

Exploiting West Africa's children: trafficking, slavery and uneven development

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Revised manuscript received 9 June 2005

This paper analyses child trafficking and slavery in relation to media coverage of West African children, international law and academic research within geography and development studies. The meaning and practice of child trafficking is examined in the context of related debates about child labour, exploitation and uneven development. The analysis highlights key differences between trafficking and slavery, thereby illuminating the varying forms of exploitation at work in different relations of power.

Key words: *trafficking, slavery, exploitation, uneven development*

Introduction

The Etireno rocks gently against the quay; the smallest ship in a small west African port . . . The Etireno was a notorious slave ship, the UN children's fund (Unicef) confirmed. (Astill 2001a, 1)

As the quote above shows, global issues of child trafficking and some of the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery, have captured media interest. While such coverage is celebrated by human rights campaigners for its 'great impact' on public awareness (Salah 2001, 5), a less charitable view dismisses 'media hype' as part of exaggerated 'moral panics about children's vulnerability' (Robson 2005, 73, 68).

Other academics fault reporting designed solely for 'human interest shock value' (Bass 2004, 10). And yet, there *are* children embedded within 'very real political and economic processes of exploitation, unevenness and inequality' (Power 2003, 190). The appropriate response to 'hype' is therefore not to deny exploitation but to try to understand it analytically (Robson 2005, 73).

This paper's central premise is that trafficking and slavery are related yet different phenomena. Trafficking is not a 'new form of slavery' (Bass 2004,

152) because different actors, features and mechanisms co-exist with the similarities. The common denominator is exploitation. But just as Bass (2004) argues for recognizing different forms of child labour, I argue for seeing that exploitative power relations – such as those involved in child trafficking in West Africa – need not involve force.

The paper uses a range of existing sources (rather than new empirical material) to support key ideas and arguments. Sources include those that echo academic research in finding the roots of West African trafficking in customs of child fostering and situations of poverty (Bass 2004; Robson 2005). The poverty factor ought not to be over-estimated at a time when it is constructed as a 'dire global problem' (Power 2003, 188) and a defining feature of Africa (Manzo 2003). I suggest that poverty's role in trafficking is best understood within a wider (in this case, West African) context of inequality and uneven development. But whatever their limitations, non-academic documents are valuable if they show 'how culture is embedded in political economy, and political economy is expressed through culture' (White 2002, 734).

Whether or not policy implications flow from this analysis is for the reader to decide. The sparking of

further policy debate would not be unwelcome. However, explicit policy considerations are beyond the scope of a paper designed as an academic contribution to related literatures within geography and development studies. There is a growing body of literature, first of all, on childhood, children's rights and child labour within the context of globalization and development practice (see, for example, Burman 1994; Moore 2000; Aitken 2001; White 2002; Ruddick 2003). Within this broad frame are studies of West African children in the context of globalization (Robson 2004 2005) and of child labour in sub-Saharan Africa (Bass 2004). Related work theorizes the nature of contemporary slavery (Bales 1999 2002) and analyses the implications of rights-based development discourse for Africa in the context of globalization and uneven development (Manzo 2003).

What then is the meaning of child trafficking and what does it entail in West Africa? In situating the first question within international legal context, part one treats international law as a site of paradox and contestation and not as either a pure expression of cultural imperialism (a flag-waver for child labour abolitionism) or as the architect of a new, post-abolitionist approach. The object of this discussion is, on the one hand, to show that disputes over meaning underpin disputes over numbers. While there is general agreement that child trafficking exists, disagreements over its magnitude are underpinned by different understandings of the terms *child* and *trafficking*. This is a conceptual and political problem that cannot be resolved by more data alone.

On the other hand, the first part explores the relationship in international law between conceptions of rights and understandings of exploitation. Children now enjoy exclusive rights to play and education as well as such universal rights as the right to life. Within a context where childhood is constituted as a space of entitlement to 'special care and assistance' (UNICEF undated, 1), the elimination of labour from childhood remains an ultimate aim. And yet, simultaneously, international law fudges the adult/child boundary by recognizing the concept of 'child worker' and targeting only the worst forms of child labour such as slavery. It is here – in international texts designed to proscribe exploitation – that trafficking and slavery are conceptually entwined. Part one concludes with a schematic that untangles the two terms, thereby highlighting the varying forms of exploitation operating within different relations of power.

