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Media Representation and Human Trafficking:

How Anti-Trafficking Discourse Affects Trafficked Persons

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ABSTRACT

Competing representations of human trafficking in the media and within the movement have contributed to a general confusion of public perceptions of human trafficking as a social phenomenon. Various activist and political groups have, over the years, divided, delineated and classified trafficking into a series of categories including sex trafficking, labor trafficking and child exploitation. These categories have become an integral part of the collective understanding of human trafficking and they have played a primary role in the crafting of national and international anti-trafficking legislation.

This paper stems from a master's thesis which analyzes the discourse on human trafficking, its understanding (and misunderstanding) within the public sphere, and manifestations of political violence through discursive divisions and fragmentations. The paper focuses specifically upon media representation of human trafficking and applies contemporary agenda-setting theory to a study of media coverage of immigration, prostitution and crime. The paper examines how current representations of trafficking ignore structural factors such as globalization, corporate hegemony and militarization, focusing instead on prostitution and migration and contributing to the marginalization of women, migrants and the global poor.

Conference participants will learn about how media representation affects trafficked persons and why it is important for anti-trafficking activists, service providers and law enforcement agents to take care in how they present the problem in the media.

Media Representation and Human Trafficking:
How Anti-Trafficking Discourse Affects Trafficked Persons

Introduction

The field of study developing around human trafficking abounds in complications and confusions. Activists, scholars and governments have struggled to define the problem and its dimensions, and there are still few reliable statistics available indicating its scope. Still—the variety of organizations and strategies on the subject reflect a complexity that belies the simplicity of its most basic definition. Human trafficking is modern day slavery. Subjects are held and forced to work against their will. They are threatened daily, sometimes hourly, with physical or emotional harm. They are treated as less than human.

Competing representations in the media have contributed to a general confusion on its significance as a social phenomenon. Various social and political groups have, over the years, divided, delineated and classified trafficking into a series of categories including sex trafficking, labor trafficking and child exploitation (Bales 1999; Aronowitz 2009; Kempadoo 2005; Lee 2007). These categories have become an integral part of the collective understanding of human trafficking and they have played a key role in the crafting of national and international anti-trafficking legislation (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005).

This paper is extracted in part from a master's thesis: *Discursive Divisions in Human Trafficking: Political Violence and Media Misrepresentation* (Wallinger 2010). While the thesis undertook a broader analysis of political violence and its manifestations through power relations within and outside the human trafficking movement, this paper focuses more closely on the U.S. media's role in defining discourse on trafficking and shaping legislation and services provided to trafficked persons. The paper identifies misrepresentations and misestimations in the media that

have undermined the efficacy of these laws and services as well as some models for improvement. It is hoped that this research might expose the consequences of a divided discourse on trafficking as well as the benefits of a more carefully nuanced approach to addressing the problem.

Understanding Human Trafficking

At its heart, human trafficking is relatively simple to define. Though it has taken many forms, historically (chattel slavery, debt bondage, forced marriage, contract slavery, etc.), trafficking in human beings has always involved the procurement and maintenance of free labor by use of force (Bales 1999). Modern analyses, though, have tended toward the complex, and human trafficking has come to mean many different things to many different groups and individuals. At this contemporary moment, it may be fair to say that there is no single movement against human trafficking, but rather a collection of efforts against sex trafficking of adults and children, labor trafficking, the use of child soldiers in international conflict and many other practices that are, at their most basic definition, trade in human beings.

