



Contemporary Slavery: A Case of Mistaken Identity?

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As the bicentenary of Britain's legislation against continued participation in the trans-Atlantic slave trade has loomed into view, two things have happened. First of all, a public debate has begun about how the blame for slavery and the credit for abolition should be apportioned, and how the anniversary ought to be commemorated in a way that combines historical accuracy with good taste. Secondly, modern-day abolitionists and emancipists have seized the moment to drive home their contention that the campaign against slavery is far from representing finished business. On the contrary, it is asserted, slavery is alive and well and coming to a country near you.

In the words of Ethan Kapstein in an article published in the prestigious journal *Foreign Affairs*:

'When most people think about slavery - if they think about it at all - they probably assume that it was eliminated during the nineteenth century. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. Slavery and global slave trade continue to thrive to this day; in fact, it is likely that more people are being trafficked across borders against their will than at any point in the past? Whatever the exact number is, it seems almost certain that the modern global slave trade is larger than absolute terms than the Atlantic slave trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth century slave trade was.'^[1]

Kevin Bales, the Director of the US-based organization 'Free the Slaves', has been amongst the most passionate and articulate advocates of the position that slavery has now reached unprecedented global proportions. His estimate for the number of slaves in the world today is 27 million, an avowedly cautious estimate that finds itself into other works. According to Bales 'Slavery is not a horror consigned to the past: it continues to exist throughout the world Slavery is a booming business and the numbers are increasing.'^[2] Given the scepticism that sometimes attaches to the work of advocacy groups - who could be said to have an interest in bumping up the figures - the authority of international organizations, most notably the International Labour Organization (ILO), is invoked to back up the claims. In fact, to be strictly accurate, one should note that it was the pressure applied by lobby groups like the Anti-Slavery Society [now Anti-Slavery International] which have helped to shape the agenda of international organizations over the course of the past century: their input is reflected in the 1926 Slavery Convention of the League of Nations; the 1956 Supplementary Convention and the creation of UN Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery; as well as the 1930 ILO Convention on Forced Labour and subsequent instruments.^[3] At the same time, there has been a great deal of crossover between activists and academic researchers, which has lent added credibility to the campaign against 'contemporary slavery'. The most recent example would be the collaboration between a team from the University of Hull's Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery and Emancipation (WISE) and Anti-Slavery International, whose report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation asserts that slavery exists in many different forms in Britain today.^[4]

Given that there is so much opinion lined up in support of the consensus, it might be considered unwise to sound a discordant note: amongst other things, it might be objected, does this not risk playing into the hands of modern-day slavers? In response I would merely comment that one is far more likely to do harm if

one misconstrues the nature of the phenomenon one is seeking to root out. Here, I do not seek to deny that the forms of gross exploitation that have been eloquently documented by Bales and others actually exist, although one has to be cautious about the numbers and the rather loose testimony that is bandied about. But what I do wish to do is to question is some of the categorisation, presumed causations and the lumping together of arguably very disparate phenomena.

What is in a Name?

The way in which slavery is deployed in contemporary discourse is frustratingly imprecise. This is a direct consequence of the ways in which international conventions have been fashioned by committee - with all the messy compromise that implies. In getting the measure of what we are dealing with, one could do worse than quote from a Fact Sheet posted by the UN Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights:

'The word 'slavery' today covers a wide variety of human rights violations. In addition to traditional slavery and the slave trade, these abuses include the sale of children, child prostitution, child pornography, the exploitation of child labour, the sexual mutilation of female children, the use of children in armed conflicts, debt bondage, the traffic in persons and in the sale of human organs, the exploitation of prostitution, and certain practices under apartheid and colonial regimes.'^[5]

