Activists can best help by providing education and monitoring to prepare and assist the community's own people to become agents of change. The mode of solidarity is, in this case, collective and patient.

The Feminization of Struggle

A final, and equally substantial, contrast is the gender politics of rescue versus community mobilization as modes of intervention. In the first wave of international human rights reports on the Haitian-Dominican situation, centering on the sugar slavery allegation, the *braceros*, the putative “slaves” of our story, had been virtually the exclusive objects of international concern and sympathy. The very existence of Haitian immigrant women went almost unmentioned from the earliest international exposés of the late 1970s through the reports of the early 1990s. As rights advocacy switched focus in the 1990s—geographically from the sugar plantations to non-sugar-producing zones, substantively from the suppression of slavery-like practices to the defense of citizens’ rights, and strategically from outside rescue to community-based self-help and consciousness-raising, training and organization—the gender dimensions of the wrongs and injustices also emerged with greater clarity.

The ascent into the international spotlight of a female community representative, Sonia Pierre, is but the most obvious indicator of a *feminization* of struggle, breaking decisively with the near-total invisibility of women in the reportage on plantation neoslavery of the late 1970s through early 1990s.⁴⁰ Feminization is a matter of substance as well as personnel. Domestic violence prevention, microcredit, and community and reproductive health—issues commonly identified with women’s rights—have gained prominence among the social and economic rights to which Haitian-Dominican rights organizations (of which MUDHA is only the best known) have attached high priority.⁴¹

Even Pierre’s international human rights presence, in litigation before the IACHR, hews to the larger feminization of the Haitian-Dominican rights agenda. Starting with a group of Haitian-descendant men, women, and children who had been unlawfully removed to Haiti, and culminating with the women and girls who filed the landmark Bosico and Yean citizenship claim, the claimants on whose behalf the cases were being brought to the IACHR are no longer just the men whom an earlier generation of international monitors had depicted to be in need of rescue from bondage. Better account is being taken of women’s lives and also of the life circumstances of all people of Haitian ancestry, on the plantations and off.

As leadership in the struggle for Haitian-Dominican rights is assumed increasingly by members of that community, so, too, do the personal dimensions of that struggle take on increasing salience. Women’s issues have assumed greater importance even among male staffers of the Haitian-Dominican organizations in part because the fate of these men’s mothers, sisters, and daughters is implicated. When asked how his childhood experiences relate to his choice as an adult to proclaim his Haitian identity rather than hide it, Pol Emil, director of CCDH, is quick to make mention of his mother’s petty commercial entrepreneurship and the negative toll that he suspects was taken on her health by long hours of work and unprotected exposure to heat through years of baking bread in a small oven over an open wood fire.⁴² Her travails and their adverse consequences for her health are factors that he counts, on reflection, as influences that honed his sensitivity to injustice and inclined him toward community

activism. Where there are clear and rigid walls between men's and women's worlds, feminization might not follow from the children of immigrants taking the lead roles in their community's struggle for recognition and rights. Yet among Haitian-ancestry people in the Dominican Republic, feminization seems to have been one possible consequence of the endogenization of human rights struggle.

Women's experiences in some ways epitomize the contrasts evoked by the fragmentary narratives of rights struggle contained in the reports on Paraison's and Pierre's internationally recognized leadership. In my eyes it is no accident that it is a girl who stands up to the soldiers in the report on Pierre and thus comes to embody the entire Haitian-Dominican community's determination to stand its ground on Dominican soil. While the archetypical migrant laborer is a footloose male, the rooted householder is a female; as Collette Lespinasse, coordinator of the binational refugee support group Groupe d'Appui aux Rapatriés et Réfugiés (GARR), summed up, "women represent stability in this population," often said to be characterized by frequent changes of residence, primarily by the men who track seasonal economic opportunities around the country.⁴³ Considering also that women are more likely than men to head single-parent households, tend to be paid less for their work than men, have lower literacy rates and hence are more likely than men to have very low incomes, it stands to reason that women also feel a greater interest in speaking out and being militant on economic rights issues than they would with regard to an agenda limited to civil and political rights.⁴⁴ Bringing into consideration also the frequent occurrence of sexual exploitation and gender violence against Haitian immigrant women, both during the journey from Haiti and in the *bateyes*, adds further gravity to women's interest in broadening the rights agenda to encompass gender bias, reproductive freedom, and economic empowerment.

Neoslavery Redux

As recently as 2006, I would therefore have said that the allegation that Haitian workers were being enslaved in the Dominican Republic was dead; and, considering that the completeness and even the accuracy of the allegation was always open to question, I would not have expressed regret about contemporary slavery's passing from the Haitian-Dominican rights agenda.⁴⁵ As I have already explained, leading international human rights organizations had reoriented their agenda to fit more closely with that of their Dominican-based partner organizations, abandoning allegations of contemporary slavery to bring attention instead to emerging issues of community-wide reach, such as deprivation of citizenship rights for the Dominican-born and infringements of due process rights for people being repatriated to Haiti.⁴⁶

It is important to add at this point that while international pressure has no doubt been an indispensable ingredient for human rights progress in this case, channeling human rights pressure along the lines specified by contemporary slavery allegations has on at least one occasion had disastrously counterproductive effects. The clearest example of clumsy international pressure worsening Haitian-Dominicans' problems occurred in 1991, when international human rights monitor groups recommended the imposition of trade sanctions against the Dominican Republic to an American congressional subcommittee, drawing the Santo Domingo government to retaliate by

expelling tens of thousands of Haitians, including even some Haitian-ancestry Dominicans.⁴⁷ Local rights organizations, not consulted by the international human rights professionals, were left to deal with the subsequent humanitarian and legal crisis. Given not only the pain, anxiety, material losses, and economic dislocation caused by the mass expulsions among the Haitian immigrant population at large but also the scarce staff time and energy spent by Haitian-Dominican organizations in administering aid to the deportees and their families left behind, the international monitors' gaffe seems costly indeed.

