

## Understanding the Demand behind Human Trafficking

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As with many criminal activities our understanding of human trafficking is piecemeal and often based on anecdotal information. Our understanding is also complicated by the global reach of trafficking, and by social and cultural variation in the ways that the crime of trafficking unfolds. Compared to other criminal activities it is especially difficult to get a clear picture of human trafficking. In part, this is because the victims of trafficking are more likely to be hidden or unreachable than, for example, the victims of burglary, or even murder. The result is a crime for which the technique of representative sample victim surveys does not apply. This invisibility has an impact on our understanding of the demand for trafficked persons as well. Trafficking, enslavement, forced prostitution, and kidnapping share the distinction that they are crimes in which the victim is also the money-making “product” of the criminal enterprise. Like the bag of cocaine that a trafficker also keeps hidden at all costs, the trafficking victim-product will ultimately be used and, possibly, exhausted and disposed of. This fact, that the victim is also the product, may help us to think through the demand for trafficked people. Products are conceptualized in a number of ways, and analyzing the “selling points” of trafficked people as products should help us to understand the context and reasoning behind the demand for trafficking victims.

This brief paper aims to explore trafficking demand using some perspectives from the field of marketing. It may seem invidious to use such terms when referring to human beings, but today there is a large and vibrant market for trafficked persons in a number of economic activities. Traffickers are regularly thinking of how to meet and stimulate the demand for their product. Victims of trafficking, noticeably those trafficked for sexual exploitation, must somehow be presented and marketed to “consumers”. If we are to begin to understand demand we must try to put ourselves in the shoes of those who stand on both sides of the supply and demand equation. Before doing so, however, it is necessary to review some of the broad themes in trafficking and to examine any information that already exists on demand for trafficked people.

Every case of trafficking is unique, but all share certain characteristics. At the most basic level are the commonalities specified in the definition of trafficking given in the United Nations *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* – the action of transporting people by means of force or deception in order to control and exploit them. It can also be said that there are three underlying factors at work that foster trafficking: 1. within the origin countries, a seemingly endless supply of victims remain available for exploitation; 2. within the destination countries there seems to be an endless demand for the services of the victims; and 3. organised

criminal networks, some large and some small, have taken control of this economic “supply and demand” situation to traffic and exploit trafficked persons in order to generate enormous profits for themselves.

I recently carried out a small statistical study<sup>2</sup> to determine the factors that most strongly predict trafficking in persons from countries and to countries. While most of this work concentrated on exploring the “push” factors that moved people to place themselves in situations in which they might be trafficked, I also sought to understand what best predicted trafficking in persons *into* a country, that is, the perceived “pull” factors as well as the relative permeability of a destination country’s borders. Unfortunately, there is no way at this time to estimate numerically the permeability of borders, though governmental corruption seems to be one possible indicator of permeability, since corruption often plays a part in the opening of borders to traffickers. “Pull” factors are somewhat easier to specify. The opportunities perceived to exist in the destination country by the trafficking victim before being trafficked include the perceived opportunity of employment, which in turn seems to be linked to the demographic profile of the destination country. The demographic profile, for example, of the Western European countries is much “older” than that of the developing world, which can lead to a shortage of younger workers who might tend to take up low-skill jobs. A shortage of workers for low-skill jobs suggests a potential demand for immigrant or trafficked workers willing or forced to take such jobs.

However, the perception of such opportunity may be at variance with the reality of such opportunity. Around the world, the stories told by recruiters to entice victims into trafficking will have little relation to the actual situation in the destination country. Moreover, most of these factors, with the exception of governmental corruption are negated when criminal involvement in trafficking leads to the coercion or enslavement of the trafficking victim. When the potential, possibly smuggled, migrants lose their free will and become victims of trafficking, their perception and pursuit of opportunity becomes moot. Having said that, the statistical study found that the “pull” factors were much weaker than “push” factors in predicting trafficking to a destination country. Those that did emerge as statistically significant were

- the proportion of the destination’s country’s male population over age 60,
- the level of governmental corruption,
- the level of food production,
- low infant mortality.

For the most part, these are simply indicators of prosperity and stability, and reflect the accepted knowledge that the traffic in persons flows from poorer to richer countries. From a trafficker’s point of view the perfect destination country would be a relatively rich country with just enough corruption to allow low risk access through its borders.

Additionally, the trafficker’s preferred destination country would also have demand for enslaved workers. Globally, there is clearly extensive demand. In attempting to estimate the productive capacity of enslaved workers worldwide, obviously a tentative exercise, and doing so conservatively, I arrived at an estimate of \$13 billion per year. This is the value generated by workers enslaved around the world, from the relatively low amounts

of profit generated by rural bonded labor in India, to the extremely high profits generated by enslaved prostitutes in North America and Western Europe. Within the global economy \$13 billion is a pittance, about the same amount that Americans spend on blue jeans each year, but within the criminal economy, and added to other trafficking profits from drugs and weapons, it is significant. That said, the traffickers cannot generate demand by themselves, indeed were there no demand whatsoever, criminals would be unlikely to attempt to generate it, because criminal businesses tend to be opportunistic rather than developmental. For trafficking to occur there must exist in the destination country an economic context in which enslaved workers can be exploited and a social context that allows treating human beings in this way. Examining the worldview of the “consumers” will help us to understand demand for trafficked people.

