Chapter 4: COERCIVE LABORING ECONOMIES

Min Ji Kim and Brad K. Blitz

Introduction

One central aspect of slavery was the institutionalization of forced labor. It is also one of its many

legacies. Even after slavery was abolished in law, we find the continued use of forced labor in major

economic powers, including the UK, USA, China, Russia, and Brazil. Often forced labor was a punitive

sentence passed down for economic crimes, for example, in the post-transportation to Australia. In

the former slave colonies of the New World, we note that over several generations, formerly

enslaved peoples and their descendants frequently found themselves engaged in bonded labor,

often just a short distance from the same private lands where they had been enslaved. Even in the

United States where the abolition of slavery was considered a constitutional landmark, employers

used the racialization of labor hierarchies, the denial of citizenship rights and debt, to foster unfree

labor relations well into the second half of the 20th century (Pizzolato 2018). Such practices illustrate

the potency of demand for coerced labor and why so many were never able to liberate themselves

permanently from servitude, even after constitutional and legal reform.

The above also illustrates the potency of institutionalist approaches to the study of social change. As

North (1991) writes, [institutions] evolve 'incrementally, connecting the past with the present and

the future; history in consequence is largely a story of institutional evolution in which the historical

performance of economies can only be understood as a part of a sequential story' (p. 97). Slavery

was arguably an institution in North's language – an example of 'the humanly devised constraints

that structure political, economic, and social interaction' (Ibid, p.97). Centuries after the abolition of

slavery, we find much evidence of extreme labor exploitation, degrading and dehumanizing work in

geographies of exploitation which have internalized and adapted informal constraints and formal

rules that enabled slavery and other forms of bondage, for example in the racial prejudices, customs social mores, constitutional and legal provisions which discriminated against designated groups.

While the trans-Atlantic slave trade, forced labor, and contemporary forms of slavery and human trafficking are ontologically distinct (O'Connell Davidson 2017), at their core, they describe human experiences that assume subjugation, the loss of personal freedom, and economic domination over marginalized groups and individuals. Common to all of these examples is a relationship based on severe exploitation – often, though not always *economic* exploitation -- which is enabled by a poor human rights framework and where there is a lack of accountability over production processes. There is also an essential ideational aspect: certain groups and individuals have been the objects of abuse, often in the absence of protective social institutions, and based on defined characteristics around which vulnerabilities have historically been structured. The descent into forced labor is, more often than not, a long story of political, social, and economic exclusion,

Scholars are divided over the most appropriate ways to analyze and describe exploitation. At issue is the relationship between extreme exploitation and the trans-Atlantic slavery in particular. Although slavery was abolished in law in the 19th Century, and further prohibitions against the enslavement of people have been reaffirmed in international law, in the 1926 Slavery Convention (the Convention to Suppress the Slave Trade and Slavery) and most notably in the University Declaration of Human Rights, it was not until the dawn of the 21st Century, that 'slavery' reappeared as a theme in both human rights and labor rights discourses. Arguably, one reason for this lag was the centrality of slavery to the political development of post-colonial and divided states in the New World and the paucity of language to describe situations which, although reminiscent of previous forms of bondage, remain notably distinct.

With the expansion of international legal instruments throughout the 20th Century, the prohibition against slavery, as characterized in previous colonial regimes, was codified into new bodies of law. However, there was little discussion about how contemporary economic activity might be labeled in post-colonial societies. Abuses such as child labor, forced prostitution, and forced labor were generally treated under separate bodies of law – children's rights; human rights; and labor rights – and monitored by different UN bodies.   In fact, until just 20 years ago, the term slavery was rarely applied to these specific abuses as reported in UN committee reports. Rather, slavery was both an historic and distant practice that was universally prohibited.

This pattern was not limited to legal or policy discourses. Within academia, scholars traditionally found other words to describe economic and related forms of oppression. Even in the Critical scholars tended to focus on the nature of economic relations not specifically what we would term slavery type conditions. Indeed, in the pioneering writings of Henri de Saint Simon, Robert Owen, and Charles Fourier who saw bondage as the result of economic systems they desperately sought to correct, we recognize that their emphasis was not on slavery but rather the creation of a positive and utopian socialism (Penssu 1974). Although they were motivated by their observations of the horrific conditions facing workers, exploitation was not treated as a phenomenon akin to slavery or other forms of bonded labor. As Lasksmir Misha notes, the existence of forced labor was an aberration which 'arises out of a relationship between the employee and the employer resting on regimentation and coercion' (p. 345).

Colonialism was called into question, not specifically the roles performed by indentured and marginalized groups. We see this clearly in South Asia where, until recently, critical scholars directed their attention to how colonial administrations disrupted local economies and created structures of oppressive rule. For example, slavery was not mentioned in the description of the *zamindary* system, which was introduced in the Bengal Permanent Settlement Regulation of 1802, converted millions of

peasants into tenants who were subject to taxation by the suzerain and lived an existence of bonded servants (Misha 2012).

> *It rendered millions of artisans and craftsmen, spinners, weavers, potters, carpenters, cobblers, and blacksmiths jobless and reduced them to the status of landless agricultural laborers. Although a move was made as early as 1830 for [the] abolition of the zamindary system, it is only 127 years later, that is, in 1957 that elimination of this primitive, unethical and tyrannical system became a historical reality* (Ibid, p.341).

Even with the growth of critical development studies, scholars tended to treat slavery as an aspect of colonial history, and not an enduring problem, as suggested in the canon on modern slavery. Instead, they focused their ire at the systemic level and the perils of development where labor was a central factor of production. In Andre Gunter Frank's (1966) work on development theory, for instance, we not his emphasis on the effects of inter-state trade. Similarly, Escobar's (1995) treatment of cultural imperialism highlights the problematic drive to modernity and makes no mention of slavery-like conditions, even in his discussion of the new international divisions of labor.

