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The Entrapment of Unfree Labour: Theory and Examples From India

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The Entrapment of Unfree Labour: Theory and Examples From India

Abstract

In this paper we explore some aspects of contemporary unfree labour in rural South India. We draw on 130 case studies and (informally) extensive field research. We do so in order to make the central point that the conditions of unfreedom are variable and subject to change but that the basic vulnerabilities are significant. Being unfree in a labour relationship is a contingent effect of a set of factors. We stress the role of (a) entrapment of labourers, (b) immiseration within bondage, and (c) barriers to exit from the labour contract. In explanations, structural factors are also important. The paper forms a basis for further empirical research in a variety of global settings even beyond India.

Key words

unfreedom, labour relations, India, labour market, moral economy, bondage, gender, institutional change, entrapment

The Entrapment of Unfree Labour: Theory and Examples From India

In this paper we explore some aspects of contemporary unfree labour in rural South India. The International Labour Organisation has carefully estimated the prevalence of forced labour at 21 million (ILO, 2012a) . The official ILO estimate of the number of forced labourers worldwide includes 44% who had migrated into their country of residence as forced labour, and 56% who were forced to work during the reference period 2002-2012 within their country of origin (ILO, 2012c). In 2005 their national estimate was 12 million (ILO, 2005) using a similar case-based methodology. Although not directly comparable, these data suggest a rise in unfree labour during the recent decade. Yet in 1999, one global organisation had reckoned there were 40 million bonded labourers in India alone (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The reasons for diverse estimates lie in part in definitional differences, and the fact that types of unfreedom can vary

considerably; but more importantly that the ILO methodology is innately conservative, based on reported cases (ILO, 2012a, b). It does not focus in particular on further investigation to seek additional cases or to extrapolate from broader parameters. Anti-Slavery International has discussed why the ILO's estimate would have been just 2.9 million for India in 2005 (ASI, 2005).

We define unfree labour as a person becoming committed to working for someone else through deception, coercion or force, such that they cannot exit freely from the work relationship (Olsen and Morgan, 2014). There is forced labour, including trafficked labour, in all the main economic sectors (for India, see for example Government of India, 2008; Upadhyay, 2006). Forced, trafficked, and bonded labourers are three of the many types of unfree labour. In this paper we develop relevant concepts of social structure and agency in order to explore the complexity and shifting nature of forced labour. Following our presentation of some contrasting empirical case materials, we provide a concluding moral-economy commentary. For issues regarding moral political economy see Sayer (1992, 2005) and regarding the sociology of moral economy Sayer (2000a, 2000b, 2001), Fevre (2003), Folbre (1994) and Nelson (1995, 1998, 2003).[1]

1 Some types of Unfree Labour

Table 1 shows the main occupations in which unfreedom has been observed in recent years in India. These are niche occupations within which unfree social relations have evolved as one of the usual institutional forms. In no case is unfreedom the only form of labour relationships for that occupation. Unfreedom does not totally constitute the relationships either.

Table 1: Occupational Niches Sometimes Characterised by Unfreedom

- Agrarian scene

[1] Other authors who have conducted empirical work regarding employment relationships using similar assumptions include Rogaly (1997; Rogaly and Coppard, 2003), Kapadia (1996), Olsen, 2007, Guerin, 2013, and Venkateswarlu and Dacorta (2001).

  - Permanent labour
  - Ritualised unpaid labour
  - Tied seasonal labour at lower wages and without freedom to choose the employer for a particular week/month
  - Help with occasional and night tasks (unpaid unfree labour)
  - Child labour (a) on farms (b) on special seed plots contracted out from MNCs
- Urban scene
  - Sex trafficking
  - Rented children
  - Prostitution via pimping
  - Construction contracting with middleman providing a loan
  - Manufacturing work with debt bondage
  - Travelling to become urban casual migrant labourers
    - -bondage - charging/cheating -female sexploitation
  - Child labour
    - -domestic labour
    - -manufacturing child labour
  - Cleaning, grass cutting, road sweeping, plumbing, etc. when bonded by debt to the sub-contractor or other 'maistry'

