

**Slavery and Human Exploitation in the Modern Era: A Case Study**

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**Abstract:** Human trafficking is a modern problem. It is a widespread issue that will not be going anywhere soon unless some drastic changes are made by world powers, food producers, and consumers alike. Conditions like poverty, refugee status, globalization, and cultural insecurity perpetuate slavery and modern consumers are allowing it to happen through ignorance. Through the use of Hegemonic Theory within this case study, I distill the roots and causes of human trafficking including political power struggles and the rhetoric of dehumanization. I employ critical analysis in order to analyze how human trafficking operations work in Cambodia, Ghana, and Italy today. In this case study I draw out some solutions to this modern issue and illustrate the contributions anyone can make in order to impact the movement against human trafficking. No one need be a bystander; advocacy may be a victim's greatest need.

*Key words: globalization, poverty, slavery, trafficking, victim.*

## **Introduction**

Human trafficking and modern slavery are largely invisible today. Thanks to the international slave trade ban of 1807 and the subsequent 1808 ban of slavery in the United States, one may assume that the issue of enslavement has been all but eradicated in the U.S. But in response to new laws, slavery did not disappear, it moved underground. An industry so old, entrenched, and widespread still exists today in the shadows of consumerism (Bales, Trodd, & Williamson, 2009). In this case study, I employ hegemonic theory paired with critical analysis to compare and contrast different cases of human exploitation in Cambodia, Ghana, and Italy while searching for solutions and explanations. This study proves that, although it may be invisible to us, we all contribute to human exploitation in a globalized economy. This study of enslavement offers the field of communication a cross cultural understanding of what causes human exploitation and what communication practices lead to the poor treatment of our fellow humans and a worldwide communicative response to addressing this issue.

People all over the world are at an even greater risk of exploitation today as a result of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As pointed out by the United Nations, women and children have been stuck at home with their abusers, “struggling to access services that are suffering from cuts and restrictions” (Goal 5, The United Nations, 2015, para. 6), and the global economy has been disrupted, increasing the need for cheap labor in the agriculture industry and putting more workers at risk for exploitation. People all around us are at risk of or may already be involved with some kind of human exploitation, and this study points out patterns and behaviors that we can use to make a difference.

## Literature Review

### What is Human Exploitation?

According to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), human exploitation is defined as “the use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labor or commercial sex act” (Department of Homeland Security, n.d., para.1). Human exploitation can take the form of slavery in any industry, in any place. The DHS maintains that traffickers target the most vulnerable populations including children, the impoverished, and those suffering political instability and natural disasters (Department of Homeland Security, n.d.). The United Nations has established that almost one-third of trafficking victims around the world are children and they have also documented the vulnerability of women, children, and refugees in their Sustainable Development Goals 5, 8, and 16 respectively (Kabonero, 2017).

Most people know of specific historical cases of slavery in Africa, the Americas, Haiti, The Dominican Republic, and other countries that have participated in the slave trade. But, even after U.S. slavery was technically abolished in 1865, and countries all over the world condemned the act, slavery and human trafficking lived on (Bales, Trodd, Williamson, 2009). In the time since, laws all over the world were not enforced as strictly as intended, governments turned a blind eye to suspicious activity, and poverty continuously prevented people from escaping dangerous situations on their own. The human trafficking industry moved underground where it needed to and has been perpetuated by globalization and poverty ever since. Today, there are over 90 different countries that have not criminalized slavery or exploitation explicitly, which means that no one can be punished in court for the enslavement of people or for participating in the slave trade in these countries (Shwartz & Allain, 2020). According to the Antislavery in

Domestic Legislation (ADL) database, even Canada and Sweden- two wealthy countries- do not have provisions against slavery specifically (ADL, n.d.).

So, why is this still a problem today? One might think that the world has eliminated the use for enslaved human labor, but this is not true in all industries. Today, human exploitation is most often used as a way to save money in order to increase profit. According to The World Bank, “25 million small producers in developing countries [...] depend on [trade] as their sole source of income, each supporting an average of five family members” (Wild, 2005, p. 1). This means that many producers rely on their company’s profit alone to survive, so in some cases they will try to find the cheapest labor they can in order to decrease their spending and increase company profit. Cheap labor may mean enslaving workers, but it can also mean simply exploiting them with wages below the poverty level. By paying workers as little as possible without benefits, producers are able to increase their profits dramatically. For example, coffee is a staple first mentioned in writing from the dark ages; it was referred to as some kind of mysterious drink that allowed people to stay awake through the night and into the day. As it became more and more popular it became an important part of world trade. More demand meant the industry needed more and cheaper labor. Enter the enslaved. With higher popularity and increased production, prices have dropped, causing the need for cheap labor to grow and the likelihood of encountering modern slavery in the coffee industry to grow as well (Wild, 2005). While human trafficking in the food industry is an ever-growing issue, one of the most common places to see it today is within the sex industry. In some places, like Cambodia, human sex trafficking has become an economic scaffold.

