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Book Review:
*Enslaved: True Stories of
Modern Day Slavery*
by Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten

Reviewed by Benjamin Thomas Greer

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California Department of Justice

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Authors: Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten

PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2008, 218 pages

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Human trafficking is an abomination that decimates the lives of the trafficked, fracturing their families, and is an act which exploits their labor and bodies, treating them as a renewable resource. Trafficking in people is the fastest growing crime:¹ not only in the numbers of victims and profits, but in the world's consciousness.² According to the United States, State Department's 2010 report, there are over twelve million adults and children in forced labor, bonded labor, and forced prostitution worldwide.³ As this emerging issue grows in awareness it is imperative to bear in mind that the victims are people and not just statistics.

Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery, is a compilation of first-person heart breaking stories of human trafficking and enslavement. Authors Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten are directors of the American Anti-Slavery Group. Jesse Sage has appeared on National Public Radio, BET, Pacifica Radio, and has spoken widely across the country against slavery.

These stories are not told by an author summarizing their notes from interviews, rather they are the actual words of the victim themselves - their unvarnished words, written and translated in their own unique verbal dialects, using their own syntax. Telling their stories in this format allows the reader to gain

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¹ Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, 22 U.S.C. § 7101(b)(8) (2008) [congressional findings have concluded that “[t]rafficking in persons is increasingly perpetrated by organized, sophisticated criminal enterprises” and “is the fastest growing source of profits for organized criminal enterprises worldwide.”].

² See Donna Hughes, *The “Natasha” Trade: Transnational Sex Trafficking*, Nat'l Inst. of Just. J. 13 (2001) (citing Michael Platzer of the United Nations Center for International Crime Prevention), <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000246c.pdf>, accessed 30 November 2011).

³ U.S. DEP'T OF STATE, TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS REPORT 341 (10th ed., 2010), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/142979.pdf>, accessed 30 November 2011).

a deeper understanding of their victimization. As the reader quiets their mind, you are able to hear the voice of the presenter. Within their words you will find their hurt palpable, their anger tangible, and their confusion understandable. The authors have done a commanding job of allowing the victim to tell their own story.

Here are just three of the stories you will experience:

Jill Leighton, United States

“As a runaway at age fourteen, your old concerns quickly disappear and are replaced by new, life threatening ones.” (p. 62) Spotted in a mall Jill was quickly seduced by the flattery and attention of Bruce. His offer of a job as an actress and a place to stay with him was too enticing not to pass up. All she had to do was go with him to his office and audition for the job. Jill thought it odd that she be required to wear a blind fold on the car ride but was too embarrassed to question it. Hearing the sounds of a roll up garage door and being lead down wooden steps to a musty, moldy smelling basement – Bruce’s insistence that they were going to his basement audition room didn’t feel right. Now scared Jill began to cry enraging Bruce. Demanding to know why she was crying – especially when all he was trying to do was help her – Jill began to apologize. Bruce reapplied the blind fold, grabbed her hands binding them together and began whipping her. Jill passed out. When she awoke she realized that she was suspended by her hands above the ground. It had been three days.

Still arguing some veil form of employment, Bruce forced Jill to sign a contract. “The contract said explicitly that I was a sex slaved owned by Bruce. I would be available to him sexually anytime he desired in any way her desired. I would never deny him anything, never wear underwear, never escape and most important, at penalty of death, never tell a soul about my new status as a slave.” (p. 68) Before Bruce could sell Jill, he needed to teach her how to act appropriately. Jill endured what she calls the “training period.” Mistakes, as judged by Bruce, were punished with a cattle prodding or whippings. Bathing consisted off Jill holding her breath or being anally penetrated face-first under water. “I had been strangled with a rope until I passed out during sex enough times to understand that my life was completely in his hands. (p. 69) He took Jill to the hairdresser, forcing her to bleach her hair so many times it would fall out in clumps. Because customers would desire blonds and Jill’s hair was to fine to continue to bleach, Bruce saw this as noncompliance; her punishment – a stun gun to her breasts. When Bruce determined the “training” period was complete he arranged her first client. \$140 later the rental was complete.

For fun Bruce would hold card games with his friends where Jill would dress provocatively, wearing a short mini-skirt without panties as required under her contract. Bruce would show off to his poker buddies by lift her skirt and penetrate her in front of all. Bruce would monetize Jill by placing bets with her body. “At more than one poker party, a losing hand for Bruce meant another player got to ‘take a dip’ inside of me.” (p. 72)

Bruce’s crimes continued for almost three years. He attempted to perform an abortion on Jill after she became pregnant. “I had been hung from the ceiling by my wrists while Bruce shoved a broken, long-neck bottle into my vagina in an attempt to remove the fetus.”(p. 76) At one point Jill was tied to bumper of Bruce’s car and told that he was going drag her until she was nothing but hair and a grease stain.

