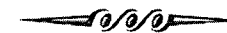




Gold diggers in Brazil. (Photograph © 1998 Sebastião Salgado/Contact Press Images)

DISPOSABLE PEOPLE



New Slavery
in the Global Economy



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THE NEW SLAVERY

THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE IN SUMMER lives up to its reputation. As we sit outdoors in little village about one hundred miles from Paris, the breeze brings us the scent of apples from the orchard next door. I have come here to meet Seba, a newly freed slave. She is a handsome and animated young woman of twenty-two, but as she tells me her story she draws into herself, smoking furiously, trembling, and then the tears come.

I was raised by my grandmother in Mali, and when I was still a little girl a woman my family knew came and asked her if she could take me to Paris to care for her children. She told my grandmother that she would put me in school and that I would learn French. But when I came to Paris I was not sent to school, I had to work every day. In their house I did all the work; I cleaned the house, cooked the meals, cared for the children, and washed and fed the baby. Every day I started work before 7 A.M. and finished about 11 P.M.; I never had a day off. My mistress did nothing; she slept late and then watched television or went out.

One day I told her that I wanted to go to school. She replied that she had not brought me to France to go to school but to take care of her children. I was so tired and run-down. I had problems with my teeth; sometimes my cheek would swell and the pain would be terrible. Sometimes

I had stomachaches, but when I was ill I still had to work. Sometimes when I was in pain I would cry, but my mistress would shout at me.

I slept on the floor in one of the children's bedrooms; my food was their leftovers. I was not allowed to take food from the refrigerator like the children. If I took food she would beat me. She often beat me. She would slap me all the time. She beat me with the broom, with kitchen tools, or whipped me with electric cable. Sometimes I would bleed; I still have marks on my body.

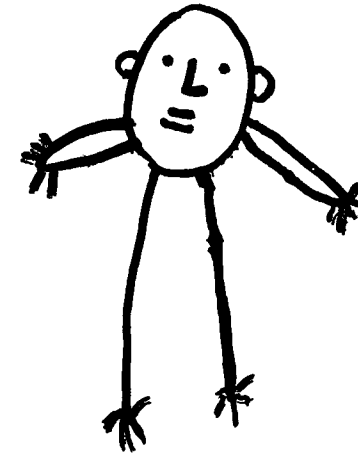
Once in 1992 I was late going to get the children from school; my mistress and her husband were furious with me and beat and then threw me out on the street. I had nowhere to go; I didn't understand anything, and I wandered on the streets. After some time her husband found me and took me back to their house. There they stripped me naked, tied my hands behind my back, and began to whip me with a wire attached to a broomstick. Both of them were beating me at the same time. I was bleeding a lot and screaming, but they continued to beat me. Then she rubbed chili pepper into my wounds and stuck it in my vagina. I lost consciousness.

Sometime later one of the children came and untied me. I lay on the floor where they had left me for several days. The pain was terrible but no one treated my wounds. When I was able to stand I had to start work again, but after this I was always locked in the apartment. They continued to beat me.

Seba was finally freed when a neighbor, after hearing the sounds of abuse and beating, managed to talk to her. Seeing her scars and wounds, the neighbor called the police and the French Committee against Modern Slavery (CCEM), who brought a case and took Seba into their care. Medical examinations confirmed that she had been tortured.

Today Seba is well cared for, living with a volunteer family. She is receiving counseling and is learning to read and write. Recovery will take years, but she is a remarkably strong young woman. What amazed me was how far Seba still needs to go. As we talked I realized that though she was twenty-two and intelligent, her understanding of the world was

less developed than the average five-year-old's. For example, until she was freed she had little understanding of time—no knowledge of weeks, months, or years. For Seba there was only the endless round of work and sleep. She knew that there were hot days and cold days, but never learned that the seasons follow a pattern. If she ever knew her birthday she had forgotten it, and she did not know her age. She is baffled by the idea of "choice." Her volunteer family tries to help her make choices, but she still can't grasp it. I asked Seba to draw the best picture of a person that she could. She told me it was the first time she had ever tried to draw a person. This was the result:



If Seba's case were unique it would be shocking enough, but Seba is one of perhaps 3,000 household slaves in Paris. Nor is such slavery unique to that city. In London, New York, Zurich, Los Angeles, and across the world, children are brutalized as household slaves. And they are just one small group of the world's slaves.