## **Cambodia**

In 2012, the WHO (World Health Organization) declared sex trafficking to be a serious world health issue. In South Asia, it all started during the pre-colonial era when the British were in control of Burma (known as Myanmar since 1889). During this time, many women were tricked into coming to Burma (Myanmar) from India thinking that they were going to get married and have a future. These women would instead be sold into the sex trade as “comfort women” whose job was to “serve” the men who worked and lived in the country. Their story was framed in such a way to make it look as though they came over by choice and free will, but this was never the case (Bernstein, 2016).

Cambodia has always been a country full of creativity and art that is largely based around religion. Early residents of the country believed in animism- the presence of a spirit in every living and inanimate thing including mountains, lakes, and animals. They later received influences of Hinduism from their Indian neighbors, and then adopted Buddhism in the 13th century. Today Buddhism is the official religion of Cambodia, but traces of Hinduism and Animism can still be found in local traditions and practices (Goldberg, 2020).

By the early 19th century, Cambodia made advancements in art, education, music and dance but, at the same time, they faced interregional conflict with their neighbors, Thailand and Vietnam. The reigning King Norodom Sihanouk chose to sign a protection treaty with France in the mid-1860s with the intention of gaining power and stability from the alliance until Cambodia could hold its own. Under French protection, Cambodia had gained economic security and had made educational and artistic progress. France struggled to control its colonies in Indonesia and Cambodia was constantly fighting for autonomy until 1953, when Cambodia declared independence and became the kingdom of Cambodia under the rule of Prince Norodom

Sihanouk (United States Department of State, n.d.). The country was stable again, but the approaching decade marked the beginning of a new struggle (CIA, 2021). During this time, a communist insurgent group known as the Khmer Rouge was trying to gain a following in Cambodia's cities. This group believed that Cambodia had become weak and needed a renewal of nationalism, self-reliance, and to abandon any western idealism in order to become a great country again (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). The group started out small and was largely unpopular until a military coup led to the downfall of Prince Sihanouk. The Khmer Rouge took this opportunity to join forces with Sihanouk, who had been very well liked, and began to gain footing. The coup had caused enough internal turmoil to result in a civil war, which served as the perfect distraction while the insurgents began their own takeover. They started with small villages, but by 1975 had gained control of the country's capital, Phnom Penh (History, 2018). This also happened to be the same year the United States pulled out of the Vietnam War, ending U.S. attacks on both Vietnam and Cambodian soil (Pike, 2020).

Under the rule of Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge, the country was renamed Kampuchea and the year 1975 was deemed "Year Zero" in reference to his goal to remodel the whole country and rewrite its history. Pol Pot started by relocating urbanites to rural farming communes based on his belief that communal farming would increase food production and lead to economic stability (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.). During this process, thousands of Vietnamese people were driven out of the country, spiking international conflict (Pike, 2020). Intellectuals, professors, artists, and leaders were executed and tortured in order to prevent an uprising. These deaths eliminated the educated population of Cambodia and instilled fear in anyone who considered trying to become educated. The country was isolated from the outside world and the doors of schools and universities closed, the education of children and

adults alike was put on pause during the rule of Pol Pot. Religion ceased to be practiced as Pol Pot saw it as a distraction from the utopia he wished to create. Around 2.2 million people died of starvation, being overworked, disease, torture, and murder under the reign of the Khmer Rouge (History, 2018).

Pol Pot ruled until January of 1979 when the Revolutionary Army of the National Front for Solidarity and Liberation of Cambodia overthrew his regime. This group was part of an internal resistance to the Khmer Rouge regime that had gained the support of the Vietnamese government. That year, 120,000 Vietnamese soldiers including armor and infantry units invaded Cambodia, and “after a 17-day blitzkrieg, Phnom Penh fell on January 7” (Pike, 2020, para. 6). The country was renamed “The People’s Republic of Kampuchea” and later became the Kingdom of Cambodia in 1989.