### ***Marketing People***

It is not enough simply to say that the “consumers” of trafficked people want them for exploitation and profit. Within our thinking about slavery is the temptation to treat it as an issue that is black and white, good versus evil, a scenario of vicious perpetrators and innocent victims. In fact, trafficking and enslavement are much more complex. Slavery is a social and economic relationship, it is a relationship marked by extreme differentials of power, by violence, and by exploitation, but it is still a relationship between two people. As a relationship it exists within a context of social, economic, and moral expectations. What can we say about that context that helps explain the market for trafficked people?

Firstly, it is important to recognize that the “consumers” of trafficked people operate within a moral economy that allows them to rationalize this activity. This moral economy will not normally be the dominant cultural or legal context, but a sub-culture that in some way defines trafficked people in a way that allows their exploitation. In northern India I interviewed a man, a minor government official and landowner, who controlled and used bonded laborers. His family had enslaved some families of bonded workers for generations. He explained to me why this was a reasonable activity:

*Of course I have bonded laborers: I'm a landlord. I keep them and their families and they work for me. When they aren't in the fields I have them doing the household work, washing clothes, cooking, cleaning, making repairs, everything. After all they are from the Kohl caste, that's what they do, work for Vasya's like me. I give them food and a little land to work. They've also borrowed money so I have to make sure that they stay on my land till it is paid back. They will work on my farm till it is all paid back, I don't care how old they get, you can't just give money away!*

*After all, there is nothing wrong in keeping bonded labor. They benefit from the system and so do I, even if agriculture is completely mechanized I'll still keep my bonded laborers. You see, the way we do it I am like a father to these workers. It is a father-son relationship, I protect them and guide them. Of course, sometimes I have to discipline them as well, just as a father would.*

Other slaveholders have also told me their slaves are like their children, that they need the close control and care of enslavement. There is also the argument of tradition: since bondage has been going on for so long, it must be the natural order of things. For other slaveholders it is a simple question of priorities: enslaving others is unfortunate, they say, but their own family's welfare depends on it. Most disturbing are the slaveholders that have convinced themselves that their slaves are less than human, replaceable and disposable inputs in their business.

To address this moral economy we must remember that human rights are based on the privileging and then codification of the victim's definitions of an action, normally an action that harms them. Virtually every action that we now think of as a violation of human rights was once defined as acceptable. Trafficking and enslavement were once legitimate and legal activities, accepted economic pursuits in which the well-being of the slave was of concern only in as much as the beef farmer of today is concerned about the well-being of his cattle. The public viewed the activity of enslavement from the perspective of the slaveholder. This was a business and one that supported an extensive economy. While it was sometimes criticized on economic grounds, such arguments had little impact on reducing slavery. To bring an end to slavery required a public redefinition, incorporating the point of view of the slave, of the action of enslavement. When the experience and views of the victim of any harmful action are socially privileged, that is the beginning of the process that leads to the codification of a human right. Over time, the history of human rights is the extension of more and more rights to broader and broader populations. By more rights I mean the extension of rights, beyond the original protections against murder and slavery, to free speech, to education, to religious expression (to name just a few). By broader populations I note that "rights" historically were assigned to males, usually of a certain ethnicity, and over time extended to women, to other ethnicities, and to children.

This digression into the origin of human rights is relevant because the "consumer" of trafficked people is operating within a moral economy in which this extension of rights to trafficking victims has not occurred. Demand for trafficked persons is based, in part, in an acceptance, at a personal level by the "consumer", of their status as people without rights. Defining the victims in this way might be based on any number of justifications, which might be racist or sexist in character. The behavior of the traffickers and the "consumer" will be more or less hidden depending on the extent to which the surrounding public also holds these views, or is simply apathetic.

One key path to lessening demand is a general and pervasive public redefinition of the activity. When public awareness is keen and public attitudes are very strongly negative toward trafficking and enslavement, there may still be those who consider it an acceptable activity, but accomplishing the exploitation of trafficked persons will be another matter. When a society's moral economy vigorously condemns trafficking and is willing to support that condemnation with resources, prosecutions will be high and the costs of trafficking and enslavement will be prohibitive.

***Wholesalers, Retailers and the USP***

Given that we have not achieved a general public awareness of trafficking nor a broad political will and allocation of resources to its eradication, we have to look toward the process of trafficking to throw light on questions of demand. Within a moral economy in which trafficking occurs, it is important to understand that traffickers and the “consumers” of trafficked people are not necessarily the same individuals. Some are “wholesalers”, the recruiters, transporters, and traffickers who harvest and move people into the trafficking streams. They convert free people into trafficking victims by taking control of their lives, brutalizing them, taking their passports and documents, and restricting their movement. There are certain attributes they seek in their potential “product” – gullibility, physical health, and the most important attribute, profitability. Profitability, in turn, is determined by the demand by the “retail consumer” for certain attributes in the people they wish to exploit. These attributes vary according to the jobs or economic sectors in which the “retail consumer” intends to use the trafficked person. Different attributes will be needed for prostitution or agricultural work or domestic service, though there will be overlap as well.

