

From Developing to Under Developing Economies - The Storyline of Slavery and Nowadays Consumption

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Abstract

Even though many individuals may perceive slavery as a past memory, it nonetheless has a significant impact on society today on a multitude of levels. The modern slavery phenomenon is the consequence of past slavery as it currently exists. Its worldwide effects range from social and cultural impacts to economic and business-related implications. The purpose of this paper is to explore various papers and studies within the academic and grey literature on the profitability of both past and modern slavery, with a focus on how modern slavery may encourage consumption in different industries. The present paper's purpose was accomplished using a qualitative research methodology, more precisely, content analysis. The findings indicate that, in contrast to past slavery, which is typically viewed as profitable and the main driving force of the economic development of certain wealthy empires, such as the British, and Dutch empires, modern slavery has a negative impact on the global economy, contributing to poverty and underdevelopment. Moreover, the fast fashion industry provides several examples of cases in which modern slavery was used to increase consumption in this field. The conclusions of this article raise serious concerns about the issue of modern slavery since it perpetuates economic underdevelopment and poverty, and because the process of uninformed consumption in some industries may contribute to the persistence of this phenomenon. Therefore, this stringent matter allows opportunity for more research and discussion.

Keywords

Slavery, Modern Slavery, Economic Development, Global Economy, Consumption and Modern Slavery, Fast Fashion Industry and Forced Labour.

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Introduction

Researchers across disciplines, including historians, psychologists, politicians, and economists, have long been interested in the subject of slavery. If the connection between historians and slavery may be more obvious, perhaps the aspects linking the phenomenon of slavery and the field of economics do not appear so conspicuous at first sight. The economic implications of slavery, however, have been documented since Ancient Greece or Ancient Rome. For instance, Finley (1999) underlines several economics-related preconditions that were initially necessary for the existence of slavery in Ancient Greece: one precondition is represented by the large, private farms that required inexpensive labour to exist and be maintained; another condition is illustrated by the development of exchange inside the market, which guaranteed a constant supply of slaves; and lastly, since Athenians were protected from some types of exploitation by democratic frameworks yet lacked adequate internal labour resources, landowners were forced to turn to alternative sources of labour, such as slave workforce. The majority of Greek slaves, who could be purchased on the slave market, were either war prisoners or were abandoned as children (McKeown, 2011). Additionally, it is interesting how utilising slave labour could benefit Greek citizens economically, as there were numerous economic activities that indicate this aspect - possessing a big farm where all of the work and activities were performed by slaves; holding a home that can be rented. Although while these types of houses often functioned as short-term residences for temporary renters, they also acted as brothels for slaves

who were forced into prostitution; or owing craftspeople slaves because many workshops engaged artisans as slave labour, some of which were even managed by dependable and skilled slaves (Cartledge, 2002).

Continuing the discussion regarding the relationship between economics and slavery, it is proper to point out the historical phenomenon where slaves from Africa were trafficked over the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas as part of the Transatlantic Slave Trade, an international slave trade. For economic reasons, Europeans preferred African slaves since they were less expensive and more lucrative (Walsh, 2011). This occurred as Europeans discovered that black people were more resilient, more docile, and had a better labour capability than white people after establishing international trade and having access to the African continent (Basset, 1896). Although perspectives on the profitability of the Transatlantic Slave Trade may differ (Richardson, 1978; Postma, 1990; Eltis, Emmer and Lewis, 2016), there are significant studies which contend that slavery was advantageous because it promoted the economic and social advancement of the distinct states that engaged in the trade (Williams, 1944; Darity, 1990; Inikori, 1992).

Ancient Greece's slavery background, what the Transatlantic Slave Trade implied, but also other than these, helped pave the way for what is now regarded as modern slavery, regardless of the fact that slavery as it was known in the past has been abolished for centuries. People who are compelled to perform different duties against their will and without receiving any kind of remuneration represent a situation known as modern slavery. Modern slavery can take many different forms, such as forced labour, debt servitude, forced marriages, domestic servitude, and sex trafficking (Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2000; Miers 2000). Modern slavery has numerous social, cultural, psychological and political implications, but it essentially implies economic aspects.

According to the International Labour Organization (2014), modern slavery is present in many profitable activities that make up a lucrative informal economy, where slave masters are growing more and richer while slave victims are becoming more and more vulnerable (Human Rights Council, 2019; Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2022). Although perpetuating modern slavery is beneficial for those who own slaves and other parties involved in its maintenance, these issues are actually connected to poverty and economic underdevelopment (Bales, Trodd and Williamson, 2009), as they are further addressed in this paper. Additionally, the use of modern slavery in many legitimate enterprises emphasises the reality that occasionally unlawful and inhumane practices provide an opportunity for the consumption of certain products. In addition to the fast fashion and textile industries, other industries that may engage in modern slavery include agriculture, the beauty industry, car washes or constructions (Gold, Trautrim and Trodd, 2015; LeBaron and Gore, 2020).

