

## Introduction

One winter's day in 1971, almost two years after arriving in the United States from Haiti, Jean-Robert Cadet was set an assignment in school as part of Black History Month. Given the task of making an oral presentation about the life of Dred Scott, he set about researching his subject. He recalls:

As I moved through this little research project, I often found myself wondering if Dred Scott had endured the same cruelties to which I had been subjected as a child slave on the impoverished island nation of Haiti. I wondered if his masters had passed around him to friends as mine had, with everyone living more easily off my labor. I wondered if he had ever gone to bed hoping never to awaken, to sleep forever. I wondered if slavery had stolen every moment of his childhood, as it had mine. I wondered if, like me, he had been taken away from his family as a toddler, never to lay eyes on them for the next thirty years. I struggled to interweave the history of slavery in the United States with my own background, because child slavery was then, and is *to this moment*, being practiced in all areas of Haiti ....

Each day during Black History Month, I listened to my classmates present the stories of Malcolm X, Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and others. When my turn came to speak, I read verbatim what I had learned about Dred Scott. As I read my essay, I noticed the teacher nodding in agreement and smiling. For one of the first times in my life, I felt proud of my achievement. Even then, I could sense the irony of that moment. *Unknown to anyone in the room (except me), a modern-day slave was relating the pain-filled saga of a famous historical slave.*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Robert Cadet, *My Stone of Hope: From Haitian Slave Child to Abolitionist* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), chap. 1, Kindle.

Identifying his experience as a child slave, a *restavec*, with the stories of historic survivors, Cadet wonders about their experiences and his own hidden history, something as yet unexpressed. While he wonders whether historic survivors' experiences were akin to his own, he at the same time finds some resonance and familiarity in the stories related; his then unspoken thoughts collapse artificial distinctions between historic and "modern" slavery to reveal the continuity of slavery to which he was subjected as a child. Cadet's two autobiographies, *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle Class American* and *My Stone of Hope: From Haitian Slave Child to Abolitionist*, finally revealed not only his experiences in childhood but how they catalyzed his activism.<sup>2</sup>

While slavery and the slave trade are globally prohibited, it is estimated that 40.3 million people are living as slaves today.<sup>3</sup> Slavery remains an unchallenged and deeply embedded aspect of many cultures, with certain practices entirely consistent with chattel slavery. However, the "fourth wave" of the struggle against slavery that emerged since the 1990s constitutes a global social movement that has articulated its demands for the end to modern slavery in ways that have mobilized and raised awareness of policy makers, governments, NGOs, and intergovernmental organizations. This movement has identified modern slavery as a global problem, provided assessments of its nature and extent, its drivers, and possible solutions for ending it. These efforts have culminated in the promulgation of Sustainable Development Goal 8.7, which demands that states: "Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour." Increased global recognition of the problem and the many ways in which key stakeholders address it are evidence that the movement has been successful to some degree. However, largely absent from the movement's discourse and policy prescriptions are the voices of those enslaved and survivors of slavery themselves, and a fuller understanding of the meaning of modern slavery from the very people who have experienced contemporary forms of slavery. Laws, policies, and strategies to assist survivors are being created without an accurate understanding of the emotional and physical realities, and effects, of enslavement. There is a tendency to focus on prevention (and on the perpetrator),

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Robert Cadet, *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle Class American* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), Kindle; Jean-Robert Cadet, *My Stone of Hope*.

<sup>3</sup> Walk Free Foundation, *The Global Slavery Index 2018*. [https://downloads.globalslaveryindex.org/ephemeral/GSI-2018\\_FNL\\_180907\\_Digital-small-p-1540817680.pdf](https://downloads.globalslaveryindex.org/ephemeral/GSI-2018_FNL_180907_Digital-small-p-1540817680.pdf)

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rather than survivor needs following discovery, and there is a lack of consideration of the factors that can provide the conditions for survivors to assume agency and authority over the self.

For centuries, survivor narratives have comprised a unique and unparalleled resource for abolition and demonstrated the realities of slavery, exposing the dehumanization, abuse, loss, and alienation at slavery's core and presenting a strong moral argument for abolition. Cadet's and other contemporary accounts add to a corpus of historic slave narratives that have long been seen as a valuable tool in abolitionism, providing an unrivaled insight into the challenges faced by survivors on their journeys from enslavement to escape, and through to their post-enslavement lives. Short stories, editorials, art, speeches, and autobiographies by former slaves during the nineteenth century were central to galvanizing the abolitionist movement and effecting change, and these collections continue to inform our perspectives on slavery today.

