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Moral Security: Anti-trafficking and the Humanitarian State in South India

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that global panic over sex trafficking animates a mode of global governmentality that fuses together otherwise contradictory registers of care and punishment in the disciplining of women who sell sex. This mode of governmentality, termed here “moral security,” foregrounds feminine sexuality as the site of greatest social risk and needful intervention. By conflating sex work with sex trafficking, moral security enables the humanitarian state to categorize all women who sell sex as victims requiring rescue, even if only from themselves. The urgency and fervor of the trafficking panic allows moral security to fuse together apparent contradictions into unwieldy amalgams: criminal victim, forced rescue, and caring punishment. To accomplish this, moral security deploys two key registers of engagement with women targeted for intervention: paternalism and bureaucratic indifference. Paternalism facilitates the possibility of harming women in the name of helping them; it is the affective glue that affixes transnational anti-trafficking metanarratives about criminality to the ambiguous realities of everyday sex work. Bureaucratic indifference further serves to deepen the harms of paternalism by disregarding and prolonging them, sometimes to the point of turning state violence into state murder. A patchwork of highly variable and often arbitrarily administered state

trafficking initiatives taken in aggregate produce a state effect in which India as a whole is assessed, ranked, deplored, or petted by transnational philanthrocapitalists and other more powerful states. The state violence experienced by sex workers targeted by anti-traffickers becomes the basis for India's claim to good governance within the framework of moral security. Action "against trafficking" is translated into numbers of shelters built, victims rescued, and families reunited, which provide easily legible metrics that add evidentiary flesh to the bones of India's place in a global moral hierarchy of states. [Keywords: Moral panic, sex trafficking, sex work, global governance, the state, NGOs, humanitarianism]

On a night in 2011, employees from an anti-trafficking non-governmental organization (NGO) arrived with a police escort at a railway station in Hyderabad, South India. They sought women who solicited customers for paid sex. That night, Preethi¹ was among the workers they swept up from the station. As she stood engrossed on her cell phone, she failed to run from the NGO employees who approached her. Preethi had seen such anti-trafficking teams before and knew their business; she tried to resist the NGO staff, but the police intervened, beat her vigorously, and forced her into a vehicle waiting nearby. During the struggle, Preethi's arm was cut open. Later that night, after processing Preethi and other women at a local police station, the NGO team drove them to a rescue shelter far from the station. It sat behind a tall, locked gate. Inside, NGO staff confiscated the women's phones, money, jewelry, and saris. In return, they furnished each of them with a salwar kameez (the unadorned, stiff cotton sort often used as uniforms for schoolgirls) and a bag of toiletries. About 30 other women were housed at the shelter that night, many of them Preethi's co-workers from the station. The guards on duty were tasked with stopping the women from scaling the locked gates and escaping. Another Hyderabad sex worker, Shrenika, told me that when an anti-trafficking team delivered her to the same shelter a few weeks after Preethi, she asked the guards what would happen next and how long the NGO would keep her locked up. The guards replied, "They have brought you here because you were out fucking on the street. . . We know only that much. Our responsibility is only to watch and prevent you from escaping. We don't care why they brought

you here or what they told you; we are here to keep an eye on you. Why were you out fucking on the street?”

To be clear, neither Preethi nor Shrenika thought of herself as “trafficked” at the time that the police–NGO team plucked her out of the train station, though each woman was familiar with the concept as well as with traffickers in their area. Rather, each of these women worked for herself selling sex at the time and neither had plans to seek other work in the immediate future (Walters 2016a). In recounting their experiences with NGOs to me, Preethi and Shrenika made direct comparisons between the anti-traffickers’ intervention into their lives—forcibly removing them from their work, holding them against their will in a rescue shelter, severely limiting their communication with family and friends, profiting off of them through charitable donations and government funding—and the notion of “human trafficking” as it is more typically defined (Walters 2016b). Preethi was explicit: “[At the shelter] we are being treated the same as how we are treated by the traffickers. How can we be changed if you keep on asking us to change by locking us in a room?” The rough treatment Preethi and Shrenika experienced at the hands of anti-traffickers conforms to other reports of unwelcome, punitive, and sometimes violent interventions carried out by anti-trafficking initiatives across India (Das 2016; Pai, Seshu and Murthy 2018; Sen and Nair 2004; Ramachandran 2015; Seshu and Ahmed 2012).

During 15 months of fieldwork among sex workers, community-based organizations (CBOs), and NGOs in Hyderabad in 2012–2013, I encountered only ten sex workers (out of the more than 120 that I interviewed) who had personally been removed by anti-traffickers from their work. Most others had only heard rumors. However, when I returned to Hyderabad in the summer of 2016, my interlocutors claimed that the frequency of raids was rising and that sex workers on the Hyderabad streets were beginning to feel themselves besieged by police–NGO squads. Whether or not their sense was objectively accurate, the India’s Union Cabinet drafted new anti-trafficking legislation, the Trafficking in Persons (Prevention, Protection and Rehabilitation Bill 2018). The Lok Sabha, India’s parliamentary lower house, approved the bill, but it stalled in the upper house in early 2019 and then lapsed. It is likely to be resuscitated by Narendra Modi’s administration, and if passed in its 2018 form, this bill would expand the number of police–NGO anti-trafficking teams and the number of “protection homes” detaining people designated as “victims of trafficking” and would widen

the ambit of India's anti-trafficking legislation past cisgender women and girls who sell sex to encompass an array of other kinds of workers as well.

Preethi, Shrenika, and their friends' encounters with being trafficked-out-of-trafficking by police-NGO partnerships were forged in the heat of what several scholars have deemed a moral panic over trafficking (Doezema 2010, Kempadoo 2005, and Weitzer 2006).² The human trafficking panic, they have argued, is rooted in part in the common conflation of sex trafficking (forced or coerced participation in paid sex) with the entirety of the sex trade.³ It is further fostered by the common semantic collapse between the terms sex trafficking, human trafficking, and modern-day slavery, which are often deployed interchangeably within anti-trafficking discourse. As with prior panics, the spreading fear of human trafficking conforms to many of the features Cohen (1971) first identified as characteristic of moral panics: little basis in fact,⁴ a reliance on folk devils, extensive effort by the media to incite and circulate fear, and an opportunity for politicians and policy makers to expand and entrench their authority. In her classic essay, "Thinking Sex," Gayle Rubin (2013[1984]) notes that sex panics (or as she calls them "moral paroxysms") are "historical periods in which sexuality is more sharply contested and more overtly politicized" (100). She argues that the work of policing sexuality congeals the very foundations of social structure. Given the geographic ubiquity of the sale of sex, these intersecting conflations have facilitated a transnational public orientation to the question of human trafficking that took root initially as a sex panic.⁵

However, as concern about countering the scourge of human trafficking nears completion of its second decade, I argue that what began as a moral panic has morphed from a bounded, episodic scare to the more durable form of global governmentality that I term *moral security*. Moral security foregrounds feminine sexuality as the site of greatest social risk and needful intervention, as Rubin's work on sex panics would indicate, but it further fuses together otherwise contradictory registers of governance and humanitarianism in the disciplining of those deemed "victims of human trafficking." Moral security authorizes NGOs (often rooted in religious groups) acting as appendages of the state and disconcerted by the perverse deployment of cisgender female sexuality⁶ to engage in direct social control while simultaneously proffering the mantle of humanitarianism to their police partners. By actively conflating sex work with sex trafficking, moral security enables the humanitarian state to categorize all women

who sell sex as victims requiring rescue, even if only from themselves. The urgency and fervor of this mode of governance fuses apparent opposites into uneasy amalgams: criminal victims, forced rescue, and caring punishment.

