

## Book Review

*Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States.* By Denise Brennan. Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 304 pages. \$23.95.

SVERRE MOLLAND  
Australian National University

Human trafficking has become subject to increasing attention among migration scholars in recent years. The migration literature on trafficking typically explores what engenders trafficking situations, as well as the politics of antitrafficking itself. Denise Brennan's *Life Interrupted: Trafficking into Forced Labor in the United States* extends this scholarship by focusing not only on trafficking experiences and the immediate antitrafficking responses that eventuate, but also on officially identified trafficked victims and their life worlds after antitrafficking assistance. Hence, the broader implications of both trafficking and antitrafficking are central concerns for *Life Interrupted* — a long-term perspective reflected in the book's methodology. Based on several years of ethnographic fieldwork in the United States, Brennan places considerable emphasis on the experiences of migrant workers. Throughout the book, the reader becomes acquainted with several key informants who have been subject to diverse and egregious forms of labor-related exploitation and abuse, as well as the subsequent challenges of rebuilding their lives in the United States.

The book includes two main parts that explore trafficking and its aftermath, respectively. In part one, the first chapter considers the political context of trafficking in the United States, arguing that immigration policies and the influence of abolitionist antiprostitution initiatives have had several negative effects for trafficked victims. Whereas immigration policies have enabled rampant abuse of migrant workers,

abolitionism has resulted in often highly punitive trafficking approaches which have done little to improve sex workers' situations. Furthermore, it has contributed to other forms of trafficking and forced labor being ignored. These claims are not new, but *Life Interrupted* provides depth to such arguments in the way Brennan examines the implications for trafficked victims. The second chapter provides a more focused analysis of migrant experiences of forced labor and trafficking. A key analytical concern here is why migrant workers often put up with situations when they may not necessarily be subject to direct threats or abuse. Drawing on anthropological research on violence, Brennan shows how "staying on" with an abusive situation must not be read as docility or "false consciousness." Instead "(r)emaining with one's trafficker... can be understood in terms of strategy, not consent or resignation. Consciousness of one's subordinate treatment is not at issue; the timing of when or how to challenge it is" (86).

What makes *Life Interrupted* original is its focus on trafficking's aftermath, which is the subject of part two. In this regard, the book is unusual on many fronts. As other research has shown, antitrafficking responses worldwide often become a question of rescues as well as repatriation of trafficked victims, including providing shelters for trafficked victims. Brennan places hardly any focus on this at all. This is not a criticism. To the contrary, Brennan redirects focus on dimensions of post-trafficking which have received scant attention. Her research explores service providers that tend not to engage in moralistic rescues of alleged victims. At the same time, most of Brennan's informants are migrant workers who are not repatriated to their countries of origin but attempt to rebuild their lives in the United States.

As Brennan points out, officially identified trafficked victims who attempt to resettle in the United States pose unique challenges. In contrast to refugees

and other migrants groups, their resettlement is highly individuated. Trafficked victims do not constitute a defined community, making integration into the United States often precarious. In these later chapters, the everyday-life dimension of Brennan's informants becomes clear. An interesting insight here is how employment becomes key to subjectivity and empowerment for former trafficked victims. Yet, as Brennan shows, this employment is also highly precarious, as few migrants can obtain anything but low-wage jobs. In fact, in some cases, the type of work is only marginally better than the situations trafficked victims fled from in the first place. A key criticism she makes is the general lack of long-term support for trafficked victims. Yet here, I wish the book extended its analysis to reflect on the whole trafficking architecture. What is the main intellectual and political lesson to learn from the sad fact that despite numerous antitrafficking efforts, many trafficked victims in the long run appear to end up in employment that is similar to what they escaped from?

*Life Interrupted* blends academic scholarship and activist research. It includes an appendix that provides practical advice on how to get involved in combating trafficking. Here, the book could stake out its position related to activism and scholarship more clearly. Throughout, there is a vacillation between approving representations of attorneys and social workers who assist trafficked victims and descriptions that are outright critical. The book seems to associate the latter with abolitionist antitrafficking organizations but remains somewhat unclear how these differences are delineated. On a related note, I would like to have seen more elaborated analysis of antitrafficking actors themselves. As the book is grounded in anthropology, it could have usefully extended the growing scholarship on aid programs as "brokers" between official policy and beneficiaries. Besides these relatively minor quibbles, *Life Interrupted* is a highly engaging book that will be of great interest to anyone interested in forced labor and human trafficking.