

# **Slavery in the Contemporary World: An Examination of Modern Slavery in Africa**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The paper examines slavery in the contemporary world with focus on examination of modern slavery in Africa. It underscored factors promoting slavery in the modern world, trends of modern slavery, causes of modern slavery in Africa, and consequences of modern slavery in Africa. The Marxian conflict theory was used as a guide and a background upon which the paper was anchored. From the point of view of the theory and available literature reviewed, the paper observed that factors such as population explosion of the post second world war, rapid economic change and the incorporation of the third world economies into the world economy in the guise of globalisation, and the widespread governmental corruption among others, are responsible for modern slavery in Africa and the world over. It revealed that forced labour, sex slavery, practice of debt bondage and trafficking in persons are all characteristics of modern slavery. The significance of this is enormous and antithetical to the development of the continent and humanity at*

*large. The paper recommended that policies on human migration should be reviewed across borders, agencies established to tackle the menace of trafficking in persons should be streamlined so as to function effectively and efficiently, African countries should make frantic efforts in tackling the issue of corruption and over-dependence on advanced countries of the world. Finally, a radical change in mentality is advised of African citizens on migration.*

**Keywords:** Contemporary, Debt bondage, Modern slavery, Sex slavery, Trafficking in persons, Africa.

## **Introduction**

Slavery has been in existence before money or law (see Hochschild, 2005). By this, it means slavery is as old as man. Meaning the concept of slavery has been in the court of mankind since time immemorial. This inhuman epidemic which has been abolished worldwide in 1888 with Brazil being the last country to do so still permeates human existence to date. Even when several countries of the world have enacted laws against slavery and any form of it, the new form of slavery which is practiced and experienced across the globe gave rise to the concept of contemporary slavery.

At this point, the question begging for answer is: why does slavery still exist after the efforts put to play both at the local and international scenes to actually put an end to the dehumanizing trade called slavery? In this work effort was made to look at the nature of modern/contemporary slavery, forms/trends of modern slavery, causes of modern slavery in Africa, global perception of modern slavery, consequences of modern slavery in Nigeria and Africa at large and finally, a theoretical postulation was examined to give reasonable explanation to the subject matter from the socio-economic and political point of view.

Contemporary slavery is the total control of a person for economic exploitation by violence, or the threat of it (see Bales, 2006). Assessing the above definitions it becomes clear that it is not a gain saying that slavery persists in the 21<sup>st</sup> century contemporary global world. Having a closer look at the definitions, it reveals that some satisfying one of the above conditions listed in the definition of slavery is actually enslaved with or without having the knowledge of it.

Defining modern day slavery includes an overbearing three (3) elements (a) The absence of any framework of human right (b) Economic exploitation (c) The maintenance of control of one person over another by the prospect or reality of violence (Craig, Gaus, Wilkinson, Skrivankova, and McQuade 2007).

From the foregoing, the work sets out to unravel the causes, trends and patterns of modern slavery with a view to finding its socio-economic impacts on the African continent and proffer possible solutions to this ugly menace ravaging the world.

## **The Nature of Modern Slavery**

In this sub heading the nature of modern slavery is considered, Characteristics that distinguished modern slavery from the old form of slavery are exhaustively discussed.

“The constituent elements of modern slavery are identified as control without ownership, violence (or the threat of violence), coercion (loss of freedom and choice), and exploitation (of labour power through unpaid work). The basic argument here is that the absence of payment for work differentiates the slaves from other

categories of workers (with the 'free' proletarian or the forces wage labourer) while the absence of legal ownership in the master-slave relation is the principal facture distinguishing the new slavery from the old (Manzo 2005).

Throughout history, "slavery has meant a loss of freewill and choice backed up by violence, sometimes excised by the slaveholder, sometimes by element of the state ... there works are, unable to walk away" (Bales, 2002 p. 2).

Buttressing on Manzo's clear distinction of modern slavery, we highlights elements of such as exploitation, which can be seen from "unpaid work relation and also "control without ownership" which is one the key elements of modern slavery. Refreshing our minds, the old slavery system, slaves were own legally by slave masters, but this is not the same in the contemporary slavery. "The new slavery appropriates the economic value of individuals while keeping them under complete coercive control but without asserting ownership or accepting responsibility for their survival" (Bales, 1999 p. 25).