To catalyze these fusions, moral security deploys two key registers of engagement with women targeted for intervention: paternalism and bureaucratic indifference. Paternalism is a sense of moral superiority that enables anti-traffickers to overlook and override the desires of those they care for with the certainty of “doing what is best for them.” This emotional orientation facilitates the possibility of harming women in the name of helping them; it is the affective glue that affixes transnational anti-trafficking metanarratives about criminality to the ambiguous realities of everyday sex work. Bureaucratic indifference, for its part, is the inescapable and unrelenting demand that state agents adhere to regulations, even those shown to be arbitrary, contradictory, or impossible. Bureaucratic indifference serves to deepen the harms of paternalism by disregarding and prolonging them in the name of procedural orderliness, sometimes to the point of turning state intervention into state violence. The NGO guards’ reply to Shrenika’s query about her release comprised these dual traits: the stony retort of the bureaucrat (“not my job”) and the biting paternalism of the moralist (“aren’t you ashamed?”).

Moral security has also produced a fresh cohort of moral entrepreneurs (Becker 1963) including public intellectuals like Kevin Bales and Nicholas Kristof, film celebrities like Ashton Kutcher and Demi Moore, and humanitarian celebrities like Somaly Mam and Ruchira Gupta. Becker (1963) identified moral entrepreneurs as vital to the instigation and propagation of moral panics. In his account, key figures work in tandem with mass media to rouse and channel public fears and to impel government action that shapes legislative contours of social orders. As a group, moral entrepreneurs engaged in ongoing anti-trafficking efforts have assumed the exhortative moniker, “modern-day abolitionists” (Brinkley 2006, Bernstein 2007). World leaders from Donald Trump to Barak Obama to Pope Francis have joined these abolitionists to decry trafficking as one of the preeminent moral crises facing the globe. Panic gave rise to new governmental bureaucracies such as the US Department of State’s Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. It defined new funding agendas for aid and research organizations, launched new IGO initiatives such as the United Nations Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking, and energized

countless anti-trafficking NGOs such as the Polaris Project, Free the Slaves, International Justice Mission, Not For Sale Campaign, Operation Underground Railroad, and the stunningly wealthy Walk Free Foundation, which now generates the Global Slavery Index. The website for the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights lists over 90 UN “agencies, programmes, NGOs and foundations working on contemporary forms of slavery,” including the International Organization for Migration, World Bank, UNODC, UNICEF, and the International Labor Organization, but notably spearheaded by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNHCHR 2020). Thus, moral security is at once governmental and intergovernmental, local and transnational, religious and secular, legalistic and humanitarian. It calls into being a unifying global moral order that offers shared notions of public enemies and public safety and a common field of righteous action traversing numerous other differences.

In the late colonial era, a racialized hetero-patriarchal paternalism began to characterize India’s legal framework for addressing the newly defined “problem” of commercial sex and female migration (Tambe 2009). However, in the decades bookending the turn of the 21st century, the transnational effort to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic spurred certain state agencies in India, along with many others in the Global South, to venture an alternative mode of engaging those who sell sex. This new approach emphasized community empowerment and mobilization (Blankenship, West, Kershaw, and Biradavolu 2008; Dworkin and Blankenship 2009; Sherman et al. 2010). The empowerment model prompted state agencies to partner with NGOs in formulating joint initiatives to embolden anyone of any gender who sells sex to articulate shared identities and complaints as a basis for demanding political recognition for their rights. The ultimate goals were the decriminalization and destigmatization of sex work. These ideals were never successfully codified into law in India, but sex workers’ rights groups persist in patches across the country.

As logics of empowerment have begun to recede, new partnerships between state actors and professional humanitarians thrive instead on logics of fear and security. Moral security roots its humanitarianism in “law and order” solutions reliant on a discourse of imminent danger. Elizabeth Bernstein (2010) points to anti-trafficking’s role in the rise of carceral feminism in the US, a feminist praxis stemming from a “law and order” orientation to women’s problems. Paul Amar (2013) similarly elaborates the rise of militarized humanitarianism, as armies in Egypt and Brazil attempt to

“blue wash” their reputations for violence and corruption through friendly—even charitable—feats of pacification and moral policing of “loose” women. While maintaining the empowerment model’s reliance on non-profit organizations in the wake of the “NGO-boom” (Alvarez 1998, Roy 2004), moral security in India has served to re-invigorate colonial era concerns with female sexual purity as a matter of Indian nationalist identity and pride (P. Chatterjee 1989, R. Chatterjee 1993, Dell 2005). Like Laura Agustín’s (2007) heuristic “the rescue industry” and Carol Leigh’s (2020) “anti-trafficking industrial complex,” moral security highlights the tightly imbricated complex of religious organizations, NGOs, IGOs, and state agencies, but it further underscores anti-trafficking’s centrality to global governance and its utility in the construction of a global moral hierarchy of states. Where Jyothi Puri notes that governing sexuality has a “constitutive effect on states” (2016:150), moral security further indexes its constitutive effect on global orders.

In what follows, I first detail the geopolitical context for the spread of moral security as a dominant mode of governance. Second, I lay out the existing legal framework in India within which the humanitarian state has responded to international pressure to combat trafficking. Third, I analyze the public discourse of Yash, the head of Anti-Trafficking United (ATU), an anti-trafficking organization in India.⁷ Here I focus on his use of elision and hyperbole as tools to incite the fear that has helped birth moral security. Fourth, I note that where Yash is tasked with translating moral security’s globalizing humanitarian imperatives into action with India’s legal framework, he relies on paternalism to resolve the contradictions that arise. Finally, I turn to the role of bureaucratic indifference in the implementation of moral security. Here my findings align with those of Akhil Gupta (2012) suggesting that the arbitrariness and unintentionality of “red tape” facilitates the slow perpetration of state violence. Moral security further serves to imbue state violence with a sense of righteous propriety. Ultimately, I conclude that under moral security’s imperative to safeguard female sexual purity, Indian NGOs operate as state-authored disciplinarians simultaneously caring for and punishing “victims of trafficking.”

Anti-trafficking Fervor Sweeps the US Anew

Indian NGOs’ practice of teaming with the police to locate and indefinitely detain sex workers like Preethi and Shrenika (while branding themselves

as charitable missionaries of freedom to the slaves of commercial sex) is spurred in part by policy originating in the US and at the United Nations. The US government has self-consciously promoted anti-trafficking as the script for enacting good global governance on the international stage. It has done this, as I outline below, primarily through the annual publication of the Department of State's Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP Report), which it explicitly ties to opportunities for aid dollars, both for governments and NGOs. The US and the UN have used the notion of "human trafficking" to construct a global moral hierarchy that interconnects a host of local, transnational, and international actors in the disciplining of sex workers in places like Hyderabad.

From the late 1990s, American evangelicals began to rally congregants around the fight against human trafficking and modern-day slavery (Berman 2006, Bernstein 2007). While these terms have each been stretched in a widening gyre of "analogic slippage" (Martinez 2014) to apply to everything from child marriage to exploitative labor conditions to irregular migration, they have been most consistently used to describe the exchange of sex for money. Where the politics of queer rights had begun dividing American Christians, evangelicals found the figure of the modern-day slave effective in fomenting shared outrage among their congregants. This has become a powerful tool for building community and political cohesion among a new generation of the faithful (Bernstein 2007). Berman (2006) argues that not only did framing prostitution as modern-day slavery help galvanize their own congregations, but it allowed evangelicals to also form political partnerships with radical feminists who, like them, opposed the entire sex industry (including pornography, strip clubs, phone sex services, and bodily commercial sex). This unexpected alliance with a group from the left brought greater legislative traction to evangelical religious ideals. As this left-right coalition understood the matter, there could be no legitimate choice to sell sexual services, therefore any woman in the sex industry was by definition a victim of trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery.

