



What Is Human Trafficking? A Review Essay

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What Is Human Trafficking? A Review Essay

Human trafficking is a major international policy concern of the twenty-first century. Although human trafficking is often confused with human smuggling and migration, given that these practices also involve the movement of persons, there are important differences between them. The United Nations “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime” (otherwise known as the Palermo Protocol) defines “trafficking in persons” as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.”¹ In short, the defining traits of trafficking are, first, the transportation of a person; second, force, fraud, or coercion; and, finally, exploitation. By this definition, the consent of a person is irrelevant. In contrast, the United Nations Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air accounts for consent in its definition of human smuggling. The body has clarified that the “smuggling of migrants” is “the procurement . . . of the illegal entry of a person into a State Party of which the person is not a national or a permanent resident.”² Simply put, the legal violation under human smuggling pertains to the illicit crossing of nation-

¹ United Nations, “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,” article 3(a), 2000, http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_%20traff_eng.pdf.

² United Nations, “Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea, and Air, Supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime,” article 3(a), 2000, http://www.uncjin.org/Documents/Conventions/dcatoc/final_documents_2/convention_smug_eng.pdf.

state borders, and it is assumed that individuals do this consensually. As such, a smuggled person would fall under the broader category of “migrant,” as migration generally refers to the voluntary movement of individuals. Yet, like human trafficking, migration does not necessarily involve the crossing of national borders, as smuggling does.

Even with these clarifications, the UN definition of human trafficking remains quite broad. The extensiveness of this definition has provided ample room for competing definitions of human trafficking. In the introduction to her edited collection, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* (Kempadoo 2005b), Kamala Kempadoo bewails our current state of knowledge, as she finds that there is “little consensus or agreement among researchers, policy makers, and activists about the scope of the problem; and scant evidence or substantiation about trafficking practices” (Kempadoo 2005a, vii). The broadness of the definition of “exploitation” in the Palermo Protocol, as well as its emphasis on “sexual exploitation,” partially accounts for this confusion. The protocol defines “exploitation” as including “the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”³ Many antitrafficking pundits, including those discussed in this essay, reduce their definition of human trafficking to its exploitative component, ignoring the fact that trafficking by definition must also include the transportation of a person, as well as deception or coercion. Siddharth Kara (2009), for example, equates prostitution with sex trafficking, while Kevin Bales (2007) considers human trafficking part of the larger problem of modern-day slavery.

Adding to the confusion over what constitutes trafficking is the absence of reliable data. As the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, which is responsible for monitoring trafficking for the United Nations, explains, “It is very difficult to assess the real size of human trafficking because the crime takes place underground, and is often not identified or misidentified.”⁴ This has created a troubling dilemma for various antitrafficking organizations, including those led by Bales and Kara.⁵ The supposed inaccessibility of trafficked victims is often used to justify unsubstantiated claims of trafficking and the development of solutions that are not based on the experiences of trafficked persons. However, the difficulty of re-

³ United Nations, “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking,” article 3(a).

⁴ UN Office on Drugs and Crime, “Human Trafficking FAQs,” <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/faqs.html>.

⁵ Both Bales and Kara are board members of Free the Slaves.

searching hidden populations does not make studies on trafficked persons unfeasible. While it might prevent the completion of large-scale quantitative surveys, it does not preclude the design of methodologically sound qualitative studies. Indeed, the challenges in doing this research have not deterred anthropologists and sociologists from accurately studying trafficked persons. A few ethnographers have successfully gained access to specific groups that have been identified as trafficked persons in the US Department of State's (2011) "Trafficking in Persons Report."⁶ These researchers worked with community organizations servicing low-wage migrant populations or worked alongside laborers to gain their trust.

