

Surveillance by another Name: The Modern Slavery Act, Global Factory Workers, and Part-time Sex Work in Sri Lanka

During fieldwork over many years in the Katunayake Free Trade Zone (FTZ), I witnessed numerous social encounters in which neighbors, bazaar traders, shop keepers, and auto rickshaw drivers used variations of the term ‘whore’ to refer to FTZ workers. The article ‘City of Whores’ (Author 2008a) began with a vignette that described how workers were called ‘no-good whores’ merely for migrating to cities and living away from patriarchal control. Such denigration was so prevalent that the workers considered it to be normal when living around the FTZ. My earlier work addressed how anxieties about nation, religion, gender, and neoliberal changes have resulted in mobile women, whose relatively free lives in urban areas are considered a threat to the patriarchal order, being condemned as the destroyers of ‘authentic’ Sinhala Buddhist culture (2008a; 2008b; 2016). While such local moral anxieties led to increased surveillance and forms of control on workers’ lives in and around the FTZ, women found creative ways to express themselves and engage with newly aroused neoliberal aspirations.

As the global movement against human trafficking was gaining traction, many western governments and organizations promised far-reaching steps to eradicate the problem. One outcome in this regard was the UK Government’s passage in 2015 of the Modern Slavery Act (MSA), which seeks to prevent and prosecute modern slavery (forced labor). Article 54 of the Act, dealing with Transparency in Supply Chains, requires due diligence from British companies to manage the risks of slavery and human trafficking within their global supply chains. This article investigates how MSA has impacted FTZ workers. Specifically, how MSA, a response to global citizen activism against human trafficking, was

perceived, interpreted and put into practice at the local level and how it impacts a particular gray space, global factory workers sometimes manipulate to engage in part time sex work.

This article analyzes how women navigate neoliberal aspirations and precarious, underpaid labor within competing local discourses that assign different values to jobs and behavior; and how the MSA affects such social navigation. Thus I theorize how gray spaces—such as the one part time sex workers who are also factory workers navigate—contain the potential for subversive politics, agency, and empowerment, and how global legal narratives and legislation impinge on such fluid spaces and thereby reenact old colonial power circuits. The article contributes to an emerging literature that seeks to understand how global citizen activism and resulting policies and practices endanger complex, context specific socioeconomic and cultural arrangements. Such scholarship should help policymakers design laws are sensitive to local cultural contexts, and that incorporate grassroots voices.

FTZ Work, Sex Work and the MSA

As in other global factories throughout the world, Katunayake FTZ factories too are characterized by target oriented, fast paced work conditions that seek to exploit women's labor for the least possible remuneration (Ong 1997; Saxena 2014; Hewamanne 2016). When the Katunayake FTZ was established in 1978, it was unmarried women from rural areas, where wage employment was more or less nonexistent, who flocked to take up assembly line work. They found accommodation with local residents who provided unregulated, substandard rows of rooms. In early years hordes of men gravitated to the area looking for romantic relationships with the nearly 200,000 FTZ women workers. Missing families while enduring difficult work and living conditions, most women were enticed into romantic relationships with such men. This sudden rise of young couples in public spaces aroused moral anxieties among neighbors, politicians and middle classes. The sensationalized stories

in the media of rampant pre-marital sex, which is taboo, date rape, unwanted pregnancies, abortions and suicide attempts resulted in FTZ workers being stigmatized as transgressive women who behave shamefully and undermine values, customs and social norms. The area was soon branded a 'city of whores' and 'love zone' and led to neighbors and police routinely calling successive generations of FTZ workers 'whores.'

Moral narratives that chastise transgressing women are not new. Mills (2018) asserts that the gendered moral narratives stemming from new patterns of production and reproduction in Asia reveal how local ideological support sustains neoliberal models of development and governance. Invoking both Lynch (2007) and Hewamanne (2008), Mills further elaborates how narratives and images of female immorality connected with global production in Sri Lanka initiate varied moral and material demands that marginalized and gendered groups must carefully navigate daily. As in many other postcolonial societies, the anti-colonial movement in Sri Lanka also resulted in rigid gender norms. The nationalist discourses of the late 19th and early 20th centuries thus resulted in women being considered bearers of national tradition and spiritual authenticity. The island's rural women were especially held responsible for being the bearers of 'authentic' traditions (Brow 1999). Therefore, migration of such women to cities aroused anxieties contributing to a fluid and sliding scale of perceptions whereby FTZ workers were branded whores, victims of predatory men, or innocent women who resisted immoral influences. The specific gendered moral tales associated with FTZ workers thus presented them with several positions, and space for moving among those positions. Workers quickly learned to navigate this field in interesting ways (Author 2008b).

Free from family and village surveillance regimes women soon started enjoying new leisure activities in urban spaces including public flirtatious communication in places like the bazaar and bus terminal and shaded areas along the railroad and alleyways. And it is such

public activities with male friends that arouse the most disdain among middle class people. When combined with the sensationalized media stories about the FTZ, it is easy to understand why the area gained notoriety as a hotbed of culturally specific sexual deviancy.