At this point the Vietnamese were still occupying and ruling the country, but they faced opposition from the coalition government of Democratic Kampuchea and remnants of the Khmer Rouge. Civil War ensued and the Khmer Rouge quickly lost support and influence. In 1993, Prince Norodom Sihanouk came back to rule under a constitutional monarchy and by 1998 Cambodia had regained relative stability and the Khmer Rouge was fully disbanded (Pike, 2020). This may sound like a victory, but Cambodia had been ravaged by a genocide that they may never fully recover from (History, 2018). Poverty runs very high in the country for a long time, and the locals have turned to many different methods in order to survive. These include agriculture and mining, as cheap labor can be procured through the exploitation of local workers. But one of the most popular sources of income in Cambodia comes from the sex trade. Local Cambodian men are some of the most common consumers, but the country has also become a



hotspot for “sex tourism” which often involves young children from the ages of three all the way up to 18 (CIA, 2021).

The sex trade has evolved into a source of income for families struggling to survive. In many cases a family will sell one or more of their own daughters into the sex trade in order to pay off debts, but they might never see them again (Hume, et al., n.d.). For the fortunate girls and women who are rescued or find a way to escape the trade, becoming a part of society again can be very difficult. In accordance with Buddhist faith and culture, these girls are viewed as “unclean” after being raped, and it may be seen as bad luck or dishonorable to invite them back into the family and community. In a collectivist society like this one, the good of everyone is prioritized over the good of one, so anything that can be done to protect the community from bad luck is acceptable.

One of the only things that has any kind of redeeming power for these victims is the prospect of a job. Many of the welfare programs in Cambodia that work to rescue victims of the sex trade Also work to find them jobs and an education to help them gain independence from their families and potential traffickers. Don Brewster, founder of Agape International Missions (AIM), Is a part of one of these programs. He has noted that having a job often helps to restore some of the dignity but sex trafficking victims of lost. It helps them find opportunities to build a life for themselves instead of following into the same patterns as their parents and community. (Hume, et. al., n.d.).

Since the rule of the Khmer Rouge and the subsequent uproot of Cambodia’s academic world, people have turned to generational stories and superstitions to cope with life, as the educational development of other countries has not reached them yet. One popular belief among Cambodian and other Asian cultures is that having sex with a virgin will cure pre-existing STDs

(Hume, et al., n.d., para. 28). Beliefs like these of lead to younger and younger victims of the sex trade. Although this issue is perpetuated by locals who turn a blind eye, foreign visitors are one of the biggest contributors to the sex trade industry.

In addition to issues within the community, lack of economic infrastructure in Cambodia and corrupt government has led to lax law enforcement and an increased use of bribery. The police force in Cambodia is known to be very corrupt and may even profit from the sex trade when officers are bribed to allow or even participate in the act of human trafficking (U4 anti-corruption resource centre, n.d.). Lax law enforcement continues to contribute to human trafficking in other countries as well, like Ghana.

## **Ghana**

Some of the most common victims of the sex trade in Cambodia are minors. This pattern carries over to another popular industry for human trafficking on the Gold Coast of Africa. This region was once a British colony, known for gold mining, but today it is known as the Republic of Ghana. Today Ghana produces 70% of the world's cocoa, the majority of which is picked and processed by children under the age of 18. This issue, much like the issue of sex trafficking in Cambodia, started with money – specifically capitalism. American capitalism perpetuated the slave trade from Africa to America when it came to cotton plantations, sugar cane plantations, and tobacco plantations in the early 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Even though America has “eradicated” slavery within its borders, we are still contributing to acts of slavery across the globe. The United States is one of the greatest consumers of chocolate in the world, and over half of that chocolate is produced with cocoa picked by enslaved children on the Gold Coast.

The issue of child labor in the cocoa industry has been pointed out and reported by journalists and other organizations many times, but this is only caused the farms using child labor to become more and more secretive, moving their operations underground in order to keep up with demand. Enslaved children often make less than two US dollars a day on average. By using enslaved people and children specifically, farmers are able to keep production costs down and cocoa prices up. Children are not as often sold into the industry like they are in Cambodia, but many have no choice except to work on the cocoa farms in order to support their families in the poverty ridden countries they come from.

Famous chocolate companies like Hershey, M&R, and Nestlé will not and cannot guarantee that any of their chocolate is made without child labor. For many years these big companies have ignored child slavery, but in most cases, they could not trace the origin of their cocoa even if they wanted to. Since its exposure began in the early 2000s, the chocolate industry has been promising to eradicate child slavery, but it is constantly missing the mark. Even though they have not directly addressed the problem with their own supply chain, they have been trying to encourage better agricultural methods overseas, encouraging education, building schools, and trying to rely on child labor less.

