A Qualitative Analysis of Child Trafficking in Haiti and the Dominican Republic Using the Capitalist Theory

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Abstract

On January 12, 2010, Haiti experienced an earthquake that brought the country more dreadful governance, economic and human rights situations. Despite the billions of dollars that have been donated toward the reconstruction effort in Haiti, the country still remains the poorest in the Western Hemisphere. “What was already a difficult place to live has also become a nearly impossible place to police” (UN, 2012). Haitians have been struggling to survive for decades; the earthquake has worsened the situation, sending many Haitians to the Dominican Republic and exacerbating child slavery in the region. The purpose of this research is to analyze the economic situation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic that causes certain individuals in the two nations to engage in child trafficking. The illicit trade has been caused by serious issues in Haiti such as a poor economic system, the lack of education, many displaced people, and poverty. Certain individuals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic who are motivated by profit are using child trafficking as a means to enrich, themselves. This capitalist impulse causes instability in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Capitalist Theory is based on the individual’s motivation for profit. Utilizing this theory, this paper therefore hypothesizes that the greater the profit to be gained from child trafficking, the greater the incentive for certain individuals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to engage in the trade. This capitalist impulse through which private means of ownership are used for profit maximization generates instability. To test the hypothesis, qualitative data were collected from both primary and secondary sources using expert interviews, document analysis and observational techniques. The data collected were systematically analyzed, and the findings delineated from analysis support the hypothesis.

Keywords: Economy, Restavek, Haiti, Dominican Republic

1. Introduction

As a result of the earthquake in Haiti, which took place on January 2010, Haiti was inflicted with economic disparity and devastations among its citizens; however, child trafficking has overshadowed the problems in Haiti. The earthquake has diminished the governance of Haiti. Post-earthquake Haitians had always migrated to their sister island, the Dominican Republic, in search of work and better lifestyles. However, the earthquake has put Haitians, especially women and children, in greater risk to human trafficking. The United States Department of State recognizes Haiti as a special case for the last six years in its Trafficking in Persons report. The majority of trafficking cases are found among Restaveks, or child domestic servitude. Approximately 2,500 Haitian children are trafficked every year to the Dominican Republic (Palayret, 2011; Baker, 2012) through restavek, which is defined as a child sent from the countryside to a family in the city with the expectation that the child will have a better life. Restavek is therefore characterized as a modern form of child slavery (dictionary.com).
Human trafficking can be traced to the Haitian Revolution, which was caused by the struggle of enslaved Haitians. Slaves outnumbered the free people in Haiti on a 10:1 ratio. The Haitian Revolution began on August 22, 1791 when the country was under the leadership of Boukman (Coupeau, 2008).

The purpose of this essay is to analyze why Haitians are still practicing child labor. While the practice has been around long before the earthquake, it seems that many families now feel that their children will be better off in bigger cities or other countries. This essay utilizes Capitalist Theory to examine the actions of the Haitian government and the economic instability in the country, and how it deepened the situation for poor families in Haiti. The time frame of this essay is from the Haitian Revolution, which began on August 22, 1791, up to the present day. The Haitian Revolution is important because it was then that Haitians fought for their freedom against slavery.

The major research questions probed in this paper are as follows: (a) What has the government of Haiti done to decrease the modern day slavery of children? (b) How has the economic instability deepened the lifestyles of poor families in Haiti? (c) Why do certain Dominicans take part in such a trade? (d) Why did child trafficking increase after the earthquake? Thus, the importance of this essay therefore hinges on the fact that by investigating these questions, it seeks to gain a better understanding of how certain Haitian and Dominican citizens are practicing modern day slavery through children.

2. Literature Review

Although slavery was abolished decades ago, it has never been removed from cultures around the world. Human trafficking is today’s form of slavery in which adults and children are forced into labor, prostitution, pornography, etc. Haiti has been recognized as a special case of human trafficking for the past six years. After the earthquake, human trafficking has drastically increased in Haiti. It has not been a priority in Haiti to put a stop to human trafficking, especially child trafficking. The following is a thematic review of a sample of the works on the topic.

Serap Kantarci is the author of the article, “The Effects of Globalization in the Sex Tourism” (2007). In the article, he introduces globalization and how it has had an effect in sexual tourism. Kantarci explains that sex trade has increased due to a globalized system of communication and transportation. He also discusses the issues that women face in Third World countries. The author elucidates on sex work being one of the main ways women earn a living.

In the article, “Combating Child trafficking and abuses in Haiti” (2008), Garry Conille writes about the fight against child trafficking. He speaks on the United Nations Global initiative to fight trafficking, which is a partnership of four United Nations agencies, which intend to advice citizens on human trafficking and how the country should be fighting it. Conille also states real examples on how to pursue a restavek and the lifestyle of a restavek.