Sex work is criminalized in Sri Lanka under the Vagrant Ordinance, Brothels Ordinance and Houses of Detention Ordinance, all of which were introduced during British colonial rule (Sri Lanka Government 1980). However, people in general reluctantly accept sex work as an inevitable part of life stemming from economic need and men's excessive desires. This allows for ambiguities even as the state resolves the resultant conflict by incarcerating sex workers and subjecting them to moral rehabilitation programs (Miller 2013). Among all communities, women do not really have to engage in sex work to be considered a slut or whore—often transgressing behavioral codes suffice to be labeled as such (Tambiah 2005; Author 2016). When female morality is equated with normative sexual behavior, suspicion of transgression can have costly repercussions.

Within this context, the global workers who are called whores—just because they are mobile—find a fluid, ambiguous space in which they can strategically move among identity labels. Engaging in part time sex work at night, for instance, provides additional income even as day time factory work allows access to a more respectable label. The field itself is fluid, in that a worker who engaged in factory work may temporarily resort to part time sex work to finance a family or health emergency. Once the financial need was satisfied, she may return exclusively to factory work. This pattern could be repeated whenever necessary, thus ensuring that the more respectable factory worker label can be utilized to save face.

Since around 2014 there is deeper casualization of factory work especially connected to Katunayake FTZ. At the same time as increasing work flexibility, casualization of factory work exploits part time workers and undermines the labor politics of full time workers

(Dabindu 2017). It is still only a small percentage that engages in part time factory work through manpower agencies (recruiting firms). Temporary day labor is characterized by unpredictability, the absence of benefits, and forms of exploitation (Lane 2011). Engaging in part time day labor leads to workers engaging in several income generating activities to piece together a living. One such activity, according to NGO activists and village agents, is part time sex work. While surveillance and vilification of sex workers and transgressing FTZ workers are not new (Lynch 2007; Hewamanne 2018), how the MSA affects the particular life ways and meanings that women created within this field has not yet being studied.

Methods:

I have been studying Sri Lanka's global factories since 2000 and during the past 18 years have conducted ethnographic research on various topics ranging from identity formation, leisure time activities and CSR policies. I first started interviewing part time sex workers in 2012; before the MSA came into being. MSA related interviews, focus groups and participant observations were carried out in 2016-2018.

The article is based primarily on 14 in-depth interviews with part time sex workers, eight factory executives, six NGO officials, six area men, three police officers and two military officers. Two focus groups held in 2016 and 2017 were attended by 13 and 14 workers (who were not sex workers) respectively. All interviewed sex workers were Sinhala in ethnicity, while 11 were Buddhist and three Catholic in religion. All interviews were conducted after spending time with the women and doing leisure time activities to build trust and friendships. My native language skills in Sinhala made this easier. Qualitative informed consent was obtained from all the interviewees and focus group participants. Names of individuals and factories and NGOs are anonymized below to protect privacy.

MSA Arrives on the Scene

The MSA must be considered within the complicated political, economic and cultural context in which it is produced and practiced. MSA is the result of long-term lobbying by anti-trafficking organizations determined to eradicate all forms of forced labor. In fact, since 2007 large UK companies have been required to report on employee, social and community issues in their supply chains (Barrientos 2013). MSA's predecessor, The California Transparency in Supply Chains Act of 2012, requires every retailer and manufacturer doing business in the state with annual worldwide gross business receipts exceeding \$100 million to disclose efforts taken to eradicate slavery and human trafficking from its supply chain (Pfcorp 2017; Verite 2011). Yet such laws do not seem to have minimized forced labor in global production networks in any appreciable way (Barrientos 2013), which is perhaps why Verite reports (2010; 2011) have strongly recommended a global legal framework that holds all commercial actors jointly accountable for forced labor.

Within this context, many heralded the MSA as a crucial piece of legislation that could eventually end the practice of forced labor. It is Article 54 of the Act that led to such widespread optimism. It stipulates that UK companies are responsible for any modern slavery associated with their supply chains, thereby forcing them to clean up subcontracting factories tied to their companies. Article 54 requires companies with over 36 million GBP in turnover to prepare slavery and human trafficking statements for supply chains and publish them on their websites. The statement is not merely geared to protect vulnerable workers from human rights violations. It is designed to also benefit business by protecting and enhancing the organization's reputation and brand; protect and grow the customer base as more consumers seek businesses with high ethical standards; and improve investor confidence (UK Government 2015). Indeed, businesses understand the dangers of their brand names being tarnished. For instance, it took Nike 15 years and unprecedented levels of transparency to clear its brand name and "halt the protests that were denting sales" following

sweatshop allegations (*Financial Times* 2017,10). Nike ultimately benefitted by implementing good practices that cleaned up supply chains (Doorey 2011). Although it is crucial to account for the human costs associated with profit maximization, the MSA recommended overarching steps to be applied universally. It thus disregarded varied sociocultural contexts in which supply chains operate. It also failed to foresee how companies would summarily transfer the responsibility of maintaining a clean workforce to local suppliers. The unintentional fallout in Sri Lanka has been the increased surveillance of female workers' leisure time activities, which has led to a climate of suspicion, caution and fear that exacerbates their difficult work lives.

Gray Spaces Matter

Critical anti trafficking literature examines how human trafficking discourses, laws, and interventions often complicate ground level realities by neglecting to problematize issues of agency, consent, identity, and individual autonomy (Kempadoo and Davydova 2012; Marcus and Snajdr 2013; Molland 2013; Mahdavi 2016). Galusca (2012) focuses on narratives and images deployed by the anti-human trafficking industry to show how they help in creating truth regimes on trafficked women across cultures. Exploring the moral entrepreneurialism of the Brazilian anti-trafficking movement, Blanchette and da Silva (2013) highlight the unequal power relations between Brazil and Europe and sheds light on the paternalism of global activism. MSA in Sri Lanka reflect similar concerns even as its specific application within global production networks add new complicated nuances.