Some cocoa has been marked “certified” for ethical business practices by third-party groups such as Fair Trade and Rainforest Alliance. But this marking has been weakened by the lack of rigorous enforcement of child labor laws within the countries where it is a problem. Third-party inspectors are generally required to visit fewer than 10% of cocoa farms in order to certify their product, so the vast majority of exploited children are being missed. This is an issue that is so much bigger than the industry itself, and it is clear that change will not happen until greater powers get involved and begin to enforce stricter boundaries. Yet another area that could

use this type of reinforcement is not so far away. Italy is also struggling to protect people from slavery while its own government looks the other way.

## Italy

Due to the intense conditions- war, famine, poverty- of some countries in Africa, as well as some Middle Eastern countries, citizens of these places have been immigrating to Italy for years. In comparison, Italy is better off in a lot of ways, and it may seem like a good place to apply for asylum. But unfortunately, the president of Italy is less than welcoming to foreigners, even if they try to immigrate the “right way.” Legality has almost nothing to do with acceptance and, in many cases, seems to do nothing to help either.

In “A Practical Guide for Asylum Seekers in Italy,” published by the Italian Ministry of the Interior, asylum is referred to as “applying for international protection” (Ministry of the interior, p. 4). This protection “guarantees above all the right not to be repatriated and to stay in Italy” (p. 6). Unfortunately, Italy on average has only a 20% acceptance rate when it comes to asylum applications (Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull’immigrazione, 2019). In 2019, Italy received applications for international protection from the following countries.

Country and Number of Applicants in 2019	Acceptance Rate
Venezuela- 1,544	93%
El Salvador- 2,520	51%
Nigeria- 1,253	17%

Pakistan- 7,305	15%
Ukraine- 1,775	12%
Ivory Coast- 407	12%
Peru- 2,445	11%
Gambia- Unknown	9%
Guinea- Unknown	9%
Morocco- 1,510	8%
Albania- 1,547	8%
Bangladesh- 1,340	7%
Senegal- 867	6%

(Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione, 2019) See Appendix A.

Italy's overall rate of acceptance is extremely low, but Venezuela and El Salvador are outliers that bring the average up. After throwing those two data points out, the acceptance rate drops to only 10%. Unfortunately, many of these asylum applicants, whether or not accepted, would prefer to do anything other than venturing back home to the war-torn or poverty-ridden states they escaped from. So, many of those who are rejected choose to wander the Italian countryside in search of work and safety.

Unfortunately for these people, the Italian Mafia is more than a Hollywood production. The mafia is still very active within the country especially on the northern coast where many immigrants are coming in from Africa. When these immigrants do not receive asylum and are

desperate for work, middlemen known as *Caporali* (often members of the mafia) find and recruit them to work on tomato farms and other agricultural sites across the country.

Immigrants are likely to have all personal belongings and forms of ID taken from them and then are charged for transportation to their new job. When they are placed on farms involved with the industry of human trafficking, they are usually placed in living conditions that are less than humane, forced to work long hours with no breaks, and are usually paid €2 a day or less. These people are isolated from the outside world and from other workers as well. They are beaten down and stripped of their humanity for the same reason that cocoa farmers in Africa enslave children- to keep costs low.

Each of these problems stems from a globalized economy. Which sounds like a good thing, but each individual country is no longer supporting the needs of its citizens. Thanks to globalization, US citizens living in Wyoming- where winter temperatures can reach -30°F in January- can eat fruits and vegetables like tomatoes any time of year. Unfortunately, this means that demand for products like tomatoes has skyrocketed since the economy went global, and small farmers and producers cannot keep up without cheap labor. Many places around the world do not have enough money to compete or even survive in a globalized economy without slavery and human trafficking of some kind.

The critical analysis of human trafficking issues across the globe can offer the field of communication a cross cultural understanding of what causes human exploitation and what communication practices lead to the poor treatment of our fellow humans. In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, these issues have become even greater and more emphasized. The global economy has been increasingly damaged by lacking trade and this is the knowledge that led to the development of the following research questions:

## Research Questions

RQ1. What are the main causes of human trafficking across the world?

RQ2. How does poverty perpetuate human exploitation?

RQ3. How does globalization perpetuate human trafficking?

