

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

OUR AIMS

This is the second of our two edited volumes on child slavery. The first, *Children in Slavery through the Ages*, explored what constitutes child slavery, as opposed to adult slavery, and provided comparative examples of the trade in children and of child slavery in a wide range of geographical locations and societies, from North America to Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia, from the eighth to the twentieth century. By contrast, the focus of this second volume is the transformations in child slavery since the first major abolitionist measures against the slave trade and slavery, in the early nineteenth century.

The contributions to this volume again have a wide geographical range. They examine the sometimes quite startling changes in the nature of the trade in children, and of child servitude, from the age of abolition to the present day. These transformations have obliged scholars of slavery and antislavery, child welfare activists, and, inevitably, governments, to question traditional concepts and to revise their definitions of slavery, particularly legal formulations. This international human rights campaign has been particularly necessary in the case of children, as the dimensions of modern child trafficking, and the complexity of contemporary forms of child servitude, are beginning to hit the public consciousness.

DEFINITIONS

Definitions of what constitutes a child are critical to studies of, and the fight against, child slavery. However, as is clear from the contributions to this volume, the boundary between child and adult is often fuzzy, and definitions vary according to place and time. Thus in nineteenth-century Africa, where slave children's ages were usually unknown, height was generally used to differentiate a child from an adult. Gwyn Campbell, writing about the Merina Empire in Madagascar, notes that any male captive too tall to fit under a soldier's arm was usually considered an adult and in consequence killed. Martin Klein, writing on the Sudan, points out the weakness of height as a yardstick, since children from the savannas were usually taller than those bred in the forests. A better but seemingly less used indicator was whether or not the individual had developed his or her adult teeth. In

more recent times, with improved documentation, people's ages were generally known and children defined in terms of years rather than physique. However, the issue of when a child becomes an adult is still unclear, as it continues to differ from one society to another. As Mike Dottridge points out in his essay on contemporary slavery, "in some cultures sixteen- and seventeen-year-olds are regarded as adults, while in others young people of eighteen or nineteen retain a childlike vulnerability to exploitation and thus require protection."

CHILD SLAVES IN THE ERA OF ABOLITION

The first section of this volume focuses on child slaves in the era of abolition, that is, after the maritime slave trade had been outlawed and when slavery itself was under attack. Benjamin N. Lawrance discusses the four children sent from Sierra Leone across the Atlantic to Havana and then sent on along the coast of Cuba on the slave ship *La Amistad* after the maritime trade had been outlawed. The children described the tactics used by "slave ship captains" to avoid capture. However, the remaining adult slaves revolted and attempted to return the ship to Africa. Off Long Island the ship and its human cargo, including the children, were captured by the American navy. At the subsequent trial, in New Haven, Connecticut, the children's testimony threw considerable light on how they had been enslaved. One had been kidnapped, another captured in a raid, and the remaining two, both from large families, pawned for family debts and sold when the families were otherwise unable to pay their creditors. Unknown numbers of children in Africa were pawned, often in times of famine, to buy food for their families. Lawrance subsequently discusses the various legal systems through which the children passed on their route to freedom under United States law, after which they were returned to Sierra Leone. One of the girls later returned to the United States to attend Oberlin College.

Lawrance's chapter reveals rare firsthand evidence from children on the slave trade at a time when the proportion of children to adults in the traffic was growing. There are two probable reasons for the rise in the numbers of children in the Atlantic trade in its last years in the nineteenth century. One is that, at a time when slaves had to be smuggled illegally into the Americas and West Indies, buyers could expect more years of work and greater compliance from children than from adults. The other, suggested by Klein, is that after the trade was outlawed and the risk of capture increased, the captains of slavers, anxious to make a quick getaway from Africa, took whatever individuals were offered rather than wait for an ideal cargo of adult males.