All of these different forms of trafficking are equally distressing. The splintered approach to prosecuting, publicizing and raising awareness about them, however, has led to a colossal misrepresentation and misunderstanding of the size, scope and nature of the core problem. Competing and contradictory legal definitions of human trafficking have rendered data and statistics unreliable. A 2005 study reveals:

> Most countries have only recently, if at all, adopted legislation criminalizing trafficking. Consequently, reliable criminal justice data are practically unavailable.... In a 2001 Europol report, only Germany, Greece, and Sweden submitted statistics on trafficking, out of 15 European Union member countries. The situation in less developed countries is

> even more dismal…. Some countries base their reports on border crossing data, and others on arrest data. Some countries do not differentiate between trafficking and smuggling, nor specifically delineate foreign prostitution in their data. All this makes reaching meaningful conclusions about the scope of the problem practically impossible. (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005, 27-28)

Of more concern than the method of statistical collection in Eastern Europe is the lack of attention paid in popular media and on the policy level to trafficking in developing countries. Trafficking gained salience as a social issue for industrialized nations in the 1990s as a direct result of the increased public awareness of exploitation of women from former Soviet countries. Gendered and racialized perceptions of the crime and its dimensions were upset, and people began to see trafficked persons more as "girls next door," and not just people of other nationalities and ethnicities (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005, 26). Simply put, media in predominantly white and wealthy nations only began generating mass interest in human trafficking when they presented the crime as one that affects primarily white persons (26).

Contrary to popular presentations of subjects of trafficking as a mostly white phenomenon, the vast majority of today's slaves live in the developing world, and the heaviest concentration are thought to be in debt bondage in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal (Bales 1999, 9). Southeast Asia, northern and western Africa and South America are also known as slavery hotbeds, and the problem is vastly understated in developing nations. Bales writes that there are "at least some slaves in almost every country in the world, including the United States, Japan, and many European Countries" (9). However, even the scant statistical evidence that is available indicates large numbers of trafficking cases in the industrialized world—and more and

more research points to industrialized nations as a source *and* destination for human trafficking (Logan, Walker, and Hunt 2009). This growing collection of information reinforces the need for a better assessment of the complicity of capitalist networks and other institutions within industrialized nations in the trade in human beings (Desyllas 2007; Chang and Kim 2007).

These indications of the broad scope of trafficking demand an analysis on why the media has focused so heavily on isolated occurrences of trafficking and so little on the sociopolitical forces behind them. There is ample evidence that the rise in global capitalism and the spread of the corporate manufacturing supply chain into some of the poorest regions of the world has fueled the rise in transnational human trafficking (Bales 1999; Chang and Kim 2007; Cameron and Newman 2008; Kempadoo 2005). The following sections will discuss why there is so little analysis of this connection in the popular media.

Media[1] and Agenda Setting Theory

For most people in the United States, information on national issues is relayed through media. Political elections, wars, sporting events and even natural disasters occur in spaces that the average citizen cannot directly or regularly access. They look to the media therefore—newspapers, television, magazines and internet blogs—to attend and interpret these events. The media serve this function in powerful ways, influencing which issues the public comes to learn about, when, why and in what ways (Maxwell E. McCombs and Shaw 1972; Ghanem 1997; Hartley 1982; Wanta 1997).

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[1] [1] For the purposes of this paper, media are defined as mainstream outlets for the dissemination of news in the United States. Examples include highly circulated newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as television news shows, Internet blogs and magazines.

A 1972 study on the agenda-setting function of mass media shows a strong correlation between media and voter emphasis on issues during political elections, suggesting that media not only provide information but also influence what information becomes important to consumers (Maxwell E. McCombs and Shaw 1972). This function is not specific to political elections alone. Because most people have such limited access to the events they follow on the news, "the information flowing in interpersonal communication channels is primarily relayed from, and based upon, mass media news coverage" (Maxwell E. McCombs and Shaw 1972, 185). This coverage is limited – there is not enough time in even a 24-hour news cycle to cover every issue in the world. There is therefore an "emphasis by the media, over time on a relatively small number of issues, lead[ing] the public into perceiving these issues as more important than other issues. The more an issue gets covered, the more it will be perceived as being important by members of the public" (Wanta 1997, 2). This manipulation of issue salience has a significant effect on the public's understanding of various issues, as we will see later in this chapter.