## Theory and Method

### *Theoretical Choice*

Hegemonic theory started out in the journals of the Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci. He believed that humankind is often controlled by force, but is also influenced by ideas (Bates, 1975). The ruling class has often used this concept to enforce hegemonic rule, meaning, “political leadership based on the consent of the led, a consent which is secured by the diffusion and popularization of the world view of the ruling class” (Bates, 1975, p. 352). This means that, by popularizing their ideas and coercing people into supporting them, the ruling class can gain power over those beneath them. In Gramsci’s own words:

The “spontaneous” consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is “historically” caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production. [...] The apparatus of state coercive power which “legally” enforces discipline on those groups who do not “consent” either actively or passively. (Gramsci, 1976, p. 12)

The ruling class does not gain consent from willing citizens in most cases, it is won by force, through coercion. In this case study I will be using hegemonic theory to analyze the power differences between groups of people in Cambodia, Ghana, and Italy. These groups include those who are impoverished and those who are not, government and citizens, consumers and producers. I will also analyze how the consent and coercion mentioned by Gramsci are used to enforce these dynamics.

### *Methodological Choice*

Critical analysis is a subject method of critique focused on learning from and developing new ideas based on those previously discovered by others. As opposed to a simple summary of what we know, a critical analysis allows us to look past the facts and draw meaning from texts and experiences (Harline, 2006). I will be using critical analysis to sift through the three examples of human trafficking I have mentioned to find similarities, patterns, differences, and causes. By analyzing the evidence provided by past scholars and those who are currently fighting against exploitation, I hope to draw out the answer to the question: what can we *do* about human trafficking?

## **Discussion**

### **RQ1. The Root of Human Trafficking**

We know that human trafficking is something that is happening all over the world, but where does it come from (RQ1)? There are minority groups in every nation across the world and many are dehumanized and oppressed by majority groups, but in some cases, like Cambodia and Ghana, oppressed people are the ones oppressing people. As previously mentioned, traffickers in Cambodia are often locals and even parents. *CNN News* reported on the experience of two



mothers in Cambodia who had sold their own daughters into the sex trade in order to pay off debts and eat. When interviewed about their motivation, both mothers expressed both their regret and their need for survival. "The debt that my husband and I have is too big, we can't pay it off," Kieu's mother, Neung told reporters. "What can you do in a situation like this? [...] I know that I did wrong so I feel regret about it, but what can I do?" she said. "We cannot move back to the past" (Hume, n.d. para. 40-42). Like many other Cambodian families, Kieu's is struggling with health and debt, and believed there was nothing left to do but take advantage of the sex trade. It has been normalized in the community and they are surely not the first family to try it.

Sephak's mother, Ann, told *CNN*, "We are very poor, so I must work hard [...] It's still not enough to live by and we're sick all the time." In regard to the sex trade she said, "I saw other people doing it and I didn't think it through [...] If I knew then what I know now, I wouldn't do that to my daughter" (Hume, n.d., para. 45-48). Ann's family could not even take care of their health, so it makes sense that they would look anywhere for help. Unfortunately, there are limited resources and Ann fell into the same situation as Neung. These stories show that the roots of human trafficking can be closer to home than one might expect. Strangers and kidnappers are not the only people who contribute to the trade., and the first root of the trafficking problem- poverty- will push people to do unthinkable things.

This situation is a good example of hegemonic power between two groups: the sex trafficking industry, and Cambodian citizens. Normally, parents would not likely consent to their child being raped and sold, but through years of cultural conditioning this practice has become normalized. People do not believe that there is another option because they have been taught that this is all that is left, and so the ruling class (the sex trade in this case) has pressured them into giving consent. Even cultures that are very different from that in Cambodia will agree that

children are generally valued. In fact, an international study based on “the value of children” found that parents across the world value children for their companionship, economic benefits, and emotional benefits (Trommsdorff, 2006). But parents in Ghana are also forced to send their children away to be overworked on cocoa farms in order to survive. The government is not going to help them out of poverty, and they have been conditioned to believe that this is the only option. The cocoa industry has gained their consent and their power.

This idea brings to mind the concept of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Maslow’s hierarchy states that humans are motivated by five specific needs: physiological needs, safety needs, love and belonging, esteem and prestige, and self-actualization in that order (Aruma & Hanachor, 2017). When we examine the situation in Cambodia, we know that people are struggling to meet their own physiological and safety needs due to government corruption and extreme poverty. According to Maslow’s hierarchy, humans are not reasonably able to consider or meet their need for love and belonging, also known as companionship, without first meeting these two basic needs. When families and parents are not safe or physiologically well, they will sacrifice the companionship and sense of belonging with their children in order to survive. This phenomenon is also seen in Ghana, where young children are being sent away to work on farms in order to ensure their families’ survival. The need to live and fulfill basic needs is used against these people by the hegemonic power holders in order to coerce them into providing services that the industry needs.