The remainder of this paper is organised in the following manner: Section 1 presents the used methodology; Section 2 explores the economic impact and the profitability of past slavery; Section 3 treats modern slavery and its connection to poverty and economic underdevelopment; Section 4 presents the case of the fast fashion brand Zara accused to used forced labour in its production process; Section 5 emphasises the results and, therefore, the comparison between the impact of past and present slavery on world's economies, together with how different forms of modern slavery fuel the process of consumption in the fast fashion industry and vice versa. Some final remarks conclude the paper.

Review of the scientific literature

1. Past slavery and economic development

The profitability of slavery and the positive impact on the economic development of states which used workforce based on slavery reflect a significant debate within the academic literature. Throughout this section, the cases of the British and Dutch empires are explored. These two Western empires, which participated in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and experienced substantial economic expansion within their histories, are now regarded as wealthy, developed nations. According to Williams (1944, p. 51), triangular commerce between the British Empire, France, and the colonised Americas enabled trade to expand globally, while also allowing the participating nations, particularly the British Empire, to develop economically at the detriment of non-trading nations. Moreover, Williams (1944, p. 53) argues that within the triangular slave trade numerous commodities specific to the European continent were loaded into ships that travelled from their home countries. These goods were then exchanged for African slaves, who were then used to trade colonial goods that were later taken back to their home countries. Further, the West Indian Islands have grown to be a centrepiece of importance and wealth for the British Empire; it was here that African slaves created the sugar-based colonies, which turned out to be the most successful and lucrative of all imperialist colonies (Darity, 1990; Wright, 2022). The British Empire's primary source of capital

originated from the transatlantic slave trade and the slaves' labour, which subsequently fuelled the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century (Darity, 1982; Inikori, 1988). In an effort to demonstrate that the Atlantic economic order served as the foundation for the current global economic order, Inikori (1992, p.151) even constructed a system known as the "Atlantic System" or "Atlantic Economic Order". Understandably, slavery and colonial expansion were the key forces and processes that contributed to the development of the system's basis and expansionary phase (Inikori, 1992). This system attempts to explain how the Transatlantic Slave Trade and the use of slave labour contributed to the establishment of an economic system that ultimately determined the current economic world order. States that benefited from the slavery system are now viewed as wealthy and developed, whereas states that were used as slave labour are currently perceived as less wealthy and less developed.

Another state entity that participated in the Transatlantic Slave Trade is the Dutch Empire, which is currently viewed as a very rich and developed European nation. The phenomenon of slavery and the advantages it provided are included within a larger framework of the Dutch economy by researchers who argue that slaves and the transatlantic slave trade had a significant part in the growth and economic development of the Dutch Empire. As a result, the Dutch Empire acquired valuable indirect economic gains from the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Fatah-Black and van Rossum, 2014; Brandon and Bosma, 2021). Each slave purchasing mission had to stock up on food and different trading equipment, and all the products to be traded in the interaction with African state entities had to be manufactured and sold by and in the Dutch economy, which also produced and marketed the ships used to carry slaves (Postma, 1990; Brandon and Bosma, 2021). Moreover, Brandon and Bosma (2021, p.49-50) emphasise the fact that these operations undoubtedly created a lot of employment opportunities for the Dutch Empire's factories as well as for textile and gun stores. Other aspects related to the positive economic impact that slavery had on the Dutch Empire highlight that commodities were created by slave labour on the plantations of the Empire's colonies, which were then refined and processed into finished goods - the refinement and processing of such items took place within Dutch Empire territory, creating new employment and generating profits (Postma, 1990; van Welie, 2008; Brandon and Bosma, 2021). Additionally, Fatah-Black and van Rossum (2014, pp.5-6) discuss how within the Dutch Empire, slavery had a stimulating economic effect with positive consequences in wages, ship construction, insurances, and equipment.

The British and Dutch Empires provide instances of two colonial powers which participated in the Transatlantic Slave Trade and benefitted from it, with slave labour having a positive influence on their economy both in past and present. The academic literature offers studies that, on the other hand, are attempting to prove and stress the fact that slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade were not in fact profitable and they did not encourage the actual social and economic development of state entities involved in slavery-related activities. This must be kept in mind for both the British (Hyde, Parkinson and Marriner, 1952; Morgan, 2000) and Dutch Empires (Eltis, Emmer and Lewis, 2016).

