

Slavery, neo-slavery and business ethics

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Despite the campaigns of the 19th century, there are currently millions of people that are enslaved across the globe. Some of these slaves are directly engaged in the hospitality sector, in other cases they are indirectly associated with the hospitality firms through sub-contracted supplier organisations. In addition, some of the industry's employees experience a kind of neo-slavery, due to low pay and low levels of personal wealth. Although they are free, their circumstances limit their power to resist unfair treatment and poverty pay rates. Hospitality organisations concerned with ethical business practices are taking an active stand against the use of slaves, directly or indirectly, and they adopt human resource management practices that pay wages that allow the workforce to live at an acceptable standard. This paper highlights some moral and ethical positions relating to slavery and neo-slavery, and the priorities for organisational policies.

Keywords: ethical priorities, living wage, neo-slavery, slaver

Introduction

The management of workers in hotels, restaurants and bars is the underlying theme of this paper. As a service industry, labour costs are a constant concern for managers and owners of commercial hospitality organisations. There is an obvious link between reducing labour costs and increasing profits. The replacement of labour with technology, or the replacements of skilled labour with less skilled, cheaper labour, are trends across the sector. Centralised kitchens allow skilled labour to be employed in a factory-like setting, and unskilled labour onsite reheats dishes prior to service in the restaurants. In other cases, menus have been designed around “one-step” cooking methods that rely on simple frying, roasting, or grilling so as to employ low-cost employees at unit level. For other businesses, the management strategy has focused on the cost of the labour being bought.

Among the various strategies to minimise labour costs is the use of slave labour, either directly or indirectly, or low pay and employment relationships that create a state of neo-slavery. The use of slave labour reduces labour costs to a mere subsistence level, but slavery has been outlawed in most Western countries. However, slavery does exist and there are reported instances in the hospitality sector. Within the law, paying minimum wages and the encouragement of customer tipping reduces the direct amount spent by employers on the cost of labour. From the employees' perspective, these employer policies frequently result in employees being paid poverty wages, i.e. levels of pay that enable them to only just survive. The Living Wage Commission (2016) shows that there is a considerable gap between the level of the legal minimum wage and the rate that recipients need to live in a way that allows them to exist beyond “just coping”. For many hospitality industry employees, low pay traps them in a world of neo-slavery. They are not the property

of their employers, but their power to resist the employer's power is seriously limited.

This paper explores the phenomena of both slavery and neo-slavery against ethical management practices. In Western hotels, restaurants and bars there are fewer instances of firms directly employing slave labour, but there are examples of the use of slave labour down the supply chain in sub-contracted cleaning or laundry services. Business ethics is at the heart of how firms deal with their labour management practices and the ethical standards they define and maintain. Employers are able to make choices, and a defined ethical policy in the firm's dealings with employees and other stakeholders helps to provide principled direction to those choices.

Slavery today

The practice of the powerful enslaving those who are weaker has a long history in human affairs. The sugar plantations of the southern United States were supplied with slave labour by both British and Dutch traders throughout the eighteenth century, though concerted campaigns against the trade brought it to an end, and ultimately led to the liberation of the slaves. For many people this was a shameful period in history, and slavery is now consigned to the past. In reality, slavery in all its forms is still around and can be found, with varying degrees of intensity, across the globe.

Slavery is defined by the Anti-slavery International (2017b, p. 1) as occurring when a person is

forced to work through coercion – mental or physical; owned or controlled by an “employer” through mental or physical abuse, or threat of abuse; dehumanised, treated as a commodity or bought and sold as “property”; physically constrained or [has] restrictions placed on their movement.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2017) suggests that 40 million people were enslaved in 2016. The Global Slavery Index (GSI) (2016) estimates this is higher at 45.8 million. The ILO suggest that 25 million are in forced labour arrangements where people are forced to work without pay, or at very low rates of pay. A further 15 million are the victims of forced marriage. Globally, slaves represent 5.4 per 1 000 of the population, and 4.4 per 1 000 were children. Women are most likely to be enslaved: 71 per cent of slaves were women. Almost all those forced to marry against their wishes were women (99 per cent) and 5.7 million of these were children; and 21 per cent of the victims of sexual exploitation were also children. The UN Convention on Human Rights defines children as being under the age of 18.