In addition to the possibility of prioritizing survival over family, there is the threat of normalization. All over the world, human trafficking practices are seen as a normal part of everyday life. One of the Cambodian mothers mentioned earlier, Neoung, illustrated this in her interview with *CNN News*. According to the interview: ““Virginity selling” was widespread in

the community, and Neoung saw it as a legitimate option to make some income. “They think it is normal,” she says. “I told her, ‘Kieu, your dad is sick and can't work... Do you agree to do that job to contribute to your parents?’” (Hume, et. al., n.d.). When something like this happens so regularly and is so under-managed, it becomes easier and easier for traffickers of all kinds to walk around in the daylight and do their job.

In fact, in many places, traffickers have formed a community. They communicate, trade, and share with each other in their world. A University of Pennsylvania Doctoral student, Heather Evans (2019), pointed out in her dissertation that the internet has become an increasingly useful instrument in the construction of these communities. All over the worldwide web we are seeing more and more pedophiles gathering on internet forums to groom and lure children. And there are even books, like Mickey Royal’s *The Pimp Game: An Instructional Guide* (available for only \$14.95 on Amazon) that illustrate the methods and psychology behind manipulation and grooming traffickers can use to dehumanize their victims (Evans, 2019). The following excerpt was highlighted by Evans:

You'll start to dress her, think for her, own her. If you and your victim are sexually active, slow it down. After sex, take her shopping for one item. Hair and/or nails is fine. She'll develop a feeling of accomplishment. The shopping after a month will be replaced with cash. The love making turns into raw sex. She'll start to crave intimacy and be willing to get back into your good graces. After you have broken her spirit, she has no sense of self value. Now pimp, put a price tag on the item you have manufactured. (Royal, 1998)

Victims are not always kidnapped and forced into the sex trade or any other trade. In many cases, as illustrated in this quote, they are coerced or groomed into being who their trafficker wants them to be. The hegemonic power a trafficker holds over their victim is secured through manipulation, and lax laws and enforcement as well as passive populations who turn the other way are at the root of human trafficking issues.

One of the greatest factors in the way we treat others and how we are treated is the rhetoric we use. Dehumanizing rhetoric and depersonalizing terms allow us to feel more comfortable discussing difficult things like trafficking and exploitation. Some examples of this are using words like “slaves” as opposed to “enslaved people.” By eliminating the word “people” it is easier for readers and listeners to forget that victims are people with families and lives and needs and wants. In the expert from *The Pimp Game*, this phenomenon is clear through the use of words like “victim” and “item”. The people who are taken advantage of in each of these stories are seen as commodities or tools for someone else’s business. This rhetoric allows community members to accept what is happening and traffickers to ignore the fact that they are mistreating their equals. A glaring example of this can be seen in Italy’s asylum issue.

## **RQ2. Poverty and Exploitation**

At a European conference on security and immigration in 2018, Matteo Salvini, Italy’s interior minister, and the Luxembourg foreign minister got into a verbal skirmish over the importance of immigrants. Luxembourg foreign minister apparently pointed out the fact that Europe needs migrants because the population is aging (Giuffrida, 2018). In response to this, however, Salvini declared that “maybe in Luxenberg there’s this need; in Italy there’s the need to help our kids have kids, not to have **new slaves** to replace the children we are not having” I

(Giuffrida, 2018, para. 4). Salvini's use of dehumanizing rhetoric during this interaction is a perfect example of why human exploitation in Italy and many other countries is not going away anytime soon. If the leaders and rulers of these places will not recognize these people as people, then what hope do they have? Hegemonic theory comes into play here, as Italy's ruling class (the government and the mafia) uses the need of asylum seekers to gain their consent to be overworked and exploited just to avoid being deported, therefore supporting the Italian economy on their backs.

In the table previously noted, we can see that Italy is extremely unaccepting of asylum seekers from many countries, but there are two- Venezuela and El Salvador- that seem to be the exception (Appendix A). This begs many questions, for example, does Italy have a better relationship with these countries? Does it have anything to do with their language, race, or political agenda? Given the past language of Italy's interior minister and the echoes of fascism that still light the corners of their government practice, it is hard to believe that the acceptance of two countries is an act of pure goodwill. Salvini is likely one of many Italian leaders acting in fear of the "browning" of Italy that would come from providing protection to darker races of people from countries like Nigeria. It is known that Italy has a "safe list" of acceptable countries of origin that is publicly available but the country never released the reasoning behind these choices.

