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**Review of *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*.  
Kevin Bales. Reviewed by Jo Beall, London School of Economics.**

Jo Beall  
*London School of Economics*

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in high-risk environments. If this first offering is any indication, the series will make an important contribution to the literature on successful youth development in urban areas. *Managing to Make It* will be particularly useful to those teaching courses on child welfare, urban studies, social and economic development, and social welfare policy.

Deborah Page-Adams  
University of Kansas

Kevin Bales, *Disposable people: New Slavery in the Global Economy*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999. \$24.95 hardcover.

The central argument of Kevin Bales' *Disposable People* is that slavery—understood as the total control of one person by another for purposes of economic exploitation—has not disappeared globally since the abolition of the slave trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the contrary, in some places such as Mauritania old forms of slavery have persisted and adapted while in places such as Thailand, it has increased with economic growth. Bales provides five instances of contemporary slavery—Thailand, Mauritania, Brazil, Pakistan and India. Each country study includes personal histories, a description of the political, legal and economic context and reference to both the local and global forces at work, including efforts to end slavery. In each case he seeks to understand slavery culturally and contextually, without forgiving it.

While the subject matter of the book is grim and disturbing, its message is hopeful and Bales has a clear vision of what should be done. The hope stems from the author's own sense of moral outrage as well as from the people in the national and local level monitoring, campaigning and relief organisations with whom he worked. Sometimes as research subjects and sometimes as research collaborators, they contributed generously to making the study possible, as Bales is quick to acknowledge. Along with international organisations opposing slavery, he calls them the 'new abolitionists' and trusts that his research will help provide legitimacy and publicity for their cause.

However, hope does not spring from the lives described by Bales. Relating the story of Siri, a child prostitute enslaved in a

Thai brothel, he talks of how he 'looked into the flat deadness of her eyes, listened to the hopelessness in her voice, and saw the destruction of her personality and her will to escape'. Bales sensitively addresses the physical and psychological traumas of his research subjects, recognising how violence, vulnerability and despair can wear down collective resistance, the individual spirit and personal self-esteem. However, no matter how his evidence and invective leads us to despise the slaveholders, brothel keepers and child kidnappers, in the end he does not let his readers off the hook. On the contrary, he shows how slavery in the new global economy binds our lives together and for people in industrialised countries how they are implicated in this social horror as consumers and investors.

In his personal narrative style as well as his determination to let people's lived experience of slavery tell its own story, Bales' work has that same 'angry young man' quality as the work of Jeremy Seabrook. As such it is important and valued polemic but it is also weightier and has more in common with academic texts such as Hugh Tinker's seminal historical work *A New System of Slavery* on Indian indentured labour, than with those writing in the *New Internationalist* tradition. Bales' work is firmly grounded theoretically, being rooted in a solid understanding of globalisation debates, which in turn allows Bales to draw robust and consistent policy conclusions. In this respect, *Disposable People* has something in common with Nigel Harris's book on international labour migration, *The New Untouchables*, although the framework and conclusions differ. Put another way, that the book is intensely readable and that it has an unequivocal political agenda does not in any way detract from its intellectual rigour.

Bales sees the causes of new slavery as the population explosion that has flooded the world's labour markets; economic globalisation and modernisation of agriculture that has led to landlessness and dispossession; and the resulting 'chaos of greed, violence and corruption'. All these reinforce poverty and vulnerability, which in turn are the life-blood of new slavery. The economic returns from new slavery are much greater than old slavery and the risks are fewer. While just as controlling of people's lives and choices, new slavery is short-termist, characterised by job insecurity and 'just-in-time' production strategies. The emphasis

is no longer on slave-ownership for life but slave-holding for as long as a slave is useful—hence the title, *Disposable People*.

The most poorly developed part of Bales thesis can be found in the contradictions in his argument on modernisation. This he says is a good thing because it can lead to employment and education, which provide an escape from slavery. However, he also argues for example, that modernisation can destroy the traditional rules and bonds that might have protected potential slaves. Despite the contesting intellectual paradigms echoed here, Kevin Bales' book is an important contribution overall and will act as a compelling catalyst for further research into new slavery globally. Moreover, for those concerned with social development, it stands as an important reminder of how global social policy solutions have to be found at the international as well as national and local levels. Moreover, these in turn cannot be divorced from the workings of the global economy and the human rights agenda. In terms of the latter, Bales leaves us in no doubt that in terms of slavery, cultural relativism cannot be tolerated and only a universalist perspective will do.

Jo Beall

London School of Economics

Kimberly A. Maynard, *Healing Communities in Conflict: International Assistance in Complex Emergencies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. \$27.50 hardcover.

During the eight years since the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed horrific levels of violence played out in internal conflicts within states. International relief efforts have attempted to rebuild communities and alleviate the tremendous hardship of affected populations with mixed results. Social workers have not played a prominent role in international assistance, and as such, within the profession, the discourse on armed conflict is often limited to the psychosocial impact of trauma on war-affected refugee populations resettled in northern countries. This book places the focus directly on conflict-ravaged communities and the responsibility of those who intercede to incorporate a systems approach in collaborative efforts to promote recovery and a sustainable peace.