

The Modern-Day White (Wo)Man’s Burden: Trends in Anti-Trafficking and Anti-Slavery Campaigns

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In the early 1990s, the debate on human trafficking was restricted to a handful of feminists and revolved around establishing “the trafficking of women” as a case of labor migration or one of “female sexual slavery.” Two decades later, the debate is more complicated and widespread, yet within the proliferation of attention, a convergence among some of the most vocal and visible campaigns is discernible. This article takes up three prominent campaigns that dominate contemporary debates internationally—modern anti-slavery, abolitionist feminism, and celebrity humanitarianism—and considers the politics that emerge at the points of their convergence. It is argued that rather than getting to “the bottom of things,” as Emma Goldman urged over a century ago in relation to the “traffic of women,” a 21st-century version of the “white man’s burden” is apparent, supported by contemporary western, neoliberal interests that maintain boundaries between the haves and the have-nots, while bolstering an image of a compassionate, benevolent West. The article points toward an alternate framework, one that is lodged in a commitment to social and economic justice, decolonization, a redistribution of wealth, and respect for subaltern experience and knowledge.

Keywords: abolitionist feminism, anti-slavery, celebrity humanitarianism, imperialism, white supremacy

INTRODUCTION

Over 20 years ago, when I first started research on the subject, the debate on human trafficking was limited and primarily contained within feminist circles. On the one hand, there were the Asian and Western European feminist activists and scholars, including Siriporn Srobanek, Lin Lap Chew, Marjan Wijers, Than Dam Truoug, and Licia Brussa, who were interrogating the presence of women in prostitution in Southeast Asia and migrant women in Western European sex industries from women’s, labor, sex worker, and migrant’s rights perspectives. This led to the formulation of “the trafficking of women” as a case of gendered sexual labor migration in the context of unequal relations between the Global North and South and to the formation of, among other organizations, the Thailand-based Global Alliance in Trafficking Against Women (GAATW). On the other hand, the work of American and Australian feminists, such as Kathleen Barry, Sheila Jeffreys, and Janice Raymond argued for an understanding of the

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problem of women in the global sex trade as “female sexual slavery,” linking up with women’s rights organizations such as Gabriela in the Philippines that were organizing around sexual exploitation at U.S. military bases and in tourist industries in Southeast Asia, which led to the formation of the US-based Coalition Against Trafficking in Women (CATW). Today, the debate has become far more complex and diverse. Indeed, the idea of human trafficking is more widely spoken about, although the definition has become more murky and confusing where trafficking has become conflated and interchangeable with the concepts of forced labor and slavery (Chuang, 2013). Nevertheless, some trends in the larger debate are visible, and, in the following, I take a macrolook at the anti-trafficking field in order to discuss the politics of the dominant perspectives. Of significance here are three of the most visible global trends: modern anti-slavery, abolitionist feminism, and celebrity humanitarianism. Each has its own set of actors, agendas, and assumptions about how to eradicate human trafficking, yet, when put together, reveal a remarkable consistency in their politics of race and approaches to the political economy. A brief review of each will help to set the stage for further discussion.

ABOLITIONISM AND HUMANITARIANISM

The modern-day or anti-slavery campaign, also referred to here as modern slavery abolitionism, was substantially formed through the work of the American Kevin Bales in the late 1990s. Bales cofounded and is former president of the organization, “Free the Slaves” — a U.S. offspring of British Anti-Slavery International that was established in 1839 to end the enslavement of Africans — that partners with a variety of local organizations in countries such as Haiti, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Nepal. He has penned several award-winning books on modern slavery and his work is influential in the global arena, establishing, for example, the number of modern-day slaves (27 million) in his 1999 publication, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, which stood as the benchmark figure until 2013.¹ Others in this category include: Siddarth Kara, director of the Program on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government and author of *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (2009); Benjamin Perrin, a university law professor in Canada, author of *Invisible Chains: Canada's Underground World of Human Trafficking* (2010), and former lead policy advisor to the Canadian Prime Minister’s Office (PMO)²; Joel Quirk, former director of the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation, UK, and author of *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (2011); and a very recent arrival to the campaign, Andrew Forrest, philanthropist and chairman of the Fortescue Metals Group — the fourth largest iron ore supplier in the world — and cofounder (with his wife and Kevin Bales) of the “Walk Free Foundation.” In 2013, this foundation began the annual “Global Slavery Index,” which ranks the world’s countries according to their estimated prevalence of slavery, and, in 2014, helped found the multifaith Global Freedom Network that brought together Catholic, Anglican, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Orthodox leaders to sign a joint declaration.³ Prominent in this trend are also journalists

¹ Bales is also Professor of Contemporary Slavery at the Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation and the University of Hull in Britain, named for William Wilberforce, the English politician and evangelical Christian who led the abolitionist movement against the slave trade in late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

² Perrin was implicated in a Senate expense scandal and subsequently left the PMO post in 2013.

