traditional workplace-based manner. As she puts it, the state is "the one actor that cannot escape" (p. 30). Yet she also notes that employers help to fund the welfare boards, which suggests that they are at least minimally implicated in meeting workers' demands, if only indirectly. At the same time, as Agarwala acknowledges (p. 198), the social benefits provided by the state function in part as an indirect subsidy to employers, insofar as they are contributing toward the reproduction costs of labor power. Yet the book neglects the role of employers in the political process which leads to state concessions in the face of workers' demands.

The book neglects the role of employers in the political process.

Another ambiguity involves the way in which that process plays out in relation to the layers of subcontracting in the two industries under study. At one point, Agarwala quotes a worker who points out that the subcontractors "are struggling just like us. They cannot give us anything. We make all our demands to the government" (p. 108). But surely that is not the case for the large employers who hire the subcontractors. It remains unclear precisely which types of employers contribute to the welfare funds and how their political influence on the state affects the micro-political process of extracting state concessions.

Finally, Agarwala points out that some of this innovative, state-directed organizing is led by unions, although most of it is driven by NGOs. At the same time, she tends to portray traditional unionism as largely irrelevant to informal worker organizing in twenty-first-century India. But how does the old guard in the labor movement view the unionists who *have* embraced the informal worker organizing documented here, and how does it view the NGOs who are similarly engaged? In light of the fact that informality is growing, not declining, and that the road to traditional unionism is filled with new obstacles in the neoliberal era, are the traditional unions making any efforts to develop direct ties to, or indirectly supporting, these emerging new organizing forms? The answer could help determine the extent to which the informal workers movement will prove sustainable in the years to come, as well as its potential to contribute to any broader transformative projects.

Although Agarwala's book does not provide all of the answers to these questions, it is nevertheless an invaluable contribution to labor scholarship, opening up a vast new research agenda for anyone interested in the challenges of organizing the growing ranks of precarious workers around the globe.

Author Biography

Ruth Milkman is professor of sociology at the CUNY Graduate Center and at CUNY's Murphy Institute, where she also serves as research director. Her most recent book is *New Labor in New York: Precarious Workers and the Future of the Labor Movement*, co-edited with Ed Ott.

Sex Work and the Law

Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States
By Denise Brennan
Duke University Press, 2014
ISBN: 978-0-8223-5624-0

Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work
By Melissa Gira Grant
Verso Books, 2014
ISBN: 978-1781683231

Reviewed by: Svati P. Shah
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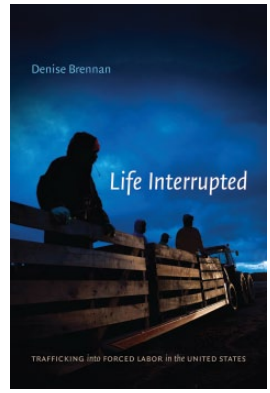

These two books join a growing body of work critiquing the trafficking framework, the dominant conceptual rubric used by U.S. law enforcement for acting upon forced labor and prostitution. The uses and abuses of the contemporary version of this rubric, including the interchangeability of the terms *trafficking* and *prostitution* in juridical and media discourses, provide the context for Denise Brennan's and Melissa Gira Grant's new books, each of which approaches a critique of trafficking from a unique direction.

Brennan targets the stated goals of anti-trafficking laws, which are both to prevent trafficking and rescue people who have been trafficked. These laws ostensibly cover all forms of trafficking, not just trafficking into forced prostitution. However, her analysis shows that extremely limited support exists for cross-border migrants trafficked into forced labor in agricultural, domestic, and sex sectors in the United States, even after they have been officially classified as victims of trafficking. The lack of real support for people classified as having been trafficked calls the aim of the law itself into question. Is it to control cross-border migration, or to help people who have been victims of exploitation and abuse? Grant, on the contrary, discusses the ways in which the law emphasizes a focus on sex workers through both formal and informal policing practices. Her book obliquely critiques the idea of the iconic trafficking victim, usually figured as a helpless girl or young woman who has been sold into prostitution and is in need of rescue.