One way to think through demand for any product is to consider its *Unique Selling Point(s)* (USP). When a marketing executive is presented with a new product, their key job is to find the product’s USP, the attribute or attributes that differentiate this product from all other products, and that feed into an existing or cultivated demand on the part of consumers. The notion of “cultivated demand” should not be alien to anyone who has been exposed to advertising, but it can apply to the demand for trafficking victims as well. Demand is not simple; it is normally brought into being by a complex array of social, political and economic forces. For our part it is worth asking: what is the USP of trafficked people? What attributes make them attractive to the consumers of trafficked people?

Anderson and O’Connell Davidson<sup>3</sup> discuss this in their report on demand for trafficking victims:

When employers and consumers pay for services/labour, they do not always simply wish to purchase a “thing” (the worker’s disembodied power to labour or serve) but also often wish to consume what has been termed “embodied labour”. This is to say that they may wish to make use of the labour/services of persons of a specific age, sex, race, nationality, caste, or class. Consumers of commercial sexual service provide a clear example here, since few clients would be equally happy to buy sex from an elderly man or a young woman. They may also have specific preferences regarding the racial or national identity of the sex workers they use. The same point applies to those who wish to consume the labour of domestic workers, wives, adopted children or *au pairs* within the private household. Equally, those who make money by organising and taking a cut from street beggars are not necessarily indiscriminate about the kind of people they “employ” (a healthy muscular adult male is unlikely to earn as much from begging as a frail elderly woman or a small child). Similarly, a person’s age and sex has a bearing on how effective a drug mule or pickpocket they are likely to make.<sup>4</sup>

The work of Anderson and Davidson, and other research<sup>5</sup>, suggests that there are parallels in the attributes that consumers of trafficked people demand in prostitution and domestic work. These attributes compose the USPs of trafficked people. Looking at each of these desirable characteristics in turn:

**Low Cost** – slaves across all of human history have shared a common situation, centered on violent control, loss of freewill, and economic exploitation. The way this core situation is played out has varied tremendously according to local cultural, economic, political, legal, social, and religious conditions. Slaves today experience the same basic situation of total control and exploitation, but for the first time in human history there is a dramatic alteration in the economic conditions of enslavement. For a number of reasons, linked to the population explosion and the ongoing impoverishment of much of the population of the developing world, slaves today are cheaper than at any time in history. This dramatic fall in the price of potentially enslavable people has had a profound impact on the use and treatment of trafficked persons<sup>6</sup>. Young men, trafficked from Mali into the Ivory Coast for agricultural work, clearly demonstrate this trend. A nineteen-year-old, healthy male accustomed to agricultural labor can be acquired for around \$50 in the Ivory Coast. The young man normally does not have any idea that he is being sold into slavery at the time, only that a fee is being taken to place him into work with a farmer. Once removed to the farm and placed under physical control, the farmer gets the entire productive capacity, the “embodied labor”, of this young man for as long as the farmer can control and exploit him. Compare that sum to the \$1000 that would be the price in 1850 in the American Deep South for an equivalent young male accustomed to agricultural work. Note, especially, that \$1000 in 1850 is the equivalent of \$38,500 in 2003. This fall in the price of slaves is in line with a handful of similar precipitous falls in history – computers being a good modern example (from hundreds of thousands of dollars to hundreds of dollars for the same computing capacity in about 30 years). The point of this comparison is to emphasize how the plummeting price of trafficked people has opened up new areas of demand. When people cost so little, they can be used profitably in ways that were not previously economic.

**Malleability** - To be useful and profitable a trafficked person must be malleable. The consumer of trafficked people must be able to get from the “product” the behaviors, services, and work that they want, and do so at a sufficiently low cost in upkeep and control. For the most part malleability is assured through violent intimidation, but this can be combined with psychological control, and threats against the families of the trafficked person. This malleability, the ability of the consumer to force the enslaved trafficked person to do anything they require, or to do anything they want to the trafficked person, is the mirror image of the vulnerability of the trafficked person. Members of the public who are confronting the realities of contemporary trafficking and enslavement for the first time often ask why trafficked people, finding themselves enslaved, do not simply resist or flee. The answer becomes clear when the array of tools used to ensure malleability is examined. At the most basic level physical attack and sexual assault induce a state of shock in a trafficked person. In shock, he or she is, at least temporarily, unable to resist. When such physical coercion is combined with sleep

deprivation, malnutrition, isolation, psychological intimidation, threats to other family members, and the withholding of documents, control becomes complete. Such control can be further assured when this occurs in a context in which the trafficked person does not speak the local language or have any familiarity with local culture. When the “work” required of the trafficked person is itself painful, demeaning, psychologically damaging, and exhausting, the initial state of shock can be extended into a state of disassociation from reality and even an identification with the consumer (abuser), sometimes known as the “Stockholm syndrome”, such as that found in some torture victims. For the consumer the question is how to maintain control and ensure malleability at the lowest cost. For example, locks are cheap, but armed guards can be expensive. The cost of maintaining the malleable enslaved worker is also a function of the social and legal context. If the chances of apprehension for trafficking are high and the penalties severe, this increases the potential cost. This question of context will be explored in more detail below.