In the effort to identify productive avenues for future research, this essay evaluates recent publications on human trafficking, which can be grouped thematically into three lines of inquiry: the examination of the law and its function in the effort to end human trafficking (see Scarpa 2008; Doezema 2010; Limoncelli 2010), the documentation of the extent of human trafficking in the contemporary period (see Bales 2007; Bales and Trodd 2008; Kara 2009), and the reframing of human trafficking as a labor concern (see Kempadoo 2005b). The body of literature on human trafficking is fragmented, and there is minimal conversation among authors. Much of the disjuncture can be traced to differences in intellectual projects, beginning with conflicting approaches to the study of human trafficking.

The priority of Silvia Scarpa, Stephanie A. Limoncelli, and Jo Doezema, the first group of authors under review, is to understand the role that the law and international protocols play in ending human trafficking. The scope of Scarpa's discussion is much broader than those of the others, as she examines legal directives on labor exploitation. In contrast, both Doezema and Limoncelli have a more narrow focus, examining legislation, protocols, and resolutions as they pertain to sex trafficking. The authors also differ in their views when it comes to consent. In their evaluation of the law, both Scarpa and Limoncelli neglect the difference between voluntary and involuntary labor. In so doing, they conflate trafficking and prostitution. Scarpa, for instance, refers to prostitution throughout her book as "commercial sexual exploitation" (2008, 9). In contrast, Doezema recognizes the voluntary labor of sex workers but at the same time attends to how a focus on consent diverts our attention from the political rights

⁶ See, e.g., Denise Brennan's (2008) ongoing interview-based study of trafficking survivors, Rhacel Salazar Parreñas's (2011) ethnography of Filipina hostesses in Japan, and Rutvica Andrijasevic's (2010) interview-based study of migrant sex workers in Italy.

of sex workers and perpetuates the conflation of trafficking and prostitution in both the law and popular discourse (2010, 168).

In *Trafficking in Human Beings* (2008), Scarpa provides an intricate reading of legal directives on human trafficking. She analyzes the law on multiple levels, examining the protocols, conventions, and directives of extraterritorial bodies including the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the Council of Europe, and the European Union, as well as the national legislation of various countries. This book is best described as a legal manual on human trafficking, offering not so much the social context that gives rise to trafficking legislation but a how-to on the prosecution of traffickers.

Scarpa's objective is to evaluate whether existing laws provide adequate punishment for the crime of human trafficking. She reads the Palermo Protocol as, above all, a "criminal law instrument primarily designed to punish human traffickers" (Scarpa 2008, 63). Focusing on Europe, Scarpa interrogates the legislative actions set forth by the European Union and the Council of Europe to meet the directives of the Palermo Protocol. Her analysis identifies a symbiotic relationship between extraterritorial and intergovernmental bodies, with regional legislative regimes closing loopholes in UN treaties. One of the most significant loopholes Scarpa identifies in the Palermo Protocol is that it limits the crime of human trafficking to actions committed by organized criminal networks, leaving member states responsible for creating laws that would hold an individual trafficker accountable. She commends the Council of Europe for addressing this loophole by making the act of trafficking itself, regardless of the identity of the trafficker, a sufficient basis for prosecution (148). She also notes that other forms of exploitation in the council's definition, namely, trafficking for the purpose of organ harvesting, have been deemphasized in favor of a focus on human trafficking as a problem of women's and children's vulnerability to labor exploitation. In her discussion, Scarpa takes the council's position—that labor exploitation is a contemporary form of slavery—and supports its ultimate goal of ending slavery (143).

This slippage between labor and exploitation poses both an intellectual and a moral dilemma. By not probing further into the implications of counting labor exploitation as a form of slavery, Scarpa equates all forms of unfree labor. For Scarpa, an exploitative relationship of peonage could be equated with slavery. Doing this does not necessarily address the needs of those vulnerable to human trafficking. It also does not advance knowledge on the subjugation of trafficked victims, failing, for instance, to explain the difference between labor exploitation, which could merely refer

to the below-market-value payment of a worker, and slavery, which refers to a property relationship between the slave (the worker) and the master (the employer). By dismissing the gradations of exploitation of victims, Scarpa can comfortably call not just for the elimination of slavery but also for the eradication of jobs that render one vulnerable to slavery. Following her recommendation would mean abolishing all forms of contract labor, including guest-worker programs throughout Asia, Europe, and the United States, thereby harming the labor prospects of workers with already limited options.