In agenda-setting theory, the process of interpreting the limited selection of events that receive coverage in the media is known as the "second level" of agenda setting, dealing with the "specific attributes of a topic and how this agenda of attributes also influences public opinion" (M. McCombs and Evatt 1995; Ghanem 1997, 3). This theory divides issues into sets of objects and states that "the way an issue or other object is covered in the media... affects the way the public thinks about that object, [and] the way an issue or other object is covered in the media... affects the salience of that object on the public agenda" (Ghanem 1997, 4).

It is thus acknowledged that media influence which events have importance over other events (Wanta 1997). It is further acknowledged that media shape the public interpretation of

such events through a series of decisions on how long and often to cover them and how. Indeed, John Hartley observes in *Understanding News,* the control that media exercise over information results in a situation where "it is not the event which is reported that determines the form, content, meaning or `truth' of the news, but rather the news that determines what it is that the event means" (1982, 15).

There are a number of factors which problematize the media's role in shaping and defining discourse on social issues. Media are generally characterized as independent, fair and balanced and to exist within a "culture of objectivity" (Ettema and Whitney 1997, 37). In reality, though, there are a number of institutional forces which have a powerful effect on the choices that individual news organizations make every day. It is for this reason, perhaps, that some of the most volatile issues of the day receive the least coverage in mainstream media outlets.

For most people, media provide the only source of information on social justice issues. Media dependency theory supports the notion that "if individuals have a goal of gaining information on the important issues of the day, they will become highly dependent on the media because the media control access to a variety of information" (Wanta 1997, 57). By this principle, someone living in Oregon might not have a way to learn about genocide in Rwanda unless they read about it in a newspaper or see a special on television. Many issues never make it to this stage of representation and therefore do not gain the notoriety or attention that other issues receive. Dependence as constituted through media reliance causes "some happenings in the world [to] become public events [while] others are condemned to obscurity as the personal experience of a handful of people" (Fishman 1997, 210).

A 2004 study on social justice issues in media explores a number of issues related to low media coverage of controversial issues (Roth 2004). Challenges include a heavy focus on bureaucratic and institutionalized sources over others, a reluctance to "go after" those in positions of power and a belief amongst many reporters that certain issues will not "resonate" well enough with the public to publish (Roth 2004, 6). All of these issues play into the "newsworthiness" of an event and, consequently, its existence within the public discursive sphere. A reasonable extension of this line of thinking might suggest that corporate and governmental sources on human trafficking provide the media with information and approaches to the issue which obscure the root causes of the problem (including corporate and governmental practices that drive a demand for slavery around the world) and instead turn the general public's interest to the effects of slavery and the various laws and strategies that they have in place to react to its existence. The media, for their part, provide these sources with a large amount of space and time to disseminate this message, and tend not to challenge the intricacies of the message very rigorously.

Organization of the media also plays an important role in shaping discourse. The way that the traditional media align themselves within public and private sectors has an effect on how the news is reported. The newsworthiness of any given event or occurrence is generally determined "according to a system of beats and bureaus that locates reporters almost exclusively in legitimated institutions of society" (Fishman 1997, 210), and this alignment has serious discursive implications. Mark Fishman's 1997 study of a California newspaper and its routine coverage of various events reveals,

> Crime was covered through the police and court bureaucracies. Local politics were covered through the meetings of the city council, county board of supervisors, and a host of other commissions, committees, and departments. Even nature is covered through a formally constituted organization (the U.S. Forestry Service). Whatever the sphere of human activities or natural occurrences (as long as it was covered through a beat) the newsworker knew it through officials and authorities, their files and their meetings. (Fishman 1997, 214)

This bureaucratization of information can and does result in the definition on the part of journalists of various happenings as "non-events." For those events which do receive coverage, the organization of media around specific, legitimized and bureaucratized beats tends to limit the quality and quantity of information provided.