One turning point was the publication in 1999 of Kevin Bales' book *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Bales 2012), which broke new ground when it exposed how globalized production processes across multiple sectors and a range of countries gave rise to situations of bonded labor. Drawing out the consequences of industrialization for workers in the Global South, Bales argues that contemporary forms of slavery are ubiquitous and, most controversially, that more people are enslaved today than ever before. Central to Bales' claim is the pace of globalization, industrial expansion, and urban expansion. These nefarious forces have created mass displacement, economic insecurity and, in the process, also destroyed social and cultural safety nets which have left millions vulnerable to modern slavery, especially in permissive and corrupt states (Bales 2017).

Over the past two decades, and in no small measure as a result of Bales' writings and the lobbying efforts of groups like Anti-Slavery International and Free the Slaves, the theme of modern slavery has been embraced by new generations of scholars and activists who identify as abolitionists.

Although abolitionism now focuses on contemporary ills, both the language and logic of abolition are contested. First, there is much disagreement with the term which they feel defames the history of the transatlantic slave trade (Beutin 2017). The multiplicity of issues associated with modern slavery, as highlighted in the UK Modern Slavery Act, for example, has complicated the development of an agreed discourse among academics on both what constitutes modern slavery and how it might be measured (O'Connell Davidson 2017); a challenge replicated in policy.   Second, critics argue that the abolitionists' emphasis on human rights, in particular the importance of human dignity within economic relations, has been challenged by critical scholars who emphasize enduring structural and power-based relations that foster extreme exploitation. One essential element of modern slavery which, they argue complicates genuine emancipation, is the prevalence of debt. Personal accounts of trafficking, sexual exploitation, and forced labor frequently record that indebtedness - whether to smugglers, employers, or family associates – best explains how people may lose power over their lives only to endure situations of extreme exploitation. Yet, debt is of course symptomatic of complex economic and social relationships that cannot be easily untangled.

Then there is the question of motive. There is also a counter moral argument. Whose interests are served by the new abolitionism, asks Julia O'Connell Davidson? In her 2015 book *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom*, O'Connell Davidson unpicks the value judgments which she argues underpin the abolitionist camp. Instead, she provides a provocative analysis into the nature of moral discourses on slavery and the relationship between poverty, coercion, and victimization which she argues are defined by the supremacy of states' interests, above all their ability to control immigration and political membership (O'Connell Davidson, 2015). She argues that these policy

initiates contradict and frustrate the ambition of abolition. Border management policies and immigration controls stimulate demand for traffickers and others who profit from unlawful and irregular migration and thrust migrants into situations of debt. Yet, even as migration experts and human rights authorities call out this failed logic, they have been unable to shift state and international agencies. Instead, the picture presented is of criminal responsibility by third parties – the pervasive role of traffickers in the illicit efforts to bring migrants into selected destination states. For this reason, critical scholars remain unpersuaded by the claims of national governments to stamp out modern slavery.

It is worth noting, however, that while the above scholars are often at odds with abolitionists whom they charge over may simplify the nature of exploitative relationships, and hence the dynamics of modern slavery, there are some points of agreement. Both camps recognize the pervasive role of Multinational Corporations in the Global North and note how entrenched poverty has given rise to situations where children have been drawn into dangerous work and criminal activities. They also agree that economic development policies, especially those designed by international financial institutions including the International Monetary Fund and World Bank have destabilized local communities and systems which in turn has enabled much bonded labor, for example in extractive industries in the Global South. Where they differ from each other, however, is in their belief in the liberal state and the architecture of the international system is placed to govern and root out such exploitative practices.

Our ambitions in this chapter both extend the above discourse and seek to present new insights about the governance of exploitation and its association with both historical forms of slavery and new modes of abuse that fall within the remit of modern slavery. While many scholars of coercion focus on the history and nature of capitalism and its relationship to the liberal state, our concern is to describe the political and economic nexus characterized by a *dependency* on unfree labor in the

illiberal or *transitional* state. Elsewhere this dependency has been examined in the context of rapidly expanding economies where informal and temporary contracts characterize much economic production and are emblematic of a neoliberal system (see: for example LeBaron and Ayers 2013). Conditions for exploitation have proliferated because of economic design, they argue:

> *The mechanics and structures of the contemporary global economy create both a 'supply' of vulnerable workers and a business 'demand' for their labor. On the supply side, the key dynamics include poverty, social discrimination, limited labor protection, and restrictive mobility regimes. These, both on their own and in interaction with each other, create a global workforce vulnerable to exploitation. On the demand side, what matters most is the concentration of wealth and ownership, the business models structuring supply chains, major firms' power to dictate the rules of global production, and the manifold governance gaps which make the business of exploitation not only viable but profitable* (LeBaron et al 2018).

As suggested above, extreme forms of exploitation are enabled, encouraged, and legitimized by the overarching capitalist system and its neo-liberal and ideological pretensions. Such criticism has been echoed by a parallel body of research on the nature of governance in developing country contexts by one of the foremost modern-day abolitionists, Gary Haugen. An experienced human rights lawyer and founder of the International Justice Mission, Haugen has put forward a simple thesis, based on his extensive first-hand experience across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Poverty is the root cause that draws people into systems of abuse and exploitation and it flourishes in situations of violence and lawlessness; hence, the urgent need to reform justice systems (see Haugen and Boutros 2014).

In recognition of the above debate, this chapter investigates the proliferation of and diversity in coercive laboring economies from the end of World War Two, to the present day and seeks to draw

upon some atypical examples. The focus of this chapter is on what we are calling 'coercive labor economies', described as economic systems where the use of forced labor is an intentional 'design feature'. A 'coercive labor economy' may be described as a particular area of production that relies on the use of forced labor; these include local centers of production as well as national economies, informal and micro-economic activity that operate on the basis economic exploitation, in addition to state-based oppression where the recruitment of forced labor is a mode of governance.

