

The Rhetoric of Revelation: Sex Trafficking and the Journalistic Exposé

In *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*, their humanitarian work of 2009, Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn recount their experience working as foreign correspondents in China after the Tiananmen Square protests and realizing for the first time that news media ignore the everyday realities of millions of women worldwide. From the perspective of journalists, the everyday abuses women around the world suffered were not newsworthy: “When a prominent dissident was arrested in China, we would write a front-page article; when 100,000 girls were routinely kidnapped and sold into brothels, we didn’t even consider it news. Partly that is because we journalists tend to be good at covering events that happen in a particular day, but we slip at covering events that happen to girls every day.”¹

In this account, sex trafficking—a practice also commonly referred to as modern-day slavery, sex slavery, forced prostitution, and, in earlier periods, “white slavery”—is taken to be the paradigmatic case of gender violence ignored by journalists. Yet positing sex slavery as the exemplary media blind spot is curious when one considers the history of journalism on this topic. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Western news media offered extensive coverage of white slavery, making claims about the severity and ubiquity of the practice that had far-reaching and questionable legislative effects. Had Kristof and WuDunn dug deeper, they would have discovered that the advent of humanitarian campaigns against sex trafficking and the rise of investigative journalism share an intertwined history. In fact, the press played a critical role in producing now-familiar narrative conventions and rhetorical tropes commonly used to depict sex trafficking, as well as establishing methods for gathering facts and arriving at conclusions about prostitution and sex slavery.

While there may have been a dearth of news reports of sex trafficking in the decades immediately before the fall of the Soviet Union, stories of innocent women and girls held captive in prison-like brothels are not new. Rather, they have, in the last two decades, resurfaced as an object of journalistic attention. This article considers the phenomenon of the sex-trafficking exposé at two moments, the late nineteenth century and the early twenty-first century, in order to gain some purchase on the relationship between journalistic coverage and the construction of sex trafficking as a practice viewed by many policymakers, feminists, and evangelicals as among the most urgent of global humanitarian issues.

A central premise here is that sex trafficking is not so much *discovered* as it is *created* as an object of humanitarian action, law enforcement intervention, and human rights policy. Indeed, episodes of heightened concern over trafficking have historically

relied on textual assertions that involve a set of interpretations that give substance and meaning to a phenomenon not readily available to public view. To explore the cultural construction of sex slavery as an object of human rights and humanitarian intervention, this article will focus on three journalistic exposés that brought a great deal of public attention to sex trafficking: “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon,” William T. Stead’s *Pall Mall Gazette* series in 1885 on London’s trade in virgins; “The Girls Next Door,” Peter Landesman’s 2004 *New York Times Magazine* piece on domestic trafficking; and Kristof’s *New York Times* series from the same year on sex slavery in Poipet, Cambodia.

Sex Trafficking as a Cultural Construction

In the late nineteenth century, journalists, vigilance movements, and evangelical women activists established a set of images and associations—the enslaved prostitute, the prison-like brothel, the mercenary procurer, and the monstrous client—to describe the players involved in the phenomenon of white slavery. These associations were first popularized in 1880s England, but by the twentieth century’s first decade they became deeply embedded in the Western imaginary such that even today the term “trafficking” (and, increasingly, “prostitution”) connotes sexual enslavement, captive innocents, and mercenary villains.

Yet despite the current ubiquity of mass and activist media productions equating trafficking with sexual slavery and identifying women and girls as its primary victims, sex trafficking has proved itself a unique social problem, in part because its existence, scope, and scale are notoriously difficult to establish using empirical methods. There is no consensus among activists, human rights advocates, or policymakers as to the actual numbers of trafficked women and girls in the world today. Even groups that take the existence of large-scale sex trafficking networks as a social fact often disagree over the reasons people end up working abroad in the sex industry. Do they willingly enter into debt-bondage agreements, believing these arrangements offer them more security or money than they can find elsewhere, or are they lured or physically coerced into such contracts against their will? Non-governmental organizations, activists, and policymakers have been divided over such issues since sex trafficking reemerged as one of the preeminent human rights issues of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Considering sex trafficking as a social construction is not meant to circumvent or replace a discussion of abuse in the sex industry. Forced prostitution is not just a textual illusion or figment of activists’ imaginations; real victims of the practice exist, and some have shared their experiences with activists, law enforcement officers, immigration officials, safehouse operators, and others. Yet a quick survey of the numbers cited should give us pause. Groups with an interest in collating statistics on trafficking in its many variants offer wildly divergent statistics on the extent of the problem globally and within U.S. borders. The Department of State trafficking in persons (TIP) report for 2010 estimated that there were 12.3 million “adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor, and forced prostitution around the world.”² The United Nations’ International Labour Organization figure of 1.2 million child victims of trafficking worldwide is widely cited.³ Abolitionist human rights groups like Kevin Bales’s

Free the Slaves tend to put the higher total number of enslaved men, women, and children globally at 27 million, a figure that then gets repeated in other groups' abolitionist media.⁴ As Kamala Kempadoo puts it, "To any conscientious social scientist, such discrepancies would be cause for extreme suspicion of the reliability of the research, yet when it comes to sex work and prostitution, few eyebrows are raised and the figures are easily bandied about without question."⁵

The estimates of U.S. government agencies also vary wildly: at different moments, the State Department has speculated that there are as many as 4 million victims of trafficking in the world and as few as 600,000. In terms of domestic numbers, the State Department estimated in 2002 that there were between 45,000 and 50,000 trafficking victims in the United States; in 2003, it reduced that estimate to between 18,000 to 20,000; and in 2004 its estimate shrank to between 14,500 and 17,500. A Department of Justice report issued in 2005 was highly critical of even these reduced numbers, citing the "incongruity between the estimated number of victims trafficked into the United States—14,500 and 17,500 annually—and the number of victims found—only 611 in the last 4 years."⁶ More recently, the U.S. General Accountability Office issued a report that was equally critical of the administration's numbers. It referred to "methodological weaknesses, gaps in data, and numerical discrepancies" in figures of domestic and international human trafficking victims. The report argued for greater oversight of groups involved in antitrafficking efforts in light of the fact that "the US government has not yet established an effective mechanism for estimating the number of victims."⁷ In short, none of the widely cited statistics on migrant slave labor are based on representative samples, and thus they cannot be trusted to accurately capture the number of people who are victims of trafficking each year. Yet despite the proliferation of high estimates, the unavailability of accurate data leads to a curious tendency in anti-sex trafficking texts to claim that the statistics reported underestimate the actual numbers of victims because the numbers are extrapolated only from known instances of sex trafficking.⁸