In the published literature bondage is described in a wide range of occupational niches (Guerin, 2013; Brass, 1995, 2008; Breman, 1999, 2003, 2007). See for example the survey of detailed sources by Upadhyay (2006). See also Olsen and Ramanamurthy, 2000; Ramamurthy, 2000, Rammohan, 1987, Rao, R.S., 1995, Rao, U., 1994, Ravinder, 1989, Reddy, 1990, and Olsen and Neff, 2007). There is bondage in brick-making, in domestic service, and in many other occupational and geographic areas in south and west India (e.g. Roesch, et al., 2009; Breman, *et al.,* eds., 2009).

All possible characteristics of unfreedom do not necessarily occur in each and every case of unfree labour. Instead, there is diversity in the concrete details of unfreedom. However, all share aspects of entrapment, immiserising terms & conditions, and barriers to exit. Some of these characteristics are part of the cause of the unfreedom, while others are part of the condition of unfreedom, and through reproduction can actually become consequences of prior experiences of unfreedom. One must, therefore, apply analytical care to issues of cause and effect in given cases. Debt, for example, can be seen as entrapping but is not always entrapping. As the ILO notes, one must consider

how debt is held (its scale, how it is serviced, whether it has been manipulated in order to be effectively impossible to pay etc.) in order to establish its potential to entrap (see also Srivastava, 2009, cited by Guerin, 2013: 411). All forms of unfreedom have aspects of (a) entrapment, (b) immiserising terms & conditions, and (c) barriers to exit. Debt can be seen as entrapping but is not always entrapping; and its tendency to entrap is compounded by its ability to create barriers to exit which are in themselves also perpetuated by the terms and conditions of work that create a dependent poverty (including such matters as rates of deduction). Of course, matters can also be simple. Staying in accommodation provided by the gangmaster or intermediary is likely to create a straightforward barrier to exit.

The general issue of contingency also matters in terms of measurement for forced and unfree labour. An appropriate sampling method would deliberately contrast unfree with free labourers. If a researcher takes a wide sample of poor migrants, they will find that becoming an entrapped migrant bonded labour is contingent. The bondage of one family member is also not necessarily associated with bondage of the whole household. In these ways, labour bondage is changing and changeable. Circulatory migrants' unfreedom is also not necessarily either lifelong or heritable. If one were to selectively sample only *unfree* labourers then one might interpret the results to mean that all labourers in a given category are unfree. This would give the sense that natural necessity or fixed and definite internal relations were always at play in the same way. Complexity, confounds this approach.

Complexity applies to the full range of social relations, which are nevertheless explicable in sociological and political-economy terms. One can for, example look at the various dynamics of 'cheating' by the gangmaster. This is defined as the manipulative behaviour of the master based on asymmetries of power and information. Unfreedom here can be exacerbated by the failure of the master to inform workers about the full range of deductions or the actual terms of exit. This cheating creates the capacity for leverage and thus entrapment, based on

the relative agency opportunities of the master. This can be distinguished from unintended consequences of institutional norms. The list in Table 1 helps us to see major lines of demarcation. For example some areas of labouring are in illegal occupations, about which getting data will inevitably be difficult. Escape from an illegal occupation may be difficult due to stigma and the loss of family ties. By comparison, construction work and agricultural work have a relatively high degree of general social approval.