The phrase that concludes this passage gives the game away. The 1956 Supplementary Convention was a compromise between the former colonial powers and the newly liberated states that wanted apartheid, in particular, to be singled out as a new form of slavery. But whatever crimes the South African regime might be accused of, the reintroduction of slavery is surely not one of them. By contrast with this very broad conceptualisation, the 1926 Slavery Convention - which defined slavery as 'the condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are attached' - was much more precise. Perhaps it was too narrowly focused on the question of legal ownership, but it had the one great merit of isolating slavery as a distinct status. However, activists wanted something much more inclusive, something that could capture a range of abusive practices which they regarded as growing in scale and every bit as iniquitous as old-style slavery. The Supplementary Convention - or to give it its full title, the Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery - repeated the formal definition of 1926, but enjoined its signatories to root out debt bondage, serfdom, forced marriage and widow marriages as 'institutions and practices similar to slavery'. A pedant might be tempted to observe that saying something is similar also amounts to remarking on its difference. Be that as it may, the net effect has been to elide some crucial conceptual distinctions, leading to the unsatisfactory definition that we are left with today.

The ILO's own efforts have been geared to defining what constitutes forced labour - rather than slavery - and on building consensus around the need to eradicate its various manifestations. But in recent times forced labour has itself been defined so as to embrace what is defined as slavery in other conventions. For example, the ILO Convention on The Worst Forms of Child Labour (1999) includes as one of these 'all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale or trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict.' Similarly its 2005 report entitled A Global Alliance Against Forced Labour provides, as illustrations of a lack of consent, 'birth into 'slave' or bonded status, physical abduction or kidnapping', alongside deception or false promises about types and terms of work and the retention of identity documents.^[6]

The ILO's definition also embraces human trafficking which is depicted as the greatest modern scourge and area of expansion within contemporary slavery. The UN Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime (2000) itself defines trafficking as

'...the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of person, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power... for the

purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.'[7]

Whereas this implicitly distinguishes slavery from forced labour and sexual exploitation, the tendency has been to define trafficking as yet another manifestation of slavery. The US State Department characteristically, refers to 'a modern form of slavery known as trafficking in persons.'[8] For modern emancipists the widening scope of the international conventions, and their overlapping content, represent a considerable victory, even if enforcement is still considered patchy. But for a historian with contemporary interests, the effects can be rather disconcerting. Putting it crudely, the term 'slavery' is in danger of becoming so devalued that it risks losing all utility. At some point, activists and policy-makers may find that its shock value has dissipated and will look around for another set of terms. But terminological promiscuity comes at the cost of deeper understanding and may even weaken principled interventions intended to benefit those who are exploited.

It is tempting to leave the discussion there, but given that an expanded definition of slavery is in common usage, it may be more helpful to enquire more closely into the ways in which some forms of 'contemporary slavery' fit models of slavery more generally. This can help to establish fundamental similarities and differences between the various phenomena - for it is by no means clear that child soldiers in Africa and trafficked Albanian prostitutes in western Europe are remotely similar things. Before proceeding, it is perhaps worth pointing out that the academic sub-field of comparative slavery has been so productive precisely because the temptation to bundle everything into the category of slavery has studiously been avoided. Scholars working across cultures and time periods have long realized that the comparisons can only be illuminating if one establishes fairly strict minimum criteria. In what follows, I isolate 4 factors which have been seen as constitutive of slavery. This list is important because what often activists often describe as old-style chattel slavery is based on one case, that of the southern United States, which was actually rather atypical. One additional caveat needs to be entered: these features are the hallmarks of slave societies rather than societies in which some elements of slavery are present. It is not clear whether modern emancipists think that contemporary slavery is systemic. But if that is so, one would expect the various manifestations thereof to tick at least a few of the boxes.

Four Features of Slavery

The 4 features may summarised as follows:

1. The importance of violence as the founding act. This is partly for the reason that people do not give up their freedom willingly. However, the French anthropologist, Claude Meillassoux, also insisted that violence was essential for another reason: namely that slave societies typically seek to take people at a working age, rather than having to meet the costs of reproducing children, and in that sense they prey off others that carry the costs of biological reproduction.[9] Warfare, slave raiding and kidnapping are therefore essential attributes of slave systems. In the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the ultimate beneficiaries were slave-holders in the New World and in Africa itself, whereas the societies which haemorrhaged populations were exclusively African. For those born into slavery, the act of violent enslavement may have occurred in the previous generation, but continued acts of violence might be necessary to inculcate the necessary habits of submission.