³ <http://www.globalslaveryindex.org/> and <http://www.globalfreedomnetwork.org/>

such as American Nicolas Kristof of the *New York Times*, who frequently reports on the plight of “sex slaves,” and his Asian-American journalist and entrepreneur wife, Sheryl WuDunn, with whom he wrote *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (Kristof & WuDunn, 2010) and created an organization named after the book, Benjamin Skinner, senior fellow at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism of Brandeis University, and Victor Malarek, a Canadian investigative journalist and author of *The Natashas: The Global Sex Trade* (2003).

Modern slavery, these academics, journalists, and businesspeople declare, is not the same as chattel slavery as it is not premised on the ownership for life of one person by another, as was the case in the enslavement of Africans and “classical” slavery. Rather, it is located in the notion of force or violence by an individual or company towards another, through which the victim loses control over her or his life and comes to exist in a state of total unfreedom. The majority of the cases however, as Quirk and Bales are quick to point out, do not fit neatly into this ideal category of “the slave,” as they are more properly situations of debt-bondage, where a person is indebted to another and works for that person to pay off the loan (Bales, 1999; Quirk, 2007). Debt-bondage is moreover, as Bales explains, a temporary condition, is not inherited nor does it involve the kinds of physical violence that held Africans in slavery (i.e., chains, manacles, stocks, branding, whipping, hanging, etc.), and, as Quirk adds, events such as kidnapping are rare. And unlike the enslavement of Africans, debt-bondage involves a level of willingness on the part of the victim, revealing a striking similarity to systems of indenture, including the types of fraud and deception in the recruitment, transportation, and/or employment of persons that were prevalent in the postemancipation era in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see Bahadur, 2014; Roopnarine, 2007).

Confounding in this approach, as Quirk points out, is that a dividing line between slavery and freedom is unclear, and it indeed is difficult to establish that line in the twenty-first-century given that many people experience force and coercion in legal work situations and where the difference between forced labor and poor working conditions is hard to determine (O’Connell Davidson, 2006). Slavery in this perspective also does not exclusively focus on the sex trade, although much attention is given for women and girls in what is identified as forced prostitution. Slavery is generally understood to cover the four practices included in the 1956 U.N. Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery — debt-bondage, serfdom, servile (arranged) marriage, and child servitude — but it is also related to definitions in the U.N. Protocol on Trafficking that emphasizes the forced sexual exploitation of women and girls and to ideas of forced and compulsory labor as contained in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Forced Labour Convention. Nevertheless and despite the already established terms in the international conventions and that conditions being described under the moniker “slavery” are more analogous to indentureship than to past practices of slavery, the campaign maintains its own definitions of slavery and trafficking. As Kevin Bales explained in a 2011 television program on slavery, “Trafficking is simply a process by which a person is placed into slavery. If they don’t end up in slavery in the end, it’s not called trafficking, it’s called smuggling.”⁴ Apart from muddling trafficking and slavery in such a way, two other dimensions surface in anti-

⁴ Quoted in Persaud, 2012, p.13. Persaud conducts an analysis of a 2011 TV talk show series on slavery, featuring Kevin Bales, Luis CdeBaca of the U.S. State Department Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, David Batstone (President of Not for Sale — another US-based anti-slavery organization), and Joy Ezeilo, U.N. Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons. Janie Chuang also identifies Bale’s number of 27 million modern-day slaves as dependent upon his “own made-up definition of slavery, which was far broader than any found in actual law” (2013, p. 64).

slavery campaigns. One is of an individual forcing another into servitude, which is woven into the movement more generally. As the Walk Free Foundation puts it, “a significant characteristic” of modern slavery “is that it involves one person depriving another people of their freedom: their freedom to leave one job for another, their freedom to leave one workplace for another, their freedom to control their own body” (Walk Free Foundation, 2014). This individualization of the problem has important ramifications for modern anti-slavery interventions and solutions, which we will come back to later. The second is the importance of morality, which guides the movement and which is commonly expressed through religious notions of “good” and “evil.” In the absence of a clear definition, the term “slavery” is invoked to appeal to emotion and a generalized sense of right and wrong in the world today (Brennan, 2014; Chuang, 2013). As David Batstone, President of Not for Sale — another US-based anti-modern slavery organization — succinctly puts it, “The moral clarity we need to end this issue is to call it slavery” (as quoted in Persaud, 2012, p. 13). It is then also a moral campaign rather than one based on evidence.