It is not that international human rights pressure has no role to play; but the representational paradigm that gives focus to that pressure directs it in one direction rather than another. The contemporary slavery allegation prescribes a consumer-centered set of interventions, including boycott and trade sanctions. The threat of that kind of pressure in 1991 did separate some Haitian-Dominican "slaves" from "slaveholders" but did so perversely, through triggering a mass expulsion that also separated the putative slaves from their homes, property, and the wages critical to their survival.

Against this background, imagine how concerned I was to hear that a new documentary film had appeared, *The Price of Sugar*, reviving the allegation that Haitians are enslaved in the Dominican Republic through the portrayal of the Reverend Father Christopher Hartley's heroic advocacy of the rights of his "Haitian" parishioners in the sugar *bateyes* of the Vicini family's Cristóbal Colón plantation. Imagine my dismay as I saw at least three other documentary films follow with much the same message.⁴⁸ Imagine my disbelief when I learned that not one but two feature-length dramatic movies were in production with plots centering on the rescue of slaves from Dominican sugar plantations.⁴⁹ More obviously than did the journalistic accounts and human rights reports that preceded them, this sort of primarily visual representation can rely on storytelling to endow substance and verisimilitude to the questions of what causes contemporary slavery and what we can do to end it, as some examples suggest.

The White Knight Syndrome

The director Claudio Del Punta and the other makers of the feature-length drama *Haiti Chérie* clearly sought accurate portrayal of the *batey* milieu, going to the trouble of filming on site, in the Ingenio Barahona in the southwestern Dominican Republic, and sacrificing a measure of audience appeal by hiring neophytes to act the roles of three of the four main protagonists in the movie, Dominicans of Haitian ancestry who speak their parts mainly in the Haitian Kreyòl language.⁵⁰ Indisputably authentic footage of the cane cutters and cart drivers at work, dwarfed at times by the plantation's tractors and other heavy machinery, adds documentary-style realism. According to Del Punta, the film aspires to portray injustice accurately and thus communicate a need for change. Noting that human rights organizations have likened the plight of the cane cutters to slave labor, the film's promotional literature observes, "It is the director's hope that by drawing public attention to . . . serious human rights abuses, more effective pressure can be applied to the Dominican Republic and the plantation companies to end this exploitation."⁵¹

In spite of breaking the feature-film mold in these ways (or perhaps to make up for the film's less than ingratiating sound and appearance to non-Haitian audiences),

Del Punta recurs to tried-and-true adventure film plot conventions of the Hollywood “escape movie” genre. The film follows the efforts of a Haitian couple, the beautiful but sad young woman Magdeleine and the gruff, hard-working Jean-Baptiste, who live on a privately leased sugar estate to escape the desperate conditions of the *bateyes*. Private plantation security personnel (referred to in the film as *guardias*, the Dominican Spanish name for soldiers) keep a tyrannical grip on the Haitians, not only impeding their right to leave the sugar estate but also even targeting the workers’ wives and daughters for sexual exploitation. The film opens with a scene in which unfeeling *guardias* deny Magdeleine and Jean-Baptiste permission to leave the plantation grounds to accompany the casket carrying the body of their deceased only child to the cemetery. It is only after a *guardia*’s attempt to rape Magdeleine in public has been repulsed by Jean-Baptiste in a bloody fist fight that the two muster the determination to flee this place of oppression. Onto the scene rushes the Spanish-speaking (but foreign-accented) plantation doctor, Ernesto. He makes it possible for Magdeleine and Jean-Baptiste to escape the *batey*, giving them a ride to the border in his tiny old pickup truck. In an abrupt and tragic ending, the couple’s hopes of escaping oppression are dashed.

It is doubtful that any plantation security guard was ever as tyrannical or absolutely controlling as this, but it is certain that the portrayal of contemporary slavery at the film’s center is an anachronism. With sugar production’s rapid decline, beginning in the 1990s, the sugar companies’ grip on their workers has weakened and, more importantly, the opening of previously unavailable urban income-generating opportunities has endowed undocumented Haitians with greater power to say no to sexual exploitation and other forms of coercion at the hands of company overseers.⁵²

More importantly for my argument, the contemporary slavery premise leaves Ernesto, the plantation doctor, only one possible mode of solidarity: to be a rescuer rather than a partner in struggle. In turn, Jean-Baptiste’s and Magdeleine’s only choice is between two forms of passivity, either to accept rescue and flee under Ernesto’s protection or stay and face worse humiliation.