In our second chapter, Campbell provides a wealth of material on slavery and slaving in the nineteenth-century Merina Empire in Madagascar before the French colonial emancipation of slaves, in 1896. The majority of slaves were women and children. Most were initially caught in local wars and raids, kidnapped, or enslaved as punishment for parental debt—an important source of slaves, as large numbers of men were conscripted for unremunerated labor for the Merina state and thus forced into debt. Adult male captives were, from the 1820s, usually executed. However, imports of African slaves also rose steadily through the decades. Overall, women and children were in greatest demand, and their numbers rose dramatically, with considerable fluctuations, from between two and three thousand a year in 1824 to possibly twelve thousand annually by 1885. Slave children between the ages of eight and ten, when they were considered particularly malleable, were the most desired, notably as farmhands or domestics. They were salable commodities, sometimes subject to harsh punishment, and often sold away from their mothers. As adults, however, they were often more fortunate than the free, for as personal possessions they were immune to state demands for forced labor. Campbell's chapter, enlivened with illustrations, includes unusually rich descriptions of slave children's lives, including their games.

Cecily Jones's contribution is exceptional in its examination of children's resistance to slavery, primarily in the eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century British Caribbean. There child slaves often took their cues from their elders, singing "insurrectionary songs," adopting go-slow tactics or performing tasks shoddily when at work, pilfering, and engaging in sabotage or arson—although it is impossible to tell if these efforts resulted from "adult encouragement" or were self-motivated.

Children, Jones tells us, were more likely than adults to suffer brutal treatment for trivial offences such as "oversleeping," and they often received the same punishments as grown-ups. In some cases, by punishing their own children, parents were able to protect them from excessive abuse by their owners. In general, however, little allowance was made for the fact that an offender was a child. Certainly during slave insurrections, owners dealt as harshly with slave children as with adult slaves.

Children sometimes engaged in acts of vengeance. Masters, who generally believed that slaves possessed knowledge of poisons, invariably suspected slave children, who served in the household and had access to food stores, should someone in the household fall ill. Some slave children did, indeed, attempt to poison their masters. However, a more common form of child resistance was to abscond, sometimes permanently to join maroon

groups, but more often to simply escape for a few hours or days. On their return, truant slaves frequently produced weak excuses—such as the boy who insisted he was “spirited away” and hence not responsible for his absence. Boys often worked away from the master’s house and thus had more opportunities than girls to abscond. The ultimate form of resistance, rarely resorted to by children, was suicide, which deprived the owner of valuable property.

Two of the chapters treat slavery in Latin America. From court records in Gran Colombia, and later independent Venezuela, Sue Taylor reveals strategies resorted to by slave parents, usually mothers, to free their children in late colonial and early independent Caracas (1750–1854). By this time, slaves as well as freed people could appeal to the courts to settle grievances, such as ill treatment or wrongful enslavement. Also, a tariff established the fair value of slaves, encouraging slave parents who managed to earn enough money to buy their own freedom and—particularly in the case of mothers—to then try to purchase liberty for their children. Should purchase prove impossible, slave parents tried to protect their children from abusive masters by requesting transfer of ownership—as they commonly did upon the breakup of an estate, which usually followed the owner’s death—in order to prevent the separation of the members of their families. In some cases, the parent was given permission to find a prospective buyer for the child; in others the child was freed. The significant number of cases decided in favor of the slave petitioners reflected growing public acceptance of freedom at a time when slavery was under attack in early national Latin America.

Nara Milanich, in a wide-ranging chapter, discusses child tutelary servitude in other regions of Latin America. She begins by focusing on the position of the *criado*—a child domestic in a wealthy household, unpaid but fed and clothed in return for work. Free poor children of both sexes were, and still are, apt to be seized for such private exploitation. Milanich defines this condition as servitude because the child is forced to work without pay. She sees it as tutelary because in theory it involves a degree of protection for a dependent minor. In practice the victim was often isolated from natal kin and suffered what Orlando Patterson has called “social death”—the *sine qua non* of slavery. When slavery was legally abolished during the nineteenth century, these forms of tutelary servitude, as well as oppressive forms of apprenticeship and guardianship, kept the children of the poor in bondage well beyond their childhood.