Human Trafficking: The Dominant Paradigm

Although human trafficking has become a more publicized issue in the past several years, no cohesive message on it has emerged. On the contrary, "issues of migration, trafficking and sex work are peppered with constructs of sexuality, gender and vulnerability, threaded through with categories of victim and agent, consent and coercion, and stirred together in a cauldron by cooks, who are far too many in number" (Sanghera 2005, 3).

At the research, policy and advocacy levels, there is a significant amount of concern over issue framing and representation and over the reliability of information on the topic as a whole. On this, Jyoti Sanghera writes:

> The dominant discourse of trafficking is based upon a set of assumptions…. [that] flow from unexamined hypotheses, shoddy research, anecdotal information or strong moralistic positions. The issue is not whether they are true or false, but simply one of pushing conclusions that are not supported by rigorous empirical research and a sound evidence base. This faulty methodology of disseminating a flow of information and data whose origins are questionable contributes to the construction of both the dominant paradigm or discourse of trafficking, as well as the mythologies of trafficking. (2005, 5)

This dominant paradigm "emphasizes sex trafficking over other forms of labor... [and] detrimentally impact[s] the lives of trafficked persons (Chang and Kim 2007, 1-2). The bulk of legislation passed on the national and international stages over the past two centuries has served to racialize and gender the problem in ways that are discursively violent toward women and persons of color (Kempadoo 2005). A strict focus on law enforcement and anti-prostitution has led to a frenzied prosecutorial approach to sex traffic and a general lack of enthusiasm regarding investigation of the broader phenomenon of trafficking into agriculture, domestic service, restaurants, hotels, manufacturing, and construction (Chang and Kim 2007, 2). Moreover, the classification of trafficking by the United Nations as a transnational organized crime has indelibly linked the discourse around trafficking to the discourse of irregular migration and "a war on international crime[s]... that defy or circumvent legal boundaries and borders" (Kempadoo 2005, xiii).

In the human rights field, there is substantial concern that "the framework adopted by the UN supports the neoliberal economic interests of corporations, multilateral agencies, policy

experts and national governments, rather than those of the world's working and poor people" (Kempadoo 2005, xiv). Data used and disseminated by the U.S. government, in particular the George W. Bush administration, links prostitution to trafficking "as a cause and an effect" (Chang and Kim 2007, 3). The data is dramatically unsubstantiated, and Grace Chang and Kathleen Kim argue it "has diverted attention away from an assessment of structural factors that facilitate trafficking such as poverty, discrimination, and civil and political unrest of certain developing regions (Chang and Kim 2007, 3). The Bush administration developed similar dubious parallels between terrorism and human trafficking following September 11, 2001. Notably, the bottom tier of the 2002 Trafficking in Persons Report was made up largely of Arab and Muslim countries including Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Lebanon, Sudan, Qatar, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia (Kempadoo 2005, xxi). Kempadoo argues that this "coincidence between what The Bush administration declares to be irresponsible countries on the issue of trafficking and those defined by the same administration as "rogue states" or supporters of terrorism should be reason for acute suspicion of the manner in which 'facts' about trafficking are constructed" (2005, xxi).

Governmental agencies are not solely responsible for the development of the dominant paradigm—Chang and Kim argue that the "conflation [of human trafficking and prostitution] appears ideologically driven, arising out of new and emerging alliances between some anti-prostitution feminists and right-wing evangelical Christians, who have recently entered HIV/AIDS service provision, human rights, and advocacy worlds" (Chang and Kim 2007, 3).

Human Trafficking in the Media

These mythologies manifest through news stories that fail to communicate the severity and complexity of the problem. Mainstream and informal media outlets have only recently focused on trafficking with very much consistency—and even now the vast majority of stories are tied directly to stories of prostitution and human smuggling. A 2004 study of coverage of human trafficking in the U.S. media found that, on the whole, news outlets provided very little coverage of human trafficking issues and that when they did, coverage was scattered, piecemeal and lacked a focus on solutions. (Roth 2004, 4). In general, the study indicates, "media tend to write about the human trafficking issue with frames that do not fully communicate the scope and severity of the problem or its relevance to the American people" (4).