The last sentence in the work of Bales above is another great feature of contemporary slavery. This alone draws a distinctive line between the old and new slavery. In the new slavery, the slaves are not seen as properties of the slaveholders which make them slaves. There are other factors responsible for slavery in the modern world; such factors are to come later in the work.

Another overreaching feature/nature of contemporary slavery is the concept of "cheap". Slaves these days are perceived to be cheap and work cheaper than it cost in then 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Slaves in U.S. Antebellum South cost, in real terms, around \$40,000; today a slave goes for around \$90' (Bales 1999). Slaves are cheaper today than at any other time in human history (Craig et. al, 2007). It is clear that no value for humanity in the modern day slavery, but the expensive slave of the past was a protected investment, today's slave is cheap and disposable" (Bales, 2001). The question yet remains, why is it that there is a change in the phenomenon? Why cost more then and cheaper now even in the wake of post scientific epoch? Effort shall be made to address the outlined questions in the subsequent headings and subheadings.

## **Reason for the Prevalence of Slavery in the Modern World**

Kevin Bales a renowned and leader in the astir slavery campaign estimated that there are 27 million enslaved individuals World Wide (Bales, 2004). Slavery tends to be booming in the recent times, and this has made scholars all over the world to grow more concern to the trend nature of slavery in the contemporary global world. Scholars like Kevin Bales and the host of others have made tremendous efforts toward understanding, explaining and answering the question of why slavery has become undying phenomenon in the world over.

X-raying some of the factors that have been identified by scholars as promoters of slavery (modern slavery) in the recent times; generally, scholars have identified among others, three over reaching reasons for existence and persistence of slavery throughout the modern world. First, the post-World War II population boom that saw the population of the world from 2 billion to about 7.6 billion people as at October 2017 (UN, World meters October, 2017). It was observed that most of the population growth occurred in the less developed countries of the world where people are perceived to be already vulnerable.

“As a matter of fact, the countries with the greater increases in population since 1945 also appear to have the most people enslaved” (Bales, 2000, p. 5).

The rise in the population growth and the attendant increase in the supply of would-be slaves, led to a downturn in the cost of obtaining a slave (Gould, 2010). Obviously, the law of supply and demand makes slaves to have low market value and no longer considered a capital purchase. This is considerably a resultant effect from the population boom which made readily available supply of slaves exceed demand. The resultant effect of this is a huge drop in the cost of slave. Bales, (2005) asserted that, “while old slave valued as high as \$40,000 and \$100,000 in today’s money, modern slave averagely cost \$100.... Since most slaves today are held for only a few years on average, the profitability of overworking one for the short term far outweighs any cost of obtaining new slaves when necessary” (Bales, 2005, p. 5, 8 – 10, 15). No wonder modern slaves are considered disposable resources and easily replaced.

The second overreaching reason for the persistence of slavery in the contemporary world as identified by Bales (2001) is the rapid economic dynamics and globalization that have pulled rural people off their lands to city centres and into debt. The socio-economic factors and globalization that coincides with this period led to rural dwellers migrating en-mass to the city centers in search for new economic realities. The mass movement of people into the cities has caused a sudden strain on resources and jobs...Many people contending for survival found themselves in squalors and shanty villages, encircled by people battling for scant resources....This in turn created a concentration of desperate people who became easy prey for exploitation and slavery (Gould, 2010). Economic globalization on the other hand, in the form of a sudden change of development strategy towards full incorporation into the world market, as part of the Structural Adjustment Programmes implemented by the IMF and the World Bank, as noted by Van den Auken, further contributed to contemporary forms of slavery by increasing poverty and therefore vulnerability for specific groups of people (see Van den Auken, 2004).

And lastly, the widespread of government corruption is another factor that has paved way for slavery in modern world. If corruption exists, a bribe alone can make almost anything legal (Gould, 2010). Also in his words “when corruption exists, those who wish, are able to use violence to secure slaves” (Bales, 2000, p. 6-7). Thus, corruption is seen as another major player in the insurgence and maintenance of contemporary slavery. Corruption itself is vast, and in the real sense, plays crucial and dimensional role in contemporary slavery most especially in developing countries of the world. All the three factors highlighted above as promoter of modern slavery in the world are perhaps factors commonly found in Africa. These can be adjudged to have played a significant role in making Africans more frustrated thereby becoming vulnerable to the menace of slavery.