Also, by the 1840s indigenous families were selling their children (known as *cholitos* or *cholitas*), or giving them away as unpaid servants, in return for land. Another source of unpaid child labor emerged during

the nineteenth-century wars of conquest by Latin American governments, which implemented policies aimed at the elimination of indigenous peoples and their cultures involving the widespread removal and enslavement of their children. The later growth of the rubber industry in Amazonia created a demand for child labor in Brazil that also drew Amerindian children into tutelary servitude. Forms of this practice still exist in "at least a dozen" South American countries.

Three chapters discuss children in Africa during the period of colonial abolition of African forms of slaving. Klein focuses on child bondage in the western Sudan from the days of the Atlantic slave trade to the late twentieth century. He makes it clear that, in the early days, children were not the slaves of choice. Their prices, relatively low when they were young, owing to their high rates of mortality and the cost of their training and acculturation, rose as they grew older. Girls were always more expensive than boys of the same age and might sell for twice the price.

In the Atlantic slave trade the numbers of children grew steadily in the nineteenth century. They were the slaves most easily acquired and retained. Apart from outright capture in raids or kidnapping, children were the first to be sold in times of famine. When the Atlantic trade ended, the demand for women and children within Africa continued. They were also the main victims of the illegal trade following the establishment of colonial rule in the 1890s and the outlawing of the slave trade in European colonies. For example, within five years of the ban on the slave trade in the Sudan in 1900, the bulk of the slaves brought to market were children—presumably because they were easier to buy, capture, control, and conceal and less likely to escape. Further, when the institution of slavery declined and adult slaves started to demand their freedom, many owners attempted to keep control of their slave children, whom they regarded as legitimate property, quoting the saying "The owner of the hen is the owner of the chicks."

Klein also discusses pawnship, widely practiced in colonial Africa. A pawn was usually a girl offered as security for a debt incurred by a member of her family. If the debt remained unpaid, the child belonged to the creditor and was often sold into slavery. Pawnship, an issue the French tackled halfheartedly, eventually declined as the result of increased demand for labor after World War II and consequently growing prosperity.

Bernard Moitt's contribution investigates the *tutelle* system in Senegal from 1848 to 1905. During that period, the French were consolidating their power in Senegal, mainly in the towns of Saint-Louis and Gorée, where the majority of the population were slaves. Tutelle was a system through which the authorities handed over freed slave children—until they reached

the age of eighteen—for adoption to individuals, or to missions and other institutions. Many of the so-called guardians of these children were African or European traders who had once owned slaves. They included the powerful *signares*—women traders of mixed race. Since the government had insufficient resources to enforce laws protecting the children, guardianship became in effect a disguise for child servitude. Moitt describes how child slaves continued to be imported into the towns from areas under only indirect French control and therefore even less regulated. He suggests that even after slavery became illegal in 1905, French officials tried to evade implementing the antislavery laws and that child servitude and tutelle continued.

Trevor R. Getz uses British colonial court records to explore the handling of child slaves in the British Gold Coast between 1874 and 1899. He raises the interesting question of the fitness of British administrators to tackle African slavery, since they had no formal legal training and were usually junior officials with little knowledge of African societies. The same question might well be raised in connection with the officials of the other European colonial powers.

Getz also examines the interplay of European conceptions of childhood and slavery with African realities. By the 1880s large numbers of slave children, mostly girls, were being brought to British Gold Coast towns. Colonial officials, afraid that emancipated children might become vagabonds, tried to avoid freeing them, using the pretext that African slavery was benign. Thus in law, rape or other forms of physical abuse, rather than enslavement per se, became the main criteria for liberation.

William G. Clarence-Smith discusses the redemption of child slaves by Christian missionaries between 1878 and 1914 in central Africa, a huge area stretching from Cameroon across the French and Belgian Congos to Mozambique. He shows that the Catholic colonial powers were particularly lax in attacking slavery. Where Protestant missionaries wanted “sincere and informed individual conversions” of free adults, the Catholics, believing that free Africans were “sunk in savagery and superstition,” ransomed slave children, later settling them in Christian villages in the hope that Christianity would spread from these places throughout the general population.

