

Human Trafficking from Southern Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala:

Why These Victims are Trafficked into Modern Day Florida

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the countless number of individuals who dedicate their lives to the fight for human rights; to those who seek to end the suffering of the slaves around the globe; and to the hundreds of thousands of men, women, and children who suffer and die daily as human trafficking victims.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| List of Tables..... | iii |
| Abstract..... | iv |
| Chapter 1: Introduction..... | 1 |
| Statement of the Problem..... | 1 |
| Background and Need..... | 1 |
| Purpose..... | 6 |
| Research Questions..... | 7 |
| Delineation..... | 7 |
| Framework..... | 8 |
| Methods..... | 11 |
| Setting..... | 12 |
| Procedures..... | 12 |
| Outline of the Thesis..... | 17 |
| Chapter 2: Review of the Literature..... | 19 |
| Trafficking in Persons as a National Issue..... | 20 |
| The Demand..... | 25 |
| The Supply..... | 28 |
| Conclusion..... | 31 |
| Chapter 3: Historic Overview of the Issue..... | 32 |
| Maya Heritage..... | 34 |
| Colonial Legacy..... | 37 |
| Machismo..... | 39 |
| Conclusion..... | 43 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Chapter 4: Analysis..... | 44 |
| Trafficking Statistics | 44 |
| Trafficking Cases Summaries | 48 |
| Case One—Melchor and Monsalve..... | 49 |
| Case Two—Navarette | 51 |
| Case Three—Cadena | 53 |
| Case Four—Tecum..... | 56 |
| Case Five—Ramos | 57 |
| Case Six—Pascual | 59 |
| Methods of Force, Fraud, and Coercion | 61 |
| Identification..... | 62 |
| Threats and Force..... | 64 |
| Brainwashing..... | 66 |
| Themes..... | 68 |
| Limitations | 71 |
| Recommendations for Future Research..... | 72 |
| Conclusion | 73 |
| References | 77 |
| Interviews..... | 82 |
| Appendix A: Copyright Permission..... | 83 |

LIST OF TABLES

| | |
|--|----|
| Table 1: World Development Indicators..... | 3 |
| Table 2: Basic Statistics for Latin America, Canada, and the United States | 41 |
| Table 3: ACCESS Program, Certified Trafficking Victims Clients..... | 47 |
| Table 4: Case Statistics..... | 72 |

ABSTRACT

Florida is ranked as one of the United States' top three destination states for human trafficking; many of those victims originate from Mesoamerica—Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Human trafficking is a growing problem which hinders universal human rights for hundreds of new victims in Florida every year. Mesoamericans have a high risk of becoming victims due to the situations in their home countries. The issue of human trafficking has only recently gained the national and state attention of law makers and law enforcement officers.

This study uses several human trafficking cases to educate and exemplify why Mesoamerican victims are selected and how human trafficking takes place in Florida. The results of this study demonstrate that traffickers use their knowledge of victims and victims' societies to lure and then enslave them into sex and labor trafficking. This research uses criminal cases to illustrate the conditions of the enslavement of human trafficking victims, the methods used by the traffickers, and the culmination of the court cases for both victims and perpetrators. Furthermore, it provides points of discussion to initiate future research and to guide legislature and law enforcement in methods to end this barrier to universal human rights.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Brimming with theme parks, cruises, museums, and other area attractions, Florida is the tourist and family fun center of the United States. However, these attractions shadow the darker side of Florida; it ranks third in the nation for the greatest prevalence of human trafficking. Many victims of human trafficking rescued in the state of Florida are Mesoamerican, from Southern Mexico, Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. Often, many of the traffickers are from this same region as well. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights promised that life and liberty are universal and cannot be withdrawn or abated (<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>). It states in Article 4 that, “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.” Yet, more than six decades later thousands of Mesoamericans are enslaved and exploited in the state of Florida.

Background and Need

The demand for human slaves inside the borders of the United States creates a massively lucrative market which requires a steady flow of its primary resource—victims. Human slavery takes two major forms—labor and sex trafficking (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013). Labor trafficking also includes domestic servitude, a

common form of human trafficking. Sex trafficking, which is the primary focus of this study, is the most common, often incorporating labor trafficking in many instances. Many victims of sex trafficking are forced into the commercial sex industry as a means of turning a profit for their traffickers. Thus, areas of increased commercial sexual activity, such as Florida, are linked to a higher demand and prevalence of human trafficking. Although the demand for human slaves is profound, the push from the victims' home countries plays a monumental role in the process of enslavement.

All across Mesoamerica, inequality, poverty, hunger, and death have persisted for centuries. The poor populations living in this developing region have suffered and continue to suffer through deplorable conditions, such as natural disasters, disease, dictators, economic hardship, starvation, and malnutrition (Amnesty International 2010). Compared to many other nations around the continent, life-expectancy rates in Mesoamerica consistently lag several years behind, infant mortality continues to be elevated, and overall health is poor (United States State Department 2011). These rates rival some developing countries in Africa, such as Libya, Egypt, Eritrea, and South Africa (Table 1). Some of the most basic human rights escape the grasps of poor Mesoamericans.

| | Life Expectancy (years) | Under 5 Mortality (per 1000) | Health Conditions (Improved Drinking Water) | Health Conditions (Sanitation Facilities) |
|---------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| United States | 79 | 8 | 99% | 100% |
| Mexico | 77 | 16 | 96% | 85% |
| Guatemala | 70 | 30 | 92% | 78% |
| Honduras | 73 | 21 | 87% | 77% |
| El Salvador | 72 | 15 | 88% | 87% |
| Libya | 75 | 16 | Unavailable | 97% |
| Egypt | 73 | 21 | 99% | 95% |
| Eritrea | 62 | 41 | Unavailable | Unavailable |
| South Africa | 53 | 47 | 91% | 79% |

Table 1: World Development Indicators: Comparison of American and African Nations
Source: UNICEF, unicef.org

The history of Mesoamerica has led to a massive cohort of Mesoamericans in desperate circumstances, which often leads to tragic ends. In evaluating the situation of those rescued from human trafficking in the United States, certain commonalities of victims demonstrate that Mesoamericans are prime targets for human traffickers looking to turn desperate and marginalized people into lucrative resources for monetary gain. Most victims do not speak English, have a low socio-economic status, and are vulnerable due to factors such as age, education level, and disability (Shively, et al 2012, 11-13; Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014).

