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Chapter

Defining Forced Labour: A Real Challenge for the World in the Twenty-First Century

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Abstract

Slavery is a social and economic phenomenon that sparked controversy even back when it was legal, whereas slavery in the twenty-first century is an obvious contradiction of everything that modern civilisation has brought. The abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century proved to be of little lasting value, as slavery returned in the form of human trafficking and forced labour. Consequently, the need for the eradication of all forms of slavery has become an imperative in the twenty-first century. Forced labour is the most dangerous form of modern slavery. It involves the violation of several human rights, and it is difficult to counteract due to its poor visibility. The legal definition of forced labour (1930) is not particularly helpful in effectively prosecuting this crime. This chapter presents the essence of forced labour in cultural rather than in legal terms. It conceptualizes forced labour as a component of modern civilisation that is heavily burdened with social taboo and concealed behind the façade of regular work, which is nowadays treated as the noblest form of human activity. This chapter concludes with a proposition of a new analytical model of forced labour as a social construct rather than a criminal and legal phenomenon.

Keywords: labour, forced labour, new definition of forced labour, counteracting forced labour, symbolic interactionism, cultural taboo

1. Introduction

In April 2013 a factory building collapsed in Dhaka, Bangladesh [1]. As a result of the disaster, approximately 1100 workers of several garment factories died, and 2500 sustained injuries. Amnesty International's Polish-language blog reprinted an article in which the event was described as the result of 'a callous alliance between business and politics in Bangladesh and around the world' [2]. Let us add only one, crucial piece of information: the workers did not want to enter the building after major cracks had been discovered on the walls, but they were forced to do so. Were they deprived of liberty, brutally intimidated or beaten? No, they were assured that everything was all right and that it was their duty to provide work. This was a fraud, but also an instance of very subtle and sophisticated coercion, which resulted in a mass violation of these people's rights, the right to life included. The tragic accident
and its circumstances bring into focus everything that needs to be considered when talking about forced labour at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Therefore, the event will be the starting point for the next considerations.

These ought to begin by emphasising that forced labour constitutes a social phenomenon that is difficult to acknowledge, difficult to fathom and difficult to accept, mainly due to its absolutely extraordinary character [3]. Forced labour entails the enslavement of a person in such a way that their intellectual potential, their physical strength or their sexuality can be used against their vital interest. In other words, it is a situation when one person treats another person like a thing that can be used, which—from the legal point of view—is called slavery. Are we ready to accept this situation in the twenty-first century?

On the level of intuitive reaction, a negative answer seems obvious. Yet it becomes less obvious when we look at the facts that will be discussed here at length. By way of a tentative hypothesis, let us say that our civilisation appears to ignore forced labour. This is chiefly because the modern human knows precious little about this phenomenon, fails to understand it and seems not ready to find out more and to comprehend. Precisely this will be the subject of the reflection presented in this chapter.

According to my research, every third Pole is aware of the phenomenon of human trafficking and forced labour [4]. The percentage is admittedly low, which gives rise to another question: why is that so? I believe that the Poles’ (similarly as many others’) social awareness of human trafficking and forced labour is low because these phenomena are not subject to public debate, enjoy negligible interest from public authorities, are hardly ever written and spoken about in the media, and are not subject of regular research. As a result, societies are not accustomed to this subject matter and hence find it difficult to learn about forced labour and modern slavery in general. That is not only because they do not want to, but because a phenomenon such as forced labour does not fit into the cognitive patterns of the contemporary human raised to follow humanistic values. The information ‘forced labour exists and could occur somewhere around you’ cannot find the right place in the recipient’s mind, a place where it could be stored and internalised. And if so, then in order to avoid the discomfort caused by cognitive dissonance, it is only natural to suppress problematic facts.\(^1\)