Many Catholic missions, however, used redeemed children as a labor force. Some even claimed that agricultural work was more important to the children’s “moral education” than lessons. Consequently, the children often believed they were slaves of the missionaries, while neighboring peoples regarded them as foreigners. The freed-slave villages thus rarely became centers for the spread of Christianity. Moreover, the missionaries were accused of stimulating the slave trade by buying child slaves to use as

a labor force—although Clarence-Smith argues that some missionaries ransomed them out of genuine pity and concern. In the face of strong criticism and poor results, Catholic missionaries stopped the practice in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The contributors to the first part of this volume cover the years in which slavery was increasingly banned in the Western world and its dependencies. However, it remained legal in Ethiopia until 1942 and in Saudi Arabia until 1962, and was outlawed in Oman only in 1970. By this time a worldwide free and mobile labor force was widely available, which for employers had the advantage over slaves that workers could be hired and fired at will.

Nevertheless, child slavery lingered on in poorer areas of the world. In Niger, a Tuareg chief announced that all the seven thousand slaves he and his clansmen owned would be liberated on 5 March 2005. However, the ceremony was canceled at the last minute, apparently at the instigation of the government, and despite agitation by Timidria—a local organization—and the British-based Anti-Slavery Society, slavery in Niger continues. In April 2008, a former slave brought a case before the Economic Community of West African States against the government of Niger for not implementing its antislavery laws.¹ Again, in Mauritania, where in bad economic times slave owners allowed their adult slaves to depart, they continued to claim control over slave children. Only in 2007 did slavery become a punishable offense—the first arrests taking place in October 2008.² While under increasing attack, traditional slavery continues today, mainly in remote areas.³

CHILD SLAVES IN THE MODERN ERA

The contributions in the second section of this volume focus on the trade in children and the complex forms of child slavery in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In this current era, governments had outlawed traditional slavery, but their focus was primarily on adult (notably male) slaves. However, as this volume indicates, forms of child servitude continued and have remained widespread up to the present day despite condemnation by national governments, by the United Nations, the International Labor Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, and other international bodies.

Our discussion of contemporary child slavery begins with its most common form—domestic servitude. In the first two chapters of this section, Jonathan Blagbrough discusses domestic child bondage in a worldwide context, while Philip Whalen and Malika Id' Salah limit their study to girls in France. All make it clear that child domestics who live in their employers' houses are in particular danger of abuse because their servitude

is largely invisible to the outside world. Blagbrough's evidence derives from interviews conducted in eight countries in 2004 by Anti-Slavery International and its partners, whereas Whalen and Id' Salah evaluate the efficacy of measures meant to protect vulnerable children in France.

The usual age at which child domestics begin their labor is twelve, but some are as young as five, notably in Haiti. Most are girls, although there are also significant numbers of prepubescent boys. Globally, the number of these children runs into millions. The practice is so widespread because it is generally believed that domestic service provides beneficial training for poor children in a "safe" environment. This reasoning, or rationalization, underlay the practices of tutelary servitude described by Nara Milanich in nineteenth-century Latin America. Although in many cases domestic service is beneficial, in a minority of cases it leads to abuse—physical or psychological or both—that is hard to detect because it takes place in private; and children often do not know how to register a complaint, or are incapable of doing so.

There are many reasons why children voluntarily enter, or are forced into, domestic servitude. Sometimes they or their parents hope to pay off family debts. Often, rural families commit their children to such servitude in the hope that their "employers" will send them to school or teach them a trade. Sometimes children are given over to strangers because there is no one to take care of them. In other cases, they are simply sold, or given away by their families, and are henceforth viewed as "transferable" resources. The only recourse of abused children is to attempt to escape, but all too often they are simply recaptured and punished. If they are fortunate, however—as Whalen and Id' Salah note—their plight is reported by neighbors or other witnesses. In France, this has led to the uncovering of cases of forced marriage as well as of child domestic abuse.

Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki discusses adolescent prostitutes in Cape Town, South Africa. While agreeing that some children are forced into prostitution and are indeed virtual slaves—in that they are controlled by others who profit from their work—she nevertheless insists that many of the young females she encountered turned to prostitution voluntarily in order to meet their material needs. It is nevertheless evident that, even if they are what we may call voluntary prostitutes, many are not independent, as they often fall into the hands of pimps, or may be controlled by "boyfriends" or even by older children. Despite this lack of autonomy, they use various strategies with those who control them in order to gain space for maneuvering. For some this involves joining gangs that can offer them protection.