In 2000, US Congress, led by Republican Christopher Smith, marshalled this logic to issue a new spate of trafficking legislation beginning with the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (VTVPA). The act sought not only to better protect victims of trafficking in the US but also to distinguish between foreign countries that met its "minimum standards" for combating human trafficking and those that did not. The act

offered foreign assistance to meet these standards, and it prescribed action against governments that preferred not to comply. When George W. Bush took office in 2001, he assured the religious organizations that had helped to elect him that his administration would prioritize human trafficking. In 2002, Bush's National Security Presidential Directive borrowed language popularized among evangelicals in asserting the politically charged proposition that "prostitution is inherently harmful and dehumanizing, and fuels trafficking in persons, a form of modern-day slavery" (Berman 2006:270). By 2003, Bush had mentioned "sex trafficking" in his address to the United Nations General Assembly. His use of the term also linked the sex trade to nationalistic fears about illegal immigration and broader risks for national security. That same year, the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee and various house committees heard testimony (much of it from Christian organizations operating in India) accusing HIV/AIDS advocates of empowering the sex trade abroad, even among children (Ahmed and Seshu 2012, Berman 2006). Based in part on this testimony from India, Congress successfully passed legislation that required any organization receiving funds from USAID for any reason to sign a statement attesting that they do not "promote, support, or advocate the legalization or practice of prostitution" (Steinglass 2005). The Bush administration informed all USAID staff that they must not consider organizations that understood sex work to be an employment choice as "appropriate partners for USAID anti-trafficking grants and contracts" (Ditmore 2005). Furthermore, they must require funding recipients to make changes to their websites championing abstinence over condom use for HIV prevention. These requirements underscore that the Bush administration understood human trafficking as related to a broader problem of sexual promiscuity requiring official intervention.

Bush created the Senior Policy Operating Group on Trafficking in Persons, earmarking \$50 million USD for initiatives to fight trafficking in persons. He appointed John R. Miller as the Director of the United States Department of State Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. Miller made his position on the question of the potential status of commercial sex as "work" clear in statements like, "Trafficking in women, the sex pillar of slavery, cannot be viewed separately from prostitution" (Berman 2006:274). Miller decried the terminological shift from prostitution to sex work that had by then been popularized by sex positive feminists and public health workers. Miller's official insistence marked an important moment

of transition. For the duration of the Bush years, the Department of State's stance on sex work as always already exploitation and a "pillar" of modern-day slavery (Berman 2006:274) suffused all of its official publications, directives, and funding priorities.

The Making of a Global Moral Hierarchy

With the passage of the VTPA (later renamed the VTPA) in 2000, the Department of State began officially pressuring governments across the globe to adopt and implement its revitalization of framing prostitution as "human trafficking" and "slavery" first popularized nearly a century prior. Renewed legislative interest in trafficking from the US converged with protocols issued by the UN the same year. Thus, at the turn of the new millennium, global power began to channel itself through the medium of trafficking discourse, with some lauding the US as a "torch-bearer" (Gallagher 2017) and others questioning its moral authority to play "global sheriff" (Chuang 2006). Pressure to capitulate was mounted most visibly via the US Department of State's Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, which it began issuing in 2003. The report ranks the world's various governments based on the US government's assessment of their compliance with its directives for combatting trafficking. It is striking that the US chose not to include itself on this annual report until 2010, and it continues to leave out many countries. Perhaps predictably, Tier 1, the best rank on the report, tends to be populated with key US allies such as the France, Israel, South Korea, Taiwan, and the UK. Tier 2 and the Tier 2 Watch List (the only demitier) usually include a greater proportion of nations from the Global South. Tier 3, the lowest, is typically composed of countries at political odds with the US such as North Korea, Libya, Russia, Syria, Venezuela, and Yemen. Iran, deemed an enemy by the US government, is routinely ranked below Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations, which the US government treats as close allies, despite these countries' reputations for highly exploitative labor practices. Cuba too had found itself listed on Tier 3 since the report's inception; however, it was abruptly raised to Tier 2-Watch List in 2015 not long after Obama and Castro announced plans to normalize diplomatic relations between their countries. Similarly, in 2015 when Tier 2 status became a prerequisite for inclusion in the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), the Obama administration upgraded Malaysia (a potential TPP signatory) from Tier 3 status to Tier 2 despite little evidence of reform. China, the world's

manufacturing center, has long been permitted to persist in its exploitative labor practices while remaining off the report's lowest tier.

From these points it should be clear that TIP rankings mirror US strategic interests more than faithfully reflecting ground-level sociological realities. While other international rankings such as rates of literacy, poverty, malnutrition, child mortality, and maternal mortality have long been used as quantitative evidence of good governance in the Global North and shoddy governance in the Global South, the case of trafficking rankings is peculiar in that it ties funding allocations, trade negotiations, and even sanctions to compliance with "minimum standards" determined by US Congress. In this sense the rankings generate more than Bourdieusian symbolic capital alone, and trafficking rankings have thus proven to motivate governments shamed by them somewhat more than other measures of governmental adequacy. The TIP Report's trade in symbolic capital, however, has provided sufficient impetus to action for even wealthy nations. The Japanese government, for example, rushed in 2005 to end visas for Filipinas who worked as hostesses in bars after the US Department of State downgraded Japan from Tier 2 in 2003 to Tier 2 Watchlist in 2004. The 2004 report claimed these women constituted a key and as yet unrecognized population of trafficking victims. In response, Japan reduced the number of entertainment visas enabling women to leave the Philippines for Japan from 80,000 in 2005 to around 8,000 in 2011. This in turn forced many women who depended on this work to risk entering Japan illegally, which increased the likelihood of their falling prey to coercive labor relations (Parreñas 2011). Thus, the US was able to leverage growing fears about the menace of human trafficking to prod the Japanese government to action for its inadequate attention to moral security. Japan's example indicates the TIP Report's key role in the shift from bounded moral panic to more durable mode of governmentality, guiding action between and within states.

Resuscitating India's Anti-trafficking Law

In India, "compliance" with anti-trafficking standards issued by the US Department of State coalesced not in visa offices, as in Japan, but in police stations and shelters for victims of trafficking. In 2003, the US lowered India to its Tier 2 Watch List on that year's TIP Report. According to the Department of State's website, the Tier 2 Watch List is reserved for: "Countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's

minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards.” India remained on the Watch List, marked as bordering on unacceptable, until 2012. By annually including India on this list during this period, the US Department of State fingered the Indian government’s apparent moral inadequacy as measured by a new yardstick—not poverty, education, or malnutrition, but trafficking.