## **Trend of Contemporary Slavery**

Towards the mid and latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slavery began to lose its popularity as nations of the world began to give more value to human dignity. This is evident in the United States when President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation proclamation was issued in the year 1863, coupled with the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United State constitution saw the abolition of slavery in the US in 1865. The trend continued till in 1888 when Brazil (being the last country) abolished slavery. After this period, a lot of

international treaties were signed and implemented to put an end to slavery. Examples include “the foundation of the United Nation in 1945, the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which outlaws slavery, the foundation of Human Rights watch in 1978, and more (Masci, 2004, p. 283).

Also, different countries of the world have enacted laws against slavery activities, agencies were also set up to enforce such laws. But to a large extent, slavery has built a resistance by devising mechanisms through which its existence continues to trend among humanity even in the face of the modern world. These trending mechanisms of slavery in the contemporary world are the focus of this section.

Generally, slavery is said to have taken an alien dimension from what was obtainable during the Trans-Atlantic slavery. Notable scholars have identified forced labour, sex slavery, practices of debt bondage and human trafficking (Craig et al., 2007, KUW, 2011, Manzo, 2005, Sharma, 2006, Department of State U.S.A 2010) among others as characteristics of contemporary slavery.

**Forced labour:** “forced labour refers to situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt (debt bondage), retention of identity papers or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities (ILO 2014). Quoting Marx, Pattergon (cited in Manzo, 2005) “slavery operates on the basis of direct forced labour whereas with wage labour the force is direct: forced labour entails the use of force, intimidation, violence or the threat of it to coerce one to work for another as against his/her will as against any socio-economic benefits to the labourer.” The evidence of the above shows that about 25,000 and 40,000 labourers working in slavery conditions in Brazil (Sharma, 2006). Eastern part of Democratic Republic of Congo where children are used as child soldiers (Department of State, U.S.A 2010); in North-East Nigeria evident in the activities of the Boko Haram using children for child soldiers and suicide bombers; Ivory Coast, India, China etc.

The concept of forced labour and debt bondage are intertwined and the act is also common in the South American province, West Africa region, some parts of Europe and East Asian hemisphere. Globally, the worst forms of child labour, ILO (2006) suggests that estimably 126 million children are in one form of child labour or the other.

**Sex slavery or sex trafficking:** this occurs when an adult is coerced, forced, or received into prostitution or maintained in prostitution through coercion – that person is aviation of trafficking (Department of state, U.S.A. 2010). In the same vein, the Department of state, U.S.A (2010) noted that “sex trafficking/slavery can occur within debt bondage, as women and girls are forced to continue in prostitution through the use of unlawful “debt” purportedly incurred through their transportation, recruitment, or even their choice “sale” – which explorers insist they must pay off before they can be free”. It is also good to note that one’s consent to partake in prostitution for one reason or the other and later held in that position even after she wants out, with either force, intimidation, violence or the threat of it. At this point it can be established that such an individual has become victims of sex slavery/trafficking (Department of state, U.S.A. 2010).

**Human trafficking:** this is also known as ‘**trafficking in persons**’ which serves as an umbrella to most of the forms of contemporary slavery can be well established and explained through the definition of it by the United Nations.... “trafficking in person” shall mean the certain of recruitment, transportation, transfer, labouring, or receipt of persons by means of the threat or use of force, or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over other person,

for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practice similar to slavery, servitudes or the removal of organs”, (United Nations 2000, Art. 3.a).

This elaborate definition almost covers every forms of contemporary slavery. Human trafficking has been seen as one of the major problems facing the contemporary human world. There are a lot of factors responsible for the incessant rise in human trafficking in today's world. This ranges from population explosion from after the second world war 1945, Economic globalization with the introduction of structural adjustment programme initiated by IME World Bank in the 1970s and 80s (see Van den Anker, 2004), the high rate of poverty in parts of Africa, South America, Asia and parts of Europe. Another factor that has triggered the reoccurrence of trafficking in the global world and Africa in particular is corruption, which has a united untold hardship on the populace of the region. And in turn the people had no choice other than to start seeking for better condition of life in Europe, Americas, and Asia etc. And by footing they are trafficked into different forms of contemporary slavery. Kelvin Bales argues that an estimated 27 million people are enslaved World Wide (Bales, 2004a).

According to ILO's 2006 report on child labour that, as at 2004, 218 million children are snared in child labour World over, of whom some 26 million children were engaged in dangerous work (ILO, 2005b). The above figure has risen up to 171 million as at 2006, including in farms, factories, and mines (UNICEF 2006a). The 2006 Department of State trafficking in persons report put it that almost 600,000 – 800,000 children, men and women are trafficked across international shores yearly (Craig, et al., 2007).

