

Examining Anti-Trafficking Measures: Academic Perspectives

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In May 2019 SWARM hosted a three day festival involving panel discussions across a wide range of topics that impact on sex workers, and that connect and intersect with sex worker rights organising and broader struggles for justice.

This recording is from that festival.

00:00:00 CH SWARM ourselves have been doing in our interventions in the anti-trafficking space, and how it relates to sex worker rights. Most recently, I was in the U.N., at the segment on anti-trafficking and labour movements, particularly in the context of women and girls. Recently at the U.N. CEDAW committee, and that was a really amazing opportunity to see how anti-trafficking narratives really can affect the sex worker rights movement, and also just how generally anti-trafficking strategies and narratives that are really dominant and on the global level often actually fail to understand the context of, you know, criminalisation of migration, reduced labour rights, the impact of neoliberalism, all of these things on how anti-trafficking — sorry, how trafficking operates, and therefore how often our responses in the global level towards anti-trafficking don't actually fulfil what we need them to do in order to be successful. So for SWARM, we came there—we were one of quite a number of sex worker organisations who were in attendance and who were giving evidence. And it was quite interesting to see the number of abolitionist or prohibitionist feminist organisations that were also in attendance, and it felt like a little bit of an ideological ping-pong that was happening. Where you'd have, I don't know, forty organisations giving evidence to the committee and it would be like one abolitionist, one sex worker rights organisation, one migrants organisation; they had Amnesty there, and other organisations that were in solidarity, but it was incredibly exhausting being told once and over and over again, "Ah, the

prostituted woman, the da-da-da-da," over and over again, "the vulnerable migrant", "the vulnerable trafficking victim", and—while being sat next to in some cases, a person who is a sex worker rights activist talking about their experience of fighting and struggling with the anti-trafficking measures themselves, while at the same time another person is talking about, you know, "The prostituted woman has no voice, and she needs to be saved." And I'm like, hello, hello, hello! Have you even—you never thought about actually asking the people who are directly affected, often, who are actually here trying to have a platform, and who you're actively silencing? And so the politics of visibility, representation and power in those kind of international spaces was really obvious and incredibly hard to challenge, even if you had ten, fifteen sex worker rights organisations speaking from around the world. We had sex workers from Mexico, Thailand, Romania, Botswana, Zambia and the United Kingdom there, and yet we're talked about as though we're a privileged few that don't represent the interest of sex workers around the world, and that we are basically spokespeople for pimps and punters, which is obviously deeply offensive and quite ironic, given the fact that the anti-trafficking lobby is often funded by the Evangelical right and the Republicans in the States, and have more to do with the—anyway. [laughs] And then in the national context, SWARM has been involved in a rather strange sort of turn of events being invited to the Home Office's modern slavery strategy groups. So I've been sitting in on the Prevent strategy group with Ella, and also being there in the—I've been asked to get involved in the enforcement groups, so that I can give a insight to police officers about how anti-trafficking can affect people on the ground. So I'm there as this radical outlier who's like, "Uh, you know, I actually think you have to really re-evaluate how you consider anti-trafficking, and your strategies." I'm sure we'll get into it more, but there was a particularly funny moment in one of the Prevent groups in which, basically, one of the people involved was saying that all we need to do is ensure that children are given the information to be able to determine who is a trafficking victim, tell their parents, and then anti-trafficking will be—trafficking won't be an issue anymore! Modern slavery will be over because the children [audience laughs] can identify who's the victim, and then, you know, it's all about awareness. When actually, for us, awareness leads to a racialisation, social control, surveillance of communities that already don't really want the public going "I think that person might be a trafficking victim," when they see a Vietnamese woman in a nail bar. How are you meant to identify a trafficking victim when often they are workers who probably don't want—if they do have undocumented status—don't want the authorities being called because that may lead to a deportation? And also, what is the sign of someone who is trafficked in that context?

Other than someone who's probably being paid a low wage, and would prefer like, I don't know, union representation, and an ability to struggle for better working conditions, rather than getting the state involved and then potentially having all the issues that come along with that. Also, I just want to say that the person who was meant to be chairing this panel was unable to attend, but I would really recommend that you look up their TED Talk which they did on this issue for SWARM on anti-trafficking and migrant sex worker experience. You can look up "Fez TED Talk migrant sex worker anti-trafficking" on YouTube and you should be able to find it. But yeah, I just want to open up to the rest of the panel, so that they can introduce themselves. I'm really honoured that we've got such incredible panellists with us today, and I'm sure that they're going to have really interesting interventions and discussions that we can frame the discussion around. Anyone want to start?

00:05:45 MG Yeah, sure. Thank you so much, Blair. Hi everyone, I am Mirna, or, my formal title is Dr Mirna Guha, but you can all call me Mirna. Please call me Mirna [chuckles]. I'm an acting Senior Lecturer in Sociology at Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge. My research specialisms include gender-based violence, sex work, social justice, as well as social relations within marginalised communities. I teach on topics such as feminist theory and practice, development studies or international development, and also on sexualities and gender. The reason I'm here today is because of my PhD research, which was with women formerly and actively in sex work in Eastern India, where I'm from. And I can talk more about my research when we have time for questions. But I kind of want to establish myself firmly as an intersectional feminist who acknowledges gender, class, race in shaping and producing inequalities.

00:06:57 MW Okay, thank you. I'm not really a researcher. At least, it doesn't feel like that. I'm here because I'm working for about thirty years both on trafficking and on sex workers rights which nowadays seems to be a weird combination, and since very short, half a year, I'm also a PhD student at Essex University. And I'm working on human rights and sex workers' rights and especially what arguments are used to exclude sex workers as legitimate partners from the political and the legal debate—I'm also a lawyer—to exclude them from human rights. My background is trafficking; we started in the Eighties on trafficking in the Netherlands, where I came from. At that moment, it was totally logic to work together with The Red Thread, the sex workers rights organisation, so if there's abuse you need rights. So working for rights, and against violence, was kind of the [chuckling] totally normal and logical

culmination. So, there are also still anti-trafficking groups and feminists out there who still think that this is a logical culmination, but we've seen that the abolitionists and neo-abolitionist and radical feminists are gaining ground in a speed, and in an extent that I wouldn't have thought possible ten years ago. Yes, so and we'll talk about that, I think.

00:08:55 SO Okay, thank you very much. I'm Sam Okyere. I'm a lecturer in Sociology and Criminology at the University of Ghana. My background—well, I started working on issues with children's involvement in precarious labour, including children in the sex trade or sex work area. Most recently, which is why I'm here, I've been looking at women's involvement—and this started from a project I carried out in West Africa, in Ghana, mainly, which was intended to explore the experiences of migrant labourers in that country, and it soon became clear to me that there were lots of Nigerian sex workers in Ghana. And through the narratives and lived experiences it's become quite evident how the use of anti-trafficking enforcement, anti-smuggling enforcement and migration deterrents policies, primarily, are being used to prevent women's movement and indeed to deny them access from—to deny them the right to reach European shores. So, hopefully I'll be able to tell you a bit about that today.

00:10:17 CH Thank you.

00:10:18 EC Hello. I'm Ella Cockbain. Thank you for having me. This is my first sex work event. Oh—actually, I went to the Sex Worker Open University film festival about a decade ago, but it's my first one since then, and it's really nice to be here. I came to this I guess in a kind of round-about way, that I started off working on child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, the kind of cases that have been dubbed by the media as grooming gangs, then went on to work on labour trafficking and then got really, really annoyed last summer with the APPG on sex work, well, not sex work, they don't call it that, do they—

00:11:08 ?? [off mic] Commercial prostitution, and the commercial sex trade.