Concerns about sex trafficking, then, have both material and symbolic dimensions. On the one hand, forced prostitution is a sociological reality, which on some scale does exist in the world. On the other hand, our understandings of this phenomenon are always mediated through language and institutional discourses. Indeed, most of us know of trafficking secondhand, through representations created by governing institutions, human rights organizations, the news and entertainment media, filmmakers, and humanitarian, evangelical, and feminist action groups. These groups shape each other's and the public's perceptions of the sex trade. Sex trafficking in its many guises—white slavery, virtual sex slavery, debt-bondage, and so forth—raises difficult epistemological and methodological questions. A concept that is difficult to quantify yet holds such capacity to inspire moral outrage deserves special inquiry into the terms used to describe and produce it. It also bears asking what other social concerns may be embedded within or hidden by controversies over sex trafficking.

The public debates, behind-the-scenes organizing, and tenuous alliances that go into influencing policy on women's human rights issues are complex and have been considered elsewhere.⁹ The analysis that follows shifts attention from internal debates and the policymaking process to explore the representation of sex trafficking as an

object of human rights and humanitarian intervention. For over a century the print media, in particular, have produced and disseminated victims' stories, intermingled with statistics about the ubiquity of sex trafficking, and these stories have helped to generate a belief that arguing over minute facts and details is irrelevant in the face of such a horrific form of abuse.

While many studies have considered the social movements that emerged around sex trafficking after 1885, journalism's role in creating sex trafficking as an object of humanitarian and human rights concern is frequently ignored within this literature.¹⁰ Indeed, many works on the history of antitrafficking movements brush over the role of mass-distribution exposés in constructing moral entrepreneurs' own understandings of sex trafficking. The tendency within some of this literature is either to accept stories as neutral statements of fact or contend that such stories made a mockery of an important social issue by sensationalizing sex trafficking.¹¹ However, such claims about press coverage overlook the fact that, from the nineteenth century on, newspapers often directed social movement actors to the very objects they sought to reform.

Indeed, many antitrafficking activists have claimed that their first encounter with sex trafficking was through the popular press. Frances E. Willard, head of the Women's Christian Temperance Organization when Stead's 1885 report was released, described reading the disclosures as a "moral cyclone [that] cleared the air and broke the spell, so that silence now seems criminal and we only wonder that we did not speak before."¹² In 2004, Richard Cizik of the National Association of Evangelicals described ending sex trafficking as a cause that "just jumped off the pages of the newspaper."¹³ It could be argued, then, that the representational strategies journalists employ in sex trafficking narratives, especially the conflation of sexual commerce with slavery, have functioned from the outset to inform and shape understandings of the phenomenon in social movements, non-governmental organizations, and legislative bodies.

Journalists from Stead to Kristof have used a revelatory discourse in which they visit a brothel, have a direct interaction with a sex worker or a group of sex workers, and experience a transformative epiphany that is then presented as the origin point of their beliefs. This encounter is revelatory because it is experienced and represented not as an impression about an individual case but as a profound truth applicable to all instances of prostitution. Such revelatory discourse functions to legitimize stories about sex trafficking in two ways. First, it creates an origin story in which particular assertions about the nature of sex work (typically that all prostitution is trafficking and that all prostitutes are victims) are true and are grounded in a unique experience that causes the revelation. The revelatory discourse assures readers that these assertions are not merely the opinions of the writer. Second, the revelatory moment turns the narrative into a story that posits a moral high ground, elevating what might otherwise be a touristic encounter to almost a spiritual level. This otherwise salacious touristic encounter then becomes a pilgrimage that the reader, by reading and identifying with the text, is invited to share in both the details of the experience and the occupation of the moral high ground. Moreover, this rhetoric of revelation is intimately connected to stunt journalism in which isolated incidents and the outcome of the journalists' behavior are taken to represent greater truths.

Linking Prostitution and Slavery: William T. Stead's 1885 Campaign

In 1885 the crusading journalist and editor William T. Stead set out to chronicle what he and other moral reformers viewed as a pernicious new form of commercial exchange: the purchase of female virgins by wealthy English aristocrats. Stead's investigation resulted in "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," a scandalous exposé of sexual transgression that appeared in five installments of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, a central newspaper of the era.

The first installment's depiction of such sexually taboo acts as bondage and flogging brought throngs of eager readers and newspaper hawkers to the *Pall Mall Gazette's* Northumberland Street office for the next morning's copy. Within two days word of the "Maiden Tribute" had traveled across the Atlantic. Readers across Europe and in American cities began following the story through telegraph. The bulk of Stead's evidence came from second- and third-hand accounts of teenage prostitution, but the narrative's centerpiece was a firsthand account in which an associate of Stead's purchased Eliza Armstrong, a thirteen-year-old virgin, from her mother for five pounds.¹⁴ This purchase functioned within the story as proof that virgins were easily procured and that such abuses were rampant in London, the city Stead christened the new Babylon. In addition to purchasing the girl, Stead's associate, a reformed prostitute, took Armstrong to a midwife who "medically" inspected her to certify her virginity. According to Stead's narrative, Armstrong was then taken to a brothel and actually chloroformed, as Stead imagined would happen to a real sex slave.

Stead was an early pioneer of stunt and role-playing journalism, and he developed many of his characteristic techniques while researching and writing "Maiden Tribute." Yet he also subjected Armstrong to physically harmful medical exams, as well as a potentially deadly exposure to the anesthetic chloroform, in the interest of public knowledge and a broader reformist agenda that conceived of itself as morally righteous. The medical examination met Stead's desire to legitimate Armstrong's virginity and ensure the credibility of the text. Although this simulated rape flew in the face of the original purity campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts, which sought to protect prostitutes from state-enforced medical examination, activists like Josephine Butler placed their full support behind Stead's actions.¹⁵ Armstrong became a martyr in a journalistic and humanitarian quest to convey a larger moral truth through a sensationalist and pornographic representation of sex slavery.