Slavery is not a horror safely consigned to the past; it continues to exist throughout the world, even in developed countries like France and the United States. Across the world slaves work and sweat and build and suffer. Slaves in Pakistan may have made the shoes you are wearing and the carpet you stand on. Slaves in the Caribbean may have

put sugar in your kitchen and toys in the hands of your children. In India they may have sewn the shirt on your back and polished the ring on your finger. They are paid nothing.

Slaves touch your life indirectly as well. They made the bricks for the factory that made the TV you watch. In Brazil slaves made the charcoal that tempered the steel that made the springs in your car and the blade on your lawnmower. Slaves grew the rice that fed the woman that wove the lovely cloth you've put up as curtains. Your investment portfolio and your mutual fund pension own stock in companies using slave labor in the developing world. Slaves keep your costs low and returns on your investments high.

Slavery is a booming business and the number of slaves is increasing. People get rich by using slaves. And when they've finished with their slaves, they just throw these people away. This is the new slavery, which focuses on big profits and cheap lives. It is not about owning people in the traditional sense of the old slavery, but about controlling them completely. People become completely disposable tools for making money.

On more than ten occasions I woke early in the morning to find the corpse of a young girl floating in the water by the barge. Nobody bothered to bury the girls. They just threw their bodies in the river to be eaten by the fish.¹

This was the fate of young girls enslaved as prostitutes in the gold mining towns of the Amazon, explained Antonia Pinto, who worked there as a cook and a procurer. While the developed world bemoans the destruction of the rain forests, few people realize that slave labor is used to destroy them. Men are lured to the region by promises of riches in gold dust, and girls as young as eleven are offered jobs in the offices and restaurants that serve the mines. When they arrive in the remote mining areas, the men are locked up and forced to work in the mines; the girls are beaten, raped, and put to work as prostitutes. Their "recruitment agents" are paid a small amount for each body,

perhaps \$150. The "recruits" have become slaves—not through legal ownership, but through the final authority of violence. The local police act as enforcers to control the slaves. As one young woman explained, "Here the brothel owners send the police to beat us . . . if we flee they go after us, if they find us they kill us, or if they don't kill us they beat us all the way back to the brothel."²

The brothels are incredibly lucrative. The girl who "cost" \$150 can be sold for sex up to ten times a night and bring in \$10,000 per month. The only expenses are payments to the police and a pittance for food. If a girl is a troublemaker, runs away, or gets sick, she is easy to get rid of and replace. Antonia Pinto described what happened to an eleven-year-old girl when she refused to have sex with a miner: "After decapitating her with his machete, the miner drove around in his speedboat, showing off her head to the other miners, who clapped and shouted their approval."³

As the story of these girls shows, slavery has not, as most of us have been led to believe, ended. To be sure, the word *slavery* continues to be used to mean all sorts of things,⁴ and all too often it has been applied as an easy metaphor. Having just enough money to get by, receiving wages that barely keep you alive, may be called wage slavery, but it is not slavery. Sharecroppers have a hard life, but they are not slaves. Child labor is terrible, but it is not necessarily slavery.

We might think slavery is a matter of ownership, but that depends on what we mean by *ownership*. In the past, slavery entailed one person legally owning another person, but modern slavery is different. Today slavery is illegal everywhere, and there is no more *legal* ownership of human beings. When people buy slaves today they don't ask for a receipt or ownership papers, but they do gain *control*—and they use violence to maintain this control. Slaveholders have all of the benefits of ownership without the legalities. Indeed, for the slaveholders, not having legal ownership is an improvement because they get total control without any responsibility for what they own. For that reason I tend to use the term *slaveholder* instead of *slaveowner*.

In spite of this difference between the new and the old slavery, I think everyone would agree that what I am talking about is slavery: the total control of one person by another for the purpose of economic exploitation. Modern slavery hides behind different masks, using clever lawyers and legal smoke screens, but when we strip away the lies, we find someone controlled by violence and denied all of their personal freedom to make money for someone else. As I traveled around the world to study the new slavery, I looked behind the legal masks and I saw people in chains. Of course, many people think there is no such thing as slavery anymore, and I was one of those people just a few years ago.