2. The importance of a market mechanism. This is necessary because slaves have to be moved from the point of enslavement to where they are most needed. In addition, masters need to be able to buy and sell their slaves, partly as a disciplinary measure held in reserve and partly to be able to cash in their investments. The rule of thumb in Africa itself was that the market value of slaves increased with distance from the point of enslavement because slaves had fewer options for running away. In the New World, the notion that slaves were chattel meant that they could be bought and sold according to the needs and accumulative strategies of the master.

3. Slavery as a form of social death. This term was coined by Orlando Patterson in his seminal work on comparative slavery.[10] The idea is that what makes the slave status unique is that the slave is treated as a non-person. The founding act of violence, the physical marking of the slave (e.g. through branding and scarification) and the symbolic renaming of the individual all drive home the message that what the slave may have been up until that point is henceforth considered as irrelevant. Within the ideology of the system, the slave lacks a history and also lacks a future in the sense of being unable to forge normal social bonds. Although marriage may be permitted, in slave systems the offspring usually accrue to the master and may be treated as slave or free depending on the status of the individuals concerned. Crucially, the slave lacks the capacity to perform honourable acts and to experience dishonour: this is considered the exclusive preserve of the master.

4. Policing the boundaries between slave and free. Although the relationship between slave and master is construed as one of diametric opposites, most slave systems have permitted some improvement in the status of the slave if only as an incentive (paradoxically) to play by the rules of the game. Manumission may be an individual act of kindness or it may be religiously sanctioned (e.g. for concubine mothers in Islamic societies), but the liberated slave typically retains a stigma of his/her former condition.

These criteria make it possible to differentiate slavery from a number of other institutions of unfreedom: pawnship or debt bondage is different in that violence is not essential to the institution and the pawn's rights are held in suspension until a debt is repaid (what one might call 'social hibernation' rather than a social death); equally serfdom is unlike slavery because, however asymmetrical the relationship with the lord, serfs also possess their own rights in land. It should also be stressed that acute economic exploitation - which many modern emancipists wrongly view as the essence of older forms of slavery[11] - is not regarded as the defining element. It arises out of treating the slave as a non-person or an extension of the will of the master. Many slaves have historically not performed manual tasks, and indeed royal slaves have often been used as a blunt instrument for the exploitation of free peasant populations. But what makes these apparently privileged individuals slaves all the same is that they are treated as the extension of their masters. The court eunuch is the classic instance of someone who may wield power, but who cannot aspire to exercising a normal social existence.

The next step is to look more closely at some of the phenomena that are labelled as 'new' or contemporary slavery and to see if there is anything that can be salvaged.

(1) Violence: The use of violence is fundamental to some manifestations of what is called 'new slavery'. The most obvious case is that of people who have been forcibly abducted under conditions of warfare in various parts of Africa.[12] Here we need to distinguish child soldiers from captive workers, although there is some overlap in practice. It has been a recurring feature of many African conflicts, from Liberia to northern Uganda, that children are abducted, forced to brutalise or kill members of their own kin and are then required to work for the rebel groups in question. For girl abductees, this might involve their use as porters and their deployment in other reproductive roles, quite apart from their sexual exploitation. Boys have been used as soldiers who have inflicted the same torment on the next cohort of unfortunates. In some parts of south-central Africa, this conforms to longstanding patterns of warfare whereby warrior groups made up of young men would enslave others and induct them into their group. Their military success against established monarchies, like that of the Kingdom of Kongo, are well-documented. The problem with these bands was that once young men acquired slave wives who produced children, they began to approximate more to the very societies they raided. In the contemporary context, the ability of the rebel bands to reproduce themselves in the long-run is similarly open to question, but they have been remarkably successful thus far. The epithet of 'slavery' does not seem so wide of the mark with respect to another category of people who have been seized by force of arms and forced to work for others under the constant threat of violence. This holds for the Sudan, where there is good evidence that southern Sudanese, especially Dinkas, have been seized in raids by the Baggara (so-called Arab militias) along the frontier zone of conflict between the SPLA and the government and then sent elsewhere as domestic workers. This meshes neatly with well-documented historical patterns of slavery in the Sudan, although Jok