In turning to the West African context, part two emphasizes that trafficking involves relations of power between traffickers and parents as well as traffickers and children. The central elements of trafficking are *not* labour or force but rather movement and exploitation. As agents rather than slaveholders, traffickers do not exploit children's labour power (at least not directly) any more than the agents who buy the cocoa from African farmers. What traffickers exploit is traditional practices (child fostering) and situations of poverty within a wider context of uneven development.

Within a global framework of children's rights and 'moral panics', questions about child abuse are inevitably legal and moral. But as the conclusion reiterates, such questions are also the stuff of development geography. Focus on children uncovers the many agents of exploitation at work in conditions of inequality and uneven development.

Child trafficking in international context: childhood, rights and labour

Scholars increasingly recognise that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child uses privileged and idealized Western concepts of childhood . . . Efforts to use other definitions of childhood based on local cultural constructs . . . tend to situate a child within an impoverished context. (Bass 2004, 19)

Child trafficking is based on distinctions of gender, place and age. Trafficked girls from rural Africa tend to be employed by urban women as street vendors or domestics, whereas boys tend to be employed by rural men on farms or plantations (Bass 2004). While the younger child is not necessarily the most abused (Moore 2000, 539), traffickers can be drawn to apparent docility and ignorance. As one infamous trafficker has put it,

A little child knows nothing . . . Older children know how to escape, but the little ones don't run away, they don't know their way home. They just stay there working, working, working. (Philomene Tegble, quoted in Frenkiel 2001, 6; see also BBC2 2001).

Constructions of childhood are clearly central to any assessment of the child trafficking phenomenon, so this section begins by considering the universal norm of childhood founded by the United Nations (UN). The concept of child *labour* is then considered because this is where national variations and age distinctions are legally recognized.

Adult or child? The construction of childhood in international law

Recognition of children's rights entered international law in 1990 – the same year the UN General Assembly ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). While ushering in a 'new era for children' (Bellamy 1998, 4), the CRC universalized a Western model of childhood as an 18-year time period characterized by school, play and freedom from responsibility (Moore 2000; Aitken 2001; White 2002). Article 1 defines a child as 'every human being below the age of eighteen unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (see UNICEF undated, 2). This has been criticized in Nigeria and elsewhere for failing to accommodate the working child and acknowledge cultural differences (Moore 2000; Robson 2005).

The construction of everyone under 18 as children has become ever more apparent since 1990. The CRC's gesture at national law is absent, for example, from the UN's 2000 Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children. Article 3(d) defines a child as simply 'any person under eighteen years of age' (United Nations 2000, 2).

Most of the Etireno children were under ten (Frenkiel 2001, 6). The small people shown tearfully sucking their thumbs in the television documentary 'Slave Children' (BBC2 2001) were arguably *children* in anyone's book. Adolescents, by contrast, are conceivably more adult than child – especially those that work (Moore 2000; White 2002; Robson 2004). Yet discussions of child trafficking and labour in West Africa do not always question convention. The category of childhood has been applied, for example, to 'young boys whose ages range from 12 to 16' (Chanthavong 2002, 1) and to 'boys and girls aged from 6–18 years old' (International Society for Human Rights 2002, 3).

While re-inscribing a Western ideal, international conventions on child labour do allow for legal distinctions between age groups. The International Labour Organisation's Minimum Age Convention of 1973 (C138) has been called 'the most widely used yardstick when establishing how many children are currently working around the world' (Bellamy 1998, 25–6). Article 2 (paragraph 3) sets 15 years as the universal minimum working age for a child.

And yet, C138 contradicts its own ideal of a simple temporal cut-off by suggesting an acceptable age range of 12–18 (Bellamy 1998, 25). The recognized variables (which appear even in Article 2) are:

- 1 age of completion of compulsory schooling;
- 2 level of national development; and
- 3 the nature of work.

In sum, C138 proscribes any form of work 'likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons'. At the same time, the 12-year-old resident of a country with an 'insufficiently developed' economy and educational system may perform 'light work' that, by definition, does no harm (ILO 1973, 2).

