A SILENT CRY: VISUALIZING DATA ON SEX TRAFFICKING

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In this era of globalization, human trafficking is emerging as a major theme, with rapid movement of information, capital and people across international borders. Despite the red alert over the issue, the crime of human trafficking remains highly unreported even in the most developed countries like United States of America. This silence over the issue in this country can be attributed to the lack of awareness about its prevalence in our own back yard and the measures available against it. This silence is further compounded by economic, social, cultural and psychological factors.

Acknowledging the need to break the silence over this globalized issue, *A Silent Cry* is an interdisciplinary response in the form of a documentary film. It combines the strengths of cinema and anthropology attempting to humanize the data available on the phenomena. This document contextualizes the issue dealt in the documentary and along with an insight into its production process.
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CHAPTER 1
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this era of globalization, human trafficking is emerging as a major theme, with rapid movement of information, capital and people across international borders. The United States defines human trafficking in Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000 and the Reauthorization Acts (TVPRA) of 2003, 2005 and 2008. These two different but related legislations address two separate issues: sex trafficking and labor trafficking. Sex trafficking is defined as a situation in which commercial sex is induced by force, fraud or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act is not at least 18 years of age. Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery [8 CFR §214.11 (a)] (Burstein, 2011).

Due to a great variety of factors inherent to the act of trafficking and its broad implications, there is still no consensus over the definition of human trafficking. However, despite all these variances, there is a general consensus on using human trafficking as an umbrella term for any kind of activity involved in forcing a person into servitude. The emphasis of this umbrella term is not on the movement but the compulsion of being in servitude, in recognition of the fact that the act of trafficking may not involve the movement or physical relocation at all. Also, the two broad categories of human trafficking, namely sex and labor trafficking are generally acknowledged without a dispute. As far as ratio of sex trafficking to labor trafficking is concerned there still remains a difference of opinion and observation.

Recent data released by the International Labor Organization (ILO) suggests that 55% of forced labor victims are women and girls, and out of this percentage, 98% are due to sex
trafficking. The United States of America has emerged as one of the major receivers of trafficked human capital. Statistics provided by United States of Department of States show an estimated 14,500 to 17,500 persons are brought into United States each year for labor or sexual exploitation. According to data provided by North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NTCAHT), of which the client, Opening Doors International Services (ODIS) is also a member, Texas has emerged as a major hub for human trafficking. Economic stability, cultural diversity, major highways and airports, a large number of sexually oriented businesses and an international border are some of the major factors facilitating human trafficking in the state.

Despite the acknowledgment of this data collected at the national and state levels, the crime of human trafficking remains highly unreported. This silence over the issue can be attributed to the lack of awareness about its prevalence in American Society and the measures available against it. It is further compounded by economic, social, cultural and psychological factors. Acknowledging the need to break the silence over the issue of human trafficking, the President, Obama signed a historic proclamation declaring January 2012 as National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month.

*A Silent Cry* is an interdisciplinary response to the general lack of awareness of the issue of human trafficking and measures available against it. It combines the strengths of cinema and anthropology attempting to humanize the data available. While informing the viewers about the issue, the documentary strives to sensitize the audiences to it. To maintain the cinematic aesthetics and accommodate of technical constraints, the focus of the documentary project has been narrowed down to the issue of sex trafficking of immigrant women.
CHAPTER 2
DESCRIPTION

The Client

Opening Doors International (formally Immigration) Services (ODIS) is a grassroots non-profit organization operating in Denton, Texas. This grassroots organization is striving to bridge the gap between immigration law and its actual execution for the benefit of the immigrant community in Denton County. In the course of helping immigrants with their documentation and representation for attaining the immigration benefits, its volunteers and case managers encounter human trafficking.

ODIS and North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NTCAHT), of which ODIS is a member, have experienced that in case of immigrants servitude is mistakenly perceived as illegal employment or prostitution by law enforcement agencies and the community in general. This misconception discourages trafficked victims from reporting the crimes committed against them and they remain silent. In order to counter this issue, ODIS understands the need of having an awareness campaign to make its operation visible. It attempts to raise the present level of awareness and sensitivity pertaining to the victims of this crime and to encourage them to resort to legal and other kind of support that ODIS has to offer.

The Project

ODIS desired to develop a documentary as part of its awareness campaign on human trafficking. In response to ODIS’s desire, a documentary titled as A Silent Cry was produced using anthropological research methods and tools. The documentary explores the causes, effects, legal remedies and challenges of combating human trafficking. While exploring these themes,
the documentary presents a scenario, under which women become vulnerable to sex trafficking, and how this vulnerability leads them to be captives of sex industry in United States of America. It also explores the circumstances that deter these women from raising their voice against their captors and traffickers.

The motive of this documentary was first, to bring visibility to the activities of ODIS in the community and presents an insight into the symptoms, causes and effects of human trafficking on victims. Second was to incite the community members to intervene at various levels. Various levels of interventions that could result from the screening of this documentary were identified as:

- Initiating dialogue on the issue of trafficking at grassroots level
- Reporting of abuse to appropriate authorities
- Generating funds, a volunteer force and other kinds of support to strengthen the efforts of ODIS in the service of victims/survivors of human trafficking

To effectively engage the audience and to provide well-researched information over the issue, various methods and epistemology from the fields of cinema and anthropology were used. The narrative of the documentary is the methodological embodiment of collective experience of victims/survivors derived from the observation of volunteers, experts working in various fields, and the filmmaker herself. Various techniques and methods were borrowed from the fields of cinema, anthropology, creative writing, journalism, music, and theatre arts to infuse life into the documentary narrative.
CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The objective of undertaking this project is to have a broad understanding of the following:

• What factors make female immigrant population vulnerable to the crime of sex trafficking?

• Where does the crime of sex trafficking originate and who are the actors involved in it?

• Why does the crime of human trafficking, especially in case of immigrants, remain unreported?

• Who are the actors involved in the rescue and resettlement?

• What are the hurdles encountered by the actors involved in the rescue and resettlement?

• How can anthropology and cinema bring awareness on the issue of human trafficking?

Delimitations/Focus

The research is narrowed to the immigrant women who are victims/survivors of sex trafficking. This excludes women and men who are trafficked for sex but are not immigrants and immigrant or non-immigrant men or women who are victims of labor trafficking.

Limitations

The major limitation for the project was, not having a substantive case history of a trafficked victim, serviced by Opening Doors International Services (ODIS). ODIS did provide access to some of the redacted case histories of victims of domestic abuse, but none of these narratives reflected an act of human trafficking. This unavailability of a case history could not be
attributed to the unwillingness of ODIS to provide access to me. In fact, human trafficking is very new area of operation for this organization. Hence, most of the victims/survivors were either in the process of being rescued or resettled and exposing their case histories could jeopardize their rescue or resettlement process. This limitation actually worked in favor of this project. It pushed me in the direction of integrating the experiential aspect of this issue in an innovative and creative way. We borrowed a news story covered by Mimi Swartz (2011), a reporter for *Texas Monthly*, a news magazine. Using the facts and structure offered in this superb piece of journalism on the experiences of a foreigner trafficked for sex in United States, an archetypal narrative was constructed combining the collective experiences of trafficking victims and survivors with that of the people committed to their rescue and resettlement.