First Come, First Served

I first encountered the vestiges of the old slavery when I was four years old. What happened is one of my strongest memories. It was the 1950s in the American South and my family was having dinner in a cafeteria. As we started down the serving line I saw another family standing behind a chain, waiting as others moved through with their trays. With the certainty of a four-year-old, I knew that they had arrived first and should be ahead of us. The *fairness* of first come, first served had been drummed into me. So I unhooked the chain and said, "You were here first, you should go ahead." The father of this African American family looked down at me with eyes full of feeling, just as my own father came up and put his hand on my shoulder. Suddenly the atmosphere was thick with unspoken emotion. Tension mixed with bittersweet approval as both fathers grappled with the innocent ignorance of a child who had never heard of segregation. No one spoke, until finally the black father said, "That's OK, we're waiting on someone; go ahead."

My parents were not radicals, but they had taught me the value of fairness and equal treatment. They believed that the idea of our equality was one of the best things about America, and they never approved

of the racism of segregation. But sometimes it takes a child's simplicity to cut through the weight of custom. The intensity of that moment stayed with me, though it was years before I began to understand what those two sets of parents were feeling. As I grew up I was glad to see such blatant segregation coming to an end. The idea that there might still be actual slavery—quite apart from segregation—never crossed my mind. Everyone knew that in the United States slavery had ended in 1865.

Of course, the gross inequalities in American society brought the slavery of the past to mind. I realized that the United States, once a large-scale slave society, was still suffering from a botched emancipation program. Soon after Abraham Lincoln's celebrated proclamation, Jim Crow laws and oppression took over to keep ex-slaves from economic and political power. I came to understand that emancipation was a *process*, not an event—a process that still had a way to go. As a young social researcher, I generally held jobs concerned with the residue of this unfinished process: I studied bad housing, health differences between the races, problems in integrated schools, and racism in the legal system. But I still saw all this as the vestiges of slavery, as problems that were tough but not intractable.

It was only after I moved to England in the early 1980s that I became aware of real slavery. At a large public event I came across a small table set up by Anti-Slavery International. I picked up some leaflets in passing, and I was amazed by what I read. There was no flash-of-light experience, but I developed a gnawing desire to find out more. I was perplexed that this most fundamental human right was still not assured—and that no one seemed to know or care about it. Millions of people were actively working against the nuclear threat, against apartheid in South Africa, against famine in Ethiopia, yet *slavery* wasn't even on the map. The more this realization dug into me, the more I knew I had to do something. Slavery is an obscenity. It is not just stealing someone's labor; it is the theft of an entire life. It is more closely related to the concentration camp than to questions of bad working conditions.

There seems nothing to debate about slavery: it must stop. My question became: What can I do to bring an end to slavery? I decided to use my skills as a social researcher, and I embarked on the project that led to this book.

How Many Slaves?

For several years I collected every scrap of information I could find about modern slavery. I went to the United Nations and the British Library; I trawled through the International Labour Office and visited human rights organizations and charities. I talked to anthropologists and economists. Getting useful, reliable information on slavery is very difficult. Even when shown photographs and affidavits, nations' officials deny its existence. Human rights organizations, in contrast, want to expose the existence of slavery. They report what they are told by the victims of slavery, and it is their business to counter government denials with evidence of widespread slavery. Who and what can we believe?

My approach was to pull together all the evidence I could find, country by country. When someone gave reasons why a number of people were in slavery, I took note. When two people independently stated they had good reasons to think that there was a certain amount of slavery, I began to feel more convinced. Sometimes I found that researchers were working on slavery in two different parts of the same country without knowing about each other. I looked at every report I could find and asked, "What can I feel sure about? Which numbers do I trust?" Then I added up what I had found, taking care to be conservative. If I had any doubts about a report, I left it out of my calculations. It's important to remember that slavery is a shadowy, illegal enterprise, so statistics are hard to come by. I can only make a good guess at the numbers.

My best estimate of the number of slaves in the world today is 27 million.

This number is much smaller than the estimates put forward by some activists, who give a range as high as 200 million, but it is the number I

feel I can trust; it is also the number that fits my strict definition of slavery. The biggest part of that 27 million, perhaps 15 to 20 million, is represented by *bonded labor* in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. Bonded labor or debt bondage happens when people give themselves into slavery as security against a loan or when they inherit a debt from a relative (we'll look at this more closely later). Otherwise slavery tends to be concentrated in Southeast Asia, northern and western Africa, and parts of South America (but there are some slaves in almost every country in the world, including the United States, Japan, and many European countries). There are more slaves alive today than all the people stolen from Africa in the time of the transatlantic slave trade. Put another way, today's slave population is greater than the population of Canada, and six times greater than the population of Israel.