In his article, “A world Enslaved (2008), E. Benjamin Skinner explores the world of trafficking and identifies it as slavery. In the article, he shows real-life examples on how easy it is for an American citizen to buy a child in Haiti. Skinner explains that it is easy for traffickers to get these children to agree to be lured from desperately impoverished rural parents, with promises of free schooling and a better lifestyle. The author also gives specific examples of how human trafficking is a job for many in Haiti.

Cyril Josh Baker is the author of the article “In the Wake of The Haitian Quake, Human Trafficking Fears Loom (2010). In the article, he introduces the deepened issue of child trafficking after the earthquake. The author focuses on child trafficking as it hindered an American based charity group when the group tried “adopting” 33 children after the earthquake. He discusses the concerns that this dilemma rose.

In the article, “Fighting Child Trafficking on Haiti’s Border” (2011), Gallianne Palayret discusses the security on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The author explains that traffickers already know the routines of patrol officers; therefore, it is easy for them to do their job.

Haiti after the Earthquake (2011) by Paul Farmer is a book written after the 2010 Earthquake. The book focuses on the chaos and ruins that the earthquake brought to Haiti. The author speaks on his personal feelings and analysis of Haitians dreadful lifestyle. The tragedy of the earthquake worsened the economy in Haiti; however, Haiti had already, been destroyed by Americans long before the earthquake.

Before understanding the governance and culture of Haiti, one must first gain knowledge on the history of the country. In Steeve Coupeau’s book the history of Haiti (2008), he begins by tracing back to when Columbus arrived to the island in 1492. He illustrates on Haiti’s tourism being drastically low is due to it been thrown at slavery, poverty and revolutions.
Reginald Dumas documents his experience as U.N. secretary General Kofi Annan's special advisor in his book *An Encounter with Haiti* (2008). He illustrates the dynamics of big power in a small country. Dumas experience in Haiti was during the crucial stage of Haiti.

In the book, *Fixing Haiti Minustah & Beyond* (2011), Jorge Heine and Andrew S. Thompson introduce the history of Haiti to the reader. He then goes on to speaking about the ruins that the earthquake brought to Haiti as a whole. He also analyzes the challenges faced by the U.N. & surrounding countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile and United States, while trying to help Haiti. Thompson and Heine examine the following questions in their books: Is Haiti beyond U.N. help? Is it a failed state? What will it take to alleviate the Haitian predicament?

Kathryn Farr, the author of article “Sex Trafficking: The Global market in women and children” (2007) educates the reader about sex trafficking and the industry of sex trafficking. She illustrates her focus through a radical feminist perspective. Her view of sex trafficking is in the elements of transnational migration of labor, which means any type of prostitution is slavery and violence against women.

Although many authors have tried to raise awareness on the problem, child trafficking continues to be an ongoing dilemma. This study aims to analyze child trafficking in Haiti and the Dominican Republic as modern-day slavery in order to draw more attention to it.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

The theory used to guide this study is Capitalist Theory, which is based on the idea of a “Social system based upon private ownership of the means of production which entails a completely uncontrolled and unregulated economy where all land is privately owned” (Harman, 2000: 4). Capitalism is applied in this study to economic issues in Haiti and the Dominican Republic by arguing that certain citizens are practicing modern day slavery for their own benefits.

This theory is useful because it can be used to investigate plausible the causes and effects of child trafficking. By using the Capitalist Theory, one can identify the economic crisis that is affecting the social classes in Haiti.

Capitalist Theory is important in this study because its premise is that certain citizens are engaging in child trafficking because of its huge profit. The paper relies on the fact that those who are participating in modern-day slavery are doing so because capitalism makes it possible.

The type of research methodology used for this analysis is qualitative, emphasized by expert interviews and also my first-hand knowledge of the issue. Qualitative methodology is used when the analysis conveyed through research is non-numerical along with primary data and secondary sources. This analysis examines how the 2010 earthquake has affected not only the economic system of Haiti but also children’s lifestyles that are causing them to be trafficked to the Dominican Republic. First-hand knowledge and experiences in the Dominican Republic are also useful in the in-depth analysis of child trafficking from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. The expert interview technique is also a great advantage for the research because a researcher is able to gather data based on personal experience and knowledge on the issue. Haiti has been overwhelmed by many economic problems after the earthquake, making it a unique case to study in regards to child trafficking.

This paper hypothesizes that the greater the profit to be gained from child trafficking, the greater the incentive for certain individuals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to engage in the trade. The unit of analysis comprises children because the paper looks at their plight in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The level of analysis is macro because this paper examines the elements of Child Trafficking in Haiti and the Dominican Republic after the earthquake in January 2010.