While Scarpa reduces human trafficking to slavery, Doezema (2010) attempts to explain why human trafficking is often confused with what was historically known as white slavery. In *Sex Slaves and Discourse Masters*, the scholar and sex-worker advocate deconstructs the ideology behind antitrafficking protocols, paying attention to how power shapes the language used in antitrafficking discourse. She uses the term “sex slaves” in her book’s title not to make a case for their existence but to establish the doctrinal strength of the idea of “sex slaves,” which she argues is nothing but a myth. As noted earlier, the lack of reliable data on trafficking has not hindered the global effort to end it; policies such as the US Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act are implemented without much evidence (see Chacón 2005). For Doezema, the absence of reliable data calls for an understanding of trafficking “not [as] a matter of ‘fact’” but as a myth (2010, 173). She interprets the political myth of trafficking as a representation of reality being shaped by ideologies of race, gender, and sexuality. The myth, according to Doezema, functions as a metaphor for social anxieties as well as a prescription for an ideal society.

Doezema contends that the myth of trafficking is “the resurrection of the myth of white slavery” (2010, 170) from a hundred years ago. For her, the most salient connections lie in the parallel constructions of female victimhood in antitrafficking laws past and present. Doezema establishes these connections not only within the broader antitrafficking discourse but also in the language of the Palermo Protocol, which she shows has been lifted from earlier international agreements on white slavery.⁷ Al-

⁷ Doezema finds the origin of the language of the Palermo Protocol in the 1910 “International Convention for the Suppression of the White Slave Traffic,” the 1921 “International Convention to Combat the Traffic in Women and Children,” the 1933 “International Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women,” and, finally, in the 1949 UN “Convention for the Suppression of the Traffic in Women and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others.” The 1921 and 1933 conventions were sponsored by the League of Nations.

though she is not the first to link nineteenth-century white slavery and contemporary trafficking, her analysis is by far the most rigorous and comprehensive (see Chapkis 1997; Murray 1998).

Doezema is in her element when analyzing the negotiations that culminated in the signing of the Palermo Protocol. She examines the language of the protocol itself, the documentary archives of the negotiation process, and the actions of those involved to illustrate how the myth of trafficking operates, to highlight the ideologies that drive the myth, and to unmask the factors that motivated nation-states to participate in the negotiation process. She demonstrates how, despite the lack of reliable empirical evidence on the extent of trafficking, the issue gained currency through what she sees as the reproduction of the myth. According to her, it is not simply that the myth of trafficking influenced the enactment of the protocol but rather that the actions of lobbyists and delegates during negotiation sessions and strategy meetings all rendered legitimacy to a socially constructed problem. Doezema also offers a compelling explanation for one of the most trenchantly critiqued aspects of the Palermo Protocol: its weak human rights protections and emphasis on law enforcement. Finally, Doezema explicates the ideological battles waged around the definition of trafficking, which rested on ideas regarding consent and prostitution. She ends by showing how the successful lobbying of neoabolitionist feminists—specifically their rejection of the distinction between forced and voluntary prostitution—and the compromises made by sex-workers-rights organizations resulted in the dominance of the antiprostitution agenda. This is demonstrated, she argues, in the prominence of “prostitution” and “sexual exploitation” in the wording of the Palermo Protocol.