***Like the “real thing”*** – A product’s USP can easily be one that is more perceived than real. Were this not true there would be no demand for clothing with certain designer labels. In trafficked people, in both domestic service and prostitution, there is a demand for enslaved workers that most approximate the “real thing”. Defining what constitutes the “real thing” is problematic, but it would be reasonable to say that a “real” domestic worker is efficient in household tasks, can understand the instructions and wishes of the consumer, is obedient, quiet, and deferential. Defining what would constitute a “real” sexual interaction within the context of prostitution is even more problematic, but there are some suppositions that might be made. These would include a sexual partner of the preferred gender, age range, and appearance. The last, while subjective, also follows known broad cultural patterns of “attractiveness”. Additionally, in prostitution the “real thing” would, like the domestic worker, be compliant or at least minimally cooperative. Being able to understand the instructions and wishes of the consumer could also be important in approximating the “real thing” in prostitution. The demand for trafficked people that are close to the “real thing” acts to reduce the pool of potential victims. This is because of both the required physical attributes of age, gender, and appearance, as well as the need for the enslaved worker to be able to have some understanding of the tasks required of them. As noted, trafficking flows move from poorer countries to richer countries, but one of the reasons that trafficked people are rarely moved from the very poorest countries directly to the richest countries is that they are unfamiliar with, or unable to communicate about, their required tasks. As in the previous example, the poor and usually illiterate young agricultural workers of Mali are trafficked to the relatively richer Ivory Coast. They rarely speak the local language, but they are familiar with the agricultural tasks they will be required to do. Were they to be trafficked directly into a suburban home in one of the richest countries, there would be a complete unfamiliarity with language, tasks, tools, and so forth. The sexual exploitation within prostitution avoids some of this difficulty by concentrating on a fundamental biological act, but prostitution still carries out that act within a complex context specific to the local culture.

***The Exotic*** – In prostitution, especially, there is a demand for the “exotic”. Quoting again from the study on demand carried out by Anderson and O’Connell Davidson for the Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women<sup>7</sup>:

...there are many studies that have explored the attitudes and practices of clients who *do* have a particular and focused interest in sex workers of a different racial, ethnic or national identity to themselves. Interview research with white Western men who practice sex tourism to Southeast Asian, Latin American and Caribbean countries reveal a constellation of attitudes towards gender, race and sexuality that simultaneously sexualise racially “othered” persons, and de-sexualise white women<sup>8</sup>. Western women who practice sex tourism voice similar forms of sexualised racism<sup>9</sup>.

It is clear that such attitudes are based within racist and nationalist notions of the superiority and inferiority of different groups. Exoticism may also be a desired characteristic in the trafficked domestic worker or other trafficked persons, but this has not been studied to the same extent.

***Allows the enjoyment of power*** – The basic relationship of exploitation is an expression of power. For some, this expression is in itself a benefit, a USP of the trafficked person. The exercise and enjoyment of power in this relationship can take several forms. At the simple economic level it involves being able to exert complete control over a worker, and reducing drastically the cost of the worker – through non-payment of wages, through substandard and inadequate subsistence, through the forced working of extremely long hours. But for many who exploit trafficked people, this exercise of power also carries a violent and sexualised meaning. The trafficked worker, under complete control, can be regularly brutalised or raped. In the case reports on trafficked domestic workers, examples of this are far too numerous to list. In some cases, such as the Lakireddy Bali Reddy case in San Francisco<sup>10</sup>, the opportunity to enjoy the exercise of physical and sexual power seem to have been primary determinants of the exploitation – the perpetrator already being rich and not needing to make a “profit” from the young women he trafficked into the United States.

These attributes must be also placed with what at first seems to be a contradictory “selling point” – ***sameness***. Exploiters of trafficked people may want their victims to be exotic, but they want to them be so within certain limits of sameness. Many products are sold to consumers with a balance of exoticism and sameness. A soft drink may be billed as “wild”, “unknown”, or “exotic”, but it will not be placed in a container that the consumer would fail to recognise as holding a soft drink. Nor would it violate the usually unstated dietary rules of the consumer’s culture, for example, in Western countries, by using blood as a key ingredient, no matter how nutritious or tasty that might be. The consumer of trafficked people wants a victim that can understand sufficiently what is expected of them, and for whom there is a basic understanding of the most basic of the physical artefacts of the culture in which they are exploited.