The second trend that is of significance here is abolitionist feminism, with the leading voices and influences being European and American, from Josephine Butler in the nineteenth century, through to the CATW. Abolitionist feminism does not draw on the earlier black slavery abolitionism as the modern day anti-slavery campaigners do. Instead the analysis and moral outrage builds from a history of campaigns against “white slavery” and focuses on the workings of patriarchy, with an almost exclusive focus on sexual violence against women. Emerging from this perspective is the notion that prostitution is a male-created, patriarchal institution for the terrorization, control, and exploitation of women, similar to that of marriage, the family, and the veil (Barry, 1984; Jeffreys, 1997). The abolitionist feminist discourse is directly related to what is known in feminist circles as Radical Feminism that emerged out of the North American and Western European women’s movement in the 1960s. Yet, while many ideas in Radical Feminism have been contested, including by Black, “Third World,” and postcolonial feminists who have critiqued the Euro-American centrism in the theorizing and politics, and some ideas have been rethought, an unreconstructed, unexamined definition of prostitution has been maintained. Prostitution is unconditionally, and without exception, viewed as violence against women. Moreover, abolitionist feminism introduced the notion of “sex trafficking” at the turn of this century, where all prostitution is seen to constitute female sexual slavery (see Raymond & Hughes, 2001). This idea circulates widely today, with trafficking becoming conflated with prostitution.

The third trend is identified by Ilan Kapoor (2013) as “celebrity humanitarianism” in his book of the same title, in which he examines global charity and philanthropy of entertainment stars such as Bono and Geldorf, billionaires such as Soros and Gates, and “spectacular” nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as Save Darfur and Medicines Sans Frontiers. In a similar vein, a number of Hollywood stars in the past decade have adopted human trafficking and modern-day slavery as social issues to speak out against. For example, Julia Ormond created the NGO the Alliance to Stop Slavery and End Trafficking (ASSET) in 2007; Susan Sarandon joined the Body Shop “End Demand” and Somaly Mam campaigns to end child sex trafficking; Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher started the Demi and Ashton (DNA) Foundation in 2009 to bring child sexual slavery into public attention, which in 2012 morphed into the Thorn foundation that aims to be “digital defenders of children”⁵; Emma Thompson curated an art installation and directed a film for the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) entitled “Journey” to address the

⁵ <http://www.wearethorn.org/aboutus/>.

trafficking of women and girls into prostitution; Mira Sorvino, who herself starred in the 2005 TV mini-series “Human Trafficking” and the more recent Indie movie “Trade of Innocents,” also became a UNODC Goodwill Ambassador in 2009 on the issue and today speaks widely, including at academic conferences, as an expert on the subject; Daryl Hannah accompanied the Oregon police to fight sex trafficking on the streets and, in 2006, made a documentary on the subject for the U.S. Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST); Lindsay Lohan made a BBC documentary on the trafficking of women and children in India; and several others have joined the Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS), “Girls are Not For Sale” campaign.

The main thrust behind such celebrity campaigns and attention is the rescue of women, particularly young women and underage girls from what they deem to be “modern-day slavery” and “sex trafficking,” picking up from the terms introduced by the two groups of aforementioned abolitionists. The activities vary from the DNA “Real Men don’t buy girls” campaign with videos that make fun of things that “real men” don’t do (such as driving while blindfolded, making a grilled cheese sandwich with an iron, shaving with a chainsaw, etc.) to the Thompson mockumentary that depicts the physical and psychological harm that young women face in very graphic detail, and which is seen to typify the trafficking/sex slavery episode (the film follows a naive teenage girl in an unknown eastern European country, who is deceived by her girlfriend, bought by a group of men speaking in a Slavic language, brutally raped, urinated upon, locked in a brothel, whereupon she slits her wrists and dies in a pool of blood). Celebrity humanitarianism is broadcast widely in the media; the celebrities’ hearts are seen to be in the right place, their pockets deep, and their star status quickly brings attention to a problem that is believed to be one of the most heinous. However, as Dina Haynes concludes from an extensive review of celebrities’ involvement in anti-trafficking campaigns:

The data strongly suggest that although a great deal of money and attention are directed to their “awareness raising” efforts, celebrity engagement is not significantly advancing the work of eradicating human trafficking. Instead, most celebrity activists reduce the complexity of both the problem and its potential solutions to sound bites, leading the public to believe that “doing something”—anything at all—is better than doing nothing, when the opposite may well be true. (Haynes, 2014, p. 40)

While these summaries of the three prominent trends do not cover all aspects of the campaigns or crusades and only highlight some of the main actors, combining the three produces a larger picture. It appears that rather than “getting to the bottom of things” (Goldman, 1911/1969) such movements result in stronger anti-prostitution ideologies, infantilizing rescue missions to save women and girls deemed “innocent victims,” greater police surveillance of the sex trade, new policies and programs to catch traffickers, new legislation to catch “pimps” and clients of prostitutes, more border controls to prevent “aliens” from entering wealthy areas of the world, a greater number of detentions and deportations of so-called illegal migrants, and a generalized panic about the idea of human trafficking that is causing anxiety especially amongst young women seeking to travel abroad or to migrate. As all of these dimensions have been documented and analyzed quite extensively as the “collateral damage” of the anti-trafficking industry and as harmful to sex worker, labor migrants, and refugees (see, e.g., Anderson, Sharma, & Wright, 2009; Bernstein, 2010; GAATW, 2007; Kempadoo, Sanghera, & Pattanaik, 2005), they are not the focus of the rest of this article. What follows here is a further discussion of aspects of the trends that is only really visible when one puts the three together and that are often overlooked in other analyses, namely the roles of white supremacy, neoliberalism, and global capitalism in cocreating and sustaining the underlying problems.

WHITE SUPREMACY/THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN REVISITED

White supremacy generally refers to a nineteenth-century Euro-American doctrine that positioned specific racialized groups — “whites” — and the societies they developed — “the West” — as superior to other peoples, nations, or communities. In the post-cold war era, Black feminist and critical anti-racist scholars identified it as still pertinent to social and political relations within North America as well as to global north-south relations as — despite claims to multiculturalism and the end of racism in Western societies — systemic racialized inequalities and injustices at home and abroad were still evident, becoming even more visible through the US-led War on Terror in the post 9/11 era, and in the state violence towards Black and other racialized minority communities in the United States and Canada (Arat-Koç, 2010; Fort, 2014; hooks, 1995; Macedo & Gounari, 2006; Thobani, 2010). It does not require individuals to hold racist ideas but rests upon a structuring of the interests of white-dominated societies as superior to others and on a systemic exploitation and control of other racialized groups and societies. It operates to maintain and defend a system of white wealth, power, and privilege — an ideology and not a skin color — that also takes for granted the role of those who adhere to the ideology as national and global leaders, thinkers, creators, authorities, and decision makers. Persons of racialized minorities and the Global South are not always in opposition to white supremacy, but indeed may be complicit with it, where the racialized oppressed become “honorary whites,” who “assimilate to succeed” (hooks, 1995, p. 189, Macedo & Gounari, 2006). Moreover, white supremacy does not always require a distancing, exclusion, or hatred of the racial Other. When steeped in neoliberalism, it can express a longing for the presence of, or a desire to help, the Other, neither of which unsettle unequal racialized relations of power (hooks, 1995, p. 185). And neoliberalism holds an important place in the contemporary analyses of white supremacy. As Macedo and Gounari explain, “the neoliberal order has presented itself as the inevitable effect of an economic doctrine theologically guarded by economic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization — institutions that largely promote and protect that economic interests of the developed world against those of the rest of the world population,” producing “unimaginable economic dislocation” and “the wholesale exclusion of most of the world population from partaking equitably in the world’s resources,” where “the permanent status of underdevelopment affects mostly countries that the dominant racialized discourse characterizes as ‘nonwhite’ and ‘other’” (2006, pp. 11–12). White supremacy today is thus an expression of the deep entanglement of racism and neoliberalism in the contemporary world order.