In India, exchanging sex for money *per se* is not strictly illegal, but, as in many countries, public solicitation, keeping a brothel, pimping, and other related activities are. While there are many women and children who are forced or coerced into prostitution in India in diverse ways, in South India, where Preethi and Shrenika worked, the majority of women who sell sex choose to enter the trade with the help of female peers and largely with the intent of supporting themselves and their families more comfortably (Sahni and Shankar 2011, Walters 2016a). Most (although by no means all) of these women sell sex without pimps, and in South India explicit red-light districts are rare, although several small towns have reputations as rural hubs for commercial sex. India has a history of protective custody for victims of trafficking stretching back to colonial times (Forbes 2016, Tambe 2009). However, prior to the resurgent global crusade against human trafficking in the new millennium, Indian police tended to harass prostitutes to extract cash and sex, but it was less common for them to remove sex workers from the streets and assign them to rescue shelters for long periods. After the advent of the US Trafficking in Persons Report, the Indian state breathed new life into the Immoral Traffic (Prevention) Act (ITPA). This legislation, enacted first in 1956, then renamed and revised in 1986, specifies that victims of trafficking must be rescued and officially housed in shelter homes until they are claimed by their parents, guardians, or husbands.⁸

The ITPA defines trafficking exclusively in relationship to prostitution, which it defines as “sexual exploitation or abuse of persons for commercial purposes or for consideration in money or in any other kind.” The law does not recognize any mode of commercial sex that is not forced or coerced. It also does not delineate any form of trafficking that is not related to the sex trade. Therefore by the ITPA’s definition there is no difference between prostitution and trafficking, both of which connote victimization. This slippage between the colloquial usage of prostitution (selling sex) and the ITPA’s legal definition of prostitution (immoral trafficking) enables the

police to leap-frog over the question of whether a woman they encounter decides to sell sex or is forced by others to do so.

After the US began pressuring nations across the globe to treat all women who sell sex as victims of trafficking, some state agencies in India attempted to pass amendments to the ITPA that would bring it even closer in line with the radical feminism embraced by abolitionists by criminalizing the purchase of sex (Kotiswaran 2014). These attempts failed, and the heightened interest among abolitionists in implementing the existing ITPA spurred the Indian police to begin more regular campaigns rounding up women who sell sex (Ahmed and Seshu 2012). Anti-trafficking efforts in India after 2003 evinced a tight tangle of directives and aid dollars from the US and the UN for research, trainings, and operations by national agencies, academics, police, and NGOs (Sen and Nair 2004). In South India, C.L. Madhuvan, an Inspector General of Police, began to operate as a central node in this transnational anti-trafficking network. Madhuvan first underwent anti-trafficking training in Great Britain and then returned to India where he ran workshops for over 5,000 other police officers. When I interviewed him in 2012, Madhuvan emphasized to me that in his training sessions he sought to “sensitize” police officers to the idea that women who sell sex should be treated not as criminals but rather as victims. This approach mirrored the discourse of transnational abolitionists such as the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women that foreground women’s need for physical protection rather than their individual agency or the need for redistributive justice. When I asked him, Madhuvan explicitly rejected the rights-based approach to regulating sexual markets that Indian sex workers themselves tend to promote (Kotiswaran 2014; Vijayakumar, Chacko, and Panchanadeswaran 2015). He instead championed the practice of providing women who sell sex with an interim cash payment in recognition of their status as victims, akin to payments the Indian state routinely offers other types of victims. In this way, Madhuvan helped lay the groundwork for implementing moral security that melds modes of police action against criminality with modes of charitable action to address victimhood in the disciplining of female sexuality.

Madhuvan’s police trainings strongly emphasized partnerships with anti-trafficking NGOs as logical allies in caring for victims of trafficking. His preferred NGO partner was Yash’s organization, Anti-Traffickers United (ATU). Together he, Yash, and a few others honed methods to identify and extract women from train stations and brothels, and Yash sometimes

even accompanied police teams on raids that traversed state boundaries to find and transport women to ATU's shelter from distant cities. During the period of my fieldwork, once a sex worker or victim of trafficking was detained in a rescue shelter, she typically remained there for around three months before the shelter, the police, and the courts processed her case and released her to her parents, guardian, or husband as mandated by the ITPA. In this way, the state made families responsible for the sexual deviance of their wives and daughters. This process obviated these women's legal status as adult citizens and likewise disregarded their constitutional right to equal treatment by placing them as perpetually subordinate to husbands or family members (Ahmed and Seshu 2012, Walters 2016b).

Thus, the Indian government's efforts to subject adult female sex workers to paternalistic kin relations in India acted to visibly materialize the state and the NGO on the streets and in the media as arbiters of a moral security championing traditionalist notions of Indian *samskruthi* (upper-caste socio-cultural norms). At the same time, it also provided evidence for the Indian state to display for the new transnational indices of good global governance, the TIP Report. By 2012, the US Department of State upgraded India from the Watch-List to Tier 2 in the Trafficking in Persons Report—a major success for the country. The training, funding, and subsequent honors awarded to moral entrepreneurs in India served to materialize humanitarian imperatives from Washington and Geneva as action on behalf of victims in Hyderabad, thereby generating an increasingly integrated global social order structured by moral security.

Elision and Hyperbole: Fomenting Transnational Fear from India

Yash initially founded ATU to help sex workers and had early success at cajoling municipal governments into providing them with deeded houses. After the film *Born into Brothels* premiered in New York in 2004 and won an Academy Award in 2005 by bringing the children of prostitutes in India into focus as particularly fitting objects for sympathy and aid, India began to receive increased transnational interest in its rehabilitation centers and schools for the children of sex workers,⁹ and Yash began winning a succession of humanitarian awards in India and abroad.

Yash's presentation of ATU's work as a form of charitable care work is clear in an online address to potential donors that brought him wide

visibility at a time that he was newly establishing his reputation as a humanitarian celebrity. Many of his speeches continue to circulate globally, inciting ongoing alarm over the apparently rampant prevalence of trafficking and instilling a sense of the need for moral security nearly a decade after he first delivered it. “I want to talk to you about the worst form of human rights violation, the third largest organized crime, a 10-billion-dollar industry. I’m talking to you about a modern-day slavery,” Yash began the recording before a live audience. He proceeded to tell stories of three small girls whom ATU had rescued from sexual abuse. He then led the audience through a rapid succession of slides depicting injured and murdered women—some South Asian, some European, some real, and some staged. With almost no verbal exegesis proffered, these sickening images served to weld a visual link for the audience between the ostensible topic of Yash’s speech (commercial sex in India) and extreme visuals of gender-based violence.

As the performance unfolded, Yash continued to employ the hyperbole and elision that serve so well in rousing a collective sense of outrage. “In this country and across the globe,” he told his audience, “hundreds and thousands of children as young as three, as young as four are sold into sexual slavery” and “. . . raped by a hundred men a day.” By beginning with stories of child abuse, Yash laid the groundwork for making broad generalizations about commercial sex and sex worker agency that might have otherwise seemed more tenuous if applied to fully adult women. For example, he stated confidently that “Ninety-nine point nine percent of them resist being inducted into prostitution.” He recounted tales of being personally attacked by traffickers, and even of the death of one of his staff members. He informed the audience (composed largely of upper-middle-class whites and South Asians) that by then he had rescued more than 3,000 women from commercial sexual exploitation and rehabilitated them to skilled, high paying jobs. After alerting the audience to the alarming dangers confronting Indian women and children as a result of the existence of a market for paid sex, Yash concluded:

And that’s what I am here for—asking for your support. Demanding for your support, requesting for your support. Can you break your culture of silence? Can you speak to at least two persons about this story? Tell them the story. Convince them to tell the story to another two persons. . . I am asking you, in your limited world, in your hearts,

can you just encompass these people too? Because they are also a part of us. They are also a part of this world. I am asking you for these children whose faces you see: they are no more. They died of AIDS last year. I am asking you to accept them as human beings. Not as philanthropy, not as charity, but as human beings who deserve our support.