And what is not said is of as great concern as any inaccuracy in the movie. Any possibility of community mobilization is erased by the filmmakers’ decision to cast Magdeleine’s and Jean-Baptiste’s plight in the simple and clear light of a one-to-one confrontation with an evil-doer, in the form of the abusive *guardia*. The women of the *batey* are not only not organized, vigilant, and collectively mobilized—not the kind of group that MUDHA and other Haitian-Dominican rights organizations work to bring into being—they only look on silently as the *guardia* publicly perpetrates his attempted rape. The kind of woman-centered community action, emblemized internationally by Sonia Pierre’s activism, is not just erased but trampled on through that particular plot detail.

A larger point, therefore, is that rescue narratives, such as that at the heart of *Haiti Chérie*, are not characterized by a simple absence of gender awareness so much as a distinct, *masculinist* gender politics. Gender’s narrative encoding in this film’s and other recent portrayals of the Haitian-Dominican experience as slavery suggest that gender is just as central an organizing axis of discourse here as it is in the feminized activism of Haitian-Dominican rights organizations. Their difference is not that one

has gender and the other does not but that the gender politics of rescue positions only men, and never women, standing up to fight for their rights.

Sugar's Secrets

The Price of Sugar, the documentary that started the latest wave of allegations that Haitians are enslaved in the Dominican Republic, fits comfortably within the split focus filmic storytelling convention with which audiences are familiar from such celebrated human rights dramas as *Schindler's List*.⁵³ The filmmaker, Bill Haney, devotes a surprisingly large fraction of the film's ninety-plus-minute running time to telling Father Hartley's life story, lavishing attention on details of Hartley's passage from a privileged upbringing in Spain to a life of frugal and heroically courageous service to the poor (on his mother's side he is of Spanish aristocracy, and through his father's family he is heir to a fortune amassed through sales of the Hartley's brand of marmalade).

Throughout much of the film, the "sugar baron" Vicini family figures as a silent background presence, whose menace is evoked alternately through images of surly-looking, burly, shotgun- and pistol-wielding mulatto men in uniform or footage of sweatily jostling masses of mainly darker-hued anti-Haitian protestors, wielding machetes and clubs, setting tires ablaze in the streets and grinning menacingly as they shout for Father Hartley's expulsion.

Testimony of shock and revulsion at the revelation of a bondage kept secret from outsiders' eyes, spiked by images of mistreatment of suffering innocents and the building of suspense, builds toward an adventure-style climax, focusing on whether the hero, Father Hartley, will escape alive and triumphant from his confrontation with evil. Instead of scenes of outright rescue, *The Price of Sugar* repeatedly features testimony from sugar plantation residents to the effect that Father Hartley has been not just a vital catalyzer but also a providential and irreplaceable defender of their rights: "He has been like a God to us, like an awaited Messiah" (Él ha sido como un Dios para nosotros, como un Mesías esperado), says one eloquent parishioner. Those suffering the human rights abuses mostly lack specific names and identities, and they are never endowed with biographical detail comparable to the film's recounting of Hartley's story. With few exceptions, the *batey* residents in *The Price of Sugar* are specimens for our pity, and the mode of public response envisioned by the filmmaker seems a direct and automatic progression from shock to outrage to action.

Near its middle, the film shifts in focus from the sugar-cane workers' plight to an idealized portrait of Hartley. From this point on, whether help can be brought to the Haitians ceases to be the axis of attention-holding tension; concern shifts instead to whether Hartley will escape from his confrontation with the Vicini plantocracy unharmed. Following the biographical middle section, *The Price of Sugar* turns toward building dramatic tension around the priest's confrontation with xenophobic nationalists seeking his expulsion from the Dominican Republic, who are repeatedly represented as mere proxies of the Vicinis. The film's climactic scenes depict a veritable showdown at the parish church, between Father Hartley and a large assembly of supportive parishioners, inside, and a chaotic, noisy crowd of nativist protesters, outside. The clownish, xenophobic nationalist television talk jock Consuelito Desp-

radel (shown earlier in the film ranting against Haitian immigrants, “¡Llévenselos to’ito pa’ Haití!” [Take ’em all back to Haiti!]), arrives in a late-model SUV, enters the church, and makes her way down the middle aisle surrounded by a scrum of television cameras, only to find herself reduced to silence at the altar by the congregation’s boisterous singing of “We Shall Not Be Moved.” Within seconds a stony, serious Consuelito decamps, leaving Father Hartley broadly grinning and his supporters euphorically celebrating yet another victorious facedown of evil.

In all these ways, *The Price of Sugar* invites consumption as what Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg calls a real-life “*Bildungsroman* narrative of emerging awareness,” in which the audience is expected to “identify with the protagonist’s growth to the status of enlightened hero figure,” shot against the backdrop of an account of human rights abuses perpetrated against a downtrodden people.⁵⁴ *The Price of Sugar* provides a white, Western, male protagonist as an easy target for audience identification, whose efforts to save a non-Western people provide dramatic impetus to the tale.

Let me hasten to clarify that my argument is not with Father Hartley, who worked valiantly under the most difficult of circumstances, but with the filmmaker, Bill Haney, who has dressed the father in the ill-fitting armor of a white knight. *The Price of Sugar* recapitulates plot elements of the rescue narratives that we saw sketched in Father Paraison’s 1994 interview with Trish Williams and acted out in more complete form in McCormick’s novel *Sold* and in the dramatic feature *Haiti Chérie*. The paternalism of rescue is underscored by gender and racial/national identities of hero and “victims”: the agent of liberation, a powerful white male; the objects of rescue, passive blacks.