Examples of coercive labor economies include some tea plantation industries; sweatshop based textile production, many forms of cobalt mining, and privately managed prison industries. Increasingly, we note the dominant presence of large private companies that operate through subsidiaries and with little oversight from regulatory bodies.

While there are countless situations where individuals may toil against their will in state and private facilities, as well as in wider social systems, for example in businesses, factories, construction, fishing, agricultural production, and in private households, less is known about how such abuse is enabled and legitimatized by non-democratic political regimes. This is a curiosity. Elsewhere, scholars have devoted many words to explore how imperial and colonial systems continue to influence and undermine the development of secure, democratic, and legal regimes, often through coercion or the direct use of force. There are also multiple accounts of how political legacies may frustrate the transition to liberal and democratic rule (See: Linz & Stepan 1996; O'Donnell 1996; O'Donnell, Schmitter & Whitehead 1986; Przeworski 1986; Shlapentokh, V et al. 1999). Notwithstanding the bias to study former modern slavery conditions in former European colonies, the constraints that structure political, social, and economic interactions, as suggested by North (1991), apply across political regime types, even if the formal rules he identified differ from one state to another. For example, property rights are far from universal and informal restraints such as customs and traditions vary based on local understandings. We suggest that an historical

institutionalist analysis may shed light on how slavery-like practices above all forced labor have been enabled in non-democratic, illiberal, and authoritarian states.

In this study, we describe a *coercive labor regime* as a political system where state institutions, identified by the introduction of laws and official policies, advance coercion as an operating principle of governance. Examples include the Soviet Gulag, the Nazi forced labor camps which functioned inside concentration and extermination camps the closed production centers in China where deported Uighurs have been forced to work, and the labor camps in North Korea today. While acknowledging the legacies of slavery and European colonialism on developing states, we suggest that there is an important distinction between the exploitation of unfree labor and the establishment of coercive regimes today where the recruitment of forced labor is an explicitly political goal. A central premise of this chapter, then is that closer definition of regime types is needed, to arrive at meaningful discussions about the idea of coercive economies and how this term may be applied to a wider range of contexts, including political systems where coercion is both a form of governance and legitimation.

The chapter begins with an examination of historical continuities between colonial and imperial pasts and today. We consider how varying types of labor coercion as institutionalized in, for example, Belgian, French, and Portuguese colonial structures, gave way to the development of globally interdependent economies and why promises made at the time of independence, including the extension of human rights norms which prohibit the practice of slavery and forced labor, were not upheld. It explores the recent interest in modern slavery before exploring how a reading of comparative political science literature may light on different models of governance, including colonial, post-colonial, democratic, and non-democratic states where coercive labor practices are prevalent. Developing Marlies Glasius' (2019) distinction between authoritarian and illiberal practices, we set out some typologies to examine how economic coercion is exercised and where.

We then offer some short case studies where forced labor has placed a central role in the design of three non-democratic systems: North Korea, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan. This chapter concludes with an assessment of coercive labor regimes.

Historical continuities from 1945

The idea of 'coercive labor economies' has multiple antecedents. While it would be easy to point to different patterns of historical development, there are, nonetheless, notable continuities between the phenomena of slavery, colonial practices of bonded labor, and the use of forced labor, for example in the Soviet Union and China, as well as the emergence of modern slavery today. For centuries, before and after the emergence of the state as the dominant political unit, we find economic systems that were designed to benefit slaveholders. Often, the beneficiaries were individual slaveholders who had been granted permission by the ruler; yet political authorities also benefitted as these privileges in turn fueled the development of governing structures in both the center and peripheral colonies. Imperial regimes and emergent states also derived much wealth and power as a result of taxes collected from overseas 'discoveries' (See: DeVos 2006). Voyages of exploration filled monarchic and state treasuries, encouraging the development of the mercantilist state.

Yet one by-product of mercantilism was the need for local and regional levels of governance. As states competed to accrue wealth, by extracting slaves, minerals, and resources from their colonies, new laws were imposed on peoples and emergent administrative systems under their control. Even after the abolition of slavery, the institutionalization of colonial laws, practices, and customs, enabled imperial powers to govern over diverse non-European populations, and equally gave cover to continued patterns of exclusion. For example, in West Africa, French colonialists introduced an

administrative rule of sanctions applied to colonial subjects, known as the *indigénat*. These 'native codes' were arguably the most important element of the colonial administrative toolkit (Mann 2009). Established in Algeria in 1881, the *indigénat* defined the relationship between natives and the French state, eventually covering the Empire of the third Republic. Relying on both exemptions and privileged categories, the *indigénat* served to both divide up and subjugate local populations. As Gregory Mann writes, susceptibility to or exemption from the *indigénat* represented both marker and motive for the proliferation of political statuses in French colonial Africa (Mann 2009).

In other parts of the world, imperial monopolies, oligopolies, and networks of privileged landholders and businesses also gained from historic systems of exploitation. As Eric Foner (2015), describes in his classic text, 'Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1883-1877', how freed slaves were ensnared in an abusive system that had perverted the 13th Amendment which prohibited slavery and involuntary servitude except as a punishment for a crime. In the decades following abolition, lawmakers interpreted petty offenses as crimes. As a result, former slaves who were judged to have committed a crime were loaned to former slaveholders where they engaged in bonded labor. This system, known as peonage or debt slavery, was facilitated by the federal government which established a series of laws, the 'Black Codes', which permitted the arrest, imprisonment, and bondage of African Americans who sustained the Southern economy. Although less explicit, today, we note how taxation and insurance structure have also sustained discriminatory practices that have impoverished the descendants of slaves. The constitutional loophole has allowed for-profit companies to hire exceptionally cheap and unquestionably exploitative labor with prisoners even engaged in the production of high street brands (Benns 2015). Elsewhere we find slavery-type situations on agricultural estates or in industrial settings. The persistent demand for cheap labor has therefore given rise to the reinvention of bondage and subordination by a different name -- old wine in new bottles.