The difference in estimates of the volume and extent of slavery is, in part, due to variations in the forms that slavery takes. Anti-slavery International (2017a) suggests that slavery can be linked to the following:

- Bonded labour: where individuals are forced to work for another because they are in debt to them. Often the poorest people have limited resources to call upon when unexpected expenses arise. They have to take out loans – often at punitive rates of interest, and are then forced to work for the person making the loan;
- Forced labour: individual are forced to undertake work against their will. This might be linked to debt, or to the right to farm a piece of land, or as a result of physical force. This frequently takes place where some individuals or groups are deemed to be less worthy than others due to ethnic or religious differences, for example;
- Forced child labour: children are compelled to work against their will. In some cases, children are made to work to pay off family debt or some other obligation. In some cases, children are forced to operate as boy soldiers, fighting against other communities, social groups, or gangs;
- Descent-based slavery: the children of slaves are considered to be the property of slave owners and can be sold on to others, or given as wedding presents; and
- Human trafficking: people are traded for prostitution, domestic servitude, forced marriage, or forced organ donation.

Direct forms of slavery can be seen to have a geographical dimension in that the ILO (2017) suggests that 62 per cent of slaves are to be found in the Asia-Pacific region, Africa has 23 per cent of slaves, Europe and Central Asia 9 per cent, and the Americas 1 per cent.

While there are instances of the direct use of slaves in Western hotels and restaurants, they are more frequently found in the hospitality sector supply chain, in sub-contracted laundry or cleaning services, or in food and drink production. The accommodation sector accounts for approximately 10 per cent of slaves, while agriculture accounts for 11 per cent of slaves. The accommodation sector is likely to involve mostly slaves who are women and girls. The agriculture sector is mostly concerned with physical labour and has more male slaves. Table 1, based upon ILO (2017) observations, shows some of the industries and activities involving slave labour and the gender balance in each instance.

The figures quoted in Table 1 are linked to the fact that much slavery is located in the Asia-Pacific area, but there are still some occurrences in the supposedly “slave-free” world. The Global

Table 1: Gender distribution of victims of forced labour exploitation by sector of economic activity

Sector	Gender
Accommodation and food service	8% men
	92% women
Domestic work	39% men
	61% women
Wholesale and trade	52% men
	48% women
Personal services	52% men
	48% women
Agriculture, forestry, fishing	68% men
	32% women
Manufacturing	82% men
	18% women
Construction	82% men
	18% women
Begging	90% men
	10% women
Mining and quarrying	100% men

Source: ILO (2017)

Slavery Index (2016) estimated that there were 17 500 slaves in the Netherlands, while it is estimated that between 13 000 and 30 000 people are in slavery in Britain, and that there are 1 243 400 slaves across Europe. Against the international average of 5.4 slaves per 1 000 of the population, the European ratio is 3.8 per thousand, though there may be differences within that average across the continent. Western-based slaves mostly come from outside of Western Europe – Albania, Vietnam, Nigeria, Romania and Poland, in the main, but some are also citizens of their home country. Anti-slavery International (2017b) estimate that there is just a 1 per cent chance of British slaves having their exploiters brought to justice.

Neo-slavery

In addition to those people enslaved in the various forms outlined above, some employees experience neo-slavery. They are technically free, but low pay, regular unemployment, and unstable employment keep them in a state in which they are forced to work and have limited opportunities to resist exploitation. Poverty and a working environment where they are commanded and controlled effectively enslave them.