Additionally, the relatively low level of awareness of human trafficking and forced labour may be a negative result of the language we use to describe these phenomena. Since both are crimes, we depict them as serious breaches of criminal law punishable by severe penalties, or as human rights violations, including with regard to the rights to life and freedom. No wonder, then, that we eagerly resort to language characteristic of law and criminal justice. On the other hand, both human trafficking and forced labour have an economic, a market dimension, which means that the language of economy, with concepts such as supply and demand, becomes appropriate. Moreover, this approach enables us to perceive forced labour from the perspective of the labour market, where the exploitation occurs [6]. Next, forced labour and other forms of enslavement are a negative consequence of mass migration movements. This dimension should likewise be taken into consideration because it is indisputable that the fundamental change of domicile and the accompanying phenomenon of severing one’s cultural roots results in higher vulnerability to abuse [7]. In this case, we use concepts from the domains of politics, social geography and citizenship. And finally, yet another perspective places human trafficking and forced labour on the civilisation plane and depicts them as a denial of humanity and a defiance of the basic

\(^1\) Leon Festinger described this discomfort as cognitive dissonance, see [5].
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requirements of modern culture [8]. This approach requires us to use the language of sociology, anthropology and the humanities. Thus, in order to properly comprehend human trafficking and forced labour, we need to perceive these phenomena as very serious crimes, as violations of the main human rights, including the right to dignity, as a negative result of migration, as a pathological consequence of a faulty labour market regulation and finally, as a conduct that does not fit with the canons of civilisation, which has been erected for decades upon pillars such as humanistic values, equality or common safety [9]. Each of these points of view calls for a different language, each of which needs to be included in a new definition of forced labour.

In this chapter, I would like to draw attention to the need to draft a definition that will take into consideration the above. The purpose, however, is not to define for defining’s sake, but to develop an operational definition that will enable us to look at the phenomenon in question from the perspective of the twenty-first century. To this end, I will attempt to demonstrate the weaknesses of the current understanding of human trafficking and forced labour as well as propose a new model of analysis. The essence of the new approach is to change the language we use to describe forced labour from the language of positivism and criminal law to language typical for the cultural variable, symbolic interactionism and humanistic approach.

2. Discussion of the theoretical foundations

Seeing the multitude of perspectives mentioned above, an approach limited to a legal definition that was phrased almost 100 years ago [10] and is relatively simple appears rather limited: forced or compulsory labour shall mean all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily [10]. Since the adoption of the Convention, forced labour has become the subject of more than 10 global treaties and nearly 300 bilateral agreements [11], yet we are not much further along in terms of understanding the phenomenon. A legal definition is not enough [12] in times characterised by macro-phenomena such as globalisation, migration, dominance of capitalist theory and climate crisis on the one hand, and the attempts to revitalise the notions of human rights and civil society on the other [13]. Furthermore, it needs to be taken into account that, as a result of the intense political, economic and social processes of the past century, we have entered the next millennium in a situation where the traditional model of governance is being undermined and the social order—redefined. On the one hand, the state ceases to play the key role as a leader of change, abdicating in favour of global business. On the other hand, civil society is morphing from a crucial player in the political game for democratic values into society’s nurse and provider of social services. The role of global religions is likewise undergoing a rather fundamental transformation [14–16].

These general observations make up the context of my remarks, yet I will stop here in order to focus on the central purpose of this chapter, which is to define forced labour. Following an analysis of the subject literature, it turns out that not only the definition of the phenomenon, but also the use of the term is in dispute. The opponents of the expression ‘forced labour’ look for solutions in two different directions: some propose that we use the somewhat broader category of ‘modern slavery’, while others suggest the rather narrow term ‘servitude’ [17]. Both groups invoke vital arguments to support their views, yet I will refrain from delving deeper into the details of the dispute, as it is not essential to my considerations. What matters is that as a
civilisation of the twenty-first century, even in a crucial issue such as the concept of forced labour, we are only at the beginning of the road.

And the problem is serious. According to the most recent estimates, the number of victims of various forms of enslavement amounts to 40 million people worldwide [18], while the number of identified victims is below 100,000 [19]. This is undoubtedly one of the most painful and pressing social issues of the twenty-first century, one with which our civilisation is simply incapable of dealing. Moreover, in all likelihood, the exploitation of human labour will not disappear any time soon, plus it will prevail over other forms of enslavement [20].