Conceptually and rhetorically, *The Price of Sugar* has much in common with the construct of “new slavery” in guises going back at least as far as the moral panic surrounding white slavery in Victorian Britain. Only by training the representational lens narrowly upon the slave-slaveholder dyad, to the exclusion of other actors on the scene, animating this premise through a suspense story organized around rescue by a morally enlightened outsider, and excluding other potential avenues of liberation—including, most importantly, the initiative of the oppressed—is a portrait of slavery created and kept stable.⁵⁵ In what little is shown in *The Price of Sugar* of plantation residents meeting to organize in defense of their own rights, no mention is made that community-based organizations are springing up in places around the country, in partnership with Dominican-headquartered and staffed civil society groups, all without the benevolent protection of an expatriate patron.

This erasure is perpetrated whenever an antislavery story depicts a coerced worker to be silent, passive, and powerless; as Jo Doezema establishes, in her analysis of contemporary sex-trafficking discourse, stories that reduce today’s slaves to pure victims not only abound but still dominate the representational ground of anti-slavery.⁵⁶ The implications of my argument reach beyond the distinction between “victims” and “willing whores” that tacitly governs the sex-trafficking discourse; I put forward the possibility, rather, that erasure of the initiative of the oppressed is a constitutive condition of the contemporary slavery construct generally, whether it pertains to women or men, sex work or any other kind of exploitation.⁵⁷ Public acceptance of

the simplifications proposed by slave rescue stories is understandable: what kind of “slave,” after all, runs her own non-governmental organization? But when rescue stories relegate today’s coerced workers to a politically problematic childlike status, negative practical consequences follow, and these consequences argue even more strongly than the odor of paternalism by itself against what I have called the “white knight syndrome.” For what good is the antislavery message if the stories we tell conceal the most transformational avenues of freedom struggle available, those that grow out of the initiatives of members of the afflicted communities themselves?⁵⁸

In characteristically postmodernist documentarian style, *The Price of Sugar* refrains from saying directly what must be done. Significantly, the Take Action page of the film’s companion website makes no mention of organizations, like MUDHA, that are directly challenging the Dominican state for its relegation of Haitian-Dominicans to second-class citizenship. That page instead urges members of the public to consume sugar and sweets made with fair trade sugar and to “write your congressman and ask him or her to make sure that the full civil and labor rights of the cane workers are respected and guaranteed in exchange for the opportunity to export Dominican sugar to the U.S. market.”⁵⁹ That the filmmakers seem to think that a consumer boycott or official American embargo of Dominican goods would be desirable is confirmed when the film ends with words warning that Dominican sugar exports to the United States “continue unabated.”

By tacking on only an ill-defined consumer-boycott/trade-embargo agenda at the film’s end and in its official website, *The Price of Sugar* avoids even the most obvious of dilemmas that any responsible distant intervener should have in mind based on recent decades of experience with naming and shaming corporate perpetrators of abuse and organizing boycotts of their products. Chief among these dilemmas is whether the impact on the workers will likely be positive or negative if consumers simply withdraw from complicity by ceasing to buy all sugar but that which can be certified worker-friendly. In *The Price of Sugar*, no such difficult questions are broached about the possible loss of livelihoods that may befall commodity producers if consumers express their solidarity solely by backing actions that will, individually or through government decree, remove ethically questionable commodities from their shopping carts.

Already, the most recent U.S. Department of Labor child labor and forced labor report and the Department of State’s trafficking in persons (TIP) report have repeated media allegations of forced labor in Dominican sugar production. The former report stands out for presenting this knowledge in the decontextualized but factual form of a table, which matches country and commodity to either child labor or forced labor (or both, in the case of Dominican sugar), all nuance regarding the level of certainty of the allegations being concealed. Vagueness takes the place of certainty in the more prose-heavy TIP report’s observation that “the sugar industry has been cited as vulnerable for possible use of forced labor.”⁶⁰ In all its celebrity, *The Price of Sugar* brings us thus to the verge of another potentially disastrous misapplication of the threat of international market sanctions, based, just as the 1991 mass expulsion crisis was, on a simplistic diagnosis of the wrongs as contemporary slavery.

Conclusions

This consideration of the stories we tell about slavery today suggests that any (and all) human rights textual or visual representation has a gender dimension, even if gender is not consistently or consciously brought to the fore by the authors. Perhaps especially when human rights representations appear to ignore gender, important questions—“Who are the story’s protagonists?” “Who is left out?” and “What scope of agency does the author accord to whom?”—will rarely yield answers that cut evenly across lines of gender difference. It is not a question of one set of activists having “got gender” while the other has not. Both the masculinist politics of slave rescue and the feminist politics of collective mobilization are gendered, but in contrasting ways.⁶¹

Another masculinist wrinkle unites the final three stories that I have examined (the BBC report on Father Paraison and the films *Haiti Chérie* and *The Price of Sugar*): the benevolent male rescuer is constructed in each of these by conceptually opposing the hero to enfeebled men as well as females in peril. The powerlessness of the black men in these stories tacitly contrasts with the assertive, if generally nonviolent, masculinity of their rescuer; in ways such as this, an enfeebled masculinity as well as imperiled feminine virtue may provide the requisite backdrop of pure victimhood against which the courage of the redeemer of slaves will be tested.