Even more pertinent is ILO Convention 182 – a general prohibition on the worst forms of child labour. Hailed as a welcome departure from 'strict abolitionism' (Moore 2000, 542), C182 co-exists, paradoxically, with IPEC – the ILO's International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour. IPEC aims for the 'progressive elimination of child labour' even as it focuses strategically on the same targets as C182 (ILO 2005). These targets include forms of work already proscribed by C138. They also include 'all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children' (ILO 1999, 2).

All of this suggests viewing international law as a locus of paradoxes due to global contestations over the rights of the 'unchildlike child' (Aitken 2001) – the young worker who disrupts Western fantasies of childhood as a period of innocent dependency (Burman 1994). The following section explores related contestations over the meaning of key terms that, although central to C182 are not defined by it, i.e. *trafficking* and *slavery*.

Child trafficking and slavery in international law

The centrality of the UN to debates about child trafficking is apparent in discussions of numbers. The conventional wisdom is that 200 000 children a year are trafficked in West Africa alone. That 'rough number' (Bass 2004, 153) has been cited by UNICEF (see Thiessen 2001, 19); the International Society for Human Rights (2002, 2); and journalists such as Frenkiel (2001, 6) and Astill (2001a, 1; 2001b, 19).

Yet, as Human Rights Watch has noted, the conventional figure is contested. Government estimates tend to be lower, while non-governmental organizations have raised them higher. This means that 'there are unfortunately no precise estimates of the number of children trafficked in West Africa overall' (Cohen in Christian Science Monitor 2003, 2).

The UN estimate necessarily reduces if a cluster of youngsters (such as teenagers) are removed from the construction of childhood. However, disputes

over numbers are not simply a matter of the meaning of the term *child*. Such disputes are also about understandings of the concept of trafficking.

As defined by the UN General Assembly in 1994, trafficking is

the illegal and clandestine movement of persons across national and international borders . . . with the end goal of forcing women, girls and children into sexually or economically oppressive and exploitative situations. (quoted in Child Workers in Asia undated, 1)

Because trafficking by that definition entails movement across borders, some have argued that trafficking can be difficult to distinguish from mere travel or ordinary migration (Chanthavong 2002, 6; International Society for Human Rights 2002, 2; Bass 2004, 157). Only trafficking is illegal and clandestine. But then illegality means that 'trafficking networks are often informal and secretive in nature' and therefore difficult in practice to identify (Salah 2001, 3).

That UN definition makes clear that trafficking is about the purpose as well as the presence of movement, so child trafficking cannot be determined with reference to movement alone. The 1994 definition has itself been criticized for its limited focus on force at the point of departure; on females; and on particular situations such as domestic labour and false marriages (Child Workers in Asia undated, 1). But notably, *force* has become less significant than *control* in the UN's understanding of human trafficking.

Article 3(a) of the 2000 Protocol recognizes

other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. (United Nations 2000, 2)

What is meant by *exploitation* is

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. (United Nations 2000, 2)

The wider significance of Article 3(a) is its analytical distinction between trafficking and slavery. Slavery is a form *of* exploitation whereas trafficking is a means *to* exploitation. And yet, the two terms are often confused. In an overview of 'types of slavery', for instance, the International Society for Human

Rights includes 'trafficking in human beings usually women and children for economic gain using force or deception' (2002, 1).

The UN may have invited such confusion by including references to trafficking in anti-slavery conventions (and vice versa). In its Slavery, Forced Labour and Similar Institutions and Practices Convention of 1926, the old League of Nations defined slavery as 'the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised' (quoted in Bales and Robbins 2001, 21). There, 'it does not matter whether or not a master actually owns a particular slave, if he exercises powers over him that are normally associated with ownership' (De Ste Croix 1988, 22).

When the UN passed the Rome Final Act of 1998, a reference to trafficking was added to the established understanding of slavery. Slavery became

the exercise of any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person and includes the exercise of such power in the course of trafficking in persons, in particular women and children. (quoted in Bales and Robbins 2001, 27)

In its defence, however, the Rome Final Act does not turn trafficking into a form of slavery. It suggests only that slavery may occur *in the course of* trafficking.