Collectively, slave narratives offer the most extensive and influential revelations of the nature of slavery. Narratives also have documentary status, providing key testimony and adding representative, often excluded voices to the discourse on slavery. Every successful social movement has been “guided by those directly affected by the injustice [who are] best positioned to determine appropriate strategies and offer visionary solutions.”<sup>4</sup> Public awareness can help to drive approaches to abolition,<sup>5</sup> and the stories told by those who have experienced slavery are important awareness raising accounts, unmasking the horrors of slavery as it existed then and continues to exist today. Their authentic voices expose the internal landscape of survivors, unearthing the subtle and complex facets of enslavement, discovery, and freedom while their accounts offering us access to the past through the perception of the slave's own reality.<sup>6</sup> Their testimony is “a means to exteriorize, while at the same time naming and validating the survivor's subjective experience,” a written representation of their belonging, and engaging the expectations of religious

<sup>4</sup> Toban Black, Stephen D'Arcy, Tony Weis, and Joshua Kahn Russell, eds., *A Line in the Tar Sands: Struggles for Environmental Justice* (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), 3.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph includes brief excerpts from a blog by the author: Andrea Nicholson, “Survivors' Solutions: The Value of Survivors' Voices in the Antislavery Movement,” *The Rights Lab, University of Nottingham*, October 27, 2017. <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/rights/2017/10/27/walkfree8/>

and political groups to “create cultural spaces in which the projection of self-representation takes place.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet although history shows us the importance of slave narratives to abolition, contemporary slave narratives have not been utilized in similar and new ways when forming state antislavery strategies and structures. Only by turning to individual narratives, can we extrapolate the meaning, emotions, states of mind, and needs of each survivor. Currently, there are only a handful of writings about contemporary slave narratives. I have analyzed a corpus of over 200 contemporary slave narratives to explore how survivors describe their experiences and sought to understand what this tells us about slavery and recovery. Drawing on 196 existing contemporary slave narratives and an additional five new contemporary slave narratives I gathered through deep interviews, I have analyzed these narratives arriving at thematic chapters on the value of telling, perceptions of freedom, the destruction and reconstruction of identity, trauma, recovery, and activism, which emerged as a result of the analysis.

Throughout this book, I demonstrate that contemporary slave narratives reveal key insights and parallels that help to inform our understanding of contemporary slavery. By examining contemporary slave narratives, we move toward a greater understanding of the condition of slavery, the agency of individuals, movements toward liberation, and the effects of current law and policy on survivors. I unearth the continuities and distinctions presented in their narratives and meanings that will enable the antislavery community to usefully apply narratives to strategies and policies for survivor support. I also argue that through narratives, survivors can be empowered to engage in frontline efforts to tackle slavery and assist other survivors, bringing the survivor center stage in representing and freeing others. By making their testimonies heard, individuals’ voices can be more usefully employed to determine concrete strategies toward abolition to analyze the role of governments and NGOs, and to identify procedural difficulties. For example, narratives can be excavated and applied to clarify debates on definition and to

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Angueira, “To Make the Personal Political: The Use of Testimony as a Consciousness-Raising Tool against Sexual Aggression in Puerto Rico,” *Oral History Review* 16, no. 2 (1988): 72. Christopher Hager, *Word by Word: Emancipation and the Act of Writing* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2013), 110. Philip Gould, “The Rise of the Slave Narrative,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, ed. Audrey Fisch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 12.

identify gaps in survivor support.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, my aim is to show what happens when we place the expressions of enslaved people at the heart of the antislavery movement. I hope to demonstrate that survivors' voices can impact on developments in the antislavery space and establish that narratives can influence the antislavery agenda, shape NGO approaches, and provide an argument for survivor-centric law and policy.

The analysis of the parameters of slavery is also key to determining issues that continue to challenge academics and governments around the measurement of slavery, definition, approaches to discovery, and processes for prosecution and survivor support. The availability of contemporary slave narratives, and their collection, sharing, and publishing, plays a valuable role in the antislavery agenda. But narratives of the past also have relevance today for our understanding of the nature of slavery. As part of the conceptual sociological and legal structuring of contemporary slavery, both historical and contemporary narratives provide a basis on which we can understand the nature of slavery. Thus, Chapter 1 explores the slave narrative genre, looking at historic and contemporary narratives to examine questions about the continuity of slavery over time, and to identify the impact of narratives on abolition and the problems with gathering and representation then and now. I ask, how do contemporary narratives compare to historical slave narratives, and what lessons have been learned from the past by the antislavery community in terms of how they approach these voices?