Sarah Maguire discusses the disturbing subject of child soldiers. There are perhaps three hundred thousand children in various armed forces

worldwide—an estimated seventy thousand in Burma alone. In some conflict zones, child recruits are forced into armed groups. Others join in order to help their families survive or because they believe their relations are dead or have migrated, leaving them alone. However, many are abducted by armed groups who force their child “recruits” to mutilate or kill companions or family who resist the order to fight. Most of the survivors grow up under arms. Some, serving alongside adults, assume a minor role in the military force; others, such as those in the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, assume major roles.

Maguire, who focuses primarily on Sri Lanka, emphasizes that children were easier to recruit, and less expensive to train, than adults. Once they join up, child soldiers may be afraid to escape for fear their families will reject them. That fear is particularly true of boys who have committed atrocities or of girls who have been sexually abused—experiences that can traumatize them. Moreover, their commanders may try to retain them by addicting them to drugs, alcohol, or human blood or flesh. Even voluntary reintegration of child soldiers into civilian life poses major challenges. These challenges are not limited to those who have committed atrocities or who became drug addicts. Many may find themselves at a disadvantage with their peers because they may have forgotten their native language, while all will have fallen behind in education.

In our final chapter, “Contemporary Child Slavery,” Mike Dottridge comments that the number of children in “extremely unpleasant” jobs has increased over the last quarter century. He reinforces the observations of Whalen and Id’ Salah that, because in most countries slavery has long been abolished, there are no longer laws to prosecute “slavers.” To make matters worse, public skepticism about the continued existence of child slavery is fueled by often exaggerated or falsified news reports. These frequently stem from children’s rights organizations, anxious to raise money, and journalists eager to get public attention, who always quote the highest estimates of the numbers of exploited children in the world. Such reports also tend to misrepresent transactions between parents and employers as sales of children and to categorize the employment of children who do not attend school, and work in bad conditions, as slavery.

Nevertheless, Dottridge makes clear that these exaggerations should not detract from the harsh reality that there are many child slaves today. Child servitude is complex, its forms constantly changing, so child slaves cannot be categorized under a single definition. They include girls—and sometimes boys—forced into prostitution to earn money for others. Often recruited through false job offers, they find themselves in brothels, under

strict surveillance, sometimes in their own countries, often abroad. Child slaves also include girls in forced marriages and brides who have been trafficked and are kept under lock and key—at least until they have a child and consequently are less likely to want to escape. Other forms of child servitude are children engaged in “hazardous” occupations—in work that is too difficult for them or likely to lead to physical or psychological harm.

There is insufficient space in this volume to cover all aspects of child slavery. Some small boys in northern Ghana are forced into the risky occupation of freeing fishing nets from underwater entanglements. Children abducted in Darfur are taken as slaves to Sudan. There are child brides in forced marriages in India and elsewhere. Labor rings in China sell children from poor rural areas to work in urban factories. In Britain children have been found in forced prostitution. Wherever there is a demand for cheap labor, soldiers, or prostitutes that cannot be met by legal recruitment, children are inevitably forced or drawn into modern forms of child servitude.

However, what the contributions in this volume clearly underline is that the key issue in the modern era is not whether children are literally bought and sold—one of the fundamental definitions of traditional slavery. The crucial issue, notably in the contemporary world, is how children in servitude are treated—the multiple forms and degrees of coercion used to enslave, trade, and control, and thus deprive them of freedom of choice and movement.

NOTES

1. “Historic Slavery Case Launched against the Government of Niger,” *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 14, no. 2 (2008): 5.

2. “Two Arrested in Mauretania on Slavery Related Charges,” *Anti-Slavery Reporter*, 14, no. 1 (2008): 4.

3. For the legacy of slavery in selected societies, see Benedetta Rossi, “Rethinking Slavery in West Africa,” introduction to *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009).