Cinematic ethics did not allow me to interview the victims on camera for public screening. The decision to create an archetypical narrative of the documentary and use a professional actor to re-enact it also aided me in resolving the dilemma of exposing this extremely vulnerable research population on screen without interfering in the experience it provided to the audiences.

The phenomena of human trafficking portrayed in *A Silent Cry* involves trafficking women for sex work, which is still not widely discussed in public. The very mention of the term sex might have blocked certain participants from discussing the subject matter on camera. Recognizing this block, the technique of re-enactment was used to discuss this essential but very uncomfortable component of the issue.
CHAPTER 4
LITERATURE REVIEW ON HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The practice of human trafficking has a very ancient history; however, the discourse on human trafficking in the context of global exploitation began only in the recent past. Global trade in female bodies came into public discourse with a strong movement against white slavery, which emerged as a tributary to legal abolition of black slavery. Jo Doezema defines white slavery as, “the procurement, by use of force, deceit or drugs, of a white woman or a girl, against her will, for prostitution” (Kangaspunta, 2012). This “revelation” was propagated as a newfound evil that never existed before. Many reformist movements mushroomed in response to this evil practice. The left front argued that these reformist movements were capitalistic attempt to mask the economic exploitation of the masses, which was the root cause of Sex Slavery. Activist Emma Goldman summarized this view in one of her essays. She states:

> What is really the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution… Naturally our reformers says nothing about this cause. They know it well enough, but it doesn't pay to say anything about it. It is much more profitable to play the Pharisee, to pretend an outraged morality, than to go to the bottom of things. (Goldman, 2002, 1917)

Although her statement does not directly address the issue of trafficking, it does bring our attention to the conditions that render women extremely vulnerable for sex trafficking. The term “driving” used in her statement forces the readers to pay attention to economic hardships that force women to take action as saviors for survival of the family. These women are forced into conditions that not only make them vulnerable to be tricked into sexual slavery, but they are also compelled to join the sex trade on their own accord, which is sometimes construed as consent.

Times have changed and so have forms and modes of trafficking; however, many scholars and economists of the present era share the views and opinions of Emma Goodman. In
an economic model of international trafficking presented by Elizabeth Wheaton, Edward Schauzer, and Thomas Gali, it is explained that economic disparities and other factors within countries affect the practice of human trafficking for exploitation abroad. They state that Criminal justice experts and sociologists believe the push and pull factors make populations vulnerable to labor market exploitation and, possibly, human trafficking. (Wheaton et al, 2009: 121)

Wheaton et al. describe that researchers have looked at demographic factors such as gender (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2006; Klueber, 2003), education (Richard, 2000; Kelly, 2002; Klueber, 2003), and age (Green, 1998), whereas others have focused on political instability (Derks, 2000; Hughes, 2000 and 2002), globalization (Bales, 2005), income differentials between developed and developing countries (Bales, 2000, 2003), worldwide capitalism and transnational corporations (Anderson and Davidson, 2003), and the universal devaluation and marginalization of women and children (Demleitner, 2001). William Ejalu, (2006, pp. 171-173) suggests poverty, lack of education, urbanization and centralization of educational and employment opportunities, cultural thinking and attitude, traditional practices, domestic violence, corruption, conflicts, and difficulty in acquiring visas as causes of human trafficking (Wheaton et al., 2010, p. 121). They argue that vulnerability emerges out of poverty.

Sally Cameron and Edward Newman describe two broad categories of factors that interact to facilitate global sex trafficking trade: structural and proximate. Structural factors include issues of economic deprivation and market downturns, the effects of globalization, attitudes to gender, the demand for prostitutes and situations of conflict. Proximate factors include lax national and international legal regimes, poor law enforcement, corruption, organized criminal entrepreneurship and weak education campaigns. The overarching argument is that the
interaction between structural factors or variables and proximate factors is key to understanding why some individuals are vulnerable to trafficking through the use of deception and coercion. It is this confluence of factors that helps to explain where and why vulnerability occurs (Cameron and Newman, 2008, pp. 1-3).

This argument further opens the way for discussion on the effect of globalization for cross border trade. It is evidenced that globalization has opened trade across borders, but governments are failing to secure their borders against free flow of labor to accommodate the demands of global trade. This imbalance restricts the legal migration of labor required to fill the demand created by globalized market. Newman explains that how traffickers take advantage of national immigration policies and practices that render migrants vulnerable to exploitation both during the process of migration and after they arrive in the destination country. The difficulty of migrating independently ensures a ready pool of recruits in the countries of origin and the lack of protections for undocumented migrants facilitates traffickers’ exploitation of victims in destination countries (Cameron and Newman, 2008, pp. 5-6).

Ironically, criminalization of sex work silences the victim forever (trafficked or not). Selling sexual services has both punitive and moral implications in society. In most of the cases, sex workers consider themselves at the point of no return in their community. The fear of social stigma and legal implications of their actions keeps a majority of sex workers in the cycle of abuse. Under these circumstances, the victims are left with no other choice but to accept the conditions to which they are subjected. Being undocumented adds to the vulnerability. Stringent immigration and criminal laws against undocumented immigrants and sex workers add to the vulnerability to the plight of victims. Liberal feminists argue criminalizing sex work has the most negative impact. For example, a ban on sex bars can force prostitutes to work in secluded areas –
such as public parks – with a higher risk of brutality (Cameron and Newman, 2008, pp. 5-8).

Apart from these laws, the US government also has passed legislation to help the victims and punish the traffickers. In October 2000, Congress created the “T” Non-Immigrant Status by passing the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act (VTVPA). The “T” Non-Immigrant Status (T visa) is set aside for those who are or have been victims of human trafficking. It protects victims of human trafficking and allows victims to remain in the United States to assist in investigation or prosecution of traffickers. So, one can argue that the government has done its job by creating the laws to help the victims and punish the culprits.

However, these laws remain only on paper until someone reports the crime. There is a dire need of effective and engaging awareness campaigns that can promote awareness of human trafficking and encourage the reporting of trafficking incidents.

There is a successful precedent of using non-fictional cinema to mobilize communities against deathly forms of silence that entrench social suffering. Susan Levin conducted research to bring attention to the shifts in consciousness and influences on behavior in individuals who view visual media like documentary. She claims that people are active agents when viewing films but that the construction of meaning is a dynamic and continuous process that is determined by the particular structural constraints of given social and political viewing context. She further asserts that silence and disbelief are direct results of harmful structural constraints like stigma and discrimination. She claims that locally produced documentaries can be effectively used to break the codes of disbelief and generate an open dialogue among community members (Pink, 2007, p. 78). Undoubtedly, visual media based on socially and culturally difficult issues, allows audiences to have a forum for all kinds of experience. People in the
documentary telling stories about their personal experience bring universality to audiences. After one of the screening of Levin's film in Africa, one of the audience members stated:

I was impressed by *Red Ribbon* the most because of the way that lady accepted herself even though she was HIV positive, and especially because her daughter was embarrassed about her mother’s status...I learnt that a person should accept him or herself and I hope that if I should ever come out with HIV positive test that I will have the courage to do what those guys (who disclose in *Ho Ea Roma*) are doing. (Pink, 2007, p. 81)

Levin’s work in Africa provides many examples for any applied visual anthropologist to confidently use documentary as a tool of representation and intervention at many different levels in the community. Hence, my decision to use documentary as a method to bring awareness and generate social empathy was well supported by these kinds of precedents.