It is also worth considering the idea of “sameness” alongside the assembling of the trafficked person’s unique selling points into “skill bundles” including their other human skills. Demand tends to focus on people occupying the next lower rung of the economic ladder, not the rungs at great distance from the location or type of work involved in



exploitation. The “consumer” wants just enough skill and education for the trafficked person to be really useful, but not so much as to be a threat to the control they exercise.

The above are the key attributes, the unique selling points, of trafficked people. In understanding consumption, however, it is not enough to understand the attributes of the “product”, one must also get to grips with the context in which consumption occurs.

### *Domus of Control*

The exercise and enjoyment of power over the trafficked person cannot be accomplished, in most developed countries, in public. Since violence is a key, always present, ingredient in the relationship of exploitation, the “consumer” of trafficked people needs a location where violence can be used with impunity. In the developed North, this usually means a private home or a brothel – private spaces where total control over the trafficked person can be established, and the movements of the victims can be restricted. For those economic sectors in which the trafficked person is exploited out-of-doors, this normally occurs in secluded areas, such as the more remote farms where trafficked agricultural workers have been used. It is interesting to note that one of the most public uses of trafficked people, the “deaf Mexican” cases of New York, used as an isolating barrier the disability of the victims. In spite of being in public places in a densely populated city, the trafficked persons were cut off by virtue of their deafness and their inability to use North American sign language. For a significant period, this inability to communicate added to the violent control exercised over them, prevented them from escaping or gaining help in spite of the fact that they were, literally, standing in a crowd. When some of the trafficked people did begin to initiate communication outside their group, it led to their rescue.

Sweatshops also provide a locked-down context of control. People trafficked into such work exhibit some but not all of the USP attributes noted above. Those exploiting trafficked people in sweatshops are not interested in the exotic nature of their workers, but they are keenly interested in low cost, malleability, and the ability to exercise power over them. The result is high profits, and the potential for profit in products that would not be feasible with any but the most negligible labour cost. The most telling example of this in my own experience is the use of families trafficked from the state of Bihar in India to the state of Uttar Pradesh, and used there to make sand by pounding rocks with hammers<sup>11</sup>. Sand is such a ubiquitous substance, the manufacture of which is so simply accomplished with basic machines, that it is very difficult to imagine that “hand-made” sand could ever be an economically viable product without a virtual absence of labour costs.

Across the world there are a great many trafficked people caught up in such work on products for which a context of control can be established and the victim isolated: quarries, mines, remote farms, off-shore fishing platforms, or locked workrooms. The total number of those trafficked into such work would easily reach the hundreds of thousands, much more than a “niche” market, and an area that needs some of the

illumination currently concentrated in the spotlight on trafficking into prostitution and domestic service.

### *Extinguishing Demand*

The point of examining demand for trafficking, of the exercise of trying to think like marketing executives, is obviously aimed at helping us think through how we might reduce the demand for trafficked people. Clearly, criminals will always look for ways to exploit people, the unscrupulous will always be willing to reap profit even when it involves the suffering of others. Yet, if the attributes that are demanded by those that exploit trafficked people can be understood and countered, then demand might be lessened.

There are several points about countering demand that arise from the discussion above. Firstly, at a basic level, is the need to counter the moral economy that allows those exploiting trafficked people to rationalize this activity. In part, this means raising public awareness of the crime of trafficking, and especially of the realities of the lived experience of trafficked people. As noted above, human rights are based on the privileging and then codification of the victim's definitions of an activity. Virtually every action that we now think of as a violation of human rights was once defined as acceptable. This process of recognizing the rights of the victims of trafficking is still in process. It is indicative of the fact that the rights of trafficking victims are not fully accepted to note that the crime itself is not yet codified in many countries, nor does the public tend to have a clear understanding of the crime, even where it has entered the criminal code. The US *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* (2000) has been hailed as breakthrough legislation precisely because it specifically recognizes that trafficked people are victims of a crime, and that it sets their status as victims at a higher priority than their status, for example, as illegal aliens. The criminals using trafficked people may not themselves decide to extend to their victims the recognition of rights, but when the society in which they operate becomes aware of the crime and able to identify a trafficking victim as such, it increases the likelihood that crime will be reported and the victim freed. This in turn increases the risk to the perpetrator and acts to reduce demand.

The *Trafficking Victims Protection Act* also dramatically increased the penalties for trafficking offences. This can be important in reducing demand, since demand is based on decisions that reflect the costs of acquiring a trafficked person. Many crimes defy an economic analysis: crimes of passion, in particular, are rarely the result of calculation of cost and benefit. Trafficking, however, is primarily an economic crime, and as such it should respond to changes in its cost/benefit structure. If the cost includes the potential of a high penalty in both economic and legal terms, demand will, at least, seek new lower risk "products". High penalties and a high likelihood of apprehension might be the most effective way to reduce demand, if they are applied to all forms of trafficking and the exploitation of trafficked people.