Several scholars have sought to both expose these continuities, through systems-based analyses (Frank 1966), and by re-centering the colonial experience to provide a view from the ground. We note the growth of slavery studies in cognate fields of anthropology, economics, geography, law, sociology, and many other disciplines. Inversely, we note how the above historical developments continue to influence academic studies, through for example initiatives that seek to 'decolonize' the curricula, to understand structural inequalities in the Global South (Pitts, 2010; Acemoglu et al., 2002), and to redress biases that affirmed colonial explanations, at the expense of local and indigenous, accounts. Some of these tensions have appeared in debates over modern slavery (See: Beutin 2017), with much disagreement over the forms that such enslavement may take and the numbers of people enslaved (Mügge 2017).

There is also a growing normative dimension to the emergence of writings on modern slavery. This body of literature now encompasses thousands of publications on law, business management, organizational studies, and sociological accounts of transnational and global economic processes, in addition to much important reporting by human rights bodies. Although there is no agreed definition of 'modern slavery', there are many examples of 'slavery-like practices' found in national laws, international instruments, and declarations that cover a range of crimes including forced labor; debt bondage, or bonded labor, and human trafficking. Also, several instruments include child slavery – where children are exploited for the benefit of others, including but not limited to the practices of child labor, the recruitment of child soldiers, and under-age marriage. Similarly, forced and early marriage is frequently included under the rubric of modern slavery. Less common, but undoubtedly central to any definition is the practice of descent-based slavery where a child is born into slavery.

While many in the developing world take exception to the term, the theme of 'modern slavery' has received further approval at the level of the UN where it has been defined in both the Global

Compact on Migration (2017) and the UN's Sustainable Development Agenda and where again it sits alongside human trafficking, child labor, and forced labor in Sustainable Development Goal 8.7 (United Nations 2015). One the one hand, these agendas seek to offer comprehensive coverage; on the other, they are noticeable omissions. For example, SDG 8.7 does not define child slavery directly, though it sets out an ambition to eliminate the 'worst forms of child labor' including the recruitment of child soldiers. This qualification reflects the challenge of committing states, especially in the developing world, to the UN's modern slavery agenda. Many states refute the claim that occasional child labor is a form of child slavery. Rather, the prohibition against child labor is particularly contentious in states where the employment of children is justified as an essential livelihoods strategy for poor families. Many children are sent to work in the home or holdings of relatives or known individuals (UNICEF 2010), above all girls. There is also considerable evidence of independent child migration where minors decide to search for work without their parents' consent, often migrating alone (Huijsmans 2011). Despite these claims, it is incontrovertible that children enjoy less protection in the workplace and this makes then more vulnerable to various forms of exploitation and abuse.

The relationship between trafficking and exploitation also warrants clarification. The 2015 UK Modern Slavery Act focuses on the motivation for facilitating the travel of an individual – whether consensual or not. From the point of law, the key issue is whether such activities are intended to be exploitative. Such definitions, therefore, reopen the long-standing debate between people smuggling, often understood to be a facilitative act that may enable refugees to flee to safety; and trafficking.

Further, we should recognize the interests of policy-makers and scholars writing on modern slavery Academic accounts are not free from normative biases and may be motivated by a desire for Northern institutions to redress painful histories of slavery and related forms of bondage which

occurred during colonialism. In this context, academic preoccupations with modern slavery might appear as a logical continuation by 'abolitionists' and liberal actors to correct the historical record. Yet, achieving 'justice' is far from straightforward. As emphasized in the writings of critical scholars, including those who apply World Systems, dependency, and neo-Marxist approaches to development studies, economic relations established over centuries cannot easily be refashioned. Rather, neo-liberal economic systems tend to reproduce inequalities and forms of oppression. As political geographer David Harvey (2006), writes, throughout the Global South, colonial structures have been repackaged, often at the expense of local labor -- neoliberalism is a form of creative destruction. Critical scholarship on modern slavery, therefore, aligns with many aspects of these theories, which emphasize how international trade is designed and structured and where capital accumulation is privileged over workers' rights. A major criticism is focused specifically on the nature of capitalist economies, which may not only destabilize social systems but also encourage national and in turn personal debt.

Non-colonial legacies

While the above writings concentrate on the development of capitalist economies and their expansion at the expense of workers' rights, one important limitation is their discussion of governance. Specifically, we record that scarce attention has been paid to how modern slavery type abuses may occur in non-democratic systems at the hands of the state, for example in Vietnam and China. Despite the expanding canon on modern slavery, there has been remarkably little attempt to connect the substantive aspect of how exploitative systems are governed beyond systemic explanations of global capitalist processes. One central failing in these accounts is their assumption that export-based, state-managed, economies operate like demand-driven market systems and are therefore similar to those that emerged from colonialism and imperial legacies, and which currently occupy a central place as global production centers, for example, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.

Moreover, the above critiques of capitalism and its association with colonialism and forced labor in the periphery do not easily fit alongside parallel historical and cultural accounts of slavery. Rather, we note the prevalence of forced labor in other hierarchically organized social systems in regions where modern slavery practices exist today. It is a frequently overlooked fact that slavery was also culturally accepted in previously both regions previously colonized by European power powers and that slavery-type practices in the Far East predated the rise of trans-Atlantic slavery; for example, in Korea, and Japan. And yet, colonial rule was far from consistent: European powers discontinued certain slave practices in their East Asian holdings, centuries before they were abolished in the New World. For example, as early as 1595. Portugal passed a law banning the selling and buying of Chinese and Japanese slaves, even though it continued to employ forms of contract and indentured labor in these territories.