Amongst many characteristics of forced labour described in the subject literature, one that is relatively least discussed is that it is difficult to recognise [12]. Forced labour becomes socially invisible, and information about it is not socially welcome. In other words, people tend to reject information as ‘bad’ as this in order to avoid experiencing the discomfort we have mentioned above. This is why forced labour and human trafficking should be talked and written about as much as possible, so as to achieve the highest possible level of intellectual and mental readiness in society to accept the fact that these negative situations occur next to us. This level has been achieved with regard to ecological issues. Once we started to talk about the climate catastrophe, hardly anyone turns away from information about it.

At least this is a good reason to alter the language used to describe forced labour. Perhaps presenting this phenomenon in the political and criminal language does not guarantee wide social interest [21]. Perhaps the metaphor of ‘modern slavery’, which is used so widely in literature and politics, is not the best tool to communicate with a mass recipient [20, 22, 23]. It should be noted, for example, that Richard-Guay and Hanley called one of the sub-chapters of their text: ‘Labor Trafficking: Still Under-detected? Or Rather Called by Another Name?’ [24]. Significant are the question marks included in the title—I interpret them as invitations for discussion. I join it eagerly, especially since the term ‘modern slavery’ is rather unclear and controversial [25].

The central issue here is not terminology, however, but the discrepancy between the estimated magnitude of the phenomenon of forced labour mentioned above (40,000,000 people) and the real interest in the problem. This discrepancy can be dissected into several questions, for example why does collecting data on forced labour, compared to sexual exploitation, proceed so slowly? Or, why has progress in eliminating forced labour, compared to sexual exploitation, been so negligible? Or, why is there no real interest in changing this situation in many countries?

It is far from easy to answer these questions, as modern slavery poses major challenges before the states and societies, irrespective of the level of the state’s economic development or of society’s legal culture. And finding answers can have serious consequences for the practice of social life in individual countries and around the globe. It may therefore be worthwhile to take a moment’s reflection and go somewhat deeper into the issue and broaden the area of analysis. This is my intention, albeit I limit my role to reporting the problem and proposing a debate on the subject, guided by the belief that we should all seek an answer.

For the purposes of this work, I propose to leave aside the legal definitions of human trafficking and forced labour that we know from the 1930 ILO Convention [10] or the United Nations’ Palermo Protocol [27]. In order to overcome interpretative difficulties resulting from the character of these definitions, I further propose

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1 For more on that subject, see [26].
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to set aside the established analytical pattern based on the AMP model: action, means and purposes [28]. The model works as a tool for the phenomenological description of events, especially for the purposes of criminal justice, including the determination of the perpetrators’ culpability. However, this is probably not the language that can easily be used to reach politicians, let alone the average citizen, to make the issue of forced labour the subject of their sincere interest and the focus of social dialogue.

I am convinced that, precisely for this reason, the language of criminal justice should be complemented with a perspective that could be described as humanistic, in the sense given to the term by the sociology that emerged from the thought of F. Znaniecki, G. H. Mead, J. Devey or W. I. Thomas. I mean an approach that is strongly supported by the philosophical elements of social pragmatism [29], and the treatment of the individual characteristic of symbolic interactionism [30]. By rejecting idealism and behaviourism, pragmatism has created a great deal of room for knowledge, especially knowledge gathered in social experience. A person’s actions are guided by not only ideas that organise their will, or only stimuli from their environment, to which they react. An individual’s actions consist in solving problems in communication with other people based on gathered information. The proponents of this way of thinking argued that actions are more effective when the mind and knowledge operate together [31]. If that is true, then perhaps a lack of profound knowledge and full understanding of the essence of forced labour limits our possibilities of taking action. Therefore, in moving away from defining forced labour in the language of law, I emphasise the importance of interpreting social reality as seen through the lens of social interaction and the stock of popular knowledge [32].