2 The Institutional Basis of Unfree Labour

Structures and institutions have emergent features, have holistic properties; are permeable; and are usually capable of organic change. An *emergent feature* is a property or characteristic which arises in the context of the arrangement of the parts of the structure (or the institution). An institution like bonded labour is therefore not the same 'thing' each time it occurs; its nature is contingent on contextual factors. Emergent features, including structures like a social class or the social exclusion of the bonded labour migrant, cannot be reduced to their component parts. Looking inside at the details of a given case, we can note the difference between the character of the whole and the character of the parts. For example, a tied field labourer living in their home village feels bound to do seasonal work at the beck and call of the landlord to which s/he is tied (Da Corta and Venkateswarlu, 1999), and this property emerges on top of prior elements in the relationship such as borrowing from the employer in a difficult year, receiving food from them on festival days, or eating near them in a ritualised way. Caste as a structure can colour and help to shape an unfree relationship, yet the unfreeness is not intrinsic to the relationship. The labour relationship which has the holistic property of tied-ness has implied obligations. These are often a seasonal requirement to keep working for this employer. Tying of workers also occurs in brick kiln work and thus is, again, not restricted to the one context of field labour with arable crops. The existence of such obligations is not negated by the fact of their impermanence. Bondage is often impermanent, yet durable. Finally, the tied labour relationship does not exhaust

the social relationships the people have. Instead, overlaid upon the tying are other obligations to family and friends, to other employers, other landlords and other workers; there are also other expectations and norms about speed of work, hours to be worked, seasonality, tools, and the means of payment. Thus institutions such as tied labour or sharecropping are somewhat changeable (see Gidwani, 2001). The kind of structuralism that we use here was described by Gimenez (1999). As Sayer says, institutions in society help to underpin structures (1992; see also Hay, In Marsh and Stoker, eds., 1995).

Another feature of structures and institutions is that most of them can change organically. Organic changes can begin from an agent positioned within a structural relation (or institution). In society, we expect to find agents within structures who can reflexively consider and decide how to act to try to change things. The possibility of organic change from within is also present in non-social structures, e.g. the mineral structure of rocks, or the shape of a tree, but social structures tend to be linked with reflexive modes of agency (Archer, 1996; Olsen and Neff, 2007; see examples in Reddy and Olsen, 2010). Institutions can also be changed by insider actors or from outside (Morgan and Olsen, 2010).

What differentiates institutions from structures is mainly that institutions are sets of norms which are predominantly followed in a particular concrete historical place in a society. Structures are not simply the norms but rather the whole ensemble of parts into wholes. Social structures inherently operate such that agents are in given relationships with others, and are not atomistically separable. Many social structures have shapes such as hierarchy, networks, pairings or other characteristic patterns (Heil, 2003). Institutions are constructed and played out by agents who are located within structures. Such structures are part of the causal context within which the institutions are born, perpetuated, changed, and sometimes ignored or dropped. Institutions such as payment-in-kind exist in a caste and class context. Thus, in other words, an agent can more easily drop one institutional affiliation (such as cash vs. kind payment) and join

another rather than drop or avoid their structural past. Traces and effects of one's past are carried along with the agent.

3 Entrapment – How and Why it Happens

In India entrapment occurs in a variety of ways. In many instances, the likelihood of entrapment rises with poverty and the rate of deductions from a wage. Cheating is defined as the master not telling the worker all the deductions. Prior to joining in the work, ignorance of the barriers to exit that are intrinsic to the work conditions – e.g. remote housing – is part of the entrapment syndrome whilst not being the same as being cheated. The agency of the gangmaster needs exploration in order to discern intentional cheating from unintended consequences of institutional norms such as offering remote housing in a camp. The pricing of food in camps is also sometimes part of an entrapment scenario.

We study the process of entrapment because if entrapment could be avoided, then some workers might avoid unfree labour altogether. However it has been shown by detailed anthropological research that cultural norms, such as obeying the demands of a maistry (labour gangmaster) of a higher caste, sometimes underpin the unfreedom in persistent ways (Picherit, 2009). According to the usual practices of old institutionalism, we study not only the institutional forms (terms and conditions), which might include the gangmasters' own hierarchical location in an economic structure and their sub-contracting, but also the evolution of norms of the workers themselves and their families, as applied in particular relationships. See Veblen, 1899 and 1914, for details of how to study norms to which workers and employers generally subscribe. Dominant norms are not always hegemonic, and variations occur.