The picture becomes even murkier when one considers that in regions that were not colonized by European states but by other regional powers, we find much evidence of slavery type situations as well as accounts of modern slavery today, for example in Thailand. In China and Korea, both domestic *and* occupying rulers permitted slavery even in these states, even into the 20th Century. In several parts of East Asia, slavery was therefore a product of both endogenous and exogenous experiments in political domination.

While recognizing the many excellent regional studies on the former Soviet Union and China, we find a lack of system-level explanations of how forced labor was crucial to the expansion of these non-democratic systems. We note, for example, that the literature on forced labor pays little attention to the political programs that sought to consolidate the Soviet Union and exert Russian dominance over its 'near-abroad; nor on China's long-held ambition to colonize Tibet and in Uighur regions. We

suggest that there are important continuities in these practices that are rooted in a quest for legitimacy and are reminiscent of imperial struggles to assimilate designated groups by force.

In the aftermath of Communism, researchers have documented how forced labor was central to the Soviet project. Just two generations after the abolition of serfdom, both Lenin and Trotsky supported the militarization of labor, which entailed converting military units into armies of labor, and pressing industrial workers to carry out particular tasks under military supervision (See Hewes, 1920). Although now focused on industrial expansion, it relied on similar forms of coercion previously seen in the Tsarist period, namely imposition based on military control over the people. The long view of Russian history, which is informed by primary source material of the periods of political development post-Revolution and immediately following the Civil War, records how the protection of individual rights gave way to collectivization and, with that, the return of forced labor. Again, we see old practices reinvented for political gain.

In addition, the Soviet system established industrial-scale labor camps and facilities. We now have extensive written evidence of the place of Gulags, as chronicled by Solzhenitsyn (1973), in the political development of the Soviet Union. Academics, including the pioneering historian Robert Conquest (1997), have drawn upon primary sources to illustrate the brutal nature of Stalin's rule and how the Communist Party drove the expansion of the state right into the lives of workers, who toiled under the threat of deportation and imprisonment (see: Wheatcroft 1997).[1]   In a similar vein, we find a parallel history in Maoist and mid-20th Century China, where forced labor was a central tenet of Communist Party rule.

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[1] There is however no agreement on the numbers who were sent to and perished in the Gulags. Some estimates suggest that between 1928–53, about 14 million prisoners passed through the system of Gulags, in addition to millions of others sent to satellite camps, labor settlements, and prisons; though there are debates as to whether these figures reflect capacity or actual victims. See the debate between Robert Conquest and Stephen Wheatcroft in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 49. No. 7, 1997.

Comparative Political Studies

Many methodological challenges complicate the effort to compare across the above regime types including different periods, shifting geographies, and legal systems where slavery-type practices occurred. Equally, we recognize the many substantive arguments against amalgamating distinct abuses under portmanteau teams like 'modern slavery', where it is difficult to discern motivations and challenging to measure abuse. One important entry point to our examination of coercive labor regimes may be found in the seminal writings of Juan Linz (2000) on authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. In his account, an *authoritarian regime* lacks the core elements of a democracy, notably, accountable institutions and key procedures including participation and political competition, civil and political rights, and mechanisms to control power through, for example, the separation of powers, parliaments, regular elections, and a multi-party system.

Yet, while Linz's work featured prominently in studies of comparative political science over forty years, the theme of unfree labor does not play center stage in his accounts; nor in the subsequent publications by his students. Beyond critical accounts of capitalism, we note that since Hannah Arendt, whose work focused on two specific historical systems, Nazism and the rise of Stalinism, there has been little recent discussion of how coercion plays out as means of political and economic organization. Two exceptions may be found in the work of legal scholars Philippa Webb and Rosana Garciandia (2019), whose focus is explicitly on modern slavery; and publications by political scientist Marlies Glasius (2018).

Examining state responsibility under international law, Webb and Garciandia identify five ways in which states may be involved in modern slavery offenses. They suggest five principal ways in which

states may be responsible which involve direct and indirect action, in addition to wider aspects of poor governance and societal tensions. These include:

i)   direct enslavement by a state, that is, forcibly conscripting individuals;

ii)   indirect enslavement where state agents and recruiters place individuals in a situation of impossible debt;

iii) coercion—driven by societal, personal, and cultural expectations, as well as from situations of debt;

iv)   structural factors which are poverty based; and include discrimination based on gender and nationality; and

v)   situations where individuals may elect to put themselves in abusive and exploitative situations.

Of course, these categories often overlap. Webb and Garcianda's typology sets out a multiple-level analysis of how states apply power over individuals directly and by violating international and human rights norms, including expectations of governance.

Glasius also examines the behavior of states, though her concern is more to understand the differences between authoritarian and illiberal regimes, which she argues has been missing in political studies. We note that further to Linz's work and the growth of studies on political transition in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a great emphasis on the failures of democratization and much effort spent chronicling the rise of non-democratic, populist, and authoritarian experiments. Yet, what is missing from these accounts in Glasius' view is the ways in power is exercised. 'We should be able to judge the "authoritarianness" of governments not solely by how they came to power…but also by what they do once they are in power', she writes (p. 517). In this context, there are critical differences to bear in mind regarding the operation of regimes, as identified by Linz. Authoritarian

regimes are based on 'accountability sabotage' Glasius claims – they are fundamentally unaccountable to the electorate. By contrast, illiberal systems defined by practices that undermine autonomy and personal dignity and illustrate how oppression is often directed, for example, against journalists and dissidents. In both cases, political legitimacy is central to our understanding of how these regimes operate and to what ends.