The most likely explanation for conceptual confusion is simply that trafficking and slavery (like childhood) mean different things to different people – sometimes to the same organization. Bass classifies trafficking as a 'new form of slavery' after defining it as 'the movement of people from one place to another through force, coercion, or deception to exploit them for their labor' (2004, 152). Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell (quoted in Bass 2004, 148) and UNICEF's Regional Director for West and Central Africa have also described child trafficking as a 'modern form of slavery' (Salah 2001, 2). But then UNICEF UK – following refusal to call the *Etireno* a 'slave' ship – insisted that trafficking in West Africa can only be stopped if differentiated from slavery. Whereas 'slavery is against the will of the individual', traffickers in West Africa elicit consent via mythical 'tales of the good life' and the 'false perception' these generate (Frenkiel 2001, 6–7; Thiessen 2001, 19).

Whatever its policy implications, that UNICEF distinction between trafficking and slavery is analytically useful and theoretically sound. Modern conceptions of slavery tend to include forced labour or 'coercive labour regimes' as a central element

Table 1

Trafficking	Slavery
Movement (through migration within and across national borders)	Loss of freedom of movement (through violence or threat, coercion and containment)
Exploitation of custom and tradition (the practice of child fostering) and inequality (through deception, fraud and control)	Exploitation of labour power (through force, coercion and loss of freedom of movement)

(Blackburn 1988, 273). This is certainly the case in the seminal work of Bales (1999), who equates 'new slavery' with violence, control, coercion and the exploitation of labour power. An earlier classic equated slavery with permanence, violence and coercion (Patterson 1982) if not with the legal ownership of people also mentioned by Blackburn (1988, 262).

What all of those definitions share – both with each other and with certain press reports of West African child slaves (see Savoor 2001, 1) – is an emphasis on *force* and *labour*. Slavery is therefore a 'face' of forced labour, whereas trafficking by agents, recruiters and transporters is only a means to that end (ILO 2001, 48).

Taking into account the concept of *movement*, the key distinctions between trafficking and slavery that are reinforced in part two can be summarized as in Table 1. This schematic presents movement as a necessary element of trafficking only and exploitation of labour power as a necessary element of slavery only. Trafficked children move whereas slaves are 'unable to walk away' (Bales 2002, 2) and 'held against their will' (Morris 2000, 3). Relations of power thus vary in terms of control versus force, even as the common denominator is exploitation. Unlike in the UN's 2000 Protocol, trafficking and slavery are both viewed here as forms of exploitation as well as means to exploitation. The other essential distinction therefore concerns the factors being exploited. It is to that issue that the paper now turns.

Child trafficking in West Africa: culture, poverty and uneven development

The Pied Piper who leads the children away with their parents' blessing . . . is the key to this modern slavery. Often one of the child's own relatives, he is commissioned to take full advantage of the extended family, and of the poor man's assumption that anywhere is better than here. (Astill 2001a, 3)

Fostering or trafficking? The exploitation of custom and tradition

Coverage of trafficking in West Africa abounds with references to all the means given in the UN's 2000 Protocol. Some children have been abducted and forced into slavery, while others have been lured (with parental consent) by the Pied Piper figure – the modern trafficker who may be a blood relative or family friend as well as a seller of children (see ILO 2001, 50; Raghavan 2001; Sheil 2001, 1; Chanthavong 2002, 2; International Society for Human Rights 2002, 2; Hinsliff 2003, 13).

Pied Pipers beg the question of why West African parents would knowingly sanction departure with 'slave traders' (American Anti-slavery Group undated, 1–2). One answer is that many do not. In these cases, it is not enslavement that is being sanctioned but 'a valuable heritage and traditional ways of educating a child' (Robson 2005, 70). As Bass concurs, 'the root of modern-day trafficking is the custom of child fostering, in which parents may send their children to live with relations and friends for economic or moral reasons' (2004, 153).

The custom of 'cultural placement' (ILO 2001, 50) is rooted in a reciprocal arrangement, whereby child labour is exchanged for education and/or training as well as the means of subsistence. What Bass (2004, 23) calls 'fostering work relationships' are not inherently exploitative (or illegal). In Ivory Coast, for example, children as young as 12 may do 'light agricultural work', although the official school leaving age is 16 (Chanthavong 2002, 12). The mere presence of 12-year-old migrants on Ivorian cocoa farms is not tantamount to either trafficking or slavery. The element of exploitation must also be present.