Case studies of institutional norms among bonded labourers include, for example, Ramachandran, 1990, and Breman, 1996. Ramachandran pointed out that in Tamil Nadu village life, many unfree workers do extra unpaid labour,

beyond their main job such as permanent farm labourer or wife of an unfree labourer, without any piecework or time-based measurement records being kept of the quantity of labour. These situations of unpaid unfree labour are prevalent in rural south India but are at times attacked as unfair and unjustified by workers when they are interviewed by outsiders (Olsen, 2007).

Two specific modes of entrapment illustrate the problems. Firstly, if a woman has to do unpaid labour in a village because her spouse is newly bonded to an employer by an advance, she has difficulties resisting the employer's requests because it might jeopardize her spouse's ability to earn wages or repay his loan. Her entrapment occurs as an offshoot of his decision to engage in bonded labour and the problem becomes a household one. A second example is provided by the case of workers arriving at a camp for a nine-month stint of quarrying. Some enter freely into an agreement to work under a system of advances. Picherit, 2009, describes the arrangements. Whilst in the camp, a series of events conspires to make their earnings less than enough to repay their advance (Srivastava, 2009: 138). Workers who end a season with a debt overhang will have to stay bonded to the same *maistry* (master) into the next year's main work season. There is wide acknowledgement that entrapment is illegal (Picherit, 2009: 266). The actual departures of jeep convoys to take workers to the work camps are kept secret and done at night to avoid enquiries about legality (*ibid.*). The wages paid per day in quarrying are far below the minimum wage, and thus are an illegal aspect of the entrapment scenario. A quarrying worker in rural Andhra Pradesh may experience up to 5 different camps in one nine-month season, and their entrapment follows them while they are bonded to *maistry*. This bondage typically lasts until a major life event, such as marrying off a girl and getting a dowry sum, or perhaps getting a bank loan, enables a bonded labourer to repay the debt to the employer in full. The *maistry* who is the immediate provider of an advance is himself typically embedded in a longer chain of advances rising up the subcontracting chain to a formal-sector contract holder (Picherit, 2009*)*. In quarrying this may be a supply contract to the public sector.

In terms of considerations of theory, the informality is neither sufficient to cause unfree labour, nor is it a necessary part of all unfree labour relations. At the same time there are recognizable vulnerabilities both of the person based on their conditions and of the situation to which they are exposed. The situation is not fixed and can evolve over time as new potentials for exploitation arise in which the maistry can make use of the labour of the unfree or can exploit that unfreedom to entrap others (a spouse, a son or daughter etc). Thus detailed empirical work is more justified for unfree labour than for more regulated, homogenous forms of work such as formal-sector salaried work.

The complexity and nuance of entrapment scenarios is most appropriately revealed through qualitative research into concrete cases (see also following section). One can finds that the aspirations of a worker prior to entering into an unfree labour relationship are part of a syndrome in which they enter at a time of relative freedom, but then gradually (contingently) become entrapped over time.[2] They begin to realize that they are entrapped, but often too late. Here, the entrapment scenario can be studied in terms of institutions. For example, if a single worker sneaks away from the work site, they still have a debt and the employer still knows where to find the family home to enforce the obligation to repay. Departures, known as desertion, do not change the entrapment institutions. (By way of contrast, if the large-scale contractor at the top of the advance chain decided to inspect camps and enforce minimum wages, this would have an impact on the institutions of entrapment.) Social and economic power differentials give a particular twist to the evolution of the norms of institutional entrapment. In this overall scene, few agents want to encourage the non-repayment of the debts. Default has been discouraged in micro-finance, and is strongly discouraged among the workers who need advances to live (Olsen and Morgan 2010). There are strong factors at work that cause the entrapment system to be self-perpetuating. Within this system, however, there can be some subtle changes in terms of social relations. In broad terms, these

[2] This scenario is the broad area covered by the 'new slavery' literature. The case of people born into bondage falls into the area broadly known as traditional bonded labour. See Van Den Anker, ed., 2004.

are highlighted by studies that focus on the 'new slavery' and contrast today's relationships with the older traditions of permanent inheritable bondage (Breman, 2007).