One such complication concerns the gray spaces that factory workers sometimes manipulate to engage in part time sex work. According to Cathy Cohen, the radical potential of queer politics stems not from merely insisting on rigid, generalized categories of straight and queer but in recognizing the diverse forms of opposition to normative institutions (1997).

Cohen's insistence on refusing rigid categories and allowing for gray spaces, where subversive, oppositional acts against normative order ensue, informs my understanding of the part time sex worker/factory workers in Sri Lanka. Gray spaces afford agency to slip in and out of normative and non-normative positions. In many cultural contexts, such as that of Sri Lanka, fully refusing certain identity categories is next to impossible, thus necessitating ambivalent spaces that allow for constant destabilization of identity categories. For instance, FTZ workers get called whores merely for transgressing cultural norms; but this creates an ambiguous space wherein women can actually engage in sex work while utilizing the general stigma of FTZ work to project an "unfairly vilified," FTZ worker. The gray space—where FTZ workers are called whores and sex workers do part time factory work—facilitates the fluid movement between the two positions. Manipulation of such gray spaces is not unique to Sri Lankan FTZ workers. As neoliberal economic practices deepen precarity of livelihoods throughout the world, and many people find themselves working in the gig economy, engaging in several low paid jobs to make ends meet. They may or may not acknowledge some of the jobs they do. Due to moral concerns, sex workers especially have to straddle various identities to manage reputations (Brenan 2004; Zheng 2009; Cabezas 2009). What is unique about the Sri Lankan case is how this gray space over the course of time allows certain FTZ workers to achieve empowerment via land ownership.

It is this vibrant space of identity work that the Modern Slavery Act now threatens. No one consulted the workers at the supply chain level when crafting the MSA, which now hampers a space that hitherto allowed some women a path to economic empowerment. Laws, policies and programs designed elsewhere that end up creating additional layers of control and regulation for those at the bottom most rung are not a new phenomenon (Karim 2011; Ruwanpura 2013; Vuolajärvi 2018). Wright (2004) showed how the attempts by political and corporate elite to make Ciudad Juarez, a modern and clean city resulted in the disappearance

of sex workers and maquiladora workers from the city spaces. Ruwanpura (2013), demonstrated how the requirement of metal free working zones have created a new form of governmentality, in that the Sri Lankan workers now have the stressful responsibility of ensuring broken needles do not get into the garments they sew. Similarly, the intense pressure on local managers to clean up their assembly lines, so that western companies would not be accused of modern slavery, is creating an unhealthy working environment where suspicion, surveillance and censure result in women's spaces for subversive acts being curtailed. According to *Financial Times* "action designed in the developed world to ease western consumer consciences" can have grave unintended local consequences (2017, 10). This clearly was the case in the Congo after Apple's and other companies' efforts to halt child labor associated with Cobalt mining led to thousands of legitimate adult jobs being lost and much socioeconomic upheaval (Edwards 2017).

Although MSA had been designed to prevent UK companies profiting from forced labor, its spotlight has focused on sex work within supply chains. This is not surprising given the not-so-subtle conflation of sex trafficking with sex work in much of the discourses surrounding the two issues (Weitzer 2009). Policies that do not recognize the multi-dimensional character of social contexts and human communities can end up hurting the people and communities such policies intend to protect (Hoang and Parrenas 2014; Kempadoo, Sanghera, and Pattanaik 2015; Mahdavi 2011; 2016). For instance, Mahdavi (2016) notes that while anti-human trafficking networks have produced a multi-million dollar charity industry promoting initiatives to "rescue," such policies are not just disconnected from migrants' lived experiences but engender negative ramifications (176).

By assuming that victimization by unscrupulous traffickers make third world factory workers enter sex work, local manifestations of Article 54 reproduce certain dichotomies that shaped colonial governance. This understanding essentializes third world women as non-

agentive victims of oppressive men and disregards alternatives such as sexual and material desires that might lead a woman to actively choose sex work over other options. More disturbingly, intentionally or not, Article 54 makes global factory managers (employers) responsible for workers' leisure time activities and, by extension, their moral conduct. Thus the surveillance mechanisms of both the UK government (via MSA), global corporations, and local cultural institutions converge on factory workers' bodies. Although MSA's expressed purposes are to the contrary, it manifests within particular contexts and hence has the potential of becoming a part of discourses and practices that maintain and reproduce western moral superiority over the global south. In short, MSA manifests itself within third world factories as a global surveillance apparatus that has cascading effects of power at descending levels of global production hierarchies: UK companies requiring local managers to clean up their work force, and the latter in turn increasing surveillance of workers' leisure time activities.

Much has been written on how colonial thought, practices and processes that sought to legislatively control native bodies, life styles and institutions ended up disrupting colonized societies (Risseuw 1989; De Alwis 1997; Mani 1998). Such imperialist thought patterns, which essentialized the gendered, colonized bodies as oppressed, victimized and traditional, now influence the imagination and execution of transnational production and global assembly lines. The assumptions underlining the structure of transnational production—that third world women were docile and non-combative and would therefore not fight for worker rights, or were obedient members of patriarchal households and secondary earners who supplemented the incomes of their fathers and husbands—have resulted in the low wages and poor working conditions at global assembly lines. These assumptions stemming from prior stereotypes about gendered, colonized bodies have created an underpaid, global servant class that is catering to the cheap manufacturing and service needs

of affluent countries (Parrenas 2001; Hewamanne 2016; Krishnamurthi 2018). MSA advances the neo-imperialist character by circuitously assuming the moral guardianship of this gendered servant class via Article 54. This in some ways recalls Gayatri Spivak's famous postulation "white men saving brown women from brown men" in the context of British colonial reforms in India (Spivak 1988).