Today, survivors have access to technology and a variety of platforms that did not exist before the late twentieth century, and which can cost little to utilize. We have seen an explosion in platforms for survivor voices through social media, websites, journalism, NGOs, UN mechanisms, governmental panels, global conferences, human rights institutions, and social movements.<sup>9</sup> This means more sources for understanding, and an opportunity for survivors to voice their stories in full and explore their

<sup>8</sup> Andrea Nicholson, Minh Dang, and Zoe Trodd, "A Full Freedom: Contemporary Survivors' Definitions of Slavery," *Human Rights Law Review* (forthcoming). On the ethics of conducting survivor-focused research, see for example Alison Faulkner, *The Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Research Carried Out by Mental Health Service Users and Survivors* (Bristol: The Policy Press, 2004); Richard Hugman, Eileen Pittaway, and Linda Bartolomei, "When 'Do No Harm' Is Not Enough: The Ethics of Research with Refugees and Other Vulnerable Groups," *The British Journal of Social Work* 41, no. 7 (2011); Chris Newlin et al., "Child Forensic Interviewing: Best Practices," *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (2015); and Ron Iphofen, *Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology* (DG Research and Innovation of the European Commission, June 30, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Paul Gready, "Introduction – Responsibility to the Story," *Journal of Human Rights Practice* 2, no. 2 (2010): 185.

own intellectual and emotional growth. In recent decades, thousands of first-person narratives have emerged, of which a number are authored by the survivor,<sup>10</sup> while others are written by amanuenses.<sup>11</sup> The majority of contemporary slave narratives are gathered by NGOs, journalists, and nondepartmental public bodies, or are a record of witness testimony in legal cases and national inquiries. There also exist several autobiographies and memoirs, some sponsored or supported by faith groups, some self-published, and survivors have utilized digital platforms, using blogs, videos, films, Twitter, and their own sites to voice their experiences. Only a few texts have sought out, faithfully reproduced and, importantly, analyzed some of these primary voices.<sup>12</sup>

The narratives I have analyzed come from my own interviews with survivors, from the above collections, NGO reports and websites, and congressional testimony, one of which includes Twitter testimony.<sup>13</sup> None

<sup>10</sup> See for example Mary Jordan, Carina Buckley, and David Mossop, *Destiny of Choice* (Southampton: Dolphin Marketing Press Ltd, 2014); Barbara Amaya, *Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Lost Innocence, Modern Day Slavery & Transformation* (Pittsburgh: Animal Media Group, 2015); Sophie Hayes, *Trafficked: The Terrifying True Story of a British Girl Forced into the Sex Trade* (London: Harper Collins, 2012); Francis Bok and Edward Tivnan, *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> For example, Mende Nazer and Damien Lewis, *Slave: The True Story of a Girl's Lost Childhood and Her Fight for Survival* (London: Virago, 2010); Zana Muhsen and Andrew Crofts, *Sold: One Woman's True Account of Modern Slavery* (London: Sphere Publishing, 2010).

<sup>12</sup> Laura T. Murphy, *The New Slave Narrative: The Battle over Representations of Contemporary Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019); Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, eds., *To Plead Our Own Cause Personal Stories by Today's Slaves* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2008); Laura T. Murphy, *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014); Rahila Gupta, *Enslaved: The New British Slavery* (London: Portobello Books, 2007). See also Laura Murphy, "Black Face Abolition and the New Slave Narrative," *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry* 2, no. 1 (2015): 93–113; Laura Murphy, "The New Slave Narrative and the Illegibility of Modern Slavery," *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 2 (2015); Kelli Lyon Johnson, "The New Slave Narrative: Advocacy and Human Rights in Stories of Contemporary Slavery," *Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 2 (2013); Kaelyn Kaoma, "Child Soldier Memoirs and the 'Classic' Slave Narrative: Tracing the Origins," *Life Writing* 15, no. 2 (2018).

