

Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States by Denise Brennan.

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Since October of 2000 when the United States Congress passed the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, the FBI has organized dozens of antitrafficking task forces across the United States, billions of dollars have been spent on international legislation and compliance reporting, and antitrafficking has become an international movement. Despite this visibility, surprisingly little is known empirically about the life worlds of traffickers and victims. Only a handful of studies have attempted to observe and analyze, in situ, their lives and meaning production. Instead, most data on human trafficking derive from victim testimonials in institutions of rescue where housing and social services are typically dependent on reflecting an interested script and impressionistic reporting by law enforcement personnel. United Nations statistics on the scope of the problem have varied between 700,000 and 25 million, and most scholarship and public discussion has focused on prostitution without regard to whether or not it is consensual. Finally, the broader population whose forced labor is not primarily sexual has largely gone unnoticed. For these reasons, Denise Brennan's in situ empirical study of a well-defined, accurately counted, richly engaged subset of the principals in the human trafficking drama is a welcome addition to a growing body of knowledge that uses rigorous research to study a population that has been wrongly identified as "unresearchable."

Instead of relying on the impressionistic categories and inclusion criteria typically employed in human trafficking studies, Brennan focuses on those who have received T-Visas provided by the U.S. government to trafficking victims. Her informants come from a variety of countries and have entered the United States through a variety of means, typically working in domestic labor but sometimes in the sex industry or in other situations in which forced labor enabled an exploiter to steal wages, exert force or coercion, or sequester them.

It is refreshing to read about human trafficking without the usual prurient obsessions with sex, bondage, discipline, and Albanian, Russian, Chinese, and so forth gangster megaprofits. When stripped of the urban legends, moral panics, and folk devils, there seems to be little to distinguish human trafficking victims from ordinary migrants without documents or with temporary employer-specific

work visas. Brennan admits as much in her concluding chapter, describing her informants' key challenges as low or unpaid wages; poor employment options; limited access to education, job training, healthcare, childcare, and automobile ownership; and the impossibility of visiting home while waiting for permanent residence. In Brennan's representation, being a T-Visa holder is largely dependent on meeting a service provider who knows about it and being willing to endure the bureaucratic hurdles and years of waiting rather than disappearing back into a vast pool of migrants lacking civil rights. After more than a decade, fewer than 5,000 individuals have received T-Visas.

Brennan has successfully produced the first ethnography of human trafficking, richly representing the migrant "life interrupted" in the title. However, the subtitle, "Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States," takes an institutionally defined migration-stream study on a wild turn into human trafficking debates that are never fully engaged. Her first chapter deconstructs and dismisses antitrafficking sensationalism through rationalist critique and well-chosen examples, such as the *New York Times*, irresponsibly promoting moral panic, but it fails to take up the empirical and scholarly debates about trafficking to which her data might have spoken, such as agency versus trauma in sex work (Marcus et al. 2014; Morselli and Savoie-Gargiso 2014; Raghavan and Doychak 2015); challenges to assumptions about profitability and scope (Curtis et al. 2008; Mahmoud and Trebesch 2010; Marcus et al. in press); patriarchy and rescue (Cojocar 2015); racial disparities (African Americans are 62% of FBI confirmed traffickers) in law enforcement (Banks and Kyckelhahn 2011); and the metapolitics of policy (Bernstein 2014; Weitzer 2014). However, Brennan's book is an excellent contribution to the literature on migration and may eventually be seen as a prolegomena to future ethnographies that robustly take up these debates about human trafficking.

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The Empty Seashell: Witchcraft and Doubt on an Indonesian Island by Nils Bubandt

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Near the end of his innovative book *The Empty Seashell: Witchcraft and Doubt on an Indonesian Island*, Nils Bubandt finally asks the real question that his closely rendered study raises for the reader: “Why do people in Buli believe in modernity in times of witchcraft?” (p. 239). Effectively drawing on historical and ethnographic evidence, Bubandt addresses this question by carefully outlining the continued empirical reality of witchcraft in the everyday lives of the Buli, a predominantly Christian group of approximately three thousand people who live on Halmahera, the largest island in North Maluku, Indonesia. Supported by a clear presentation of evidence obtained over 20 years of sustained contact with the community, Bubandt asserts, without sensationalizing or normalizing the phenomenon, that witchcraft for the Buli remains terrifyingly real as an invisible, aporetic force, rather than a locatable, singular object of belief, and emphasizes that it is doubt rather than belief that sustains witchcraft as a force within the Buli present.

At times echoing James Siegel’s writings regarding similar phenomenon on Java and Sumatra, Bubandt makes effective use of Jacques Derrida’s concept of aporia to express how something can, without contradiction, be simultaneously unknowable and real (pp. 35–38). Evoking Meno’s Paradox regarding the unknowable within knowledge, Bubandt links the problem of witchcraft’s aporetic character to longstanding problems within Western thought

and philosophy (pp. 60–61). The subtlety of the author’s argument and his consistent care to link and limit his conceptual claims to what the evidence will permit the reader to grasp allows Bubandt to avoid the common hazard of clumsily grafting the wisdom of the ancients or Continental philosophers on to ethnographic situations in which such connections may be less than clear.

Credibly making the claim that witchcraft cannot serve, and has never served, as an object of belief for the Buli requires a great deal of context. Thus, Bubandt wisely offers several chapters of historical evidence to ground his more general ethnographic claims. The author’s account of the Buli’s sudden and near-total conversion to Christianity around the turn of the 20th century is particularly fascinating, as this ultimately served as a strategy to, finally, eliminate the *gua* (witch) from the community once and for all. Carefully taking the reader through the parallels between traditional Buli cosmology and the promises of Christian missionaries, the practical logic of Buli conversion as an antidote to the poison of witchcraft is quite clear. Given that the dead did not rise and the witch only seemed to get stronger in the wake of leaving behind the old rituals and commemorations, the Buli’s subsequent doubt of these same Christian teachings also makes perfect sense. Bubandt demonstrates how Christianity itself later appeared to the Buli to mimic the witch with its “deception” and ultimately generated more danger and more doubt. Although rendered with less detail, Bubandt further demonstrates that a repetition of this cycle of fervent belief followed by radical doubt took place during the time of the Suharto’s New Order, this time with “modernity” as the object of faith. Given the New Order