Low pay results in having limited resources available when times get tough. They have to work to survive and are a pay check away from abject poverty should job loss happen. In-work poverty is rife (Bramley & Bailey, 2017). In the UK, “[p]overty, defined as those whose lack of resources and low-income forces them to live below a publicly agreed minimum standard, is affecting over one in five people – and over one in four children” (Dermot & Main, 2017, p. 32). The *Working for Poverty* report (Living Wage Commission [LWC], 2016), claimed that 21 per cent of the workforce (5.24 million worker) are paid below a “living wage”, and this had risen by 9 per cent in the preceding twelve months. Over half of the 13 million people living in poverty in the UK were in households where at least one family member works; many other poverty households were retirees. The LWC report (2016, p. 32) stated that “housing costs have tripled in the last 15 years, one and a half times the amount by which wages have risen; and

electricity, gas and water bills have risen by 88 per cent in the last five years". In these circumstances, people look to support themselves via the use of loans: 2.9 million people classed as over-indebted have an income below £15 000 (LWC, 2016). By 2016/2017, food banks issued 1 182 954 three-day packs, rough sleeping had almost doubled since 2010, with 4 751 people sleeping rough on the streets, though some estimate this to be as high 9 000 (Miller & Moore, 2018).

The hospitality sector has a reputation for low pay. The industry has one of the highest proportions of staff receiving the UK National Minimum Wage (re-branded as the National Living Wage). It is estimated that 25 per cent of the workforce receive the national minimum wage (Eversham, 2013), but there are other wrinkles in which employers minimise labour costs by paying wages that are the lowest they can get away with. The use of service charges and tips increase the "take-home pay" for employees while minimising the labour cost to the firm. The Office for National Statistics (2016a) estimated that 60 000 employees in the hospitality sector were being illegally paid below the legal minimum wage rate (4 per cent of the workforce).

In the UK, just 3 per cent of the hospitality employees are members of a trade union (Turnbull, 2018). Most of these are in bigger hotels, where it is easier to organise the workforce collectively. Trade union membership is also higher in the welfare sector, in hospital and schools, and industrial catering, where the hospitality workforce is unionised as a by-product of the unionisation of the organisation's total workforce. As a consequence of low trade union membership, there is a limited ability for collective resistance for many hospitality employees. If they are able, employees withdraw from the firm, or take unplanned absences. Their ability to change things is restricted and, because the secondary labour market is unskilled and plentiful, employers easily manage to replace staff who leave the organisation, and employees who do withdraw often move from one exploitative low-paid job to another (Toynbee, 2003).

Low pay in these low-skilled, secondary labour market jobs is accompanied by a low investment in training and development. Opportunities for advancement at work are constrained and many are locked into a section of the labour market where there is little chance of escape. The stress of just managing to cope with low-paid jobs, and a financial existence that requires the use of loans, creates stress for the hospitality worker in this position. Some have to rely on "pay-day loans" for those people who are a potentially higher risk, but suffer under punitive interest rates, locking them into a cycle of debt and pay-day repayment. Command and control and hierarchical top-down management styles do little to value employees' sense of worth. In addition, a culture of bullying in some hospitality units and departments increases the stress of working in these roles. Though not the property of their employers, these workers exist in a state of neo-slavery through the use of direct and in-direct enforcement. The neo-slave is forced to work and take what is given, in some cases having to work in more than one job (Office for National Statistics, 2016b)

Ethical and moral responses

Fisher and Lovell (2014) provide a valuable insight into business ethics that can map various actions and stances in reaction

to slavery and neo-slavery. Although the words *ethics* and *morality* are often used interchangeably, it is more helpful to see *morality* as relating to codes of behaviour determining what is good and what is bad. In western Europe, for example, the sale of alcohol is more strictly controlled in more dominantly Protestant societies as a result of Calvinism and the advocacy of duty to work as an end in itself. The German sociologist Max Weber's work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, suggests that Protestantism emerged as economies began to rely more and more on trade. The move from agricultural work patterns, where people worked when they needed to, towards a moral code that valued work as a social good, promoted an ethic of hard work as being an act of piety. For adherents of these religions, alcohol consumption was seriously restricted, or in some cases was banned completely. Moral codes define acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, and religious pronouncements may be further reinforced by legislation.