00:11:11 EC Yes. Because—ugh, I just wanted to bang my head against the wall, because it was just full of conflating child sexual exploitation and adult sex work, which... conflating adult sex work and sex trafficking, and just all the kind of worst things about the trafficking field being thrust out there as reasons for policy change. So I'm really, really interested in the

overlap between sex worker rights and how anti-trafficking can be done in a sensible, just, I guess "intelligent" way, I think Emily described it as earlier on the opening panel, which I thought was quite smart. So that's why I'm here. I worked a lot with various public, private, third-sector organisations in the research that I've done, but I haven't worked with sex worker groups until Blair and SWARM, which was really exciting. They joined the Modern Slavery Strategy and Implementation Group on prevention of human trafficking when I became co-chair, because, before that, I was a member of the group and I was really fed up of being the person going, "Wait a sec, that's profiling, and that's not going to help, that's just going to discriminate against sex workers," and it just seemed sensible to have a group that could represent sex workers a hell of a lot better than I could on there. So it's really exciting to be here and thank you for having me.

00:12:45 CH Thank you. So, for those that aren't aware, but I'm sure everyone in this room is to be quite honest, mainstream anti-trafficking policy, which relies on police raids, deportations and general surveillance, makes things worse, not better, for sex workers. We frequently talk about experiencing police raids as traumatic, terrifying experiences, and to refer to them as rescue operations, as they commonly are, is not only deeply ironic but bitterly, bitterly untrue. Sex workers are often having their phones and earnings seized, they're facing sudden losses of their income, and migrant sex workers are often experiencing immigration detention and deportation through these raids and these interventions in the name of rescue. So I'm really interested to hear from the panel about what they think—if they can elaborate a bit more about how anti-trafficking measures and the ways they are enforced, including through migration, criminalisation etc., impact sex worker vulnerability, and your experiences of theorising around this and trying to understand it in a deep way. If anyone just wants to jump in, that'd be great.

00:14:09 MG I'm going to start by just talking a little bit about my research, because even though I'm based here and I work in the U.K. now, my research was with sex workers and women formerly in sex work in Eastern India. So I'm only going to talk about it from that perspective. Another thing that I should share, and I usually don't share this in sex worker spaces, and justifiably, because sex workers get antagonistic about this, is that I used to work in the anti-trafficking NGO sector in India. And I worked on—not directly on anti-trafficking interventions, but I worked with organisations that were doing rescues and all of that. And then I kind of had enough, and decided this is just bullshit, and then I decided to

get into academia. But that's also kind of where my research interests come from. So this research in question was with women formerly and currently in sex work in Eastern India, they're primarily rural, they come from rural backgrounds or peri-urban backgrounds, so we're really talking about economically and socially disadvantaged women. What I did for my research was I collected life history interviews of forty-two of these women, and they were part-time and full-time sex workers across two red light areas in the Eastern Indian city of Calcutta. One of these red light areas, Sonagachi, is one of Asia's largest red light areas, and if you've had the misfortune of watching the Oscar-winning documentary called *Born into Brothels*—please don't watch it if you haven't watched it. It's horrible—hat was filmed on Sonagachi, on children of sex workers. What I also did for my research was I spent time living inside an anti-trafficking shelter home, so I spent time living with women who had been rescued from sex work to talk about their experiences—"rescued", air quotes—and learning about their experiences, and I also spoke to women who had left sex work and gone back to their villages where they were from. To answer this question, I think in the context of South Asia, anti-trafficking interventions take the shape of three kinds of interventions. So there's rescue, there's rehabilitation and there's reintegration. So it's always rescue, rehab, reintegrate. I'll talk about each of these in the context of my research. As Blair very rightly pointed out, rescue interventions are anything but rescue. They're very, very violent. They are ad hoc police raids where everybody who looks like a minor—so anyone who looks below the age of eighteen in a brothel is picked up whether they want to be rescued or not. From a theoretical perspective, anti-trafficking rescue interventions in South Asia, which obviously draw from abolitionist global perspectives, they consider all sex work as violence. And they don't differentiate between sites of sex work. What I found in my research was that a sex worker could have experienced violence in a brothel, she could have left and gone to a different red light area and been completely happy there. Teila Sanders00:17:05 has written about this as well, that violence and sex work depends upon the site in which you work and also on, what I found in my research, based on the social relationships that you have in the area that you work. But anti-trafficking interventions ignore that entirely. You're picked up irrespective of whether you want to be picked up or not. Then we come to this rehab thing, which is where you're put in a shelter home, and this is where anti-trafficking and carceral feminism are best friends—and radical feminism. So you're put in this shelter home, and you have to be there until your family can claim you. Not only is this horribly patriarchal, because family means father, husband, brother, but it also means that—and that was true for a lot of the women in my research—is that they had entered sex work because they had

experiences of violence in their families and communities, and sex work was a way of negotiating with this violence. And Kimberly Walters has written on this as well, that rehab interventions re-insert women into the same relationships of violence that they are trying to leave. A lot of them don't want to go back, understandably, so they lie about where they're from, so they're just indefinitely stuck in this closed institution where they're treated, well, worse than children. And the re-integration aspect is, if you've managed to get out of the shelter home, and if your family has claimed you, then the re-integration interventions make you stay in the same community that you left. So the same village that you left because, you know, you might have had a broken marriage, and you were stigmatised, or you experienced violence by family, re-integration efforts are all about making sure you have a "livelihood" in that community. What re-integration interventions don't do is they don't work on relationships of violence. So they don't tackle the problem at the source. So to say that anti-trafficking interventions exacerbate sex worker vulnerability is an understatement. What I would say is that they increase the life-cycle of violence within sex workers and take away whatever options they have to deal with existing violence in their lives.

00:19:04 SO Ok, well thank you very much. So, as I indicated earlier, I've also been looking at this particular issue in the context of West Africa. And what's occurring there is the fact that anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling has become integral to the European Union's migration deterrence policy, as articulated explicitly in the European Agenda on Migration of 2015 which states, which states—and I've forgotten the page number here, I'm sorry—but, it says that the E.U. would employ all its available facilities in terms of external measures to prevent the movement of people from West Africa, Nigeria in particular—and I'll come to Nigeria, why it's targeted, in a minute. But the main thing that's happening there is that there has been a real surge in anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling campaigns in this region. It's really, it's quite hard to overestimate the number of campaigns that are on-going. So, most recently you may have seen a poster funded by DFID telling Nigerian women to stay at home and not to travel to the U.K. because they will become victims of modern slavery. In 2017 there was another, it was an actual TV series, a thirteen-part—so think Game of Thrones proportions here [laughs]—TV series called the Missing Steps, which was broadcast to over 100 million people across the region. About two hundred thousand DVD copies were made and circulated across as well. There has been funding to the Nigerian anti-trafficking unit called NAPTIP to make anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling an important, well, a compulsory element of the Nigerian school curriculum. And the overarching