These slaves tend to be used in simple, nontechnological, and traditional work. The largest group work in agriculture. But slaves are used in many other kinds of labor: brickmaking, mining or quarrying, prostitution, gem working and jewelry making, cloth and carpet making, and domestic service; they clear forests, make charcoal, and work in shops. Much of this work is aimed at local sale and consumption, but slave-made goods reach into homes around the world. Carpets, fireworks, jewelry, and metal goods made by slave labor, as well as grains, sugar, and other foods harvested by slaves, are imported directly to North America and Europe. In addition, large international corporations, acting through subsidiaries in the developing world, take advantage of slave labor to improve their bottom line and increase the dividends to their shareholders.

But the value of slaves lies not so much in the particular products they make as in their sweat, in the volume of work squeezed out of them. Slaves are often forced to sleep next to their looms or brick kilns; some are even chained to their work tables. All their waking hours may be turned into working hours. In our global economy one of the standard explanations that multinational corporations give for closing factories in the "first world" and opening them in the "third world"

is the lower labor cost. Slavery can constitute a significant part of these savings. No paid workers, no matter how efficient, can compete economically with unpaid workers—slaves.

What Does Race Have to Do with It?

In the new slavery race means little. In the past, ethnic and racial differences were used to explain and excuse slavery. These differences allowed slaveholders to make up reasons why slavery was acceptable, or even a good thing for the slaves. The *otherness* of the slaves made it easier to employ the violence and cruelty necessary for total control. This otherness could be defined in almost any way—a different religion, tribe, skin color, language, custom, or economic class. Any of these differences could be and were used to separate the slaves from the slaveholders. Maintaining these differences required tremendous investment in some very irrational ideas—and the crazier the justifying idea, the more vehemently it was insisted upon. The American Founding Fathers had to go through moral, linguistic, and political contortions to explain why their “land of the free” was only for white people.⁵ Many of them knew that by allowing slavery they were betraying their most cherished ideals. They were driven to it because slavery was worth a lot of money to a lot of people in North America at the time. But they went to the trouble of devising legal and political excuses because they felt they had to justify their economic decisions morally.

Today the morality of money overrides other concerns. Most slaveholders feel no need to explain or defend their chosen method of labor recruitment and management. Slavery is a very profitable business, and a good bottom line is justification enough. Freed of ideas that restrict the status of slave to *others*, modern slaveholders use other criteria to choose slaves. Indeed, they enjoy a great advantage: being able to enslave people from one's own country helps keep costs down. Slaves in the American South in the nineteenth century were very expensive, in

part because they originally had to be shipped thousands of miles from Africa. When slaves can be gotten from the next town or region, transportation costs fall. The question isn't “Are they the right color to be slaves?” but “Are they vulnerable enough to be enslaved?” The criteria of enslavement today do not concern color, tribe, or religion; they focus on weakness, gullibility, and deprivation.

It is true that in some countries there are ethnic or religious differences between slaves and slaveholders. In Pakistan, for example, many enslaved brickmakers are Christians while the slaveholders are Muslim. In India slave and slaveholder may be from different castes. In Thailand they may come from different regions of the country and are much more likely to be women. But in Pakistan there are Christians who are not slaves, in India members of the same caste who are free. Their caste or religion simply reflects their vulnerability to enslavement; it doesn't cause it. Only in one country, Mauritania, does the racism of the old slavery persist—there black slaves are held by Arab slaveholders, and race is a key division. To be sure, some cultures are more divided along racial lines than others. Japanese culture strongly distinguishes the Japanese as different from everyone else, and so enslaved prostitutes in Japan are more likely to be Thai, Philippine, or European women—although they may be Japanese. Even here, the key difference is not racial but economic: Japanese women are not nearly so vulnerable and desperate as Thais or Filipinas. And the Thai women are available for shipment to Japan because Thais are enslaving Thais. The same pattern occurs in the oil-rich states of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, where Muslim Arabs promiscuously enslave Sri Lankan Hindus, Filipino Christians, and Nigerian Muslims. The common denominator is poverty, not color. Behind every assertion of ethnic difference is the reality of economic disparity. If all left-handed people in the world became destitute tomorrow, there would soon be slaveholders taking advantage of them. Modern slaveholders are predators keenly aware of weakness; they are rapidly adapting an ancient practice to the new global economy.