## **Causes of Slavery in Modern Africa**

Generally speaking, causes of slavery in contemporary Africa is not far-fetched from what Bales (2001) made mention as for the causes of contemporary slavery in the modern world. Viz. Population boom of the post 2<sup>nd</sup> world war, the rapid and dynamic economic change and globalization that face the world since after the war, and finally government corruption (Bales, 2001), Bales believes that these three factors catalyzed the re-introduction of slavery in the contemporary global world. Though, much had been discussed on these factors earlier, however, speaking in the African context, the last variable which is corruption has been most of the problem facing Africa continent which can be said to have largely been responsible for untold and unimaginable hardship and poverty that befalls citizens of the continent. The resultant effect of corruption (untold hardship poverty) necessitated the quest of citizens seeking for greener pasture (migration) in Europe, America, Asia and other parts of the world. Poverty then serves as a push factor pushing the individual from country of origin to places (countries) perceived to be better economically. Example is Europe. The perception of having better economic fortunes in Europe, part of Asia and the Americas serves as a pull factor pulling people from home countries (Africa) to Europe and the likes.

The deplorable state which corruption has left the continent left the citizens in abject poverty to an extent that with the hearing of Europe, people are willing and ready to do anything, doing anything to escape the better imagined than experienced hardship. Thus, people are lured to Europe on the promise of

better and decent jobs and with much better life expectation. The end product of this is often not palatable as individual(s) are being trafficked from land through the Mediterranean Sea to Europe. This is the risk many are taking and willing to take as corruption coupled with its adverse effects has eaten deep into the nooks and crannies of most African societies. Majority of which ended up in different types of slavery camps, some in debt bondage as their handlers/traffickers keep increasing their debts, sex slavery/prostitution, some being sold and resold into slavery. This is currently evident in Libya where lots of Nigerians are being sold into slavery for different purposes (Vanguard Dec. 3, 2017).

On the other hand, greed and the search for greener pastures have also been responsible for the cause of slavery in modern Africa. This can be explained in respect to people who are seeking greener pasture not because they are totally powerless but because they just want to make quick money. Their mind set is that money is easily made in Europe. These individuals pay huge sums of money just to facilitate their movement. According to one of the Libyan returnees' to Nigeria, Ewere Joseph "I paid N.5 million for the journey from Benin to slavery (Vanguard Dec. 3, 2017). This amount of money is enough to start up something in Nigeria and earn a living from it. But he decided to invest in a journey to Europe where he believed he can make some quick fast money.

The complete loss of hope and trust in the government of home countries (African countries in particular) has also been identified as another cause of contemporary slavery in the African region. These five reasons account for huge number of human migration in the said region. It also serves as a push factor as individuals seek imaginary better life outside the shores of Nigeria and Africa at large without the knowledge of what awaits them on the other side.

### **Consequences of Modern Slavery in Nigeria and Africa at large**

Speaking of the consequences of modern slavery in Nigeria and Africa at large, one cannot but notice the huge negative effect of this on the entire African continent. Estimated, there are 27million individuals trapped in one form of slavery or the other World Wide (Bales 2004a); Chunk of this figure is coming from Africa. By so speaking, it calls for alarm. Going on the memory lane, the Trans –Atlantic slave trade saw an estimated of nothing less than 12.5 million slaves transported from the shores Western and Eastern Africa alone (Contemporary slavery teachers' Resource, 2015). On the other hand, nearly fifty million Africans are said to have lost their lives due to horrific conditions on slavery vessels (Anti-slavery international 2005).

History has it that the slaves that were shipped out of Africa were able bodied men and women who were supposed to have laid the foundation of development in all spheres of life in Africa but were caught in drag nets of Europeans and Americans which they in turn laid the foundations of both economic and structural development in new homes. History also has it that the huge profit made from slave trade contributed to the industrial revolution experienced in Europe.