In this perspective, it is useful to employ symbolic interactionism, which has redefined the social order and raised the social status of the individual as a free, active and creative subject. Human action is not merely reactive but is performed on the basis of the ongoing definition of the situation [33]. Thus, in describing this action, the point of view of the acting subject must also be taken into account. This, in turn, fundamentally changes the social role of communication, which serves not only the transmission of content, but also the construction of reality. This way of thinking rendered possible the fundamental breakthrough in the description of society and the genesis of crime brought about by the Chicago School [34]. Yet what is most significant about symbolic interactionism is the role of meanings in stimulating human action. To put it simply, people take certain actions on the basis of meanings they learn in the process of social communication [35]. This rule applies also to social behaviour and allows us to ask: does forced labour mean the same thing to everyone? Without going into details, let us just say that it does not, as evidenced by the fact that not all forms of human trafficking and forced labour receive the same attention from politicians, experts and the media [36].

By contrast, if we were to look for the place of forced labour on the map of the twenty-first-century social mentality, we would notice that it is marginal. The modern world pays most attention to sexual exploitation, even though its scale is much smaller [37, 38]. Certainly, there are authors who note that the situation is changing and forced labour is gaining wider attention from researchers and analysts [39], yet this alters little. The public perception of the scale of the phenomena discussed here, but also of policies to combat forced prostitution and forced labour [40], are consistent with the trend outlined above.

This marginalisation is also confirmed by the data. Let us recall the gigantic difference between the estimated number of victims of modern slavery (40,000,000)
and the number of victims, which we know by name, because they were identified by law enforcement (100,000). But that's not all: it turns out that the vast majority of these people are victims of sexual exploitation and not forced labour [18]. Explaining this fundamental discrepancy is not difficult, as a victim of forced prostitution is far easier to identify compared to an enslaved and exploited worker. All police forces in the world monitor the sex industry because it is a useful source of operational information, although sex workers try to avoid contact with the police and often do not even report, for example acts of violence [41]. Nevertheless, establishing details of the status of sex workers for the police is not a particularly difficult task. The matter is even easier in countries where prostitution is illegal, as it suffices to arrest such persons from time to time to gain useful information. Invariably, another source of information are pimps, who—in return for tolerating their activities—act as informants to the police. Under these circumstances, identifying a victim of sexual exploitation is not a problem for the police, as long as the police are willing to do so. It is much harder to identify a victim of forced labour, unless they are, for example in a labour camp, since there is no operational control over the labour market. Furthermore, the specific interest arrangement means that no one is interested in leaking information. There is on the one side a socially vulnerable migrant who wishes to earn money, and on the other, a dishonest employer who wants the migrant’s cheap labour. Additionally, various ‘discomforts’, such as enslavement, loss of independence or lack of influence on the working conditions are treated as a price the migrant has to pay [43]. And finally, it ought to be noted that identifying a victim of forced labour is difficult because the labour inspection services in many countries are ineffective [44].

Albeit this explanation could be satisfactory, it remains incomplete in the sense that it ignores the essence of the behaviour that is the subject of our interest. In search for said essence, it is worth looking at the problem with the above-mentioned ‘humanistic factor’ in mind [45]. To that end, we should refrain from defining sexual services and forced labour from the structural and normative perspective and instead adopt an interpretative, semiotic approach [46]. Then, the key category of description becomes the ‘symbolic visibility’ of those phenomena, that is their social meanings established in the process of social communication. Let us try to explicate how this system works.

Commercial sex is not ‘welcome’/well taken in the symbolic sense, as in a manner, it is subject to individual experience in two ways. Firstly, because offering or buying sexual services, especially when they are illegal, is an obvious breach of a law. Anyone who does that commits a criminal/administrative offence. Therefore, it is relatively easy to collectively establish the meanings of such conduct. From this point of view, it is in fact irrelevant whether the sex worker was forced to provide their services or not. Secondly, commercial sex is a social taboo and subject to moral condemnation, even when it is legal. In that case, it is likewise easy to ascertain its negative value, which is determined by this moral judgement. If we adopt W. I. Thomas’s theory that opinions and actions are the consequence of an interpretation and definition of a situation [47], then we tend to think of the sex worker as a sinner rather than a victim of coercion. This is true also because we cannot imagine how brutal (drastic) methods need to be used to force someone to provide sexual services.