Though there is some ambiguity because of Father Paraison’s Haitian nationality, these gender contrasts are enabled also by the racial, national, and class coordinates of rescued and rescuer. A tripartite racial division of humanity is conjured through *The Price of Sugar*’s verbal/visual rhetoric: African descendants (those whom the film uncritically calls “Haitians” even though many are by birthright Dominican citizens) gain admission not through their actions—the presence of activists emerging from the afflicted communities being largely ignored—but through images of their injuries and other visible signs of suffering. Other African descendants (those marked as “Dominicans”) are excluded from the imagined global community of human rights, their hatreds being implied to preclude reasoned dialogue; the role of “saviors” falls by default to ethically motivated and mainly bourgeois and European-descended Westerners.⁶²

One starting point for further intersectional analysis of contemporary slavery representations, grounded in feminist critical race studies, might therefore be found in analysis of the racial and national attributes of contemporary slavery narratives’ perpetrators and responders. Even as the founding documents of human rights bid us to imagine a global community whose membership has no borders, representations of contemporary slavery, and especially their tendency to identify non-Westerners but not Westerners as perpetrators of enslavement, may contribute to the perpetuation of racial and national asymmetries in the emergent global citizenship of human rights.

The gender politics of rescue nests neatly in yet another dimension within the racial and national foundations of global human rights *Machtpolitik*. Particularly when it concerns the alleged enslavement of Africans or their descendants, can we speak about slavery today in ways that do not harken back to discourses molded in the crucible of colonial slavery? Are subterranean fears at play of victimhood’s narrative opposite, armed insurrection, with blacks rising up in rebellion the feared alternative

to our solicitude, their machetes raised (so often the subject of eroticized fantasy in the retelling)?

Beyond such speculation, I think it is safe to say that prevailing images of the slave today, as a passive recipient of redemption rather than an active seeker of liberation, is a way of reassuring Western audiences that the slave with whom they must feel sympathy is a politically tame being.⁶³ Of all globalizing discourses, should human rights be conceding political space to narratives as depoliticizing as these? Can we imagine new ways to conceive of our duty to respond, less haunted with stereotypes of docile subalterns or vicariously observed fantasies of rescue? More generally, how can we, as producers and consumers of human rights reports, rethink the terms of representation? At stake is the difference between believing what we see and seeing what we believe.

NOTES

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1. Charlotte Bunch, “Transforming Human Rights from a Feminist Perspective,” in *Women’s Rights, Human Rights: International Feminist Perspectives*, ed. Julie Peters and Andrea Wolper (London: Routledge, 1995), 11.

2. Makau Mutua, “Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights,” *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (2001): 201–45.

3. Some of the major book-length new-abolitionist publications from trade and scholarly presses in just the years 2009 and 2010 include Beate Andrees and Patrick Belser, eds., *Forced Labor: Coercion and Exploitation in the Private Economy* (Boulder: Rienner, 2009); Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, eds., *To Plead Our Cause: Personal Stories by Today’s Slaves* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Kevin Bales et al., *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009); Gary Craig, *Child Slavery Now: A Contemporary Reader* (Portland: Policy Press, 2010); Anne T. Gallagher, *The International Law of Human Trafficking* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Siddarth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); Stephanie Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking: A Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a critical perspective, see Jo Doezema, *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters: The Construction of Trafficking* (London: Zed Books, 2010).

4. See Molly Gordy, “A Call to Fight Forced Labor,” *Parade*, February 20, 2000; Bales and Soodalter, *Slave Next Door*.

5. This idea obviously relates to the vast literature relating law and literature. I draw ideas particularly from Anthony G. Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner, *Minding the Law* (Cambridge,

Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000); Bruner, *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002); Robert M. Cover, "Nomos and Narrative," *Harvard Law Review* 97, no. 4 (1983–84): 4–68; Shoshana Felman, *The Juridical Unconscious: Trials and Traumas in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002).

6. Kevin Bales, for example, has always made extensive and prominent use of first-person accounts.

7. The most consequential of which is surely the U.S. Department of State's annual TIP report. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 10th ed. (Washington, D.C., 2010), <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt> (accessed March 19, 2011).

8. Bales and Trodd, *Plead Our Cause*; Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten, eds., *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

9. Journalists' reports on contemporary slavery are far too numerous to be cited here. Even reports that have triggered major international responses, such as the newspaper stories of 2001 on children being enslaved on West African cocoa farms, have yet to gain systematic scholarly scrutiny. Notable also are Nicholas Kristof's series of *New York Times* feature articles in January 2004, recounting his experience buying and liberating child sex workers in Cambodia, as well as Peter Landesman's lead article in the *New York Times Magazine*, January 25, 2004, "The Girls Next Door."

10. Chris Abani, *Becoming Abigail: A Novella* (New York: Akashic Books, 2006); Mia Kirshner et al., *I Live Here* (New York: Pantheon, 2008); Patricia McCormick, *Sold* (New York: Hyperion, 2006).

