

The Naked Anthropologist

Dr Laura Agustin on Migration, Trafficking and the Rescue Industry

Wannabe Special Agents act out fantasies about sex slaves

20 August 2012 in [trafficking](#) by [laura agustin](#) | [6 comments](#) | [print](#)

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(<http://www.lauraagustin.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Rescued-women-1.jpg>) A National Geographic television special called [21st Century Sex Slaves](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4zjs07h0z4) (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4zjs07h0z4>) employs the melodramatic voiceover common to all trite police documentaries, but it goes further. The ever-evolving Rescue Industry now has a large media branch, where camera crews film undercover operations and men act out hero fantasies (women get subordinate roles, usually as faceless victims).

The wannabe Special Agent in this story is Steve Galster, head of something called [Freeland Foundation](http://freeland.org/eng/about-freeland/mission) (<http://freeland.org/eng/about-freeland/mission>), which bizarrely seems to have been dedicated to preventing *wildlife trafficking* before jumping on the human gravytrain. I wonder if they found it an easy mental shift from pangolins to young women; the rhetoric is the same:

Freeland is dedicated to *making the world free of human slavery and wildlife trafficking* by increasing law enforcement capacity, supporting vulnerable communities and raising awareness.

Law enforcement is a Man's game, right? So these men otherwise associated with saving animals and running NGOs now have an excuse not only to hobnob with real cops but also to play cops themselves. The camera spends a lot of time on Galster, whose features recall pretty-man Special Agents Gibbs and DiNozzo in *NCIS*, but Galster is a weak, non-charismatic character. National Geographic has taken television shows like *NCIS* as inspiration in all sorts of ways – but the excitement is conspicuously absent.

Notice the technique: the camera records crowded streets where lots of young women mill about. The narration mentions that many have gone into sex work on their own, but as the camera pans past, the voiceover talks about willing and unwilling women in the same breath, implying that everyone you see is a potential slave.



(<http://www.lauraagustin.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/maybepattaya.jpg>) In this attempt at a thriller the Bad Guys are *Uzbeks*, in just the same way that *Law & Order* often singles out an ethnic group's misbehaviour: Russians in Brighton Beach is a popular one. Here a Thai police chief laments how his country is being abused by foreigners (the trafficking Uzbeks). But it's wildlife-saviour Galster who gets the main role, despite his inability to convey drama. The whole thing is, like the [BBC series on Mexican sex slaves](#)



(<http://www.lauraagustin.com/slick-misleading-infotainment-on-sex-trafficking-from-the-bbc-no-ones-immune-then>), *infotainment*, a misleading blend of facts, factoids and fantasies.

Unsurprisingly, Pattaya is one of the locations chosen for this cliché-ridden show, where one place offers *Only European Girls*. I doubt they pick up any of the irony.

-Laura Agustín, *the Naked Anthropologist*

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Andrew hunter on [21 August 2012 at 05:52](#)

Those white girls do great pole dancing!

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Maxine Dooqan on [21 August 2012 at 07:40](#)

pretty-man Special Agents Gibbs ...lol

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Sheldon Ranz on [21 August 2012 at 14:10](#)

Gibbs would not approve of his work being misused in this manner. At the very least, he would give Galster a slap on the back of his head.

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Glad to see everyone has a good sense of humour here!

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