Book Review

Genevieve LeBaron (ed.) (2019) *Researching Forced Labour in the Global Economy: Methodological Challenges and Advances.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. ISBN: 9780197266472. 228 pp. Hardcover US$65.00.

Reviewed by
Jonelle Humphrey, McMaster University, Canada

According to the Global Slavery Index (GSI) there are approximately 40 million victims of modern slavery globally. This astonishing figure has mobilised governments, civil society groups and businesses to urgently implement anti-slavery, trafficking and forced labour policies including supply chain transparency legislation. However, the data from which these statistics are generated is problematic. Its illegal nature means that forced labour presents many methodological challenges for researchers including gaining access to workers who are victims of forced labour. Governments and multinational corporations (MNCs) routinely refuse academics access to their workers or supply chain information. Consequently, researchers have had to rely on unverifiable data generated by anti-slavery groups such as the Walk Free Foundation which produces the GSI. Fortunately, scholars have found ways to navigate these challenges and are generating robust empirical data about the factors which create conditions for forced labour as well as the business demand for it. *Researching Forced Labour in the Global Economy: Methodological Challenges and Advances* provides methodological guidance from researchers in a variety of disciplines who are working to improve the strength of data on forced labour.

The volume's editor, Genevieve LeBaron, Professor of Politics and prolific researcher of forced labour, commences the collection with an overview of the political, ethical and methodological challenges related to researching forced labour. This introduction emphasises the tendency by anti-slavery groups to inflate forced labour statistics in an attempt to spark action against the phenomenon. However, opting for this big data approach is also politically strategic. Attempts to rigorously research the roots of forced labour would undoubtedly expose the role of MNCs in perpetuating forced labour business models, which would be undesirable as it could compromise the corporate funding on which such groups rely. Furthermore, anti-slavery groups frame forced labour as a randomly occurring problem caused by a few unscrupulous employers rather than a predictable feature of many industries. The unfettered power and profitability of corporations is rarely if ever addressed. Additionally, policies produced from poor data often yield equally poor results and could negatively impact those whom they intend to benefit. Recognising the potentially damaging effect of misleading figures and narratives, contributors to this book have taken novel approaches utilising robust empirical research.

The book is targeted at social sciences and humanities scholars as well as researchers seeking to understand the root causes of forced labour and the mechanisms through which corporations profit from labour exploitation. It is not meant to be a comprehensive guide nor a one-size-fits-all methodology for studying forced labour. Nor does it provide a single interpretation for what

constitutes rigour or transparency in forced labour research. Instead, it incorporates multiple epistemological and ontological approaches and illuminates the merits and limitations of the methods explored. This book aims, first, to strengthen the research methods used to investigate forced labour. Second, because research on the political economy of forced labour tends to be fragmented across different academic disciplines, the volume seeks to bridge various streams of scholarship across the humanities and social sciences to consolidate the bourgeoning empirical evidence base on forced labour. Finally, the book seeks to make an empirical contribution. The authors explore forced labour in various industries globally, including mining and electronics, and present rare empirical findings which highlight the fact that forced labour is thriving as capitalist markets deepen and expand. This empirical evidence makes a crucial contribution given that there is a scarcity of such scholarship on forced labour where the global economy is concerned.

The volume is divided into two parts of five chapters each. The first part focuses on surveying methodological gaps while in the second part researchers discuss the methodologies they have utilised along with the ethical and logistical obstacles they have encountered, in a bid to help future researchers better navigate these challenges. In Chapter Two LeBaron and Andrew Crane discuss the lack of emphasis on the business of forced labour in the literature. They draw on modern slavery literature from management studies and advocate for the strengthening of business methodologies to better understand forced labour's business dynamics. These methodologies include systematically analysing business models and mapping the structures of labour and product supply chains. In Chapter Three Nicola Phillips looks at the ways in which forced labour statistics and quantitative data are manipulated towards political ends. She discusses how anti-slavery groups such as Walk Free inflate the estimates of forced labour in order to exert political pressure on those who control resources. Phillips cautions academics against placing quantitative data on a higher pedestal than much-needed qualitative data.