Apart from the ideological imperative provided by Protestantism, slave labour on the sugar plantations and the trade in slaves provided important financial resources that were able to fund increasing international trade and the industrialisation of production. In the hundred years ending in 1820, it is estimated that British trading ships transported over 3 million slaves. Slavery was therefore at the heart of industrialisation and the growth of capitalism. Williams (1994) reports that as many as one fifth of wealthy Victorians derived all or part of their fortunes from the slave economy. Indeed, when slave ownership was outlawed in Britain in the nineteenth century, slave owners were given financial compensation for each liberated slave so as to compensate them for their "loss". These slave owners were paid huge sums in compensation by the British government. Interestingly, no compensation was paid to former slaves (Williams, 1994).

Nowadays, slavery is legally outlawed in most, if not all, Western societies, though neo-slavery through low pay and limited safeguards are frequently deemed as unfortunate, but determined by the supply and demand for labour and on the status of the labour concerned. In secondary labour markets, plentiful, low-skilled, low-status labour attracts the lowest levels of wages. Given that the supply of labour into these roles is also increased by those looking for part-time, fractional or holiday work due to family commitments, or the need to top-up income levels, market forces would push pay rates for some jobs to the point beyond a base level of survival for those in work. Low wage legislation, in-work benefits, and income support are state initiatives designed to manage the tendency for pay rates to "race to the bottom". That said, the interventions and pay levels deemed to be acceptable are deeply political. Employers and their political advocates want the rates to be low, while the low paid and their trade unions push for above inflation levels of pay increase. The moral positions taken by employers and employees are intrinsically in conflict: income for employees is a cost to employers; and employee income determines the lifestyle and comfort of employees and their families.

Ethics are principles and virtues which guide individual or organisational conduct. There are a number of ethical positions an individual may take about slavery and neo-slavery. The most disconnected and lacking in compassion refuses to accept that they exist. The refusal to acknowledge a problem is a classic response of the ruling elite. The limited coverage of the extent

of slavery, the experiences of slaves and the low paid, and the injustices that many victims face, is typical of the response of the mainstream media in many Western countries. The Indian freedom fighter Mahatma Gandhi famously commented: "First they ignore you; then they laugh at you; then they fight you; then you win". The neo-slavery caused by poverty-like pay rates is rarely a feature of mainstream media, and human trafficking is mostly presented as something that happens overseas, or to people from Third World countries.

A second position acknowledges the existence of slavery or poverty, but distances the person from the problem. Sometimes blaming the victims, or finding some form of justification for disengagement with these human problems requiring action. In contemporary times, this "blame the victim" mindset acknowledges that slavery and neo-slavery exist, but attempts to explain it as the fault of the victim, either by being born in the wrong place, or for not having any qualifications. Again, limited exposure in the mass media limits popular understanding of these issues, and this influences the political priority given to tackling slavery and neo-slavery. The Global Slavery Index (2016) estimates that there are 17 500 slaves living in the Netherlands, with a similar level in the UK (the ILO estimate that it could be as high as 30 000 in the UK). In Europe, the GIS estimate that there are 1 243 000 slaves across the continent. Neo-slavery arising from low pay and fractional contracts varies between countries, with countries like the UK being less "protectionist" than some of its mainland neighbours due to the stronger influence of neo-liberalism and greater income and wealth inequality.

Fisher and Lovell (2014) provide an interesting model for mapping the ethical management actions that might be helpful in the analysis of slavery and neo-slavery. By combing two continua – good/bad and legal/illegal – they produce four ethical positions. Actions that are

- *bad and illegal* are judged to be both bad in that they cause harm and are against the law;
- *good and illegal* are judged to reduce harm but are deemed to be illegal;
- *bad and legal* are judged to cause harm but are not against the law; and
- *good and legal* are judged to reduce harm and are lawful.

Figure 1 applies this model to actions over the direct use of slaves by hospitality organisations.