messaging in all of these campaigns is that Nigerian women shouldn't move, they should stay at home. As you may well be aware, there is this notion that trafficking and smuggling are pervasive in Nigeria, and that almost every trafficked person or trafficked women in Europe, especially Italy and elsewhere, is of Nigerian origin. The one thing that's often missing from some of these claims is the context of Nigeria itself. It's a country of over two hundred million people. It's the seventh most populous country in the world. The most populous country in Africa. And we were talking about this yesterday—in fact, if you put together the entire West Africa, which is made up of sixteen countries, the population is less than that of Nigeria. It's a very massive country, and when you think about the numbers and the claims that are made about Nigeria, you have to look at the context. And you can see that within the grand scheme of things, while there may be a higher representation of Nigerian women in migrant populations, that is not extremely widespread or pervasive as the claims would suggest. But the most prominent aspects of the on-going campaigns is the fact that the EU has now deployed what are called Immigration Liaison Officers at airports. There are two international airports in Nigeria, and the job of this Immigration Liaison Officers is to basically police the movement of Nigerian women under the guise of saving or rescuing them from trafficking. And unlike India, where there are other elements apart from rescue, with Nigeria, it's basically arrest. You're held in detention until someone pays a bribe to secure your release. And it disproportionately affects women. So if you look at some of the publications by the Nigerian Anti-Trafficking Force, it's mostly women who are stopped, who are prevented from moving, and whose, I suppose, migratory plans are being thwarted or frustrated by these migration deterrence practices. What's happening, therefore, is that women who are trying to travel to Europe, either for sex work or for other activities, as most other women in other countries are able to do, are now compelled to use more precarious migratory routes. So where previously they could try to use the services of travel facilitators, and the reasons why they use the services of travel facilitators—you can call them smugglers, they aren't called smugglers out there—but the reasons why they may use these services is quite simple: they are denied the opportunities for safe migration. There was a woman I interviewed who had tried to apply for a visa at least six times. And she'd been refused on all occasions. She had a boyfriend here in the U.K., she wanted to join him, she was a sex worker in Nigeria, and she intended to continue that upon her arrival here. The first time she applied for the visa, she was just refused without any credible explanation. The same the second time. On the third go, Mrs May had implemented what she called the minimum income threshold. As you may well be aware, if you've got a partner here and you

want to join the person, he or she has to be earning at least eighteen thousand pounds. So for migrants, basically the price of having a partner is eighteen thousand pounds at the very minimum, as your income threshold. Anyway, that meant she was refused again. So after frustration, she's secured the services of a smuggler who was trying to help her leave Nigeria. But because of the risk of being arrested, they are now having to use alternative routes. So as I discussed in a recent paper, the enforcement of anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling measures in Nigeria has now catalysed new smuggling routes across the region. And what this means in practice, as well, is that for those who can't afford—because previously, if you were using the services of a smuggler, the price you were charged is now much, much higher, because there are two steps involved. First of all, the person has to pay for the journey, bribe a number of officials across—I interviewed these women in Ghana, so they'd crossed from the Nigerian border, the Togolese border and the Beninese border, the Ghanaian border to get to Ghana. That's about four borders. And although there is free movement in West Africa, people still have to grease the palms of police officers and immigration officers. So that's exponentially increased the amount sex workers have to pay to those who facilitate their travels. But again, because they are now trying to use countries such as Ghana as a means of travelling into Europe, that's added to the perils that they face on these journeys. So in the context of Ghana, one of the things I observed during the data collection was that the police would summarily round sex workers up, especially migrant sex workers. And I witnessed this occasion where about eighteen women were left standing in the blazing hot sun at the police station, and they had to pay—actually, that gentleman there, Bismack, 00:27:04 is a lawyer whose firm has been providing pro bono service, and he can tell you about some of these experiences later. But the simple point here is that the enforcement of anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling initiatives, the work of anti-trafficking NGOs who are funded by the E.U. to carry out these campaigns in West Africa, is having a real impact, negatively so, on migrant sex worker's rights, and on the migratory plans of a wide variety of people out there.

00:27:42 MW Thank you. I haven't heard of any—hardly heard of any positive outcomes of anti-trafficking measures. What I would like to do is to look a bit back at what the problems are with the concept of trafficking, which basically go back to the first treaties, Victorian times, around 1900, rescuing white innocents to be lured by dark man, Arabic or Jewish man, even, into brothels. And I think that basically we're still gripping with the history of that. And when, in the Eighties, we started using the word "trafficking" to address abuses of

migrant workers in the sex industry, really, believe me, we had no clue what concept, basically, we referred back to. If we had known, we would have gone to forced labour, or any other concept, but not trafficking. But at that time, we had no clue. We learnt quite quickly that trafficking was more about rescuing innocence and protecting borders. But then it was already almost too late. So, during the negotiations on the U.N. trafficking protocol, which was adopted in 2000, we tried to address some of those problems in a coalition of progressive anti-trafficking, human rights and sex workers' rights organisations. And we succeeded in small things. In terms that—the abolitionists tried to have "prostitution" and "trafficking" the same. So, consent doesn't matter—it's all the same. They didn't succeed in that. So the trafficking protocol does make a distinction between trafficking and sex work. But what you see in practice is that they're, you know, again, totally conflated. And one of the reasons is that if you look at the definition in the protocol, it says trafficking for sexual exploitation and for forced labour, etc. etc. So what they do is saying it's trafficking for sexual exploitation, whatever that may be, and trafficking for labour exploitation. And then we have two totally opposite strategies to deal with that. If we deal with labour exploitation, we need more rights for labourers, and if we deal with sexual exploitation, we just need to eradicate the whole sector. Which is a bit weird, but it's how it works. The other problem of the definition of trafficking traditionally, also, is the focus is on recruitment and movement. Recruiting and moving innocent women to be lured abroad for immoral purposes. So it's really very focused on movement, on crossing borders. And then, of course, there's the distinction between the innocent and the guilty victims. The innocent ones are the ones who can prove that they have never worked in the sex industry, that they had no clue they would do sex work and that they don't want to do it, and basically that means you have these two categories of women, the bad and the good, that we all know. But the whole trafficking concept has so much reinforced that, the idea of good women who need to be rescued and who are entitled to protection, and bad women, who can be abused with impunity. And the underlying idea, I think, is that the right of women to be protected against abuse and violence depends on our sexual purity, our chastity, our innocence, and I'm so deeply convinced that it's not only bad for sex workers. It's bad for all women. So sometimes I really cannot understand why we don't have all feminists on our side because it's so... logic, you know, really? Well. So sometimes I really don't understand things. And then of course trafficking has been racist and nationalist from the very beginning on. And it is still, you know, in its extreme it's about white men rescuing black women from black men, and that becomes more and more clear. But basically it was already clear in, you know,

parliamentary debates in the Netherlands in 1950 were about, in that time, German women who, you know, flooded our borders to do immoral things and who like, you know, all women in the world, German women were... well, like Negroes for slavery, German women were you know, kind of very suitable for prostitution. So the women about who the stereotypes are changed but the racism is still there. So the result is that trafficking is mainly used as a justification for measures against sex workers and measures against migrants, to control border, and to control female sexuality and female mobility. And what the impact is—I don't have to add very much, I think, because you were quite clear. Just two examples from the Netherlands, and the Netherlands are relatively, you know, if I hear stories from other countries I think, all the time, "Okay, it can be a lot worse than in the Netherlands." But one thing for instance was this idea about innocent and guilty victims, and migrants who are vulnerable and don't have the agency to make decisions and know what they're doing, etc, it's that we have this kind of profiling in our airports. And then if you come from one of the Eastern European countries—we have a lot of Eastern European women doing sex work in the Netherlands. So if you're from one of the Eastern European countries and you look kind of nice and you are in this vulnerable age, you know, there is a good chance that you will, you know, pick out and be interrogated, etc, etc. And one of the other things of the conflation of trafficking and sex work, for a long time we didn't have that so badly in the Netherlands, but now? Also we've become affected—so there is a lot of licensed working places now who are closed under the guise of 'We are combatting trafficking.' So we push you into illegality to rescue you from trafficking. Again, the logic is really difficult to understand. But it happens. You know? One third of the windows in Amsterdam have been closed; all of the windows in Utrecht where I live have been closed because, well, there was a rumour that there was trafficking. So there is a whole list, you know? And I think it works out different in different countries because we work in different contexts. And it's different whether you're from the Netherlands or Ghana. You know? We are in other ends of the process. But if you look at what the fundamental flaws are and the problems are with the concept, then I think we all feel the impact of that in different ways, but it's the same fundamental problems that we are confronted with.