Noting that there is both a wholesale and retail market for trafficked people also suggests counter actions. The "wholesalers" are the recruiters, transporters, and traffickers who

harvest and move people into the trafficking streams. Disruption of the wholesale chain also increases costs to the “consumer”. Doing so, however, requires international cooperation and resources. It also requires addressing the attributes the wholesaler looks for in the trafficked person. While reducing the physical health (an attribute sought by wholesalers) of trafficked people would be not be acceptable, reducing their gullibility would (though this is a preventative against trafficking, rather than a measure that reduces demand). This is the aim of public education and awareness campaigns in origin countries<sup>12</sup>. A much greater challenge would be reducing the malleability that follows from economic deprivation and the lack of opportunity. Throughout the developing world, economic change has pushed large numbers of people into extreme social and economic vulnerability. In the developed world there is a continuing demand for cheap, low-paid workers. At a very basic level, the barriers that exist between the locations of supply of workers and demand for workers will tend to reward those who work out ways to overcome those barriers. This is simplistic, of course, and does not touch the deeper underlying themes of the extreme inequalities in wealth between countries. Addressing those inequalities is not yet an aim of the Northern destination countries which has received any significant allocation of resources.

In addition, there are a number of structural and legal measures that can be taken to reduce demand. One is to increase the availability of *legal* possibilities for people to emigrate for work. Such legal opportunities mean that potential trafficking victims are less likely to rely on traffickers who provide false documents, arrange travel, and find them work abroad. This lessens demand in the destination country for illegally supplied labor by forcing it to compete with legally supplied labor. Such legal arrangements are possible. For example, a bilateral agreement between Italy and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) office in Tirana, Albania, provides for the management of labor migration flows from Albania and smoothing the integration of migrant workers into Italy. The agreement allows 5,000 Albanians to work in Italy for one year. The IOM office in Tirana interviews applicants, who undergo testing of job skills. The profiles of would-be migrants are entered in an IOM database that is available to Italian employers for consultation on the Internet. The database also posts job offers in Italy, mainly in six regions where the need for workers is high. By matching their skills to existing vacancies, the database allows applicants to leave Albania with a labor contract, enabling them to start work upon arrival in Italy. When the workers arrive in Italy, the IOM in Rome provides orientation and vocational training courses to some of the newcomers. Since most applicants are men, men have benefited most from this agreement. Clearly, such an agreement reduces demand for illegal labor in some sectors, but not all. The involvement of criminal organizations in prostitution means that exploitation for sexual purposes continues outside any such monitoring of labor flows.

### ***Reducing Demand for Prostitution – Legal Approaches***

Since trafficking into prostitution is one of the main destinations of trafficked people, it is important to consider attempts to reduce demand for prostitution. We might also look for clues about the demand for prostitution by noting the ambiguity in the official responses to this particular market for trafficked people. Trafficking leads to a situation of

enslavement, and the question arises why enslavement into prostitution has been consistently treated differently in laws concerning trafficking. I would argue that this differentiation has occurred for two reasons, one historical and negative, one contemporary and positive. Historically, there has been a reluctance to deal with prostitution within the legal discourse on slavery. The willingness to define most prostitution as consensual, the stigmatisation of prostitutes, and the marked ambivalence of (primarily male-directed) law enforcement towards prostitution led to its separation from “real” slavery and its toleration in many countries. Past instruments, the 1910 White Slavery Convention being a good example, were attempts to establish a line between unacceptable forms of forced prostitution (especially of white women), and those forms of prostitution that the framers of these laws and conventions considered normal, acceptable, or inevitable. This, in turn, speaks to a more generalized moral economy that if it does not allow, it turns a blind eye toward, trafficking into prostitution and thus erects no barrier to demand.

More recently and more positively Swedish lawmakers took an opposite tack. In 1999 Sweden passed a law that criminalized the purchase of sex. According to the Swedish law the economic and social relationship between a woman selling sex and a man buying sex is not a relationship that even approaches equality. The rationale behind the law is that as long as society remains male dominated, women selling sex will be in a more vulnerable position than men buying sex. Men's right to buy women's bodies is seen as a form of male dominance to be resisted and controlled. This law leaves the *sale* of sex as legal, it is only the *purchase* that is made illegal, thus attempting to redress the imbalance of power between men and women. An official report by the government concerning the law explained:

“The proposal by the Prostitution Report to criminalise both buyer and seller has been subjected to extensive criticism by almost all referral bodies. The government also deems that, even if prostitution in itself is not a desirable social activity, it is not reasonable to prosecute the party that, at least in most cases, is the weaker party, exploited by others to satisfy their sexual drive. This is also important if prostitutes are to be encouraged to get help to leave prostitution and can feel they will not have to worry about the consequences of having been prostitutes.<sup>13</sup>”

This approach is unique, and runs counter to recent laws in Germany and Holland that attempt to reduce demand for women trafficked into prostitution by legalizing and controlling brothels. Sweden is trying to extinguish demand for prostitution (and trafficked people) at the point of consumption, Germany and Holland in the supply chain by arresting traffickers. Do either of these approaches work? At this point, no one knows for certain. Criticism has been levelled at the Swedish law that it has simply pushed prostitution underground and toward trafficking victims, but no evidence has been forthcoming. Likewise, the government has stated that the law is reducing the number of women exploited in prostitution, but again little evidence is available. On the other side, the legalizing of brothels in one state in Australia has been interpreted as both decreasing trafficking by some commentators and increasing it by others. Given that demand for

prostitution is often met with women (and children) who have been trafficked it is critical that detailed and unbiased research is carried out as quickly as possible.