The problem of media representation and human trafficking centers at this stage around an overreliance on bureaucratic and moralistic sources of information. Kempadoo argues that the discourse on trafficking has changed, somewhat, according to "shifts in understanding among feminists, researchers, activists, and community workers about prostitution, migrant work, and the global political economy" (Kempadoo 2005, xiv). Insofar as media largely "reproduce" the U.S. government's focus on identifying foreign actors as primary perpetrators of trafficking, though, change has been slow (2005, xvii).

Focusing as it does on trafficking as a transnational criminal, migratory and sexual crime, the dominant discourse on trafficking overlooks serious issues of complicity on the part of capitalist governments, corporations and networks. This oversight has had severe consequences for subjects of human trafficking, as can be seen below.

Trafficked Persons in the Media: Marginalization Through Misrepresentation

In October 2009, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "Prostitution Raids Rescue 52 Youths; Federal Officials Arrest Almost 700 People" (Markman 2009). In February 2010 the same newspaper ran a headline with a top deck reading, "14 Illegal Immigrants Found in a Reseda House" (McDonnell 2010). An October 2008 headline in the *New York Times* declared, simply: "North Dakota: Immigrants Arrested" and the *Washington Post* reported, in September 2009, "3 Americans Face Child-Sex Charges" (Surdin 2009).

Each of these stories reports a separate event, and yet they are connected in various ways. First, they all report on possible subjects of human trafficking. Second, none of them mention trafficking in the headline or report on it very thoroughly or accurately in the body. Finally, all of them rely on widely held stereotypes as a means of drawing the readers' attention. Overall, these articles are all representative of the things that are said and left unsaid in the majority of stories reported today on human trafficking as a social phenomenon. This section is dedicated to an examination of the superficiality of media coverage of human trafficking and the impact that this superficiality has on subjects of trafficking.

Most news stories that report on human trafficking are published either on the heels of a "major unplanned event... such as when a boat of people being smuggled sinks off the coast of Florida," or "as a result of human actors staging events, issuing reports or press releases or convincing editors the story is worth pursuing" (Roth 2004, 11). In other words, for a story to make the news, it has to be timely or newsworthy in the eyes of a publication's editorial staff. It stands to reason, then, that survivors whose stories are not "newsworthy" according to these few decision-makers receive little to no attention from the media. Even in today's new media

environment (featuring internet blogs, e-magazines and other online content) this is troubling news. Evidence suggests, “when the media fails to cover adequately an issue such as human trafficking, it is less likely that the public can or will form opinions about the issue” (Roth 2004, 5). In the absence of an informed and mobilized public, resources for fighting human trafficking as a whole become limited, and subjects of trafficking have less hope for escaping the oppressive systems that place them at risk of exploitation.

Limited representations of human trafficking affect trafficked persons in serious ways. Considering that women are “disproportionately represented among the poor, the undocumented, the debt-bonded and the international migrant workforce” (Kempadoo 2005, xi), the range of policies and regulations pertaining to prostitution and trafficking has created a social and political battleground of women’s bodies. Continued victimization and retraumatization of women who participate willingly and unwillingly in the sex industry has reduced women’s autonomy and contributed to a stereotypical assumption that women—especially poor women from developing countries—lack the agency to seek reasonable solutions to structural problems. This assumption, paired with imposed solutions from outside parties, contributes to a self-fulfilling prophecy in which women do face very limited opportunities for improving their conditions in satisfying ways.