Coercion as governance: methodological considerations

Glasius' distinction between accountability and autonomy, although applied to modern states, is an important lens through which to examine political organization. Yet one limitation in her study is the exclusive focus at the domestic level. In the context of both traditional forms of slavery and modern slavery, we must recognize not only how authoritarian and illiberal practices have been applied at the domestic level, for example in the 20th Century analyses of non-democratic regimes in Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere in Latin America, but also through historical and transnational relationships. To understand the function of imperial and colonial systems, we suggest that the notion of accountability and the development of ideas around personal autonomy and rights should be examined in terms of the relationship between centers of power and the delineation of governance across geographies under their control where labor is extracted. We offer the following observations.

1. **Differentiation between colonies**: For some imperial powers, the economic development of overseas colonies was a central ambition, but not others. Some colonies, therefore, emerged as regional commercial centers, e.g. the British colonies in the Caribbean, after the growth of sugar plantations in the West Indies. By contrast, other territories evolved as slave colonies where labor was extracted for export but the imperial powers did little to build their capacity, for example in West Africa.

2. **Geographies defined political pursuits**: The place of slavery and other forms of forced labor in these political systems depended on geography, in addition to other factors, including the degree to which local populations were considered manageable. As Fieldhouse (1966) writes,

> "The Portuguese had little difficulty in establishing their power up the Congo and the Zambezi early in the sixteenth century and could have created territorial empires here and elsewhere in Africa if they had chosen. In fact, they did not. In most parts of Africa, the climate was unattractive to Europeans. The eastern trade and the carriage of slaves to America proved more attractive, and Brazil offered Portugal a better field for settlement and plantations (Fieldhouse, 1965: 8).

Equally, as noted above, the Portuguese attitude towards slavery in East Asia was far removed from the practices visited upon Africans.

3. **South-South relationships also existed:** While center-periphery relations were a key feature but so too were horizontal relations between colonies. The Portuguese empire, which distinguished itself from its European, neighbors, through its mixture of imperialism and exchange also saw its colonies enmeshed in a system of bartering or purchasing one type of usually primary commodity in exchange for another.

4. **Local factors enabled slavery:** The nature of social organization within colonial holdings also influenced their place in the colonial system. As Martin Klein (2001) argues in his discussion of the predatory state, decentralized societies were largely treated as 'as reservoirs within which the more powerful military formations fished for bodies to sell into the Atlantic and Saharan trades' (p.49).

5. **Colonial economies were demand-driven:** With the second wave of European expansion, after 1815, we detect a marked shift from conquest to industrial colonization, which reached deeper into the established imperial holdings and beyond the large slave economies of North America and the Caribbean. Forced labor became increasingly central to Belgium's colonial ambitions in Africa, for example. As Orde-Browne records, 'forced or compulsory labor was fundamental in the implementation of colonial economic ventures, such as mining, the building of roads and railways, plantation agriculture, and head-porterage' (Orde-Browne, 1967: 39-41).

6. **Political exclusion gave rise to forced labor:** In the Great Lakes region of Africa, as well as in many parts of Asia and the Middle East many territories were marked out in the sand. One consequence of these divisions was that, across the British Commonwealth, minorities have been excluded from membership of the successor state and denied citizenship. Although the granting of citizenship is principally a political act, it has significant economic consequences, including the creation of conditions that encourage the use of forced labor. In Myanmar, hundreds of thousands of Rohingya saw their citizenship withdrawn and have been denied the right to marry, endured forced labor, and expulsion. They have also been victimized in the neighboring state of Bangladesh.

Categorizing Coercive Economies

Developing Glasius' distinction between illiberalism and autonomy helps to open the door to further classification of systems where coercion is prevalent. We propose the following typologies:

i)   *A coercive labor economy*: is a particular area of production that relies on the use of forced labor; these include local centers of production, as well as national economies.

ii)   *A coercive labor regime:* is a political system where the introduction of laws and official

policies advance coercion as an operating principle of governance.

Coercive labor economies may be found in colonial and post-colonial states. Unlike formal regimes, the use of coercion is opportunistic and is not *mandated* by political authority. For example, we note how in the as Spanish influenced waned in the 17th Century, the ruler's ability to issue asiento monopolies over the slave trade in its colonies was constrained by other imperial actors. Today, we find such examples within states characterized by weak systems of law enforcement, monitoring, and lacking accountability mechanisms. In Webb and Garcianda's model, coercion still operates under structural conditions but is more likely the indirect result of government action, or may be influenced by societal pressures, as well as from situations of debt and poverty.

Coercive labor regimes by contrast use law and policy to promote direct enslavement and forcible conscription into labor markets under their control. Historical examples include the practice of forced labor in the French Empire and the subsequent *indigénat* system; slavery in the United States, and its continuation in different guises until the 1964 Civil Rights Act; the gulag and prison camp industry that spanned the Soviet Union; and the Nazi concentration camps system, which included both extermination and forced labor camps. All of the above were established by law and governed by national authorities. What is more, they feature in both authoritarian and quasi-democratic systems – political systems that lack the core elements of democracy as identified by Linz above.

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Insert Table 1 here

We recognize that the above typologies appear as binaries where economic interests are separated from political control; in practice, however, there is often a tangled nexus of co-dependent coercive practices, for example, the way states may regulate the provision of prison labor where private companies deliver on behalf of the state and often permit the use of unfree labor. Our interest is to examine how coercion operates within arm's length of the state. For this reason, we suggest that Webb and Garcianda's typology of direct enslavement by a state should be extended beyond the use of forced conscription to consider the economic *and* political axes of governance. We argue that oppressive regimes are strong states that function according to a logic of *oppressive neo-mercantilism.* In these non-democratic, illiberal, export-based economies, forced labor is used to legitimate political control over domestic populations and to drive economic production. Forced labor is therefore both an end and a means of governance.