One other demand reduction strategy exists in the education and awareness raising with the men, especially the young men, that may seek out prostitutes. There is a great deal that we do not know about how young men first are brought to purchase sex. This is significant because there is great variation in the use of prostitutes between locations and societies and historical periods. Demand seems to have been reduced in some locations and it is necessary to explore ways to recreate the conditions that led to such reduction. Clearly, improvements in the power and status of women are defining factors. One hypothesis would suggest that young men in the military are especially likely to be introduced to prostitution. One suggestion to reduce demand is to target young men in the military with messages that help them to understand that the women they use may well be trafficked, and, at the least, are almost certainly under the violent control of pimps. The rationale being to have these young men confront the impact their sexual use of prostituted women will have on the lives of those women. To date, to my knowledge, such an awareness raising program has not been tried.

### *Conclusions*

This has been an exploration of demand for trafficked people. It is based on very little hard evidence and only a working knowledge of marketing. The lack of information needed to address this question points to a profound need for better research all along the “product chain” of human trafficking, and especially with consumers of trafficking victims. If we imagine for a moment that we are that hypothetical marketing manager charged with increasing the number of people trafficked and exploited, our first action would likely be to concentrate on the most promising sectors. The “promise” of our marketing exercise would be based on whether we believed we might maximize our profits through the greatest volume of trafficking or through trafficking high value “product”. For the former, permeable borders and a significant demand for labor is the determinant, while for the latter, demand for high value “product” is crucial. In either case it is necessary to determine how vertically-integrated the enterprise is. If the trafficking enterprise can control the process across borders and from top to bottom (origin to destination), then, in effect, the trafficker is faced with a need for consumer marketing. The aim then would be to increase business in the origin country by increasing demand at the destination by using consumer marketing tools<sup>14</sup>. The foregoing represents a general view, but the reality is (always) more complex. Borders are more or less permeable, vertical integration varies from trafficking group to trafficking group. In some countries there is a demand for volume and in others a demand for high value “product”, and in some countries both. The point is that these variations are areas that must be studied before we can arrive at an understanding of demand for trafficked people.

In the same way, there is another variation that has to be understood in each context of trafficking. Earlier I referred to wholesalers, retailers and consumers of trafficked persons. This is important in understanding demand because much of the marketing that

must go on to move trafficked people across borders and toward consumers is what the marketing manager would call “B2B” (business-to-business) rather than “B2C” (business-to-consumer). Many traffickers are dealing with “employers” rather than the end-users (consumers) of trafficked people. Marketing theory and practice could still help with the analysis of this situation, but it would be a rather more complicated scenario. This would require a form of “channel marketing” with wholesalers and retailers, and within that there is perhaps room for some system integration to create a value-added product (trafficked people that speak English perhaps, or know how to operate certain machinery). Linked to understanding the “channel”, is the task of determining how the buyers and sellers of trafficked people find each other. There is not an open marketplace, nor one that uses the usual forms of advertising (though the internet, and some other methods are used). Locating the point at which contact is made and the “sale” takes place would also be of importance to those that wish to disrupt the trafficking flow.

Having said that, price is a key marketing variable and in this context it is the one that matters. If trafficked and enslaved labor wasn't cheap it wouldn't last very long. For that reason it is worth concluding with a quick review of questions of the elasticity of demand for trafficking victims. “Elasticity” is the term that economists use to describe the potential rise and fall in demand for any product. Some products have a great deal of elasticity, others very little. Solid gold designer watches, for example, have great elasticity of demand, if there is a cheaper acceptable alternative, if consumers have limited resources (for example, during a recession), demand for such luxury goods will shrink. Basic foodstuffs, on the other hand, have low elasticity of demand, even if the cost of bread doubles, people will need to eat and will continue to buy it. In describing elasticity economists will point to addictive drugs, like heroin, as a product with virtually no elasticity of demand, the force of the addiction driving the demand no matter what the cost of the product.

The most important determinant of the elasticity of demand is the availability of substitutes. The elasticity of demand for a product tends to be greater for products that have more close substitutes available. This general rule of economics is suggestive of responses to human trafficking. Firstly, it supports the idea that alternative, legal, and controlled forms of labor migration would help reduce demand for trafficked people. If the demand for cheap labor can be met with a competitive alternative that does not involve illegal and abusive trafficking, consumers will shift to the legal labor. Secondly, if the cost of using trafficked labor is increased, through more law enforcement and prosecution, legal alternatives become more attractive.