Having laid this background, it is evident that Nigeria and Africa at large is at loss economically in relation to the contemporary slavery. The trend of the Trans –Atlantic Triangular slave trade, Africans were shipped out from their homes as slaves to Europe and the Americas to work on farmlands and factories. The finished products were sent back to Africa for sales. Africa served as market for their finished product, and by so doing they became economically strong. Contemporarily, the trend is still the same. Most of the individuals trafficked out of Africa in recent times ended up being used as slaves. Due to the factors earlier

discussed for slavery in contemporary world, more are being trafficked into Europe and other parts of the world. As such, the increase in supply of slaves and potential of it to the western world and part of Asia is what scholars have described as responsible for the concept of “cheap and disposable,” also geared the demand of slaves worldwide as industries tend to reduce production cost by reducing personnel cost. The foods produced by these slaves (mostly substandard) are being shipped to Africa for sales.

Another undeniable consequence of contemporary slavery to Nigeria and Africa at large is the issue of “Brain Drain”. Since the 70s brain drain has accounted for high level of Africans’ manpower (professionals, skilled and unskilled) trapped in and outside the shores of Africa for one reason or the other. These are individuals who would have contributed their quota towards the socio-economic and political development of the region if they had been in the continent.

### **Theoretical Explanation to Contemporary Trend of Slavery**

There are different theoretical postulations that can best describe the contemporary trend of slavery in Africa and the rest of the world in recent times. For the purpose of this work, the Marxian perspective or theoretical postulation has been chosen to give an insight to the subject matter. Karl Marx sees the basis of human struggle, conflict, exploitation and even development in economic terms which is embedded in the production process. This determined who gets what, when and how. Marx drew a parallel line between the two classes of people which he opined that made up the society. These are the ‘haves and the have not otherwise known as the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Marx observed that the bourgeoisie class always subjects, exploit and maintain constant dominance on the proletariat. Marx also said that these groups of classes are characterized by conflict as the exploited class seeks to break out of their current state and the exploiters doing everything possible to maintain the status quo, as to maintain and continue their dominance and exploitativeness.

From the foregoing, the theory can be used in understanding and explaining the trend of contemporary slavery, conceptualizing the world into economic lines. Economic is seen as the substructure that controls the superstructure. One can begin to understand why demand and supply of slaves is on the increase side in the contemporary world. The ILO estimates that the World Wide traffic in human beings is worth at least US 32 billion annually (quoted in Craig, et al., 2017). Thus, lots of monies are being made from slavery in the contemporary world owing to that fact that slaves are perceived cheaper and disposable.

Explaining contemporary slavery using Marxian perspective in respect to economic, modern slavery is not just a socio-psychological condition (Bales, 2002), but a political economic relation of power (Manzo, 2005 p. 20). Speaking of political economic power relation, the incorporation of the African economy (Periphery economy as used by the dependent theorists), into the global economy through the concept of globalization has also been seen as a method of maintaining dominant and exploitation of the peripheral by the core countries of the world. In his words, Van den Anker, “economic globalization in the form of a sudden change of development strategy towards the full incorporation in the world market, as part structural adjustment programmes implemented by the IMF and the world Bank, does contribute to the contemporary forms of slavery by increasing poverty and therefore vulnerability for specific groups of people”. (Van den Anker, 2004).



These groups of people referred to in Auker's work are developing nations of the world. The poverty and subsequent vulnerability created through the various programmes and policies of core countries can be said to a deliberate attempt by the industrialized nations of the world to keep the developing nations on their knees while they siphon the surpluses of the land through their multinational companies which are later transferred to home countries for further development. Thereby leaving the developing world in abject poverty, increases vulnerability and frustration that further increases supply of modern slaves and finally, increases the dependent level of developing world.

## **Conclusion**

The work has been able to x-ray the meaning of slavery, why slavery still exists in the contemporary world, the nature of modern slavery, trend of modern slavery, down to causes of slavery in modern day. The work also took a special and closer look some of the consequences of contemporary in Nigeria and Africa at large while also paying special attention to some theoretical assumptions that underpinned the ugly incident of slavery in our contemporary climes. In all, slavery has been seen to currently exist in all regions of the world (Van den Anker, 2004, p. 15). As such, the unfortunate incidence has continued to mete untold hardship on its victims and impinge on the socio-economic and political development of the African continent and the world over.

## **Policy Implications/Recommendations**

- Policies on human migration should be reviewed across borders;
- Also the agencies established to tackle the menace of trafficking should be straightened so as to function effectively and efficiently;
- Countries caught with high level of trafficking (developing world) should look inwards and find a lasting solution to issues of corruption and over dependent on the advanced countries of the world and
- Finally, citizens of these countries (Nigeria and countries in Africa) are advised have fundamental change of mind in terms of traveling to Europe in search for greener pasture without a proper channel of migration.

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