Qualitative data were collected from both primary and secondary sources using expert interviews, document analysis and observational techniques. I also had first-hand information, since I was born and raised, attended elementary and secondary school, and spend my holidays in the region being studied. Factors that shaped the data collection technique are the personal interest on the Haitian economy and the Dominican Republic, abundance of research and cost of utilizing alternative data collection techniques.

4. Data Analysis

With little education on how to conduct a war, slaves in Haiti began the revolution by burning plantations and executing as many Frenchmen as possible. They then became military and politically organized with the help of Francois Dominique Toussaint (Coupeau, 2008).
During the time of the Haitian Revolution, there were similar revolts in other islands of the Caribbean; however, the Haitian Revolution was the most successful because of influence from the French Revolution. The achievements of the French Revolution were the ideal inspiration the slaves in Haiti needed to arouse their passion. Slaves in Haiti had been mistreated for many years; their anger and passion led to the first success of slave insurrection. In 1840, Haiti became the first country to abolish slavery (Coupeau, 2008).

Even though slavery was abolished centuries ago, it has never really been discarded from the globe. Today, human trafficking is known as modern-day slavery in which adults and children are forced into labor, prostitution, pornography, etc. A US Department of State report defines specific forms of slavery, including sex trafficking, in which adults or children are forced or deceived into prostitution; forced labor among adults and children; bonded labor, in which traffickers or recruiters exploit an initial debt assumes as terms of employment; involuntary domestic servitude; and use of children as soldiers. Poverty and political instability have made it impossible for Haiti to abolish slavery (US Department of State, 2011).

Child trafficking in Haiti has been an epidemic long before the earthquake. *Restaveks*, the term used for child domestic servitude, is part of the culture in Haiti. Poor families send their children to live in bigger cities like Port-au-Prince or across the border to the Dominican Republic for a better lifestyle. However, by doing so, they are putting the lives of these children in danger. The children are often forced into the sex trade, are not given an education, and are not allowed to live a normal childhood or eat a normal meal. Also, they never grow up to realize that they have rights (author’s observations).

The problem begins in the countryside where families feel they have no support or anything for which to live. They either sell their children to traffickers or give them to host families able to provide them with work. It is a reality with which poor people in Haiti struggle from birth (author’s observations). Despite human rights organizations often fighting for some child slaves, these children do not have enough people to help and give them hope. To find a solution to this difficult situation, organizations need to go beyond the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and beyond the bigger cities in Haiti. Families in the countryside need to be given aspiration and also be informed of their human rights. The following example is that of a six-year old domestic servant in 2007 who was sent to live with another family by her father:

Jeanette is walking up a hill in Petionville, a district in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince. She is carrying a huge blue drum full of water on her head. Jeanette is only six, but has to walk 4km (2.4 miles) every day to get the water from the public standpipe (Castor, 2007).

Jeanette was born in the countryside outside the small town of Hinche in the north of Haiti. Her parents are among the poorest of the poor in this country where more than half the population of nine million lives on less than 50 US cents a day. Her father one day told her she was going to stay with (French: *resteravec*) distant relatives in the Haitian capital. Since then, Jeanette has become one of the estimated 250,000 children used as near-slave labor in Haiti. Parents need to accept the responsibility of having children and find a way of taking care of their children instead of putting them in a worse situation. The problem deepens for *restaveks* when a child reaches the age of 15, when by law a person in Haiti must be paid to work. But this is when many families either throw their children out on the street or force them to work as unpaid domestics.

The challenge for the Haitian children in the Dominican Republic begins with them not knowing the language or the culture and then being physically and verbally abused by people who do not want them in the country. Margarett Lubin, who works with the International Organization for Migration in Haiti, points out the following:

Because economic conditions are better there, some Haitian parents think they are helping their children get on if they are handed over to agents who ferry them across the border, but those kids have no rights at all in the Dominican Republic, and they are often abused. Haitian children struggle everyday to try and get a shelter to live in and to at least be able to eat one meal every day, when both are already a human right and it should not be a struggle for a person to attain neither (Lubin, 2007).

It is easy for a person from the Dominican Republic to buy a child slave in Dajabon, the Dominican town on the Haitian border. A person will just ask around for the kind of child he/she needs. The easiest part of everything is getting these children over the border; traffickers can either bribe the guards or cross through the Massacre River. These children are wanted because they are the ones who are not aware of their rights and will work for either no pay or “cheap labor.” There is a thriving trade in Haitian children in the Dominican Republic, where they...
are mostly used for domestic service, agricultural work or prostitution” (guardian.co). Nicole Lee, President of TransAfrica, stated in 2007:

The plight of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic, the neighboring country that shares the island of Hispanola is that Dominican companies bring in Haitian workers, but their children, who are born there, are deprived of citizenship as the Dominican Republic does not issue them birth certificates. “They’re not citizens of the Dominican Republic; they’re not citizens of Haiti. They have not county - which is a violation of international law (Lee, 2007).