The case of forced labour is completely different because we are dealing with its ‘double invisibility’. The difficulty in eradicating forced labour as a criminal act

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3 For more on the special position and role of pimps, see, for example [42].
4 For more about said effectiveness, see, for example [44].
stems among others from the fact that it is hard to distinguish from, for example the exploitation of another's labour taking place in corporations [48]. Unlike paid sex, forced labour is well hidden behind the façade of work, which in turn is something legal, and even very noble and commendable. There were, however, periods in world history when work was deemed a shameful and degrading activity [49]. Nowadays, at the level of meaning, we have no doubt that work is something good and expected. Yet forced labour is invisible also because those who profit from it do everything in their power to conceal it by employing subtle and sophisticated methods of enslaving and taking control over their workers. This goes equally for working conditions as well as remuneration and the legality of employment. In turn, a worker who, for example, has no work permit or no visa will do all in their might not to appear conspicuous to the authorities, but also to be invisible, including in the symbolic sense.

3. A new model of analysis and an attempt at a definition

The starting point for the present considerations was the observation that the interest in forced labour continues to be low and the progress in eradicating it—negligible [50]. On the other hand, we have ascertained that forced labour, in contrast to sexual exploitation, is less visible and successfully avoids recognition. Next, it has turned out that the knowledge we collect translates into concrete actions and increased effectiveness of prosecuting perpetrators only to a limited degree.

In my opinion, the solution to this problem should be sought on the side of collecting data about the phenomenon and the absorption of knowledge by public services, which demonstrate either insufficient determination or incompetence. Possibly, we need to look at the other side, as well, and ask about the quality of forced labour's image that we have. Perhaps the description and interpretation of the phenomenon are faulty and therefore incapable of convincing the authorities to change the state policy. Perhaps what we know fails to motivate society to act so that it can better identify victims and successfully support them. Thus, we draw attention to issues such as the limits of scientific cognition, the reconciliation of meanings of social phenomena in the communication process, and the intensity and style of the public debate on forced labour.

In this sense, it is well founded to ask: is the situation of a corporate employee who, under the pressure of their environment, takes out a loan to buy a flat in a ‘better neighbourhood’ and then works for 12–13 hours a day to pay it back essentially different from that of a Vietnamese who arrives in Europe and is exploited by their compatriots? Certainly, a question like that has a purely scholarly value, because, from the legal perspective, the answer is obvious. Yet is the legal perspective sufficient? I argue that it is not, which is why I am taking the liberty to outline a new perspective and propose a model of analysis that might be helpful in further studies.

It will be a five-element model of description and analysis of forced labour, which will make it possible to deepen the reflection on this phenomenon. When developing this tool, I departed from classic, legal definitions [3, 5] in order to approach the issue from a theoretical perspective I outlined in the introduction to this chapter, which is referred to as the humanistic perspective. Thus, rather than examine whether specific conduct of the perpetrators was human trafficking within the meaning of the Palermo Protocol [27] or forced labour pursuant to the ILO Convention [10], we will define the situation of the victim based on established social meanings. We will bear in mind, however, that these meanings are modified in the course of interpretation carried out by individuals in specific social situations [35].
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In order to test the diagnostic value of the model, I will again juxtapose forced labour and sexual exploitation, but I will add forced begging to expand the area of analysis. These are namely the most popular forms of modern slavery.

