Chapter summary

The era of slavery is not over. The trafficking of people to work in homes, fields, back rooms and bedrooms of those who will secure them takes many contemporary forms. The work of formal and informal bodies to detect and erase such illegal and immoral activities is vitally important. Strictly speaking, such exploitation is not an explicit or even condoned aspect of capitalism. The impact of people trafficking and the mass migration of people seeking the means of life however, are inextricably woven into the fabric of capitalism. You might think about masses of undocumented labour accepting work under conditions a unionised labour force would not tolerate. These conditions of exploitation continue to be the focus of human rights and labour activists the world over. Subtle forms of control exerted through formal or legalised employment are our primary concern in this chapter – the harnessing of the energies and the fears of many ‘normally employed’ people through the changes to the structures and value of work that they are expected to accept as reasonable or fair. The seeming gap between the world of trafficked people, itinerant workers, and casualised work however, may not be as large as we want to believe. While there are people willing to work for less than the minimum legal standards and hard-won conditions of service, or we accept the expansion of our jobs and hours at work with no adequate raise in compensation, the shape and conditions of work are open for devaluation. These processes of devaluation are not always immediately visible to the naked eye. It takes careful attention to observe the re-shaping and re/de-valuing of work under the conditions of capitalism, and our own part in it. It may be that what we agree to in one place has dramatic implications for someone else in another – as the story below illustrates so well. Are we sleepwalking through our lives? Bauman has a caution:

The technical administrative success of the Holocaust was due in part to the skilful utilisation of ‘moral sleeping pills’ made available by modern bureaucracy and modern technology. The natural invisibility of causal connections in a complex system of interaction, and distancing of the unsightly or morally repelling outcomes of action to the point of rendering them invisible to the actor, were most prominent among them.¹

Webpage structure

On this webpage you will find:

4.1 A short story to read and discuss.
4.2 Ideas and exercises to extend your understanding.
4.3 People to meet, [web]places to go, actions to take.
4.4 Could you? Would you? Should you?
4.5 Reflection.

4.1 A short story to read and discuss

“Fīfī Ika Maka” – Preparing and sharing the gifts from the ocean

Palu was excited! It was the day “Tā ’Atu” was to begin. There was great anticipation in the village. The schooling fish were coming into the shores of Ha ’ano and he was ready to join the gatherers! Indeed, when he and Uncle Finau arrived on the beach, many of the people of the four local villages were ready to greet the fish. They would gather as many of them as possible not only for the immediate feast ahead, but also for the careful preparation and preservation of some of them for the joyful sharing among the people who could not be at the “Tā ’Atu”.

But look! Here and there some big fish had leapt onto the sand. Palu noticed no one touched them but that later some people gathered them up into special baskets. “What will happen to these fish?” he asked. “Ah!” said Uncle Finau. “These will be taken to the island of the Hon.Tu’iha’angana. He will divide this special basket of fish among the King, the Nobles and their relatives, the government officials and the church leaders – just as we will share our fish with the people on the other islands, the places where the fish do not choose to come to shore as they do here.”  Uncle Finau explained to Palu that during a Tā ’Atu, it is absolutely forbidden to strike the fish, to cause them to bleed or to sell any part of the catch. The sea provides for the people out of love. The fish are essential for the health of the people and the people should treat them with ‘ofa (love) and faka’apa’apa (respect). If the people do not obey the ritual and traditional ways of Tā ’Atu, “’atu will leave and will never come back”. This was a lot for Palu to think about.

Not only was this a wonderful day. The days to follow would also be wonderful! There would be much feasting on the fish. The delicious smell of the fish being preserved for later would remind him not only of the great meals yet to come – but also of the journey ahead to bring some "Fīfī Ika Maka" to distant family and friends. This would be a happy time! He would see cousins and elders. There would be stories.

What was even more exciting was to learn from Uncle Finau that in the very near future, he, ten year old Palu, skilled fisherman, would be invited to join his relations on the nearby island of Fotuha’a to join in with the fishing. There the work of fishing is called “Hī ’Atu”. Here the fish do not come to the shore to be gathered. The fishermen of Fotuha’a will go out in their canoes for days. They know exactly where to go for Hī ’Atu. However, they can only go when the weather is right for them. The decision to go (or not) is a difficult one. Conditions can be quite treacherous. It is hard to know when the next expedition would happen. Palu hoped his parents would not think he had better stay home and go to school! There was much to learn about fishing! There were few people with the Know-How for “Hī ’Atu”. Palu sensed the honour he was about to be included in this highly skilled group of providers!

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2 “Fīfī Ika Maka” is a Tongan proverb which refers to a careful way of preserving and cooking rock fish in Tonga. It involves wrapping or weaving fīfī (the rock fish) ika maka (with leaves) usually coconut leaves then baking this in the umu (earth oven). In that way, ika maka is kept moist and lasts for days. The proverb then means to take good care of something that is valuable and precious.