Complementing Doezema’s historically sensitive work, Limoncelli (2010) provides a historical explanation of how female victimhood became the predominant framework for understanding the problem of trafficking. The tension between seeing prostitution as an issue of women’s subjugation or as an employment opportunity is hardly novel or unique to the current debate over trafficking. Rather, as Limoncelli demonstrates in *The Politics of Trafficking*, it is one that antitrafficking advocates have been trying to resolve for over a century. *The Politics of Trafficking* is a historical study of the first antitrafficking movement. Limoncelli’s narrative, which follows the movement from the late nineteenth century through World War II, centers on the struggle of liberal feminists to end state-regulated and clandestine prostitution around the globe. The counterfigures in the narrative are purity reformers, who sought to end the forced prostitution of women and girls but not, notably, regulated prostitution. By the end of World War II, more nation-states adopted the agenda of purity re-

formers than that of liberal feminists because, in Limoncelli's estimation, the position of the former could be readily folded into the ideological vision of imperialist European powers.

According to Limoncelli, the movement of male bodies to cities and colonies in the nineteenth century created a demand for sex, and state powers attempted to regulate its global commercialization by establishing official brothels and sex districts, prostitution licenses and registrars, sexual health exams, and enforcement agencies. Still, abuses took place, prompting liberal feminists and purity reformers to form influential international antitrafficking organizations: the International Abolitionist Federation (IAF) and the International Bureau of Trafficking in Women and Children (IB), respectively. The IAF, led by liberal feminist Josephine Butler, saw the regulation of commercial sex as nothing but forced labor and called for its abolition. In contrast, the IB, led by purity reformer William Coote, merely sought stricter regulation.

Limoncelli's sympathies are with the IAF, and she considers worthwhile its efforts to articulate, legislate, and enforce a universal humanitarianism that sought to protect all women, regardless of race, nationality, or class, from exploitation (2010, 61). Limoncelli also shares the IAF's hardline abolitionist stance on prostitution. Her position is evident in her assumptions about consent. For Limoncelli, human trafficking is "the general movement of women across territorial borders for prostitution" (15), a definition that fails to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary prostitution. Interestingly, this omission of women's consent has historically fed into the construction of all prostitutes as victims of trafficking (hence the IAF's position). Addressing the question of female consent, however, is critical to understanding trafficking in this historical period. Recent research has established that large numbers of prostitutes during the time entered their profession voluntarily.⁸

The failure to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary prostitution continues to confuse the study of human trafficking in the contemporary period. The second set of works considered here, Kara's *Sex Trafficking* (2009), Bales's *Ending Slavery* (2007), and Bales and Trodd's *To Plead Our Own Cause* (2008), attempt to document the extent of human trafficking today. Yet these works are troubled by their cultural assumptions about the sex trade as inherently oppressive for women and

⁸ For instance, in stark contradiction to Limoncelli's argument is Donna J. Guy's (2002) research on brothels in Argentina, a country Limoncelli references. Guy documents that claims of trafficking were largely exaggerated and that many women worked in the sex industry voluntarily.

their assumption that human trafficking is a cultural and not a structural problem.

In *Sex Trafficking*, Kara attempts to amend the absence of empirical data on human trafficking by giving voice to victims of sex trafficking. Taking a hiatus from his MBA program, Kara used his personal savings and embarked on three trips to twelve countries in Asia and Europe to find and interview trafficked persons. Kara spoke to as many as 150 sex trafficking victims and 200 other individuals who were subject to other forms of contemporary slavery. While his sample size is impressive, the methods he employed to gather data produced a biased sample. He conducted most of his interviews at shelters. As a consequence, victims of forced prostitution were overrepresented in his data. Kara tried to correct for this by approaching prostitutes still in the sex trade. Yet, as he himself admits, he failed to gain their trust. In other instances, he could not speak with prostitutes because of language barriers. Instead of interpreting these experiences as his own failure, Kara took prostitutes' refusal to speak as proof of their enslavement.