As he ended, the live audience thundered its approval, rising together in a long and raucous ovation and an elated moment of collective effervescence. Listening to Yash's account of ATU's work, the audience encountered the figures of true victims and definitive heroes, as Vance's (2014) term "melomentaries" suggests. Entering Yash's narrative avails the audience of moral security's strong affective rewards: the possibility of abetting the rescue of innocent little girls from the darkest injustice through the simple transfer of charitable rupees and dollars.

Yash's skill at reorienting his patrons to moral security's *conscience collective* has enabled him to rapidly expand her organization. Yash's speech has been watched online by many millions of viewers. A man who attended the talk in person reported the next day on his blog that when the ovation subsided, a woman from the audience called out that she would donate \$10,000 USD to ATU if ten other people would do the same. Yash left the auditorium with \$110,000 USD in hand, and he received another \$90,000 from individuals the next day. Yash later blogged that a large tech corporation had awarded her a \$1,000,000 grant on the heels of this. ATU remains a primary purveyor of Indian rescue and rehabilitation narratives on the transnational charitable market and began receiving a rapid influx of transnational funding for the rescue and rehabilitation of victims of sex trafficking. ATU has counted Asset, Catholic Relief Services, Global Giving, Edukans, Ekdisha, Leger Foundation, Misereor, Partner India, the Reliance Foundation, UNIFEM, UNICEF, UNODC, and the US Consulate among its many sponsors and humanitarian partners. Large donations have enabled ATU to construct a new facility with space to hold up to 500 victims at a time. Yash's filmed insistence that *all* commercial sex is slavery obviates ATU's need to distinguish forced and consensual participation in sex work, thus aligning Yash's rhetoric with the nearly 50-year-old ITPA. ATU, in partnership with the police and the ITPA, is thus semantically free to fill its transnationally funded facilities with any of the large number

of women soliciting clients in Indian train stations and bus stops with little respect to whether they consent to being rescued.

Paternalism as Resolution to Moral Security's Internal Contradictions

The global moral hierarchy now emerging out of what was the trafficking panic occasionally necessitates that its metanarrative about organized criminal perpetrators profiting off hapless victims be squared against the more ambiguous and variable realities of paid sex. The discourse that arises as Indian anti-traffickers attempt to align the two is often fraught with tense contradictions. As shown above, in transnational settings Yash is able to elide anti-trafficking's contradictions altogether while using hyperbole to foment fear over the looming dangers of sex trafficking. In such contexts, there is little requirement to address anything but the atrocities of the sex industry. However, when forced to reckon with the specific cases of actual women at ATU's protection home that fit uneasily within anti-trafficking's tropes of organized criminals and innocent victims, Yash fuses together contradictions into an uneasy amalgam. As I show below, this fusion's key catalyst is paternalism's presumption of "knowing what's best." Paternalism permits moral entrepreneurs to combine transnational anti-traffickers' desire to rescue victims with the legal impetus to discipline loose women within the framework of the ITPA. This allows moral entrepreneurs like Yash to render abusive experiences like that of Preethi and Shrenika legible as examples of procedural propriety within a context of moral security.

An interview Yash gave in Telugu in late 2014 regarding the actor, Lovely Kumari, illustrates his attempt to resolve moral security's contradictions through paternalism. Lovely Kumari gained fame in India as a child actor and went on to star as the romantic heroine in a variety of South Asian language films. She found her biggest success in the Telugu film industry centered in Hyderabad. In 2014, a Telugu news channel, 6TV, released footage from an investigative sting in which they captured the actor on video negotiating a three-lakh rupee fee (around \$6,000 USD at the time) from an undercover journalist in exchange for sex in a high-end Hyderabad hotel (Bhaskar 2014). Five months after 6TV reported their investigation, in an unrelated case the officers from Hyderabad's West Zone Task Force Police arrested the actor along with her middleman. News sources across

India ran eye-catching headlines and each reported that Kumari had been caught red-handed in a compromising position with a businessman in Hyderabad's most expensive hotel. Reporters claimed that a handful of other businessmen were also taken into custody at the scene. If the police did in fact apprehend any businessmen, they and the press chose not to release their names along with Kumari's or any information about them. After the police detained Kumari, a district court mandated her to stay in a "rescue home" for six months. Kumari's mother filed a petition with the Metropolitan Sessions Court. This appellate court overturned the lower court's decision and released Kumari after only two months in custody of the rescue home. Upon her release, Kumari tweeted that the court "gave [her] a clean chit in the case and withdrew the charges and stay order against [her] made by the trial court." ATU owned the rescue home that held Kumari for two months before the court mandated her release.

Just days following Kumari's release from ATU, Yash gave an interview to a Telugu news channel, ABN Telugu, that circulated on YouTube. While consistently describing Kumari as a "victim," Yash nevertheless emphasized the contrast between Kumari and the majority of victims brought to his organization:

We brought this girl to our home very confidentially and we have kept her with us for the last two months. The world is saying so many things through the media—about her, and about her issues. But the girl that we have actually seen—it's been an amazing experience to have such a victim in our home. You see, I remember when the first moment they brought her to me that first day. After telling me about her life, in the end she asked me a last question. It was really touching. She said, "I know theater well. I will teach sitar well. I know some songs. I know good English. I know photography. Please tell me how I can use all these skills in your home. From my side, how can I serve your home?" This is very, very different. I mean, because we usually get around 65 women sent to our home each month on prostitution cases. As soon as they arrive in our home, they cry and cry and cry. "When will you release me? When will you release me?" they ask. Fighting, swearing—that's what we see on a daily basis. But, this girl! She is the first girl in my life [who said]: "Somehow I must straighten up [*sardukovadali*] my life. Whether I understood it before or not, I was part of something wrong. After coming here, I have come to

understand what a big mistake I took part in. I must change.” . . . And, so every day! Every day she has spent teaching the children [in our school].

In his recounting of Kumari’s arrival at ATU, Yash underscored his own role as caregiver by referring to Kumari as a “victim” and to ATU as a “home.” He elsewhere referred to ATU’s shelter as “the ashram, the holy place..” Yash also emphasized his role as an inspirational humanitarian by interlacing his stories of Kumari’s stay at ATU with emotive phrases often associated with charitable outreach such as “an amazing experience” and “really touching.” In the same breath, however, he also stressed his disciplinary role vis-à-vis rebellious sex workers who cry, fight, and swear in response to being forced to accept themselves as targets of his humanitarian care work. This disciplinary posture also informed his interactions with Kumari. In the video interview, as Yash recounted witnessing Kumari’s contrition, he smiled broadly as if gratified by the actor’s willingness to confess and forsake her mistakes (which he referred to as *tap-pulu*, a word which can also mean “sins”). In this way, paternalism enabled Yash to simultaneously understand Kumari as a victim and yet also as a criminal brought to her on a “prostitution case” and in need of moral reform. In one stroke, he ministers to the blameless while simultaneously curbing the blameworthy, both of which are situated in the single figure of the trafficking-victim-cum-prostitution-case-defendant. These merged categories thus justify (even necessitate) a singular humanitarian-disciplinary response. It is this ambivalent tension that I suggest creates an axis upon which moral security turns as mode of governance.

Recognizing the contradiction, the reporter in the video attempted to push Yash for clarification. “Do you think of her as a victim or as an offender?” she asked. Without pause, Yash reinvested in his earlier use of “victim.” Yet because the victim label adhered so precariously to a famous, educated, and wealthy adult woman who showed no signs of having been forced into selling sex, Yash added some additional rhetorical glue, while continuing to refer to sex work as “forced prostitution”:

In my mind she is a victim. You can say, she’s a victim of psychological compulsions. We have to keep in mind that in many cases, people who enter prostitution—are *forced* into prostitution don’t do so because of poverty. Many times there are very strange compulsions

that occur in life. At such a time, they may see no other path. They don't think of this path themselves, but someone shows it to them. This little girl (*paapaa*) is the victim of such compulsions.