White supremacy is clearly visible in the three dominant anti-trafficking campaigns. Each is inspired, founded and directed primarily from within “developed” racialized centers of the world, by predominantly white women and men, with the Global South and East/the “developing” world serving as the “dumping ground” for a range of Western fantasies and where Indian brothels, Bangladeshi factories, Nigerian slums, Polish truck-stops, or Thai massage parlors are raided by anti-slavers, abolitionist feminists, and celebrities for suffering bodies that can be captured, rehabilitated and returned home (preferably accompanied by a photo shoot with brown or black children, or tweets during a raid) (Agustin, 2012; A. Ahmed, 2014; Kapoor, 2013). The rescue fantasy is a means through which the endeavors are legitimized as altruistic and humanitarian, obscuring the reliance on and reproduction of the racial knowledge of the Other

in the historical tropes of, on the one hand — the hopeless victim, impoverished and incapable of attending to one’s own needs — and, on the other, the benevolent civilizing white subject who must bear the burden of intervening in poor areas of the world. The rescue mission then becomes a vehicle of transformation of the self — through contact with the Other — providing the “rescuer” with a sense of satisfaction and a form of pleasure or even enjoyment due to the psychic investment that is made in the process (S. Ahmed, 2000; hooks, 1992; Kapoor, 2013).

While Laura Agustin has written extensively on the praxis of the rescue industry with regard to the sex trade, calling it “the soft side of imperialism” where people such as Kristof “embrace the spectacle of themselves rushing in to save miserable victims, whether from famine, flood or the wrong kind of sex” (Agustin, 2012, para. 6), Barbara Heron’s analysis of race and gender in the Western “helping imperative” is equally pertinent. From her own training and experience as a Canadian development worker in Africa and through interviews with others in a similar position, she identifies a consciousness about the world that carries a colonial continuity of a sense of Western/Northern entitlement and obligation, which, she argues, constitute two dimensions of the white bourgeois subject today (Heron, 2007). This consciousness, she analyzes in her book, enables white Canadian middle class women to feel they can intervene globally “to do Something” over there, positioning Others as amenable to the Western interventions, yet without questioning their role as global do-gooders (Heron, 2007, p. 54). Indeed, doing something “for the other’s own good” in Africa or elsewhere in the South bolsters the women’s own subjectivity, identity, and self-esteem to the extent that the “desire” to be engaged in development, “while a manifestation of the helping imperative” ultimately appears as “a profound desire for self” (Heron, 2007, p. 156).

This “updated version of the white man’s burden,” as one Web journalist names it in relation to the “self-styled modern-day abolitionist” Mira Sorvino, is that campaigners “tend to regard themselves as noble saviors on a mission to rescue millions of (mostly brown) people” (Rothschild, 2011, para. 3).⁶ Scholars such as Kapoor and Agustin concur, arguing that it underpins contemporary Western humanitarian interventions, and it becomes also evident around the issue of human trafficking and slavery (Parreñas, Hwang, & Lee, 2012). Abolitionist feminism, with its roots in nineteenth-century antiprostitution discourses, spawned maternal feminist charitable rescue work of middle-class women that appeared in urban centers in Europe and the colonies, through which mothers were exhorted to protect “daughters,” and respectable women were called upon to rescue “fallen women” (Doezema, 1999; Walkowitz, 1980). It contained a rescue and redemption narrative in which a class of European and American women was positioned as the moral and spiritual custodian of poor and working class women and girls. Today, the campaign typified by the CATW locates its moral obligation and civic responsibility in great part in the rescue of “prostituted” women and children (victims) from the clutches of male privilege, power, and lust (sex trafficking) and celebrates its success in extending its international reach (especially in Asia), reproducing the colonial maternalist position in relation to the non-Western world while reconfirming white Western feminine subjectivity as benevolent.

Contemporary antislavery advocates share a similar dimension of the modern “white man’s burden” in that they see themselves as leading a moral crusade against an

⁶ The “white man’s burden” refers historically to the poem written by Rudyard Kipling about the moral responsibility of the United States to uplift and civilize people of the Philippines, which has been taken to illustrate the racialized character of Western imperialism more generally (see Parreñas et al., 2012).