The trouble with Kara's analysis is his equation of prostitution with sex slavery and sex trafficking. This conflation can be traced to Kara's fundamental assumption that sex trafficking is primarily the product of male sexual appetite. Although Kara recognizes that "destructive asymmetries of economic globalization" (2009, 201) increase the vulnerability of the poorest to forced labor, for the most part he blames sex trafficking on bad culture that condones the purchase of sex, which he regards as "an act of self indulgence or moral turpitude" (148). For Kara, the culture of legal prostitution makes it easy for businesses to circumvent law enforcement agencies and to "import sex slaves, lock them up, and exploit them" (104). According to Kara, sex slavery is akin to mass marketing for sex in that sex is made available at low prices and in high volume. Simply put, he views sex trafficking as nothing but an economic response to male desire. In his own words, "sex slavery is the profit maximizing version of prostitution" (33). Notwithstanding the fact that he admits that sympathetic clients have aided trafficked women (105), he dismisses men who buy sex as looking for "a way to act out violent, racist, pedophilic, or other antisocial traits" (203). Seeing commercial sex as indicative of bad culture, Kara offers solutions that focus on the prosecution of traffickers and the reduction of the profitability of trafficking (37).

Kara is part of a larger colonial tradition that (mis)places the blame for third-world woes on culture. In the late nineteenth century, the English poet Rudyard Kipling wrote of imperialism as a moral responsibility of the United States, a project that would uplift and civilize the people of

the Philippines, “fluttered folk and wild,” “sullen peoples” who are “half devil and half child” (1899, 290–99). More than a century later, the same logic motivates the antitrafficking efforts of Pulitzer Prize nominee Bales in *Ending Slavery*, as well as in his book coedited with Trodd, *To Plead Our Own Cause*. Echoing Kipling’s sentiment in “The White Man’s Burden,” in *Ending Slavery* Bales states, “The greatest obstacles we face in ending slavery are not poverty and violence; they are the toxicity of some cultures and the perversion of organized crime” (2007, 231). By blaming human trafficking on the toxicity of certain cultures, Bales charges those from what he suggests are superior cultures with the same burden of a civilizing mission that Kipling mandated over a hundred years ago. Following Bales, ending slavery would not so much require the elimination of poverty as it would the intervention of moral uplift.

Bales’s mission is to end modern-day slavery, an umbrella category that includes human trafficking. In *To Plead Our Own Cause*, Bales and Trodd define slavery broadly as “a social and economic relationship in which a person is controlled through violence or its threat, paid nothing, and economically exploited” (2008, 10). According to them, approximately 27 million people are enslaved, a figure based on “very rough” guesses.⁹ In Bales and Trodd’s calculation, slavery manifests most prevalently in three forms: chattel slavery, in which one is owned by a master; debt-bondage slavery, in which a person functions as collateral for a loan; and contract slavery, in which a person is bound to an employer as a contract laborer. This conceptualization blurs differences among various labor structures. By insisting that contract labor falls under the category of slavery, Bales and Trodd do not distinguish between servitude as a relation of unequal exchange and enslavement as a property relation. For them, servitude, which refers to the condition of being temporarily bound to the will of another person, inevitably turns into debt bondage, meaning that one is bound in perpetuity to one’s creditor. As Bales and Trodd state, “Technically, bonded laborers can end their servitude once the debt is repaid, but this rarely occurs” (45).

The evidence that Bales and Trodd present to document contemporary forms of slavery is meant to incite moral indignation. They selectively use personal testimonies that are the most extreme examples of slavery in their effort to show that slavery does not discriminate. Pointing to the lack of

⁹ The 27 million figure and Bales’s admission that it is based on “very rough” estimates appears in Bales’s article “International Labor Standards: Quality of Information and Measures of Progress in Combating Forced Labor” (2004, 343). The figure appears again in Bales (2007, 3) and Bales and Trodd (2008, 12).