MSA attempts to legislate disparate geographical and national entities without regard to contextual politics. The results recall concentric circles of power (Abu Lughod 1990) in that while workers may become free of traffickers they get trapped within a broader circle of power involving local and global management. In the Sri Lankan context, Article 54 adds a more powerful, official layer of control on women workers who are already enmeshed in a surveillance regime consisting of familial, community, institutional and state level agents and agencies. Interestingly, this broader level may come in a particularly attractive package (i.e., ensuring one's human rights), which leads to misrecognition and workers' consenting to its controlling power.

Rather than requiring UK companies to ensure a living wage and develop opportunities for education and economic empowerment, MSA criminalizes a gray area where the normative order is transgressed. It is similar to how the U.S. criminalizes homelessness, in that legislators, rather than focusing on socioeconomic inequalities and health disparities, persecute homeless people for using public spaces for rest. By doing so, they avoid tackling complex issues like the need for providing sustainable work and housing opportunities (Boden and Messman 2015). Studies on Sri Lanka's ethical garment production narratives and practices show that the minimum wage stipulation has seen the least improvement (Ruwanpura 2012; Author 2017). This is due to the simple reason that increasing the minimum wage also increases manufacturing costs, which then lowers profit margins. Global assembly lines, after all, were initiated with the specific goal of minimizing

manufacturing costs to the lowest degree possible. From that standpoint, one cannot help but wonder if the singular focus on monitoring and cleaning up supply chains for trafficked labor is a way to deflect action on the all-important issue of providing meaningful living wages.

In the following sections, I demonstrate how FTZ workers utilize the gray space and how the MSA impinges on this fluid space.

Part-timing and Empowerment

In the summer of 2012, I met Lilani, an atypical former global factory worker, who instead of going back to her village in North Central Province to get married stayed on in the same FTZ boarding house following six years of work. By then she had managed to buy a small plot of land in Gampaha, a town about 15 miles from the FTZ. Lilani now worked part time at a small subcontracting shop while making paper flowers as a side business. Her friend, Taxila, had bought the plot of land adjacent to Lilani's.

In 2014, I contacted the owner of the workshop where they worked to so I could reconnect with Lilani. That's when in a hushed tone she said: "I fired her. She is not a good woman." After some prodding the owner divulged that Lilani and Taxila engaged in part time sex work and that was how they managed to save sufficient funds to buy land in Gampaha. The female workshop owner, herself deeply entangled in the gig economy, reviling the two women for using whatever avenues available to generate income was not surprising as that is considered the correct course of action by many Sri Lankans. Ilana Gershon (2018) showed that neoliberal principles are not rigidly prescriptive and that they can initiate different dynamics depending on the particular context. Although neoliberal ethos celebrates the gig economy, Lilani experience highlights how it is only celebrated to the extent permissible within Sri Lanka's moral landscape. Apparently getting their maneuverings within the gray

space exposed entailed dire consequences, even before MSA. But such exposure was rare in the past since no one pre-MSA had any official or urgent reason to investigate.

In an interview in 2016 an NGO official said while there are no definitive numbers of FTZ workers who are part time sex workers, it cannot be a large percentage of workers. She, however, added that any number of workers could have engaged in part time sex work at any given time during their tenure at Katunayake. In the following section, I discuss two FTZ workers' narratives about part time sex work to highlight specific socioeconomic and cultural travails that lead to such work, how they navigate part timing, and the gray space of the 'whore' label.

Asha

Asha hailed from Pollonaruwa District and worked at three well known FTZ factories during her time in Katunayake. When I interviewed her, she was working as a "manpower" employee, which are temporary workers who typically gathered at the Katunayake roundabout to be hired by FTZ factories for day labor. Asha liked day labor as it paid well and she did not have to work if she did not feel like it. When she started doing part time sex work she was working as a full time FTZ worker. "Circumstances made it impossible to go to work every day," Asha laughingly said as a preamble to her story of moving from being a FTZ worker to part time sex worker.

She came to the FTZ at age 18 and was enthralled by the area's offerings. She soon experienced the stigma associated with the FTZ as those living in the area called her and other workers whores and sluts. At first outraged, she quickly came to regard these encounters as a mundane fact of life in the FTZ. Within one year she started a romantic relationship with a police officer. Although Asha was reluctant at first, due to the taboos on pre martial sex, they quickly started sexual relations. She soon started to think of herself as

his fiancé and believed he would marry her. Unfortunately, Asha got pregnant in 2009 and the man thereafter stopped communicating with her. Asha tried various ways to get rid of the pregnancy, such as eating raw pineapple and drinking vinegar. No method worked, and she was contemplating suicide when an older worker in the boarding house, Shanthi, helped her get an abortion and thereafter financially helped her through the recovery period. After two months of hiding in the boarding house, Asha and Shanthi, moved to a different boarding house and Asha got a new job at another factory. Thereafter Shanthi, who was a part time factory worker/sex worker, introduced Asha to part time sex work.