“unconscionable evil” that proudly claims to be following in the footsteps of the British and American nineteenth-century evangelical-inspired movements to abolish the enslavement and trade of Africans. In a very detailed examination of the history, Quirk and Richardson reveal how much the earlier anti-slavery movement was steeped in white supremacy, noting that “Europe’s commitment to anti-slavery included self-congratulatory efforts to differentiate between ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ peoples, and, as such, helped to legitimate imperial expansion between 1850 and 1914,” with anti-slavery becoming a “hallmark of European civilization” (2009, p. 78). Similarities with present-day campaigns are remarkable. For example, in the twenty-first century, white middle-class or elite men — American, British, Australian — dominate the anti-slavery campaigns. They are the founders of the majority of the international abolitionist organizations today, populate the executive boards and directorships and possess the resources and cultural capital to produce books, news items, and films on the subject. Non-whites and non-Westerners are, in the campaigns, most commonly positioned as in need of rescue or education, as the modern “slaveholders,” especially in Asia and Africa, and as “survivor leaders” and tokens. Or as with Siddarth Kara, they may be identified as integral to white supremacy, as “part of a larger colonial tradition that (mis) places the blame for third-world woes on culture,” with “bad culture” defined as the source of the problem of sex trafficking (Parreñas et al., 2012, p. 1023).

Accolades abound for the rescue work, including a Pulitzer nomination and prize, an honorary doctorate, various awards for human rights and peace work, appointments as U.N. ambassadors, and Emmy awards for documentaries, often launching individual campaigners to celebrity status. And, as with the abolitionist feminists, a sense of obligation and entitlement to intervene around the world is unquestioned. Instead the modern anti-slavery men feel free to roam the earth, convinced of their own righteousness in saving poor people. Moreover, the history of the early abolitionist movements as having been steeped in white guilt, fear of black violence, distrust of black men, colonialism, paternalism, as well as conservative Christian values is barely addressed by the modern campaigners. How this legacy and the history of an uncomfortable politic that sometimes emerged between whites and blacks in the earlier abolitionist movement around questions of social equality is dealt with is not clear. So, although scholars such as Quirk and Richardson (2009) are willing to analyze the nineteenth-century antislavery movement as having rested upon Western imperialism and a shoring up of European identity, there is little recognition that this continues into the present. Rather, racism is banished to the past, even while the argument is made that there is no sharp divide, but rather many continuities, between old and new practices of slavery. Indeed, it may even be argued that Europe’s civilizing colonial approach was beneficial in that “the imposition of European rule on Africa increasingly placed anti-slavery on local political agendas”(Quirk & Richardson, 2009, p. 90). The contemporary problem of slavery is thus transferred to “developing” nations, absolving the West from complicity in sustaining contemporary conditions of exploitation, force, and violence in labor markets. As noted recently about the Global Slavery Index, “[it] ignores global interdependence to frame modern slavery as an issue rooted in the Global South. It exculpates the Global North of its continuing role in extreme exploitation and perpetuates a politics of rescue” (McGrath & Mieres, 2014, para. 1). So rather than producing a self-reflexive white subject, we are presented with the image of a daring knight whose moral obligation is to save the world — especially Asia and Africa — from itself and an affirmation of white masculinity as, amongst other things, powerful, heroic, and morally superior.