Furthermore, the persistence of the social systems of patriarchy and machismo, which are prevalent in Mesoamerica, feed into ideas regarding a lack of agency (Prevost and Vanden 2011). In this area of the world, the idealized male role as the leader and head of the family, as one who is aggressive and prideful, has also spread into the larger society. Government officials and presidents of these nations have even been esteemed for their macho pride and leadership styles. Unfortunately, this preoccupation with male superiority has led to a denigration of women. They are often treated as less than their male counterparts. This machismo phenomenon fosters a mindset of male domination, which can often lead to mistreatment of women and children at the hands of men.

Traffickers' tactics for capturing victims include kidnapping and broken promises of a better life in the United States (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013). In many kidnapping cases, victims are taken after running away from home or are lured by skilled traffickers with legitimate work or unrealistic ideas of life with the trafficker. Traffickers are experts at evaluating the situations of their potential victims. They make promises of fame and fortune, wealth and security, or even love. After the victims become trafficked, reality is harsh and cruel. International victims destined to live out lives of slavery, labor servitude, and prostitution, come from economically unstable and deprived places (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014). International victims in Florida were reported as originating mainly

from Mesoamerica, India, the Caribbean, and the Philippines (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013).

Human trafficking is big business and generates enormous amounts of revenue every year. According to Corporal Alan Wilkett of the Pasco County Sheriff's Office, a trafficker may spend roughly one thousand dollars procuring a victim, and then the trafficker will gain more than one hundred thousand dollars in profits during his or her victim's estimated eight-year life expectancy (interview, November 20, 2013). Only drug trafficking outstrips human trafficking in its economic yield; however, recent trends will soon see human trafficking taking the lead (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014). Annually, nine billion dollars is spent buying and selling other human beings (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014). Trafficking is a very profitable business for traffickers, as they can continue to exploit their victims long after the first purchase or smuggling. Using various methods of force, fraud, and coercion, traffickers create a world of terror and helplessness for victims.

The steady stream of demand for enslaved humans in Florida is fed by Mesoamerican victims. The situations in this area of the world breeds targets for human trafficking due to poverty, desperation, political unrest, and other factors of global marginalization (Prevost and Vanden 2011). Victims from Mesoamerica fall prey to many forms of coercion and fraudulent promises. These promises can be as

fundamental as food and shelter to elaborate deceptions involving fame and stardom (Smith 2013, 45-47). They are then smuggled into a life of slavery and, for many, death. Mesoamericans, as victims of trafficking in Florida, face a more complicated situation than United States' citizens, both as victims and survivors. Alienation from their home culture, a distrust of law enforcement and social workers, and laws regarding non-citizens create a difficult situation for many to overcome and heal.

Purpose

This study examines the human trafficking of Mesoamericans into the state of Florida. By adding a greater understanding of the situation as well as offering suggestions for decreasing this criminal activity, this research can educate and inform. It could be argued that the pull of demand from Florida is the primary motivational force. However, this study forwards the hypothesis that the situations surrounding the victims in their home countries, working in conjunction with demand, creates a lethal slave market which ensnares thousands of victims each year.

The prevalence of human trafficking has only recently caught the attention of government officials and concerned citizens of the United States. Since that time, the nation has been working on many levels, from government to NGOs, to combat the issue. The most current Trafficking in Persons Report states that, "The U.S. government fully complies with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. Federal law enforcement prosecuted more cases than in the previous reporting period, obtained

convictions of sex and labor trafficking offenders, and strengthened training of government officials at the federal and state levels (U.S. Department of State 2013).” It is hoped that the outcome of this research will provide useful data to those attempting to abate this pervasive crime. By providing evidence to support the hypothesis and ideas to decrease this criminal activity, this study aims to enforce basic human rights.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the questions which arise from this situation. Why are Mesoamericans common victims of human trafficking into the state of Florida? How are these victims obtained, smuggled across the border, and held as slaves in Florida?

Delineation

For the purposes of this study, Mesoamerica will be defined as the Northern Tier of Central America, which includes the countries of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras, and the southernmost area of Mexico. This definition of Mesoamerica refers to the heartland of the region. Southern Mexico consists of the Yucatan and the state of Chiapas, as these areas contain a high population of indigenous people, common victims of trafficking in this region. Chiapas was once part of Central America, and both Chiapas and the Yucatan remain culturally, economically, politically, and geographically similar to the other countries of the Mesoamerican heartland.

The legal commercial sex industry is defined as any legally sanctioned activity which commercializes sexual activity, such as “live sex shows; all variety of pornographic texts, videos, and images, both in print and on line; fetish clubs; sexual “emporiums” featuring lap-dancing and wall-dancing; escort agencies; telephone sex and cyber-sex contacts; [and] “drive through” striptease venues (Bernstein, Elisabeth 2001).” In this research, all types of legal sex establishments are included.

This study uses the U.S. legal definition of human trafficking, defined as, “(a) sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age; or (b) the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery” (Section 103(8) of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000).

Framework

Aside from relying on data and case studies of human trafficking, this study is rooted in theory. Developed by Andre Gunder Frank, dependency theory plays a role in evaluating this transnational issue (1969). Dependency theory states that developing countries are milked for their resources. Periphery nations, like those of Mesoamerica, are forced into feeding their resources to the core nations, such as the United States. This system was historically established by the core nations, dating back to colonial

history. The United States, in order to meet demand, bleeds resources from Mesoamerica, which in this case are the people themselves.

This study uses dependency theory to argue that human trafficking from Mesoamerica into Florida is a transnational issue. The trafficking of Mesoamericans can be understood by means of the core-periphery analysis (Frank 1969). Mesoamerica is a prime example of an area composed of periphery countries, one whose main resource is its people. Core countries like the United States, which rely on the raw material and cheap human resources of periphery countries, can escape the social issues surrounding a globally low socio-economic position.