11. Movies seem to dwell disproportionately often on the theme of sex trafficking: *Taken*, DVD, directed by Pierre Morel (Los Angeles: 20th Century Fox, 2009); *Human Trafficking*, DVD, directed by Christian Duguay (2005; La Crosse: Echo Bridge Home Entertainment, 2006); *Holly*, DVD, directed by Guy Moshe (2006; New York: WEA Corp., 2009); *Lilja 4-Ever*, DVD, directed by Lukas Moodysson (2002; London: Metrodome Distribution, 2003).

12. The exhibit "Journey," organized by the film actor Emma Thompson, is traveling to several world cities.

13. Céline Anaya Gautier, *Esclaves au paradis* (La Roque d'Anthéron: Vents d'Ailleurs, 2007); Mark Sealy, Roger Malbet, and Alice Lobb, *Documenting Disposable People: Contemporary Global Slavery* (London: Hayward, 2008).

14. Major documentaries include *Dying to Leave*, DVD, directed by Chris Hilton and Aaron Wolf (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2004); *The Price of Sugar*, DVD, directed by Bill Haney (New York: New Yorker Films, 2007); *Sex Slaves*, DVD, directed by Ric Esther Bienstock (Alexandria, Va.: PBS Video, 2006), and *Stolen Childhoods*, DVD, directed by Len Morris and Robin Romano (Lawrenceville, N.J.: Films for the Humanities and Sciences, 2005).

15. Doezema, *Sex Slaves*, esp. chaps. 1–3.

16. Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle-Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (London: Routledge, 1992); Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003); Judith Walkowitz, *City of*

Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

17. McCormick, *Sold*, 1.

18. *Ibid.*, 249.

19. The media studies scholar Gretchen Soderlund used the phrase “paradigm repair work” in her public presentation at the scholarly workshop “The Gender of Humanitarian Narrative,” University of Connecticut, May 15, 2009.

20. Wendy Chapkis, “Trafficking, Migration, and the Law: Protecting Innocents, Punishing Immigrants,” *Gender and Society* 17, no. 6 (2003): 923–37; Global Alliance against Traffic in Women, *Collateral Damage: The Impact of Anti-Trafficking Measures on Human Rights around the World* (Bangkok: GAATW, 2007), http://www.gaatw.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=9&Itemid=17 (accessed March 19, 2011); Kamala Kempadoo, ed., *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives on Migration, Sex Work, and Human Rights* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005); Gretchen Soderlund, “Running from the Rescuers: New U.S. Crusades against Sex Trafficking and the Rhetoric of Abolition,” *NWSA Journal* 17, no. 3 (2005): 64–87.

21. For valuable overviews of the scholarly research to date, see Christien van den Anker, ed., *The Political Economy of New Slavery* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); David Kyle and Rey Koslowski, *Global Human Smuggling: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Louise Shelley, *Human Trafficking*; the special edition of *International Migration* 43, “Data and Research on Human Trafficking,” no. 1/2 (2005).

22. Anthony M. DeStefano, *The War on Human Trafficking: U.S. Policy Assessed* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 83–85; Debbie Nathan, “Oversexed: Anti-Trafficking Efforts Too Often Neglect Other Forms of Forced Labor,” *Nation* 281, no. 6 (2005): 27–30.

23. See Tequila Minsky, “Dominican-born Sonia Pierre Wins Amnesty International’s 2003 Human Rights Award for Working for Her People” (April 2003), <http://haitisupport.gn.apc.org/Sonia.htm>. As this essay went to press, the piece was no longer available online; hard copy in author’s possession.

24. Anaya Gautier, *Esclaves au paradis*; Haney, *The Price of Sugar; The Sugar Babies: The Plight of the Children of Agricultural Workers in the Sugar Industry of the Dominican Republic*, DVD, directed by Amy Serrano (Miami: Siren Studios, 2007).

25. Amnesty International, “A Life in Transit: The Plight of Haitian Migrants and Dominicans of Haitian Descent” (2007), <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/AMR27/001/2007/en/ad444c48-d3ad-11dd-a329-2f46302a8cc6/amr270012007en.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2011); International Human Rights Law Clinic, *Unwelcome Guests: A Study of Expulsions of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian Descent from the Dominican Republic to Haiti* (Berkeley: Boalt Hall School of Law, 2002), http://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/Unwelcome_Guests.pdf (accessed March 19, 2011); “‘Illegal People’: Haitians and Dominico-Haitians in the Dominican Republic,” *Human Rights Watch* 14, no. 1 (2002), <http://www.hrw.org/en/reports/2002/04/04/illegal-people> (accessed March 19, 2011); *Expelled: Mass Expulsions of Individuals of Haitian Descent from the Dominican Republic*, online video, directed by Michael Granne (New York: Witness Productions, 2001), http://www.witness.org/index.php?option=com_rightsalert&Itemid=212&task=story&alert_id=10 (accessed March 19, 2011).

