Theorizing Involuntary Servitude through the Lens of Guestworkers Who Organize

ABSTRACT

by

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Recent and dynamic guestworker organizing across many sectors of the U.S. economy has exposed the role of employers and the state in employment relationships involving gross violations of minimum workplace standards, egregious discrimination, and aggressive retaliation against workers’ attempts to change those conditions. Drawing from recent examples where guestworkers themselves have publicly claimed 13th Amendment protections, my paper will theorize the specific elements that constitute involuntary servitude in the context of temporary workers whose immigration status is tied to one employer. My paper will also discuss the relevance of thinking about this question transnationally as an element of strategies to defend workers’ ability to organize and bargain collectively at multiple points along the global worker supply chain.