In Benin, 'slavers often play off a local tradition of "vidomegon," where village children work as servants to wealthy urban families in return for education and training' (American Anti-slavery Group undated, 2). False promises of reciprocity and return are

precisely what turn a cultural practice into a relationship of exploitation. This is why trafficking has been called an 'abuse of Africa's extended family tradition' (Astill 2001a, 1) and why the trafficking of children from Mali to Ivory Coast amounts to 'a kind of perversion of a traditional practice' (Ngokwey, cited in Raghavan 2001, 3).

What Bales calls the 'weak rule of law' is relevant where it facilitates the violence considered central to slavery. In Bales' words, 'widespread corruption of government and police allows violence to be used with impunity even when slavery is nominally illegal' (Bales 2002, 3). Other sources suggest that trafficking too exploits ineffective legislation and lack of enforcement (American Anti-slavery Group undated, 1; Frenkiel 2001, 7; Chanthavong 2002, 12; International Society for Human Rights 2002, 6; Bass 2004, 62).

However, the exploitation of tradition by traffickers is arguably more pertinent than the exploitation of law precisely because violence and force can be removed from the equation. Coercion is *not* 'the key element behind trafficking' (Child Workers in Asia undated, 1) in the sense that trafficking thrives better on willingness. Traffickers are attracted to areas where 'young children and their parents are all too willing to believe slavers' stories of prosperity in countries like Ivory Coast' (American Anti-slavery Group undated, 1–2). The most attractive areas of all (such as rural Togo) are those where youngsters show 'willingness to go with the traffickers with their parents' approval' (International Society for Human Rights 2002, 4).

The roots of all this willingness are themselves partly familial and cultural. It can be difficult to alert West African parents to the dangers of trafficking when the idea of adults harming children – especially when those adults are relatives or friends – is an alien concept (see Raghavan 2001, 3; Salah 2001, 4; Sheil 2001, 1).

The roots of consent are also economic as well as cultural, because promises vary. Children have been promised material goods such as bicycles or radios (Raghavan and Chatterjee 2001, 4; Bass 2004, 160), while parents are sometimes 'lured by a promise of money' (Raghavan 2001) – either for themselves (a cash payment) or for their children (wage labour). In situations of poverty, 'stories of hope' (Bass 2004, 160) and 'images of the "good life"' elsewhere (Robson 2005, 69) can be hard to resist, as the following section now illustrates in more detail.

Uneven development and the exploitation of poverty

If the buying and selling of persons (legal or otherwise) is a defining feature of slavery then there is no real distinction between traffickers and slaveholders. But even in situations where monetary exchange precedes movement (see Astill 2001a, 3; Frenkiel 2001, 6; John 2002, 34; Bass 2004, 90), parents are not necessarily selling their children into slavery, for three reasons. Firstly, the offer of money may be understood as a wage – a down-payment on the freely-offered labour of the child. Secondly, the parents involved may be ignorant of their children's fate given their physical separation from actual slaveholders by 'a chain of intermediaries, transporters and border smugglers' (Astill 2001a, 3). And last but not least, parents are led (by the means already discussed) to expect more for their children than slavery.

'Would you like a great job in Cote d'Ivoire?' ask child traffickers in Mali (quoted in Raghavan 2001, 1–2). Anecdotes such as this illustrate two obvious points about the economics of trafficking. The first is that cash payments to parents are not always necessary. In reference to young migrants in Ivory Coast, for example, a study by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture gives the main motivation as 'the promise of a better life . . . None of the children reported that their parents had been paid and none reported being forced against their will to leave their home abode' (2002, 13).

The second point is that trafficking flourishes where poverty is itself a symptom of a structural problem, namely high unemployment. Here, a better life is not signalled by education and training but by the lure of a wage. Whereas 'boys are more likely to emigrate to find work than girls', rural children in general are more likely to work away from their parents than urban ones (Bass 2004, 90, 88).

All of this suggests a robust relationship between poverty and trafficking. Parents who 'sell their children' from 'poor countries such as Benin, Mali, Senegal and Togo' blame their actions on poverty (Frenkiel 2001, 6). However, as the studies cited in Table 2 make clear, the relationship between trafficking and poverty is not always either direct or uncomplicated.

My argument here is that poverty is best contextualized within wider patterns of uneven geographical development. Using standard measures and variables for two West African countries, Table 3 illustrates a regional dimension to the unequal spatial patterns studied by development geographers (see, for example, Perrons 2004).

