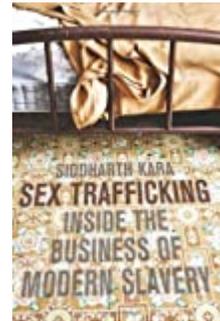




**Siddharth Kara.** *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2009. xviii + 298 pp. \$24.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-231-13960-1; \$16.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-231-13961-8.



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**Published on** H-Human-Rights (April, 2010)

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## A Slave by Any Other Name

This is a provocative book filled with vivid details of modern (particularly sex) slavery. The author, Siddharth Kara, is deeply and rightly concerned with the sexual exploitation of women and girls worldwide and makes a strong case for abolition. Kara does not mince words in his condemnation of sex trafficking and his depictions of the "slaves" he encountered. He was obviously profoundly affected by what he saw and who he talked to, and he wants to convey the sights and sounds of human depravity to his audience. This he does with mixed results since the constant framing (and naming) of sex workers as slaves, though understandable in many contexts, confuses the issues of prostitution and actual sex trafficking.

Similar to Victor Malarek's *The Natashas: Inside the New Global Sex Trade* (2004), though not quite as salacious in its details, *Sex Trafficking* is about the global sex trade, with each chapter devoted to the stories of the women and girls who are trafficked, voluntarily and involuntarily, to other parts of the globe. Kara begins with a call to action for groups, governments, and individu-

als to "dismantle the business of sex trafficking" and is upfront that his account will not be objective and emotionless (p. xv). He is open that he was shocked and disgusted by what he saw, and he describes his revulsion many times throughout the book. This both adds to his account (in its honesty) and detracts from it, as he comes across as somewhat naive and uninformed.

What is unique about Kara's book is his attention to the "business" aspects of the sex trade and his recognition that money is the driving force for everyone involved from pimps to prostitutes, traffickers, and governments. His central argument, in fact, is that the "enormity and pervasiveness of sex trafficking is a direct result of the immense profits to be derived from selling inexpensive sex around the world" (pp. 3-4). He is strongest when he describes the economics of prostitution and shows how many players benefit from the sexual exploitation of women and girls. On the supply side, he argues that the main factors for the increased numbers of sex slaves have to do with economic globalization, the fall of the Berlin Wall, policies of the International Monetary

Fund, and gender and caste discrimination. On the demand side, he claims that male sexual demand, increased profit, and the elasticity of demand are to blame because of the decreasing cost of sex. "The cheaper the cost of sex, the more men who could afford it, or afford it more often" (p. 34). His main solution is to make buying sex so expensive and risky that it erodes profitability.

The middle chapters are descriptions of the geographical regions he visited and the stories of people he met in India, Nepal, Italy, Western Europe, Moldova, the former Soviet Union, Albania, the Balkans, Thailand and the Mekong subregion, and finally the United States. He interacted with many slaves, not all of whom were sex slaves, but also child laborers, beggars, and construction, agricultural, and domestic workers. These are horrific stories of abduction, coercion, fraud, and violence, and they speak to people's desperation for a better life. He notes the collusion and corruption that goes on at many a border crossing and shows how many government officials, including police, prosecutors, and border guards are complicit in the trafficking of persons. As he argues, there must be the political will to fight against this corruption and make people understand that the trafficking in persons is just as (if not more) harmful than drug and arms trafficking.

My main criticisms of the book have to do with the author's lack of attention to migration versus forced trafficking issues. In some cases, the women clearly knew

what they were doing and it was for immigration reasons that they were voluntarily trafficked. My other problem was with his account of organ harvesting, which he mentions in the middle of the book with no real evidence. In this section, he insinuates that children are being killed for their organs, which if true is of course horrific, but with no evidence it seems quite out of place except for its shock value. "There is no crime more disgraceful than murdering innocent children, profiting from the removal of their hearts, livers, kidneys, and eyes, and tossing out the remains like refuse" (p. 149). Well, yes, he is correct in this assessment. This is so dreadful that it makes what comes before seem somewhat innocuous and in doing so takes away from his outrage against other forms of slavery. Obviously, more research needs to be done on the existence of organ harvesting, immediately.

That being said, this is an important and necessary work and it will educate many people about sex trafficking around the globe. The author has many solutions for the problems covered (which is refreshing) and these solutions revolve around inverting the risk-reward of the economic determinants, educating men, and raising the costs of doing business. I like that he comes up with a seven point mission for eradicating sex trafficking and that he acknowledges the apathy that can happen when we think a problem is so overwhelming that it is hopeless. He directly addresses what one person can do to make a difference and those four solutions alone are worth the price of the book.

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**Citation:** Meredith Ralston. Review of Kara, Siddharth, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. H-Human-Rights, H-Net Reviews. April, 2010.

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