The role of the cost of labor is also reflected in a second known determinant of demand elasticity, the proportion of the consumer's budget devoted to the product. Put simply, the more expensive (the greater the proportion of the consumer's budget) a product is, the more elastic will be demand for the product. A sandwich may double or triple in price without significantly reducing demand, a house (which takes up a sizeable portion of most budgets) that doubles or triples in price will dramatically reduce demand. The unfortunate reality of human trafficking, and one of the key reasons for its explosive growth in the past decade, is that the relatively low cost of trafficked people means that

their consumers are not sensitive to the cost of trafficked labor. Again, this rule of economics supports the idea that policies must work to dramatically increase the costs of using (or consuming) trafficked labor.

This brief discussion of elasticity of demand is also aimed at highlighting the fact that different forms of trafficked labor will have different levels of elasticity of demand. None of these different levels have been estimated and represent another area of needed research. That said, it might be surmised that demand for trafficked people to be used in domestic service would be more elastic than the demand for trafficked people to be exploited in prostitution. The former having potentially greater numbers of alternatives, the latter having limited alternatives since it exists within an illicit market and because it is driven by what, at least some men, might describe as biologically driven need. This demand is also linked to the USP attribute described above, as some men express low elasticity in their demand for “the real thing”. Whatever the case, the different levels and elasticity of demand, the different levels of integration, question of high volume versus high value, all of these need exploration for each sub-type of human trafficking. This in itself would be a step toward demand reduction.

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<sup>2</sup> Kevin Bales, “What Predicts Human Trafficking?” Proceedings of the United Nations Conference on Human Trafficking, Verona, October, 1999 (forthcoming).

<sup>3</sup> Bridget Anderson and Julia O’Connell Davidson, *The Demand Side of Trafficking, Part 1 Review of Evidence and Debates on “The Demand Side of Trafficking”* Global Alliance against Trafficking in Women, Bangkok, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> GAATW Demand Study, 2002, Part 1, page 18.

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Ai Yun, H., 1996: “Foreign Maids and the Reproduction of Labor in Singapore” *Philippine Sociological Review* vol. 44 (1): 33-57. Anderson, B., 2000: *Doing the Dirty Work? The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*. London: Zed. Anti-Slavery International (ASI), 1996 ‘Child servitude: children working as domestic servants’ ASI submission to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery. Coser, L., 1974: “Servants: the obsolescence of an occupational role” *Social Forces* 52: 31-40. Kyle, David and Lian, Zai 2001: “Migration Merchants: Human Smuggling from Ecuador and China” Working Paper No. 43, Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, University of California-San Diego. Macklin, A., 1992: “Foreign Domestic Worker: Surrogate Housewife or Mail Order Servant?” in McGill Law Journal/Revue de droit de McGill 37 681ff.

<sup>6</sup> For a fuller explanation of this transformation, see Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, University of California Press, 1999

<sup>7</sup> Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, GAATW Demand Study, 2002, Part 1, page 23.

<sup>8</sup> See for example: O’Connell Davidson, J., 1998: *Prostitution, Power and Freedom*. Cambridge: Polity. , 2001a O’Connell Davidson, J., 2001a: ‘The sex tourist, the expatriate, his ex-wife and her ‘Other’: The politics of loss, difference and desire’. *Sexualities*. Vol. 4, No.1, pp. 5-24. Kruhse-Mount Burton, S., 1995: ‘Sex tourism and traditional Australian male identity’, in M. Lafab, J. Allcock and E. Bruner (eds) *International Tourism: Identity and Change*. London: Sage. Seabrook, J., 1996: *Travels in the Skin Trade: Tourism and the Sex Industry*. London: Pluto Press. Bishop, R. and Robinson, L., 1998: *Nightmarket: Sexual Cultures and the Thai Economic Miracle*. London: Routledge.

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<sup>9</sup> See: Sanchez Taylor, J. 2000: 'Tourism and 'embodied' commodities: sex tourism in the Caribbean', in S. Clift and S. Carter (eds), *Tourism and Sex: Culture, Commerce and Coercion*. London: Pinter.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Anita Chabria, "His Own Private Berkeley", 25 November, 2001, found at <http://fpmail.friends-partners.org/pipermail/stop-traffic/2001-November/001756.html>.

<sup>11</sup> This is further explained in my article: "The Social Psychology of Modern Slavery" *Scientific American*, April, 2002

<sup>12</sup> Ideas about what the "consumers" of trafficked people are looking for could be introduced into anti-trafficking public education messages, and might alert potential victims to the nature of the risks they face.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Maria-Pia Boethius, "The End of Prostitution in Sweden?", Swedish Institute, October 1999, found at: [http://www.sweden.se/templates/Article\\_\\_\\_\\_2295.asp](http://www.sweden.se/templates/Article____2295.asp).

<sup>14</sup> For example, the AIDA model – generating Awareness, Interest, Demand, and Action on the part of the consumer.