Stead helped establish narrative conventions and a cast of characters, including the victim and the procurer. His story and the characters within it served as evidence supporting his claim of a much wider phenomenon. Stead made no attempt to quantify or estimate the numbers of girls and young women lured or forced into prostitution in London; as such, his narrative stood alone as evidence. Yet Stead's methods and the narrative that resulted would come to serve as the template on which later journalistic stories would be built. This narrative structure is commonplace in current antitrafficking reports and continues to serve as "evidence" of the assertions made by authors, sometimes in place of numerical evidence and sometimes alongside various figures that are bandied about. Stead's narrative supported universalizing claims about sexual slavery and trafficking and served to foreshorten lengthier discussions of variations in conditions under which commercial sex work occurs.

“Maiden Tribute” was England’s most commercially and politically successful publicity stunt of the decade. It contained all the thematic ingredients of sex scandal—sexual transgression and abuse of power and social rank—while also directing readers’ attention to a more systemic social problem. Where the previous lobbying efforts of British antivice social organizations had not resulted in the implementation of strong laws protecting girls, the widely distributed journalistic exposé succeeded in constructing forced prostitution as an urgent humanitarian crisis and object of political intervention by strategically using scandal to force political action. In response to Stead’s allegation that members of Parliament abetted the virgin trade, Parliament passed the sweeping Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885. This law raised the age of consent, expanded police power to arrest prostitutes and brothel owners, and led to a national crackdown on all forms of commercial sex. It also ushered in a period of police attacks on male homosexuality in Britain through its provision making “indecent acts” between men illegal. Oscar Wilde, an acquaintance of Stead’s, was convicted in 1895 of violating the law.¹⁶

As the Criminal Law Amendment Bill was being passed in Parliament, Stead himself was tried and convicted on abduction charges. Armstrong’s mother, who sought the criminal charges, testified that her understanding was that her daughter had been offered a respectable position as a domestic and that Stead’s apprentice had deceived her into accepting the deal. Stead argued in court that the girl’s purchase was justified because it had been committed in the service of a larger goal. The court finally pronounced the journalist and his conspirators guilty of abduction, but Stead nevertheless emerged from this episode a national and international hero among antivice and social purity forces in England and abroad.

The history of antitrafficking activism did not begin with Stead, but his reportage helped jumpstart an international humanitarian movement to combat the traffic in women. The era’s campaigns against sexual commerce were in part a response to increased state regulation of prostitution in the nineteenth century. The rise of regulatory systems that enabled, coordinated, and stipulated the conditions of men’s access to women’s bodies led to an international movement against organized prostitution.¹⁷ After 1885 the movements that arose to fight various forms of state intervention into prostitution began to coalesce under the mantle of stopping trafficking. Despite this new common cause, the groups that emerged during this period often operated with different definitions of trafficking and had diverse agendas. Some focused only on local and national issues, while others sought to rescue prostitutes in colonial contexts or to stem the international flow of prostitutes. Some worked for the abolition of prostitution on the grounds that its existence harmed all women, while others sought new forms of protective regulation.¹⁸

While in its generic sense trafficking refers to the unsanctioned movement of bodies or goods across borders, often for commercial purposes, by 1910 trafficking in most popular and humanitarian discourse had become nearly synonymous with prostitution. Moreover, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century activists increasingly referred to the trade in women as white slavery, a racialized conception that imaginatively conflated prostitution and chattel slavery. Within the phrase “white slavery,” “white” connoted innocence and racial purity, while “slavery” suggested a lack of

freedom and possession by another individual. On a symbolic level, the notion that prostitutes suffered under slavery-like conditions was mapped onto the understanding of trafficking as organized prostitution. In addition to its proximal effects, Stead's exposé performed important cultural work by cementing this connection between prostitution and slavery, a symbolic association that continues to animate representations of prostitution and to mobilize transnational social actors on behalf of today's sex slaves.

Journalism and the New Abolitionism

The traffic in women continued to be an object of newspaper crusades in England and the United States until the onset of World War I. Grassroots activism in both countries waned by the 1930s, although the League of Nations was active in this arena well into the 1930s and the United Nations declared sex trafficking a human rights violation in 1949. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of economic globalization, however, there has been an increase in media exposés on trafficking and prostitution as well as heightened visibility of concern surrounding the global sex trade. Many of the new campaigns against global sex slavery are based in the United States and England. Most recently, American celebrities like George Clooney, Demi Moore, and Ashton Kutcher pledged money to combat sex trafficking and used their celebrity status to publicize the issue.¹⁹ In September 2010, Moore and Kutcher unveiled their new campaign "Real Men Don't Buy Girls" at the Clinton Global Initiative forum, which will feature public service messages by such "high-profile" men as Ben Stiller, Ben Affleck, and Snoop Doggy Dog. The DNA ("Demi and Ashton") Foundation also intends to work with communications companies like Microsoft and Square, a mobile credit card reader, to create technological barriers to online sexual exchanges. At a press conference, Kutcher claimed that the anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was not celebrated because people believe slavery is over. Invoking the evangelical neo-abolitionist Kevin Bales's oft-cited figure, Kutcher claimed there were 27 million slaves in the world today and of these "1 million [are] in the United States today, of which 120,000 to 130,000 are children, raped for the benefit of pimps."²⁰

To some degree our current understanding of trafficking is the result of remnants of historical discourses that congealed during an earlier wave of global migration, revived in a new historical moment. An increased wave of immigration in the 1990s led to renewed attention to sex trafficking, which was represented in the early 1990s in the news media and among feminist organizations like the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW) as the dark underbelly of globalization and free-market economies. As the 1990s went on, however, evangelical groups, harnessing their activism to human rights initiatives, became increasingly interested in sex trafficking as a social ill that preys upon the most innocent victims.²¹