Women have been arrested for prostitution or deported and denied protection against trafficking unless they were willing to explicitly “cooperate” with law enforcement in the prosecution of traffickers (Chang and Kim 2007, 11; Aradau 2008, 2). Sex workers have been denied services to prevent HIV and AIDS because limitations in U.S. legislation that deny funding to organizations that refuse to adopt a strict stance against the legalization of prostitution

(Chang and Kim 2007, 2). Subjects of other forms of trafficking have been overlooked. Agencies that focus on “criminalizing prostitution as a purported means to stop trafficking” overlook other forms of trafficking including “trafficking into agriculture, domestic service, restaurants, hotels, manufacturing, and construction” (Chang and Kim 2007, 2). Even statistics have been overblown:

> In 2005, the Department of Justice reported that over two-thirds of ninety-one human trafficking cases were cases of sex trafficking. This information directly conflicts with empirical reports from service providers who have found that sex trafficking cases comprise only one-third of their caseload. For example, a recent study by the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking reports that clients trafficked to Los Angeles are subject to exploitation in many fields, including domestic work (40 percent), factory work (17 percent), sex work (17 percent), restaurant work (13 percent), and servile marriage (13 percent). These striking numbers refute the government's assertion that most trafficking is for prostitution. (Chang and Kim 2007, 5)

Regarding migration, media have so confused issues of trafficking with human smuggling that many people do not know how to separate one issue from the other. Although human trafficking and human smuggling are very different crimes (the former occurs when one person or party pays another to help them cross an international border clandestinely, usually for a set fee, while the latter is defined as the use of force, fraud or coercion by one person or party against another for the purposes exploitation, regardless of location), news stories, and sometimes lawmakers, use the terms interchangeably (Aradau 2008, 23; Dinan 2008, 71). The result can be disadvantageous for foreign and domestic subjects of trafficking, and indeed,

migrants in general, in that confusion of the problem leads an imbalance in services, funding and public attention for whole populations.

Contrary to typical understandings of the problem, human trafficking does not necessarily involve the crossing of a border. Large numbers of men, women and children are trafficked every year within their own countries, and forced to work against their will. Unfortunately, exact numbers are hard to come by—in part because so much of anti-trafficking policy is focused on migration.

Comparisons between trafficking and migration resemble linkages between trafficking and prostitution in several ways. As with prostitution, the consequences of such comparisons have proved harmful for poor people from developing countries. Indeed, some have argued, trafficking policy in the past and present has often manifested primarily as "thinly disguised battles against illegal immigration" (Newman and Cameron 2008, 14), just as it has also mirrored anti-prostitution campaigns.[2]

Trafficking has been represented in the media as a form of organized crime operating in the shadows and run by mysterious international syndicates (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005; Aronowitz 2009; Lee 2007). This representation has lent itself well to the categorization of trafficking as a migration issue. In the United States, though, "most of the trafficking occurs not for underground sex industries run by criminal elements, but for sweatshops, farming, service

[2] This battle is exemplified in a 2005 Arizona law against human smuggling that allows the state to prosecute migrants as conspirators in their own smuggling (Associated Press 2008). While the law is aimed at "smugglers" it has serious consequences for trafficked persons who may have agreed to pay a fee in return for safe passage to the United States, but who are handed over to traffickers upon arrival. Various other state laws in Arizona and elsewhere that are aimed at curbing irregular migration are justified by lawmakers on the basis that irregular migration is linked to human trafficking (Maricopa County Sheriff's Office and Joseph Arpaio, 2009).

and domestic work that are attached to formal sectors of the economy" (Jahic and Finckenauer 2005; Aronowitz 2009; Lee 2007). Contrary to this reality, news networks and law enforcement agencies continue to distract the public from the underlying causes of this exploitation with stories of insidious

> middle-persons who are held up as the 'real' menaces—recruiting agents and those who assist others to move without legal documents or money—who are commonly identified as greedy, immoral men from the global South and post-socialist states. Thus, the first US government report to document trafficking into the country identifies Mexican, African and Middle Eastern families; Thai and Latin American men; Russian, East European, and Italian organized crime groups and syndicates; Asian, Mexican, and Nigerian smuggling rings; the Canadian "West Coast Players"; Chinese triads; Hmong gangs, etc., as the primary agents who profit and benefit from trafficking. (Kempadoo 2005, xvii)