accepts that servitude in recent times has tended to be impermanent.[13] Meillassoux's point about some societies preying parasitically off others is born out in significant ways in these examples. The point is to distinguish violence that is contingent from that which is integral to the relationship in question. Violence may be present in a great many other contexts, but this does not of itself point to the existence of slavery. Where girls are abducted from their parents and sold into sex trafficking rings, as seems to happen in China, we are arguably in familiar territory. But when migrants sign on to contracts that turn out to be bogus, and when they subsequently work under the threat of violence, it is stretching a point to claim that this is akin to slavery. Deception is one thing, the act of being forcibly torn from kith and kin is qualitatively different.

(2) The Market. The Sudan has already been mentioned as a case where captives are passed on through chains of intermediaries to their final 'owner'. We are not talking about the slave markets of old, but rather of interpersonal networks that enable people to be moved from one location to another. In the case of Mauritania, where slavery has been proclaimed dead on three occasions over the past century (1903, 1961 and 1980), servitude has survived in the absence of a formal market - although the bonds have been somewhat modified by successive Sahelian droughts and the urbanisation that has led to.[14] The masters cannot buy and sell their slaves, but there is good evidence that they retain their rights to control children by slave mothers who may be separated from them and despatched elsewhere. Such acts constitute transactions in people and may fairly be described as a perpetuation, or rather a reconfiguration, of older patterns of slavery. In cases of debt bondage, we can also point to transactions in people, even if formal ownership is not claimed. Across much of South Asia, families that are in debt are often forced to pledge their children to work off the debt. In India, Pakistan and Nepal debt bondage has been a feature of agriculture, but has also been present in brick-making, silk weaving and carpet-making. In these countries, the claims over the labour of others may be traded onwards: for example when one creditor discharges the obligation of a debtor and thereby takes on the role himself - as reputedly happens in Nepal under the kamaiya system when debts are settled on an annual basis.[15] Again, as Bales demonstrates, sex trafficking in countries like Thailand builds precisely on relationships of debt in which young girls may be 'employed' to pay off a family debt and then be traded into prostitution. As with the slave trade, selling a person on diminishes their bargaining power and renders them easier to exploit. It is precisely because so much of what is called 'new slavery' involves transactions in people that many of the claims of anti-slavery activists seem plausible.

(3) The Slave as a Non-Person. This criterion is absolutely fundamental to slavery and makes it qualitatively unlike other servile relations. There are really very few instances today where this aspect is properly apparent. In the case of child soldiers, the captives are brutalised, but boys also represent the next group of leaders within the group. This means they are not non-people, but are better considered as initiates. This makes them quite unlike military slaves that are well-known to us from the histories of the Middle East and Africa. In Sahelian countries with a stubborn tradition of slavery - notably in Mauritania and parts of Niger - the ideology of kinship tends to represent slaves as 'members of the family'. However, their unique personal names that act as signifiers; the categories work that they alone perform; the mandatory exhibitions of deference and their particular location in physical space all single them out as slaves. It is through the control over marriage, and the offspring that ensues, that masters are able to assert their grip over the next generation. The Mauritanian example fits very neatly with Patterson's definition of slavery. The case of people who find themselves subjected to bonded labour is somewhat different in that their free status may be affirmed even as they are denied the rights this presupposes. The fact that those who are the most exploited are children has a bearing on how the relationship is conceived: that is, their condition is construed as a transient one. The distinct preference for child labour in some sectors, notably weaving, does not contradict what Meillassoux's predicts because children can be clearly skilful and productive workers at a young age.[16] But it is not clear that there is anything to be gained by calling child labourers slaves, except as a rhetorical device. Caste is an additional ingredient in the bondsman-creditor relationship in South Asia. Although low caste groups and tribals (adivasis) may be treated as different to other kinds of people, the relationship is conceptualised through the discourse of caste rather than slavery. These categories differ in very many different ways: in South Asia, and indeed West Africa, caste revolves around presumed innate characteristics (reproduced through endogamy) and conceptions of pollution: slaves, by contrast, are created, often bear children by free men and can be deployed flexibly by the master precisely because they are an extension of his will. This may seem a fine distinction, but in West