As evangelical antitrafficking efforts gained momentum after 9/11, there was a shift toward representations of innocent victims and villainous captors that continued to emphasize globalization, but only to the degree that it created new opportunities for evildoers. This emphasis on "bad guys who enslave girls" led to a focus on criminality and a quest to find law-and-order solutions to the problem of sex trafficking. For

example, the evangelical activist Gary Haugen, head of the International Justice Mission (a group based in the United States that conducts raids on brothels in India, Thailand, and Cambodia), has repeatedly claimed that “trafficking is not a poverty issue, it’s a law enforcement issue.”²² In a *Christianity Today* article of 2007 commemorating the great abolitionist William Wilberforce, Haugen claimed there were 25 million slaves in the modern world and went on to suggest that the problem surpasses the transatlantic slave trade in size and severity: “There are more slaves in the world today than were extracted from Africa during 400 years of the transatlantic slave trade. More than 25 million human beings are slaves in 2007. They are not slaves in a metaphorical sense. They are held in forced servitude by other human beings. The statistics may seem incomprehensible, but my colleagues and I have known thousands of them by name.” Haugen then offered his theory of the most important factor behind slavery, “aggressive violence.” As he explained, “That is the core reality of forced labor: coercion and terror. Poverty, ignorance, and spiritual darkness are all part of a complex set of social factors that exacerbate slaves’ original vulnerability, but once enslaved, they need someone to rescue them from the brutal hand of their oppressor.” Haugen recounted the story of Elizabeth, “a 16-year-old girl held inside a brothel in Thailand” for whom “it was money for Bible college that lured her into the hands of a sex trafficker who lied about a job across the border. Once inside the brothel, however, it was sheer violent terror that forced her to submit to multiple rapes by the brothel’s paying customers.”²³ While acknowledging tenuous links between cases of forced prostitution to economic inequalities, many current trafficking narratives take the form of melodramas that depict innocent victims enslaved by evil people who must be stopped.²⁴

From an early twenty-first-century vantage point, it is clear that fears of women’s sexuality, immigrant populations, urbanization, and racial mixing were encapsulated in campaigns against sex trafficking a century ago. “Maiden Tribute” was a watershed moment for the antivice movement because it defined a new object of humanitarian concern that had both domestic and international dimensions and was consonant with prevailing understandings of women’s purity.²⁵ The social anxieties expressed in current trafficking narratives are not always so readily apparent, but an examination of the sex slavery exposé can provide a starting point for examining why trafficking has resurfaced as, in the words of former president George W. Bush, “a spreading but hidden evil.”²⁶ If Stead’s crusading journalism helped propel an international movement against sex slavery, how has recent reportage helped to produce sex trafficking as a central object of humanitarian action?

Twenty-first-century investigative reports on sex trafficking have followed a different trajectory. Where some evangelical antitrafficking crusaders learned about the phenomenon through episodic accounts of busted sex trafficking rings in the 1990s press, the last decade’s highest-profile exposés, both published by the *New York Times* in January 2004, emerged in the context of an already growing movement. In 2000, the United Nations established the Optional Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (also known as the UN Protocol), and the United States passed the Victims of Violence and Trafficking in Persons Act, which mandates a yearly TIP report. By 2004, in an address to the

United Nations, President Bush had declared sex trafficking as the worst “moral scourge” confronting the planet.

On the heels of President Bush’s call to end sex slavery, the *New York Times* ran two reports on the topic in January 2004. The first was Nicholas Kristof’s series on teenage prostitution in Poipet, Cambodia, which appeared in five installments between January 14 and January 31. Apparently ignorant of Stead’s unscrupulous strategies, Kristof’s special journalistic and humanitarian mission was to purchase the freedom of two sex slaves and write about his experiences for *New York Times* readers. The other was Peter Landesman’s January 25 piece in the *New York Times Magazine*, “The Girls Next Door,” a detailed investigative report focusing on the ubiquity of internationally trafficked sex slaves in the United States that blended interviews, personal narratives, and hearsay to create a partially fictive portrayal of the global sex trade.

While the exposés in question did not spearhead antitrafficking movements, they did perform important cultural work by helping to establish the invisibility of the trade, a move that rendered critique of trafficking narratives difficult and established a dynamic in which belief trumped evidence. These trafficking exposés also used a relatively small number of personal narratives to metonymically stand in for the alleged millions of victims of sex trafficking worldwide, and tended to appeal to a rhetoric of revelation in which antitrafficking authors behaved as though their ideas were spawned at the very moment in which they personally encountered prostitution.²⁷

“Hiding in Plain Sight”

In December 2001, the Canadian newsmagazine *Maclean’s* printed an exposé of the country’s alleged traffic in women. “Inside the Sex Trade” purported to capture for its readers the largely invisible yet rapidly expanding world of sexual trafficking. The cover photograph suggested that viewers were covertly witnessing an intensely private but also bleak and impersonal moment between two figures. The photo was framed by a doorway, which illuminated only a small portion of the austere room within. Inside the room, a shirtless man, obese and hairy, lay on a massage table, his face obscured. A dressed woman leaned listlessly against the doorway, her back to the camera and gaze fixed on the man on the table. A caption identified the scene as occurring in a Toronto massage parlor. Another caption read: “Trafficking in foreign prostitutes is one of the fastest-growing illicit activities in the world. Welcome to a hidden Canada—and lives of quiet desperation.” The magazine’s cover featured a slightly open doorway inviting readers to view just a small slice of what presumably lay inside both the magazine and the massage parlor. *Maclean’s* readers were promised an expanded view of this disturbingly different world.²⁸

Though other sex trafficking exposés appearing during this period were peppered with similar allusions to the sex trade’s hidden nature and the reader’s potential for voyeurism, the most extreme example of this tendency was Peter Landesman’s article. The magazine’s cover photo was captioned “Sex Slaves on Main Street” and featured an image of a girl sitting on a bed with a wooden dresser behind her. The generic nature of the comforter and dresser suggested that the photo’s backdrop was a cheap

motel room. A teenager in a schoolgirl's outfit, with a short plaid skirt and knee-high black socks, sat on the bed. The photo was taken from below and the girl's face was partially cropped. Because the camera was focused on the girl's knees, viewers were literally looking up the girl's skirt. This photo served as an invitation to readers to indulge their voyeuristic fantasies, in much the same way as the partially opened door in the *Maclean's* photo did.