As with women and children in the sex industry, "Trafficked migrants are usually considered vulnerable, infantile, backward, outlaw, in need of protection, and/or a threat to national security...[and] rarely...whole, complex people" (Newman and Cameron 2008, 14). This characterization is due in no small part to the superficial and incomplete nature of news coverage on the subject. Gabriela Rodríguez Pizarro, special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants for the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, reports,

> For the most part the mass media do not collaborate in serious campaigns against human trafficking....The phenomenon of trafficking tied to the process of migration is not taken on adequately by the mass media: trafficking is countermanded/displaced by the fact of migrant status, thus the victim is foreign and is in the territory through irregular means.

> These sensationalist, contemptuous and discriminatory views reflect, for the most part, the lack of knowledge on the part of the mass media, which fail to project the problem of trafficking as an offence. (Pizarro 2008, 219-220)

Although the dominant discourse tends to misrepresent the relationship between migration and trafficking, this should not minimize its reality. Trafficking situations have increased dramatically as border security has tightened between developing and industrialized countries, and trafficking networks have taken advantage of available opportunities to exploit people who migrate across borders in search of economic prosperity (Cameron and Newman 2008). Unfortunately, sensational stories of abuse have taken precedence in the news over informative coverage of the structural forces causing them. Strong analyses of trafficking and migration take into account structural variables including "historical processes of poverty, economic crises, state dependence on developed countries and scarce opportunities for human development in the local and national spheres" (Pizarro 2008, 209).

Conclusion

Discursive divisions within the human trafficking field have contributed to misrepresentations of the problem that have had harmful effects for women, migrants and the global poor. Presentations of trafficking as a problem of migration, prostitution and organized crime portray only some aspects of the crime and leave out larger issues such as poverty, lack of opportunity and globalization which stem from structural injustices including racism, sexism and economic hegemony. Remedies and interventions that focus only on "saving victims" and not on addressing structural violence as exercised through cultural and political institutions provide unsatisfying results for those who are most at risk of or affected by human trafficking. A better

approach is necessary if the movement against trafficking in humans is to take hold in an effective manner.

The scattered approach toward human trafficking thus far has proven ineffective for raising awareness about or putting a stop to actual trafficking in humans and has instead resulted in a significant misunderstanding of the problem as a whole. There has been a surge of interest in the field, though, and some have proposed a significant and necessary reconceptualization.

Grace Chang and Kathleen Kim suggest a “rights-based” approach to human trafficking—one centered within a “broader framework of labor migration, human rights, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health rights, and globalization” (Chang and Kim 2007, 6). Free from the fallout of ideological warfare over prostitution and irregular migration, such an approach could, they claim, balance policies and practices which inhibit the rights of trafficked persons (6).

In addition to policy, the discourse on trafficking must also change. Media must stop covering trafficking in the piecemeal and inadequate manner that they have so far, and anti-trafficking agencies must fight for deeper and more thoughtful coverage of the issues than has been provided. Reporters and editors must learn the differences between trafficking and smuggling, prostitution and sex work, illegal immigrant and undocumented (and sometimes unwilling) worker. Stories must not appear as chance occurrences, shocking and unusual and instead as predictable consequences of unjust policies. Various specialized forums have developed in recent years that provide more nuanced approaches to the issue of human trafficking (Change.org and Humantrafficking.org are two examples), but they have yet to gain credibility as mainstream sources of information.

The culture of victimization around trafficking must also end and anti-trafficking advocates must acknowledge the agency and self-determination of people in difficult circumstances to find appropriate solutions under just conditions. Those who work to create those conditions will help empower survivors to seek collaborative solutions.

Human trafficking is a complicated, far reaching, structural problem within our global society. Until the movement against it can adopt the same characteristics and challenge the institutions which support its existence, it will thrive in the recesses of humanity—and indeed before our very eyes.

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