Joel Quirk, in Chapter Four, criticises the politics of anti-slavery activism which frames modern slavery as an exceptional issue that rarely threatens major economic and political interests. He claims that activism can only improve if informed by stronger research which entails careful analysis and strategic targeting of the root causes of forced labour. Jean Allain, in Chapter Five, stresses that a baseline understanding of the concept of forced labour is vital to ensuring methodological rigour. He offers a detailed analysis of the 1930 Forced Labour Convention and explains how its definition of forced labour differs from definitions of legal exploitation and slavery. He encourages consistent use of terminology so as to increase comparability across different types of labour exploitation research. In Chapter Six, Samuel Okyere examines the bias in reporting by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). He demonstrates the way in which NGOs such as Free the Slaves consistently use language such as "child mining slaves" and "forced child labour" to legitimise their stance as abolitionists and to attract funding for their cause despite the fact that research participants did not agree with the conventional notion that the age of eighteen signified a person's maturity. He emphasises the importance of researcher reflexivity to ensure that research is representative of the research participants' experiences and not only those of the researcher.

Part Two, in which scholars reflect on methodologies they employ in their own forced labour research, begins with Chapter Seven; Neil Howard argues that in-depth research needs to be conducted among the victims of forced labour to serve as a corrective to inaccurate narratives. Detailing his use of ethnography, interviews and focus groups when conducting research in Nigeria among youths working in artisanal quarries, he illustrates how such research can be conducted ethically and in a way which empowers the voices of the vulnerable. Jenny Chan in Chapter Eight

describes her use of ethnography and interviews when conducting research among student interns recruited to work in China's electronics industry. She emphasises the importance of triangulating between sources – in this case, checking documentary evidence such as wage statements to corroborate her field work and gain a deeper understanding of forced labour business models in the context of supply chains. In Chapter Nine, Andreas Rühmkorf explores how legal research could be used to capture and analyse data pertaining to the way companies address forced labour in their supply chains. Using examples of his own research on MNC policies to address forced labour in supply chains, he shows how he utilises methods such as doctrinal legal research and documentary analysis to investigate how forced labour practices are shaped by business policies.

Robert Caruana, in Chapter Ten, illustrates how discourse analysis can be used to research forced labour. He surveys the language used by the government, media and civil society groups when addressing the United Kingdom's 2015 Modern Slavery Act to demonstrate how the concept of modern slavery is socially constructed in different ways to give credence to agendas of various actors. In the last chapter, Jessica R. Pliley shows the difficulty of using archival methods to generate accurate data about trafficking in the United States in the 1900s. She documents the practical, political and definitional challenges of attempting to correctly quantify trafficking and makes the correlation between the similarities of past and present methodological challenges in researching modern slavery.

This book is an invaluable resource to researchers seeking a deeper understanding of the role of forced labour in the contemporary global economy. It serves as a helpful guide regarding the methodologies which can be used to generate accurate qualitative data as opposed to the guestimates manufactured by abolitionist groups for their own political agendas. I found this book to be clearly structured and written in a manner which is accessible to academics across various disciplines as well as readers without prior knowledge of forced labour and the methodologies used to research it. Although the volume does not focus on quantitative methodologies, I believe that a major factor contributing to the strength of this book is its analysis of a wide range of qualitative methodologies including interviews, focus groups, ethnography, participant observation, business and supply chain mapping, discourse analysis, legal analysis and archival research. All the volume's contributors are notable scholars in the field of modern slavery and every academic pursuing forced labour research should make it their business to read this book.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

JONELLE HUMPHREY, LL.B, LL.M, is a PhD candidate in the School of Labour Studies at McMaster University. Her research focuses on regulation designed to combat modern slavery in supply chains. [Email: humphj2@mcmaster.ca]