There have been other visual ethnographic attempts to expose and explain the phenomenon of sex trafficking as one of the common currents of globalization. Ursula Bieman’s video essay titled *Remote Sensing* exposes what it means to experience the world remotely. In her own words:

*Remote Sensing* plots the passage of women’s bodies through the material and virtual terrain inhabited by global sex trade. My aim was not to produce an unquestioning euphoric image of migration in the virtual realm but to give expressions to a situation full of conflict in which women who have become commercial objects to an exceptional degree generate innovative geographies of survival that may be interpreted as subversive. (Ursula, 2011)

*Sex Slaves* (Bienstock, 2006) is another gripping documentary exposing the inside of the global sex trade in women from the former Soviet Bloc. The film takes viewers into the shadowy, multi-billion dollar world of sex trafficking. Part cinema verité, part investigation, *Sex Slaves* puts a human face on this most inhuman of contemporary issues.

Contributions and Expectations from ODIS Project

In just a very short span of time many aspects of human trafficking have been researched
and discussed globally at both the micro and macro level. As evidenced by literature review on the phenomenon, a large amount of scholarship is dedicated to provide the facts and figures; the rest seems to be arguing over the accuracy and adequacy of the presented data. The issue of inaccuracy and inadequacy of data eclipses efforts of the scholarship dedicated to the issue.

It is beyond the scope of this research to delve into the questions of accuracy and adequacy of data. However, through this documentary project we can attempt to humanize the pre-existing data through experiences of those who are either victims of human trafficking or those who combat it.

The documentary medium has the capacity to help generate social empathy and allow audiences to live the experience of those who are affected by the phenomena. Gerder et al. (2011) claim that empathy is critical in any kind of social work practice and can be taught. They further argue that often people describe a book, cinema, music, dance, or a piece of art as "moving" or "eye-opening" or "touching." What they are describing is their reaction to a visual, auditory, and possibly somatic stimulus that engaged them in the experience. Using the medium of art can be a way to engage people in training or retraining the mirror neurons for affective sharing and the cognitive pathways for self/other-awareness, mental flexibility, and emotion regulation (Gerdes et al., 2011). Segal, defines social empathy as the ability to understand people by entering into their situations in ways that reveal inequalities and disparities and then acting to effect social change (Segal, 2006, 2007b).

Drawing its strength from this argument, *A Silent Cry* attempts to humanize the research data on sexual trafficking of immigrant women to the United States of America. Borrowing interdisciplinary ideas from the fields of creative writing, theater, digital cinema and anthropology, the documentary unpacks the complexity of human trafficking by providing “thick
description” that explains the vulnerability of the victims of this phenomenon. Thick description, as explained by Geertz, provides context and meaning to the behavior so that it makes sense. In Geertz’s understanding, ethnography is by definition “thick description” or “an elaborate venture in” (Geertz, 1973). In the present “thin description” is the phenomenon of human trafficking and “thick” is the meaning behind it and its symbolic import in society or between communicating actors participating in the phenomenon.
CHAPTER 5

METHODS

Given the complexity of the human trafficking, ethical constraints, the form of deliverables, and the desired outcomes of documentary in the community, the following methods from the fields of cinema and anthropology were used to fulfil the objectives of the project.

Digital Movie Camera

As suggested by Postma and Crawford, a video camera was employed as a research method to collect data with the purpose of generating anthropological knowledge and representing social realities on screen. My interactions with the members of Opening Doors International Services (ODIS) and experts were recorded. In order to give trafficking victims an appropriate representation in the documentary a news story was chosen to construct an archetypical narrative of the documentary. This constructed story was shot as a re-enactment of a victim’s experience.

A high definition, professional camcorder, Sony Z7U, was used to shoot the footage. The use of professional camera allowed me to add an XLR shotgun and mini lavalier microphones for better sound quality making the documentary broadcastable. The highlight of this camera is that it allows an uninterrupted interview of about two hours of duration without having to change tape or card storage device.

Archival Research

To gain background information about ODIS, I resorted to the use of their scrapbooks, from the year of their inception to present. The scrapbooks really helped me with providing
historical information about my client and also the clients of my client. Through various paper clippings preserved in there I also got to see the faces behind this organization; the faces that were engaged in providing assistance and also the faces that were being assisted. Some of these people I got to interview afterwards (on camera, and off camera). It was almost a historical trip of their achievements over the years.

Given the sensitive nature of the topic, I decided not to contact the victims and skimmed through all the redacted affidavits that were made available to me. This allowed me to identify prospective cases of abuse that could be the driving force of the narrative of the documentary. Only three cases that promised to form the narrative fabric of the documentary to meet the objective of the project were chosen for further in depth study. Similarly, news stories highlighting immigration related abuse were reviewed. Finally, the composite story of Kiki, an immigrant tricked in to coming to the United States to be enslaved for sexual services proved to be the most feasible, engaging and compassionate approach for *A Silent Cry*.

Ethnographic Interviews

As described by James Spradley (1979), an ethnographic interview is a particular kind of speech event. All speech events have cultural rules for beginning, ending, taking turns, asking questions, pausing. It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as series of friendly conversations into which researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants (Spradley, 1979:461, 465-466).

I conducted the ethnographic interviews in two phases. Both the phases happened on different days. The first phase took place off-camera whereas the second was on-camera.
The First Phase: Initiating an Ethnographic Interview

The stranger behind the camera can become a source of fear and anxiety for the participants of a documentary. I have experienced participants shutting down on the camera crew, only because they did not relate to the person behind the camera. Hence, it is very important for the camera operator to create a rapport with the participants of the documentary. Participants must feel that they are in their comfort zone where they can breathe comfortably and vent out the information they carry in their heads. Therefore, it was important for me to have an introductory conversation with my participants to introduce myself as a person, anthropologist and a cinematographer. The purpose of these pre-interviews was to give them a chance to know me, and ask me questions. I tried to arrange these encounters in a very casual environment at a local restaurant over lunch. I also attended the Christmas party organized by Anne Starnes, the executive director of ODIS at her home. She made an announcement about my presence and the purpose of my momentary association with ODIS. Her announcement allowed the ODIS members in attendance to approach me allowing me to know them and get very valuable information in a casual environment. These casual encounters also allowed ODIS members to know me as a person and an artist. This mutual interaction facilitated "me" and later on "my camera" to become part of the conversation in the final product (documentary) rather than the source of intimidation.

Participant Observation

*Attending ODIS Workshops*

ODIS organizes workshops and seminars to train attorneys and legal representatives to help with cases related to abuse, originating from immigration situations. I attended one of these
workshops and gained certification for representing undocumented immigrants under Violence Against Women Act. My training and attendance in this workshop helped me in understanding the desired role of legal provisions to help protect the victims and punish the perpetrators. It also acquainted me with the issues that blocked the execution of these laws and ODIS's efforts to remove these blocks.

*Attending North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking Meeting*

Attending coalition's meeting helped me understand the working relationship of various national, state and regional level organizations to reach a common goal of combating the abuse originating from enslavement of immigrants for the purpose of labor and sex work. It also helped me identify the place and significance of ODIS within the non-profit community in the state of Texas.