“I first went with her to this pick-up point only because I was curious. Then a man was very taken up with me and offered higher and higher prices the more I refused to go with him. This amused all the other women (sex workers) and they encouraged me to go with him. He was very good to me, bought me a nice dinner, took me to a very nice hotel and even bought me a pair of good ear rings. We were together till 12:00 noon the next day and he gave me 2,500 rupees.” Although workers can earn up to 25000 rupees a month through overtime work, the basic salary of a FTZ worker is 13000 rupees. Thus Asha found the money from sex work to be ‘really good.’ Thus after a year of weekend sex work she quit the factory job and began doing part time factory work, which put her in a routine of three days factory work and three nights sex work.

When I asked why she would not engage in full time sex work if the money was so good, she made a shocked face and said, “What will I then tell my parents? What would they tell the village people? Whether I want it or not I have to keep working at the factories, so none of the other workers from my area can tell people there that I am not a factory worker. No, no, no. That would be a disaster. My whole family would be destroyed if the news get out that I am a sex worker.” Her agitated response reminded me of a popular film titled *Kinihiriya Mal* (Flowers under the Anvil), that was produced 17 years ago. In this movie, a

FTZ worker falls into sex work through a massage parlor. When a village man sees her at the parlor and informs the villagers an angry mob attacks her family home, leading to the deaths of her father and brother. The movie depicts how previously constructed notions of good womanly behavior elicit intensely antagonistic responses to sex work. Thus I was not surprised when Asha laughingly noted that she would hang on to her factory job the way a downing man holds on to a branch. This need to hold onto the factory worker label recalls how sex workers of Mexico's state-run *Zona Galactica* brothel dress either in lab coats or styles common to other working females to escape stigma (Kelly 2008).

Asha further said she was not bothered by people calling FTZ workers whores anymore. "All these innocent women who do not do sex work get called whores just because they are living alone and have boyfriends. Here I am, getting paid, and paid well, for sex work," She said. Although she did not directly say so, she seemed to manipulate the ambiguity created by the haphazard use of the term "whore" to condemn factory workers for transgressing behavioral norms to her advantage. Asha noted that village people are not yet aware of part time sex work among FTZ workers. She agreed that there were hardly any media reports of part time sex workers and, folding her hands, said "may it remain that way."

She also said that she had boyfriends on and off during the years she engaged in sex work. She did not tell them about sex work and none had any idea of her nightly activities. When they wanted to have sex she readily agreed but she had also found that she was now picky about sexual partners. "If I am going to have to have quick sex with sweat-smelling, hairy men, then I want to get paid for it..." She said while laughing. She also said sex work made her pay more attention to her body weight, beauty regimens and stylistic clothes, and presented these new habits as positive developments.

In Asha's case, we see a woman whose story is complex and multilayered, not just someone who engages in sex work for financial reasons. Stigma of wage work—produced thanks to notions regarding ideal woman, and other unfair circumstances like FTZ workers being devalued as marriage partners—had led to her being abandoned while pregnant and eventual entry into sex work. She was not directly forced by an exploitative boyfriend into sex work. Rather, she seems to, at a very basic level, understand the value of work and sees sex work to be more dignified than unwanted and coerced sex within romantic relationships.

Sashi

Sashi hailed from Monaragala District and was determined to work hard, save, quit work in five years, and settle with a simple village man while building a house in the village.

Although she did find a boyfriend soon after arriving at the FTZ, she managed to keep to her other aims resolutely. Within five years she added two new rooms, a kitchen and a wrap-around verandah to her parents' house. No sooner than she finished renovations, her parents, under duress from her brothers, sold the property and divided the gains among all five siblings equally. This, together with her breaking up with her boyfriend, deeply depressed Sashi. In this state of mind she accepted the first man who invited her to go to a rooming house and had sexual intercourse. The fear of social repercussions further depressed her as she was brought up to believe that nobody would marry a woman who had lost her virginity before marriage. During this time, she went out with another man who together with two friends gang raped her while forcing her to engage in 'abnormal' sex acts. After a 12 hour ordeal she was dropped near a boarding house cluster, and a kindly boarding auntie (owner) took her in. That night she met Shanthi (the same Shanthi who introduced Asha to sex work), who later introduced Sashi to sex work.

Sashi went to Shanthi's village and spent two months recuperating under the kind care of Shanthi's parents and extended family. "This healed most of the wounds in my heart [from the betrayal of family and boyfriends]. I came back to Shanthi akka's boarding house and took up part time sex work, in the beginning just to pay back rent. But later to earn better money. I continued to do part time factory work so nobody could pin me down as a whore," Sashi said.

Sashi was outraged by neighbors and visitors to the area calling factory workers whores. "I may have fallen into hard times and ended up a sex worker, but 90% of the workers are called whores for no reason other than having sex with their boyfriends. In fact, even the men who have sex with workers then turn around and call them whores for having sex with them. I just cannot even talk about it...So unfair, so unfair," she tearfully declared. Interestingly, six FTZ area men I interviewed noted that they have more sympathy for sex workers because they felt it was economic hardship that drove women to be sex workers, whereas women who engaged in casual premarital sex with their boyfriends grossly violated cultural norms. When asked about FTZ workers who engage in part time sex work, all six men—three auto rickshaw drivers, one factory worker and two shop assistants—used rough, abusive terms to talk about such women. All of them noted that the few factory workers who engage in sex work give a bad name to all the good, hard working factory workers.