One similarity found among all three of our trafficking examples is the spending of money and the lack thereof. In Cambodia, the economy has become weak due to political unrest, government failure, bribery, and corruption and evidence of this weakness lies in their issue with child trafficking. Families are pushed to the brink when it comes to debt and scarce work and

have come to the point over and over of selling their daughters to be used by foreigners and neighbors alike. *This* is extreme poverty.

In Ghana, children are going to work under questionable conditions for hours a day on the cocoa plantations just to make enough money to stay alive. Their families are not making money or saving any of it, it all has a destination before it is even earned. In Ghana and Italy, the roots of human exploitation are related, but not completely dependent on survival. Many of the children “employed” by Ghana’s cocoa farms work so that their families can eat, but the problem here is based on supply and demand thanks to globalization.

### **RQ3. Globalization and the Perpetuation of Human Trafficking**

Author Joseph Stiglitz in his book, *Making Globalization Work* (2006) defined globalization as “the international flow of ideas and knowledge, the sharing of cultures, global civil society, and the global environmental movement” (p. 4). This concept was originally intended to be the economic integration of countries. Globalization as a concept was supposed to “raise living standards throughout the world, give poor countries access to overseas market so that they can sell their goods, allow in for an investment that will make new products at cheaper prices, and open borders so that people could travel abroad and be educated, work, and sent home earnings to help their families find new businesses” (p. 4).

The concept of globalization could have been an extremely positive thing for the world, but in many ways, it has let the world down. Stiglitz argues that this is simply because of how the idea was carried out. Even if it started with economic benefits in mind, politics has shaped it into an industrial ploy to meet the individual wants of the political powers. But times are changing. In 2004, at a World Economic Forum meeting in Davos, a popular Swiss ski resort, the

views on globalization and all its positivity began to change. Was it really doing what it was supposed to for the poor countries of the world specifically? Participants at the invitation-only event started to wonder if these countries would be able to cope with the economic changes at the end of the 20th century. Instead of being a discussion about international marketing, it became one about human rights and fair trade.

Pressure was put on less developed countries by some who said that if globalization was not working for these countries, they must just need to “open their markets more to free trade and globalize faster. They needed to keep up” (Stiglitz, 2006, p. 5). But a counterpoint was provided by someone Stiglitz refers to as “an Indian running a micro-credit bank” (p. 5). This person pointed out the fact that the presence of international banks was making it increasingly difficult for small farms and businesses like his. It is just too difficult for smaller operations to keep up with global demand and also support themselves. Industry, international banks, and the demand of consumers hold hegemonic power over small producers. These small groups are forced to play by tougher rules created in favor of big business and global producers in order to keep up.

This issue is clearly represented in the examples of human trafficking in Ghana and Italy. Both are home to industries that take advantage of children and adults who are struggling to survive in order to make a profit. Supply and demand determine the outcome of so many lives in these places. Competitive industry requires cheap labor in order to function, and migrant workers are the ones who usually pay the price.

### **Solutions**

After learning about how many people are being trafficked around the world and how often, it is impossible not to try to think of solutions. This is a difficult thing to do as just one person, but luckily there are many others who have been working on this issue and developing

solutions that are gaining traction. One of the first I learned about, who was also my introduction to this topic was a Laramie, Wyoming resident named Ruth Williams. Around 15 years ago, she read a story about a young girl in Cambodia. This girl had been sold into the trade when she was only 5 years old after her mother died. Her picture was posted in a magazine by a woman named Somaly Mam, who runs a program called Agir Pour Les Femmes En Situation Precaire or AFESIP (Translated to stand for “Acting for Women in Distressing Situations”). This program is run out of Cambodia and has existed since 1996. The girls staying at the AFSIP center learn life skills and Somaly mam sets them up with a future. About 75% have been trafficked and can no longer attend regular schools because they have been ostracized, but Somaly Mam works to rescue girls from the sex trade then and re-integrate them by educating them and getting them to college.

The sex trade industry causes issues with unbelievably long-term effects. Some girls enter the sex trafficking industry before they even learn how to speak and then have a harder time learning once they have been rescued. When Williams learned about these issues and the AIFSIP program, she knew she had to be a part of it, so she started a companion program to AIFSIP based in Laramie Wyoming. Williams’ effort started with writing letters to the little girl in the magazine. After getting into contact with Somaly Mam, Ruth learned that what rescued girls needed more than anything to heal was a mother’s love, so she began to send packages and letters and pictures.

