



5-1-2015

# Review, Other Dreams of Freedom: Religion, Sex, and Human Trafficking, by Yvonne C. Zimmerman

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## Recommended Citation

Beloso, Brooke M., "Review, Other Dreams of Freedom: Religion, Sex, and Human Trafficking, by Yvonne C. Zimmerman" *The Journal of American Studies* 49/2 (2015): 454-456.

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Yvonne C. Zimmerman, *Other Dreams of Freedom: Religion, Sex, and Human Trafficking* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013, \$35.00). Pp. 214. isbn 978 0 1999 4219 0.

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Yvonne C. Zimmerman's *Other Dreams of Freedom: Religion, Sex, and Human Trafficking* occupies the conceptual space cleared by Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini's 2003 book *Love the Sin: Sexual Regulation and the Limits of Religious Tolerance*, and Elizabeth Bernstein and Janet R. Jakobsen's 2010 essay "Sex, Secularism and Religious Influence in US Politics." In this conceptual space, one understands that – especially when it comes to sex – there really is no separation of Church and state in the contemporary American political sphere. Therein Zimmerman artfully details the way in which the interpenetration of Church and state gave rise to and perpetuates the thoroughgoing conflation of trafficking and sex work (among other "immoral" sexual behaviors) at work in federal policy and initiatives on trafficking today. From a bird's-eye theological perspective, *Other Dreams of Freedom* connects the dots between and among the relationships that sex-worker-rights activist Anna-Louise Crago characterized in 2003 as an "unholy alliance" of feminists and the Christian right united in their efforts to end not only sex trafficking but also sex work, via US domestic and foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

Zimmerman's unique contribution to the lively and ongoing (albeit sparsely populated) critique of this unholy alliance is to trace its specifically Protestant genealogy. In contradistinction to a Catholic dream of freedom for trafficked persons, which might look equally askance at both sex within monogamous, heterosexual marriage and sex within the sex industries (understanding monastic celibacy to trump both), or a Buddhist dream of freedom, which might regard sex work undertaken for the purpose of supporting one's family as an exemplum of merit making, Zimmerman argues that a Protestant dream of freedom for trafficked persons categorically precludes the possibility of sex work. For the Protestant, freedom should and must be exercised within monogamous, heterosexual marriage. Moreover, both the Bush and the Obama administrations have failed to promulgate religious pluralism (not to mention the widely touted yet nowhere-to-be-found American bedrock, the separation of Church and state) in their adherence to this particular, and particularly Protestant, dream of freedom. Freedom for trafficked persons under the purview of the American federal government is synonymous with life, liberty, and the pursuit of monogamous, heterosexual marriage – the one and only route through which Protestantism deems that individuals can exercise their "God-given potential" (a phrase that has peppered the Obama administration's official trafficking policy).

Patricia Williams suggests in her 2001 essay "Begging to Disagree" that religion, from the Latin *religare* ("to bind together"), is an ideological apparatus whereby followers bind together cause and effect.<sup>2</sup> In this vein, Zimmerman offers readers a new way to perceive hegemonic beliefs about the cause and effect of trafficking as but one belief system among many possible belief systems, wherein separation from the Protestant God's plan for human freedom as exercised in marriage is not only the worrisome *cause* of trafficking but also a worrisome *effect* of trafficking.

This reader (admittedly enamored of neither celibacy nor merit) came away from Zimmerman's book longing for the elaboration of dreams of freedom for trafficked persons – and all persons, for that matter – other than those on offer from orthodox Catholicism and Buddhism. In a certain sense, *Other Dreams of Freedom* is a misnomer, in that the book is in sum an exhortation to awaken from our collective,

Protestant dream of freedom, rather than a sampler or compendium of other dreams we might dream instead. I especially wanted Zimmerman to think outside the box of religion as orthodox dogma: what might liberation theology have to say about the Protestant dream of freedom for trafficked persons? What might a radical Marxist have to say about capitalism-as-religion's (to borrow from Walter Benjamin) dream of freedom for trafficked persons? What might a dream of freedom that pushed back on both Protestantism's and capitalism's narrowly circumscribed visions of sexuality as a means to an end for spiritual and material liberation look like?

With any luck and broad readership of this readily accessible text, more will realize with Zimmerman that the only dreams of so-called "freedom" on offer from the US government issue directly from the holy writ of Martin Luther and Max Weber. So doing, we might dream of a freedom before and beyond orthodox hierarchies of morality, merit, and even class – perhaps a dream predicated upon an ideology of sex as a means to the revolutionary end of "shiftlessness" and "radical insolvency," manifested in recent articulations from (respectively) Mindy Chateauvert and Heather Berg.<sup>3</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Anna-Louise Crago, "Unholy Alliance," *AlterNet*, 21 May 2003, at [www.alternet.org/rights/15947](http://www.alternet.org/rights/15947).

<sup>2</sup> Patricia Williams, "Begging to Disagree," *The Nation*, 20 Dec. 2001, at [www.thenation.com/article/begging-disagree](http://www.thenation.com/article/begging-disagree).

<sup>3</sup> Mindy Chateauvert, "Prefatory Remarks," Debt Trafficking: Sex Work, Deficit, and Radical Insolvency panel, American Studies Association 2014 Conference, and Heather Berg, "An Honest Day's Wage for a Dishonest Day's Work: (Re)productivism and Refusal," *WSQ*, 42, 1–2 (forthcoming).