00:35:31 EC For me, I guess, focusing mainly on the U.K., I think there's probably four main things. So I'll do them very briefly. The first is FOSTA-SESTA, and the discussions around whether similar measures should be implemented here. And, honestly, coming from having worked mainly on labour trafficking, whereas Marion mentioned, labour trafficking is

defined as a category that doesn't include sexual labour, and it doesn't include labour within the home, so domestic servitude. Nobody would dream of proposing, "Let's shut down all employment websites." That just would not happen. And it's kind of befuddling that this becomes the default response to, "Yes, there absolutely is extreme exploitation that is facilitated by websites." I mean, that happens. That's not a complete myth. The figures around trafficking are inflated and unreliable, but the core essence, the fact that exploitation occurs, is a fact. And I think, honestly, I think the kind of FOSTA-SESTA thing comes back to what Belle was saying in the migration panel earlier, which is people just not really caring enough about sex workers to think, "Would we do this in any other context?" So that's depressing and should be challenged, obviously. The second one is trafficking, and now, modern slavery, which is a concept which is even more problematic. It's a hot topic, it's a big PR move. So you see this with corporates at the moment—the obvious example is Marriott and the spot-the-signs type training that was rolled out. But it's happening with loads of other things as well. It's this big PR move to go, "Yeah, we're against trafficking," and, now that you've got them on the Slavery Act and companies have to submit their modern slavery statement to say what they're doing, to have these big glossy interventions, regardless of whether they help or not, and regardless of whether there's things closer to home you could be doing, like looking at—are you directly employing, or are you outsourcing your workers? Are you paying minimum wage—sorry, living wage? Have you got zero hours contracts? So those things that are really important for a fair labour market get forgotten about because it's easier to do your one-off big PR drive. So that's number two. Number three sort of ties in with that, which is spot-the-signs. Trafficking indicators have historically been developed by this process known as the Delphi process. Basically, you get a bunch of people who sort of know about a topic, and you put them in a room, and they come to an agreement. And this is where the lack of sex worker representation is a real challenge. Because the indicators that you have for sex trafficking are based on things you see in cases that have been identified as sex trafficking, but so little thought seems to have gone into whether they're any good at distinguishing sex trafficked sex workers from non-sex trafficked sex workers. And so when these signs then get applied across the board, effectively, yeah, what you're doing is you're profiling. We see it with other forms of labour trafficking, increasingly, like around car washes, or nail bars I think Blair mentioned before, that it is this, basically, are you spotting someone who looks like they might be Vietnamese who's painting nails? Because if so, it's probably trafficking! But I think it happens particularly strongly for sex work. And actually, these indicators suck. So we did a bit of research looking

at websites aimed at Lithuanians who wanted to find work abroad. And it was something along the lines of ninety-seven percent of the adverts contained one or more signs of labour trafficking. Which to me just says that these indicators, at least when applied in isolation, are not very good. But they get used as if they're gospel. And you see this in research, for example, there was work done around Backpage Hawaii that applied the indicators of sex trafficking to sex work classifieds and then presented it as a study on sex trafficking. And it just wasn't, it was a study on sex work and how it mapped across, so that's a problem. And then problem number four, which is the one I'm going to end on, is rubbish statistics. And bad data and bad statistics is a huge problem for decision making. And this one paper in particular that makes me really cross—it's nowhere near as bad in the actual paper, from how it gets used by people who are advocating for the Nordic model. But what it basically is, is it's a study of whether legalisation of sex work is associated with higher rates of trafficking or not. Now, anyone who's worked in trafficking research can tell you trafficking data, you cannot use as a measure of actual trafficking. And apart from the fact that it doesn't look at, you know, pre- and post-, it just looks at one point in time, it uses these as if they're reliable data that can be compared across countries, and it's dangerous, and then it gets manipulated for really rubbish purposes. So, sorry, rant over.

00:41:02 MW [off mic] I had something [inaudible]. [mic] I know which research you mean [laughs].

00:41:06. EC Yeah, they should put caveats in it, so—

00:41:09 MW Yeah, but it's—

00:41:11 EC Flawed in the—

00:41:12 MW —so in your face, you know, and it's really, I don't understand any institution, any academic institution who has a bit of self-respect let it go, really. Because, what it does, it compares figures of trafficking in different countries. And, just to take my own country, we have this extensive training of police and whatever, and you register not real victims but even possible victims, so we have an extensive system. And we don't deport victims. We do have already, since '89, a system of temporary residence permits, and reflection periods, and if a case is three years running on 00:41:58 you can get a

humanitarian 00:41:59 permanent stay permit etc. So compared to Sweden, for instance, we do have quite a lot of trafficking victims, because Sweden just deports any migrant women who are suspected on prostitution. So what they do, they compare figures that can't be, because there is a good policy and there is a bad policy. And moreover, they assume that all countries use the same definition of trafficking, and, even worse, not only that there's the same definition in the books, but there's also the same definition in practice, which of course is totally untrue! You could have even exactly the same wording in your criminal code, but the way it's implemented per country can be so, so totally different. So anybody who does any legal research knows that what they did is, on each level you can think about, it's bullshit. But still, it's there, and it's used, in your face.

00:43:02 EC Because it's statistically valid, it's just the premises are totally flawed. So, it's trying to explain that, and challenge that to people.

00:43:18 MW The interesting thing is that in the research itself, so if you get ever thrown it in your face, remember this: in the research itself, they say that basically they cannot compare their data, because they're not reliable. What they do in their conclusions: compare the data. And say if you legalise or decriminalise or however you call it, sex work, then trafficking will increase. So remember this: they say themselves that it's totally unreliable what they did. They only don't say it in their conclusions. So go back to that. Just one more thing. We had a research done in the Netherlands on the instigation of our Christian party in parliament, who of course want these kind of outcomes. So we had the university compare all the research that are there on whether decriminalisation or criminalisation or criminalising clients etc.—what impact that might have on the prevalence of trafficking. And the result is that there's not one research that's reliable enough to have any, any conclusions about that.

00:44:31 EC Which is why what basically seems to happen is anti-trafficking measures—which there is very little if any reason to think that they would address sex trafficking effectively—get rolled out without thinking about the fact that a) there isn't evidence that they're likely to be effective and b) there is really good evidence that they're likely to be harmful to sex worker populations. And that is really frustrating, because I don't think there's very many other fields you would do that for. And it's, yeah, it's pretty rubbish.

