

Human Trafficking Numbers Are Spun From Fantasy.  
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The subject of Human Trafficking is appearing in the press this month largely because of the Foreign Policy Association's "Great Decisions Program." Sixty Minutes ran one dispiriting feature of a human rights official in Northern India trying to get enforcement from indifferent police to raid a prostitution ring. It seems that the reluctant police warned the fathers in advance, fathers who were the pimps selling their own daughters.

Years ago, a reporter in Lagos, Nigeria saw a busboy from the hotel filling water bottles from a city tap. "What are you doing!" he said in alarm. "You foreigners like your waters in bottles," said the boy. The reporter then understood why they all got so sick. Hearing this story, I then understood that just as we think water in bottles is safe, we think that because something is in numbers, it is real.

The Great Decisions casebook that came from New York this year was full of charts and numbers in the chapter on human trafficking that cannot possibly have been gathered from reality. You cannot convince me that anybody can go around in a Muslim country door to door asking how many women in the household are slaves from Bangladesh! Nor has anyone gone into the combat zone where Boko Haram has murdered civilians or sold kidnapped girls at a slave market and counted bodies or counted slave sales. Where are they getting these numbers?

How do we know the casualties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo civil wars?

How do we know how many Muslims there are in the world? Who is providing those numbers? Propagandists? Do we really know the population of Afghanistan? Is a census being taken? Do we really know life expectancy?

In the West, where census taking is the most reliable, does "religion" ever appear on the census or do we politely shy away from such a rude question? In the United States, when we do try to find out how many people go to church on a Sunday, people say one thing, and when someone goes around counting cars in a church parking lot, we find far fewer cars than we would expect. What does it mean when one says that one is a Christian, or a Jew, or a Muslim even in the Western world? And what does it mean in Indonesia or Saudi Arabia or Iran? What does it mean in Tehran or an Afghan village? Do the numbers that someone spins mean anything?

Is human trafficking going on around the world? Indeed it is. How do we know this? We know it by the escapees. We know it by the occasional and much-too infrequent arrests. We know it by the horror stories and by the horrific amounts of money that appear to be involved in this illegal trade. Somebody is making fortunes out of the misery of others, and we do know what the elements are. The majority of victims appear to be women and children, who are always the most vulnerable, and their uses are mostly forced labor and sex.

Every region of the world is tainted by this trafficking, and it is shameful! Africa, India, and the Middle East appear to be the most abusive, but the Russians have the longest history of exploiting women sexually (their history of this goes back centuries of providing blonde beauties from the Caucasus to the Muslim harem slave markets). One new and horrific market is providing kidneys, needless to say, not voluntarily.

Are we including in the notion of "trafficking" the handing over of underage children as "brides?" The pictures of underage little girls in mass "weddings" that appeared in a recent National Geographic taking place in Yemen certainly looked like trafficking to me. Money certainly changed hands, and the terror on the faces of the children spoke volumes. But who's counting.

Is anyone counting the little boys offering up their bodies to tourists in Central America or Egypt or Thailand?

I suggest that we fall out of love with numbers and start asking where these fake numbers come from. Is "60 Minutes" listening?

684 words

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