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BOOK REVIEWS

Denise Brennan, *Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2014, xii + pp, ISBN 978-0-8223-5624-0 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-8223-5633-2 (pbk)

Denise Brennan quotes a farm owner as saying that 'the north won the war on paper but we Confederates actually won because we kept our slaves. First we had sharecroppers, then tenant farmers and now we have Mexicans' (p 44).

This book is a reminder that unlike old forms of chattel slavery, human trafficking for forced labour is based on an exploitative commercial arrangement that will eventually come to an end, leaving the formerly-trafficked person vulnerable in a new society. Drawing on interviews with individuals who have been trafficked for forced labour into the United States, Brennan explores this post-contractual phase in the victim's experience of human trafficking. In doing so, Brennan examines what it means to be exploited, and what it means to be a victim of human trafficking for forced labour. Brennan problematizes the mechanisms of control in order to understand how they work in the context of forced labour – isolation, surveillance and informants, debt, violence, subhuman treatment, fear of deportation (pp 98–104).

The book is structured in two parts. The first part covers the sexual and immigration policies of human trafficking, and the exit conditions for victims. The second part examines problems faced immediately after a victim leaves forced labour, the long term crises faced by victims, and the relationship of a victim with labour after being in a state of trafficking. The book concludes with a chapter containing some suggestions for action by readers.

As Brennan states in her introduction, 'the book operates on two levels: it examines the lived experience of migrating internationally for work, and it analyses the effects of immigration policies – which may not have an ostensible connection to trafficking – on efforts to prevent trafficking into forced labour and assist trafficked persons' (p 4).

This book adopts a qualitative methodology which is particularly well-suited to critically analysing the lived experiences of formerly-trafficked persons. Although the people interviewed for this book are recounting vastly different experiences, their stories 'capture the experience of being under someone's control as well as the mechanisms used to control' (p 27). In this book, Brennan demonstrates the value of taking an anthropological approach to the issues posed by human trafficking. Throughout the

book, Brennan maintains a focus on 'real people, not mythological versions of "trafficked persons"' (p 5). In doing so, she attempts to provide a representation of human trafficking that is more grounded than the often abstract presentation of human trafficking – one that has on occasion been elevated by activists, academics, and politicians to a position that no longer reflects reality.

Life Interrupted is a well-written and useful examination of the experiences of individuals who have gone through a situation of trafficking into forced labour. There are three particularly strong elements to the book. First, Brennan shows a nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the conflict between the concepts of slavery and human trafficking – an issue that has often been problematic. Brennan notes that 'trafficked persons are typically not physically restrained' (p 13), but may instead appear to be regular migrant workers. This problem of identification is compounded by the fact that victims of this type of trafficking may not self-identify as being trafficked. Instead, they may complain about related issues, such as not being paid, or being beaten up by their employer.

Brennan unpacks the definition of what it means to be a victim: 'only certain conditions of "victimhood" qualify the [victims] for trafficking status' (p 29). Brennan's interviewees tell of the dilemma of being abused, but not abused *enough* to be eligible for state assistance. Brennan argues that a successful claim requires the victim to be proficient in English (in order to be able to give appropriately phrased evidence), and to have evidence of physical suffering – two requirements that can be problematic for a foreign victim of human trafficking for forced labour living in the United States.

The book covers examples of work situations that fall on just the wrong side of the exploitation threshold to be considered as human trafficking. Brennan shows a considered understanding of the parameters of forced labour – an understanding that if taken at an abstracted level would be a useful contribution to a theory of exploitation. This is an issue that Brennan returns to. Brennan explores 'the subjectivity of coercion' (p 75), noting that the threshold for coercion is fluid, and that the transition into a coercive situation can be a gradual process. Brennan tries to understand the reasons why not all victims choose to leave their abuser when they have the chance (p 81). She concludes that the answer must relate to the imbalanced power relationships that exist between a trafficker and their victim. Noting that victims must strategize in order to escape, she points out that 'remaining with one's trafficker thus can be understood in terms of tactics and strategy, not consent or resignation' (p 86).

The second strong aspect of the book is the way it seeks to understand the needs of victims. Brennan looks at the ways in which victims begin to 'move through the world again' (p 117). This section covers the 'nuts and bolts' issues that victims must deal with immediately after exiting a situation of human trafficking for forced labour. These issues include finding a place for a trafficked individual to stay on their first night out of an exploitative situation, establishing relationships with social workers, and overcoming language barriers (pp 126–36).

Although for some workers being able to choose work is empowering, as it allows them to reclaim their labour, for others it can be disempowering. The issue with the low-wage job market is that it can be just another area of exploitation (p 165). Indeed, Brennan uses the term 'trafficking plus' to reflect the fact that victims of forced labour

in the United States will always be a member of the working poor class – essentially in a state of 'controlled poverty' (pp 151–52). These people live on the edge of an 'economic precipice' with no support networks or family to help them. Brennan points out that 'trafficking survivors only know poor people … poverty is not about money, it's about access' (p 154).

Brennan makes clear that the recovery of formerly-trafficked persons is not simply about obtaining legitimate employment, however. Victims must relearn to 'inhabit' the world again (p 17), and reclaim their lost agency. In discussing this, Brennan references work that has been done on using narratives of trauma as the basis of a human needs approach to overcoming the trauma associated with trafficking. In doing so, formerly-trafficked persons are enabled to resolve issues relating to their trafficking before they become pathological (pp 25–29). On this point, Brennan notes that programmes for victims of trafficking often use the language of recovery and rehabilitation, which pathologises victims in the short-term, but in the long-term, when the victim might require those services, the statutory or regulatory time limits have expired (p 116).

The final strong aspect of the book to mention is the way in which it critically looks at the 'rescue industry' of NGOs that adopt a competitive stance toward other NGOs, rather than a collaborative one (pp 70–71). The implication of this is that best practice is not shared, information about victims is not shared, and while that NGO may continue to be funded, it is not in the best interests of victims. Brennan discusses the importance of funding trends to NGOs, and points out that the focus of NGO programmes shifts in line with current funding priorities. In this vein, the book briefly covers the history of the trend toward conflating issues of prostitution with human trafficking, showing how the focus on sex trafficking has marginalised victims of alternative forms of human trafficking (pp 61–63).

One of the book's central arguments is that 'trafficking into forced labour cannot be understood or prevented without learning from creative rights outreach in migrant communities' (p 23). In light of this, the final chapter of the book presents some suggestions as to what readers can realistically do to deal with issues of human trafficking for forced labour. These suggestions are deliberately not phrased in terms of 'heroism' or 'abolitionism' but are, rather, centred on methods of increasing workplace safety and promoting the rights of workers and migrants. Brennan aims through these suggestions to address the range of structural factors that allow trafficking for forced labour to continue.

Brennan argues that 'the fundamental issue that confronts formerly trafficked persons [is] poverty' (p 189). The book shows the problems that economic insecurity pose to formerly trafficked people. It contains considered analysis of complex issues and will appeal both to academic and non-academic readers. The book opens up a range of research questions that would benefit from further in-depth academic research.

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