2. Modern slavery and the global economy

Modern slavery is defined by the Anti-Slavery International Organization (2023) as a situation in which a person is exploited by others for their own or another party's benefit. He or she forfeits their freedom whether they were deceived, forced, or coerced. From sex trafficking and forced labour, to domestic servitude and forced marriages, modern slavery represents one of the most perceptible legacies of past slavery. A valuable distinction between past and present slavery has been made by Bales, Trodd, and Williamson (2011, p.50-51), who claim that, in contrast to slavery in the past, modern slavery is globalised, meaning that its manifestations in various parts of the world are becoming more and more similar. Slavery in the past was legal and used to create empires, but it is now illegal and widely condemned.

A recent report by the International Labour Organization, the International Organization for Migration, and the international organisation Walk Free (2021, p.1) highlights the fact that nearly 50 million people are currently victims of modern slavery, despite the fact that the international and European arenas are constantly trying to impose legislation and take action towards the eradication of this global phenomenon. The International Labour Organization (2014, p.13) also showed that contemporary slavery is a very lucrative "business," generating US\$150 billion annually throughout the globe, of which US\$99 billion is generated by sexual slavery and US\$51 billion by forced labour, such as domestic work or agriculture (International Labour Organization, 2014).

The concerns that the phenomenon of modern slavery brings to the world are in reality related to poverty and economic underdevelopment, despite the fact that the numerous "businesses" that can grow off the back of modern slavery are enormously profitable for certain "business" and modern slave owners. This begins with the discussion about the momentum of globalisation in the mid 1980'. Although the development of

this worldwide phenomenon brought positive aspects (Mukherjee and Kriekhaus, 2012), it has also implied unintended negative consequences (Bardhan, 2004). Even the International Labor Organization once called modern slavery and human trafficking as the dark sides of globalisation (International Labour Organization, 2005). More specifically, the negative and significant relationship between modern slavery and globalisation highlighted by Bales, Trodd, and Williamson (2009, p.49) emphasises the reality that due to increased global interconnectivity, the production of the goods and services we frequently consume takes place in numerous places all over the Globe. As a result, modern slavery frequently appears in the process of production, mixing itself with the legal process, without us being aware of it (Bales, Trodd and Williamson, 2009). In addition, three elements—poverty, corruption, and the decline in the price of slaves—that are specifically associated with social and economic underdevelopment are identified as factors that contributed to the development of slavery and continue to carry on doing so (Miers, 2003; Anker, 2004; Bales, Trod and Williamson, 2009; Kara, 2009).

Because modern slavery impedes the proper development of the economies of many countries around the globe, its presence and levels inside a state constitute an accurate predictor of economic and human growth (Sawyer, 1986; Bales, 2007; Bales, Trod and Williamson, 2009; Datta and Bales, 2013; Cockayne, 2021). Bales, Trodd, and Williamson (2009, p.63) argue that modern slavery distorts local economies in two ways (1) slave labourers can drag down the wages of free workers in the same sector they work in, and (2) slavery distorts economies by removing slaves and their families from the role of consumers in local economies. On top of that, modern slavery creates inter-generational poverty (Dowlah, 2021), as slavery deprives its victims of opportunities for education, training, and other human capital building, which has long-term effects on their ability to generate income; girls, women, and children are particularly impacted by this (Baten and Cappelli, 2017 cited in Dowlah, 2021, p.60). Another factor that is related to the negative impact of modern slavery and economic underdevelopment is, as Faure (2015, p.5) mentions, the fact that by preventing the State from receiving income tax on the wages that enslaved people should have rightfully received and consumption tax from their foregone consumption, it lowers tax revenues.

3. Consumption in Fast Fashion Industry and Modern Slavery

Reconsidering the matter of globalisation may lead us to question whether it gave poorer people more options for employment and pay or whether it determined a life of inferior working conditions or even an unfree labour environment for those at the "bottom" of the development scale. As Barrientos, Kothari and Phillips (2013, p.1037) state, many employees across the world are subjected to unstable, unprotected, and often exploitative working circumstances. The most vulnerable workers are subjected to various types of forced labour. Unfree labour is one type of modern slavery that is associated with the concepts of coercion, the use of force, and the use of deceit throughout the recruiting process (Barrientos, Kothari and Phillips, 2013). However, it is also essential to recognise the different types of coercion that workers may experience when they appear to willingly enter a working context. These forms of coercion are not caused by external forces but rather by the workers' poverty and vulnerability as well as their involvement in social and familial systems of duty and accountability (Steinfeld, 2009; O'Neil, 2011). Phillips (2013, p.178) draws attention to the fact that in the current worldwide production, constraints of debt as well as the withholding of wages until the conclusion end of a contract genuinely create an environment of forced and forced labour.

