

# Book Review

## **Demystifying Modern Slavery By Rose Broad and David Gadd Publisher: Routledge (2022)**

ISBN: 9780367149307 (Hardback)  
9780429053986 (eBook)

Price: £115.00 (Hardback) £35.09 (eBook)

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‘Unless representations of perpetrators are recognisably ‘real’, efforts to deter offenders and safeguard potential victims will continue to be misdirected (p.145).’

Without any legal definition, modern slavery is an umbrella term that captures an expanding range of crimes. These crimes are often seen as organised crime or immigration issues within the political debates. Through in-depth interviews with people accused of, and convicted for, committing modern slavery offences, the book ‘Demystifying Modern Slavery’ sought to answer ‘Who are the perpetrators of modern slavery? Why do they exploit others? What might be done to stop exploitation recurring?’ The book analyses and interprets the life stories of 30 convicted offenders to challenge the depiction of modern slavery in the UK as an issue of organised crime and immigration.

Using the Free Association Narrative Interview Method and through interviews with people who had been accused or convicted of modern slavery and other allied forms of offending — (county lines) drug dealing, holding people in domestic servitude and facilitating illegal immigration, the book reveals how modern slavery has been mystified. Chapter by chapter,

the book runs the reader through life stories of offenders of people smuggling, cases closest to ‘organised’ criminals, sham marriage, domestic servitude, labour exploitation, adult sexual trafficking and child sexual exploitation.

Life stories of the convicted offenders show the challenge of drawing a line between the victim and the victimiser questioning the evil slave masters, as has been the dominant political rhetoric. While the events described by the offenders in Chapter 4, ‘Organised criminal?’ fit the broad definition of organised crime: ‘necessitating three people engaged in ongoing serious crime for profit’ — the stories their interviewees told show how interdependent the relationship between the perpetrators and victims is; in each, there has been some level of consensus, at least on the surface level, between the offender and victim.

The authors, Rose Broad and David Gadd, also shed light on how the convicted individuals themselves could have been victims of exploitation who did not have access to a fair court because of institutionalised racism. In Chapter 5: ‘Sham Marriage’, Broad and Gadd found that ‘the case against Rasheed convicted of sham marriage was made in the language he did not understand, in a country he had barely explored given his confinement to a single shop seven days per week, with legal representation that was serving the best interest of the relative who was exploiting him (p. 90).’

The occurrence of sham marriages demonstrates how, in an unequal world with limited opportunities for movement from

poorer to wealthier countries, marriage serves as a crucial method for gaining global and, thus, social mobility. Likewise, in Chapter 6 — ‘Domestic Servitude’—the authors refer to the UK’s tightening up the eligibility requirements for becoming an overseas domestic worker while allowing those found to be victims of modern slavery to apply for temporary leave to remain. The book posits that the prevalence of domestic servitude can be attributed more to the absence of rights afforded to people who are forced to migrate and live in poverty, rather than the malicious intent of human traffickers and organized crime syndicates.

Chapter 6 — ‘Labour Exploitation’ demonstrates how the ‘denial’ of individuals, businesses, and government has shielded them from taking responsibility for exploitation — from the ‘trouble recognition’ of structural issues that have made the lives of individuals, including undocumented migrants and sex workers, more precarious. According to the book, to address labour exploitation, the first and most essential step is to provide everyone who lives in the UK with the right to a guaranteed minimum wage and secure accommodation. Additionally, it is crucial to change the culture of business practices that depend on and profit from underpaid and destitute individuals. Despite mounting evidence of exploitative labor conditions within supply chains of large businesses, the British government has only held a small number of individuals accountable for such practices. Instead of developing and enforcing frameworks that would address the root causes of exploitation, such as low prices, the government has

taken a conciliatory approach by seeking to work with the private sector. This approach has failed to effectively tackle exploitative purchasing and sourcing practices.

Regarding sexual exploitation, the book argues that the focus of the debate should shift from organised crime and evil enslavers to providing minimum wage provisions and trade union representation in the sex industry. It is important to note that while the authors question the debate about the prevalence of organized crime and evil enslavers, they do not overlook the harm suffered by

those who have been exploited financially, physically, or otherwise. Nevertheless, the life stories of those accused or convicted of modern slavery offences demonstrate how structural issues such as harsh inequality, immigration regimes, lack of labour rights, and limited opportunities have led to such exploitation, which is referred to as 'modern slavery' crimes.

In sum, the book sheds light on the mystique around modern slavery and highlights the lack of qualitative research in this field. It encourages further research to

develop a better understanding of different forms of crime that fall under the umbrella of 'modern slavery'. It is a timely and valuable read for anyone who wants to fight against modern slavery practices in the UK; it sheds light on how the state enables exploitation by ignoring structural vulnerability and mystifying modern slavery. It serves as a reminder that exploitation is still prevalent and will continue to persist unless the root causes of exploitation, such as the absence of rights and hostile immigration regimes, are recognised and addressed.