Africa nobody would confuse caste groups with slaves. When it comes to so-called sexual slavery in south-east Asia, where caste is not a factor, it is difficult to argue that the victims are slaves. They are not presumed to be non-people, but are young women who are especially vulnerable and thus ultra-exploitable. Those who come from neighbouring countries may be even more vulnerable, but their 'otherness' does not of itself make them like slaves. The attempt to cram human trafficking into the category of slavery is the least convincing of all. In many instances, those who are trafficked freely enter into agreements with contractors who, legally or illegally, enable them to cross borders, in return for which they find themselves forced to labour for low wages. The traffickers and those who employ them exploit their vulnerability, to be sure, but the relationship is conceived of in terms of payment for their work. Money may be withheld until the notional debt is repaid, and the terms may clearly be extortionate, but I have not come across any cases in the literature where it is denied that those who work are due a wage. To suggest that this is merely a matter of semantics is to entirely miss the point that words define the relationship between parties in any relationship of exploitation. The traffickers know that those they exploit are actually free and that they can only squeeze them for a limited period of time. The hardship endured is typically justified as a temporary measure, which is one reason why those who are ruthlessly exploited may put up with their lot. At a push, one might say that those who have their identity documents taken from them are rendered virtual non-persons, but that it is because of the importance that it vested in documents by the host countries. It is not inherent in the personal relationship between trafficker and victim in the way that it is in slavery. In sum, therefore, whereas Bales argues that it is the hallmark of 'new slavery' that victims are exploited intensively over the short-term,[17] I would make exactly the opposite point: namely that precisely because the people in question are free they cannot be treated as beasts of burden for very long.

(4) **Boundary Maintenance:** The policing of the boundary between slave and free is a serious matter in slave societies, for which reason it is considered not merely the responsibility of individual masters, but the concern of the entire group. A collective consciousness on the part of the masters is present in the case of Mauritania, but one merely has to ask how servile relations are upheld in other contexts for the problems of the 'new slavery' paradigm to become apparent. Putting it simply, where is the master class that seeks to uphold contemporary slavery? In the case of debt bondage, elites may have a vested interest in not enforcing laws that seek to criminalise such forms of exploitation. Equally, it may well be true that the police and other authorities turn a blind eye to abuses. But if slavery has truly become a global phenomenon, surely one needs to identify a group with a consciousness of its collective interests in this context. When subjected to close scrutiny, the modern day slavers evaporate into thin air. This then raises the fundamental question of how, in the absence of such a slaveholding class, modern forms of exploitation - which I insist are not akin to slavery - are reproduced.

But before proceeding, let us see where we have got in the form of a simple table. This underlines my contention that only one of the cases meets more than 2 of the 4 criteria and most only meet one - namely the existence of a market.

Form	Violence	Market	Non-Per	Bound
Mauritania	Yes, origin	Yes	Yes	Yes, but...
Debt bond (S. Asia)	No	Yes	No, but caste logics	Maybe
Sex Slave (Thailand)	No	Yes	No	Maybe
Wives (China)	Yes, abducted	Yes	No	No
Child soldiers	Yes	No, but Sudan	No	No
Trafficking EU/USA	No	Yes	No	No