*Grounded Action*

Posited by Simmons, and Gregory (2003), grounded action addresses the complexity and multi-dimensionality of organizational and social problems and issues. It extends grounded theory beyond its original purpose of generating theory that is grounded in data by providing a means of developing actions that are also grounded (systematically derived from a grounded theory). Primarily an inductive research method, grounded theory was developed in the mid sixties, by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (1967). As they pointed out, before their discovery of grounded theory, methods of social research focused mainly on how to deductively verify logically elaborated theories. They suggested it was equally important to have a method through which theories could be systematically generated, or "discovered," directly from data. Grounded
action based on this theory has been specifically designed for the purposes of investigating and addressing the complexity of organizational and social problems and issues (Simmons and Gregory, 2003). If we translate grounded theory and action in context of film, the experience gathered by the filmmaker and camera is data and process of editing is chiselling away the repetitive ideas in a given set of data. Therefore this process, as a whole is grounded action. This process aids in developing cohesive and concise representation of the major findings in a representative way. Dent, a visual anthropologist, while producing his recent documentary, *Graciously We Receive* (2011), observed that several important concepts borrowed from grounded theory apply seamlessly to production practices and analysis in post-production.

Digital workflows provide a rapid feedback with rushes available almost instantly after the shoot, emulating the constant comparison concept of grounded theory that is the comparison of data to data, looking for themes and gaps in the coverage. Logging clips in a non-linear editing program is grounded theory's equivalent of open coding in ethnographic film production (Dent, 2011).

To apply grounded theory on non-linear editing systems for the purpose of this project, I assigned themes, codes and bins to all the characters of the documentary. As I went over the footage, some themes and codes emerged more than others evidenced by the volume of information/footage accumulating in certain bins/codes. The application of anthropological concepts and methods on cinema allowed me to sift through the material with an analytical mind, opening up to innovative ways to represent a difficult phenomenon.

**Storytelling and Testimony**

Storytelling is an established method of engaging audiences in social issues. Russell suggests that storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of "representing the
diversities of truth” (Smith, 1999). Smith argues that the storytelling is a tool to create humor, gossip and creativity. Stories tell of love and sexual encounters, of war and revenges. Their themes tell us about our cultures and the formality of testimony provides a structure within which events can be related and feelings felt, while the listener may ask questions, testimonies structure the responses, silencing certain types of questions and formalizing others” (Smith, p. 144). The decision to present the story of victim in form of testimony was partially to enhance the connection with the audience. This structure was well suited for a tragic theme and story of the victim in *A Silent Cry*, allowing the maintenance of illusion to keep the audiences engaged and honoring the pain of the victims.

Re-Enactment as Ethnography

*A Silent Cry* uses re-enactments as a method of presenting anthropological information. As argued by Johannes Sjöberg, combination of improvised acting, fiction and reflexivity, is a useful complement to contemporary and established methods for ethnographic research and representation (Sjöberg, 2009). This approach has been referred to as ‘ethnofiction’ and was used in several of Jean Rouch's films, of which the most innovative is *Jaguar* (1957-67). *Jaguar* was an improvised documentary film in which local collaborators lived a fictional account of an archetypal journey, the true story unfolding in the presence of the camera. In essence, ethnofictions are films about events that could have happened as they do in the film because that is the way events unfold in their specific culture. Sjöberg also argues that ethnofiction is not merely an indefinable surrealist game as Rouch often described his filmmaking, but as a method that consciously draws on dramatic work processes to conduct ethnographic research and representation through narrative filmmaking (Sjöberg, 2009)
Rouch did not believe in a strict delineation between fiction and non-fiction films. He writes, “For me, as an ethnographer and filmmaker, there is almost no boundary between documentary film and films of fiction” (Rouch, 2003, p. 20). Recognizing that cinematic objectivity was illusory and that a camera was bound to change the kind of interactions he could have with the world around him, he saw nothing contradictory in the idea of employing narrative techniques in his ethnographic films. This practice has come to be known as ethno-fiction.
Due to the vulnerability of the population discussed in the documentary, the ethical concerns always remained on the forefront. In fact, *A Silent Cry* starts with the ethical dilemma of the researcher in the film, and her concern about the effects of exposure of the story on the victim. In the hook of the documentary, she asks, “Are you comfortable talking to me about your past?” After getting an affirmative answer from the victim (actor), the documentarian carefully makes the victim aware that her interview might become public in case it makes to the final documentary. Here, the documentarian is allowing herself to be a character of ethno-fiction, a concept and a method discussed in detail in previous section. She is performing for the audience, so that they experience the process of getting an informed consent in the event of participant being a real victim and not merely an actor performing the act. In this context, researcher gets a dramatic nod from the victim. The victim says, "It doesn’t matter..." This performative consent has a deeper meaning than merely being an act of informed consent. It exposes the purpose of telling the story. The victim adds, “I don’t want other women to go through the things, I went through…” Her statement clearly sets the purpose of the project that is a bigger and common good. This purpose is also inline with the purpose of Opening Doors International Services (ODIS). ODIS desires to bring awareness in the community and create social empathy over the issue of trafficking in order to prevent it and combat it.

The Canadian National Film Board discovered that even with the best of intentions a documentary film can bring hardship to participants (Dent, 2012). In 1966, the production of *The Things I Cannot Change*, which depicted life in an impoverished area of Montreal brought scorn and ridicule from the community to the woman whose family was depicted in the film (Gwyn
In the aftermath of this public relations disaster, the film board experimented with participatory production methods on the island of Fogo, in which participants had control over how they were represented in film. The result was greater empowerment and community cohesion among the Fogo islanders (Gwyn1972, pp. 12, 20). Although the Fogo project had a much different purpose and methodology than *A Silent Cry*, both projects have as their foundation the intention of representing social conditions of marginalized populations.

The Center for Social Media recently published ethical guidelines broad enough to cover the ever-changing circumstances of non-fiction film but descriptive of the documentary film producer's mandate: Do no harm, protect the vulnerable and honor the viewer's trust (Aufderheide, Jaszi and Chandra 2009). Given the subject matter of the documentary, it was imperative that I evolved a formula during pre-production itself that allowed the accommodation of the above given formula to the fullest. ODIS desired a visual awareness tool that could aid in community outreach, informing the community about the issues it worked on, the importance of its work, its philosophy, and its objective, primarily for the purpose of procuring financial and human resources for its working and also to create empathy for the clients they worked for. The Center for Social Media’s guidelines are specific to the needs of documentary producers who operate in a business environment that exerts economic pressures on content and format. The American Anthropological Association (AAA) code of ethics addresses the research cycle and the ethical issues of each stage of the process and envisions many of the dilemmas researchers encounter in the field and in publication. The Center for Social Media’s ethical guidelines overlap in many cases with the AAA code of ethics, which covers a wide range of contingencies that researchers find themselves in.
The AAA code of ethics recognizes a primary ethical obligation to the community in which anthropologists conduct their research to avoid harm. They are also expected to work toward conservation of knowledge and cultural resources in a working relationship that can be beneficial to all parties involved. Other items within the AAA code of ethics that apply to documentary producers in general is recognition of the filmmaker's debt to the communities in which they work. The AAA emphasizes the expectation that anthropologists disseminate their findings to the academic community and make the results of their research appropriately available to sponsors, students, decision makers, and other non-anthropologists. I have offered ODIS the use of this documentary for the purpose of promoting the cause of organization and the benefits of its clients.