The Rise of the New Slavery

For thousands of years people have been enslaved. Slavery echoes through the great epics of the distant past. Ancient Egypt, ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire all made slavery integral to their social systems.⁶ Right through the American and Brazilian slave economies of the last century, legal, old-style slavery persisted in what is now called the developed world. But slavery never disappeared; instead, it took a different form. The basic fact of one person totally controlling another remains the same, but slavery has changed in some crucial ways.

Two factors are critical in the shift from the old slavery to the explosive spread of the new. The first is the dramatic increase in world population following World War II. Since 1945 the world population has almost tripled, increasing from about 2 billion people to more than 5.7 billion. The greatest growth has been in those countries where slavery is most prevalent today. Across Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and the Arab countries, populations have more than tripled and countries are flooded with children. Over half the population in some of these countries is under the age of fifteen. In countries that were already poor, the sheer weight of numbers overwhelms the resources at hand. Without work and with increasing fear as resources diminish, people become desperate and life becomes cheap. Especially in those areas where slavery had persisted or was part of the historical culture, the population explosion radically increased the supply of potential slaves and drove down their price.

The second crucial factor is that at the same time that the population was exploding, these countries were undergoing rapid social and economic change. In many developing countries modernization brought immense wealth to the elite and continued or increased the impoverishment of the poor majority. Throughout Africa and Asia the last fifty years have been scarred by civil war and the wholesale looting of resources by home-grown dictators, often supported by one of the superpowers. To hold on to power, the ruling kleptocrats have paid enormous

sums for weaponry, money raised by mortgaging their countries. Meanwhile traditional ways of life and subsistence have been sacrificed to the cash crop and quick profit. Poor families have lost their old ways of meeting a crisis. Traditional societies, while sometimes oppressive, generally relied on ties of responsibility and kinship that could usually carry people through a crisis such as the death of the breadwinner, serious illness, or a bad harvest. Modernization and the globalization of the world economy have shattered these traditional families and the small-scale subsistence farming that supported them. The forced shift from subsistence to cash-crop agriculture, the loss of common land, and government policies that suppress farm income in favor of cheap food for the cities have all helped bankrupt millions of peasants and drive them from their land—sometimes into slavery.

Although modernization has had good effects, bringing improvements in health care and education, the concentration of land in the hands of an elite and its use of land to produce cash crops for export have made the poor more vulnerable. Because the political elites in the developing world focus on economic growth, which is not just in their collective self-interest but required by global financial institutions, little attention is paid to sustainable livelihoods for the majority. So while the rich of the developing world have grown richer, the poor have fewer and fewer options. Amid the disruption of rapid social change, one of those options is slavery.

The end of the cold war only made matters worse. William Greider explains it well:

One of the striking qualities of the post-Cold War globalization is how easily business and government in the capitalist democracies have abandoned the values they putatively espoused for forty years during the struggle against communism—individual liberties and political legitimacy based on free elections. Concern for human rights, including freedom of assembly for workers wishing to speak for themselves, has been pushed aside by commercial opportunity. Multinationals plunge confidently into new markets, from Vietnam

to China, where governments routinely control and abuse their own citizens.⁷

In fact, some of these countries *enslave* their own citizens, and others turn a blind eye to the slavery that generates such enormous profits.

THE OLD SLAVERY VERSUS THE NEW SLAVERY Government corruption, plus the vast increase in the number of people and their ongoing impoverishment, has led to the new slavery. For the first time in human history there is an absolute glut of potential slaves. It is a dramatic illustration of the laws of supply and demand: with so many possible slaves, their value has plummeted. Slaves are now so cheap that they have become cost-effective in many new kinds of work, completely changing how they are seen and used. Think about computers. Forty years ago there were only a handful of computers, and they cost hundreds of thousands of dollars; only big companies and the government could afford them. Today there are millions of personal computers. Anyone can buy a used, but quite serviceable, model for \$100. Use that \$100 computer for a year or two, and when it breaks down, don't bother to fix it—just throw it away.