Ruth set up a program of her own called “God Mothers,” meant to be an organization of pen-pal moms that would provide love and help to trafficking victims staying at AFSIP’s headquarters in Cambodia. Soon after, however, Ruth realized that because most people in Cambodia are Buddhist, so the name “God mother” may not mean the same thing to them. She



changed the program's name to "Heart Mothers", and it stuck. Today there are around 87 volunteer heart mothers, 57 of whom are currently writing to someone who is at the AFSIP center where over 7,000 girls have been saved so far.

In Ghana and Italy, there is so much left to be done by the local government, but anyone can fight against the exploitation of adults and children in the agriculture industry by being aware of their food purchases. In most cases we have no idea that we are purchasing food that may have been picked or produced through human exploitation, but by doing the research we can make more mindful choices. As consumers we can look for labels on our food that certify the brands as "fair trade." The certifications are still a little bit too easy for companies to qualify for, but it's one way to start being mindful of our purchases. Through [endslaverynow.org](http://endslaverynow.org) there is even a slave free shopping guide one can follow to choose humanely produced brands.

There are hundreds of websites online that cover which brands to buy from and which ones to avoid, but an even less complicated way of making smart purchases is by buying locally produced foods from small businesses and farmers markets. Although this route may be more expensive, it is a surer way to know where your food is coming from and how it is produced. We can also avoid buying from brands that are known to be a part of the problem, like Nestle, and Hershey. Consumers can even join mindful shopping groups like Civil Eats, an online group committed to advocating against slavery in the food industry.

The people who are stuck in trafficking situations today, no matter where they are, need one thing more than anything else: advocacy. By reading and researching about these issues, spreading the word, and practicing mindful consumer habits we can all begin to contribute less of a problem and more to the solution. Advocating for companies to take action against slavery in

their supply chains and contributing to programs like AIFSIP and Heart Mothers allows us to push for change and create it.

### **Limitations**

There were several limitations to this study. Unfortunately, many of the sources for Italy's statistics and immigration policy are in Italian. The language barrier may have prevented a full and accurate understanding of these sources as well as some sources from Ghana's and Cambodia's history. In addition to this, each of these issues has existed for a very long time, so I was certainly limited by how much history I could include in and consider for this paper. All context is important, and I have tried to include the most pertinent. This case study is also limited to only three countries and the experiences and facts recorded here may not be representative of every human trafficking case across the world.

### **Future Research**

One possible route for future research is to try and gain an understanding of why Italy is so unaccepting of specific asylum seekers but not others. A study of the country's history of fascism and the attitudes of its political leaders could lead to further insight. In addition to this, interviews with trafficking victims in these specific countries as well as interviews with leaders of said countries would provide an interesting comparison between the two points of view and their understanding of the problem.

In the case of Ghana, I think there are several routes to take. From a media point of view, I think researching and proposing a campaign to put pressure on industries like the chocolate industry to take a real stance against child slavery in their production chains. Doing an in-depth

or investigative report on one specific company, like Hershey, to trace their supply chain back to the source would also be helpful to our case against them and put pressure on the brand.

As far as future research on Cambodia goes, I think doing more research on what the government can do and is doing to prevent sex trafficking could lead to important discoveries about what steps still need to be taken. From this research a plan might eventually be proposed to improve the parts of Cambodia's economy that allow such tragedies to continue and to educate citizens.

### **Conclusion**

Slavery is a modern but invisible problem. The critical analysis of three countries struggling with this issue- Italy, Ghana, and Cambodia- has demonstrated the common roots they all share. These include poverty, the global economy, supply and demand, dehumanizing rhetoric used by world leaders, and cultural insecurity. This study proves that we all contribute to human exploitation in a globalized economy, and by doing nothing we perpetuate the exploitation of people and children in and outside of the agriculture industry. In light of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important now than ever before that we spread awareness about trafficking risks and advocate for those whose voices are not being heard. By doing the research, joining advocacy groups, and making mindful purchases, everyone can make a difference.

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## Appendix A

Country and Number of Applicants in 2019	Acceptance Rate
Venezuela- 1,544	93%
El Salvador- 2,520	51%
Nigeria- 1,253	17%
Pakistan- 7,305	15%
Ukraine- 1,775	12%
Ivory Coast- 407	12%
Peru- 2,445	11%
Gambia- Unknown	9%
Guinea- Unknown	9%
Morocco- 1,510	8%
Albania- 1,547	8%
Bangladesh- 1,340	7%
Senegal- 867	6%

(Associazione per gli studi giuridici sull'immigrazione, 2019)