Both books argue against seeing people who have been trafficked or who do sex work as exceptional or somehow anomalous within an otherwise perfectly laboring world. Instead, they deploy the idea of a continuum. Grant addresses *Playing the Whore* to the continuum of work, asking what it means to think of sex work as work. Brennan addresses the continuum of experiences of exploitation among low-wage migrant workers, including wage theft committed by employers, arguing that trafficking is one extreme of the more generalized exploitation of low-wage migrants. Both books will be of interest to audiences seeking a more complex understanding of informal sector work in the United States.

Life Interrupted will be of particular interest to those seeking an ethnographic perspective on the nuances and complexities of being officially classified as a victim of trafficking in the United States. The book links immigration policy to a critique of low-wage work in America and makes it clear that trafficking and prostitution are not the same thing. Instead, the book makes a compelling case for the idea that people who are thought to be "trafficked" are properly understood as unskilled workers caught between a bad economic situation in their home countries and even worse immigration policy in the United States.

Grant's book will interest audiences seeking a clear argument against criminalizing sex work in the U.S.

Grant's book will be of particular interest to audiences seeking a clear argument against criminalizing sex work in the United States, using examples culled from media reports and interviews on how, exactly, sex work is policed. With reviews of cases involving murders of women doing sex work—for example, on Long Island, New York and in Vancouver—Grant draws on criticisms of the criminalization of sex work. Solicitation for the purpose of exchanging sex and money has been criminalized in U.S. law since the nineteenth century, under vagrancy and anti-solicitation laws. The rise of the anti-trafficking rubric has consolidated the criminalization of prostitution further, by giving police more power to arrest and harass people selling sexual services. Grant's discussion of the Long Island and Vancouver murders speaks to this by discussing the ways in which criminality renders sex workers as being ultimately expendable.

The term *trafficking* made its first appearance in juridical discourses in the late nineteenth century, driven by efforts to abolish what

was then being called "white slavery" and "the traffic in women." These terms connoted "prostitution" in English-speaking Europe and the United States, and were the subject of Emma Goldman's famous essay, "The Traffic in Women," where she wrote that "the 'righteous' cry against the white slave traffic is . . . a toy" that would only serve "to create a few more fat political jobs—parasites who stalk about the world as inspectors, investigators, detectives, and so forth."[1] Anti-prostitution laws dating from this period use the term *trafficking* to indicate prostitution, and they formed the basis of a bureaucratic response to prostitution that included the formation of vice squads and other "fat political jobs" that are with us today.

However, as Carole Vance points out in a 2011 paper, "Although the crime of trafficking is no longer synonymous with prostitution in international law, these more capacious and exploitation-based definitions compete with popular and media portrayals, which overwhelmingly favor the nineteenth-century story of sexual danger and rescue."[2] The disconnect between these sensationalist portrayals and the lived experience of poverty is the location for Brennan and Grant's respective critiques, which address the effects of conflating trafficking and prostitution in the modern imagination.

Brennan stages a powerful ethnographic critique of the idea that the anti-trafficking rubric and legal regime protect victims of trafficking.

Denise Brennan stages a powerful ethnographic critique of the idea that the anti-trafficking rubric and legal regime actually protect victims of trafficking. She chooses the most uncontested space of the anti-trafficking regime to stake her claim: the space where people have officially been designated as victims of trafficking and have received the elusive T visa. The T visa is an exceptionally quick path to a green card for undocumented migrants in an otherwise punitive and notoriously slow immigration system. Following people through the everyday tasks of resettlement and work, Brennan shows the unique struggles around resettlement experienced by people officially designated as having been trafficked.

