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Ahmed, Aziza. 2014. “Think Again: Prostitution” *Foreign Policy* 204:74-78.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1491444057/fulltextPDF?accountid=10639>

Prostitution has especially been a condemned practice as it fits within a U.S. foreign policy framework. This article examines alternative views and considers that U.S. foreign policy measures may misinterpret or ignore some of the facts associated with the practice. The first assumption the author addresses is that prostitution is inherently bad. The author points out that there is a religious segment of the population who consider sex to be sacred and believe that the selling of sex is sinful. On the other hand, there are emphatic liberals that are willing to accept prostitution, or at least not impede on an individual’s agency when it comes to their own bodies and sexual freedom. It is important to note that “plenty of people have views that lie somewhere in between” and these people “are fighting over the fairness, regulation, and even the precise definition of what advocates and practitioners increasingly refer to as ‘sex work’” (Ahmed, 2014:74).

Thus far, this debate has been dominated by the abolitionist advocates who believe that “all prostitution is inherently degrading and dangerous” and all necessary steps should be taken to eradicate the practice (Ahmed, 2014:74). The abolitionist faction is diverse as its members include religious organizations, liberals and conservatives, as well as some “outspoken feminist camps” (Ahmed, 2014: 74). Ahmed (2014:75) criticizes these groups for failing to make a distinction between prostitution and human sex trafficking “which involves controlling someone through threats or violence with the express purpose of exploitation.” The U.S. government’s stance has been much closer in alignment with the views of the abolitionists. Countries are often denied needed funding to combat and prevent AIDS and human trafficking if they are not in alignment with U.S. policy standards. Pertaining to the American policy position, Ahmed (2014:75) ultimately claims,

This stance has put sex workers and their advocates – who support the idea that some people choose, although perhaps from a range of poor economic options, to sell sex in an impossible position: They must make a choice between compromising their principles or missing out on opportunities for much-needed money.

Policies regulating sex work should be tailored to the specific countries in which regulation is the goal. No blanket policy can cover prostitution or the sex industry. In some countries prostitution is completely legal, in others it is conditionally legal or outright illegal, and some countries fall somewhere in a muddled gray middle. For example, Thailand has “long outlawed sex work, yet the industry operates quite open there” (Ahmed, 2014:75). Policies aimed at eradicating and criminalizing prostitution tend to drive the industry underground. This unintended consequence can be potentially detrimental for sex workers. “Clients have more power to say when and where they want to have sex, inhibiting workers’ ability to protect themselves if need be” (Ahmed, 2014:75). Additionally, if the act of prostitution is criminalized, prostitutes are less likely to report any physical abuse, health concerns, or symptoms. U.S. interference with other nation’s regulation policies can also undermine steps that have been taken to protect sex workers within their own country by other natives. Ahmed (2014:78) describes how “Durjoy Nari Shangho, a Bangladeshi organization, shuttered drop-in centers for sex workers after the international NGO from which it received funding signed the U.S. anti-prostitution pledge.”

The author concludes by suggesting that prostitutes should be incorporated and utilized as part of the effort to combat human sex trafficking. She points out that they are more likely to be aware of traffickers’ movements and are often the first to know when trafficking violations occur. A SANGRAM representative put it this way: “Sex worker rights groups should be involved in the genuine anti-trafficking work because, at the end of the day, they know their industry and their spaces and their better at it” (Ahmed, 2014:78). Ahmed (2014) believes that harm-reduction programs utilized by governments and NGO’s would be most effective without pressure from outside governmental bodies to meet a foreign standard. Incorporating prostitutes, decriminalizing prostitution, and striving towards “broader legal and social efforts to normalize the sex industry,” are all key elements of her proposal (Ahmed, 2014:78).