The same thing happens in the new slavery. Buying a slave is no longer a major investment, like buying a car or a house (as it was in the old slavery); it is more like buying an inexpensive bicycle or a cheap computer. Slaveholders get all the work they can out of their slaves, and then throw them away. The nature of the relationship between slaves and slaveholders has fundamentally altered. The new disposability has dramatically increased the amount of profit to be made from a slave, decreased the length of time a person would normally be enslaved, and made the question of legal ownership less important. When slaves cost a great deal of money, that investment had to be safeguarded through clear and legally documented ownership. Slaves of the past were worth stealing and worth chasing down if they escaped. Today slaves cost so little that it is not worth the hassle of securing permanent, "legal" ownership. Slaves are disposable.

Around the world today the length of time a slave spends in bondage varies enormously. Where old-style slavery is still practiced, bondage lasts forever. A Mauritanian woman born into slavery has a good chance of remaining so for the rest of her life. Her children, if she has any, will also be slaves, and so on down the generations. But today most slaves are temporary; some are enslaved for only a few months. It is simply not profitable to keep them when they are not immediately useful. Under these circumstances, there is no reason to invest heavily in their upkeep and indeed little reason to ensure that they survive their enslavement. While slaves in the American South were often horribly treated, there was nevertheless a strong incentive to keep them alive for many years. Slaves were like valuable livestock: the plantation owner needed to make back his investment. There was also pressure to breed them and produce more slaves, since it was usually cheaper to raise new slaves oneself than to buy adults. Today no slaveholder wants to spend money supporting useless infants, so female slaves, especially those forced into prostitution, are prevented from conceiving. And there is no reason to protect slaves from disease or injury—medicine costs money, and it's cheaper to let them die.

The key differences between the old and new slavery break down like this:

<i>Old Slavery</i>	<i>New Slavery</i>
Legal ownership asserted	Legal ownership avoided
High purchase cost	Very low purchase cost
Low profits	Very high profits
Shortage of potential slaves	Surplus of potential slaves
Long-term relationship	Short-term relationship
Slaves maintained	Slaves disposable
Ethnic differences important	Ethnic differences not important

Looking at a specific example will clarify these differences. Perhaps the best studied and best understood form of old slavery was the system in

the American South before 1860.⁸ Slaves were at a premium, and the demand for them was high because European immigrants were able to find other work or even start their own farms in the ever-expanding West. This demand for slaves was reflected in their price. By 1850 an average field laborer sold for \$1,000 to \$1,800. This was three to six times the average yearly wage of an American worker at the time, perhaps equivalent to around \$50,000 to \$100,000 today. Despite their high cost, slaves generated, on average, profits of only about 5 percent each year. If the cotton market went up, a plantation owner might make a very good return on his slaves, but if the price of cotton fell, he might be forced to sell slaves to stay in business. Ownership was clearly demonstrated by bills of sale and titles of ownership, and slaves could be used as collateral for loans or used to pay off debts. Slaves were often brutalized to keep them under control, but they were also recognized and treated as sizable investments. A final distinctive element was the extreme racial differentiation between slaveholder and slave, so strong that a very small genetic difference—normally set at being only one-eighth black—still meant lifelong enslavement.⁹

In comparison, consider the agricultural slave in debt bondage in India now. There land rather than labor is at a premium today. India's population has boomed, currently totaling three times that of the United States in a country with one-third the space. The glut of potential workers means that free labor must regularly compete with slave, and the resulting pressure on agricultural wages pushes free laborers toward bondage. When free farmers run out of money, when a crop fails or a member of the family becomes ill and needs medicine, they have few choices. Faced with a crisis, they borrow enough money from a local landowner to meet the crisis, but having no other possessions, they must use their own lives as collateral. The debt against which a person is bonded—that is, the price of a laborer—might be 500 to 1,000 rupees (about \$12 to \$23). The bond is completely open-ended; the slave must work for the slaveholder until the slaveholder decides the debt is repaid. It may carry over into a second and third generation,

growing under fraudulent accounting by the slaveholder, who may also seize and sell the children of the bonded laborer against the debt. The functional reality is one of slavery, but its differences from the old slavery reflect five of the seven points listed above.

First, no one tries to assert legal ownership of the bonded laborer. The slave is held under threat of violence, and often physically locked up, but no one asserts that he or she is in fact "property." Second, the bonded laborer is made responsible for his or her own upkeep, thus lowering the slaveholder's costs. The slaves may scrape together their subsistence in a number of ways: eking it out from the foodstuffs produced for the slaveholder, using their "spare time" to do whatever is necessary to bring in food, or receiving some foodstuffs or money from the slaveholder. The slaveholders save by providing no regular maintenance, and they can cut off food and all support when the bonded laborer is unable to work or is no longer needed.