Three contemporary examples of direct enslavement

North Korea: prison camp and coal mining

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea ('DPRK') exemplifies the first scenario in Webb and Garciandia's typology (2019): direct enslavement by a state that is forcibly conscripting individuals, including children who are educated to be 'loyal' and 'patriotic'.[2] Testimonies of North Korean defectors record various forms of slavery including forced labor that is carried out in closed camp structures and prisons for political dissidents. While it is difficult to arrive at independent estimates, the recent 'Trafficking in Persons Report' published by the U.S. Department of State (2019: 275) claims that the

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[2] "UN: Seek Justice for North Korean Forced Labor Victims," Human Rights Watch, March 11, 2016. https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/11/un-seek-justice-north-korean-forced-labor-victims

'DPRK holds an estimated 80,000 to 120,000 prisoners in political prison camps and an unknown number of persons in other forms of detention facilities, including re-education through labor camps. In many cases, these prisoners have not been charged with a crime or prosecuted, convicted, or sentenced in a fair judicial hearing. In prison camps, all prisoners, including children, are subject to forced labor, including logging, mining, or farming for long hours under harsh conditions.

Findings from the 2018 Global Slavery Index compiled by the Walk Free Foundation suggest that one in every 10 people living in North Korea are forced into some form of modern slavery.[3]

Further, the U.S. State Department charges the DPRK government with state-sponsored human trafficking through the mass mobilizations of adults and children for the purposes of forced labor. Camps serve both a political purpose, namely repression, but also an economic function. Proceeds from state-sponsored forced labor are used to fund government functions as well as other illicit activities.[4] Foreign companies may also benefit as the state exports forced laborers to support their activities.

Vietnam: 'Blood cashews'

As of 2019, the Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, Vietnam was classified under Tier 2 Watch List. The government has not yet satisfactorily met the minimum standards for the elimination of human trafficking or forced labor but is making 'significant efforts' to improve its performance. One critical issue has been the persistence of forced labor, including child labor, in state facilities, including

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[3] The estimated number is 2,640,000 out of the total population of 25,243,917.
[4] United States Department of State, *2019 Trafficking in Persons Report - United States of America*, June 2019, available at: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2019-Trafficking-in-Persons-Report.pdf [accessed 2 November 2019]

prisons, rehabilitation centers, and drug detention centers. Testimonies of survivors record working more than eight hours a day without compensation, many in toxic, hazardous industries, including in cashew nut processing.[5]

Vietnam is the world-leading exporter of cashew nuts with industrial-scale production taking place over 1,000 hectares. Thousands of prisoners work to stringent production quotas. Few know that cashew shells contain caustic ingredients including anacardic acid, cardol, and urushiol. According to a report submitted to the ILO Committee of Experts[6] records that physical contact with cashew nuts, oil from the cashew nutshell and fruit, or inhaling fumes from roasting or boiling the nuts can cause skin rashes, itching, blisters, eye irritation, and respiratory problems including asthma and bronchitis.

The OHCHR notes that it is especially difficult to monitor the supply chain line of cashew manufacturers due to the lack of government transparency regarding the imprisonment of suspects and the absence of monitoring and complaint review processes (OHCHR, 2018). Rather, the Vietnamese government is charged with concealing the true nature of the cashew nut industry by disguising all forms of physical violence and forced, unfree labor in cashew processing taking place inside detention centers as 'therapeutic' and aimed at reducing drug dependency.

Uzbekistan

In the 1920s, the Soviet Gosplan (State Planning Committee) imposed a system of quotas for the production of cotton. This system encouraged the mobilization of forced labor; later a seasonal activity that on some occasions brought more than 2 million pickers to Uzbekistan's cotton fields.

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[5] OHCHR (2018) Torture in Vietnam 2018 A Joint NGO Report to the UN Committee Against Torture
[6] Prepared by U.S.-based international organization Boat People SOS [BPSOS])

Previous reports from human rights groups recorded that children as young as ten were required to pick cotton and that adults did so under the threat of detention.

Despite a global boycott launched in 2006, which seeks to force Uzbekistan to abandon the practice of forcing its citizens to pick cotton, it has managed to see cotton and textiles abroad to Asia. Further to pressure from major brands and consumers, Uzbekistan has significantly reduced the number of conscripted laborers. However, estimates from 2019 suggest that even after the introduction of labor reforms, more than 100,000 people were forced to pick cotton in 2019, most of them government employees including teachers, doctors, nurses, and military servicemen (Batmanghelidj & Shaykhov 2020). In March 2020 president Shavkat Mirziyoyev signed a decree that eliminated production quotas in the cotton industry, raising hopes that Uzbekistan would discontinue this particular form of forced labor.

Analysis

The three cases presented above illustrate how state complicity for forced labor may define a wider economic and political system where coercion is central to the state's claims to legitimacy. We see this in their use of forced labor, which plays a particular function, either as appeals to patriotic participation in the collective harvest in Uzbekistan and demonstration of loyalty or in demands of obedience under threat of imprisonment in North Korea – all of which are characteristics of an authoritarian state.

Arguably, there are degrees of authoritarianism, just as there are degrees of oppression. North Korea is without doubt the most oppressive and the use of forced labor the most pervasive. By contrast, we note how Uzbekistan has been prompted to abolish production quotas which allowed it to conscript its citizens as cotton pickers. Vietnam also stands out from both North Korea and

Uzbekistan. Although a one-party communist dictatorship, it has a fast-growing and increasingly

market-oriented economy. It also has a mixed economy. While state monopolies dominate, private

enterprises and joint-stock companies coexist – alongside a large informal sector.