The bigger issue was my concern about the privacy of the victims whose stories were going to form the foundation of this documentary. In order to engage the audiences and giving them a sense of proximity to these incidents, it was important to tell these stories. However, revealing their identity could mean an irreparable damage to their already damaged lives and identities. In the year 2008, I confronted a similar ethical dilemma on the location of Searching for Juan Carlos. It was a film about the psychological effects of abandonment of children by their biological parents even after their adoption by loving adoptive parents. During the research and pre-production stage the family seemed very excited about it but when I arrived with camera and crew they completely shut down on me. I realized I was shaming them. Their scars were so deep that it hurt to bring them on surface for me to film. I brought whatever footage I could, but promised to be very careful in any of my future ventures on emotionally and socially sensitive issues. The idea of having re-enactment in my future documentaries involving sensitive subject matter was born then. So when we decided to produce A Silent Cry for ODIS, my impulsive
reaction during my very first meeting with Starnes, the executive director of ODIS was that I wouldn't have victims on screen, and would reconstruct the stories of victims and have professional actors re-enact them. I was informed that there were victims who might agree to come on screen. I was concerned not only about the victims but also their present and future families whose relatively smooth life could have jeopardized by the revelation of the identity of the victim alone. It was certainly not a risk worth taking.

My decision of not bringing victims on screen made my task rather complicated. I was committed to dispense information that my client, ODIS needed to give to their target audience and I was also bound by the necessity of humanizing this information to make it as engaging as possible within the range of my budget, access and objective. From my own experience as a documentarian, I knew that without bringing a compelling story on screen, it was almost impossible to invoke emotion from the audiences. Viewers, especially those who could actually relate to the issue needed a face on the screen to identify with. I was faced with a direct conflict between my ethics and the demand of the project. To bring a balance between the two, I decided to reconstruct a true story of a victim and hire an actor to perform it.

To implement the plan to minimize the damage to the victim, and to universalize the contents, a method had to be evolved to bring a balance between the reality exposed in the news story and reconstruction of some demographic elements related to the victim. In this case journalist, Mimi Swartz, had acted ethically by hiding the name of the victim to maintain her anonymity; however, my training in anthropology prompted me to go a step further by concealing the name, race, ethnicity and the country of origin. To keep the audience engaged, and to maintain the element of reality, it is not revealed that the victim on the screen is a seasoned actor hired to play the part of the victim, and both the actor and the documentarian are
role playing to offer the experience that the media professionals and the victims of tabooed crimes go through before outing the story in public. In reality, this dramatized nod symbolizes the nod that Mimi Swartz, the writer of the story must have gotten from the real victim and which gets translated in *A Silent Cry* in a visual language.
CHAPTER 7  
THEORY AND ANALYSIS

Using the concepts of grounded theory as guiding force, major themes that emerge out of *A Silent Cry* are vulnerability, guilt, disgust, a sense of moral failure and insecurity. These themes branch off into diaspora, trafficking and silence. Frequently, the conflicts of the enslaved are not resolvable at many levels and they become marginalized. Arnold Van Gennep in his seminal work *Les rites de passage* (Rites of passage) describes the three part transformational structure that appears in many cultures consisting of separation, liminality and re-integration. Rituals such as coming-of-age ceremonies and marriage are described as having a three-part structure. Persons undergoing the ritual are first stripped of the social status and the identity they possessed before the ritual. Then they are inducted into the liminal period of initiation through trials and hardship, and are finally given a new status. After going through this ritual they reassimilate into society (Gennep, 1960/1909). In *A Silent Cry*, liminality and the haunting possibility of marginalization of the victims is a strong undercurrent. Victor Turner specifically differentiates marginality from liminality in his work on Communitas. He states, "marginals like liminars are also betwixt and between, but unlike ritual liminars they have no cultural assurance of a final stable resolution of their ambiguity" (Turner, 1974, p. 233).

The immigrants who are victimized into forced sexual slavery are vulnerable because they have nowhere else to turn. Even return to their countries of origin is not an option. The act of crossing the border and falling into the trap of traffickers automatically burns all the bridges for them. Their movement to United States of America becomes “one-way traffic.” As evidenced by protagonist’s statement in the documentary, the decision to migrate, especially in case of women, is primarily compelled by their economic circumstances coupled with socio-
cultural abuse in their own country. Their dream to migrate to America provides relief from both.

This desire to escape from multifaceted abuse in their home countries makes them a vulnerable target of sex traffickers; the documentary portrays the concept of vulnerability as a fluid one. There are people who are more vulnerable than others due to many social, political, and economic factors. However, the people who are not vulnerable or are strong willed can also become vulnerable under given circumstances. In *A Silent Cry*, Dr. Needleman, the psychoanalyst elaborates on this point. She explains how the issue of need in a moment makes for an inequality, and in turn vulnerability of the person in need. She illustrates that whenever a person turns to an expert for help, the expert gains power automatically. If there is a predator in that position of power, he/she can take over the mind of the one who is rendered vulnerable due to the need that requires to be fulfilled (Singh, 2012). In *A Silent Cry*, the victim explains the conditions, which rendered her vulnerable. She states, "You know when you have problems...you think if you go far, you will leave your problems behind." She had a deep desire to escape from her abusive husband, and gain stronger financial footing. She fell into the trap of traffickers disguised as genuine job agents. One would argue that she herself consented to take the risk with his life. Dr. Re Cruz, an anthropologist and expert on border and immigration studies, looks at this kind of consent as a class issue that purges people out of their own country in search of means of economic and/or physical survival. In the film, she states,

> It is a forced decision, sometimes without the men. It is a decision that comes from themselves but at the same time, from an anthropological point of view, it is a decision that is pushed by the economic situation of the family.

In the present context also, the victim’s story starts with her marginalized status in her own country. The protagonist states that her husband was very abusive and she needed to run far away from him. By allowing herself the desire to migrate to America she enters into a cruel
variation of the transformation ritual that Van Gennep and Victor Turner describe. By accepting the offer to work in America she allows herself to be initiated into the ritual. She is officially stripped of her status once her parents sign the contract for her to leave her country and go work across the globe for prosperity of the family and to pay the off the debt to the job agent. This stage, for her, is the point of no return. She must leave to live a new life. The documentary introduces the protagonist, reflecting on her situation. When asked about country of origin, she states, “I come from very far away…” Her statements indicate the universality of the issue, and of movement from the lands of origin into the boundaries of a place that is not only geographically very far away, but culturally and politically too. With this move, she marks her separation from her previous ties. This is her “point of no return” and also being “nobody.” This is the point where she pushes herself into the chaotic liminal stage of the ritual, making herself vulnerable to any kind of abuse, in this context, sexual enslavement, a trap that she can’t break through. The documentary introduces the protagonist, reflecting on her situation. When asked her name, she carefully replies, “It doesn’t matter, it can be any name….” While looking at the concept of “human dignity,” Kuch (2011) describes this phenomenon of being “nobody” as a particular form of vulnerability – a symbolic vulnerability, which has its roots in a desire for recognition. Drawing the idea from Hegel’s struggle to death, he emphasizes on the primacy of “recognition” over “physiological life.” He argues that something that may hurt us even more than insults is the complete closure of communication, that is, social death in silence. In this sense, humiliation is at the very least a minimal form of recognition – which may be still more bearable than not to be recognized at all (Kuch, 2011, pp. 45-50).