00:45:06 CH Great. That's alright! I wanted to pick up quickly on the discussion around the FOSTA-SESTA implementation, and then move onto the next question. But I've recently—not that recently, actually, a long time ago—was at a meeting with AdultWork [laughs] yeah. There was a workers forum, like uhuh 00:45:24. They obviously have a monopoly on the market in the United Kingdom for being the main advertising website. And particularly for people who are independent, full-service workers, that is really one area where if you don't have access to AdultWork in order to advertise, you are going to be severely impeded in your ability to access the market, be able to research clients. And also, there's a certain level of being able to screen, to a certain extent, through client feedbacks etc. We recently had a meeting with them to discuss a particular issue we'd had, where they were basically allowing people—when you sign up, you have to give a copy of your passport showing that you are who you say you are. And often this is obviously a way to reject migrant sex workers or to ensure that undocumented sex workers are not getting access to the platform. And this is a common thread that we have in sex worker support spaces, where we're trying to help people overcome this barrier so that they can actually access AdultWork. During that, we also talked about the fact that often the photos of the passports or the ID that they're using are often being allowed to be seen by clients. So, instead of ticking so that it's anonymous, often it would be ticked so that it would automatically show the minute the your profile went online, so people's legal names, a photo of themselves identifying themselves was being shown to hundreds of thousands of users, clients, on there. And the particular thing that I always find really interesting is when we talk to them about it, they just pretended that they didn't know, of course, because they're scumbags. But then on top of that, they pretended they didn't know after being told by several other people over the course of a few meetings, and it was just like, "Oh, we didn't know that, blah-blah 00:47:13, we'll look into it." And how this feeds in is this complete comfort level with seeing sex workers as basically disposable, not in any right to having privacy or autonomy over their information, and at the same time using it in order to be able to harvest data, store it—and then they admitted that if they see a number of the indicators, that they will pass on that information to the Home Office. So really what you have is a system in which the advertiser has the monopoly on the market, who has complete control over the identity information of those who are often most vulnerable and who are at most of risk of the state, and then at the same time making clients, who are often the people who could also be the second level of most violence and most risk, have access to our identifiable information also. So you have this crazy situation where we're going in, talking to them about how they're going to cope with the FOSTA-SESTA implementation, but

then realising they will continue to survive because they are happy to work with the Home Office in any way they can in order to maintain their monopoly. And really, they've made sure that they're already offshore in—I don't actually know which country, I think it's Malta?—where they have their offices, so they're completely unimpeachable by British law. But at the same time, they're happy to feed into the Home Office to keep themselves on side as much as they can. So we can't think of the industry as something that is inherently looking to fight back in the same interests. Like workers, advertisers, clients, the government: they're all different actors with different interests, and this is why a worker's movement has to be solely focused on workers' interests, because we are the people who are most at the coalface of this. I just want to—obviously, that was a little tangent, but I want to look to the question, basically—

00:49:03 ?? [Inaudible]

00:49:11 CH —Sure, if I ask the question, yeah. So I want to ask: how do questions of agency, choice, force, exploitation, a great bag of stuff, factor into how anti-trafficking and trafficking measures are discussed and understood, how we come to think about them in the context of agency, choice, and how these narratives and ideas are conceptualised in the imaginary of the global policy-making space?

00:49:34 MG I'm going to take the—there's a lot to unpack, but I'm going to try not to talk too much. I'll talk about agency and choice first, and then I'll talk about force and exploitation. So, globally, and discursively, anti-trafficking interventions are abolitionist, which means they don't recognise agency in sex work. They don't recognise choice of women to be in sex work. But what I found was really interesting in India, and also in my work when I was working in Bangladesh and Nepal, is that the picture is very different on the ground. So anti-trafficking interventions actually—the organisations, they actually do recognise that there are women who are choosing to be in sex work, and that these women are being picked up in rescue organisations, and that these women are in their shelter homes, and they don't want to be there. So there is a very strong recognition of that, but there is also a sense of helplessness. And this is not to defend these organisations, but to say that we shouldn't target anti-trafficking organisations working on the ground as the biggest enemy. What we should be looking at is international funding cycles. The funds come from international abolitionist organisations, they come from philanthropists who want

to save women but not listen to them, and they dictate the politics on the ground. So when I was living in this shelter home I spoke to the founder of the organisation, and they were running the shelter home, but they had no say on who could be in that shelter home. Other organisations, larger often Christian-based international organisations were rescuing women en masse and using force in the process as well. So there's this paper I've written about women's pathways out of sex work, and I talk about this experience of this woman called Mantha 00:51:11, and how the rescue process for her was so forced. Because she didn't want to go and she was essentially pulled and pushed into a police van, and her phone was taken away from her. And it's important to look at the big picture, and not to make enemies of those who don't have any power. So this particular shelter home just didn't have a say on who could be in that shelter home or not. The other thing I want to talk about is if you look at pre-trafficking, so if you look at the prevention side of trafficking, which is often not funded because all the funding goes into rescue, again, there's an issue of choice there, and there's an issue of gender inequality. Because often the subjects of anti-trafficking interventions are young girls in villages who want to leave the village, they want to go to the city, they want to have a city life, they want to do sex work, they want to do other kinds of work as well, they want to work in the entertainment industry, which is quite common in India as well. And what preventative anti-trafficking interventions are telling them is: don't dream big. Stay in your village, listen to your parents, be a good girl, marry who your parents choose for you, don't leave this village. If you leave this village, if you get a mobile phone, if you talk to this boy, you will get trafficked, your life will be over. So these anti-trafficking interventions are also creating these good, obedient little girls who don't dream big. So that's just completely eliminating choice and aspirations there. And in my research, I found when girls came back—and this is important to say, and I wanted to say this in the first thing, is: we need to talk about genuine victims, as well. Because often anti-trafficking interventions say, "Oh yes, we know we are picking up women who don't want to be rescued, but look at all the amazing work we are doing with all these women who want to be rescued." And in my research what I found is even when women wanted to be rescued, when they were forcefully sold into sex work, they hated the process. They hated being locked up in the shelter home. They hated being told what to do. They hated the fact that for the rest of their lives, if they wanted the support of the anti-trafficking organisation, they had to stick to a moral code made by this organisation. So a lot of these women who went back to their villages—they were having affairs with married men in the village. Because they just wanted a normal life. And they were seen as being outsiders and deviants, and they didn't tell the organisation about this, if

they had issues in these relationships, because they were scared the organisations would withdraw support. And I think it's important to remember this as well. That even victims get—genuine victims get exploited in the process. So anti-trafficking interventions like to talk about how they're stopping exploitation, but it's also they're exacerbating it massively as well. Can I have a little bit more, or have I gone over? Yeah, I think I'll end there, and then I'll come back to it.

