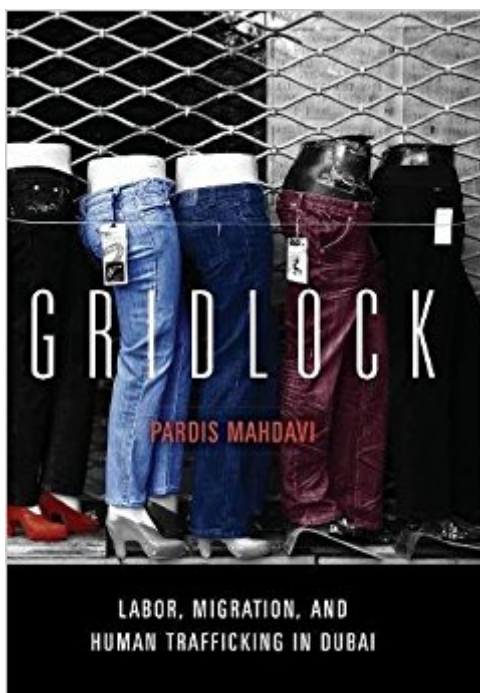


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# Gridlock: Labor, Migration, And Human Trafficking In Dubai



## Synopsis

The images of human trafficking are all too often reduced to media tales of helpless young women taken by heavily accented, dark-skinned captors—but the reality is a far cry from this stereotype. In the Middle East, Dubai has been accused of being a hotbed of trafficking. Pardis Mahdavi, however, draws a more complicated and more personal picture of this city filled with migrants. Not all migrant workers are trapped, tricked, and abused. Like anyone else, they make choices to better their lives, though the risk of ending up in bad situations is high. Legislators hoping to combat human trafficking focus heavily on women and sex work, but there is real potential for abuse of both male and female migrants in a variety of areas of employment—whether on the street, in a field, at a restaurant, or at someone's house. Gridlock explores how migrants' actual experiences in Dubai contrast with the typical discussions and global moral panic about human trafficking. Mahdavi powerfully contrasts migrants' own stories with interviews with U.S. policy makers, revealing the gaping disconnect between policies on human trafficking and the realities of forced labor and migration in the Persian Gulf. To work toward solving this global problem, we need to be honest about what trafficking is and is not and to finally get past the stereotypes about trafficked persons so we can really understand the challenges migrant workers are living through every day.

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## Customer Reviews

"Gridlock is a lively, provocative and timely book that challenges many long-held and misinformed

popular beliefs about human trafficking. Mahdavi astutely and engagingly examines the connections between migratory experiences and trafficking in the UAE, providing an insightful and constructive, ethnographically-based critique of U.S. and international anti-trafficking initiatives." (Nicole Constable University of Pittsburgh)"This is an extraordinarily well-researched and gripping book on human trafficking in Dubai. With impressive clarity, Professor Mahdavi describes the complex problem of trafficked women, migrants and foreign workers and the role of the international community and the host country in dealing with it." (Haleh Esfandiari Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, author of *My Prison, My Home: One Woman's Story of Captivity in Iran*)"This is essential reading for all migration practitioners and trafficking policy-makers, and a solid ethnography for inclusion in migration and gender courses." (Olga Demetriou Royal Anthropological Institute)"Mahdavi's examination of the labor conditions in the UAE, teases out the differences between trafficking into forced labor and migration for work-albeit under lousy conditions. Her analysis reveals the perverse effects that anti-trafficking policies have had on migrants' rights. At the heart of the book is a plea for greater worker protections. A must-read for those interested in labor and migration issues-not just trafficking." (Denise Brennan Georgetown University, the author of *What's Love Got to Do with It? Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic*)"Pardis Mahdavi provides a valuable service by exposing the contradictions and complexities that so often muddle the discussions and debates surrounding the issue of human trafficking. She makes an impassioned call for a more rational policy for dealing with this scourge, a call that eschews the sometimes simplistic and often melodramatic rhetoric surrounding the problem of international human trafficking." (Reza Aslan)"Mahdavi's book *Gridlock* offers a fascinating report of the negative consequences in the Middle-East, specifically in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Dubai, as a result of the impact of the UN Trafficking Protocol and the U.S. anti-trafficking law . . . [S]uccessfully argue[d]." (Prabha Kotiswaran)

Pardis Mahdavi is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Pomona College and is currently an American Council of Learned Societies Fellow and a Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars Fellow. She is the author of *Passionate Uprisings: Iran's Sexual Revolution* (Stanford University Press, 2008). She previously was editor-in-chief for *Slant Magazine*, as well as a consultant for the United Nations Population Fund, and has written for the *Los Angeles Times Magazine*.

I kind of threw a hail Mary and just clicked and purchased this title, a topic I was interested in buy

not fascinated by. I was expecting a dry formal doctoral dissertation in a nice book sleeve' type of book (I read those things a lot so no knock on those!), but the book was very approachable for non-academics too. Yes it was in my field of study and had some academic threads to follow and those were really well-written. What made this book good for non-academics was how she had lots of clear and concise personal experience type examples of individuals experience in the labour markets in Dubai and well, interspersed perfectly with theoretical materials and some personal stories of her trials of going about studying and experiencing life in Dubai. Great mix of slice of life, hard theoretical social science and ethnography. I won't bore readers with the 'sociological theoretics' here, but this book is a great read, fun to read, added to my theoretical background in my field and will probably become required reading (at least parts of it) in some of the junior/senior level courses that I teach.

Super interesting and informative. Also very accessible to a general audience.

Having lived in Dubai for a number of years, the stories of exploitation and abuse related herein are not unfamiliar. I have never had the occasion to solicit sex, so found the chapters on its trade revealing and congratulate the author for bringing this to wider public attention. As she explains, the issue of trafficking is much broader than the sex trade, and in my experience issues faced by many white collar workers are not dissimilar to some of those faced by domestic servants or construction workers, such as employer failure to fulfil labor contracts and ineffectual and often biased judicial system that makes pursuing such claims expensive, time consuming, and pointless endeavours. Still, as the author points out, it seems Dubai and the UAE are sensitive about their reputation and are making efforts at improvement. It may be a generation or two before they come to fruition.

After successfully getting people talking about the sexual revolution taking place in Iran through her book *PASSIONATE UPRISINGS*, author and journalist Pardis Mahdavi is back with another thought-provoking expose called *GRIDLOCK*, this time involving trafficking and the conditions women in Dubai have to endure. What surprised me the most about this new book was the way that laws which were meant to curtail some of the ills taking place against women ended up being part of the problem instead of the solution. Through Mahdavi's reporting we learn that while some who end up as part of Dubai's sex trade are brought there against their will, there are others who come willingly to make money that they can then take home for themselves and their family. Some of the individuals that shared their stories with the author put the blame on the laws for the way that things

were being handled. Others seemed not to see the harm because it appeared as though most parties were acting willingly. Throughout the book, however, one of the biggest messages seemed to be that there was not a quick fix to this serious problem. I commend Pardis Mahdavi for what she has done in bringing more of the real stories from women in Dubai to life. This is a book that opens the door to discussion, and enlightens the world on a problem that with focus and hard work can be addressed.

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