The idea of structural-functionalism as a means of understanding the roles of societies is essential as well (Cole 1966). This theory treats society as an organism, with customs and institutions working together to fill niches created by the greater society (Cole 1966 40-42). This theory aids in understanding that for as long as there is a demand created by society, there too will be a supply. Both theories aid in understanding the situation of human trafficking from Mesoamerica into Florida.

The use of structural-functionalism asserts that aspects of society determine actions for the whole. Not only can it be said that as long as there is a social demand for victims of labor and sex trafficking, there will be a demand, but furthermore, due to Mesoamerica's role in the world, this area will furnish people to meet that demand. Integrating theories tie these theories together with the criminal activity of human

trafficking (Lutya and Lanier 2012, 562). Demand theory, constitutive theory, and economic theory all add layers of reason to the framework as they account for the constant demand for victims, the inequality of power, and the economic forces. “To synthesize, human traffickers and demand, each play an instrumental role in the victimization...Identified are unguarded victims—seen as attractive targets who are innocent or facilitating the process, cooperative even and whose countries may be experiencing some structural constraints—to supply the needs of the demand (Lutya and Lanier 2012, 567).” The organs of society work together to shape the complex system (Cole 1966). In this case, structures work together to increase human trafficking.

Louise Shelly offers a theory specific to human trafficking (2010). She argues that human trafficking has not received the attention it deserves, despite its global position as a huge transnational crime (Shelly 2, 2010). She continues her argument, noting that the forms of human trafficking encompass diverse methods of exploitation, even those not covered in this study, such as child soldiers and organ sales (Shelly 2, 2010). Her proposed theory of human trafficking is global, incorporating all the different types throughout the world. Shelly states that:

World conditions have created increased demand and supply. Migration flows are enormous, and this illicit trade is hidden within the massive movement of people. The supply exists because globalization has caused increasing economic and demographic disparities between the developing and developed world along with the feminization of poverty and the marginalization of many rural communities. Globalization has also resulted in the tremendous growth of tourism that has enabled pedophiles to travel and many to engage in sex tourism. Trafficking has expanded

because the transportation infrastructure is there and transportation costs have declined (2-3, 2010).

Shelly provides evidence that trafficking in humans and smuggling of humans has been growing quickly and has been beneficial for transnational criminals (2010). Current trends in globalization, after the Cold War, which enhance regional conflicts and blur borders, result in an increased number of both economic and political refugees and illicit criminal groups. The law of supply and demand has created a new level of demand for trafficking victims and new entrepreneur opportunities for criminals, as producers require forced labor and forced sex workers to increase profits and remain competitive. The business of human trafficking is economically very profitable, due to “low start-up costs, minimal risks, high profits, and large demand (Shelly 3, 2010).” For traffickers, exploiting human beings is a more profitable economic venture than drugs or weapons, since humans can be sold and exploited repeatedly. Society as a whole suffers due to human trafficking, harming the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights (Shelly 3, 2010).

Methods

In order to contribute to this field of study, this research will seek to explain the crime of human trafficking, at least for those cases which link the demand for slaves in Florida to the desperate situations of Mesoamericans in their home countries. Using case studies of six court cases of human trafficking in Florida with Mesoamerican victims, it becomes possible to understand the factors which increase human trafficking

regarding this population (Lester 1999). Such research will educate in order to decrease the prevalence of human trafficking in Florida, a domestic issue which has been the focus of attention in the United States since 2000.

Setting

This study was carried out in the state of Florida under direction of the Institute for the Study of Latin America and the Caribbean (ISLAC) at the University of South Florida. The cases of human trafficking examined in this research are all Florida cases. The survivors involved in this study were trafficked into the state of Florida from Mesoamerica.

Procedures

To begin the process of studying this particular issue, basic information on human trafficking in Florida was obtained from the Center for Public Safety Innovation, St. Petersburg College—Allstate Center. The “Training Those Who Serve” tutorial offered by the college is used in training law enforcement officers regarding human trafficking. It teaches how to identify victims, capture traffickers, and the laws in place regarding the process. The training provided useful information regarding methods used by traffickers to ensnare and enslave victims.

The next step in collecting appropriate data for this study was to interview individuals directly related to the human trafficking issue in Florida. The first interview was with Laura Hamilton. She is the president of Bridging Freedom, a non-

profit in the process of building a long-term safe house for survivors of human trafficking. Before starting Bridging Freedom, Laura worked intimately with the Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking, as an analyst for the Clearwater Police Department. She was able to provide detailed information regarding the situation in the Tampa Bay area from an administrative perspective. Her specific contribution to this project was in her understanding of the politics of trafficking, including the laws and regulations, the workings of the task force, and treatment of survivors after rescue.

An interview with Detective James McBride of the Clearwater Police Department was also exceptionally useful to this study. He was able to provide his perspective as a law enforcement officer and leader of the task force. His interview provided details regarding some specific cases, including methods of enslavement. Detective McBride was also able to share the various avenues and methods used by law enforcement to find traffickers and rescue victims. His interview was instrumental in understanding the severity and magnitude of the criminal activity of human trafficking.

Eddie Rhea, a survivor of human trafficking, provided the perspective of the victim. She was a victim of sex trafficking. Her interview added to this study the emotions and memories of a survivor of human trafficking who has been able to move past the pain and the suffering and speak out against this crime. Her story supplied subjectivity to this particular study. Eddie Rhea provided invaluable information

regarding her own physical and mental struggles before, during, and after her time as a slave.

Corporal Alan Wilkett, of the Pasco Sheriff's Office, was available for an interview as well. He supplied his own perspective regarding his time as a law enforcement officer and his many encounters with human traffickers and victims. This was valuable at both the subjective and the objective level. He was able to provide several stories of human trafficking cases, share his emotions and the feel of the situations. He was also able to share statistics regarding estimated prevalence of victims, economic profit gained by traffickers, and ages and origins of victims.