Here, when emphasizing Kumari's victimization, Yash switched from his earlier more generic term for girl (*ammai*) in reference to Kumari and began instead to refer to her as *paapaa* (little girl or even infant). While making the case for Kumari's lack of agency (central to the trope of victimization), Yash chose paternalistic referents that emphasized Kumari's innocence and naiveté despite her status as a highly successful and worldly adult. Yash's logic in this quote fused the two (victim and offender) together and subverted them to his authority as a humanitarian whose moral vision trumped that of the *paapaa*.

Thus, addressing his tenuous application of the victim label to this most unlikely of high-profile cases, Yash then returned in the interview to his earlier treatise on humanitarian care work. Here again moral security's fused logics manifested. Yash explained at length that although Kumari was being held at ATU for connection to a "prostitution case," nevertheless, the actor used her time within this NGO-setting to volunteer for the organization by teaching children attending school at ATU. Yash also helped the students put on small theatrical productions. Lakshman noted in the interview that when the time for Kumari's release arrived the children presented her with a homemade card and that they cried as she drove off. The scene Yash described evoked for the viewers an image of Angelina Jolie or similar humanitarian celebrity surrounded by poor but adoring Indian children. In the interview, Yash neatly transformed Kumari's legal jeopardy, which was then being gossiped about across India's news media, into an opportunity to inspire her audience with an admonition on moral character and celebrity volunteerism:

[Kumari] is one of the very, very few human beings who has made use her of adverse situation. . . I am extremely proud to see not only an extremely talented actress, but an extraordinary human being. And that is something that the world should know! . . . Despite what was going on in the media outside, she did not waste time on that. She spent her time providing service [*seva*] to underprivileged women and girls. How many people have that kind of capacity? . . . I can say proudly that this girl came to me as a victim. But she spent

every minute of her time to bring happiness to the lives of the other residents in my home while she was with me. That is a lesson to the whole world!

Kumari too later highlighted the role she played as celebrity volunteer during her court-mandated time at ATU. As part of a longer post on Twitter about her experience, she wrote, “I had a lovely time there teaching kids Hindi, English, and Hindustani Classical vocals. I always do and I always will count those children in my prayers.” Thus the police working to secure Hyderabad against the moral threat posed by prostitution initially incorporated Kumari as a highly visible perpetrator of a scandalous crime, but the anti-trafficking organization that received her from them transformed her into the ambivalent figure of the repentant victim, and finally returned her to society appropriately re-oriented toward her normative role within the humanitarian state: celebrity ambassador for charitable service to disadvantaged children. Kumari’s tweet seems to indicate that ATU was successful at soliciting her capitulation to the wider project of moral security.

Bureaucratic Indifference as State Violence

Rhetorical ambivalence between care for and punishment of women who sell sex expressed by anti-traffickers like Madhuvan and Yash seems to resolve in practice toward punishment when we consider the day-to-day experiences of Hyderabad sex workers as a whole. Elsewhere I have characterized the anti-trafficking programs carried out by police–NGO coalitions as a mode of humanitarian trafficking (Walters 2016b). Police–NGO teams across India disappear sex workers off the streets, hold them against their will, strip them of their possessions, bar their direct contact with families and friends, abuse sex workers emotionally and in some cases even physically in return for salaries, donations, grants, and humanitarian awards. “Rescued” sex workers, in turn, try to escape, attempt and sometimes complete suicide, and even mount riots against their would-be rescuers. While locked up, women lose their earnings from sex work. They cannot provide care for their dependent family members, nor can they meet their financial obligations. Their sudden absence poses a risk to their reputations by potentially alerting family and neighbors to their occupation. The length of stay is elongated in India by an insistence on verifying identities and kinship before sanctioning victims’ release. The

NGO–state’s demand for proof and paperwork as part of anti-trafficking measures indexes bureaucracy’s centrality to the local operationalization of moral security in India. Physical papers serve as the material stuff tendered in most encounters with the state, making bodies legible as citizens, ration recipients, or the criminally charged (Das 2004, Gupta 2012). But paperwork has been undertheorized as a currency in humanitarian encounters. As a hybrid mode of punitive care, Indian anti-trafficking policies necessitate legibility through paper proofs as in other governmental encounters. This documentary legibility can exact an excruciating toll on sex workers, who are often illiterate or semi-literate.

Varsha’s experience is illustrative. Before I first met Varsha in 2009, she had already begun managing her HIV infection well. She was young, healthy, and continued full-time sex work at the Secunderabad train station despite her positive status. Condoms and anti-retroviral therapy (ART) were her daily companions. I last saw her at a party I threw in Hyderabad in 2013. She sat eating chicken curry and tossing her glossy black braid as she exchanged loud, lewd jokes with other sex workers. However, when I returned to the city in June 2016, news reached me that Varsha had entered hospice care. She died a few days later from AIDS and before I managed to visit her. Based on the accounts of her closest friends in the sex worker community, Varsha’s death was precipitated by the thick bureaucracy of anti-trafficking regulations. In this sense, Varsha’s funeral was the programmatic output of moral security’s unrelenting demand for papers and proofs.

About a year before her funeral in the hot months of 2015’s monsoonless summer, an NGO–police team had rounded up Varsha with about 30 other sex workers from the Secunderabad train station. Varsha’s sex worker friends heard news of the station raid and came searching for her and the other women they knew among the 30. They recounted to me what happened to Varsha in the days after her funeral. The police brought a large vehicle for the apprehended women and took them first to nearby Gandhi Hospital for medical testing, as is common procedure with women who have been raped or otherwise sexually victimized. According to Varsha’s friends’ account, the process of getting all the women seen and documented by doctors took over a day, and none of the women were fed during this wait.

Once medical authorities had documented the women’s sexual status, the police bused them to the police station. There the police deployed

anti-trafficking categories of victim and perpetrator to divvy up their catch from the streets. According to my sex worker interlocutors, from among the 30 women extracted from the station, four or five women were arbitrarily selected to be presented before the courts as traffickers and the rest were presented as victims of trafficking. The courts in turn churned out the expected rulings: traffickers were penalized with jail terms and victims of trafficking were sent for mandated care in protection homes. The police and the courts pronounced Varsha a victim of trafficking, apparently unaware of her relative seniority in the train station's hierarchies. Together with a small group of other victims, the police took Varsha from shelter to shelter across the city, attempting to find room for them in the already overcrowded facilities that the government had partnered with to oversee the women's safe rehabilitation.

The process of identifying spots for each of these women took another five days, during which time Varsha told her friends that the police provided the women only one meal a day. She also received no ART medication. Thus began the extended bureaucratic process of sapping Varsha's health. Careful attention to nutrition is key to managing HIV infections, but inside the government-sponsored protection home, Varsha was fed poorly. ATU is the only anti-trafficking shelter in Hyderabad with a reputation for providing plentiful and nutritious food, but the police lodged Varsha in a much smaller NGO-run shelter. For six months, her sex worker friends made repeated attempts to win Varsha's release from the shelter. They reported that Varsha was fed what they called *patchi pulusu* (a thin lentil gruel) and *control rice* (the lowest quality of rice, rationed out via government schemes). Despite being informed that Varsha was HIV positive, Varsha's friends claimed that the shelter failed to provide her with ART medication. When I later interviewed the head of this shelter, she made no mention of Varsha, but she revealed that her organization received very little in transnational donations and the government allotted amount for each inmate was severely insufficient.