The construction of my model begins with specifying what we understand by ‘exploitation’. Aware that this concept raises considerable doubts and controversies [51], for the purposes of this argumentation, I will limit the issue to answers to two questions. First is the goal of the perpetrators to exploit the vital forces, body or intellect of the victim for their own benefit? And second, do the perpetrators take into account the deterioration of the victim’s health and physical condition? These two questions reflect the evaluation criteria with regard to a specific situation. Those who have children work in a quarry exploit them consciously, but also take into account that the work will ruin their frail health. The goal of a corporation which forces a young person to work 12 hours a day is not to wreck their health, but to maximise its own profits. Regarding all three tested forms of human trafficking (sexual exploitation, forced begging and forced labour), the answer to both questions is positive.

The second element of the model is the phenomenon I call the ‘façade’. What I understand by that is the existence or non-existence of a cultural curtain that conceals the analysed conduct, and in practice, not the conduct itself, but its negative manifestations. No such façade exists in the case of sexual exploitation, because work in the sex industry is culturally rejected regardless of whether it is legal or not. As for forced begging, the situation is similar. Civilisation-wise, a level of destitution that forces people to beg is difficult to accept. In turn, forced labour effectively hides behind the curtain of labour as such. A forced labourer wears no symbolic attributes of their status. Furthermore, work is the most expected and pro-social activity of the modern human [52].

As the third element of the model, I propose to use the phenomenon of ‘cultural taboo’, which removes some types of behaviour from society’s and authorities’ line of sight and brings out others. In almost all cultures, regardless of the model of legal regulations, paid sexual services are taboo based on moral judgement and social norms [53]. Yet that was not always so. In antiquity, in countries, such as Babylon, Phoenicia, Persia, Greece and India, widely respected sacral prostitution existed [54–56]. In some cultures and mythologies (Egypt and Japan), it was treated as a form of hierogamy, that is, sacral marriage [57]. The contemporary moral taboo has the consequence that individuals who provide such services completely openly, treating it as a way of life, are in the minority.

Begging, in turn, has the hallmark of extreme poverty, of which modern society is ashamed, and perhaps even afraid. The taboo against begging is a mixture of shame, sympathy and rejection of deviation [58]. Even if according to some religions, people are obligated to give alms, a beggar remains an evident sign that something has gone wrong in the construction of social equality.5

Work is not only free from any taboo; it is something noble, and in many cultures perceived as the most commendable way to achieve financial success. In some periods, it was even considered a condition for full membership of society [60]. Yet that was not always the case. In antiquity, work was something shameful, and even disgraceful. As a result, people who worked professionally were at the bottom of the social ladder. In the period of slavery, labour—as a burden and hardship—was offloaded on the

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5 This thought is excellently put in words by Sandra Martyres in the poem ‘The Silent Beggar’ since 2007, see [59].
slaves, who were treated in some cultures (Greece) like talking tools [49]. It is only recently that work became a noble activity.

The construction of the model is completed with a fourth element, one which I refer to as the ‘symbolic visibility’ of the behaviour. It means its accessibility to the common perception of others and a specific openness of the behaviour to giving it meanings. We could say that symbolic visibility is an aggregate of the ‘façade’ and the ‘taboo’, where a lack of a ‘façade’ paired with a strong ‘taboo’ renders a type of behaviour clearly visible. It is fairly easy to accurately interpret forced prostitution and begging as types of behaviour characterised by a high degree of visibility and at the same time burdened with a cultural taboo. As for forced labour, which at the level of behaviour is deceptively similar to work as such—that is not the case. In order for this situation to change, some serious modifications in the mechanisms of giving meanings would be needed, for example for some reasons we would decide that begging was socially beneficial. This would firstly require fundamental transformations in the communication model as the source of meanings. Are modern societies ready for that, though?

Finally, the fifth element of the model is a variable that I provisionally call the ‘level of subtlety of control measures’. Parents who have to encourage their children to study have a wide array of measures at their disposal, but seldom employ the most drastic ones. An employer who wants to boost the effectiveness of work, first of all, considers instruments from the spectrum of financial incentives. It is extremely difficult to force another person to provide sexual services against their will, as the sphere of individual sexuality is the most protected area of human activity. The unwilling are ready to sacrifice their health and even life on the altar of their own autonomy. It is possible to force such persons into prostitution only when the construction of the pressure mechanism renders it effective. That is the case, for example when the person becomes addicted to drugs or when the perpetrators make real threats against their family members. I do not know how many women are able to refuse to ‘cooperate’ with human traffickers when their children are threatened with beating or rape.