As the final interviewee for this particular study, Ross Spano, a Florida congressman, was able to offer his perspective as a law maker. He championed the work done by law enforcement and by survivors, but stressed the importance of the law making process. His interview provided statistics regarding punishments associated with human trafficking crimes and an understanding of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act and of local state laws protecting victims. He argued for harsher punishments and for more powerful laws concerning human trafficking in general.

To begin the case study, a selection of six criminal cases was chosen via convenience sampling, which is to say that each case which fit the parameters of this study and was available for detailed research was selected. The population of those

who could have been included was unavailable since human trafficking is a fairly newly prosecuted crime, with most cases still ongoing and many survivors wishing to remain anonymous and under law enforcement protection. However, several of the cases had been tried and the survivors or representatives of the survivors were able and willing to step forward to tell their stories. In other cases the facts were available as public record, with the names of the victims changed for protection. This study is able to use these cases for purposes of research.

This study was conducted through primary and secondary sources. Survivors of these particular cases were unavailable for interview due to protection programs and the necessity of security; however, the previously mentioned interviews, training, and the case details, provided invaluable information. Other information regarding cases was provided by narrative analyses of cases of human trafficking from Florida State University. The sources used for this research included governmental research, interviews, case reviews and summaries, and task force resources. The majority of the information was made available through the Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking and the Florida State University Center for the Advancement of Human Rights. Other sources included the Florida Department of Children and Families and the Polaris Project.¹

¹ The Florida Department of Children and Families has a human trafficking division which offers information, such as statistics and case overviews. The Polaris Project continues to provide basic human trafficking statistics for the nation. Information pertaining to Florida includes the number of hotline calls, laws in place to aid survivors, and state ranking compared to other states across the nation in regards to rates of human trafficking.

This research proposes that, aside from the demand for slave workers, one of the prime factors of human trafficking includes the living situations in the region of origin of the victims. They cause desperate people to fall prey to victimization. This research uses the cases and stories of Mesoamerican survivors of human trafficking in Florida to increase understanding and describe the situation of this type of trafficking victim.

Although the issue of human trafficking is very important, little research has been conducted to describe the situation. As such, this study uses criminal cases to analyze the available research. It seeks to develop a clearer and more solid understanding of the situation, the motivations, and the processes of human trafficking. This study also analyzes the situation in the countries of departure. A review of the situation from the countries of origin reveals that factors of desperation result in increased levels of victimization. The humans required to supply the demand of human trafficking are readily found in Mesoamerica.

Due to limited available data on this particular topic, this study uses a case study approach. The available data regarding this issue remain limited, due to previously mentioned reasons, making other types of studies difficult. In order to provide knowledge of the situation, the best method available was to provide the perspective of those intimately involved. Through a subjective approach, which emphasizes the importance of personal experiences of victims, perpetrators, and law enforcement, this research can offer a powerful understanding to the field. By providing insights

regarding actions and motivation, this study conveys a realistic appraisal of the human trafficking of Mesoamericans into Florida, perhaps breaking through assumptions and stereotypes.

Outline of the Thesis

The prevalence of human trafficking in Florida is increased by the demand for labor and sex slaves in the United States and the availability of high levels of at-risk individuals in Mesoamerica. Interviews with survivors and arrest records of traffickers and those being trafficked demonstrate this correlation. According to Detective James McBride, the commercialization of sex and sexually oriented establishments perpetuates sex trafficking in the state of Florida (interview, June 6, 2013). Situations in the home countries of Mesoamerican victims create a prime locus for exploitation and enslavement (United States State Department 2011). The objective of this research is to provide a clear description of how and why Mesoamericans are victims of human trafficking and to offer avenues for abating the issue.

Chapter 2 begins this study with a review of appropriate literature related to the topic. Although the issue of human trafficking is a fairly recently researched criminal topic, human trafficking has received attention for many years on a global scale. By organizing the literature surrounding this topic, theories and other studies can aid in evaluating these six cases of Mesoamerican victims in Florida.

Chapter 3 is a brief review of the history of Mesoamerica from pre-colonial history to present day to provide an historical and culturally relevant setting for the study. Since this study focuses on the situations in the home countries of the victims as a cause for the human trafficking, the legacies of influential historical periods and socio-cultural characteristics are of importance.

The results and analysis of the case study will be provided in Chapter 4, which will include a brief synopsis of each case. For the purposes of this case study, the analysis will provide points of understanding developed from the data. Each case study evaluated will provide a perspective on the issue of human trafficking. After reviewing each case study, conclusions regarding the trafficking of Mesoamericans into the state of Florida can be drawn. This study will synthesize key themes and issues found in the data. Two types of data sets are found in the research—one is a quantitative set, while the other is qualitative. The first provides information regarding official statistics of trafficking survivors and Florida's position as a destination state, including methods enacted to stop trafficking and help survivors. The second data set provides detailed descriptions of survivor and trafficker stories, which facilitate the understanding of central themes. This chapter provides insights gained from the cases, methods of traffickers that are specifically relevant to Mesoamerican victims, themes discovered regarding victims and traffickers, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

Trafficking of persons is also known as modern day slavery. “Combating organized immigration crime became a high priority of a new state agency that was created in the United Kingdom to combat serious organized crime. So far, few other countries have yet to allocate the resources needed to fight human trafficking, even though it has become one of the fastest growing forms of transnational crime worldwide (Shelly 2010, 2).” In 2004, official estimates ranged from 600,000 to 800,000 victims globally, of those, 70 percent were victims of sex trafficking (Shelly 2010, 5). According to the Center for Public Safety Innovation at St. Petersburg College-Allstate Center, more slave trading and more slaves exist today in the world than existed throughout history; it is estimated that more than 900,000 were sold and bought in 2013. Annual estimates of those trafficked into the United States range from 18,000 to 50,000 (www.catfht.org). In the United States more than 100,000 children under the age of 18 live as sex workers (Smith 2013, 33).