As Linz and Glasius note, illiberal and authoritarian regimes may co-exist; yet both may enable

forced labor. The case of the Rohingya of Myanmar serves to illustrate this point clearly. While the

military-controlled regime in Myanmar fits the classical definition of an authoritarian system, and

the lack of civil rights, including the cancellation of nationality rights of Rohingya, is indicative of an

illiberal regime; the contrast with Bangladesh where human rights abuses including forced labor, is

not the product of state design but is nonetheless evidence of a permissive state and illiberal

situation. In the above cases, there is an additional facet of governance that warrants our attention.

While Bangladesh has often been described as a 'weak state' as a result of demographic pressures,

mass outward migration, rampant corruption, environmental vulnerability, poor public services,

food insecurity, etc. our three case studies are less easily categorized. Vietnam, Uzbekistan, and

North Korea may all differ in their degree of authoritarianness, and state capacity varies significantly,

however, all have considerable control over labor recruitment. Unlike Bangladesh, in our case

studies, forced labor is mandated to advance the goals of their state-directed export-based

economies. Oppression is an essential feature of these neo-mercantilist systems.

The above case studies also inform the wider discussion about historical dependency and the

relationships between colonial, post-colonial, and other systems and slavery. Most writings on the

legacies of slavery focus on the capitalist world with countries such as Vietnam and Uzbekistan

appearing and newcomers described as transitional states. Yet, this is only part of the story. North

Korea, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan were all implicated in imperial practices of slavery and forced labor;

most as sites of labor recruitment. Vietnam has a long history as both a source for slaves for Chinese

and foreign powers and home to Vietnamese agents who enslaved 'barbarians'. Slavery was also a

widespread domestic practice. For example, in Korea, the *nobi* were treated as a specific caste, some of whom possessed property and other rights, not unlike serfs (see Rhee & Yang 2010). Yet, Korean citizens were also subject to forced labor during the Imperial Japanese occupation, which included thousands of 'comfort women' who were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army. By contrast, in Uzbekistan, where forced labor was previously unknown, peasants were effectively turned into serfs during the period of Soviet collectivization (Rumer 2005).

Previous forms of enslavement in Vietnam, Korea or Uzbekistan, may not site neatly alongside conventional explanations for the expansion of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, the development of colonial models of exploitation, or how exploitative labor practices became embedded in liberal and neo-liberal economic systems in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Equally, exploitative practices may vary among these states, just as they do among those so frequently cited as geographies of labor abuse, including India, China, Bangladesh, to name a few.

Conclusion

This cursory examination of centuries-old and contemporary practices of forced labor makes a case for enlarging our understanding of governance and the conditions under which extreme labor exploitation occurs. As we record, there was considerable variation in the place of forced labor within imperial systems; some colonies became sites for sourcing of slaves; others for the exploitation of slave labor, on plantations, in the intensive extraction of minerals, or agricultural production; others emerged as centers of commerce where slavery was less common. In most cases, however, demand drove practices of slavery and the continued use of forced labor even after Emancipation.

How states responded to that demand for forced labor further informs our understanding of the emerging political systems. We suggest that the relationship between authoritarianism and illiberalism provides a useful analytical lens to assess where forced labor is privileged in economic systems. Developing this point, we propose that there is a meaningful distinction to be drawn between coercive labor economies, where slavery-type practices are the result of weak or indirect governance that permits such illiberal activities, and coercive labor regimes that employ forced labor with intent. We see this distinction born out through a comparison of three different regimes: the quasi-democracy that was the United States before the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act; the National Socialist experiment that was Germany between 1933-45; and the Soviet Union.

In the United States, a country with a tradition of localism and decentralized governance, laws enabled landowners and businesses to engage in the recruitment of bonded labor. In Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the expansion of forced labor camps, fit within a centralized model – in Linz's terms a totalitarian system -- that relied upon them for political legitimacy both directly and indirectly. Both regimes were authority-based and illiberal; forced labor was a central element of their need to establish political legitimacy, through demonstrations of absolute loyalty, under the threat of imprisonment or death, and through economic production.

In the contemporary era, we find coercive labor regimes in North Korea, Vietnam, and Uzbekistan. All of these states have employed forced labor to cement their political authority and stake their legitimacy on the cooperation of a loyal and patriotic workforce that sustains essential, export-led, and income-generating activities. Although these three states are frequently identified as sites where modern slavery occurs, it would be shortsighted to lay the fault for current slavery-type practices at the door of globalization alone, without recognizing historical traditions of unfree labor and the potency of states' claims to political legitimacy. The development of recent export-based industries over the past twenty-five years has given rise to an oppressive neo-mercantilism,

illustrated by the use of forced labor under license from political authority and in the absence of

prevailing democratic norms.

Many studies of modern slavery either seek to draw a thread linking contemporary abuses to

legacies of colonialism, directly or indirectly, or steadfastly reject such comparisons. In both, there is

a tendency to turn to the history of European colonialism and capitalist development as the central

point of reference, whether in discussions around the appropriateness of the term 'slavery' or in the

charge that neoliberal economic systems are undermining labor protections and leaving millions

vulnerable to exploitation. The above case studies are drawn from a different chapter of world

history. While the intensity of slavery in the Americas, and the influence of European colonialism,

continues to bear its mark throughout the developing world, we recognize that other forms of

control existed in the Far East and Central Asia. We would be remiss to highlight historical and

cultural traditions in one system and not recognize the legacy of exploitation in others. The degree

to historical forms of economic bondage and slavery-like situations have influenced subsequent

political regimes in Uzbekistan, Vietnam and North Korea require further examination.

Table 1

Coercive labor economy v coercive labor regime

	Colonial	Post-Colonial	Democratic	Quasi-Democratic	Authoritarian	Illiberal
Coercive labor economy	X	X				X
Coercive labor regime	X	X		X	X	X

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