This salacious cover photo was the introduction to Landesman's dubious investigative piece that purported to detail the methods used by Eastern European and Mexican trafficking rings to import sex slaves into the United States. Evidence for Landesman's claims rested on a mixture of interviews with law enforcement agents as well as feminist and evangelical antitrafficking activists, first-person observation, lavish description based on hearsay, and interviews with two self-described sex slaves to create a composite representation of global trafficking circuits and the despicably brutal practices that recruiters and Mexican pimps use to "break girls in" and prepare them for the rigors of sex slavery in the United States.²⁹ Some of the scenarios he described, such as lines of sex slaves in mini skirts and high-heels being force-marched across the U.S.–Mexico border and a child sex ring that conducts its transactions at Disneyland, were so outlandish that a number of bloggers and media critics pointed out several blatant contradictions in his story and questioned the veracity of his sources.³⁰ During the postpublication media blitz about his exposé, Landesman admitted while being interviewed for *Fresh Air* that his primary informant, Andrea, suffered from "multiple personality disorder."³¹

Along with other recent antitrafficking publications like Kevin Bales's and Ron Soodalter's *The Slave Next Door*, "The Girls Next Door" appeals to a logic of ubiquity and invisibility.³² One section of Landesman's piece was suggestively titled "In the United States: Hiding in Plain Sight."³³ Such appeals to invisibility lead to a peculiar dynamic in which groups and individuals claiming the widespread existence of slavery speculate as to its scope and scale, while law enforcement sets out *after the fact* to confirm such allegations. The ensuing allocation of vast resources and elaborate institutional responses are then justified to critics through an appeal to the invisibility of the phenomenon. For example, Landesman reported that Laura Lederer, acting as senior State Department advisor on trafficking, told him: "We're not finding victims in the United States because we're not looking for them."³⁴ Lederer articulates a paradoxical reasoning in which the presence of a phenomenon purported to be invisible is actually supported by its very unverifiability.

The Rhetoric of Revelation

When comparing a century of narratives over sex trafficking, it becomes clear that while the temporal and spatial vectors have changed, the basic narrative structure of these stories has remained the same. The following two passages illustrate how a revelatory discourse similar to that deployed by Stead functions in recent journalistic antitrafficking narratives.

The first example comes from a speech delivered by Dorchen Leidholdt, co-executive director of CATW, to fellow feminist antitrafficking activists. In this speech Leidholdt describes how she posed as a newspaper reporter to get inside a Frankfurt

brothel and how her encounter with the city's legal sex industry convinced her of the necessity to combat prostitution in all its forms. CATW explicitly aligns itself with earlier women-led campaigns against trafficking and nearly singlehandedly kept the trafficking-as-prostitution thesis alive in the late 1970s and early 1980s, when many American feminists were preoccupied debating whether or not pornography was the lynchpin of women's oppression. The group argues that trafficking and prostitution are synonymous phenomena and sharply disagrees with distinctions other feminist and human rights groups make between legal and illegal or voluntary and coerced prostitution (or any other frameworks meant to differentiate among forms of commercial sex and degrees of harm and risk). At the level of narrative, Leidholdt's speech sought to create and reinforce strong semantic and emotional associations among the terms "trafficking," "prostitution," "slavery," and "violence":

While not as dire as their internationally trafficked sisters, the lot of the legally prostituted woman was also dismal. Posing as an American newspaper reporter, I was welcomed by the madam into a legal brothel in the heart of Frankfurt. It resembled a four-star hotel in the US. I was soon surrounded by a group of women eager for a distraction from their late afternoon wait for their clients. Several of the women's husbands were also their pimps, most of the women were from poor, rural areas of Germany, and all faced bleak futures with few employment skills. The sex of prostitution was an unwanted invasion they had developed a series of strategies to avoid—their favorite, they confided, was to get the men so drunk that they didn't know what they were penetrating. The women seemed bored and depressed. The depression deepened when I asked them what they were going to be doing in five years. Aside from one woman who said that she hoped to help manage the brothel, they were at a loss for words. [. . .] When I boarded the plane to Strasbourg, it seemed indisputable to me that prostitution and sex trafficking were interrelated phenomena.³⁵

Here Leidholdt chooses to impersonate a journalist, of all people, in order to gain access to the interior of a brothel. Leidholdt's invocation of a rhetoric of revelation is somewhat more subtle than that of most journalists. She does not make an overt claim that these women are held captive inside. However, she does interpret the women's affect and failure to answer some of her questions as depression. Leidholdt's experience of this perceived emotion then leads her to posit a connection between prostitution and sex trafficking as inseparable phenomena. She implies that the sex workers in all contexts are experiencing similar emotions.

The second passage appeared in the January 17 installment of Kristof's Cambodian sex-trafficking series. Kristof describes posing as an American sex tourist so that he can purchase the freedom of young sex slaves in order to eventually deliver them back to their families in rural Cambodia. Reviving a long-established tradition in the fact-gathering methodology of trafficking journalism, Kristof purchases a real live sex slave. But this time he buys her freedom instead of chloroforming her and having her hymen checked, in an apparent improvement over Stead's approach. Here Kristof meets Srey Momm, one of the two girls whose freedom he purchases:

Another girl, Srey Momm, grabbed at me as I walked down the street. She wouldn't let go, tugging me toward the inner depths of her brothel—but she looked so young and pitiable that I couldn't help thinking that she really wanted me to tug her away.

So I did. I paid the owner \$8 to spring her for the evening and then took her away for an interview. . . . I asked Srey Momm what her freedom would cost. Payment of about \$70 in debts to her brothel owner, she said. Two girls in her brothel had been freed after they found boyfriends who paid their debts, she said, and she spoke of her longing to see her sisters and the rest of her family in her village on the other side of Cambodia.

“Do you really want to leave the brothel?” I asked.

“I love myself,” she answered simply. “I do not want to let my life be destroyed by what I'm doing now.”

That's when I made a firm decision I'd been toying with for some time: I would try to buy freedom for these two girls and return them to their families. I'll tell you in my column Wednesday what happens next.³⁶

Kristof's purchase of Momm's freedom appears at once as a rehash of and at the same time as an improvement on Stead's kidnapping and assault. But both journalists take the logic of the exotic touristic encounter with commercial sex to the brink, then recover their own and their readers' moral high ground by releasing their female subjects and framing the stunt as a humanitarian action. Certainly Kristof's assault-free approach allows him to end his travels with an instance of moral consumerism, the ultimate “feel good” purchase (a righteous souvenir of sorts). However, even though Kristof verifies the actual freedom of his victim with the same enthusiasm that Stead verified his victim's virginity (Kristof devotes a chapter of *Half the Sky* to Srey Neth and Srey Momm, the two girls he purchased), it is possible that these methods perform little good other than serving as publicity stunts and rhetorical fodder in the form of journalistic “evidence.”³⁷

Indeed, purchasing sex slaves, even for the purpose of obtaining their freedom, may in fact exacerbate problems of prostitution in impoverished areas. The trafficking in persons Report of 2009 specifically warned against taking such measures to combat human trafficking in all its manifestations.³⁸ In the case of prostitution, such a strategy creates a market for sex slaves whose freedom becomes another item to be purchased on the brothel's menu. Just as “virginity” can be purchased at a premium in illicit sex markets, so too now can “freedom.” It matters not whether Stead's girl was a real virgin or Kristof's was really a slave. An influx of crusaders with full wallets can ultimately result in the costly purchase of false hope.