00:53:47 SO Again, I think it's pretty similar. So there's no real recognition of agency in the context that I spoke about earlier. The campaigns and the narratives all promote a sense of compulsion or force of the woman involved. And the paradox, frankly, is that for the women themselves, acknowledging one's agency and one's choice or one's cooperation with the person who is alleged to be your trafficker means that you are complicit in the eyes of the Immigration Liaison Officers and the Nigerian anti-trafficking officials. It means you become complicit. So during the interviews some of the things they kept saying was that, well, depending on who is involved with us, we might say we are victims of trafficking. So the reality is, trafficking is also being used subversively, I found, by the women themselves. Because they know that it may be the only way through which you may not be subject to either deportation, if you were successful, or, on the other hand, if you were still trying to make it out of West Africa, assuming you've been arrested by the police, because prostitution is illegal in Ghana, and you've been arrested by the police, saying that you are a victim of trafficking and that you've no agency, you've been dragged literally kicking and screaming from Nigeria to Ghana might mean that you would be treated slightly more humanely, although that doesn't always bear out. But I suppose the other side to all of this again—the funding aspect is important. So a lot of the funding from anti-trafficking, anti-smuggling initiatives comes from the European Union. I think just last year nearly two hundred and forty million euros, when I did the sums, have been spent on anti-trafficking campaigns out there. So exploitation, on that topic. Again, the paradox here is that talking to the women in that region, exploitation from their perspective is more prevalent from the state itself compared to their clients. I spoke earlier about the ways in which they are subject to real dehumanising treatment from the police. They are roughed up. I think in the context of Ghana to be deemed complicit, even if it's suspicion of being involved in prostitution, you must be found soliciting on the street. What's happening is that the police are breaking up brothels at night. So you've locked your doors, you may be asleep, the police break up the

doors and arrest the women. And they have to bribe their way out, or they are sometimes subject to sexual assault by the police themselves. Anyway.

00:56:54 EC So, I think one of the things that struck home the most with me in *Revolting Prostitutes*, which is awesome and I'm constantly giving to people, is this phrase about whether it's by choice, circumstance or coercion. And I think that's something that we need to be picking up on a lot more in the trafficking research, anti-trafficking activity. Because the focus—and Emily Kenway picked up on this earlier—about this idea that the focus is very much on these bad actors, and the people who are being coerced, and nowhere near as much attention goes into the effects of circumstance. And that's, I think, a really important thing to be pushing back on. Because most people—not everyone. There's some people who see things very black and white. But most reasonable sensible people working in trafficking research, anti-trafficking in the U.K. at least—I'm not going to talk about globally, and America is a whole different kettle of fish. But most people in the U.K. that I've encountered are aware of the fact that trafficking is not a binary. It's not this neatly delineated issue that can be categorised off from everything else. And actually what you're dealing with is a spectrum of exploitation that goes from decent work on the one hand right up to severely exploitative labour.

00:58:29 CH [off mic] Is there any decent work, though?

00:58:32 EC That is a good point [laughs]. But reasonably alright work. I mean, I would say—I was doing labour trafficking research and I was doing crazy hour weeks and was just thinking, yeah, this is silly, because this is exploitative labour. But obviously I'm doing that in a relatively stable job on a relatively decent income, and I don't think that can be equated with someone working in a chicken factory, let's say. But if you start to see this, I think, as a spectrum of work, and if you accept, I think, what should be a really obvious argument, that sex work is work, then you're basically dealing with trying to improve labour rights, and access to labour rights, and good working conditions across the spectrum for everyone. And in doing that I think you deal with the extreme cases, but also you deal with everyone else along the way. And there's been some really positive shifts—slow, but positive shifts in this direction when it comes to labour exploitation, labour trafficking. I think things are a lot further behind with sexual exploitation and sex trafficking because of this tendency to exceptionalise it and to treat it as though sex work isn't work. Then very, very quickly these

stereotypes of trafficking of, you know, Liam Neeson's kid being snatched off the streets of Paris—pretty much everyone is coming to accept the fact that very, very little trafficking of any type, anywhere in the world, involves abduction. I mean, it happens occasionally. But tiny, tiny proportions. And the vast majority is some level of deception or coercion. I mean, the stuff we did on labour trafficking of people within the E.U. into the U.K., that was four hundred and fifty people, and I think two, maybe, were anything other than straight-up economic migrants. And I think we've got to come to a point where it's okay to say, you know, it's absolutely fine to want to migrate for economic reasons. And because you decide to do that, doesn't mean it's okay for other people to take advantage of you. And also, the systems that take advantage of people, we should look at those as well. And I think we need to do that for all forms of trafficking. And I think we need to look at austerity and the options people have when they're taken out of trafficking situations. Because often you find people, say for labour trafficking—people didn't need to be rescued. People were escaping, as a rule. But then were ending up sleeping on the streets, and had nowhere to go, and didn't have the money to put down a deposit for a flat because you have to have some level of regular income or savings to do that. And I guess thinking about the alternatives in a more positive way would be helpful.

01:01:26 CH Can I just jump back on that? I think it's a really interesting one, because often in the sex worker rights movement we have this conflict or this contention, where there are some of us that talk about sex work and trafficking as these discrete, very clearly identifiable two things. And we argue for our rights on the basis that one is one and one is the other, and never the twain shall meet. And I don't come from that school of thought. I'm really glad that we have SWARM, and particularly Revolting Prostitutes, as a clear intervention into that discussion, and sees, as you said, the labour continuum, the working conditions, the human rights continuum, the access to safe migration continuum as all things that inform a structural analysis and an analysis that is ostensibly and credibly leftist of why trafficking can occur, and what sex work can look like, as well, within that. And I think, as well, that the issue around the decent work—I only mention that because sometimes I find that people talk about "sex work is work" as a slogan that obviously occupies a lot of our movement, and sometimes that can be really fucked. Because actually, we're saying sex work is work, as if sex work, prostitution in the imaginary is down here, and work is up here, and we're trying to elevate prostitution up to the level that we see decent work. And actually, I'm trying to tear work down to the level that we consider prostitution, and antagonise and

interrogate what work means, and what capitalism means, and how neoliberalism informs our relationship to our labour, to our bosses, and actually think: if we could all treat prostitution and work the same way, in the sense of interrogating decent work that's not in the mainstream labour market in the same way as we do treat prostitution as this unsavoury, intelligible phenomenon, then I think we actually might be on a journey towards a more radical leftist future. But then that's just me going off in my little tangent [laughs]. [Audience laughs and applauds] I really want to open up to questions [interruption] oh, sorry, go ahead—

01:03:37 MW No, I just wanted to react on this question that you posed. One remark about personal data, the fact that somebody is a sex worker is considered to be sensitive data according to European Data Protection law—which is quite strong—it's in principle prohibited to process sensitive personal data. So there is also a legal way to go there. The question, of course, it's always: do you want to walk that legal way? Because if you put attention to the adult websites, yeah, it can have very adverse consequences. So it's always balancing. Then, about money being put into prevention, I know there has been millions and millions and millions put into prevention with the message, "Keep your women home". I once wrote an article for a book which I had called "Keep Your Women Home", and without telling me, they changed the title. So I found it really, you know....Then, there certainly is a lot of abuse and exploitation in the sex industry. We all know. And most of the sex worker organisations are dealing with it daily, that's why they're there! It's not denial; they know it's there. But the point is that anti-trafficking does not relate in any way to the actual violence, the actual abuse, the actual exploitation people are confronted with in the sex industry. And certainly it doesn't offer a way to address those abuses. That's the problem. It's not that the abuse is not there: it's there. We know. But it just doesn't relate to it, and it doesn't give an answer—

01:05:21 CH And those who are experiencing actual violence and abuse that would consider themselves to be a victim of trafficking are being utterly let down by the system—

01:05:30 MW Exactly. So, what we have is a system that on the one hand that does a lot of harm to people who are not victim of trafficking or whatever, and at the same time the people who are a victim of extreme forms of exploitation and abuse, because that's what you're talking, then, about, are not getting the support and the protection that they should have. So... that's one thing. The other thing I wanted to say is that there are a number of in

my idea 01:06:01 very problematic and dangerous things in this discussion about agency, especially in the abolitionist discourse where prostitution is considered to be against dignity. Or it's violence per definition, and what women think themselves doesn't matter. So the will of women, the conditions—and men and trans in sex industry—the conditions under which you work are not important. But basically, if you say that sex work is in violation of dignity, you construct people as subhuman, as less human than other people are. And the same you do if you say that sex workers don't have agency. Because also agency is considered as something that's really specific, belonging to a human being, to be able to make decisions about what you do, and obviously consequences or not, but still make your decisions. So I think especially those two things: the denial of agency by defining everything as violence no matter what you yourself think, and this idea of against dignity is dehumanising arguments that give—they wave a green light—together with stigma, that's part of it—it gives a green light for abuse. Because if you're not fully human, I can do with you what I want, you know? Because you're not on the same level as me.