International trafficking victims are often tricked or coerced into leaving their countries of origin and entering the slave trade. Often, the traffickers use women to pitch a story of a better life to prospective victims, promising them jobs and careers in the United States (Florida State University 2003, 40). The traffickers are often able to get

the victims to pay their own smuggling fees by using these methods. Beatings, manipulation, brain-washing, and countless other forms of force, fraud, and coercion enable traffickers to keep their slaves “working like animals and selling themselves for the profit of the traffickers (Smith 2013, 47).” Once the victims are under the control of the traffickers, they are usually first beaten and raped into submission, then the manipulation and brainwashing begins to alter the identity and agency of the victims (Smith 2013, 120). “The result: a hostage situation [wherein] the youth is emotionally, physically, psychologically, and financially dependent on the pimp (Smith 2013, 120).”

There is a dearth of literature specific to the parameters of this study; however, a review of the literature surrounding modern day slavery does provide information relevant to the situation. The literature can be divided according to three major areas—the history of the issue of human trafficking in the United States, the demand for human slaves, and the ready supply of victims to be exploited in Mesoamerica.

Trafficking in Persons as a National Issue

The Polaris Project was one of the first initiatives established in the United States to stop human trafficking within national borders. The Polaris Project has provided service to victims and law enforcement for more than a decade, such as researching statistics of prevalence, training law enforcement and others to spot trafficking, and promoting new laws and regulations to stop human trafficking (Polaris Project 2013). Although those involved in combating trafficking in the United States reviewed the

issue of human trafficking on an international level, by providing Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports for countries all around the globe, the government left the United States out until 2000 (Polaris Project 2013). In response to this lack of particular data, the Polaris Project began to offer and continues to offer a detailed report on the status of each of the fifty U.S. states and their laws and programs. Each state is ranked according to several factors, such as laws passed and enacted, operational task forces, and victims' assistance programs. These data offer a vivid progress report for each of the states in the United States and note the work done to combat human trafficking. Many states receive high marks and improve each year, while others continue to receive failing marks and continue to have shamefully high levels of trafficking and low legal protection. Specific literature concerning Florida and its position as a major destination state is limited to a sparse number of governmental and non-profit sources; however, many scholars have written about awareness of the global issue (Bernstein 2001, Fisanick 2010, Lee 2007, Shelly 2010, Smith 2013).

Recently, Christina Fisanick provided an anthology on human trafficking which discussed the task of stopping human trafficking. Her work concluded that the responsibility lay on multiple levels, including government, non-governmental organizations, the common people, and the international community (Fisanick 2010). Contributing authors agreed that the basis for combating this violation of human rights must first stem from laws. Although she was not able to offer an evaluation of the state-

level laws of each state in the United States, an historical look reveals that ambiguity and lethargy have characterized the history of laws regarding human trafficking in the United States up until the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000.

In a study carried out in 2001, specifically on human trafficking laws, Kelly Hyland noted that the leaders of the United States had acted for years as if this nation were above such human rights violations, above such slavery. However, she argued that through passing the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (VTVPA), the United States had taken on the responsibility of fighting human trafficking within the nation's borders, both for domestic and international slaves. The VTVPA began the fight against human trafficking in the United States by defining human trafficking and providing means to rescue and rehabilitate survivors. It is set up on the principles of prosecuting criminal by establishing appropriate laws and punishments, protecting survivors by providing physical and psychological care, and preventing future human trafficking by raising awareness and decreasing the demand culture (Hyland 2001, 34-35). She acknowledged that this monumental first step was taken to rescue victims and pursue prosecution of criminals.

Cheryl Butler carried out a study which looked directly into the methods for combating human trafficking in Texas, specifically regarding the 2011 legislation (2012). Her careful review of the issue in Texas revealed that the state was working effectively to curb the incidents of human trafficking within its borders. Texas was one of the first

states to make human trafficking a felony offense (Butler 2012, 850). Texas also created several variations of criminal offenses surrounding human trafficking. These include “continuous trafficking in persons” and both “child labor trafficking” and “child sex trafficking” (Butler 2012, 850). Texas has also pushed for harder punishments for traffickers (Butler 2012, 885). Butler demonstrated that although Texas is a border state with high numbers of smuggling and migrating, its incidents of human trafficking as a destination state were lower (Butler 2012, 845). Her study also forwarded the notion that Texan laws protecting minors were the most effective. Human trafficking victims who were minors were positively identified as victims and not criminals. According to the federal VTVPA, there is no need to prove force, fraud, or coercion in a case involving minors.

The creation of appropriate, conclusive, and powerful laws in Florida is the primary step in the process of ending human trafficking. Florida Congressman Ross Spano stated that recent laws in Florida, which permit law enforcement to move quickly in cases where human trafficking is suspected, have saved countless victims (interview, November 21, 2013). He also praised the Safe Harbor Act of 2013 which has stopped unnecessary criminal charges against minors in trafficking situations. Spano pressed for further laws regarding human trafficking to facilitate the termination of the mounting issue.

In the research by Maggy Lee, she found that the main type of trafficking was sex trafficking, where individuals are used as if they were property and sold for sex and sexual escapades (2007). Lee made a strong case that connected slavery, prostitution, organized crime, and migration. By assessing numerous case studies from around the globe, including countries in Africa, Asia, Australia, and Europe, she argued that it is evident that human trafficking is not a new crime, that humans have been traded as slaves since trade was invented (Lee 2007, 1). The term “human trafficking” has been developed in recent years to give new life to an old issue. However, human trafficking is slavery, and slavery has existed in one form or another since history began (Lee 2007, 2-3). It is an historical problem that continues in modern time. Her work did not include the United States, but did provide characteristics of the nature of human trafficking that are applicable across the borders of nations. Such characteristics included a slave environment of manipulation and force, prostitution or other forms of selling of victims, an organized criminal system, migration of victims, and the violation of human rights (Lee 2007, 5-10). Lee found that governance and geographic location directly affected the pervasiveness of human trafficking around the globe.