Jill’s captivity came to an abrupt end. Bruce was arrested on unrelated charges and Jill was able to finally escape. Jill laments that the arresting officers gave her no support – despite finding her blindfolded and locked in a closet. Her requests for a female officer went unanswered and Jill her self was threatened with arrest. She grabbed whatever money she could find laying around and ran out the back door.

Jill summarizes her story by saying, “I write this story so that maybe someone who hears it will somehow be able to avoid the pain that was forced on me, and for others to know that things like I experienced really do happen – and they can happen to anyone’s daughter, sister, girlfriend, niece, or wife.” (p. 79)

Beatrice Fernando, Lebanon

Offered a salary of two thousand rupees per month with free room and board, Beatrice saw an opportunity to better the life of her family. She left her home country of Sri Lanka to work a domestic housekeeper in Lebanon. Paying a fee to sign the contract was the start of her victimization. Landing at her destination the first order of business for the employer broker was to confiscate her passport. Displayed like trinkets and selected by a buyer Beatrice was whisked away in a luxurious car into the nearby mountains. At first the work difficult, but Beatrice managed. Towards the end of her first month she got sick, which enraged her employer. Without pay, Beatrice was snatched out of her bed shoved into a cab and left on the side of the road. Not knowing where to go Beatrice sought out the only person she new - the employer broke.

Displayed like a trinket again, she was once again selected by an employer. This employer forced Beatrice to clean her menstrual stained underwear with her bear hands and would beat her in the head with her household cleaning tools. Locked in a house with no viable means of communication Beatrice was

effectively isolated. Starved, only being fed the table scraps from the children, Beatrice tried to continue her daily chores; however the abuse continued. “[N]ot a single day went by without a knock on the head, a sharp twist of the ear, a slap on the face, or a demanding insult...” (p. 105) A vain attempt of escaped ended with a beating and an order to the guards “to shoot me if they ever caught me outside the house.” (p. 106)

Fashioning a make shift rope out of saris, Beatrice attempted to repelled down off of a four story balcony. Because of her lack of strength she was not able to complete her escape. She crawled back into the house, staring up at the ceiling praying to God for help. “*Lisha is going to kill me.*” (p. 109) She vowed to make one final attempt, an attempt that would not stop in a half measure. Beatrice would jump from the fourth story, surviving the fall. She awoke in the hospital, paralyzed with most of her limbs broken. She was able to convince the employer broker (presumably because she no longer had value to him) to send her back home.

Harry Wu, China

Human trafficking is often thought of as a street crime conducted by vicious predators or gangs. Often overlooked is institutional human trafficking – forced labor. While other victim’s story in this book focus on the physical or physiological pain they endured Mr. Wu story focuses on hunger. His daily struggle and search for food in the Chinese government labor camps.

Laogai⁴ means “reform through labor” in Chinese. Laogai is a common tool used by which the Chinese government enforces many of its judicial rulings. These institutions are incredibly hard on the people sentenced there. They are forced to work in sub-human conditions while being starved. The Government has refused repeated requests of the Red Cross and the United Nations seeking access to check on the well being of the camps prisoners. Harry Wu was an inquisitive university student and was arrested without explanation after a group of fellow students held a meeting to criticize and denounce him. Wu was sent to a Laogai where he spent 19 years in 12 different camps, forced to dig trenches, harvest crops, and mine coal. The camp where his story takes place is Branch 583 located in the western zone of the Qinghe Farm. It held 1,800 prisoners, housed in twenty-plus rows of houses with toilets, the kitchen, solitary confinement and tool sheds surrounding the periphery. The prisoners sleep ten to a twenty-five-foot-long kang (a heated bed).

⁴ Added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003.

A centralized tool Mr. Wu uses to convey the systematic enslavement is the wotou bun. The wotou bun would provide short term sustenance and life, but also would rob the consumer of long term nourishment at the same time. The chemical make-up would vary camp to camp but wotous are generally a sorghum flour based (sometimes ground corn cobs) roll that contained about fifty percent bran. (p. 119) Prisoners received these rolls two at a time, twice a day. The buns were often targets of sneak attacks by other prisoners looking to steal calories. Each person also received one ladleful of vegetable soup, which had a few leaves of yellowed greens and was salty. But the majority of the meal was the wotou. Some of the other camps would provide wotous that were more sorghum than brand which would cause severe and insufferable constipation. “Many of us had helped dig the lumps of feces from each other’s anuses... eating the wotous made from sorghum flour, the feces would not come out. It was extremely painful. The digging caused many of their anuses to bleed, but they continued to dig.” (p. 121) The struggle for food was not limited to the rations provided.