GLOBAL CAPITALISM

The other dimension is the understandings of the neoliberal global political economy, which is perhaps the most evident in the modern slavery abolitionism and celebrity humanitarianism yet which runs through abolitionist feminism in unmarked ways. The problem of “trafficking” — sex or otherwise — is, as all three campaigns acknowledge in various ways, grounded in inequality between “the haves” and “the have-nots” as it is the latter — marked by poverty, gender, and age — who are vulnerable to force and violence in migration and work. Global capitalism is thus acknowledged as the economic context within which sex trafficking and modern-day slavery occurs and, although believed to create certain problems (such as poverty), is not identified as a problem from which people need to be freed. Rather a neoliberal understanding of the political economy is upheld that takes capitalist free enterprise, individual liberty, and private ownership as essential to human freedom (Harvey, 2014, pp. 204–205). With such an approach, individuals — traffickers, criminals, clients, pimps, corrupt immigration officers or policewomen or men, or greedy businesspeople — specific “bad” corporations and companies that violate labor laws and codes of conduct, or isolated national governments that oppose Western hegemony (such as Cuba, South Korea, Syria, Venezuela, Zimbabwe, etc.) are classified as the problem. “Deviants” to the contemporary global order and political economy thus are singled out, and the task of the anti-trafficking campaigners is to introduce more regulations in order to bring these “rogues” into compliance with dominant (Western, capitalist), hegemonic standards and values. The U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, for example, targets countries through its annual assessment, the Polaris Project targets individual states in the United States, the Walk Free Foundation emphasizes businesses and industries, and CATW focuses on individual men — clients and pimps. The results are more laws and the criminalization of greater areas of human life and an intensification of policing and surveillance, including more prosecutions, detentions, and incarcerations. Yet, this leaves the greater system that lies at the bottom of things intact — and indeed, capitalism is not only left untroubled but given a boost. One of the strategies then to end modern slavery is by “raising unprecedented levels of capital to drive change” as the Walk Free Foundation (2014, para. 1) aims to do, or as Skinner puts it in an interview he gave on German television, “more capitalism is needed to bring more people out of poverty, and can also be the most effective tool to bring people out of slavery” (Global 3000, n.d.).⁷ Elizabeth Bernstein adds an important comment on this: “the ‘freedom’ that is advocated by contemporary abolitionists,” she writes, embraces neoliberalism and “locates all social harm outside of the institutions of corporate capitalism and the state apparatus. In this way,” she continues, “the masculinist institutions of big business, the state and the police are reconfigured as allies and saviors, rather than enemies, of unskilled migrant workers, and the responsibility for slavery is shifted from structural factors and dominant institutions onto individual deviant men” (Bernstein, 2007, pp. 144/141). The focus on the individual — person, corporation, or agency — enables claims that the problem can be found in a wide range of incidences, situations, and conditions that can affect anyone, anywhere at any time as well as in “every industry and corner of the earth,” and causes for the problem are no longer relevant.⁸

But how, might we ask, does the magic bullet of capitalism work when capitalism itself produces the very conditions that the campaigners are seeking to address? Did it not, as Eric Williams and C.

⁷ <http://youtu.be/niZPU4JkHBA>.

⁸ See for example, the Web sites of the Not for Sale campaign and the Global Freedom Network: <http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/about/> and <http://www.globalfreedomnetwork.org/>, respectively.

L. R. James argued more than half a century ago, produce slavery, racism, and colonialism that caused destruction and underdevelopment in African and Asian societies? And did it not leave the legacies that are still deeply felt today in countries such as Haiti, which are trapped in neocolonial dependencies and debts, as well as in black communities in the United States? Can more capitalism undermine or reverse the power and rapaciousness of transnational corporations that pick up and leave industrialized countries with their regulated markets to find the cheapest labor possible and that use their might to extract relaxations around taxation, laws, and working conditions from the host country, creating slavery-like conditions in the process? Is capitalism to alleviate the damage caused by neoliberal free-trade agreements that favor the already wealthy and powerful nations to the detriment of the weaker nations? Can more capitalism influence the management of financial markets that work to the benefit of the banks and their managers, stop the growing privatization of human life and the ecology that supports it or halt the continuous drive for greater consumption that is necessary for capital accumulation and profit? And, along this vein, should we not ask in what way is it possible for the neoliberal state that favors “free trade” and few regulations on the flow of capital, technology, and goods to undo the harms that capitalist exploitation puts in place? Is more capitalism really the panacea to the problem of modern slavery and human trafficking?

It is quite well established by now that several centuries of globalizing capitalism and (neo)liberal agendas have produced the problems that underpin the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the dire circumstances for the world's majority. David McNally reminds us of the vampire qualities of capitalism when he writes “the essence of capitalist monstrosity is its transformation of human flesh and blood into raw materials for the manic machinery of accumulation” (2012, p. 115). Many people, he argues, are not just harmed but mangled and worked to death, and, indeed, this has been chronicled from European colonialism and slavery through the industrial revolution in the Western world and into globalized modernity. It becomes evident through, for example, the 2014 Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report, which points out that “the bottom half of the global population own less than 1% of total wealth. In sharp contrast, the richest decile hold 87% of the world's wealth, and the top percentile alone account for 48.2% of global assets” (Credit Suisse, 2014, p. 11). This working of capitalism produces, as Kapoor drawing heavily on the work of Slavoj Žižek foregrounds in his analysis, a social and economic apartheid between the haves and the have-nots — the Included and Excluded. Unsurprisingly, many of the benefits and privileges, including economic, psychic, and racial, accrue to those already in the ranks of the Included.