Kristof's and Leidholdt's eyewitness accounts emerged from different institutional locations. Leidholdt is an antitrafficking activist who traveled abroad to convince an international audience that abolishing prostitution in all its forms should be feminism's central task. Kristof traveled to Cambodia at the behest of the *New York Times* in order to bring stories about trafficking back to American newspaper readers. Yet despite differences in time and place—not to mention diverging political and professional agendas—the authors offer strikingly similar perspectives on the sex industry and the women working in it.

Such stories, reproduced at international conferences, in activist publications, and in the print, broadcast, and digital media, constitute evidence that the trade exists, standing in as a synecdoche for the alleged millions of trafficking cases worldwide. When stories—especially two firsthand accounts—share so many common features, we can generally assume an important essential truth is being conveyed about an event or phenomenon. These narrators must have captured some intrinsic or elemental aspect of prostitution that would be readily available to all sympathetic observers venturing into such spaces as German brothels or Cambodian red light districts. It is my contention, however, that what connects these two representations has less to do with what our activist and reporter witnessed in Germany and Cambodia as it does with the way they understood what they saw and heard and the conventions they drew upon to bring these findings to light. The similarities also have to do with their use of a common rhetorical strategy in which these stories stand in for a larger reality but also certify their argument that the trade exists and universally means what they say it means: in Leidholdt's case that all sex workers are helpless victims, and in Kristof's case that trafficking is the only form of prostitution with which we should be concerned.³⁹

These representations share at least two striking features that are common to innumerable journalistic and activist narratives of sex slavery and that highlight the power of narrative to “write us,” in Stuart Hall's words.⁴⁰ First, the concept of trafficking as it has evolved linguistically exercises a determining force in both narratives. From the beginning, trafficking constitutes the frame through which the authors view the social milieu of commercial sex. Both authors approach their object fully expecting to witness scenes of imprisonment and hear stories of emotional depression and withdrawal. Yet details offered up in their own narratives depend on lavish interpretive license in order to conform to the trafficking narrative. Kristof meets Srey Momm when she grabs him walking the streets of Poipet. Assuming he is a Western sex tourist, she pulls him toward her brothel, an action that disrupts the sense of forcible enclosure that Kristof has earlier equated with slavery. The journalist superimposes his own interpretation on the interaction: “She wouldn't let go, tugging me toward the inner depths of her brothel—but she looked so young and pitiable that I couldn't help thinking that she really wanted me to tug her away.” Likewise, Leidholdt interprets her informants' “loss for words” in response to her query about future prospects as emotional resignation. While occasionally errant details threaten to undermine these narratives, the concept of trafficking serves to unify and anchor them, pulling the stories toward established conventional meanings.

Second, witness accounts, such as these that assert sex slavery, are infused with a rhetoric of revelation. Although Leidholdt and Kristof purposely set out to chronicle trafficking and sex slavery, they nonetheless rely on a revelatory discourse to convey what they witness in the field. Thus, despite a predisposition to see and document sex slavery, the actual encounter with what they understand as trafficking is inevitably couched as a discovery. Encounters with the object inevitably lead the chronicler to confess shock, stirring, awakening, surprise, and renewed conviction to battle trafficking. For example, Leidholdt leaves the Frankfurt brothel with what she describes as a renewed belief that trafficking and prostitution are intrinsically related

phenomena (as though her belief in this understanding of trafficking had ever been in doubt). The ubiquity of revelatory discourse in antitrafficking texts leads me to believe that they are actually ritualized travel narratives, stories of predestined epiphany resembling the experience of a pilgrim visiting a foreign shrine. These accounts put both audience and writer on the moral high ground. The writer invites the reader to partake in an exotic touristic narrative; and because that narrative has a moral, both can feel good about their role as witness.

Narrative and Political Effects

The purpose of this inquiry has not been to assert that narratives are fictive but to underscore the idea that journalists often employ old familiar victim narratives to create stories and garner evidence that promote particular interpretations of the meaning of commercial sex work. These meanings are not just a matter of personal opinion and are not mere semantic distinctions but have broad policy implications and even more pointedly become the hinge on which legal definitions turn.

The antitrafficking crusade that gained traction under the Bush administration tends to conceive of all prostitution as a form of slavery—the worst form of slavery ever. And some moral entrepreneurs like John R. Miller, who until 2006 headed the State Department's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, have campaigned for a thoroughgoing eradication of prostitution under the mantle of anti-trafficking.⁴¹ Following this reasoning, there is something that is so morally repugnant about prostitution that it should somehow be grandfathered in as a special type of trafficking, even in local cases in which there is no movement or migration of people, forced or unforced. Indeed, the William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 contained a provision that rendered so-called domestic trafficking—without so much as crossing a state border—a federal crime.⁴² This provision allocated five million dollars to local urban police squads to aid in routine crackdowns on street prostitution. Pimps can now be convicted of a federal crime and serve prison sentences disproportionate to the offense (as long as ninety-nine years), and discussions on how to implement similar draconian punishments for clients of prostitutes are currently underway.⁴³

Because of its historical association with prostitution and the way it has been used interchangeably with the terms “forced labor” and “slavery,” the concept of “trafficking” tends to confuse rather than clarify the multiplicity of processes of labor and migration in the global economy. Human trafficking implies the movement of people across borders, and yet in a form of symbolic slippage, trafficking has gone from denoting the unsanctioned movement across nations or states to the domestic movement of people (rural to urban migration, for example). Now, it is even used to describe conditions in which there is no movement at all (urban street prostitution, for example), and antitrafficking activists assert that movement is not necessary for trafficking to occur. One antitrafficking organization's website states “human trafficking is modern-day slavery through labor or commercial sexual exploitation, and does not require transportation to occur, though transportation may be involved.”⁴⁴ The target of many antitrafficking interventions—prostitution and not forced or coerced migration—ultimately stands in for and displaces other forms of labor and

other forms of exploitative migration, thereby eliding and undercutting the significance of forced and exploitative migrant labor as well as the trafficking of humans for nonsexual exploitation.