When told of these interviews, Sashi said it is like "Damned if you do; damned if you don't," by pointing out how the men used the term whore to talk about workers having sex with boyfriends. "How funny that they get called whores while working in factories, and we do part time factory work to not get called whores," she later added. Although she did not elaborate, Sashi seems to allude to the slippery, gray area between the stigmatized FTZ factory work and part time sex work. "I go to (factory) work three days a week and that is all I need to maintain my reputation at my boarding house and the village," she said. When

asked whether she engage in sex work for financial reasons, Sashi thought a long while before answering. She said factory work could have been enough to make ends meet, but not enough to buy land or build houses and acknowledged that she will continue with sex work so she could buy land and build a house.

Shashi has not had a boyfriend since the last disastrous relationship and does not want to get into relationships with men. She sees sex work as a job that pays well and sometimes includes perks such as gifts and meals at fancy restaurants. She said she does not enjoy the identity of sex worker but has orgasms often and likes the idea of living in a dream world for a moment when men praise her looks. She has not experienced violence as a sex worker, although a few men repulsed her. When asked about her long-term plan Sashi said, “all I want to do is to look after Shanthi akka when she is old, and run a home for children no one else wants.” Then she added with a quizzical smile, “yes, the two of us are going to run an orphanage from the house I will build with money from sex work.”

Asha was more expressive than Sashi about how her clients were of a different social class than the working class pool of men they usually chose boyfriends. She also noted how she liked sitting by the pool at a resort hotel in Negambo once while with a client. She enjoyed the leisurely evening and said if that client asked her to become his girlfriend she would have immediately agreed just to return to that place again. Both Asha and Sashi enjoyed going to restaurants they could otherwise not afford to dine in. “Never knew such beautiful places existed in Sri Lanka, even the biryani at those places looked and tasted different from the ones in Katunayake shops,” Sashi said. They both said they would only accept clients who came in cars, as that to them indicated “wealthier, cleaner, kinder and gentler men.” The two women clearly appreciate some aspects of urban, middle class social spaces that their pecuniary salaries deny them but sex work makes possible. Both navigate

the world of sex work to fulfill long term economic aspirations while using the factory work label as a protective shield.

The notion of corporeal entrepreneurship (Wacquant 1995) is appropriate here to discuss how these women use sex work to seek long term social mobility. All interviewed part time sex workers saw sex work as the only way to move out of the marginal positions that they found themselves in. Focusing on sex trade at the US-Mexican border, Susan Hoffman (2010) also shows how sex workers strategically use their bodily and erotic capital to counteract socioeconomic marginalization. Clearly, part time sex work is just as important for these workers as is managing reputations through part time factory work.

Shanthi

Unfortunately, Shanthi, who is the important link between Asha and Sashi and their entry into sex work, declined to be interviewed. But from what one boarding auntie and several other workers told me, Shanthi is about 40 years of age, hails from Anuradhapura (in North Central Province) and worked at a FTZ factory for 15 years before starting to do part time sex work. According to rumors, she started sex work because successive boyfriends abandoned her and the last one left her with an unwanted pregnancy. She gave birth to a baby boy and started sex work to help raise him. A few years ago she boarded the child at a Buddhist temple and started factory work by day and sex work by night. She is by all accounts a very kind and generous person who would help other workers in trouble by offering money, shelter and entry into sex work.

According to Malsha, a worker who refused Shanthi's offer of help, Shanthi thinks that sex work provides very good supplementary income. Shanthi advised Malsha to take advantage of her good looks while they last and use the money to buy property, which no one could steal from her. "She told me that factory work alone will never allow us to buy

property, and if we do not have property, the moment we lose the job, we lose our strength,” Malsha said. Shanthi did as she advised, having purchased a parcel of land near the Katunayake railroad in 2011, and building a small house with a concrete roof on top so she could add another floor later.

Naila Kabeer (2011; 2016) has noted the importance of land ownership for meaningful women’s empowerment, in that owning land allows women to exercise voice and agency. In Sri Lanka too, the land ownership affords women status and voice (ICES 2018). Shanthi in her own way seems to exercise agency by accumulating both cultural and economic capital. Despite rumors of being a sex worker, Shanthi seems to have earned the respect of boarding aunties and many workers as a hard-working, strong, no-nonsense woman with a heart of gold. One such boarding owner told me that “Shanthi has solutions to everything. How to fix a broken blender; how to get a copy of a birth certificate, where to get some sorcery done, where to get an abortion if needed...anything and everything.”

By all accounts, Shanthi seems to be a strong woman who built a life out of very difficult beginnings. However, it is hard to ignore the similarities to accounts of male pimps; specifically, the gentle grooming, seeking women in trouble and facilitating their entry into sex work, and the deep emotional bonds she creates with the sex workers. For instance, Sashi said that she owes it to Shanthi to be successful in sex work and buy land, and that Shanthi is, “mother, sister, teacher, friend and everything else to me.” Both Asha and Sashi considered Shanthi to be closer to them than some of their biological kin. However, creating kin relationships with close friends and mentors through address forms and emotional bonds, is common in Sri Lanka, and especially prevalent among FTZ workers.

Shanthi appears to work alone and seems to have an organically developing approach to recruiting workers. She also does not take a cut from the sex workers' earnings. Furthermore, only four of the interviewed sex workers have or have had connections with Shanthi. All 14 entered sex work either through friend networks, or Shanthi. Although some doubts remain about Shanthi's role, it is important not to assume that all connections through which young women enter sex work as suspicious.