Observing transformations of norms is essential to institutionalist studies and the time dimension is crucial to how unfreedom develops. Unfreedom can be shifting in terms of vulnerability for given groups, one can transition from one context of unfreedom to another as exploitative potentials are iterated and innovated in processes of power. Equally, the movement from unfree to more free labouring relationships is a process in time. Unfreedom can be broken down by stages of a relationship, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Temporal Stages of Unfreedom

Entering the relationship ---> becoming unfree (entrapment)

Being unfree ----> having to stay unfree
(often through immiseration)

Staying unfree ----> being unable to exit
(barriers to exit)

Timing variations are considerable. For example, some children are born into unfree labour, whereas in rural South India it often happens that an adult free labourer joins in a labour contract for a few weeks or months that only later turns out to be entrapping.

4 Case Materials From Cotton Seed Production And Urban Construction

In order to consider the variability of unfree labour we drew on the ongoing and existing work of Davuluri Venkateswarlu based in Hyderabad, and Bhim Reddy based in Mahbubnagar District. Each provides well-documented detailed case-studies discussed in person *in situ* during visits to villages of northern and

southern Andhra Pradesh, and to Hyderabad and Tanduuru, Andhra Pradesh, beginning in 2006-8.

In total 130 case-study accounts of up to 3 pages each were available (all in English typescript based upon Telugu and Urdu interviewing). Based on the examination of these 130 case studies we found that the duration of unfreedom did not correlate strongly with the severity or type of unfreedom. Instead a whole variety of unfree features contributed to both entrapment and remaining unfree. Moreover, having barriers to exit can be a different dimension of unfreedom from the social/cultural/economic and institutional nature of the unfreedom, and the severity of suffering was not necessarily associated with longer or shorter periods of bondage. This can be illustrated by reference to specific cases. See www.ruralvisits.org for four detailed sample case studies, which are translated and pseudonymised. See also Reddy and Olsen (2010), for an in-depth study of male and female migrant bonded labourers. Below, we describe two case studies to give a flavour of some of the contrasts of unfreedom. These two show the degree of variability in the lived experience of unfreedom in both rural and urban areas, differentiated in part by gender and age-group (structural factors alongside caste, language group, and class).

The first case study is a child, pseudonym Narsamma, who moved from her home to a farm in a different district to work in field-based cotton seed production. The second was an adult male bonded labourer, Sridhar, who moves periodically from his home village in northern Andhra Pradesh to the urban construction sites of Nasik near Mumbai in Maharashtra state. These two cases provide a contrast between two types of bondage amongst the many types that are found in Andhra Pradesh.

Detailed documentation of the Andhra Pradesh rural case study of Narsamma can be found in Venkateswarlu, 2003a, 2003b, 2007. 400,000 bonded children worked in this industry in 2007 (anon., 2007). Upadhyay, 2006, gives historical and cultural background from across India. From the case material in Andhra

Pradesh, we learn that some migrants suffer differently than non-migrant unfree labourers.

> "The working conditions of migrant children in particular are pitiable. They are housed in the verandahs of farmers, or have a small bed in a dark corner, fed just enough to keep them working, day in and day out. They reach the farm by 6:00 in the morning, and return only after it gets dark. The smell of pesticides and the scorching heat cause headaches … and mental depression… The employers also often resort to verbal abuse and physical violence to make the children work according to their instructions. … Beating of children if they fail to work properly is also not uncommon." Venkateswarlu, 2007: 19.

A broader overview of unfree labour in India as a whole indicates that the reasons for the stubborn persistence of bondage include a low-waged pattern of economic development in India as a whole, cultural patterns that persistently keep certain castes down, and "the desperate poverty of the labouring classes" (Lerche, 2007: 445). However, the unfreedom is slowly evolving from a traditional form of permanent bondage toward a wider range of types of re-worked unfreedom (*ibid.*). For instance, Venkateswarlu stresses in his accounts of girl child bonded labour that new rewards like hair ribbons, food treats and being allowed to watch t.v. are important ways that employers now motivate the children who work in the cotton-seed fields. The concept of a game in which children compete for treats has arisen. Norms, institutions and structures are all integral to the girl child bonded labour case. The girl is expected to be docile, obedient, and respectful in the farm where she lives after being bonded by a loan made to her father (these are social norms). Some employers are cruel or violent (institutions of violence include simply raising a hand as a threat, keeping children in degraded clothing, and punishing the child by physically excluding her/him from the normal social interaction of the farm. Structures of caste, class and gender all contribute to the underlying power differential. This power differential combined with the girl's separation from her natal village leaves the girls vulnerable.