Table 2

Poverty as an indirect contributor to trafficking	Poverty's co-contributors to trafficking
Poverty breeds desperation (Sheil 2001; Chanthavong 2002) Poverty (like disease and civil war) facilitates breakdown in social structures (Bass 2004)	Good infrastructure (Astill 2001a) Unemployment; searches for education; trust; traditional migration of adults; high demand for cheap labour and vulnerable workers; physical mobility; youthful desires for migration; and weak rules of law (Robson 2005, 73; Salah 2001)
Poverty is mediated by exploitation and false promises (Bellamy 1998; Cohen in Christian Science Monitor 2003)	Lack of regulation of illegal migrant workers (UNICEF, cited in Astill 2001b)

Table 3 Indicators of uneven development

	Cote d'Ivoire	Mali
Human development index: HDI rank ^a	163	174
Human and income poverty: Human poverty index (HPI-1) rank ^b	79	93
Human and income poverty: Population % below income poverty line of US\$1 a day (1990–2002)	15.5	72.8
Demographic trends: Total fertility rate (births per woman) (2000–2005)	4.7	7.0
Economic performance: GDP per capita (US\$) (2002)	707	296
Structure of trade: Primary exports (% of merchandise exports) (2002)	85	–

Source: UNDP Human Development Report 2004

^a High = 1–55; Medium = 56–141; Low = 142–177

^b Ranks are for 95 developing countries only

Analysis of the causes of uneven development in West Africa is clearly beyond the scope of this paper. What the comparative data are designed to show, first of all, is why trafficking is so often international (and not always from global South to global North). Traffickers rely on perceptions of uneven development; on the idea that while there is poverty 'here' there is wealth and prosperity 'there'. In the imagery of push and pull, poor families may be pushed by poverty into consenting to trafficking, but they are simultaneously pulled by images or stories of relative prosperity elsewhere.

The data further suggest why West African trafficking must entail fraud and deception if not violence and coercion. Traffickers hide the reality of life in street vending, domestic service and cocoa farming. They 'typically entice parents with false promises of high quality education, paid work, and vocational training [for the child]' (Cohen in Christian Science Monitor 2003, 1). Traffickers exploit poverty by promising what they cannot deliver – the

great job and the better future – in countries that (like Ivory Coast) remain marked by limited job opportunities thanks to high levels of dependence on export commodity production.

Whether or not *any* job is better than none is a matter of interpretation. But at least in the terms of the child labour laws mentioned earlier, no child employment can be viewed as beneficial if it violates a child's rights to education and freedom from harm. Well beyond the pale are the worst forms of child labour, such as slavery.

Conclusion

Initially inspired by media coverage, this paper has argued for viewing trafficking and slavery as related yet different forms of exploitation, rather than treating trafficking as a new or modern form of slavery. Child traffickers may thus be agents of slaveholders but they are not themselves 'slavers'. Nor do they operate necessarily through force, coercion and

violence. In the West African context, the most evocative image is that of the Pied Piper, whose stock in trade is exploitation via deception and fraud.

Sources used in support of the main arguments ranged from media reports to international legal documents and academic research. Taken together, these sources highlight the importance of critical analysis of key concepts and assumptions. They argue for integrating culture and political economy and for situating moral concerns about issues such as child labour and poverty within appropriate contexts. And last but not least, they suggest that behind moral panics and abolitionist agendas are ongoing questions for development geography about unevenness, inequality and exploitation.

The real advantage of separating trafficking from slavery, I suggest in conclusion, is that it prompts additional questions about power and its exercise. This paper asked how child trafficking is enabled and sustained in West Africa. Its focus was parents, children and traffickers (rather than slaves and slaveholders) and its emphasis was on control (via deception and fraud) rather than force.

Future studies of trafficking might test the validity of this argument in other contexts, or identify situations where the labour of trafficked children has *not* been exploited in the ways suggested here. Analyses of slavery, meanwhile, might usefully ask whether it can operate without violence and force, or try to explain another key characteristic, namely labour exploitation. This would direct renewed attention to an issue clearly still open to debate (Bass 2004, 159), namely the thorny question of how slavery both differs from, and co-exists with, other contemporary forms of the super-exploitation of labour power.

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