At the national level, researched conducted by Walker-Rodriquez and Hill provided a useful evaluation of the issue of human trafficking (2011). They supported their hypothesis, that the sex industry is not full of consenting, adult workers, but rather forced and coerced women, girls, men, and boys of various ages, social classes, and

demographic and cultural backgrounds, through FBI and ICE records. They found that the magnitude of the situation was substantial. The number of international victims trafficked into the United States exceeded the number of domestically trafficked victims (Walker-Rodriquez and Hill 2011). Although true numbers are unobtainable, the authors did note that 293,000 domestic youths are at-risk for being trafficked. Traffickers are organized, effective, and very powerful. The prevalence of the issue is unknown, but it is clear that thousands of individuals are living enslaved in Florida alone.

The Demand

According to author Jane Pritchard, economic forces create the demand for trafficked humans in order to supply society with labor and sex workers (2012). Pritchard argued that sex work is a social construct, fueled by economic interests. She noted that profit and market forces have historically driven the prevalence of the sex worker and the sex industry, but that the mentality and nature of the customers of such services are strongly influenced by the society, culture, and economy around them (Pritchard 2012). Her work demonstrated that the commercial sex industry is the bridge that spans the gulf between the illegal human trafficking and the legal economy.

By evaluating the economy and the levels of commercial sex and human trafficking in Nevada over time, Benjamin Spillman offered evidence of the importance of demand (2009). Economic disturbances during expositions in Nevada substantially

lowered the amount of commercial sexual activity in the area. He argued that during major sporting and governmental events, demand for sex work of all kinds increases, amplifying levels of human trafficking. His research would suggest that areas with high levels of legal commercial sexual establishments, such as Florida and Nevada, have proportionately high levels of human trafficking.

According to Elisabeth Bernstein, there has been a rise in commercial sexual activity recently (2001, 395-396). In her work she argued that the growing popularity of the sex industry in the United States is due to social changes, which perpetuate the normalcy and acceptability of purchasing sexual attention and sex itself (Bernstein 2001). She stated that commercial sex and sexually charged businesses boast a varied clientele, spanning age and social class. A link between the business of commercial sex and the magnitude of human trafficking is facilitated by economic drive (Bernstein 2001). She argued that dollarizing the human being into a resource for money-making causes traffickers to consider their human slaves to be their property, to be sold, beaten, and discarded at the whim of the trafficker. Her hypothesis is that dehumanization and a lack of human empathy are conditions for human trafficking.

Kathryn Hausbeck reviewed the situation for demand in Nevada, a state which is critical to any study on human trafficking and sex work, since prostitution is legal in certain areas of the state (2004). Hausbeck found that legalized prostitution was associated with higher crime levels and increased human trafficking in Nevada (2004).

Her study of Nevada noted that lenient laws and regulations regarding the sex industry breed criminal activity with negative legal, public, and social effects.

Other authors argue that basic human rights, such as life and liberty, are hindered merely by social stigma associated with sex work. Jo Bindman argued that sex work should not be labeled a violation of human rights and that sex workers, including prostitutes, would have better access to their universal human rights if their work were seen as legitimate and regulated accordingly (1997). She argued that sex workers are often victims of crimes and human rights violations due to their status as marginalized and discriminated members of society. She supported her claims with evidence that sex workers face higher rates of discrimination by law enforcement and other authorities and employers. Her data do suggest that sex workers suffer a higher percentage of arrests and have higher incidences of slavery and loss of self-determination. However, there is reason to be skeptical of Bindman's findings, since her work was before the VTVPA and does not account for victims of human trafficking. Also less stringent laws in Nevada have yet to provide a reduction in the rates of human trafficking in that state.

Ronald Weitzer hypothesizes that the "sex worker" and the "human trafficking victim" are not interchangeable (2011). His claim was that more legalization would be beneficial; commercial sex is not by nature violent and against human rights. His argument is backed with research from other countries where some legalization of the

commercial sex industry has already occurred. However, his conclusions do not take account of human trafficking. He used data regarding interviews and cases of consenting adults. His findings were not particularly relevant to the human trafficking situation in Florida, as many victims of trafficking are either unaware that they are victims or are forced or coerced into believing that they are there by choice (caftfht.org).

Due to the exploitative nature of sex work, increased sex industry equates to greater numbers of humans being trafficked (Hausbeck 2004). The demand for sex workers, both legal and illegal, requires a supply of humans to fill that need. The breeding ground for criminal behavior, such as human trafficking, flourishes in areas where it is demanded. The relationship between the legal sex industry and human trafficking is positive, where as one increases, so does the other (Walker-Rodriguez and Hill 2011; Bernstein 2001, 400-402).

The Supply

Literature regarding the situation in Mesoamerica is abundant. Throughout history, this small collection of nations just south of the United States has gained much attention and been the focus of many scholarly works. Of all the authors who have focused on Mesoamerica as their topic of academic research, one in particular was able to historically expand upon the political, social, and economic issues, while evaluating the relationship between Mesoamerica and the United States. Eduardo Galeano wrote

Open Veins of Latin America more than 40 years ago, yet it remains relevant to the current situation.

Eduardo Galeano wrote concerning all of Latin America in 1971; however, his work can be readily applied to the current situation in Mesoamerica. Galeano offered an historical appraisal of the situation and noted that throughout history the area south of the Rio Grande had been exploited and bled of its resources. His argument was that the imperialist nations, such as the United States, continue to bleed all of Latin America of their most precious resources, leaving a barren wasteland of survivors. The situation for most Latin Americans, most especially in Mesoamerica, is a life of desolation and choices of desperation. Many Mesoamericans give up their resources, including their children and their sovereignty, for survival and a chance at a better existence. He argued that the very life of the people is being bled dry.

Prevost and Vanden reviewed the current issues in Mesoamerica (2011). Their work discussed topics of relevance, including religion, culture, society, and economics. They offered a view of Mesoamerica as an area in constant turmoil, with gangs, drugs, and political dissent and violence as everyday occurrences. The situation is further complicated by overzealous militaries and police forces that carry out heinous crimes against unsuspecting civilians. They noted that women's roles in society are precarious, with the male-dominated culture clashing with new efforts to globalize by international markets and non-governmental organizations. These authors offered a glimpse into the

complexities of life in Mesoamerica, with rampant levels of fear and violence and high rates of mortality and unemployment. Levels of femicide, sexual violence, rape, disappearances, and attacks have increased throughout Mesoamerica (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 6). Mexican rates of femicide have risen 40 percent, while rates in Honduras are up 257 percent (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 8). "Sexual violence is routinely used to intimidate and subdue women (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 9)."