Varsha might have survived the poor food quality and the lack of ART had she been released within the typical three-month timeframe. But Varsha lacked two important sources of capital to accomplish this: first, support from her mostly estranged family; and second, documentation to verify her relationships to kin. Each of these play a key role within India's anti-trafficking apparatus. India's ITPA states that victims of trafficking may only be released from government custody after satisfactory vetting:

[T]he magistrate making an inquiry under Section 17, may, before passing an order for handing over any person rescued under Section 16 to the parents, guardian or husband, satisfy himself about the capacity or genuineness of the parents, guardian or husband to keep such person by causing an investigation to be made by a recognised welfare institution or organisation. (Government of India 1956)

At first, Varsha's friends themselves posed as her relatives, but the shelter turned them away without allowing them to see her. However, when they returned with photo-documentation of their relationships, the shelter allowed them to visit her, but insisted that only her kin would succeed in securing her release. Establishing the "genuineness" of Varsha's male kin became the bureaucratic game that sex worker friends found themselves forced to play in order to negotiate her freedom. First, Varsha's father agreed to provide "proofs and photos" but later withdrew his help in fear that it might damage his position as a government employee. Varsha's legal husband had taken a second wife and rarely interacted with Varsha by then. He was unwilling to provide his "proofs and photos." Varsha's boyfriend at the time came forward with documentation connecting the two of them, but the shelter rejected this connection after discovering a discrepancy in their government issued IDs (*Aadhar* cards). Finally, Varsha's sex worker friends prevailed on her son, then a teenager and legal minor, and helped him to compile his own paperwork to claim his mother. The shelter head greeted his attempt with skepticism when the boy could not produce photos of himself that included his mother. In desperation, the sex workers paid for the creation of these photos on his behalf using Photoshop, and after six months of bureaucratic demands to document "genuineness," Varsha was at last released from the shelter. Doctored photos here became the tender of bureaucratic rectitude.

In the process, the sex workers traveled to two different villages to obtain paper proof of Varsha's identity and spent over 30,000 rupees (\$465 USD or about a month's full earnings) on documentation, travel, lawyers, and bail. They were also forced to submit their own photos along with Varsha's son's "proofs and photos." The shelter informed them that after Varsha was released, if she were to run away before the court had finalized her case (a process usually requiring four additional appearances before a judge), shelter staff would turn their photos over to the police to

“catch them,” underscoring again the punitive register of this ostensible care work.

By the time she was released, Varsha was suffering from advanced stages of HIV infection. Her friend described her to me as desiccated: “She became dry, Madam! Her intestines had become dry.” Varsha’s HIV counselors in Hyderabad attempted to restart her on ART. They told her closest friend, Sujata, “She is fourth stage. Tell her to take her medicines so that she can live at least for one year. Otherwise, she will die soon as her CD4 count is drastically low. She is in serious danger.” But once she was released from the shelter, Varsha spiraled downward in a prolonged drinking binge. Her use of ART was spotty, and her relations with her family rockier than ever. A few days before she died, she brought her daughter to live at a facility for the children of sex workers and then admitted herself to a hospice for AIDS patients in a nearby city. At the time of her funeral, Varsha’s court case remained as yet unresolved.

According to her coworkers in 2016, some of whom had also experienced this mode of humanitarian incarceration, Varsha was not the only sex worker to suffer serious health problems as a result of being rescued. Other women had also been denied ART medication in shelters, sometimes ironically because their CD4 count registered as normal when they entered. One woman died from poorly managed diabetes, I was told by the group. By one sex worker’s tally, ten of her coworkers had died in the last six years at least in part as a result of being sent to shelters. One shelter director informed me that for women from other countries with no bilateral repatriation agreements with India, the processing delay can prove indefinite and women may remain suspended in bureaucratic limbo. In one instance, a newspaper reported that an Uzbek national living in Hyderabad and forcefully sheltered as a victim of sex trafficking hanged herself to death when her release from the NGO was endlessly postponed (*Deccan Chronicle* 2018). Shelter staff prolong inmates’ stays, sex workers explained, because “their proofs are not precise.” According to one former resident, the shelter staff tell them, “This is not your mother. This is not your father. There are no photos. Wouldn’t they possess photos [if they were genuine]? Wouldn’t they have proof if this were their daughter? Wouldn’t they start taking photos from her childhood?” Moral security thus melds punitive care work with administrative processes of “proofs” and demonstrations of “genuineness” to inflict slow bureaucratic violence.

This mode of governance costs women not only their earnings and reputations but also their health and, in a few cases, their lives.

Conclusion

Moral security is characterized by a profound paternalism that speaks of women as young girls, dresses them in school uniforms rather than the saris due South Indian adult women, and insists that their kin (and especially male kin) claim ownership and moral responsibility for them by proving their relationship and personally accompanying them home. The paternalism of moral security is based in the simultaneously classist, sexist, and casteist sense of “knowing better” than women who sell sex. It serves as a cognitive and emotional tool that enables police officers to physically force sex workers to submit to humanitarian control, shelter management to train their staff and guards to ignore sex workers’ demands to be set free, and humanitarians to present their work as charitable to philanthrocapitalists and the concerned transnational public. The paternalism of moral security proves equally useful when engaging women as victims in need of protection and when engaging them as criminals in need of discipline and moral rehabilitation. In this way, moral security’s paternalism soothes the central tension between care work and punishment in anti-trafficking discourse and practice. It provides a singular mode of response thereby unifying and stabilizing a category—criminal-victim—that would otherwise fracture too easily. Paternalism allows moral entrepreneurs such as Yash to bridge the gap between the global demand to rescue victims, Indian demands for the enforcement of traditionalist notions of female sexual purity within the control of patriarchal kin relations, and the everyday reality that women who sell sex may fit within none of these boxes.

In India, moral security’s stabilizing paternalism is ensconced in sticky bureaucracy. The NGO-state encumbers the process of sex workers winning back their freedom of movement and association with requirements for police and medical reports, fact finding expeditions to natal villages, NGO scrutiny of friends and relatives, and requirements to appear and re-appear before magistrates. By remaining dogmatic about procedural requirements, the humanitarian state performs carefulness, conviction, and orthodoxy. These performances bolster an ethos of safety and moral certainty that anti-trafficking governance promises to impart in response to global fear of traffickers. Sex workers, however, experience these

bureaucratic demands for proof of identity and kinship as a slow-motion violence, delaying their access to cash to transact their lives, to medicine, and in some cases to healthful food. Varsha's death by bureaucratic indifference can be understood as a regularized paternalism emanating from a humanitarian state that deemed her unfit for self-determination until paperwork from male relatives at last passed inspection and she could be returned to the "safety" of familial domesticity, back inside the mythological protection of the Lakshmana rekha drawn by her male kin.

Although Varsha was forced to stay in a shelter for six months, Preethi found her way out of her shelter only ten days after she entered. She negotiated her quick release by twice attempting suicide. For her part, Shrenika reported that she successfully dislodged herself from a protection home after only four weeks through a combination of capitulation and deceit. Most of Preethi and Shrenika's coworkers taken to shelters remained there for two to three months as did the actor Lovely Kumari. Since their release, moral security has advanced apace, gaining increasing prominence as a mode of governmentality in India. In June 2018 in Bengaluru, the Minister of Women and Child Development as well as of Kannada and Culture for the state of Karnataka, Jayamala, instructed all state functionaries beneath her to substitute the term "sex worker" in their official documents with the term "oppressed women." In July 2018, Indian Parliament began considering new legislation (crafted largely by Indian moral entrepreneurs) to greatly expand India's anti-trafficking model of forced rescue and rehabilitation to situations beyond commercial sex.