<sup>13</sup> The narratives analyzed are not limited to the UK, but are global and constitute all the narratives that could be found during the study and which were available in English. Survivors' countries of origin and of enslavement are included in the Table of Narratives Analyzed in the Appendix. Of the five interviews I undertook, although these were held in the UK, only one participant was a UK national. The other four participants were from Africa, Vietnam, and Poland, and all had been enslaved in their home countries or trafficked from them, through Europe and into the UK.

were chosen based on the legal definition of slavery under the 1926 Slavery Convention, as this would require a judgment on the degree to which an individual was “owned” over which there is ongoing academic debate. Additionally, most of the narratives located were too brief to provide sufficient data for such a judgment.<sup>14</sup> Instead, I have adopted the social definition of “modern slavery” that encompasses a range of practices that may, or may not amount to slavery, but where narratives are presented as modern slave narratives in collections, through testimony, by survivors, and by amanuenses. I nevertheless encountered a number of difficulties in locating and selecting narratives. In the search for autobiographies and memoirs, distinguishing genuine narratives from fiction was challenging. On NGO websites, many stories are written about survivors and presented in the third person as “case studies” rather than as survivor narratives and so these too were excluded. A large number of texts exist that concern slavery-related practices, such as sex work, but which are not identified as a form of slavery, and many are fictional or are re-tellings of survivors’ stories, but where the survivor has not been included as author. Equally, a number of texts touch on slavery, but were essentially concerned with race, gender, migration, or imprisonment (such as J. James’ *New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings*<sup>15</sup>). At the time of writing, I had identified thirty-one autobiographies, ten of which are coauthored with amanuenses, and three of which are only available in French and could not therefore be analyzed.

- Jean Robert-Cadet, *Restavec: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American* (1998)
- Henriette Akofa, *Une Esclave Moderne* (2000)
- Francis Bok with Edward Tivnan, *Escape from Slavery: The True Story of My Ten Years in Captivity and My Journey to Freedom in America* (2003)
- Beatrice Fernando, *In Contempt of Fate: The Tale of a Sri Lankan Sold into Servitude, Who Survived to Tell It* (2004)
- China Keitetsi, *Child Soldier* (2004)
- Ishmael Beah, *A Long Way Gone: The True Story of a Child Soldier* (2007)

<sup>14</sup> Article 1(1) Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. For academic debate on the application of legal definition to “modern” slavery, see n. 2, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Joy James, ed. *New Abolitionists: (Neo) Slave Narratives and Contemporary Prison Writings* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2015).



- Faith J. H. McDonell and Grace Akallo, *Girl Soldier: A Story of Hope for Northern Uganda's Children* (2007)
- Sarah Forsyth, *Slave Girl – I Was an Ordinary British Girl. I Was Kidnapped and Sold into Sex Slavery. This Is My Horrific True Story* (2009)
- Timea E. Nagy, *Memoirs of a Sex Slave Survivor* (2010)
- Zana Muhsen and Andrew Crofts, *Sold: One Woman's True Account of Modern Slavery* (2010)
- Mende Nazer, *Slave: The True Story of a Girl's Lost Childhood and Her Fight for Survival* (2010)
- Emma Jackson, *The End of My World: The Shocking True Story of a Young Girl Forced to Become a Sex Slave* (2010)
- Rachel Lloyd, *Girls Like Us: A Memoir* (2011)
- Fatima Téigmoinage, *Esclave à 11 ans* (2011)
- Jean-Robert Cadet and Jim Luken, *My Stone of Hope: From Haitian Slave Child to Abolitionist* (2011)
- Tina Okpara and Julie Jodter, *My Life Has a Price: A Memoir of Survival and Freedom* (2012)
- Sophie Hayes, *Trafficked: The Terrifying True Story of a British Girl Forced into the Sex Trade* (2012)
- Monluedee Lueche, *Child Sex Slave: A Memoir* (2012)
- Theresa Flores, *The Slave across the Street: How a 15-Year-Old Girl Became a Sex Slave* (2013)
- Katie Taylor and Veronica Clark, *Stolen Girl: I Was an Innocent Schoolgirl. I Was Targeted, Raped and Abused by a Gang of Sadistic Men. But That Was Just the Beginning ....This Is My Terrifying True Story* (2013)
- Sarah Forsyth and Tim Tate, *Slave Girl: Return to Hell. Ordinary British Girls Are Being Sold into Sex Slavery; I Escaped, but Now I'm Going to Help Free Them. This Is My True Story* (2013)
- Katariina Rosenblatt and Cecil Murphey, *Stolen: The True Story of a Sex Trafficking Survivor* (2014)
- Alice Jay, *Out of the Darkness: A Survivor's Story* (2014)
- Barbara Amaya, *Nobody's Girl: A Memoir of Lost Innocence, Modern Day Slavery & Transformation* (2015)
- Jinan and Thierry Oberlé, *Esclave de Daech* (2015)
- Lara McDonell, *Girl for Sale: The Shocking True Story from the Girl Trafficked and Abused by Oxford's Evil Sex Ring* (2015)
- Farida Khalaf and Andrea C. Hoffmann, *The Girl Who Beat ISIS: My Story* (2016)