These struggles are unique for two reasons. First, because people who have been designated as "trafficked" must pursue resettlement after receiving the T visa without the benefit of assistance from networks of other migrants from their home countries or regions. This is due to the stigma of a trafficking designation, in part because trafficking and prostitution are so often conflated. Second, although people trafficked into a range of industries do receive the T visa, support for them is limited because of the dominance of the idea of prostitution in institutional responses to trafficking. "Forced labor is simply invisible, overshadowed by the dominant discourse of sex trafficking" (p. 39). Rather than thinking of migrancy and forced labor (which is only legible to the law as "trafficking") as completely separate entities, Brennan argues that "the reality of migrant exploitation . . . is all around us" and should be understood as a real possibility for low-wage and unskilled cross-border migrants in light of prevailing anti-migrant policies.

Rather than seeing trafficking into forced labor as a lesser form of trafficking into sexual commerce, Brennan argues that "trafficking into forced labor is on the extreme end of a continuum of abuse of migrant workers" (p. 5). Her book focuses on sex work, agricultural work, and domestic labor, and on the difficulty of proving "coercion," one of the three criteria (along with "force" and "fraud") that people must meet to be officially classified as having been "trafficked." Brennan attaches this rationale to the oft-made criticism that the numbers of T visas granted are well below the government's yearly quotas of these visas, which are based on controversial overestimates of the numbers of people trafficked into the United States each year. She emphasizes that the burden of proving coercion weakens the anti-trafficking legal regime and that it is particularly difficult to prove coercion in the terms of labor exploitation—for example, in the terms of wage theft—especially in the absence of physical violence (p. 11).

Instead, the current policy regime in place to protect victims of forced migration focuses on the moment in which individuals lost control over their own migratory status in some way. This

moment is defined as the moment someone was "trafficked." Instead, Brennan "dwells on the ordinary tasks and chores of resettlement in the United States, what I call *everyday lifework*" (p. 4). This focus entails pulling the discourse on trafficking into the United States toward the discourse on migration and immigration policies which, she suggests, "may or may not" impact how common trafficking into forced labor in the United States may be, and "may or may not" impact efforts to prevent trafficking into forced labor and assist trafficked people.

Written in a journalistic style, Melissa Gira Grant's book critiques the criminalization of prostitution, including both the criminalization of people selling sexual services and, more recently, the criminalization of men who buy these services. In reviewing the history of the figure of "the prostitute" in Western Europe, Grant emphasizes the importance of narratives in producing the laws and policies that sex workers must navigate to survive. The idea of narrative suffuses the book, as much as the idea of performance in selling sexual services, in that the representation of sexual commerce is highly mediated by ideas about prostitution that have been circulating for a long time.

The term *playing* in the book's title resonates with Grant's discussion of the term *sex work*, of which she says, "The most important difference [between 'sex work' and 'prostitution'] is that the designation of sex work is the invention of the people who *perform* it" (p. 14, emphasis added). While there is vast disagreement on whether sex work is "labor" in a Marxian sense, there is broad agreement that the exchange of sex and money is a form of livelihood. Grant's use of terms such as "performance," "narrative," and "play" speak to this argument by asking what, exactly, is the "work" of sex work? What is being sold, if not, as abolitionist advocates insist, the person herself? Is an experience being sold? A discreet service? A performance?

The body of work that contextualizes both of these books has emphasized questions of economic class and poverty in understanding when and how people living in poverty use sexual commerce and/or illegal migration for their own survival. This is a qualitatively different perspective on sexual commerce than the dominant, individuated rhetoric of "good girls gone bad." As Grant writes, while anti-prostitution activists blame the glamorization of sex work on television for increasing the numbers of women selling sexual services, "Not as responsible apparently are: the labor market, the privatization of education and healthcare, and debt" (p. 21). Similarly, Brennan emphasizes that debt and poverty loom large in the lives of migrants.