Sonia Cardenas reviewed the prevalent issue of human rights in Mesoamerica (2010). She found that many of the current situations had deep roots. The civil wars of many countries created a distrust of government and police, as human rights violations became a part of everyday life for many. Genocide and crimes against humanity occurred frequently and without restraint during the social and political turmoil surrounding the Cold War era. Even at the time of her research, she found that the Mesoamerican nations had a persistent distrust of officials, remained economically disadvantaged, and had a continued diaspora outside Mesoamerica.

The history and current situation in Mesoamerica is ideal for traffickers. The countless number of desperate and uneducated people looking for avenues of survival is high. Mesoamericans are often smuggled into the United States of their own free will and then later come to realize the trap of their enslavement (Shelly 2010, 4-6). Many Mesoamericans are searching for a way to escape the poverty and lack of resources and

jobs available in their home countries. Others are captured and sold in their home countries, to later be taken to the United States.

Conclusion

The literature available concerning Mesoamericans as victims of human trafficking in Florida is scant. However, through literature concerning each of the three defining topics, human trafficking, the demand in Florida, and the desperation in Mesoamerica, these authors provide an introduction upon which this current study can be built.

After reviewing the vast literature concerning human trafficking around the globe, the magnitude of the issue becomes apparent. Human trafficking permeates societies around the globe, affecting hundreds of thousands of people each year. In order to get a more detailed and specific understanding of the situation, this study seeks to incorporate the current scholarly work and theories into a study concerning victims from a specific area, Mesoamerica, who are enslaved in a particular state, Florida. By looking at specific cases in a specific area, this research aims to add to the literature on trafficking and thus increase understanding.

CHAPTER 3

Historical Overview of the Situation

Since the first *conquistadors* arrived in Mesoamerica near the beginning of the 16th century and conquered the majority of the land for the Spanish crown, the area has been milked for its resources, including its human population (Woodward 1999, 3-4; Jackson 2003, 195). During the 19th century this region, comprised of Southern Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, experienced a massive upheaval; independence movements supplanted the king and later elitist dictators terrorized the masses with their “iron fist” regimes (Bevan 2012, 32). From the 1850s on, international powers, such as the United States’ government and large corporations, such as the United Fruit Company, began to establish huge capitalistic empires which appropriated resources in Mesoamerica for monetary gain (Woodward 1999, 178-179; Jackson 2003, 195). The most important economic advantage was the cheap labor, an exploitable human resource. At one point the United Fruit Company owned as much as 70 percent of Guatemalan land with large holdings in Honduras as well, employing thousands of workers at pitiful wages (CIA factbook 2012).

As time progressed, the level of fear from domestic and international players caused much devastation. Leaders were removed from office by various domestic and international pressures, and guerilla forces began to surface in the 1960s (Jonas 1996,

146). All across Mesoamerica, government-sponsored atrocities were on the rise. In Guatemala, a three-decade long civil war took the lives of more than 200,000 people (United Nations 2012). Honduras and El Salvador survived similar types of regimes, with 70,000 lives lost in El Salvador and more than 200 confirmed “disappeared²” in Honduras (Jackson 2003, 194-195; Prevost and Vanden 2011, 70-72; Sherman 2000, 106-107).

Despite the end of civil wars in the 1990s and the movements toward transitional justice and democracy, the marginalized majority in Mesoamerica continue to be exploited and harmed by more powerful actors. Violence is rampant as rates of homicide in Guatemala City exceed those of New York City fifteen to one (Lucchi 2010, 978). The majority of women in Guatemala are victims of sexual abuse as their first sexual experience (Lucchi 2010, 977). Seventy-five percent of Hondurans live in poverty, with 63 percent in extreme poverty (Rural Poverty Portal 2013). Children and adults across Mesoamerica die due to non-potable water and a lack of sanitation (World Vision International, 2013). Gangs control large amounts of non-governed territory around the major cities, wreaking havoc and destruction, while armed guards protect the private properties of those who can afford to hire them (Stahler-Sholk et al 2008, 321).

² “Disappearing” victims was a common method for eliminating proposed threats during the Cold War period throughout Latin America. Targets perceived as threats would simply go missing and never reappear. By “disappearing” rather than arresting and charging suspects, governments and paramilitaries were able to avoid political responsibility and blame.

The situation in this region leaves many living in deplorable conditions, creating an atmosphere that renders the job of human traffickers that much easier. A history of the region reveals that conditions present today are a product of centuries of social, economic, and political circumstances that have created a breeding ground of victims. These circumstances have shaped the role of power and perception of enslavement; they include the Maya heritage, colonial legacies, and Machismo.

Maya Heritage

Mesoamerica was, and still is, the homeland of the Maya people. Although Southern Mexico and Guatemala have been the major areas of Maya civilization for thousands of years, their presence and culture have had lasting effects all the ways through Honduras and El Salvador (Woodward 1999, 10). The Maya ruled differently than many of the other native groups of Latin America. The Maya people were politically organized by city-states and ruling groups rather than in an empire fashion like that Aztec and the Inca (Woodward 1999, 10; Cline 1986, 5-6). The Maya people lived throughout the area for thousands of years (Cline 1986, 6-7). Today, they remain one of the native peoples which still have a presence in Latin America. Their culture, language, and practices continue to influence the greater society.

The Maya culture was not one of equality. The hierarchical structure of their society created a system where nobility ruled in an authoritarian manner, while common people were at the mercy of their leaders (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 24-25).

Maya society included concubines and prostitutes, and in some cases polygamy was allowed (Woodward 1999, 20). The Maya people did employ the use of slavery and slave trade. They also plundered and conquered nearby groups in order to gain riches, slaves, and sacrifices (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 25). Their culture included public beheadings and sacrifices to the gods. Great importance was placed on class; however, only men could reach certain positions in society (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 25).