Shanthi's reported ideas about work, value and empowerment are intriguing. She seems to understand neoliberal values rooted in aspirations and self-advancement well and helps younger workers achieve empowerment within their constricted choices. Shanthi seems to fit the description; a former corporeal entrepreneur helping others realize the full potential of their bodily and erotic capital.

MSA and Local interpretations

As noted above, Article 54 of the MSA requires due diligence from British companies to manage the risks of slavery and human trafficking within their supply chains, prepare slavery and human trafficking statements for supply chains, and publish them on their websites (UK Government 2015). The failure to comply with the requirement can result in a law suit filed by the Secretary of State leading to unlimited fines (IBID, 6). The government further expects organizations to improve their performance with regard to training due diligence within supply chains. Organizations have taken steps to prepare their statements with varying levels of rigor. Several companies, including Marks and Spencer, added whistle blower policies in addition to global sourcing principles, ethical trading auditing, risk assessment, and training of local staff. Accordingly, the workers are expected to report concerns, using appropriate reporting channels, and management is expected to act upon these concerns.

How does MSA adversely impact the gray space workers utilize for managing respectability? The adverse impact results from the intersection of the exploitative character of global production, dominant local cultural discourses, and a peculiar concoction of miscommunication between the center and the periphery—disjuncture between the needs and wishes of western executives, local management and workers as well as willful misinterpretation of original intentions in an effort to meet documentary requirements.

British companies have a big presence in Sri Lanka's FTZs. In light of the new legislation, these companies have outsourced responsibility to local factory management to ensure supply chains are free of forced labor. The latter, consequently, feel tremendous pressure to monitor their labor force even beyond the shop floor. Local factories depend on contracts from western companies and they therefore monitor not only the FTZ factory workforce but workers in their local subcontracting factories. I interviewed four middle level factory human resources executives in summer 2017, and all of them insisted that the buyers (companies) require them to be diligent and eradicate forced labor from their factories. This for them meant firing workers suspected of being forced to work against their will by boyfriends, or pimps. When asked about the emphasis on sex workers, all said sex work is strongly linked to pimps and boyfriends exploiting women, making management wary about any sex workers also working in their factories. When informed that some workers willingly engage in sex work to augment their income, a manager said, "the problem is that they would never admit to sex work, willing or forced. So, we have no other choice but to fire them if there are reports or rumors about women engaging in part time sex work. If not, our factory can be black listed, and our orders cancelled."

All four executives interviewed in 2017 said that they heard about the MSA from their immediate supervisors, and thought the higher management may have been instructed when they went for meetings overseas or via memos from companies. In September 2018, I

interviewed a Group Managing Director (GMA) and a HR manager in addition to two middle level executives. They all understood that MSA is about eradicating forced and trafficked labor in their factories, and not about eradicating sex work elsewhere. However, they all thought that if the sex workers are trafficked/forced, then having them work part time in their lines violated MSA stipulations. Only two of the executives shared the names of companies, but with the condition that I do not publish them. When asked to see the communication from companies regarding MSA, all executives declined, saying that it is prohibited to share information about buyers. This was in fact a rule preceding MSA, since even in 2000 any photos I took of the factory had to eliminate all signs of company names.

The MSA stipulations have led to women being circuitously monitored even during their free time and leisure activities. While surveillance regimes at global factories are not a new phenomenon (Ong 1987, Pun 2005; Author 2008b), the factory panopticon officially extending to workers' leisure time and part time work is a deeper layer of control on women who are already supervised by many agents and institutions in their daily lives. Although MSA has not initiated contractual or regulatory action to create a standard set of rules to ensure workers behave well outside the factory premises, the anxiety of being accused of aiding and abetting sexual slavery seems to have taken over at the managerial level. For example, Gupte (2018) documented how manpower workers who were chosen/recruited to "go to the manager's room" (to have sex with him) were asked by manpower and factory agents whether they are willing. "They ask 'did you come by your own volition? or by force/coercion?'" one woman shared (15). The contradictions inherent in this example aside, it evidences how tightly intertwined the local managers' understanding of forced labor is with that of any kind of sexual labor.

MSA and Factory Workers

The challenges stemming from the new requirements have made matters more onerous for workers. During a focus group conducted in 2016, four workers belonging to a large factory in the FTZ said the factory compliance officer (whose exact role none of the workers was able to describe) told them that engaging in other part time work, including sex work, posed the risk of being trafficked and abused and those doing so should stop such activities immediately. They were also asked to inform management about factory workers who engaged in any kind of part time work. The (corporate responsibility) compliance officer had emphasized several times that workers engaging in part time sex work or any activity that violated human rights could cause the factory to lose out on orders from UK companies, which could result in all workers losing their jobs. Workers were also asked to leave the factory if they engaged in part time sex work. As one worker noted, the meeting ended with the compliance officer emphasizing that the “security of our jobs is in our own hands; and that the workers alone are responsible for ensuring their continued employment.”