Of sex work and low-wage work in other sectors, Brennan writes,

> At first glance these two communities—low-wage migrants (undocumented and documented) and workers in the sex sector (undocumented and documented)—may seem to have little in common. Yet both communities labor at the margins of legality, and thus both constantly face the possibility of arrest and detention. (p. 39)

Grant signals the same concern with the first chapter of her book, titled "Police," in which she discusses the various uses of entrapment and disregard for the privacy of sex workers, as contemporary vice squads seek to find and arrest women selling sexual services.

If the dominant discourse on forced migration reduces the "victims of trafficking" in Brennan's book to the moment of their having been "trafficked," then the dominant discourse on prostitution reduces the sex workers at the center of Grant's critique to the moment of their arrest. Instead, Grant argues, "If we let go of the desire to diagnose and pathologize what's been called sexualization, we could observe and describe women's lives more fully and describe more precisely how power and sex shape us" (p. 97). We may also read this insight in Brennan's argument, where she aims to place trafficking in the context of immigration and labor policies, ICE raids, the militarization of the border, and agricultural work that is "practically all trafficking," according to an attorney representing low-wage workers with whom Brennan speaks (p. 48).

Both books are written with activism as a central focus, and both ultimately argue that the groups of workers at the center of these critiques are fundamental to the systems that

benefit from their labor. That is to say, the forced-labor migrants Brennan discusses actually support and sustain the economy, rather than being surplus to it. For Grant, this economy includes the expansion of an NGO sector dedicated to rescuing women selling sexual services. She quotes Selma James, for example, a "socialist activist and feminist campaigner," who documents the closure of a successful grassroots, sex worker–led organization. The organization was then replaced by an organization run by anti-pornography feminists, who reaped the grants that would have gone to the sex worker–led organization, without offering employment to any of the sex workers whom they had displaced (Grant, pp. 56-57). Sex work as a criminal activity is understood here as fundamental to maintaining the status quo of abolitionist intervention and arrests.

Both of these books rely on a critique of a larger system of labor exploitation, rather than participating in the normative idea that the economic status quo is generally functional, except for these anomalous phenomena. The discourse on trafficking has been impoverished by the ways in which it has rendered deeply exploitative modes of migration and labor as both exceptional and as a state of being for exploited workers. Both books seek to redress this problem by offering rhetorical and ethnographic arguments that shift the frame we use to understand and, ultimately, to act upon forced labor and sex work.

Notes

1. Emma Goldman, *Anarchism and Other Essays, Second Revised Edition* (New York: Mother Earth, 1911), 183-200, available at www.marxists.org/reference/archive/goldman/works/1910/traffic-women.htm.
2. Carole S. Vance, "Thinking Trafficking, Thinking Sex," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 17, no. 1 (2011): 135-43.

Author Biography

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Labor Rights and Labor Standards in the Global Economy

The Promise and Limits of Private Power: Promoting Labor Standards in a Global Economy
By Richard M. Locke
Cambridge University Press, 2013
ISBN: 978-1-1076-7088-4

Human Rights and Labor Solidarity: Trade Unions in the Global Economy
By Susan L. Kang
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012
ISBN: 978-0-8122-4410-6

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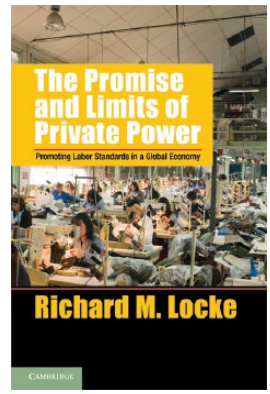

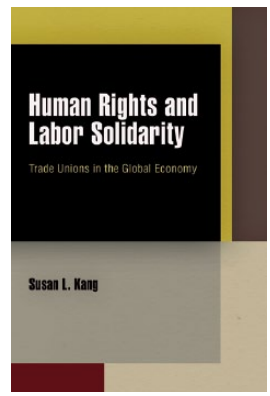

These two books are among a small, but growing, number of new publications dealing with