The United Nations, to its credit, has consistently deployed a more nuanced understanding of sex trafficking that distinguishes among forced and voluntary migration for work into the sex industry. The UN's new "forced labor" approach being advanced under the aegis of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is beneficial because it emphasizes labor—a critical variable that many anti-sex trafficking activists have tried to deemphasize—and considers the trafficking and forced labor of people across a range of industries, from the sex industry to gem-cutting and agricultural work. Critically, the ILO's efforts to combat forced labor take into account that men and boys are also victims of this practice.

However, legislation often has unanticipated effects, and policies pertaining to forced prostitution can also be used for purposes that may interest states and their "law and order" campaigns but that have little to do with ensuring the security of men, women, and children. For example, the United States could easily adopt "forced labor" statutes that are used in practice only to crack down on and impose heavy punishments on prostitutes, their clients, and their intermediaries. A more nuanced approach to prostitution would recognize women's agency, distinguish among voluntary and involuntary prostitution, and not demonize sex workers or cut funding from programs that emphasize harm reduction.

Conclusion

Attempts to curb trafficking by creating heightened minimum jail sentences for perpetrators do nothing to address the conditions that lead to prostitution and to forced labor more generally. It is also possible that recent efforts to curb the global traffic in women can harm rather than assist migrating and nonmigrating women who work in the sex industry. Those who facilitate unsanctioned immigration do so in order to circumvent restrictive immigration policies. Yet for many women in poor countries, the ability to enter constitutes the appeal of debt-bondage contracts. Legal solutions to trafficking often culminate in the creation of restrictive immigration laws and the fortification of national borders. If anything, the history of panics over trafficking suggests that activists, in their selection of issues, should base their decisions not on the phenomenological experience of shock in confronting representations of sex slavery but on historical and social knowledge of the unintentional material effects of past campaigns against trafficking on women's lives.

If we remain mired in a discourse of innocent victims and villainous captors, we are unlikely to find solutions to the problem that do not ultimately rely on repressive measures to curb instances of forcible trafficking. As some progressives have pointed out, the suppression of prostitution through negative means often leads to the production of new social problems, while frequently intensifying old ones. While the legal "solution" to trafficking is to restrict immigration and fortify national borders, the solution in part exacerbates the problem it attempts to ameliorate. Moreover, journalistic and activist approaches insisting that all forms of prostitution are trafficking, or that trafficking is a problem primarily of sexual slavery, ultimately

encourage international policy and domestic legal tactics that target prostitution and thus female prostitutes, the women they purportedly assist. Once again, this points to the importance of critical approaches to how journalists gather evidence, tell stories, and create meanings. If journalists who seek to render sex trafficking visible to policy-makers do not understand the narratives and rhetorical tropes they are deploying in their productions, how can they be sure that the legislation that may be implemented as a result of their efforts targets only those undesirable practices and does not have unintended effects?

Sex trafficking allows governments like the United States to appear to be making humanitarian interventions by focusing on moral crusades of relatively limited scope and cost. State-sponsored campaigns to end trafficking are not conducted against other states, or against terrorists who might fight back; they are humanitarian actions that even a noninterventionist like former American UN ambassador John Bolton would likely approve. The public and international communities applaud such efforts because they approve of humanitarian efforts that help people. But when these efforts produce few results—in this case few sex traffickers and few trafficked women—the American public, in particular, is still left with a feeling of satisfaction because its sense of moral rectitude has been stroked. This moral ethos overwhelms any residue of failure that might potentially smear the antisex trafficking international agenda. Thus the antisex trafficking movement presents a win-win proposition for politicians who promote it: they come out looking good regardless of the results.

In a field whose primary function is to report on the “new,” journalists are not always historically informed and rarely reflect on the linkages between journalistic methods and specific representations, including portrayals of gendered and racialized violence. Yet reportage and humanitarian representations are always a blend of fact and narrative. They are human creations that explain events and attempt to incite change. Ideally these representations would be accountable to the facts, including where they came from, whom they came from, and the conditions under which they were produced. But it is also important to critically examine stories as narratives, to understand how meaning is created, how stories are structured, and how certain stories are deployed to particular effects. After all, the stories we tell are never just stories in a vacuum. These stories have social and institutional effects; and those effects, the products of narrative, are facts as well.

In addition to using recycled stories and images from earlier eras, journalists and antitrafficking activists repeatedly deploy a number of rhetorical strategies to legitimize their claims about prostitution. As I have shown in this essay, one prominent strategy is the rhetoric of revelation, in which a journalist or activist tells a story recounting how the direct experience of having contact with a prostitute led him or her to have an epiphany in which his or her beliefs about sex trafficking were revealed as a *Gestalt*, moral imperative, or higher level of awareness. By appealing to the reader to accept their direct experience, in particular the experience of emotions attributed to the sex worker or by the writer on her behalf, authors using the rhetoric of revelation establish authority and legitimize the truth value and generalizability of their narrative as well as explicitly certify their own point of view about commercial sex work. The endpoint of this rhetoric is almost always an oversimplified argument about the nature of sex

work, one that posits a single truth and tends to be highly reductionist. While there is no logical reason why the rhetoric of revelation should always result in oversimplified understandings of sex work and women's mobility, the fact remains that in the past and present the overwhelming function of the rhetoric of revelation is not to explain at all but to establish belief.