Third, if a bonded laborer is not able to work, perhaps because of illness or injury, or is not needed for work, he or she can be abandoned or disposed of by the slaveholder, who bears no responsibility for the slave's upkeep. Often the slaveholder keeps an entirely fraudulent legal document, which the bonded laborer has "signed" under duress. This document violates several current Indian laws and relies on others that either never existed or have not existed for decades, yet it is normally used to justify holding the bonded laborer. It also excuses the abandonment of ill or injured slaves, for it specifies responsibilities only on the part of the bonded laborer; there are none on the part of the slaveholder. Fourth, the ethnic differentiation is not nearly so rigid as that of the old slavery. As already noted, bonded laborers may well belong to a lower caste than the slaveholder—but this is not always the case. The key distinction lies in wealth and power, not caste.

Finally, a major difference between the old and new slavery is in the profits produced by an enslaved laborer. Agricultural bonded laborers in India generate not 5 percent, as did slaves in the American South, but over 50 percent profit per year for the slaveholder. This high profit

is due, in part, to the low cost of the slave (i.e., the small loan advanced), but even so it reflects the low returns on old-fashioned small-scale agriculture: indeed, almost all other forms of modern slavery are much more profitable.

Agricultural debt bondage in India still has some characteristics of the old slavery, such as the holding of slaves for long periods. A better example of the new slavery is provided by the young women lured into "contract" slavery and put to work in prostitution in Thailand. A population explosion in Thailand has ensured a surplus of potential slaves, while rapid economic change has led to new poverty and desperation. The girls are often initially drawn from rural areas with the promise of work in restaurants or factories. There is no ethnic difference—these are Thai girls enslaved by Thai brothel owners; the distinction between them, if any, is that the former are rural and the latter urban. The girls might be sold by their parents to a broker, or tricked by an agent; once away from their homes they are brutalized and enslaved, then sold to a brothel owner. The brothel owners place the girls in debt bondage and tell them they must pay back their purchase price, plus interest, through prostitution. They might use the legal ruse of a contract—which often specifies some completely unrelated job, such as factory work—but that isn't usually necessary. The calculation of the debt and the interest is, of course, completely in the hands of the brothel owners and so is manipulated to show whatever they like. Using that trick, they can keep a girl as long as they want, and they don't need to demonstrate any legal ownership. The brothel does have to feed the girl and keep her presentable, but if she becomes ill or injured or too old, she is disposed of. In Thailand today, the girl is often discarded when she tests positive for HIV.

This form of contract debt bondage is extremely profitable. A girl between twelve and fifteen years old can be purchased for \$800 to \$2,000, and the costs of running a brothel and feeding the girls are relatively low. The profit is often as high as 800 percent a year. This kind

of return can be made on a girl for five to ten years. After that, especially if she becomes ill or HIV-positive, the girl is dumped.

THE FORMS OF THE NEW SLAVERY Charted on paper in neat categories, the new slavery seems to be very clear and distinct. In fact, it is as inconveniently sloppy, dynamic, changeable, and confusing as any other kind of relation between humans. We can no more expect there to be one kind of slavery than we can expect there to be one kind of marriage. People are inventive and flexible, and the permutations of human violence and exploitation are infinite. The best we can do with slavery is to set down its dimensions and then test any particular example against them.

One critical dimension is violence—all types of slavery depend on violence, which holds the slave in place. Yet, for one slave, there may be only the threat of violence while, with another, threats may escalate into terrible abuse. Another dimension is the length of enslavement. Short-term enslavement is typical of the new slavery, but "short" may mean ten weeks or ten years. Still another aspect is the slave's loss of control over his or her life and ongoing "obligation" to the slaveholder. The actual way in which this obligation is enforced varies a great deal, yet it is possible to use this dimension to outline three basic forms of slavery:

1. *Chattel slavery* is the form closest to the old slavery. A person is captured, born, or sold into permanent servitude, and ownership is often asserted. The slave's children are normally treated as property as well and can be sold by the slaveholder. Occasionally, these slaves are kept as items of conspicuous consumption. This form is most often found in northern and western Africa and some Arab countries, but it represents a very small proportion of slaves in the modern world. We will look at chattel slavery in Mauritania in chapter 3.

2. *Debt bondage* is the most common form of slavery in the world. A