In the Western world, slavery is illegal, however, some operators may see it is an easy way to make extra profits. Where it does occur, this is more likely to take place in "back-of-house operations" – in kitchens, housekeeping, and cleaning services. There are examples of slaves being employed in restaurant services, in some "ethnic" restaurants, where individuals are transported from the local national and cultural setting to work in the Western-based restaurant. These examples aside, slavery tends not to be employed directly in hospitality businesses in the West, but rather at some point in the supply chain. Sub-contracted laundry or cleaning services, or in the food supply chain on farms, etc., are the more likely locations for slave labour. Both these positions are bad, though direct slave recruitment is illegal and the indirect use of slave labour is legal. Organisations that directly campaign against, or adopt business practices to avoid both the direct and indirect employment of slave labour are located in the quadrant that is good and legal (see Figure 1). Employment practices that

	LEGAL ACTS		
GOOD	Actively campaigning against the use of slave labour in the industry	The use of suppliers that exploit slaves so as to reduce costs and increase profits	BAD
	Discriminating in favour of the former slaves in recruitment	Directly recruiting slaves to make higher profits via exploitation	
	ILLEGAL		

Figure 1: Ethical options on slavery in the hospitality sector

positively discriminate in favour of the recruitment of former slaves in an attempt to compensate former slaves for their abuse are perhaps good, but would be deemed illegal in most countries with equality legislation. "Positive discrimination" in these circumstances is deemed to be illegal, though the intention may be good.

Employees in the hospitality sector are more likely to experience neo-slavery in most Western countries. In some cases, employers are paying below the legal minimum rate, they are acting illegally and their actions are bad. Others are paying legal minimum wages, but these do not provide a living wage, or tie employees into arrangements such as zero-hour contracts. Hospitality workers are employed, but the employer is not obliged to provide a minimum number of hours. In other cases, the use of sub-contracted labour makes the worker nominally self-employed and the organisation avoids holiday pay and other legal obligations it might have. Again, these are examples of actions that are legal but bad. Hotel companies like Accor take an ethical stance that is committed to anti-slavery, and at the same time pay employees at a rate above the national minimums in the countries in which the company operates. Both Accor and Shiva hotels adopt ethical policies relating to slavery and neo-slavery that are legal and good.

Against the Fisher and Lovell (2014) model, neo-slavery is essentially bad, but when employers pay below even the legal minimums, their action are both bad and illegal. Using the law to pay the legal minimums, which are below the point deemed to be a "living wage", is legal and bad, as are the use of tips to meet part of the wage, zero-hour contracts, and sub-contracting arrangements that define people working for the organisation as self-employed.

Epicurus, the Greek philosopher writing in around 400 BC, provided a valuable ethical guide when he suggested that in dealing with other people it is important to ask: "How would I like to be treated like this?". While Epicurus was an atheist writing at a time when most of his fellow Greeks were polytheists who believed that the gods lived on Mount Olympus, the message resonates with many contemporary religions across the globe today.

Insights from contemporary religions

- *Buddhism*: "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (Udana-Varga, 5–18).
- *Christianity*: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this the law of the Prophets" (Matthew 7:12).

- *Hinduism*: “This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you” (Mahabharata 5: 1517).
- *Islam*: “Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you would wish for yourself” (The Prophet Mohammad, Hadith).
- *Jainism*: “One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated” (Mahavira, Sutrikanga).
- *Judaism*: “What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. This is the whole Torah all the rest is commentary” (Hillel Talmud, Shabbat 31a).
- *Taoism*: “Regard your neighbour’s gain as you gain, and your neighbour’s loss as your own loss” (T’ia Shang Kan Ying P’ien, 213–218).
- *Zoroastrianism*: “Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself” (Shayast-na-Shayast 13.29).

Learning to ask the question “What is it like not to be me?” is an important message that comes from these various philosophical and religious observations. Buddhism and Jainism are not like the Abrahamic religions in that they do not believe in a monotheistic god and the notion of heaven as an afterlife for the soul. The quotations above suggest a common human morality that requires individuals to treat other people as they themselves would wish to be treated. Whatever the religious narrative, there is a common thread with atheists that might be better understood through an ethical position that recognises just one common humanity. Whatever we look like or sound like, we are all one human family as brother and sisters, and an injury to one is an injury to all.