The situation with forced begging is not necessarily any less drastic. There was a case of a criminal group in Poland that forced women to beg together with children who were not their own [61]. The brutality of the control methods consisted of the fact that children were taken away from their mothers and begged with someone else. Consequently, the control was fully effective. The situation is completely different in the case of forced labour. Employers who expect to continue to exploit the victim’s labour for a long time do all in their power to ensure that the mechanisms of enslavement and the establishment of dependency are as subtle as possible. Beating, starving or depriving of sleep are counter-productive and increase the risk of social visibility. The system of enslavement works very efficiently when control is effective and the social business environment is not in a position to recognise the signs of pathology in the treatment of workers. Furthermore, the system works perfectly when the workers themselves believe that what happens to them is necessary, and even right. For instance, they are foreigners and have violated the visa rules, and the employer nevertheless shows them ‘kindness’. This effect of humility and engagement in work can be achieved not with violence or threat of violence, but with very subtle manipulation, as a result of which the worker does not even know anymore when they begin to spiral down the so-called continuum of exploitation [44].
4. Conclusions

N. Chomsky suggests that each employee is in some sense exploited and that many working people become ‘wage slaves’ [62]. I do not go that far, as I consider this view overly radical, but it certainly does delineate an area of possible analysis and show the seriousness of the problem. Albeit for years overshadowed by sexual exploitation, forced labour is drawing public attention worldwide.6

If mentioned by politicians and experts, it is usually presented as a problem of ‘migration’ threatening the economic stability of a country [63]. As it is often illegal migration we are talking about, forced labour is sometimes identified, or rather confused, with human smuggling [64]. And if so, it is perceived as one of the chief challenges for state security [64]. This is particularly the case because ‘smuggling’ and exploitation of labour entail criminal activity of well-organised syndicates involved in human trafficking [65]. A rather late addition to the analyses and studies on forced labour is the issue of dire ‘working conditions’ [66], which are an inherent attribute of modern slavery. Yet it was even later that the experts looked at it from a purely ‘economic’ perspective [67], which covers, among others, studies on the negative consequences of slave labour for market mechanisms. Another dimension of the economic approach is the perspective of the ‘labour market’ [68], and even more from the perspective of the need to protect the market from slave labour or the market’s reaction to its presence. Although forced labour is most often found in private business, some part of it remains the domain of states [69]. There is hope, however, that the extent of labour imposed by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes (‘state-imposed forced labour’) will continue to shrink as the issue will be subject to political debate [68, 69]. Furthermore, it should be noted that the ‘gender’ perspective is increasingly present [70]. Its inherent attribute is the focus on gender and the psychological effects of enslavement.

The range of points of view presented above is wide, yet not complete, as it lacks an approach that has been discussed here at length and that was called the ‘humanistic coefficient’ by Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki [45]. Our knowledge of forced labour continues to grow when we introduce in the debate the element of symbolic meanings imparted on actions, which is the essence of communication between humans. Following this train of thought, we should try to perceive forced labour as a form of sophisticated manipulation, which is so intensely present in modern society (witness: social media). Certainly, for this approach to make sense, forced labour should be seen not as merely a ‘modern form of old slavery’, but rather as a new, and even very ‘modern’ social phenomenon. A phenomenon where even adult and well-educated people are ensnared by criminals trading in human lot because they want to improve their life, because they trust sources of information (advertisements) uncritically, and because they believe in others’ good intentions.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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6 An example of the growing interest of state authorities could be the British Modern Slavery Act 2015, the Duty of Vigilance Law (‘DOV Law’) passed in France in February 2017 or the Australian Modern Slavery Act 2018.
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