Kuch’s statement may be one explanation to victims’ seemingly lack of desire to get out of the cycle of abuse and humiliation. The protagonist of the documentary recognized her
permanently severed status from her past life, including her identity, self worth and recognition in her past social environment. If she refused the status she was being offered in her new environment, she could run the risk of being devoid of any recognition, or socially dead. She accepted to be humiliated to gain and then retain whatever little “recognition” her new environment had to offer. It was better than being socially dead in silence.

Many victims in her situation feel marginalized even after their rescue. Lack of social empathy towards their situation coupled with the stigma attached to their identity corners them in social isolation. In order to escape this social death they find refuge in the trap they had escaped from. It is an ironic situation where the humiliation itself becomes the source of “recognition,” and hence the abuse causing this humiliation remains unreported. Despite this desperate state of affairs, the documentary doesn’t portray a total hopelessness. It calls for social empathy to help pull victims/survivors out of marginality into re-integration into society. In the film, Dr. Needleman, in this regard, states,

The abused victim will always have scars…will always be potentially prone to being triggered…but they can develop a life for themselves.

The documentary doesn’t portray a total hopelessness or indefinite marginality. It calls for a collective measure on part of the community to help pull victims/survivors out of marginality.

The themes in *A Silent Cry* of guilt, disgust and moral failure contribute to a sense of impurity brewing deep inside the mind of trafficking victims. This is total loss of “self,” a state where a person loses faith in her own goodness. She becomes dirty in her own eyes, unworthy of the society, even her own family. She is marginalized, hence a “danger” to the society. Mary Douglas explains that societies are usually highly structured entities. Power and authority are understood within the context of the culture and even help to define it. Anything that exists outside to the structure of the society, or in the margins of the society is outside of the structure
and poses a danger (Douglas, 1996). In a society like United States of America where lines of structure are clearly defined, people like the protagonist can “transmit danger by contact.” She is an anomaly who doesn't fit in the "normal” structure of society. For many, and may be for herself she is polluted at so many different levels; she is a prostitute, an offender, a criminal of law and society, somebody whose mere association can cause someone to lose his/her status in civil society.

In *A Silent Cry*, the victim is guilty of her absence in her children’s life and desires to be with them, but is also unable to face them even if she ever gets a chance to do so. She is ashamed of her past life and is unable to separate herself from the shame of living a life of a prostitute. In an answer to the question on the possibility of reuniting with her children she states, I don’t know…I don’t know if I can face them.” Dr. Re Cruz explains this guilt by stating, "When they cross the border, they not only literally cross it…metaphorically they cross a lot of social, economic, and ideological boundaries." Immigration attorney, Meghan Abigail, adds, "A lot of them don’t have an option to go back either because a lot of them were tricked into coming here under the pretences of a great job offer…back home they don’t want to reveal to the parents that they are here actually working as a prostitute and in debt." Dr. Needleman describes this feeling of impurity as self-loathing, which makes trafficking victims vulnerable to marginalization.

The documentary runs on two interweaving channels. One is assigned to a true account of a victim of human trafficking, and another to the people who are passionately involved in the fight against this modern day enslavement and abuse of similarly situated people for prostitution or any other kind of sex work.

My usage of the word *enslavement* as opposed to *slavery* (as used by a documentary character) is intentional. Slavery is like a stigma tattooed on one's forehead by birth, just by
virtue of being born at a certain time, place and/or to a certain class of people, like *shudras*,
lowest of four castes in Hindu religion in India. As per Hinduism, a person is born into slavery if
he is born in a *shudra* family. This belief is another battle to fight. In the present context, we are
dealing with the issue of persons forced into slavery. Enslavement reflects one time “non-slave”
status of a human being after being born until enslaved by someone. The word enslavement
reflects an evil act that seems missing in the commonly used word “slavery.” Randolf Harris, a
correspondent with *Lancaster Online* discusses the change of rhetoric in the contemporary
scholarship. He states,

> Terminology can enlighten understanding, but it also can block awareness and shade
> sympathies… The millions of people of African descent brought into the British colonies
> of North America and, later, the United States were enslaved as opposed to being slaves.
> Use of this term calls attention to the person’s forced condition rather than permanently
> branding him or her with a negative connotation not of his or her choosing. (Harris, 2011)

I am deeply concerned with the casual use of the word, “slavery” that unintentionally conceals
the act of enslaving, especially if it’s used without a context or explanation. In *A Silent Cry*, at
least one character has used the term slavery; however, not without the context. Kate Williams,
forcefully opposes the term “human trafficking” by replacing it with “slavery.” Then she goes on
to explain the various ways and types of social actors that can be involved in the enslavement of
innocent and vulnerable human beings. She states,

> I hate the phrase human trafficking…it’s actually slavery. It doesn’t have anything to do
> with movement…you can be trafficked in your own home, you can be born to your
> traffickers, traffickers could be your parents, your siblings, they could be your spouse,
> who knows who they are…but if someone is selling your services for their own good and
> they are using force, fraud or coercion or if you are child they didn’t even have to have
> used force, fraud or coercion…a child under the age of fourteen, if they are engaging in
> prostitution, that is sex trafficking.

Her complete statement within the given context shows her absolute understanding of the
act of forcing a fellow human being into enslavement. Her innocent and emotional use of the
term slavery is balanced by the explanation that follows, and hence complements the objective of the documentary, *A Silent Cry*.

Slavery symbolizes ownership, which has a possibility of having a definite ending. The slave, in most situations, is fully conscious of his/her condition and has a will to fight it, however enslavement is an act of control, which does not free the enslaved even when they are set free. Dr. Wanda Needleman through her behaviour analyst’s lens equates the state of slavery with “soul murder.” She borrows this term from Leonard Shengold’s book *Soul Murder Revisited* (Shengold, 2000) in which Dr. Shengold discusses wilful neglect and abuse of children and the consequences of such abuse. In the film, *A Silent Cry*, Dr. Needleman states,

> They (victims) have been soul murdered. Soul murder is the complete extinguishing of life by the perpetrator in the victim. So, the victim no longer has psychological life of their own. The only thing that exists for them is the perpetrator. So, they go out in the world, they are in a terrifying abyss because they don’t have themselves anymore. They only have the perpetrator.

Without understanding this psychological deterioration of the victim that renders her/him completely helpless and muted, it becomes overtly difficult for a rescuer to help the victim. Kate Williams laments that it is very difficult to prosecute these cases because victims at one point of time always have a chance to physically escape, which they seem to let pass. The above mentioned statement of Dr. Needleman describes this lack of action as victims’ inability to do so.