This brings me to the final part of my talk, which addresses the question of whether terminological precision really matters all that much. Surely, it might be reasoned, if the word 'slavery' has been conceived of too broadly that is nevertheless justifiable if it assists the global campaign to eliminate fundamental abuses of human rights. The first observation I would make is that there is a danger within the narrative of 'new slavery' of attributing everything to a single root cause. But the phenomena may be very different in origin, have different underlying causes and be embedded in different ideological frameworks. It follows that there is no silver bullet that will lead to their eradication, however much modern emancipists would like to believe the contrary. Bales' own interpretation combines a neo-Malthusian interpretation - in which people are brought into the world faster than can be absorbed - with a dusted down modernization paradigm in which traditional structures that once mediated access to resources and entitlements are seen as being in terminal decline.[18] The net result is that, in his account, a vast mass of rootless people are drawn into the vortex of globalisation where they can be ruthlessly exploited by the traffickers. Now there is no doubt that global inequalities are truly vast and probably unprecedented in scale. But it is not at all clear that debt bondage in South Asia can be reduced to overpopulation, traditional breakdown or, for that matter, the forces of globalisation, a term that signifies everything and nothing. Given the very deep roots of debt bondage, one might actually read its contemporary manifestations as evidence for the resilience of 'traditional structures' - if one wants to use such language, which it is probably better to avoid. Some of the Indian or Pakistani industries that are integrated into global trade certainly do make use of bonded labour, but many are part of a local system of production and consumption. The factors that underlie this bondage lie in the mutual reinforcement of caste ideologies and acute poverty born largely out of India's chosen path to development. The problem that underlies attempt to 'free the slaves' is that people who have no resources of their own are necessarily forced back upon dependency on others in the absence of alternatives. Even in Mauritania, the ending of has often not meant the ending of the master's de facto control.[19] 'Emancipation', as understood in the conventional anti-slavery sense, is not the issue here because no piece of paper could free people whose vulnerability arises out of not controlling their means of subsistence.

Secondly, I would submit that invoking the term 'slavery' carries with it serious implications for those who are exploited. Let us take the question of human trafficking which receives more coverage than other forms of 'contemporary slavery'. Modern-day emancipists seek to identify a universal crime against humanity that requires governments and international agencies to take decisive action to root 'it' out. But this plays into the hands of the very actors who have helped to manufacture an environment in which such abuses occur. The phenomenon of human trafficking arises out of a convergence between three realities. The first is the sheer desperation of the victims who, in their eagerness to find a better future, place themselves in the hands of middlemen who offer to assist with their migration. The second is the reality of states in the developed world that have sought to impose tougher barriers against immigration, whether because they genuinely fear the collapse of their welfare systems or because they need to play to the gallery. The third reality is that of people who seek to profit from moving other people about, responding to the demands of employers for cheap labour and of migrants for some kind of remunerated work. When activists argue that state controls need to be tightened up, they no doubt genuinely hope to eliminate abusive labour practices. But, as with any kind of smuggling, creating an environment of scarcity - in this case scarcity of access to mobility - merely increases the economic rent to those who can beat the system. Hence, tighter border controls may increase profit margins and lead to a greater incentive to engage in trafficking. And insofar as these controls are effective, they merely condemn would-be migrants to live in poverty. The US State Department now produces a regular report on trafficking across the world and seeks to deploy sanctions against countries that fail to comply with international protocols.[20] Ostensibly, the aim of the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) is to attack the traffickers and not to criminalise their victims, which sounds laudible enough. But when the Bush administration talks about dealing with the supply side - that is, 'educating' vulnerable groups about the dangers of trafficking - this amounts to telling Africans, Asians and above all Mexicans that they had better forget trying to leave their countries of origin because immigration controls are destined to be used with increasing vigour against them. But there is no evidence to suggest that this is likely to convince the would-be migrants who are prepared to take untold risks to escape their predicament. One would have thought that those who seek to better the lot of their fellow human-beings should argue a case for human rights based on the inalienable right of all human beings to

migrate in search of self-betterment and to insist that governments respect that right unless they have very good reasons not to do so. More open borders would help to undercut the traffickers and would enable more people in the poorer countries to work abroad and remit money home.[21]