The second detailed case study focuses on Sridhar (a pseudonym) who works in Nasik as a bonded construction labourer. His regular travels to Nasik were preceded by many years of significant debt. Sridhar and other migrant construction workers at Nasik have strong aspirations for saving money to invest in their home villages. The combination of freedom of choice along with unfreedom is evident in several details of the account about Sridhar. Sridhar's social class is landless worker. He is of Golla caste (a shepherd caste). The institutional side of Sridhar's experience is varied and has changed considerably over time. Three facets are important. 1) he would prefer to use a physical labour market (a *nayaka [street market]*), where employers come in the mornings to gather daily casual labour, rather than use a gangmaster; 2) he prefers to borrow money from sources in the village, and thus he is gradually becoming an unbonded casual labourer; 3) he uses a mobile phone to widen his work opportunities. In this way Sridhar typifies the labourer who tries to move from bondage to the relative freedom of the casual labour market. His attempts however have not yet freed him from a bondage relationship with a construction gangmaster.

In Table 2 below we identify some relevant characteristics of unfreedom. In column 1 of Table 2, we list the key facets of unfree labour in rural South India, particularly for workers whose home villages are in Andhra Pradesh. We focus on the two case-studies in columns 2-3 of the table.

Table 2: Characteristics of Unfreedom in India (With Two Illustrations)

Characteristic	Narsamma	Sridhar
Cheated		
Lied to upon entry		
Cheated on pay rate		√ (in the past)
Disappointed about terms and conditions		√
Wages kept back from the worker		
Indebted	√	
Heavy household debts overall	√	
Debts from the employer	√	√
Tied due to debts – seasonally	√	√
Tied due to debts – permanently	√	√ (from gangmaster)
Culturally Obligated		
Obliged to obey master (caste; or patriarchy)	√	
Must provide unpaid services (to achieve respect; or dignity via rituals)	√	
Triadic threat of punishment (threat to the family; or social network with hierarchy)	√	
Gender Oppressed		
Sexually violated (harmed, or reputation damaged)	possibly	
Patriarchally controlled (wages given to father; or docility required)	√	
Forced to conform to gender norms (single sex work group; or docility)	√	
Violently treated		
Degraded by violence		
Threatened with violence or retribution	√	
Theft or the keeping of passport and papers		
Limitations Upon Job Search		
Wage is immiserising	√	√
Wage deductions excessive		√
Knowledge of job opportunities being deliberately restricted	√	√
Forced to travel in specified vehicle		
Excessive hours required (so cannot do job search)	√	√
Barracks – or not allowed out (illegal housing, or complicity, or locked doors)	√	√
Distant from job market itself (e.g. forced to live on-site)	√	
Systemic exclusion from local job market (refugee or non-citizen or no papers)		√

NOTE: The names are pseudonyms. For detailed case studies, see online examples at www.ruralvisits.org.

The table shows a strong contrast between the girl Narsamma and the man Sridhar. The girl's bondage is in the tied seasonal bondage niche and it arises mainly from her father's taking an advance on her behalf, and sending her as a migrant labourer to the cotton fields. Debt and culturally ingrained obligations play a large part in her bondage. By contrast, for the adult male bonded labourer Sridhar, debt was a practice he could engage in himself, both by taking and repaying various debts. Violence played less of a role in his bondage, compared with an ongoing threat of violence for the girl. Various practices that limit job search were important ways in which both these bonded labourers had been entrapped. One difference is that the man was making concerted efforts to improve his job search skills.