Forced labour is, unsurprisingly, the most prevalent type of modern slavery in the apparel industry as a whole, which also encompasses the fast fashion industry (Hasan, 2019). The dangers within the apparel industry are prevalent and endemic at every step of manufacturing, as shown globally in supply chains for fast fashion companies as well as luxury brands (Hasan, 2019). Moreover, a report of the international organisation Walk Free Foundation (2018) stresses the fact that one of the major global promoters of modern slavery is the fashion industry. The Spanish fast fashion brand Zara has been accused several times of using forced labour in its supply chains. The well-known brand was implicated in a situation in 2006 where Syrian refugees in Turkey were forced to work for many clothing companies, including Zara (Reuters, 2016) the investigative documentary Panorama also discovered that there was a child working more than 12 hours per day among the Syrian refugees (BBC, 2016). Zara has been revealed to obtain clothing from Brazilian factories that practise modern slavery, as Brazilian federal government investigators discovered 15 immigrants living and working in terrible conditions in two tiny workplaces in Sao Paulo in August 2011; workdays for labourers may last up to 16 hours, and they had limited freedom of movement (Antunes, 2011; Mind the Gap, 2020). Furthermore, in 2020, an investigative report (Xiuzhong Zu, et. al., 2020) highlighted the fact that Zara used in its supply chains the forced labour of the ethnic group Uyghur in the Xinjiang region of China (Breedon and Gallois, 2021; Yerramilli, 2022).

The relationship between modern slavery, forced labour, the treatment of non-free workers, and the responsibility of the companies engaged in such activity has long been discussed, but there is still little

research on the consumer's role in the support of various forms of modern slavery, according to Carrington, Chatzidakis, and Shaw (2020, p.2). But nonetheless, several studies (Nolan and Bott, 2018; Korczynski et. al., 2000) emphasise the relevance of the consumer in the labour and production operations, as well as the importance of the customer in eliminating modern slavery from the supply chain of the goods and services they consume. When questioning consumers over the issue of slavery and how their consuming actions support such human rights violations, Carrington, Chatzidakis, and Shaw (2020, p.8) found in their practical research the theoretical framework of neutralisation where people engage in illegal/unethical behaviour by relying on justifications that may protect them from self-blame or the blame of others.

Methodology

The present paper's purpose was accomplished using a qualitative research method called content analysis. Through the content analysis there was undertaken a literature review on how past slavery impacted the economic development of Western Worlds, and how modern slavery is connected to poverty and economic underdevelopment. Furthermore, the content analysis focused on the evidence that the consumption of specific fast fashion industry items may stimulate and support the phenomenon of modern slavery, especially the practice of forced labour.

In all, 40 sources were examined, including 9 books, 7 online newspaper articles, 5 international organisations reports, and 19 academic articles. Jstor, ProQuest, Science Direct, Sage, and Francis and Taylor were the main databases used. The primary keywords employed were *slavery*, *slavery profitability*, *transatlantic slavery*, *modern slavery*, *modern slavery on global economy*, *fast fashion industry*, *model slavery and fashion industry*, *Zara and modern slavery*, *Zara and forced labour*.

Results and discussion

Slavery has been an ongoing theme within academic literature, engaging not just the interest of historians and sociologists but also that of economics and politicians. Although the relationship between this phenomenon and the general area of the economy may not seem to be very close at first glance, we have already seen how slavery is a topic of interest for economists. The topic of whether slavery was profitable or if this historical institution had an impact on the social and economic development of today's most developed countries is one that economists are particularly interested in. In addition, modern slavery, a legacy of past slavery, has drawn the attention of economists as well as other experts since it is an extremely lucrative illegal business that encompasses a variety of business models. Moreover, social and economic underdevelopment, poverty, and modern slavery are all globally interconnected.

Although there are different viewpoints, it is clear that historical slavery is seen to have contributed to economic progress and that nations that historically engaged in slavery, notably the Transatlantic Slave Trade, are among the most developed and wealthy nations in the world today. On the other hand, because it perpetuates intergenerational poverty and puts disadvantaged people at the periphery of backwardness, the heirress of slavery, modern slavery, is becoming more and more linked to high levels of poverty and economic underdevelopment. The example of fast fashion was insightful as consumers typically do not look into the system of production and continue to consume such goods creating a cycle of poverty and modern slavery. The process of unaware consumption of various goods produced by different industries does nothing but support the chain of forced labour.

Conclusions

Although while slavery may appear to be a thing of the past and a problem that has long since passed, its effects are still being felt today. While past slavery is frequently seen as a contributor to economic and social development for states that engaged in slavery and employed slave labour in various fields, modern slavery, despite being a lucrative industry internationally, it only perpetuates and preserves poverty and keeps some nations and groups in a persistent state of economic underdevelopment.

Consuming particular goods from certain businesses on a regular basis typically supports contemporary slavery; the fast fashion industry serves as an excellent example of this. A pair of jeans purchased from a fast fashion brand most likely contributes to the phenomenon of modern slavery, so slavery, whether past or modern, continues to be a subject of intense interest and debate. Slavery also plays a significant role in

the discussion of consumption and the significance of educating consumers about the repercussions of their consuming actions.

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