Several other workers from four different factories said that their supervisors too had asked them to be vigilant and inform on women who may be engaged in part time sex work. One worker speculated that the sudden departure of an older worker (aged 28) who everyone thought was a little wild had something to do with this new policy. While no one accused her of sex work, there were rumors about her engaging in casual sex with various boyfriends. In a context where female sexual transgressions are equated with bad moral and ethical character (sluts/whores), this particular woman being fired due to pressure stemming from MSA is not hard to imagine. Workers, however, seemed not outraged by the situation. Perhaps due to the prevalence of such speculation and rumors in factory and outside social lives, they seem to accept this official speculations, surveillance and punitive action as normal.

Some have questioned the strength of MSA and asked whether it is enough to eradicate forced labor and human rights abuses (Guardian 2015). No studies have yet questioned how MSA, designed and ratified in a western center, affect women workers in global assembly lines. Considering the cultural context of Sri Lanka where, as in other post-colonial societies, women's purity is discursively constructed to be synonymous with the nation's pride and honor, the misinterpreting and misapplying of MSA result in even more stressful work cultures shaped by moral surveillance, fear and anxieties. As noted earlier, some women engage in sex work because factory pay is insufficient for achieving long lasting empowerment. While the obvious remedy is to pay these women an adequate living wage—not just to make ends meet, but to live with dignity and achieve lasting empowerment—local factories appear to have embraced a policy of getting rid of the rumored/suspected part time sex workers in their effort to meet the UK requirement of clean supply chains. The connection to the “race to the bottom” concept that characterize global production is evident here; because a meaningful living wage will lead to declining profits and hinder the “race to the bottom.” Although MSA intend to “create a *race to the top* by encouraging businesses to be transparent about what they are doing” (2015: 5), the outcomes at the ground level are still mediated through long entrenched ‘race to the bottom’ ideology.

While factories within the FTZ follow the basic minimum wage stipulations, most subcontracting companies surrounding the FTZ walls do not do so. In the absence of enforcement, these locally owned subcontracting factories use part time workers and keep other workers at “trainee” positions longer to avoid paying the minimum basic salary. Even well respected FTZ companies are increasingly relying on part time workers recruited through manpower agents. Although such workers are paid a stipulated daily salary they do not get any other benefits. While there are multiple and complex reasons for the increase in part time workers since around 2012, the MSA may also be contributing to the increasing

demand for part time workers. This is, as noted earlier, not beneficial to the permanent work force and the possibility of collective action.

Prior to the MSA being enacted, part time sex workers were able to use their connections to legitimate employment in global factories to move between stigmatized FTZ work and sex work. While this space has not been completely eliminated, it is under threat now due to the MSA. Unfortunately, a legislation designed to protect vulnerable workers from human rights abuses has added more controls, surveillance, and restrictions for Sri Lanka's global workers. The case of the MSA points to how legislation formulated in western centers can have unintended, and sometimes harmful, consequences at different nodal points of their global influence networks.

Conclusion

According to Scouler (2015), laws and policies work together with other discourses and practices to shape subjects, spaces and material conditions of sex work. This article showcases how a UK law on forced labor interacts with local cultural norms and global structures of work to shape and reshape sex work, factory work and an ambivalent space that has hitherto allowed women to navigate varied work identities and 'good women' requirements. Much of the debate surrounding legalizing and decriminalizing sex work is now shaped by conflating sex trafficking with sex work (Weitzer 2007; 2009). The MSA's local manifestation showcases this conflation at both the policy and practical levels. It thus ends up being another surveillance apparatus on factory workers even while presenting itself as a moral crusader for labor and human rights. Meanwhile the complex and multivalent reasons why some FTZ workers engage in part time sex work face erasure due to the assumption that sex work is always exploitative and abusive.

Thanks to the social constructions of corresponding dichotomies—i.e., full time/ part time; controlled/agentative; creative/boring; repetitive—South Asian workers' bodies are already deemed less valuable than those of western workers (Elson and Parsons 1981). They are also constructed as passive, docile, submissive and victims of patriarchal forces (IBID). The MSA builds on and contributes to these constructed narratives. Combined with local cultural notions of women's good conduct, the MSA reproduces Sri Lankan global workers as victims (prone to trafficking and human rights abuses) while generating additional moral surveillance, leading to part time sex workers to be condemned as bad workers who could potentially cause all factory workers to lose their jobs.

In the Sri Lankan context, MSA has not only added another layer of surveillance but is creating a work place culture characterized by suspicion and fear. This forces workers to choose between identity labels. Moving among available labels is useful for gendered subjects navigating social spaces and opportunities that were formerly unavailable. For part time sex workers at the intersection of global exploitation, national regulations, and moral anxieties, the need to hold onto the label of factory worker is deeply meaningful. Factory work, taken abstractly is more respectful, but as noted above, the stigma associated with the FTZ leads to workers being labeled whores. This creates the gray space women utilize to manage respectability. The MSA, has begun to impinge on this and endanger one of the few routes female global workers have for long term empowerment through land ownership.

The Sri Lankan case evidences the futility of taking measures to prevent human rights abuses without considering the current exploitative global production networks. Companies outsource manufacturing looking to exploit abundant third world gendered labor and minimize production costs. From that standpoint, it is hardly surprising that the MSA, rather than requiring companies to change the 'race to the bottom' principle and providing workers a meaningful living wage, ends up requiring companies to provide comprehensive statements

noting what they have done to eradicate forced labor within supply chains. On the other hand, western governments, themselves steeped in neoliberal regimes, are unlikely to require companies to increase their production costs (i.e. worker salaries/benefits). Thus, as always, third world women workers, in this case those who work in Sri Lanka's global factories, end up being the ones who pay the price.

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