Much of the labor required on a daily basis demanded the digging of ditches. Mr. Wu was quickly schooled by other inmates that this digging could unearth valuable nutrition. He was told, when digging strike near existing holes in the ground. You may fortunate enough to uncover field mouse, frog or snake meat to eat. Apparently mice holes were the best. Mice had a habit of storing all sorts of grains in underground catacombs and uncovering one would unveil a treasure trove of food. Harry tells one story about coming across a massive mouse nest. Well, actually the nest was discovered by another prisoner who was excessively jubilant. One of the other prisoners discovered the hole and called for Harry to help dig. Harry dug furiously and when he was convinced of its legitimacy, he stopped and ordered the founding prisoner to leave the dig. “I found it! It was I who called you here. You helped me dig, so I can share some with you!” (p. 132) Food equaled survival. “Without the slightest hesitation, I took one step back, then summoned all of my strength and punched him. He fell onto the bank.” (p. 132) Harry would claim this stash for myself – only to be shared with his trusted compatriots.

One day, while digging a trench another prisoner had uncovered several bones. Nobody was sure as to the origin of the bones, but recognizing that they could be used as soup stock he wrapped them up in his clothes and smuggled them back to the camp. The group had a discussion as to the likelihood of the bones being human or possibly from pigs or cows. In the end some were will to convince themselves that the bones were not human and bone soup was made.

A part of the labor duties was to plant freshly tilled fields. This created a difficult problem for the prison guards. Starving inmates will have ready access to grains. “Anyone who surreptitiously eats the wheat seeds will be locked up in solitary! All of the seeds have been soaked in pesticide. You decide if you want to

live or die!” (p. 127) One cruel twist Mr. Wu recalled was, in his observation, the stronger a person was, the less able he was to withstand hunger. Most of those who died were strong young men or the elderly, who “were like candles in the wind from the start.” (p. 129) He attributed the falling of the strong to their greater demands for fuel and energy. The institutional enslavement had found that careful balance of nourishment at which the ration needed to provide to continue the demanded labor without providing excess energy. Scientifically denying the strength required to attempt an escape. Harry and the other prisoners talked about escape but he relented – believing that escape was not a smart thing to do.

Escape, even in part, meant success for the prisoners. One of Harry’s friends was caught stealing and was summarily sentenced to time in solitary confinement. Preferring the infirmary to solitary, while being dragged to the hole he grabbed a “shovel and ferociously chopped off the little finger on his own left hand.”(p. 139) He shouted “F--- your mother!” and threw it over the wall. “It was as if part of him were free now.” (p. 139) Harry’s friend never recovered from the self inflicted wound and would die days later incoherently mumbling “F--- his mother!” “F--- his mother!” “F--- his mother!”

Mr. Wu was released in 1979, some 19 years after being seized at his university for criticizing the Communist Party. After teaching at the University of California at Berkeley, he established the Laogai Research Foundation.⁵

Slavery is a crime in almost every nation; yet, slavery exists in almost every nation. The trafficking and subjugation of another is not a new practice.⁶ In a world where predators continue to disregard the human rights and physical wellbeing of their fellow man, the innocent and vulnerable will continue to be at risk of subjugation for the sole benefit of another. We cannot begin to formulate solutions for a problem that we are not intimately aware of. Traffickers thrive in and require a clandestine environment which cloaks their illicit conduct. If closely examined, exploitation and victimization *will* be found in almost every segment of our communities. *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery* provides an important first step in gaining a deeper understanding the victimization survivors endure.

As governments and service providers approach solving the issues and challenges this scourge presents, it is paramount that we maintain a strong understanding that the victim is a person, not a case number or a statistic. By the explicit sharing of these stories, the veil of secrecy begins to recede. If you think you might know of an enslaved person, you can call the Human Trafficking Information and Referral Hotline: 1-888-373-7888 (Within the United States).

⁵ www.laogai.org

⁶ 22 U.S.C. §7101(B)(3) (West 2010).

Recommendation:

This book is well suited for a general introduction of human trafficking as it artfully describes the horrendous nature of this crime and the full impact survivors endure. These stories also serve as a strong reminder for academics, as to enormity of the issue and help translate the statistical analysis and data to have real and tangible affect.