01:07:28 CH I really want to get into questions, so you've been waiting very patiently, thank you. ...And if you could ask—whether it's to an individual panel member or just to the panel—

01:07:40 Q1 Sorry, this is very loud. I've got a couple of things to say. Firstly, picked up on the use of the word 'Negro' by Marion. Is your name Marion? 'Negro'. There was no need to use that word. Especially, it's a bit telling, that you used the word 'Negro women' and you repeatedly referred to 'Black men' before. Just wanted to say that.

01:08:08 MW Can I just explain. It was a quote. It was a quote of a researcher who said that Black Negroes are suitable for slavery—

01:08:15 CH I think, no, don't repeat it.

01:08:18 MW —and Germans are suitable for prostitution. So it was not my own words, sorry.

01:08:20 Q1 Okay, well if it was made more clear maybe—okay. Secondly, I, besides—sorry, I'm really terrible with names and I can't read all your name things—besides the lady

in red, I was wondering what the other academics are doing in their research to be more than doing voyeurism? Like, just writing on behalf of the victims you speak of. Because the lady in red has talked about on the ground work in East India, but from what I've heard, I haven't heard any other—what you're doing to give a voice to the trafficking victims and sex workers that you speak about, that you write about, that your job is based on.

01:09:20 CH I'm not an academic, it's just as an activist—I can tell you more afterwards about what SWARM's doing, and Crosstalk 01:09:25 and sex worker migrant organisations are doing around anti-trafficking and working with sex workers and people who would identify as trafficking victims, if you'd like. I just want to give these guys a chance.

01:09:38 SO So I spoke about advocacy, and as I explained the gentleman in the corner, Bismarck, is lawyer who provides pro bono services to sex workers, migrant sex workers and migrant labourers generally. So I've been involved in that work with him through the advocacy work. One of the main challenges that I have also found, again, thinking of the visa application process itself—because we had wanted to invite some of the women who were involved in the research to be present at events such as this. But guess what? “No,” according to the Home Office. So there are obstacles that we face and some other things we can do, but certainly where it is within our gift 01:10:22 to be partners or collaborators rather than voyeurs, we do do that. Does that address the question? Thank you.

01:10:32 EC So I've worked a lot with administrative data, which poses quite a big challenge when it comes to direct engagement. Because often you're doing it because you don't want to, for example, re-traumatise people by asking them to repeat things that are already there written down, but you do then have that level of remove. Where possible, I try to engage with things like participation groups, representation groups. The thing I'm finding really useful recently is Twitter. Just because then you do end up with a lot more direct contact. So, like I said, I worked on child sexual abuse for a long time. And I probably know way more child sexual abuse survivors from Twitter than I have directly through research. And that's been quite useful, trying to amplify their voices where possible, trying to do things that aren't necessarily particularly useful from an academic career perspective, but are important for the real world. Like, I don't know, universities, they value peer review journal articles. They don't really care that much about things like things in the commentaries in, I don't know, the Guardian, or something like that. But trying to write that kind of stuff that

challenges harmful stereotypes as well. But absolutely an area, I think, that it's worth thinking about. And I'm always open to ideas. And I think for me starting to do some stuff with SWARM was really good in that respect, and there's definitely a lot more I could still do.

01:12:12 CH Would anyone else like to ask a question? In the back?

01:12:19 Q2 I'll keep it short. I'm from the Netherlands, and we have an emerging trend, I think maybe since one year or a bit longer, of the male victim of trafficking within the sex industry. So you spoke about anything that people do against trafficking of women. Is this familiar with you, have you heard of this? Any one of you who wants to respond to this.

01:12:50 EC So in terms of identified sex trafficking cases in the U.K., or cases that people have been formally labelled as yes, we believe you have been trafficked, the overwhelming majority are women. So something like ninety-seven percent for a certain period. But probably a lot of that comes down to what meets the stereotypes. And for a long, long time—it's slowly changing, but for a long time in general trafficking was thought about as something that happened to women. And so there's much more slowness to recognise that men can be exploited as well, be it in labour and arguably, particularly in the sex industry.

01:13:34 SO Yeah, I'll echo the same point. I think in the Nigerian-Ghana context it follows the same stereotypical model. Women are most likely or more likely to be stopped at the airports, they are more likely to be arrested and harassed. And where a man is involved, it may be because they've been named, but the police do not go out of their way to target men, or to, I suppose, deal with them in terms of their victimhood status, as victims of trafficking, if that makes sense.

01:14:13 MG I mean, in the context of South Asia, and I would say other places in the world as well, I mean the victims—there's this category in policy literature which is "Women and Children", so—and it's almost one word, womenandchildren. Apart from the fact that you're infantilising women's choices and decisions and lives, in South Asia, men only enter this picture when they're boys, essentially. And even then, there just aren't enough services that recognise that there is victimhood there. Because as Marjan pointed out, it's very much—it's very gendered. So it's very much about a certain victim who is female, who is from a particular class and background and needs saving. Whereas boys, I would say, and also

men, are considered criminals before they're considered victims. And I did some research volunteering with a refugee and migrants centre in Coventry for a while, and when I did my research there, a lot of the men who had experienced labour trafficking, they said that the asylum offices were just not interested in their stories, because they were men and they were not deserving of help. So I think this is a feminist task, to break this category of good victim-bad victim. Not just for the benefit of women, but for men as well. And also, of course, trans people as well.

01:15:44 Q3 I wondered if I could raise the issue of clients reporting trafficking, or what they perceive to be trafficking, as the case may be. In Sweden, before they brought in the Nordic model, one of the main ways that they would find out about cases would be when clients would come forward and say, "I'm concerned about this. It doesn't look entirely above board." And they then find out that something was wrong that way. So that's potentially valuable information. But on the other hand, we want to be wary of creating a situation where any client off the street has the power to decide for a sex worker whether they're being trafficked or not. And of course, if they go straight to the authorities, then the police aren't going to care about consent or agency anyway, especially where migrant workers are involved. If they can just palm it across to immigration enforcement and make it a migration issue instead of a worker's rights issue, then that saves them the trouble of having to investigate trafficking, from their point of view.