As explained by Dr. Needleman, enslaved people lose their capacity to speak up against the abuse. In some cases, they even lose their capacity to recognize the abuse and start rationalizing with it. Hence, there is a necessity to train the agencies to recognize the silent signals omitted by these victims. In Swartz's (2011) news story, Dottie, the ardent social worker and an activist against human trafficking in the Houston area, gets infuriated by the police force’s argument of not being able to find trafficking victims. Dottie claims,
“I see them everywhere—in restaurants, discount stores, factories, and of course massage parlors and spas...they have a look of hopelessness about them and sometimes have scars and bruises from their beatings. They tend to be frightened of police and never seem to know where they are geographically. They have trouble with time. Often they seem incapable of speaking for themselves. They rarely have identification. First nobody believed it was happening...then we got one hundred cases and it was like, whoa, this is really messy." Dottie believes that it shouldn’t be up to the victims to save themselves, because a lot of times they blame themselves for what has happened to them. (Swartz, 2010)

As discussed earlier, in an economic model of international trafficking presented by Wheaton et al. (2010), it is described how criminal justice experts and sociologists believe the push and pull factors make populations vulnerable to labour market exploitation and, possibly, human trafficking. For example Ejalu (2006, pp. 171-173) suggests poverty, lack of education, urbanization and centralization of educational and employment opportunities, cultural thinking and attitude, traditional practices, domestic violence, corruption, conflicts, and difficulty in acquiring visas as causes of human trafficking (Wheaton et al., 2010, p. 8). Cameron and Newman (2008) describe this phenomenon under two categories: structural and proximate. Structural factors include issues of economic deprivation and market downturns, the effects of globalization, attitudes to gender, the demand for prostitutes and situations of conflict. Proximate factors include lax national and international legal regimes, poor law enforcement, corruption, organized criminal entrepreneurship and weak education campaigns. The overarching argument is that the interaction between structural factors or variables and proximate factors is key to understanding why some individuals are vulnerable to trafficking through the use of deception and coercion. It is this conjunction of factors that helps to explain where and why vulnerability occurs (Cameron and Newman, 2008).

This argument opens up the discussion on the effect of globalization in facilitating cross border trade. It is recognized that globalization has paved a way for free trade across borders
generating unusual demand for labor. However, governments are failing to loosen up their borders for the free flow of labor to meet the demands of the global trading environment. This imbalance between "demand and supply" restricts legal migration of labor required to fill the demand created by a globalized market. The difficulty of migrating independently ensures a ready pool of recruits in the countries of origin, and the lack of protections for undocumented migrants facilitates traffickers’ exploitation of victims in destination countries (Cameron and Newman, 2008).

*A Silent Cry* attempts to symbolize the globalization of the phenomena of human trafficking, especially for the purpose of sexual enslavement. The ordeal of the protagonist starts in her own homeland with a promise of a well paying legitimate job and expands over to a never-ending misery in America. Swartz (2011) in the original news story states that once the victim was brought in United States, she became an integral part of an organized Asian crime ring that was run more efficiently than many global corporations. In the documentary, the victim points towards the global nature of this crime. She mentions that in case of her return to her home country, she would be killed by the same people who trapped her. She now knew them and their reality very well, and could expose their true face to the public. Obviously it was bad for the business that was being operated across the international borders. Andrea Bertone presents this business as three types of networks responsible for trafficking in women: large-scale networks with political and financial contacts that enable them to establish links between countries of origin and destination countries; medium-sized networks that concentrate on trafficking in women from one country only; and small networks that place one or two women at a time as required (Bertone, 2000). Similarly, Finckenaur differentiates organized crime from criminal activity more precisely. He defines organized crime as an organization that is stable and that is
involved in various criminal activities as opposed to criminal activity that could entail a good organization but lasts only for the duration of a planned criminal act (Salt and Hogarth, 2000).

Given the gravity of this undoubtedly well organized crime of human trafficking coupled with its camouflaged nature, it is almost impossible to fight it without bringing awareness in the communities at grass root level. It would mean bringing awareness at the places where crime originates and also the host society where the victims are transported for sex work as enslaved. An informed community can not only help spotting and preventing this kind of organized and camouflaged crime from happening but also counter it in various ways.

A Silent Cry operates on two separate tracks. On track represents facts (interviews of real people) and other emotions (constructed story of victim). They are intersectional, supporting and help interpret one another.

The channel assigned to the victim/survivor is a visual reconstruction of a news story titled as “The Lost Girls” reported by Mimi Swartz in 2010. The decision of using the “found data” embedded in this news story did come easy to me. I did not personally interview the victim, yet I had a goldmine of information on the victim’s experience gathered by a responsible and passionate journalist. The news story as Swartz’s expression of victim’s experience created a cultural context of trafficking victims in Texas. I was faced with the question of the anthropological-ness of the journalist's expression of the victim's experience in a news story, which was to form the basis of my ethno-fiction. My dilemma was overcome by Turner’s and Bruner’s collaborative work titled as Anthropology of Experience. While quoting Dilthey, Bruner states that "reality only exists for us in the facts and consciousness given by inner experience… experience is not just the diluted juice of reason but also feelings and expectations, and we transcend that narrow sphere of experience by interpreting expressions." He distinguishes the
experience as an inner process from behavior, that is external and exemplifies expressions as representations, performances, objectifications, or texts, including theater, narratives, hunting stories, revitalization movements, curing rites, murals, parades, carnivals, Thoreau’s *Walden*, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, and Helen Cordero’s pottery (Turner, 1986). Supported by the argument, I felt confident in using the printed text of the news story and convert it into visual text.

The form of *A Silent Cry* emerges naturally from the objective, purpose, level of access, proposed duration, target audiences, and most importantly resources available for the production of the documentary. In this case, ethnographic documentary seemed to be the best suited form. *A Silent Cry* not just the product of the collective experience of the participants of the documentary and other who are involved in the phenomena, but it is also reflective of my experience. Karl Heider (1976) explains that how the term ethnographic film embodies an inherent tension or conflict between two ways of seeing and understanding, two strategies for bringing order to (or imposing order on) experience: the scientific and aesthetic. He defines ethnographic film as a film that reflects *ethnographic understanding*, gained by observing and by asking questions (Heider, 1976, pp. 8-9).

In the context of this particular project, I gained my ethnographic understanding through ethnographic interviews, on camera and phone, archival research and participant observation discussed earlier in the methods section.
CHAPTER 8
PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

I have been involved in theater and films as an observer and actor on sets and locations since childhood and as a maker of media, especially socio-political media, since the year 1998. Every project has enriched me with more information and ways of working in this field than I originally started with. In India, I viewed myself as a visual storyteller who strove to create a dialogue between diverse layers of Indian society through cinema. However my circumstances took a sudden turn and I got uprooted from my land of origin to migrate to the United States. Here, I am allowing myself to acclimate and assimilate in a considerably alien environment to be part of an essentially hybrid culture. In this whole process of uprooting and re-rooting, I am experiencing a process of learning a newer way of life, fighting the beliefs and values that conflict with my own and also learning to compromise on some of the values I was never acquainted with. This process has also positioned me as a participant observer of not only of my own resettlement experience but also of others around me who have reached this land from different parts of the world.

I believe that most of the resettlement journeys are very silent, chaotic, isolating and painful—some more than the others. This realization has shifted my perspective on the filmmaker inside me. Now, I see myself more than just a storyteller. I believe that I am transforming into a culture broker, not only creating dialogue between the different colors of the United States of America but also facilitating an exchange of experiences at a global level through the media both fiction and non-fiction. This realization drew me to the idea of being trained as a visual anthropologist. _A Silent Cry_ is my first conscious step towards my journey as an anthropological filmmaker. This is a very special project for me, because this film marks the
new beginning in my life as a visual anthropologist. I consider this a step ahead in my journey as a media producer.

