Kamala Kempadoo and Elena Shih (eds), *White Supremacy, Racism, and the Coloniality of Anti-Trafficking*, New York: Routledge, 2023. ISBN: 9780367753498 (paper); ISBN: 9780367753504 (cloth); ISBN: 9781003162124 (ebook)

Lyndsey P. Beutin, *Trafficking in Antiblackness: Modern-Day Slavery, White Indemnity, and Racial Justice*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2023. ISBN: 9781478019787 (paper); ISBN: 9781478017073 (cloth); ISBN: 9781478024354 (ebook)

Elena Shih, *Manufacturing Freedom: Sex Work, Anti-Trafficking Rehab, and the Racial Wages of Rescue*, Oakland: University of California Press, 2023. ISBN: 9780520379701 (paper); ISBN: 9780520379695 (cloth); ISBN: 9780520976870 (ebook)

Decolonising "Modern Slavery"

Since the late 1990s, there has been growing attention to so-called "modern slavery", "forced labour", and "human trafficking". Yet the critiques have also multiplied and intensified, concerning not only the depoliticising nature of hegemonic *anti-slavery* discourse, but also the harmful effects of actions carried out under the banner of *anti-slavery* (Bernstein 2019; Quirk 2011; Sharma 2018). In other words, the *anti-slavery* project has been condemned not only as neoliberal, but as anti-migrant and anti-sex worker (see O'Connell Davidson 2015). Some geographers (one of us among them) have turned to Marxian notions of "unfree labour" as an alternative lens through which to analyse extreme forms of exploitation intertwined with severe constraints on workers' mobility (McGrath et al. 2022). But the seeming urgency of combatting "modern slavery" continues to draw in geographers dismissive of the critiques outlined above (e.g. Brown et al. 2021; Smith 2018). Within a discipline which is at the forefront of debates on "decolonisation", we should take care not to inadvertently reinforce colonial tropes of saviourism and environmental determinism. We therefore wish to highlight three recent books which deepen and extend our understanding of the dangers of the *anti-slavery* project by analysing it through the twin lens of racism and imperialism. As critical geographers, the readers of *Antipode* should find much of value in these volumes.

 White Supremacy, Racism, and the Coloniality of Anti-Trafficking, edited by Kempadoo and Shih, offers the broadest view of the legacies of white supremacy,

colonialism, and racism in anti-trafficking efforts across the world. By bringing together critical scholars and activists from the US, India, Brazil, Iran, and Ghana, the book creates spaces for antiracist and decolonial knowledge from across the globe on themes of surveillance, control, and resistance of racialised bodies on the move and in work. This edited collection takes readers on a critical journey, arguing that despite incisive critiques of the colonial and racist legacies embedded in anti-trafficking efforts, the agenda—often driven by Western academics—continues to create new spaces for the reinforcement of white supremacist projects of anti-migration/sex work/terrorism, particularly in the Global South. Organised into three parts, the collection includes contributors from a range of disciplines such as criminology, sociology, and politics while spanning locations from India to Canada, and West Africa to the Amazon. The first part provides a comprehensive overview of how anti-trafficking initiatives perpetuate and bolster the white supremacist agendas of the Global North in relation to the Global South. The second part delves into specific debates, presenting empirical examples that illustrate how anti-trafficking policies generate exclusions and reinforce inequality. The final part, which includes contributions by practitioners/organisers, explores the theme of resistance—highlighting the ways in which migrants and sex workers actively oppose and challenge these oppressive policies and practices. Together, these three parts critically reassess current anti-trafficking initiatives—predominantly shaped by the Global North and imposed in the Global South—to meaningfully challenge the power structures inherent within them.

Since the passage of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) in 2000, the United States has framed itself as the global leader in the fight against human trafficking. Beutin's *Trafficking in Antiblackness: Modern-Day Slavery, White Indemnity, and Racial Justice* offers a view from the US, arguing forcefully that "antitrafficking is a racial project that redeems the West *and indemnifies it* against indictments of racial injustice in the past and in the present" (p.20). Throughout the book she examines various media portrayals, legal frameworks, and historical narratives and powerfully argues that anti-trafficking representations enable Western states and corporations to evade accountability for the enduring legacies of the transatlantic slave trade while perpetuating antiblackness. Drawing on critical Black studies, she demonstrates how efforts to combat trafficking often mask the continuation of racial oppression, absolving former colonial powers and businesses of

historical harm while reinforcing harmful racial stereotypes. Organised into four chapters, the book begins by exploring the emergence of the anti-trafficking movement, suggesting that it politically functions to suppress demands for reparations. She then examines how anti-trafficking efforts frequently shift blame onto racialised and gendered bodies, such as "Black mothers", thereby perpetuating stereotypes and diverting responsibility from colonial structures to individual racialised subjects. She critiques the use of big data and statistics on human trafficking, arguing that empirical manipulation supports a political agenda that preserves the status quo of the Global North, enabling philanthropic institutions and the media to uphold racial hierarchies. The final chapter underscores the deep connection between anti-Blackness and anti-trafficking efforts, calling for the dismantling of the racial hierarchies that anti-trafficking maintains.

Shih's *Manufacturing Freedom: Sex Work, Anti-Trafficking Rehab, and the Racial Wages of Rescue* offers a grounded ethnographic account, focusing on vocational training programmes targeting migrant women who might otherwise engage in sex work. Shih examines the technocratic solution of jewellery-making as a form of anti-trafficking rehabilitation, often framed as a humanitarian intervention but which ultimately reinforces "American empire and global white supremacy" (p.21). Through her ethnographic research within two faith-based non-profit organisations in China and Thailand, Shih critiques how these NGOs present sex workers as trafficked victims and promote market-based solutions to their rehabilitation. Shih's ethnography begins by analysing how the US replaces rights with rescue and rehabilitation, highlighting the broader geopolitical implications of these interventions. She critiques the technocratic solutions of vocational training, which align global development goals with ethical consumption, exposing the political motives behind such initiatives. The following chapters explore how anti-trafficking organisations exert social control and how the women they aim to "rescue" often resist these structures. Shih's focus then shifts to the policies of China and Thailand, critiquing the hypocrisy of the Chinese state's use of trafficking legislation to oppress undocumented migrants and sex workers, as well as the commodification of victimhood by Western NGOs in Thailand. In her final chapter, she tracks the afterlife of these rescue and rehabilitation efforts by following four women who have left the jewellery-making trade. Despite their vocational training, Shih

exposes the hypocrisy and inefficiency of these interventions, showing how they often fail to equip women with real marketable skills, pushing them back into global capitalist systems.

In conclusion, these three books collectively lay the groundwork for decolonising the *anti-slavery* project. Together, they make a powerful case for rethinking the anti-trafficking movement by exposing its deep entanglement with white supremacy and colonialism. They call for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners to rethink and challenge the dominance of Western epistemic frameworks and expose how deeply white supremacy and coloniality are embedded in these efforts, urging us to dismantle not only the exploitative systems but also the very categories of exploitation that mask them. This is a call that critical geographers should take heed of. Decolonisation, as Beutin suggests in her afterword, might ultimately require the dismantling of anti-trafficking organisations themselves as a necessary step toward real change.

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