NOTES

1. Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (New York: Vintage, 2009), xiv.
2. United States Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 10th ed. (Washington, D.C., 2010), 7.
3. International Labour Organization, *Training Manual to Fight Trafficking in Children for Labour, Sexual and Other Forms of Exploitation* (Geneva: ILO Publications, 2009), 34.
4. Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009).
5. Kamala Kempadoo, "Globalizing Sex Workers' Rights," *Canadian Women Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* 22, no. 3/4 (2003): 144.
6. U.S. Department of Justice, *Assessment of U.S. Government Activities to Combat Trafficking in Persons in Fiscal Year 2004* (Washington, D.C., 2005), 4.
7. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Human Trafficking: Better Data, Strategy, and Reporting Needed to Enhance U.S. Antitrafficking Efforts Abroad* (Washington, D.C., 2006), 2.
8. For example, the *Training Manual to Fight Trafficking in Children for Labour, Sexual and Other Forms of Exploitation* claims that "the criminal and hidden nature of trafficking means that the only data available are generally based on the few reports that come to light. [. . .] By their very nature, these figures probably underestimate the true picture." International Labour Organization, *Training Manual*, 34.
9. See Sally Engle Mary, *Human Rights and Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); Penelope Saunders, "Traffic Violations: Determining the Meaning of Violence in Sexual Trafficking versus Sex Work," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 20, no. 3 (2005): 343–60; 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.
10. One striking exception to this claim is Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
11. See, for example, Stephanie L. Limoncelli, *The Politics of Trafficking: The First International Movement to Combat the Sexual Exploitation of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900–1918* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983).
12. Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889), 419.
13. Nina Shapiro, "The New Abolitionists," *Seattle Weekly*, August 30, 2004.
14. Stead used the terms "girls" and "children" interchangeably in the exposé. In fact all of the girls to whom he refers were teenagers.
15. For more on the earlier campaigns, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class, and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

16. Raymond L. Shultz, *Crusader in Babylon: W. T. Stead and the Pall Mall Gazette* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972); Anthony E. Simpson, ed., *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon: The Report of the Secret Commission by W. T. Stead* (Lambertville, N.J.: True Bill Press, 2007); Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*.
17. For an insightful account of the globalization of prostitution in the nineteenth century, see Limoncelli, *Politics of Trafficking*.
18. See Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887–1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Limoncelli, *Politics of Trafficking*; Rosen, *Lost Sisterhood*.
19. George Clooney and Steven Soderbergh served as executive producers of the 2009 documentary *Playground: The Child Sex Trade in America*, directed by Libby Spears.
20. Karen Rubin, “Ashton Kutcher, Demi Moore Launch Campaign to Stop Child Sex Trafficking,” *Long Island Populist Examiner*, September 26, 2010.
21. For an account of the recent evangelical involvement in human rights campaigns, see Allen D. Hertzke, *Freeing God’s Children: The Unlikely Alliance for Global Human Rights* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004); see also Elizabeth Bernstein, “The Sexual Politics of the ‘New Abolitionism’: Imagery and Activism in Contemporary Anti-Trafficking Campaigns,” *differences* 18, no. 3 (2007): 128–51.
22. Quoted in Peter Landesman, “The Girls Next Door,” *New York Times Magazine*, January 25, 2004, 34–35.
23. Gary Haugen, “On a Justice Mission,” *Christianity Today*, March 2007.
24. For an insightful analysis of melodrama as a pervasive post-9/11 cultural narrative, see Elizabeth Anker, “Melodrama, Victims, and September 11,” *Journal of Communication* 55, no. 1 (2005): 22–37.
25. While Stead’s investigation focused on the London sex slave market, it contained sections on the import of French and rural girls to London and the export of British girls to other European countries.
26. George W. Bush, “Address to the United Nations” (September 23, 2003), <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/09.23.03.html> (accessed May 29, 2005).
27. Given that the rhetoric of revelation, which structures so many sex slave narratives, is similar to standing before a church and bearing witness to the personal experience of being born again, it is little wonder these narratives have appealed to evangelicals.
28. Susan McClelland, “Inside the Sex Trade,” *Macleans*, December 3, 2001, 21–25.
29. Landesman claims some girls in Mexico were made to “have sex with 29 to 30 men a day; they would do this seven days a week usually for weeks but sometimes for months before they were ‘ready’ for the United States.” Landesman, “The Girls Next Door,” 37.
30. The blogger Daniel Radosh, the *Slate* media critic Jack Shafer, and the journalist Debbie Nathan continue to express intense skepticism over Landesman’s piece, claiming that at least parts of it were fabricated.
31. See Jack Shafer, “Doubting Landesman: I’m Not the Only One Questioning the *Times Magazine*’s Sex-slave Story,” *Slate*, January 27, 2004, <http://www.slate.com/id/2094502> (accessed March 15, 2011).
32. Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, *The Slaves Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery in America Today* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
33. Landesman, “Girls Next Door,” 38.

34. Ibid., 37.

35. Dorchen Leidholdt, "Demand and the Debate," CATW website, <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/readingroom.shtml?x=53793> (accessed May 2, 2009).

36. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Girls for Sale," *New York Times*, January 17, 2004.

37. Indeed, Srey Momm (spelled "Mom" in Kristof's *New York Times* pieces) ultimately rejected Kristof's rescue attempts. Kristof reports being "devastated" when, during a follow-up visit to Poipet, he found Momm working in the same brothel from which he had purchased her a year earlier. Over the course of 2004 an American aid group had given Momm several chances to earn a living outside of prostitution, but "each time Srey Mom fled back to the brothel." Kristof attributes Momm's inability to be rescued to her low self-esteem, her drug addiction, and her "eerily close relationship with Mrs. Heok Tem," the brothel owner, whom she calls "Mother." Kristof, "Back to the Brothel," *New York Times*, January 22, 2005, A10. The purchases of Srey Momm and Srey Neth are also detailed at length in *Half the Sky*. The uncertainty of purchasing freedom leads the authors to conclude that rescue is "sometimes impossible, and that's why it is most productive to focus efforts on prevention and putting brothels out of business." Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, 45. For more on the politics of rescue, see Soderlund, "Running from the Rescuers."

38. U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report*, 9th ed. (Washington, D.C., 2009), 24.

39. Kristof advocates a "big stick" approach to prostitution. He contends that sex slavery is so heinous a crime that using law enforcement and other repressive measures to end it outweighs any harm that may come to nontrafficked prostitutes in the process. See Kristof and WuDunn, *Half the Sky*, 25–34.

40. Stuart Hall, "The Narrative Construction of Reality," *Southern Review* 17, no. 1 (1984): 8.

41. John R. Miller, "The Justice Department, Blind to Slavery," *New York Times*, July 11, 2008. Miller believes that all women prostitutes, except perhaps the highest-paid call girls, are victims.

42. U.S. Department of Justice, "William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008" (Washington, D.C., 2008), <http://www.justice.gov/olp/pdf/wilberforce-act.pdf> (accessed September 25, 2010).

43. Bernstein, "Sexual Politics," 148.

44. Polaris Project, <http://www.polarisproject.org> (accessed September 10, 2010).