The ethical message is that a cornerstone of human morality is founded on empathy for each other and compassion for those who are weak and powerless. Slavery and neo-slavery are both manifestations of oppression of the weak by the strong. In the case of the hospitality sector, the oppression may be direct or indirect. The payment of poverty wages, the use of zero-hour contracts, and pseudo-self-employment do not involve direct slavery, but they create a state of neo-slavery in their effects. Employees involved barely survive on the income paid and in their domestic life options are restricted by the shortage of income and wealth, and their experiences in employment constrained by the secondary labour market powerlessness, and a restricted collective voice because of low levels of trade union membership.

Slavery and neo-slavery are different in that the slave is formally tied in one way or another to a “slave-owner”, while neo-slaves are legally free agents, they are enslaved by their low levels of income and wealth, and so are similar in that both states involve oppressors and oppressed. Whether they are slave owners or merely low-paying employers, they are using their power to oppress people that have limited power to oppose them. Indeed, the oppression may be focused on many different issues: gender; ethnicity; religious faith; language; geographical origin; etc. In these circumstances, there are a number of positions individuals may adopt. Clearly, they may side with the oppressors, or with specific oppressed target groups, or with all forms of oppression. In the latter case, the manager or citizen tries to imagine what it is like to be oppressed and comes to the conclusion that it would not be something one wants for oneself and therefore should be opposed. Indeed, all forms of oppression should be opposed and this needs to be also in the contexts in which this occurs.

Martin Luther King, Jr draws a parallel between individual injustices and their systemic causes: “True compassion is more than flinging a coin at a beggar, it comes to see that the edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring”.

Others observe that they themselves are not affected so why should they concern themselves. This position is one lacking in empathy and compassion, but is expressed by some. Others attempt to blame the victims for their plight, implying that this situation is their own fault and they are just getting what they deserve. This is again a position lacking in an ability to imagine the position of the victim. Individuals who have authoritarian personalities tend to dismiss or demean those they perceive to be inferior to themselves, often having in reactionary and “alt-right” political views.

Some people aim to distance themselves from these events by asserting that they are not interested in politics; they are “not political”. Given that slavery and neo-slavery exist in the world today and are the result of the power of a few individuals to dominate many others, political forces are at the heart of the situation, so being “not political” implicitly supports the injustice of the status quo. Being “not political” is therefore ultimately conservative of the way things are and supports the oppression of the many by a few. Malcolm X, the US black rights activist famously observed: “A man who stands for nothing, will fall for anything”.

Conclusion

This paper has explored the existence of slavery in the world today. Despite slave owning and the trade in slaves being illegal, the practice continues in the world today. Estimates suggest that there are millions of slaves across the globe. Most are women, who are typically trafficked for sexual purposes, though some are victimised into slave labour. Approximately three in ten slaves are males, mostly traded for labour exploitation. Children make up a significant minority of trafficked humans, many for “sexploitation”, but many are enslaved to work and, in some cases, to fight for their owners. In Western countries, hospitality firms are less likely to directly employ slave labour, though some benefit indirectly as they use the services of firms in the supply chain that use slaves.

The paper has also explored the plight of neo-slaves, those who are actually not the property of another, but who are locked into slave-like relationships because of their low pay, low status, and limited oppositional power. Low pay rates are a common feature of the work in too many hospitality firms and this causes in-work and domestic-life stress. Pay rates that leave employees’ households “just coping”, secondary labour market jobs that are easily recruited and allow limited bargaining, together with low trade union membership, restrict employees’ powers to resist.

Slavery and neo-slavery raise some important ethical issues for hospitality managers and organisations. A fundamental ethic of humanist and religious faiths is that individuals should not treat the other in a way that they themselves would not like. Flowing from this, organisations have ethical obligations that require a concern for employees as organisation stakeholders and these have to be recognised in a way that informs management priorities and practices.

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