3 http://www.everyculture.com/To-Z/Tonga.html
And indeed, the adventure came to pass. Palu sailed off with the men. They were strong and brave. They caught many fish. They returned to Fotu’a with a proud catch! A tired but elated Palu staggered off the boat. And just as had been the practice at Ha’ano, the villagers gathered to vahevahe (to share) and to tufofufa (to distribute) their catch. He felt good! He knew that the receivers of the fāfī ika maka would be appreciative because of the thoughts and love represented by this mata ‘ofa kainga’ (sharing and caring for the relatives/extended family/friends). It is always a happy reunion with fākamālō (thankfulness) and ‘ofa (love) that strengthen their family ties or relationship between friends. He looked forward to the next journey to friends and family.

4.2 Ideas and exercises to extend your understanding

Education in English speaking jurisdictions is often tightly associated with job opportunities. There are many ways to think about this. Education has not always saved people from the harsh elements of the financial system – particularly in times of recession. It might also be argued that the education being imported into societies that have once had thriving cultures with systems of lore and law to ensure social cohesion are being undermined by a western form of education.

- What are the risks for these communities in the uncritical adoption of western educational and training programmes?
- What are the responsibilities of managers who lead ‘development’ projects in societies that are very different from your own.
- How universal is the call to organise humanity through the principle of ‘love’. Where else might you see this expressed?

Three questions for course participants based on this story

- This story provides a description of a distribution system that differs from that of a ‘market economy’. Can you describe the system of entitlement and responsibility in this story? Can you describe the system of entitlement and responsibility of your own culture?
- Skills and competencies are an important part of education. What was Palu learning through his participation in the work of fishing?
- What are the dominant educational values that underpin your degree courses? Are these diverse enough for the development of your aspirations for yourself? Are these diverse and critical enough to guide you in your understanding and interrelationships with people who are different from you?4

4.3 People to meet, [web]places to go, actions to take

People to meet
- César Chávez: Mexican-American farmworker, labour leader and civil rights activist.

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http://www.humanrights.com/voices-for-human-rights/c%C3%A9sar-ch%C3%A1vez.html

- Charles Kernaghan: Executive director of the Institute for Global Labour and Human Rights and is known for speaking out against sweatshops and the appalling conditions of many workers around the world.
  http://www.globallabourrights.org/about?id=0002
- The Crave Collective: Lots of people – just like you and I.
  http://cafecrave.co.nz/mad-for-change/
  https://www.facebook.com/cafecrave

[Web] places to go

- http://www.laborrights.org/rights-for-working-women
  Globalisation has led to the rise of export processing zones (EPZs) in poor countries throughout the world. These industries are heavily dependent on cheap unskilled female labour, and women often comprise between 70–90% of the total labour force in EPZs throughout Asia, Latin American and Sub Saharan Africa.
- http://www.alternet.org/are-your-clothes-made-sweatshop?akid=10222.1125622.epnlPe&rd=1&src=newsletter812980&t=6
  Where are your clothes made?
  Which manufacturers [do not] support building code improvements?
  http://www.voanews.com/content/most-us-retailers-choose-not-to-sign-bangladesh-factories-accord/1683655.html
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xoqZvhvHvHk
  Slavery in modern China
  http://www.uproxx.com/technology/2012/01/ny-times-investigation-confirms-that-apples-factories-in-china-are-basically-slave-labor-camps/
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ry7nJbFPOoI
  Denim Blues: Can you compete with this?
- http://hum.sagepub.com/content/63/1/83.full.pdf+html
  Flexible Work Practices

Actions to take

- Support Fair Labour legislation in your jurisdiction
  http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/677/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=6266
- Support any organisation working to eliminate modern day slavery
  Visit “We are not for sale” and support the efforts to extinguish modern day slavery.
  http://www.notforsalecampaign.org/?gclid=COXc3v-L5LUCFUYhpQod-lgAJg
- Start a Planking Movement in your area
  Planking is an activity that involves people laying face down on the ground with arms by their side as a form of protest (Hodgkins, K. (2011, May 18) Protesters Plank Outside Foxconn’s Shareholder Meeting. Retrieved 22 June 2011 from http://www.tuaw.com/2011/05/18/protesters-plank-outside-foxconns-shareholder-meeting/). Gather together a group of concerned consumers and/or investors and plank outside an exploiters headquarters.
4.4 Would you? Could you? Should you?

Stop buying clothes made in China, Bangladesh or any other jurisdiction allowing the exploitation of labour working in unsafe environments?

4.5 Reflection

Every day, 6,300 workers die on the job.\(^5\)
Does it matter to you?