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- Anna Ruston, *Secret Slave: Kidnapped and Abused for 13 years. This Is My Story of Survival* (2016)
- Nadia Murad, *Last Girl: My Story of Captivity, and My Fight against the Islamic State* (2017)
- Vannak Anan Prum, Ben Pederick, and Jocelyn Pederick, *The Dead Eye and the Deep Blue Sea: The World of Slavery at Sea – A Graphic Memoir* (2018)
- Sammy Woodhouse, *Just a Child* (2018)

Academic analysis of these autobiographies and memoirs, as well as of the body of shorter contemporary narratives published by NGOs or as witness testimonies and speeches, has been very limited. There exists a wealth of resources analyzing and applying historic narratives across a number of disciplines, but in the few cases where contemporary narratives are considered this is done by a handful of researchers.

Murphy's excellent research reveals: that within survivor autobiographies there is a preponderance of the testimonies of formerly enslaved Africans that serve to associate their experiences with historic slavery to veil sponsors' crusade politics;<sup>16</sup> that survivors describe themselves in their narratives as human rights ambassadors; that today's narratives are often characterized by optimistic purposes; and that survivors retreat from graphic descriptions and bodily detail so these remain obscured.<sup>17</sup> However, I have found these findings are not emulated when the lens is widened to narratives from a range of sources, including the hundreds of narratives available through narrative collections, grey literature, congressional testimony, and the narratives provided by survivors on social media. In these typically shorter narratives, the characteristic of optimism is not present, with many survivors struggling to meet their basic needs in recovery, to live with the effects of complex trauma, having to confront feelings of shame and guilt, and finding themselves ostracized from their communities. Indirectly, the desire to bear witness for others lost to slavery and to make their experiences known can have the effect of promoting human rights, but an analysis of the corpus examined here revealed that the majority of survivors do not explicitly identify as human rights ambassadors. Further, graphic descriptions and bodily details are evidenced in some autobiographies, in many of the shorter narratives available, and were expressed by Tung, Dwain, and Keith in my own interviews with

<sup>16</sup> Laura Murphy, "Black Face Abolition," 97–98.

<sup>17</sup> Laura Murphy, "The New Slave Narrative," 393 and 399, respectively.

them. By way of example, Seba explains, “If I took food, she would beat me. She often beat me. She would slap me all the time. She beat me with a broom, with kitchen tools, or whipped me with an electric cable. Sometimes I would bleed; I still have marks on my body.”<sup>18</sup> Christine Stark explains in explicit detail the degradations she endured, saying:

These men gang rape us. They rape us with dogs. They rape us with knives and guns and beer bottles. They tie us down, chain us to bedposts and basement poles and each other. They make us eat shit and maggots and urine. They rape us with masks on their faces. They rape us in the name of Satan and Hitler and De Sade. They rape us in front of our mothers and grandmothers; they rape our mothers and grandmothers in front of us. They play games with us. They force us to choose who will live, which child or aunt, or grandmother will live and which will die. They hold mock executions.<sup>19</sup>

The use of narratives to support existing understandings of modern slavery is well established in key texts in the field, such as those by Laura T. Murphy, Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, E. Benjamin Skinner, Kathleen Barry, and Siddharth Kara.<sup>20</sup> Only Murphy has analysed autobiographical narratives in detail and touched on the ways in which narratives are used to pursue sponsors’ agendas and few researchers have successfully engaged with survivors’ meanings. None have undertaken a deep textual analysis across the breadth of narratives that have been excavated here, demonstrating the current vacuum in the excavation and theorization of contemporary slave narratives and the need for deep analysis to reveal the value of contemporary slave narratives to abolition.

<sup>18</sup> Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, *To Plead Our Own Cause*, 98.

<sup>19</sup> Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd, *To Plead Our Own Cause*, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Laura T. Murphy, *The New Slave Narrative*; Kevin Bales, *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2016); Kevin Bales, *Disposable People New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2012); Kevin Bales and Ron Soodalter, *The Slave Next Door: Human Trafficking and Slavery Today* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010); Kevin Bales, Zoe Trodd, and Alex Kent Williamson, *Modern Slavery: The Secret World of 27 Million People* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009); Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery: How We Free the World’s Slaves* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008); Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery: A Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005); E. Benjamin Skinner, *A Crime So Monstrous* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 2008); Kathleen Barry, *Female Sexual Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 1979); Siddharth Kara, *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009); *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). See also Julia O’Connell Davidson, *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).