When brought into conversation with the growing evidence of large numbers of people trapped in “modern-day and sexual slavery,” we see a correlation between a rise in forced labor in sex and other industries and the ongoing accumulation of immense wealth by a few — that the one is happening at the expense of the Other. And in light of such a correlation, we must ask whether a system that generates such inequality, servitude, and exploitation can be used to fix the problem. What is called among philanthropists such as Gates, as the “big bang approach” of injecting millions of dollars into poor communities, à la Jeffrey Sachs's Millennium Villages Project in Africa, is open to close scrutiny and a great deal of skepticism. Charity is not, as *Vanity Fair's* journalist Nina Munk discovered after following the Sachs project for six years, the same as sustainable economic development (Munk, 2014), but it does do the work of propelling the CEOs into the limelight and of alleviating some of the guilt and anxiety amongst the elite whose grotesque wealth is accumulated off the sweat and blood of millions of others. Kapoor also concludes that the charity work of celebrities, while perhaps bringing media attention to humanitarian crises, is implicated in both the (re)production of Western nations as sites of benevolence and generosity — in the celebration of the “great nations” of the

world — and in unquestioningly promoting capitalism by virtue of being tied to the corporate world through their professional work, earning some of the highest incomes globally and profiting from their brand-image (Kapoor, 2013, p. 29). They avoid, he documents in his book, confronting the corporate power from which they so profit. Celebrity humanitarianism, as well as modern anti-slavery and abolitionist feminism by virtue of their lack of critique or attention to the global political economy, settles only on “an outward violence that is symptomatic of an underlying structural violence, which the spectacle conveniently obscures,” and, in failing to tackle the broader politics of inequality while naturalizing neoliberal capitalism “as the only game in town” and as caring and humanitarian, the campaigns work to depoliticize the global economy (Kapoor, 2013, p. 115).

CONCLUSION

Combining the three contemporary prominent trends — modern antislavery, abolitionist feminism, and celebrity humanitarianism — we see a neoliberal white chivalrous crusade across the world, born of a moral sense of goodness that shores up the power and subjectivity of the North, with the “developing” Global South and East as the dumping grounds for helping imperatives involving rescue and charity. They have little effect on the causes of the problem, and the subjectivity and humanity of the Other is secondary. Moreover, there is a notable lack of engagement with other perspectives and experiences, especially those of women from the Global South and the “subaltern” (Ho, 2005; Kapur, 2010). In the outpouring of outrage, condemnation, and claims to human rights that reverberates through the campaigns, the “Wretched of the Earth” are spoken for and represented but rarely are they positioned as authorities on human trafficking and slavery or as voices in their own right. As a U.S. Christian evangelist anti-trafficking organization states: “Due to the controlling and secretive nature of the ‘Industry’ the victims remain isolated and voiceless. Rescue 1 has *chosen to become their voice* [emphasis added] to help free and empower women and children in high risk areas around the world” (Rescue 1 Global, n.d.). The work of countercampaigns and organizations as exemplified by the GAATW located in the Global South is easily eclipsed, and the non-Western/ migrant/sex working “victim” becomes the ground for competing abolitionist, feminist, and humanitarian claims pushed aside by not only the depoliticized neoliberal master narratives but also the racialized, neoimperialist gaze. The dominant human trafficking/modern-day slavery discourse thus operates through several registers and through a number of prominent and eye-catching campaigns absent the major causes of the problem of unfettered exploitation of human labor and bodies today. It produces epistemic, political, and material boundaries between those who are viewed as victims and those defined as the saviors, between those who “know” and those who are deemed incapable of knowing, between those who theorize and those who experience, and between those who have wealth and those who do not, while bolstering the image of a compassionate, benevolent West. So, rather than learning from and respecting working and poor people’s knowledge and experience, such as articulated through the sex worker collective Veshya Anyay Mukti Parishad (VAMP)’s “Save us from Saviours” campaign⁹ and calling for a redistribution of wealth, more neoliberal regulation and a stronger form of capitalism is advocated through Western eyes and interests, and the white man’s burden is given a new lease of life. To counter the kinds of exploitation and violence that we are

⁹<http://saveusfromsaviours.net/>.

witnessing today requires a far broader commitment to social and economic justice than is possible through the narrowly defined anti-trafficking and anti-slavery campaigns. The principle “that if we share, there is more than enough to go around,” as Oxford Fellow Bridget Anderson urges us to do,¹⁰ could then also be a better guide for the world’s richest decile, if there is a sincere desire for equality and justice for all.

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¹⁰ See Bridget Anderson’s TedX talk “Imagining a World Without Borders” at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zht-6BrX1b4>.

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