The police officer C.L. Madhuvan was later awarded the Trafficking in Persons Report Hero. He received his award from the US Embassy on behalf of then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for the "key role he played in rescuing victims." For his part, Yash was flown to New York in 2013 by a famous fashion designer and awarded \$50,000 USD, for his work as a feminist champion. In later years, Yash became a finalist for an international humanitarian prize worth over \$1 million USD. He received a runner-up prize of \$30,000 USD from a committee that included famous Hollywood stars. Another prominent Indian abolitionist, Ruchira Gupta, won a similarly prestigious humanitarian award and was appointed to an intergovernmental agency in New York City to help continue the formulation of a global order articulated through state responses to the dangers posed by trafficking. I suggest that honors and policy roles awarded to Indians like these three serve alongside the TIP Report to index their nation's place

in a global moral order increasingly oriented toward moral security. Such awards and appointments highlight “progress” made in countries in the Global South, which in turn reifies the standard itself and with it the apparent superiority of countries in the Global North, which top the Report’s rankings.

Akhil Gupta (2012) has shown that in their everyday operations, states are neither unified nor rational. He advocates instead a model of the state as fragmented, dispersed, pluricentered, multileveled, and decentralized. What I suggest here, however, is that a patchwork of highly variable and often arbitrarily administered state trafficking initiatives do in fact produce something like a state effect in which India as a whole is assessed, ranked, deplored, or petted by other more powerful states and by transnational philanthrocapitalists. The arbitrary violence of anti-trafficking interactions like those experienced by Preethi, Shrenika, Kumari, Varsha, and thousands of women like them taken in aggregate are rendered as the very basis for India’s claim to good governance on the global stage. Action “against trafficking” demonstrated through numbers of shelters built, victims rescued, and families reunited become easily legible metrics that add evidentiary flesh to the bones of India’s place in a global moral hierarchy of states. Foucault suggested that “sovereignty is exercised within the borders of a territory, discipline is exercised on the bodies of individuals, and security is exercised over a whole population” (Gupta 2012:18). In this vein, the anti-trafficking panic materializes Indian sovereignty as it disciplines the bodies of women like Preethi, Shrenika, Kumari, and Varsha and effects moral security not just on behalf of the population of India, but as part of a larger project of global governmentality. The global circulation of the fear of trafficking has prompted India to re-prioritize old legal codes that depend on ideologies of female vulnerability, the risks of female mobility, and the inherent victimization of selling sex. Panic has thus fueled a mode of governmentality in which female sexual vulnerability becomes the ideological grounds for practicing the care and security of populations. ■

Endnotes:

¹All names, including those of sex workers, have been changed.

²Scholars have noted the historical and legal roots of our present moral panic over modern-day slavery in Victorian feminists' campaigns against "white slavery" at the turn of the 20th century (Doezema 2010, Forbes 2016). A century ago, the first global trafficking panic initiated the earliest iterations of global legislation against the imagined menace of non-white men coercing white women into the sex trade. Judith Walkowitz (1992) found no empirical basis for these racialized fears of widespread, forceful commercial miscegenation, but the laws that mushroomed in response to this panic in the US served to curtail female mobility and punish interracial romance (Soderlund 2002).

³In the last few years, transnational anti-trafficking advocates and policy makers have begun to focus on a variety of forms of labor exploitation other than sex trafficking. The continued impact of many years of almost exclusive focus on sex trafficking *qua* human trafficking (particularly during the administration of George W. Bush) is witnessed by the endless use of the trope of sex trafficking in popular film and television in contrast to the relative absence of depictions of other forms of labor exploitation in popular culture.

⁴Zhang (2009) and Weitzer (2011) were some of the first to note that there are as yet no methodologically rigorous studies demonstrating high numbers of sex trafficked women and children in any country despite the massive numbers consistently cited by abolitionists. Weitzer (2015) cites a study which found only 1,058 women trafficked into sexual labor in Cambodia in 2008 in contrast to the 80,000–100,000 then claimed by Cambodian NGOs. Similarly, contrary to the widespread assertions that the 2010 FIFA World Cup would spur the trafficking of 40,000 women into South Africa for commercial sex, researchers found no evidence of mass immigration or a significant spike in sex work during the Cup (Delva, Richter, Koker, Chersich and Temmerman 2011). More recently, the Global Slavery Index has drawn extensive criticism for its flawed methods (Gallagher 2014, Dottridge 2017).

⁵I distinguish the panic over trafficking (evidenced by hyperbolic and inaccurate claims about the exponentially ballooning problem of disappearing girls) from the movement to end labor exploitation through measures such as unionization, a universal minimum wage, basic income, and an end to debt bondage, job recruitment fees, and other exploitative labor practices. My analysis applies only to the former.

⁶Moral security concerns itself with securing cisgender female sexuality but not transgender female sexuality. Although in India transgender women are routinely targeted by the Indian police and are also the targets of NGOs engaged in HIV/AIDS work, they are never the targets of anti-trafficking efforts, despite the fact that many of them work selling sex like the cisgender women interviewed for this article. This discrepancy points to the roots of moral security not in universal human rights applied across all genders, but rather in patriarchal mores dependent on gender-normative binaries and the control of reproduction.

⁷I gleaned much of the data analyzed herein from publicly available videos, newspaper articles, social media posts, blogposts, and television programs. Nevertheless, as I have used pseudonyms to obscure the identities of Yash, ATU, C.L. Madhuvan, and Lovely Kumari, I have also excluded any citation that would directly identify them.

⁸Shelter homes administered under this law became the target of complaints and lawsuits in the 1980s and 1990s for their reportedly egregious conditions (Dhaliwal 1997, Kotiswaran 2014:567).

⁹Local residents of some of the neighborhoods in which Yash placed his schools protested his public assertions that students in attendance are the children of prostitutes. These residents claimed to the contrary that a cross-section of neighborhood parents enrolled their children at these schools without knowing that ATU markets itself to donors as rescuing victims of sex trafficking. Local protestors rioted against Yash, forcing him to close at least one of his schools.

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Foreign Language Translations:

Moral Security: Anti-trafficking and the Humanitarian State in South India

[**Keywords:** Moral panic, sex trafficking, sex work, global governance, the state, NGOs, humanitarianism]

నైతిక భద్రత: దక్షిణ భారతదేశంలో అక్రమ రవాణా మరియు మానవతా రక్షణ
[ముఖ్య పదాలు: న్యాయభీకారం, రక్షణ హింస, నైతిక న్యాయస్థాపకులు, పరిపాలన నైతిక
సహకారం]

道德安全：南印度之反人口贩卖以及人道主义政府

[**关键词：**道德恐慌，性贩卖，性工作，全球治理，政府，非政府组织，人道主义]

Segurança Moral: Anti-Tráfico e o Estado Humanitário no Sul da Índia

[**Palavras-chave:** Pânico moral, tráfico sexual, trabalho sexual, governança global, o estado, ONGs, humanitarianismo]

Моральная безопасность — меры по противодействию торговле людьми и гуманитарное государство в южной Индии

[**Ключевые слова:** моральная паника, секс-торговля, секс-работа, глобальное правление, государство, НГО, гуманизм]

الأمن المعنوي: مكافحة الإتجار والدولة الإنسانية في جنوب الهند

كلمات البحث: الذعر المعنوي، الإتجار بالجنس، العمل بالجنس، الحوكمة العالمية، الدولة، المنظمات غير حكومية، الإنسانية