Here we suggest that unfreedom in rural South India can involve seven characetristics: being cheated, being indebted with an advance or heavy household debts, being culturally obligated to be subservient, facing gender oppression, being treated violently, and having limitations upon job search. Some root causes of unfree labour are left out of this typology, such as having little formal education or few social connections, since they are not features of unfreedom itself. The typology found in Table 2 is applicable in a wide variety of contexts. We follow the general methodological guidance of Byrne and Ragin (forthcoming 2009; Olsen, 1998) that sets of conditions are likely to create a context for a given outcome; indeed in this particular case of unfreedom, the various sets of unfree conditions constitute unfreedom itself. What we call unfreedom in the abstract (see Sayer, 1992), or in general, is constituted in reality by the series of sets of specific conditions as listed in Table 2. Abstract arguments and policy debates about unfree labour do need to refer to concrete cases. Table 2 is thus a brief guide to the kinds of unfreedom one can find in rural South India. One usually expects a typology to use mutually exclusive categories, but the list in Table 2 is different, with overlapping dimensions of the experience of unfreedom.

5 Conclusion

Unfree labour research is a form of engagement which has multiple social dynamics. For example, research on bonded labour in rural villages can create reflexivities and dialogues that did not occur before. It may change expectations in currently unrealisable ways, and it may create hostilities, conflicts and new strategies of oppression to perceived threats. However, some dialogues may support and encourage empowerment, and can spread from the research community into the practitioner community or into policy dialogue. Although the direct impact of research is limited, in the longer run better empirical accounts of the diversity of unfreedom are an important component in the eradication of unfreedom (Lerche, 2007). For example, the author may want to question widely held social norms of social hierarchy, social superiority/inferiority, self-respect for skills vs. needing respect 'from' others', intrinsic value vs. extrinsic awards and designations. Hirschman's "exit, voice, or loyalty" analysis (1970) may be relevant here. Significantly, unfreedom is not all about exit, but about both getting *into* and getting out of entrapped situations.

One might also note that the adequacy of research has social theory and moral economy implications. A constructive critical questioning of basic norms is part of how good research on labouring norms can take place (see MacIntyre, 1995). MacIntyre, like Veblen, suggests that the researcher need not agree with the internal values intrinsic to a practice. The dimension of studying social values both from within and from a critical perspective is sometimes missing in recent works in economics (Genicot, 2002). For example, Basu and Chaui (2003) provide mathematised, apparently value neutral accounts of bonded labour. However, many authors have provided more nuanced discussion of social values in India: Athreya, Djurfeldt and Lindberg (1990), Banerjee, Gertler and Ghatak (2002), and Singh (1995). The entrapment scenario can be described in many ways – from formal mathematics to anthropological story-telling – but it is important for the author of a description of entrapment not to appear to condone this practice.

Debates about freedom are intrinsically about systems, and thus about the norms within systems that create and licence rules and action. Freedom can be defined organically and can be contested. Unfree labour research is a form of praxis in itself and encourages change in the praxis of practitioners, thus an evolution (Flyvberg, 2001). An explanatory theory of unfreedom has normative nuances and knowledge claims rest upon a bed of experience when we engage with the world (Morgan and Olsen, 2007). In moral economy terms that engagement may involve five features:

1. moral economy research aims to be transformative. It involves *praxis* aiming at better social relations.
2. the moral economy researcher is engaged in a dialogue with workers, not just a one-way data collection exercise.
3. the moral economy researcher is aware of families and caring and does not see each worker in individualistic, atomised way.
4. the moral economy researcher realises that the "realm of the economic" extends into social, cultural, customary and display arenas of human life.
5. the moral economy researcher avoids the error of assuming that cash and commercial factors always dominate over other factors.

Moral economy studies of unfree labour put at issue the quality of the social relations of production, not just the material conditions of work. Loss of freedom, being treated disrespectfully and coercively, and being cheated about pay can be subtle issues but the observed abuses and consequences of unfreedom are rarely so subtle and opposing them requires no great ethical leap of faith.

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