In my humble opinion, therefore, much of the campaign to eliminate 'new slavery' in the form of trafficking is misplaced. Furthermore, the argument by Kapstein that western countries should be prepared to resort to force - on the basis of the analogy that coercion was necessary to end the trans-Atlantic slave trade - is as historically tendentious as it is irresponsible.[22] It bears pointing out that anti-slavery campaigners of the nineteenth century became apologists for imperial conquest at immense cost to Africans, often involving the use of slave soldiers. The show of force that Kapstein advocates would simply inflame existing perceptions that the United States is wedded to a new imperialism. The likelihood that getting tough would achieve the desired results is also highly questionable. What is really needed is an acceptance that in a so-called 'globalised world', the whole of humanity has a right to share in the benefits thereof. That implies the right to secure a livelihood, including the possibility of geographical mobility. Certainly, for Africans or Mexicans a freedom that condemns people to struggle in poverty in their countries of origin in order to save them from the abuses of trafficking is likely to seem a hollow one. People will continue to undergo every form of privation in order to reach Europe and North America - a struggle that is actually unnecessary.

A final point that needs to be underlined is that because 'new slavery' does not exist as such, different kinds of interventions are required. Permitting greater freedom of movement addresses some of the concerns about human trafficking, whereas liberating slaves in Mauritania, bondsmen in South Asia and its variant in Brazil implies creating viable livelihoods outside of dependency relations. This does not come cheaply, and is inseparable from the realities of mass impoverishment more generally. Similarly, railing against child trafficking in West Africa is all well and good, but unless the root causes are addressed the results are likely to be minimal. These cases are, in turn, somewhat different to the problems that surround the end of child soldiering in Africa. It is important to appreciate the ways in which poverty plugs into power relations that vary considerably from one context to the next.

In conclusion, I have sought to argue that words matter greatly, not least because they are deeply expressive of relations of domination and subordination. We should abandon the term 'new slavery' because it rests on the lowest common denominator and creates endless confusion: for example, when is child labour and organised prostitution merely exploitation and when does it become 'slavery'? It is never clear. Attempts to establish some meaningful criteria, such as whether work is paid or whether victims are coerced, are in effect pretty unhelpful: almost every form of 'new slavery' involves remuneration, raising the vexed issue of what is fair pay, and an element of implicit coercion. We would be better served by trying to distinguish different forms of exploitation and the underpinnings of each in specific contexts. This does not preclude comparisons or coordination - for example there are certain patterns within debt bondage that recur in different parts of the world. But the bottom line is that one has to be confident that one is comparing like with like. At the time of this bicentenary of British withdrawal from the trans-Atlantic slave trade, let us at least let the real slaves have their moment without trying to press them into the service of modern campaigners.

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- [15] Omar Sattaur, *Child Labour in Nepal: A Report by Anti-Slavery International and Child Workers in Nepal Concerned Centre*(Kathmandu/London: CWIN & ASI, 1993), p.46.
- [16] Weiner, using the data from the Indian census of 1981 estimated that 6.8% of the rural labour force and 2.4% of the urban labour force in that country were children below the age of 15 years, In certain sectors, the contribution of child workers were fundamental: notably 42% in match production. Myron Weiner, *The Child and the State in India: Child Labor and Education Policy in Comparative Perspective* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.10.
- [17] Bales, *Disposable People*, pp.14-19.
- [18] Bales, *Disposable People*, pp.12-13.
- [19] E. Ann McDougall, 'Living the legacy of slavery: between discourse and reality', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines* XLV (3-4), 1179-180, 2005, P.970. This article presents a far more nuanced view of slavery in Mauritania than in most of the anti-slavery literature, including cases where descendants of slavery have come to own slaves and seen themselves as extension of beidan society.
- [20] US Department of State, 'Trafficking in Persons Report', 5 June 2006, pp.9-10, at <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=texttrans-english&y=2006&m=June&x=20060605173646mbzemog0.1155926>

[21] Here I am fully in agreement with Jeroen Doomernik who has argued this case in a bit more detail. See his 'Migration and security: the wrong end of the stick?', in Van den Anker, Political Economy of New Slavery.

[22] Kapstein, 'New global slave trade', pp.114-15.

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