reliable data on slavery and human trafficking, Bales and Trodd (ironically enough) use selective evidence to demonstrate universal risks. With the use of token examples, they attempt to establish that both men and women, young and old, the educated and not educated, can fall prey to slavery. An emotional climax of the book is reached with a concluding story of society's most vulnerable members: children. Bales and Trodd focus on the plight of the *restavec* in Haiti. *Restavec* children emerge from a social system in Haiti in which parents who are unable to care for their children send them to relatives or strangers, usually in more urban areas, where they will, the parents who send them believe, do light housework in exchange for food, shelter, and education. In Bales and Trodd's assessment, *restavec* children are not considered part of the family that takes them in but instead are enslaved and subject to abuse. Missing from their assessment, however, are the conditions that compel parents to leave their children vulnerable to abuse. The same is true in their discussion of other vulnerable populations. The unanswered question in *To Plead Our Own Cause* is, what are the larger cultural, economic, and political structures that create the conditions that render debt bondage or contract labor an appealing option for survival?

This question is also not addressed in Bales's earlier publication, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves* (2007). In it, Bales is concerned with getting people out of slavery but does not have as his goal the eradication of its causes (19). The need to remove people from situations of slavery is urgent, but to do so effectively requires an understanding of the conditions of labor, the circumstances of its emergence, and the structures that delimit the options of vulnerable people. Viable solutions cannot be formulated otherwise. Being more aware of global economic structures would have saved Bales from making some shortsighted proposals. For instance, in a moment of recognition that slavery has structural causes, he advocates that the World Bank take an active role in addressing poverty. However, his proposal ignores the work of numerous development scholars who have shown how the policies and programs of international lending institutions like the World Bank are major causes of debt and poverty in developing countries.¹⁰ International lending institutions impose austerity measures that aim to balance a country's budget by limiting fair-pay laws, decreasing health and safety regulations, and reducing social services (see Rai 2002). In other words, the World Bank is culpable for conditions that make people vulnerable to slavery.

Ending Slavery is also thin in its empirical examples. In his discussion

¹⁰ See the publications of Focus on the Global South, at <http://www.focusweb.org/>.

of Japan, Bales calls the “entertainer visa” a loophole for human traffickers, asserting that entertainers “fill the most dangerous jobs” and “are most likely to be enslaved” (2007, 108). But none of the testimonies he and Trodd share from trafficked women in Japan are from holders of entertainer visas. Instead, all of the women entered Japan with either a tourist visa or a family visa (2008, 83–97). The need for more substantive and evidence-based research is imperative, and it is one that is possible to fulfill, as illustrated by the works of Denise Brennan (2008), Tiantian Zheng (2009), Rutvica Andrijasevic (2010), Sealing Cheng (2010), and Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2011).

This essay concludes with a consideration of Kempadoo’s edited volume *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* (2005b), which was published before any of the preceding works but whose message is profoundly pertinent to productive scholarship and effective policy making on human trafficking. This anthology brings together practitioners and scholars who share the challenges they have confronted in their years of advocacy work on behalf of sex workers and migrant laborers. Most refreshing about this anthology are the empirically grounded discussions offered by the contributors. For the authors in this anthology, human trafficking is foremost a human rights violation that needs to be situated in a labor and migrant rights paradigm. This leads them to take a critical stance against the dominant discourse on trafficking espoused by the likes of Bales and Kara, whose assumptions about women and sex work lead to their conflation of human trafficking and prostitution and whose analyses discount the will of trafficked persons.

Many of the authors in Kempadoo’s (2005b) collection conclude that the dominant crime-and-punishment approach to trafficking actually harms the very people it seeks to protect. They find that this approach fails to address the immediate needs of “victims” and may actually increase their vulnerability to trafficking. Ratna Kapur (2005), for instance, criticizes the protectionist stance toward women taken by governments in their fight against trafficking. She finds that the impulse to protect women from trafficking leads to calls for curbing their independent migration as a means of prevention. At the same time, she points out that the focus on protecting women directs attention away from the possibility that men are also victims of trafficking. Another underlying theme in these essays is the argument that, globally, the overzealous focus on prostitution in antitrafficking campaigns costs average citizens their civil liberties. Melissa Ditmore, for example, shows that sex workers lose rights when antitrafficking and antiprostitution efforts in the United States join forces. Sex-worker advocacy groups have been most successful in reducing the risk

of trafficking, but they find themselves ineligible for US funding because they happen to also advocate for the legalization of prostitution (2005, 117–22). In a similar vein, Josephine Ho also shows a loss of civil liberties in Taiwan, where speech acts regarding commercial sex can render one liable to indictment as a result of antitrafficking legislation (2005, 94).