The Process of Identifying the Theme

Initially, I did not set out to produce a documentary exclusively on the issue of trafficking. I intended to make a documentary on abuse of women including domestic abuse and human trafficking of women hidden in the process of diaspora. However, for many technical, thematic, aesthetic and access related constraints, I had to narrow down on only one form of abuse that allowed me to open up a dialogue on social, economic, cultural and psychological reasons that induced silence on the issue of abuse embedded in immigration process.

After having few initial meetings with Starnes, Executive Director of Opening Doors International Services (ODIS), it became clear to me that a common reason for victims of almost all forms of abuse to remain silent was the fear of deportation and the psychological, economic and social implications that were believed to follow the exposure of abuse in their own communities. Hence, the focus of the film was the silence of victims and witnesses of abuse embedded in immigration and not necessarily any particular kind of abuse as much as the fear instilled in the victim.

The film was expected to generate an emotional reaction; hence, I used my participants as my scale to measure the reaction to different forms of abuse. I noticed that out of all forms of abuse discussed with the interviewees, human trafficking seemed to invoke extreme emotion even amongst the ODIS members. In a pre-interview with Jack Thomson, a board member of ODIS, He stated that he was shocked when Kate Starnes, a case manager in ODIS, gave a presentation in his church regarding human trafficking in North Texas. He and a majority of his
fellow church members could not believe that North Texas was emerging as a major hub for human trafficking. They believed that human trafficking did not occur in the United States of America. Similarly, Sue Thomson found it very hard even to mention trafficking of women for sex.

Lee Howell, Denton Police Chief, stated that human trafficking was still considered to be victimless crime. He stated that due to lack of training and awareness about the issue, the victims of human trafficking are misperceived as criminals, either as undocumented aliens or as prostitutes or both. Apart from being emotionally engaging, it also seemed to be a most hidden and camouflaged form of crime. In order to fight against this crime against humanity, ODIS has joined hands with the North Texas Coalition Against Human Trafficking (NTCAHT), run by Mosaic Family Services. NTCAHT, is a group of social service providers, law enforcement officers, faith leaders, and other North Texans committed to collaborating to identify, rescue, and serve trafficked persons, and successfully prosecute their traffickers. ODIS strives to present the community with some information on human trafficking in order to create empathy for victims/survivors and mobilize the community to work against human trafficking in the North Texas region through the specialized comprehensive social, medical, legal services, and advocacy that ODIS has to offer.

My first choice for the project was to reconstruct a case handled by ODIS. I was drawn toward the story of incest of a teenager. The story was not published and moreover my ethics wouldn’t allow me to reconstruct it without the permission of the victim. I had to have a consent form from her. For some reason, we felt that the victim was not comfortable with even having a meeting, so we decided to drop the idea of using her story. Now we were left with the stories of emotional abuse and human trafficking. Both were available to us. In the case of emotional abuse
In case, the victim was ready to give consent and in the case of human trafficking, it was already published and hence was in public domain. The story of emotional abuse seemed difficult to visualize through the medium of film, I wasn't inclined towards using this story. I decided to test the news story on sex trafficking reported by Mimi Swartz. Since this story had already been published in *Texas Monthly*, a news magazine, it was in public domain. This allowed me to share this story with my friends and family just to measure their reaction. As in the case of the ODIS member, the reaction coming from other reader to the story of human trafficking was extreme. It was generating more questions than the story of emotional abuse. Considering the reaction it was generating amongst the readers, I deviated toward this story to study its various aspects. After I started peeling its layers, it showed almost all the layers of any immigration related abuse. In other words the reasons that explained the prolonged silence of this victim could be applied on victims of any other immigration related crime. The universality of reasons to remain silent drew me to this story. Following is the partial list of features that made this story seem more universal than others:

- The desire to migrate originated from the economic necessity
- It involved undocumented migration, an extensive, yet dispersed human trafficking network
- There was a promise of protection from deportation (a disguised threat of deportation).
- The victim was undocumented (reason to hide)
- The victim did not know the laws of host country and considered herself a criminal (another reason to remain hidden)
- The victim did not know the language spoken by the majority of people in the host country
- The victims did not know that there was help out there
• The victim was emotionally distressed due to the sense of being trapped coupled with
disgust and shame
• The victim truly believed that prostitution was her fate and she could not get out of it
• Victim was in an abusive cycle and had lost the sense of being in it
• Cultural and social conditions in her home country barred her return to her family
• The victim had consciously embraced silence to protect herself from being punished
and deported where she believed death and ridicule awaited her

Undoubtedly the case of the victim is reflected in the dilemma of thousands of victims of abusive
situations (including domestic abuse and incest) that gets translated into a deadly silence and
remains hidden.

After deciding to use the story of Kiki (a fictitious name given to victim by the
journalist), I had a telephone conversation with the journalist who authored the story and
received permission to use it for re-enactment in the documentary. I want to specially comment
on the quality and ethnographic-ness of this news story. It was undoubtedly brilliant and very
descriptive. After giving each set of facts, the journalist made an effort of putting her readers in
the victims’ shoes, a technique that was definitely engaging and helped me reconstruct the story.
Later on it also helped the actor to prepare the character for re-enactment.

I also made a conscious choice of re-enacting the story as an interview with the victim
rather than reproducing the incidents revealed in the story. It helped me retain the interactive
color of the documentary and also reveal the character of the victim in a very close proximity
of the audiences, almost in the face kind of situation. The victim had nothing to show, but
everything to tell. The documentary makes us feel what the victim felt not what she saw. The
emphasis is on her emotions not on the voyeuristic view of her life as a prostitute. Everything
that followed after she took the decision of migrating to United States happened under the table
and behind the closed doors. She doesn’t want to give us a complete and transparent access to
those places but she wants us to know how she felt. In this documentary spoken words were important. I attempted to reduce the visual noise surrounding the participants, while creating the contrast between the victim of abuse (the actor) and other social actors (the real people). I wanted the film to whisper to its audiences a clear message: listen carefully. Camera angles, the natural background (as opposed to black background of all non-victims participants) and extreme close ups of all participants were part of a well thought out production design.

It is my attempt that *A Silent Cry* has a long afterlife so that more people gather the courage to speak up against the abuse knowing that they are not the only ones stuck in an abusive situation and that there is help available. The only requirement is their bold and loud cry for help. Based on the data collected through pre-interviews, archival material, training sessions with ODIS, and my participation in anti trafficking coalition meeting organized by Mosaic Family Services in Dallas, I naturally drifted in the direction of human trafficking of women for sex slavery as the narrative force of the documentary. Although the narrative is constructed around a case study of a trafficked woman enslaved for sexual work in United States of America yet, being extreme in nature, this compelling story identifies legal, cultural, and emotional barriers that prevent victims of all kinds of immigration related abuse to speak up and seek help.

From the discussion above it is apparent, that I am in a liminal state as a person, as a media professional and as a student. However, while producing this documentary, I also felt marginalized at times by association with the subject of sex slavery. Going through the process of producing this documentary, I entered the status of liminality along with the protagonist of my film. It’s a positive progression. I hope to remain in this transitional state for a longer duration, as it feeds my creativity as a media producer and as a visual anthropologist.
REFERENCES