Haiti won the battle against slave-owner 207 years ago; but today, Haitians are enslaving their own people and also letting others enslave them.

The Haitian government is aware of the issue its country has been facing for decades; however, it has made little or no progress in addressing it. Prevention to the problem has been encouraged mostly by NGOs. The government has had little to do with assisting victims with human rights information and coordinating anti-trafficking strategies. Also, Haiti lacks the ability to enforce the legislation to prohibit any form of trafficking. The Haitian justice system did not make advances in prosecuting traffickers during the reporting period. The government did not report any investigations, prosecutions, or convictions of trafficking offenders in Haiti. It is severely understaffed and lacks the necessary resources such as vehicles and computers to equip many Haitian National Police Units (Palayret, 2011).

Laws about child slavery have been established, but their enforcement has not been strongly enough. In 1984, Haiti passed the Labor Code of 1984, which sets the minimum working age to be 15. Also, in 2003, a law was passed to prohibit child domestic labor, mostly in restaveks. But these laws remain to be enforced (Dumas, 2008).

That the Haitian child trafficking trade must be quite lucrative to those who engage in it is hardly a matter of dispute give the data in Table 1 of the number of assisted cases alone reported to the International Organization for Migration in 2011 alone. As can be seen in the table, Haiti accounts for the overwhelming majority of the cases.

Table 1: Child Trafficking in the Western Hemisphere, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Cases Assisted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbia</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haiti</td>
<td>656</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Caribbean region</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The United States of America</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REGIONAL TOTAL</td>
<td>984</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: International Organization for Migration Trafficking Case Data
http://ec.europa.eu/anti-trafficking/download.action;jsessionid=re1GPLSD3X2MQMTyFpT5YmplykC54Jzzy02L4CSQTLtMzFPZgR1FI-471497004?nodeId=0c594432-d910-421a-864f-45f546ae3abb&fileName=IOM+Global+Trafficking+Data+on+Assisted+Cases+2012.pdf
5. Expert Interviews

In order to get another perspective on child trafficking from Haiti to the Dominican Republic, I conducted three expert interviews. These respondents requested to remain anonymous. The first interviewee is a friend and colleague who has worked for the US Department of State. According to this respondent, after the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the dire conditions forced Haitian citizens to find alternative forms of survival techniques during the ensuing economic crisis. Consequently, he added, child trafficking has increased tremendously. He also noted that non-profit organizations have been persistently tackling the issue; however, attention needs to be drawn to child trafficking by government officials in order to make the necessary changes.

The second interviewee is a close relative, who was raised in the Dominican Republic and has witnessed these conditions. According to her, Dominicans are involved in child trafficking because like Haitians, the Dominicans lack access to resources that are provided by this cheap form of labor. She noted that child trafficking has a long-term effect on the identity of the children. After years of cheap labor, she added, the children are not granted Dominican citizenship, making them displaced persons.

The last interviewee is a young lady who works in a colmado (grocery store) in the Dajabon. She witnesses the adults illegally transporting children across the border into the Dominican Republic. Although this happens very frequently, she remains very stricken by the act. The lack of acknowledgement by the border control startles her; she believes that this carelessness is responsible for child trafficking to thrive. In order to change these conditions, she suggested that there needs to be an agreement among the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic and the non-profit organizations that focuses on eradicating child trafficking through strict law enforcement.

Throughout the expert interviews, the hypothesis was affirmed. The economic pressure in both countries, Dominican Republic and Haiti, is forcing certain citizens to engage in criminal acts in order to earn a living. For the problem to be ameliorated, the governments need to start building strong ties with the non-profit organizations that are currently working it.

6. Conclusion

Based on the Capitalist Theory, it was hypothesized that the greater the profit to be gained from child trafficking, the greater the incentive for certain individuals in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to engage in the trade. This hypothesis is shown to be tenable. Certain Haitians and Dominicans individuals are engaging in child trafficking for their own benefit.

Having firsthand knowledge of the issue that has been affecting so many lives has made it a difficult for my journey to carefully analyze and grasp the factors that have led to child trafficking to increase. The reason for this analysis was to examine the economic disparity after the earthquake and its impact on child trafficking. After analyzing the available data, it has been shown that the impetus for certain citizens to participate in child trafficking hinges on the desire to make a living and it is also profitable. This shows that phenomena like the earthquake in 2010 can have severe consequences on an entire population of a country. It is therefore hoped that this study will encourage others to engage in deeper analyses of the issue and also encourage the development of intensified reform programs to combat child trafficking in Third World countries.

7. References