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Jenny McPhee

Reinventing Love or, Slavery Inc.: The Untold Story of International Sex Trafficking

“The clients are insecure drunks who believe whatever we tell them,” a young Cuban prostitute in a Cancun lap-dancing bar tells Lydia Cacho, a Mexican journalist who has devoted her career to investigating violence against women. “Some of them are very vulgar, and they believe we are going to fall in love with them.” Worldwide, one of the first things enslaved girls are taught, Cacho reveals in *Slavery Inc.*, her devastating exposé of the rapidly expanding global market for sex slaves, is to call their clients “my love,” “my life,” “darling,” “big daddy,” or “my king.”



International trafficking of women and children for sex is a multi-billion dollar business rivaling the numbers of African slaves sold from the 1500s to the 1800s. Each year, 1.39 million people -- mostly women and girls, many as young as 4 years old -- are sold and subjected to rape and enslavement. Over a period of five years, Lydia Cacho traveled the world from Mexico and the U.S. to Thailand and Japan, from Turkey and Israel to the UK and the Ukraine tracking small and large sex slave mafia operations run by the Japanese Yakuza, the Chinese Triads, the Italian, Russian, and Albanian mafias, and the Latin American drug cartels. Often risking her life, she interviewed victims, clients, pimps, traffickers, politicians, businessmen, law enforcement officials, and employees of NGOs trying to help the victims. Packed with mind-boggling statistics, her book provides a detailed explanation of how sex trafficking works and the fundamental role played by mafias, governments, and banks.

In a conversational prose, Cacho unfolds a horror story of unfathomable human suffering. She reports on girls sold to traffickers by their mothers in Cambodia, girls stolen from orphanages in Romania, women in Uzbekistan and Brazil who, seeking to escape poverty, are duped by traffickers with fake foreign employment contracts as nannies, domestic workers, secretaries, models, etc., then forced to repay their exorbitant travel and immigration expenses through prostitution after undergoing systematic brainwashing convincing them they are good for nothing else. Confronted by these abhorrent practices, Cacho tries to understand how, ethically, we as a society can allow sex slavery to exist and thrive. She boldly questions every aspect of our civilization, including sacrosanct values such as free speech, free markets, and liberty. Recalling Isaiah Berlin’s famous quote, “Liberty is liberty, not equality or fairness or justice or culture, or human happiness or a quiet conscience,” she wonders: “What is liberty for these girls, for women? Or perhaps liberty is what allows men to foster a culture where slavery is normalized.”

Despite the strides made this past century to improve women's lives, our planetary culture is still permeated with Page 3s and Page 6s, ubiquitous advertising equating eroticized women and girls with merchandise, and movies, music, and computer games promoting violence against women. Cacho writes: "In a culture governed by misogynistic and patriarchal values, the female body is viewed as an object that can be both sold, used, and disposed of. No country has made an effort to create real conditions for equality between the sexes."

The pervasive cultural practice of blaming the victims of sexual violence for their fate -- "they asked for it," "they like it," "they're born that way," "they tempt men into it" -- is a sex trade industry tool used to maintain their power structures. Even campaigns to stop violence against women, Cacho notes, promote the blame-the-victim-paradigm by telling women not to "allow themselves to be fooled or abused." A shift focusing on the aggressors has begun, however. For example, the common slogan: "Every fifteen seconds a woman is abused" has now been changed to "Every fifteen seconds a man chooses to abuse a woman."

Though governments and individuals can effectively fight sex trafficking,* Cacho believes the ultimate answer lies in a global reassessment of masculinity itself. "A new masculine revolution is necessary," she declares. "We need a new generation of men, not warriors, not armed, not threatening divine punishment, not violent, but men who possess a strong sense of progress and justice... Male power must re-invent itself."

One brutal paradox of the pan-religious tradition's invention of masculinity as aggressive domination and femininity as submissive chastity, Cacho says, is that to assert their virility men are encouraged towards violence. Cacho reports: "According to the United States Development Fund for Women, six out of nine women suffer domestic violence, physical, sexual, psychological, or economic, at the hands of a husband, boyfriend or lover." This behavior both desensitizes men to the "other" and causes him a deep internal anxiety about his "lovability" leading to myriad psycho-sexual aberrations including sex slavery. "It is also imperative that men discover new ways of coexisting, in which pornography, violence, and sexism are not the only options for their erotic lives and their relationships with women and other men."

Most men, Cacho believes, are themselves slaves to a masculine culture undisputed by them or by those "in a position to promote cultural transformation, such as religious leaders and editors of print and electronic media. Directors, scriptwriters, and producers of films and television programs perpetuate the values of machismo and sexual violence, which may be depicted subtly or overtly. In general, even academia has not been able to change its patriarchal ways through a reappraisal of roles and genders."

She feels it is now largely up to men to stop the systematic violence against women and children by recognizing their own abuse by a global capitalism making billions off manipulating men into believing prostitutes and pornography will make them into "real men" and, despite paying for it, also lovable. The greatest enemies of girls, boys, and women who are victims of sex trafficking, writes Cacho, are "the clients of the slave market and their greatest allies could be millions of men willing to question slavery from the ethical stand point of otherness."

Cacho is not alone in her vision of masculinity in crisis. In September, *Ms. Magazine* published "Men's Manifesto 2012" written by a group of men "challenging male violence and outdated notions of masculinity." The manifesto also appears in the new book *Men Speak Out: Views on Gender, Sex, and Power*. Hanna Rosin's popular new book *The End of Men: And the Rise of Women* predicts an unprecedented sex role reversal in the U.S.

Cacho's previous book, *The Demons of Eden: The Power that Protects Child Pornography* (2005), exposed the involvement of politicians, police officers, and businessmen in child pornography, leading to the arrest of a high-level mafia boss. She was subsequently raped, tortured, put on trial, and nearly jailed. It is clear that Cacho will never relinquish her fight to expose and stop violence against women. Throughout *Slavery, Inc.*, she expresses enormous hope for what we as a society are capable of. The Mexican poet Octavio Paz once said that the great moral and spiritual flaw of liberal democracies is their emotional insensitivity. "Society's on-going task," Cacho urges, "is to reinvent love and eroticism without violence."

* Cacho has an extensive appendix recommending ways to fight sex slavery.

See the excellent website Slavery Footprint <http://slaveryfootprint.org/>

Read Obama's Sept. 25th Landmark speech about ending Modern Slavery
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/09/25/remarks-president-clinton-global-initiative>

Check out One Billion Rising (<http://onebillionrising.org/>), a movement that will stage a global dance protest on February 14, 2013 to stop violence against women.

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