26. Silvio Torres-Saillant, "The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity," *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 126–46.
27. José del Castillo, *La inmigración de braceros azucareros en la República Dominicana, 1900–1930* (Santo Domingo: CENDIA, 1978), 47–58; Samuel Martínez, *Peripheral Migrants: Haitians and Dominican Republic Sugar Plantations* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 41–43.
28. For an overview of the history of the Dominican sugar industry's labor practices, see José Israel Cuello, *Contratación de mano de obra haitiana destinada a la industria azucarera dominicana, 1952–1986: Detalles y comparaciones de los documentos que regularon el reclutamiento de trabajadores haitianos para las zafras azucareras en la República Dominicana desde 1952 hasta 1986* (Santo Domingo: Editora Taller, 1997).
29. Investigators from multilateral and non-governmental organizations, along with independent journalists and human rights advocates, have repeatedly brought the plight of Haitian-Dominicans to international attention. Chapter 5 in Samuel Martínez, *Decency and Excess: Global Aspirations and Material Deprivation on a Caribbean Sugar Plantation* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), provides an overview of the scholarly and advocacy publications.
30. Americas Watch, *A Troubled Year: Haitians in the Dominican Republic* (New York: Americas Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, 1992).
31. *Beyond the Bateyes: Haitian Immigrants in the Dominican Republic* (New York: National Coalition for Haitian Rights, 1996).
32. Faustino Jiménez, "Perspectiva de la industria azucarera en el marco del RD-CAFTA" (2005), http://www.inazucar.gov.do/conf_londres_nov25_05.htm (accessed March 19, 2011). See also the yearly production reports of the Instituto Azucarero Dominicano: <http://www.inazucar.gov.do/index.html> (accessed March 19, 2011).
33. David C. Baluarte, "Inter-American Justice Comes to the Dominican Republic: An Island Shakes as Human Rights and Sovereignty Clash," *American University Human Rights Brief* 13, no. 2 (2006): 25–28, 38.
34. Gina Gallardo, *Camino a construir un sueño (sistematización de experiencia programa legal y derechos humanos)* (Santo Domingo: MUDHA, 2001), 16.
35. Interview with Antonio Pol Emil, July 4, 1997.
36. Centro Cultural Dominicano-Haitiano, "Nueva vision del CCDH acerca del trabajo legal y derechos humanos," *Boletín Carril* 1, no. 1 (1999), 5; Gallardo, *Camino*, 17.
37. To my knowledge, these misgivings have never been voiced publicly. To learn more about the Red Jacques Viau, visit <http://www.redhjacquessviau.org.do> (accessed March 19, 2011).
38. CCDH and MUDHA are not the only organizations promoting this human-capacity-building approach. The support of ActionAid for such training was noted in Minsky's report on Pierre's receipt of the Sagan Prize. Also, ENDA Caribe's mode of operation was described by one community-based human rights outreach volunteer as follows: "They taught us [volunteers] where it was we had to go, what we had to do. They gave advice so that we would be able to defend ourselves, because they said that if they went away and a case [of abuse] occurred and they were the ones who defended us, [then] we would never learn." Ana Jiménez, unpublished interview with ENDA Caribe staff, August 20, 2002.
39. Additional citation information is unfortunately not available.
40. In a paper posted to FLACSO-República Dominicana's Observatorio Migrantes del Caribe Website, "Women, Migration and Rights Activism: The Dominican Experience" (2009),

3–5, http://www.obmica.org/noticias/archivos/32adac_woodingipsajulo9.pdf (accessed March 19, 2011). Bridget Wooding also speaks of a “feminisation of Haitian immigration and rights issues.” See also Dawn Duke, “From Yélida to Movimiento de Mujeres Dominicano-Haitianas,” in *At Home and Abroad: Historicizing Twentieth-Century Whiteness in Literature and Performance*, ed. La Vinia Delois Jennings (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2009), 84–88.

41. Gallardo, *Camino*.

42. Interview with Pol Emil, July 26, 2002.

43. Ana Jiménez, unpublished interview with Collette Lespinasse, August 1, 2002.

44. Organización Internacional para las Migraciones (OIM) and Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO), *Encuesta sobre inmigrantes haitianos en la República Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: FLACSO and OIM, 2004), 89, 95, III–12.

45. Samuel Martínez, “Indifference within Indignation: Anthropology, Human Rights, and the Haitian Bracero,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 1 (1996): 17–25.

46. From 1992 to 2006, only a couple of prominent reports based on field research had returned to the Dominican sugar slavery angle: one was a photo-essay with a text that largely peddled atmospherics, and the other was a more abundantly contextualized study of limited geographic reach. Amy Wilentz, “Slaving for Cane: Photo Essay by Antonin Kratochvil,” *Mother Jones* 26, no. 5 (2001): 52–59; Plataforma “VIDA”/GARR, *Tras las huellas de los braceros: Una investigación sobre las condiciones de contratación y trabajo de braceros haitianos en la zafra azucarera del Ingenio Barahona* (Santo Domingo: Plataforma “VIDA”/GARR, 2002).

47. Martínez, *Peripheral Migrants*, 164; Bridget Wooding and Richard Moseley-Williams, *Inmigrantes haitianos y dominicanos de ascendencia haitiana en la República Dominicana* (Santo Domingo: Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo and Servicio Jesuita a Rejugiados y Migrantes, 2004), 78–79.

48. NYIHA Media, *Human Rights in Quisqueya* (New York: NYIHA Media and Perfil Latino, 2007), <http://www.nyiha.com/videos.html> (accessed March 19, 2011); *Di Perejil*, DVD, directed by Irene Rial Bou (Lanham, Md.: National Film Network, 2006); Serrano, *Sugar Babies*.