Drawing from their years of experience in local advocacy work, the authors in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* repeatedly call for a paradigm shift from legally defining trafficked persons as victims of crime to seeing them as labor migrants. This shift would redirect antitrafficking campaigns from the current focus on prosecution and prevention to ensuring the “safe migration” of labor migrants, as Phil Marshall and Susu Thatun call for (2005, 50). This approach would also begin to question the strategy of preventing trafficking through the interception of migrants at the border. According to Natasha Ahmad, who has worked extensively with Bangladeshi migrants in India, border interception is an ineffective strategy of preventing migration and only exacerbates the difficult situations migrants face. In fact, she argues, it has led to the harassment of independent female migrants and has limited their access to viable employment (2005, 225).

Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered productively reframes human trafficking as a problem of labor and migration. Unlike other studies, it refuses to reduce prostitution to human trafficking or to confuse slavery and human trafficking. The authors in this volume cast doubt on the solutions of rescue, interception, and prevention that dominate current antitrafficking directives. They find that conventional solutions do not offer viable labor alternatives to trafficked persons. The fact of the matter is that those informed of the risk of trafficking will still take the chance of migration because of the economic and social marginalization they confront at home. Thus, as argued by the contributors in this volume, the focus of antitrafficking pundits should be on the human rights of those vulnerable to trafficking, which would mean a redirection of efforts toward ensuring their access to safe labor migration as well as protection from exploitative commercial environments. These efforts would require a more comprehensive understanding of the problem of human trafficking, including a consideration of the structures that leave people vulnerable to trafficking as well as the conditions of such labor. As the women’s group Jagori observes in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered*, “It is as important to locate how globalization has led to increasing impoverishment of many people as it is to understand the actual experience of [the worker]” (2005, 171). Offering a refreshing alternative to the morally laden views that dominate mainstream accounts of human trafficking (e.g., Bales 2007;

Bales and Trodd 2008; Kara 2009), the perspective presented by the essays in *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered* insists that the moral imperative of antitrafficking advocates should not be the rescue of women but the empowerment of all workers and migrants.

The problem of human trafficking has become a key focus in the mainstream media. Take for instance MSNBC programs on Cambodian child prostitution or CNN specials on sex trafficked victims in Nepal.¹¹ Even Hollywood personalities and celebrity journalists, including Nicholas Kristof, Mina Sorvino, Ashton Kutcher, Demi Moore, and Julia Ormond, have made the fight against human trafficking their calling. The attention given by the media to human trafficking has had some positive effect, turning a spotlight onto the problems of forced labor, coerced migration, debt bondage, and enslavement. Yet the attention that the media has given to the problem of human trafficking is not mirrored in academia, leading to distorted views and limited knowledge of human trafficking. Sorely lacking from media depictions of human trafficking are evidence-based discussions, a fact that underscores the need for more empirically grounded studies. Another problem, one potentially remedied by empirically grounded studies, is the overwhelming media attention given to female trafficked victims as well as females in the sex industry. The literature suffers from the absence of studies on other groups identified as vulnerable to trafficking: agricultural workers, domestic workers, and factory workers. To solve the problem of human trafficking, scholars need to use empirical evidence and expand the focus of the discussion beyond the female trafficked victim in the sex industry.

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¹¹ See, e.g., the programs "CNN Freedom Project: Ending Modern-Day Slavery" and "MSNBC Undercover: Sex Slaves in America." Another example is the *Dateline* segment "Children for Sale" on the sexual trafficking of children in Cambodia, which has been reaired on MSNBC.

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