01:17:02 CH Yeah, I'll just respond on the client issue in—just from our experience of... I think clients getting involved in a worker's struggle is always a bit of a contentious and problematic thing in and of itself. As I've said about the relationship between power, the imbalances in terms of safety, visibility etc., earlier, and that's never more clear as this sort of situation where a client could possibly shut down a premises with an accusation, or an informing of the authorities. And that could be completely against the consent and the rights and the autonomy of the workers in that workplace, or the people who are in those premises. But on the other hand, as you said, I know of cases in which a client has helped someone to escape from a toxic, exploitative, violent situation. And at the end of the day, that is obviously a possibility. But I think to be honest, in my personal opinion, we want to be working towards a situation and finding solutions that don't actually involve clients being a saviour, because actually it's not a systematic approach. That's based on individuals making individual decisions and individual evaluations, and you know, I don't trust the individual as

the saviour of people. I see it as changing on a systematic level so that it's not people relying on clients.

01:18:37 MG I would actually say in India it's different. I would say that there needs to be a recognition of the fact that women would rather exit sex work through rescue by a client. They would rather a client helped them escape. Because often the client will also give them money, will give them resources, and that client becomes a lifelong form of support, usually. Often they get married to the clients, as well. And sex workers told me this very clearly: we would rather a client help us escape than be rescued by an anti-trafficking intervention. Because—and this needs to be put in the context of India as well, right. It's a patriarchal society, there is a sense of normalisation that comes with being in a relationship with a man which sex workers aspire to, because they often come from broken marriages. So we need to question that. But there was one story which—and I've written about this, where this woman, Jasmine, was—and of course I'm using pseudonyms here. But her client helped her escape. And this was the same client who she had been forced to sell sex to the first time they'd met. And he came back after a year, and then she told him—because at that point, she'd negotiated better living conditions, so she told him about her story, and he helped her escape. And I said, didn't you feel uncomfortable trusting somebody who had been violent towards you a year ago? And she said, "Yeah, but if I were in my village and I got married to somebody my parents chose for me, my first sexual experience would be coercive as well. So that doesn't mean anything." So for the sex workers, they saw clients as extremely fluid and dynamic, like their relationships with their clients. Clients could be sources of violence, they could be sources of help, could be sources of support. And sex workers actually said they wanted interventions to recognise that.

01:20:21 SO I think it's pretty similar in the Ghanaian context. Apart from the criminalisation, there's also extreme stigmatisation. So both the client and the sex worker are socially stigmatised, and this means that the example you gave is not likely to happen. Nobody's going to go to the police and say, "Well, I was involved with this person, and I suspect she's a victim of trafficking," because that gets you in trouble, or in shame within the society. And very similar to the example you've given, I've spoken with women who have gone, "Well, actually I'd rather be in a relationship with him, or be rescued by someone who is from this area, and maybe we get into a relationship or I move in with him, or vice versa, and we become partners or allies or whatever." So, yeah, that doesn't really work.

01:21:19 MW I know indeed also both situations where—well, in some cases, clients are one of the few uncontrolled contacts that women have if they're really in a very controlled situation. So I know both situations where clients were welcome in helping a woman escape, but I also know situations where it was not welcome at all. So it keeps being difficult. And I think what the main problem is, is the moment a criminal justice system comes in, then you don't have any control anymore about what happens. Things can happen against your will. You don't know beforehand whether it's really a situation that somebody wants to leave or not, or whether she needs you to leave, or was just working on her own to get more freedom or more autonomy. So I think it's basically the criminal justice system coming in where the problems start. And we had, in the Netherlands, there's these campaigns to encourage clients to report at this anonymous helpline if they think that a woman—it's always about women, sorry—could be a victim of trafficking. And then if you look at the figures, part of it is just calling that helpline, that anonymous line, about illegal prostitution. Which means women who work outside the licensed brothels, for instance at home, autonomies 01:23:04 for themselves. So there's thin lines between what's okay and what's not. But the bottom line is really the problem of the criminal system, I think.

01:23:16 CH Any other questions?

01:23:21 Q4 A slight plug and a question. There's a really great documentary just come out, called Heartbound, and if people haven't seen it it's really worth watching. It's about Thai workers who—there's a little village in Denmark that now has 560 Thai women living in it, because one woman went over twenty-five years ago. She was a sex worker who got married to a client. And now she's—she can be presented—she's a trafficker. She's like a match-maker who then brings other Thai women over. And it's the first time I've ever seen a documentary that centres the women's voices and doesn't engage in some sort of stereotyping—

01:23:56 CH Can you repeat the name?

01:23:57 Q4 Heartbound. It's my accent, sorry.

01:24:04 CH Heartbound?

01:24:05 Q4 ...B-O-U-N-D.

01:24:13 CH Bound! Heartbound. A less broad Scottish accent. Heartbound.

01:24:18 Q4 I'm Northern Irish! You just realised who I am [laughs] ...Yeah, but my question's going to be: how do we stop the abolitionists co-opting human trafficking organisations that quite often don't support the Nordic model? Because I've seen the Nordic model now retweet the Human Trafficking Foundation, who don't take any position on sex work, or Anti-Slavery International who oppose the Nordic model coming down to Northern Ireland, as if they support them. So how do we get the trafficking sector to be a bit more—even if they're not going to support decrim, that they don't take a position on that and that's something for worker's rights advocates to take a position on?

01:25:00 EC I think—I mean, it's a really difficult question. But I think part of it is making morally unacceptable not to give a shit about sex workers' welfare and rights. Because there is this funding question and there is this question around—and I don't know if these organisations think it, but I get the impression for some of them it's almost like it could damage a reputation to come out in support of sex workers. And I think Amnesty's awesome for that, because Amnesty's obviously gone, “No, this is the right thing to do.” And I think making it so that not doing that and not taking a stance and not standing up for it is the nasty thing to do, I guess, but how you do that is a whole different question.

01:25:49 SO I think the other issue's about funding. So in the areas that I have done my research, most of the organisations are dependent on aid from external, mainly U.S., Northern America, Western Europe-based organisations who invariably happen to be those with money. They also will tend to be mainly Evangelical Christian organisations and hardcore abolitionist organisations such as the International Justice Mission and others. Or it may be from the European Union, which is now made, as I explained at the outset, anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling a core part of its migration deterrence measures. So the first issue is funding, and associated with that is access to alternative discourses. So if you are a small, sometimes well-meaning organisation who wants to help women selling sex in Nigeria or Ghana or wherever, and you're looking for materials to promote your advocacy, you go on Google. And the first thing you find is something from, I don't know, the I.O.M. or another

abolitionist organisation. So there are these two core issues that I find as one of the ways to produce more holistic narratives and discourses. But I do agree with the point you made as well.

01:27:17 MG I just want to add that thankfully the Nordic model hasn't reached South Asia yet—God, I hope it doesn't—but we have another danger, which is abolitionist organisations getting into bed with radical feminism. And especially carceral feminism. This is a real problem for India right now, because the state is becoming relied on more and more to end violence against women, to help trafficking victims, and this is dangerous. This is a dangerous path for feminism. So I would like to end by saying be very vigilant about the feminism claims of these organisations. Not just in terms of their carceral feminism, but also coming back to what I was talking about, a kind of feminism which demands a kind of empowerment that sex workers are not interested in. So as young women, always be vigilant of the kind of feminism that is being sold to you in the name of anti-trafficking interventions.

01:28:16 CH Great. So that actually brings us to the end. I've been really thankful and very honoured to chair a panel with you guys, so thank you very much, and I hope that it's been an interesting and good discussion for people in the audience. Just a bit of housekeeping—

[End of recording]

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