49. Soon after the release of *The Price of Sugar*, Jodie Foster announced plans to produce a feature-length dramatic film, *Sugarland*, about “Haitian sugar slaves in the Dominican Republic.” At the time this essay went to press, Foster had suspended production of the movie. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jodie_Foster (accessed March 19, 2011).

50. *Haiti Chérie*, DVD, directed by Claudio del Punta (Rome: Esperia Film and Arethusia Film, 2007). See <http://www.highpointfilms.co.uk/haiticherie/index.htm> (accessed March 19, 2011).

51. From promotional literature for the film.

52. On the Dominican sugar industry’s decline, see Argelia Tejada Yangüela, *República Dominicana, bateyes del estado: Encuesta socioeconómica y de salud de la población materno-infantil de los bateyes agrícolas del CEA, diciembre 1999* (Santo Domingo: USAID, 2001), 5–11. On the effects of this process in the *bateyes*, see Martínez, *Decency and Excess*, 42–44, 86–88.

53. Elizabeth Swanson Goldberg, *Beyond Terror: Gender, Narrative, Human Rights* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 28–29.

54. *Ibid.*, 28, 29.

55. An echo may be discerned here of Liisa Malkki’s argument, developed in the context of her ethnography of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, that inserting particular suffering humans into a transhistorical category (in her study, “refugee,” not “slave”) presupposes “abstracting their predic-

aments from specific political, historical, cultural contexts,” at the cost of silencing its subjects. See Liisa Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 378.

56. Doezema, *Sex Slaves*.

57. *Ibid.*, 14.

58. According to Kevin Bales, “While governments, in time, may . . . be the most powerful forces against slavery, today they are not. At present, the most efficient engine for freeing slaves and keeping them free is when a community makes a conscious collective decision to do just that. As far as I can tell, more slaves are freed every year through community organization than any other way; they are also freed more efficiently, and their freedom has more permanence.” Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today’s Slaves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 82.

59. <http://www.thepriceofsugar.com/takeaction.shtml> (accessed March 19, 2011).

60. U.S. Department of Labor, *The Department of Labor’s List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor: Report Required by the Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Acts of 2005 and 2008* (Washington, D.C.: 2009), 16, 92–94, <http://www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/ocft/pdf/2009tvpra.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2011); U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 134. The 2009 USDOL report seems to be a new one in this format, but the language in the 2010 TIP report differs from the 2009 edition in specifying sugar once more as a sector where particular vigilance against forced labor is needed. See U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report* (Washington, D.C.: 2009), 123, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/123357.pdf> (accessed March 19, 2011).

61. I label the politics of collective mobilization “feminist” in the knowledge that feminists of different stripes have disagreed about the use and definition of the terms “trafficking” and “slavery,” as well as about the kinds of interventions needed to address root problems. Public disagreement arose at the Vienna negotiations of the UN Protocol on Trafficking between “abolitionist feminists”—who see all forms of sex work as being premised upon objectifications of the person that infringe human dignity and endanger women and hence constitute human rights violations—and sex worker-rights feminists—who argue that trafficking should be combated by expanding and protecting sex workers’ rights rather than prohibiting sex work. On the strange coalition of abolitionist feminists and Christian evangelicals that united with representatives of the George W. Bush administration to push an antiprostitution agenda as the main prong of U.S. and UN antitrafficking efforts, see Tara McKelvey, “Of Human Bondage,” *American Prospect*, November 1, 2004, <http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?articleId=8763> (accessed March 19, 2011); and Soderlund, “Running from the Rescuers.” Idealistic though it admittedly is, I characterize the politics of collective mobilization versus rescue to be, respectively, feminist versus masculinist in character, in the belief that a feminist would not gallop onto the scene of an ongoing freedom struggle and pretend to take the flag of leadership from a sister’s hand.

62. Parallels may be drawn with Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2006); other relevant works include Didier Fassin, “The Humanitarian Politics of Testimony: Subjectification through Trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,” *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 3 (2008), 531–58; Miriam Ticktin, “Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France,” *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 1 (2006): 33–49.

63. Relevant to this point is David Rieff’s insight that “humanitarian” concern is being increasingly deployed in international relations as antipolitics, a way of avoiding having to deal

with conflicts underlying genocide and other human rights crises by restricting the international community's concern to immediate alleviation of the victims' suffering. See David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), esp. chap. 3. Closer to the context about which I write is Miriam Ticktin's analysis of the creation of "humanitarian exceptions" within an increasingly restrictive French immigration policy. Miriam Ticktin, "Sexual Violence as the Language of Border Control: Where French Feminist and Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric Meet," *Signs* 33, no. 4 (2008): 863–89. These exceptions turn the political issue of border policing versus migrant rights into a moral narrative that casts agents of the French state as saviors of women at risk of gender violence at the hands of non-Western men. The boundary between rights-based action and humanitarianism emerges as a line between not just legally and morally based interventions but differing concepts of subalterns' agency. As Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown phrase it, the "assertive political agency" of rights-holders appears at times to contrast irreconcilably with the passivity of beneficiaries of humanitarian assistance. See Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown, eds., *Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2009), 7–8.