In the pre-colonial days of Maya rule, the society was patriarchic, as leaders and nobles were rarely female and royal succession was male centered (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 25). The Maya were very gendered (Woodward 1999, 17). "In pre-Hispanic society, a person's sex was a significant factor in determining the role that he or she played (Cline 1986, 112)." At birth, boys and girls were given tools that they would need in their lives. These tools were symbolic of the infants' future place in society (Cline 1986, 112). Boys would receive tools for hunting, fishing, farming, and other such manly tasks, while girls would receive the tools necessary for sewing and weaving (Cline 1986, 112). Maya men were in charge of nearly every trade, with the exception of sewing and weaving, while women's primary duty was to reproduce and care for the children.

The importance of the males in Maya society can be illustrated through language. Names were of great importance, with the father's name being incorporated into the child's name (Cline 1986, 117). Women and men even had different words that

they should use when talking; a man using words allotted only for women was belittled, while a woman was not allowed to use words only available to men (Cline 1986, 122). Women in Maya society were usually illiterate. Even in the rare written work that survived from the Maya culture, women's names are rarely mentioned, except as the mother or wife of a man (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 191). In Maya visual art, the women are portrayed in sexually submissive roles and positions, with the dominant male the focal point (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 330-331).

In the famous mytho-historical book, the *Popol Vuh*, notably one of the most celebrated Maya works, women's roles are defined in an unequal and submissive way. The entire text is male-dominated, with every main character being a man (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 191). The few women characters are often mentioned in passing, identifiable only through their relationships to important male characters (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 210). Throughout the text, women's roles are child rearing and domestic work (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 218).³ The *Popol Vuh* offers a code by which to live, noting that women are to remain covered and be always sexually available to their husbands (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 218). Throughout the history of the Maya people, women were married as a, "coin to pay for peace or to ensure hegemony (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 218)." The role of women, and of children, during pre-colonial Mesoamerica was one of submission and passivity.

³ One of the common types of human trafficking is domestic servitude. Many women are rescued from slave conditions which include domestic duties.

Colonial Legacy

Mesoamerica is a product of years of colonial rule. Every aspect of the pre-colonial culture and society was affected by the invasion and subsequent subjugation by the Europeans. Aspects of language, religion, the land holding system, the orientation to export in the global market, and the persistent social inequality can be traced to colonial roots (Woodward 1999, 54-56; Gilbert 1990, 1). Although the Maya heritage in Mesoamerica is still prominent, the current system of exploitation in Mesoamerica, which includes the exploitation of humans, was established during colonial times.

From the very beginning, Spanish conquistadors set the tone for the treatment of lower classes, especially women. While native males were being wiped out by the Europeans, native women were being beaten and raped (Gilbert 1990, 5). Very few Spanish women came to the New World with the boat loads of Spanish male invaders. As such, native women were quite often used sexually by the conquistadors (Gilbert 1990, 5). Many of the native women were married to Spaniards and produced thousands of *mestizo*⁴ children. “Lower-class women of color were often at the disposal of men of lighter caste and higher class (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 33).”

The colonial, plantation-style land holding system of *encomiendas*⁵, which were later replaced by similarly exploitative *haciendas*, were ruled by a European or Creole

⁴ Mestizo is a Spanish term referring to someone of mixed Native American and European blood.

⁵ Encomienda refers to the plantation-style land system set up during colonial times. Usually, the large tracks of land were ruled over by an elite Spaniard, who had many native people and slaves under his control. He could treat them as he wished, provided that he brought them to Christianity.

leader and were present across much of Mesoamerica (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 34). Native people were often enslaved or forced into positions of menial labor work for bare sustenance (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 34). The leader of the land ruled with an iron fist of authority. This system has often been compared to a feudal system of land holding, where the lord ruled like a king, and the subjects were without rights (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 33). This semi-slave situation had disastrous effects for the poor. Rights of the lord often included a *derecho de pernada*, or the right to have sex with any woman on the estate (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 34). Furthermore, in some cases the lord practiced the right to have the first sex with the bride on her wedding day (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 34-35).

The colonial period created a divided and stratified social system built upon hierarchy and caste. The most influential and powerful persons in colonial America were the Spaniards and other Europeans (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 33). Those persons born across the sea, who traveled to the New World to rule, were almost entirely male. Next, those of European blood who were born on the American continent, the Creoles, were high in society as well. Those of mixed blood came next, the whiter the better. Finally, at the bottom rung were the “free” natives and then the slaves, both native and imported (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 33). Despite the caste system, which provided some avenues for social mobility for some, women remained far below their male counterparts of the same caste. Some were lucky enough to marry up, and even some

were able to own some land. Yet the cases of these exceptions are few and far between (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 34).

Slavery was employed throughout the region for generations. Many of the first slaves were the native people (Woodward 1999, 15). Later, after native populations were declining, due to their inhuman treatment, slaves were imported from other areas, mostly West Africa (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 35). Slavery in the colonies originated from the notion of Eurocentrism and racism; Spaniards viewed natives as inferior and as a resource to be used to further European desires (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 35). “The treatment of the Native American population imbued the Spanish and Portuguese colonies with a deep-seated racism, institutionalized callousness toward laborers (particularly when they were of color), and a proclivity toward (often brutal) exploitation that remains today (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 37).”

Machismo

Today, the persistent patriarchic social system of Machismo permeates the lives of Mesoamericans. Women across the region have long lived in a male-dominated system which places value and power in the hands of the male. Machismo breeds a mindset of superiority in men and inferiority in women (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 126; Gilbert 1990, 81). Men can exert considerable control women, who are expected to remain passive and submissive (Gilbert 1990, 81). This phenomenon is visible in households and across the political region.

In the household setting, the male is the leader of the household. The wife is often grouped with the children in matters of the family (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 126). Men make decisions and work, while a woman's primary role is child care and domestic work. The woman is also expected to be available sexually to her husband (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 218). Women are to enter marriage sexually pure, while men are expected to bring into the marriage considerable sexual experience (Gustafson and Trevelyan 2002, 218-219). Often, the age difference between the husband and wife is substantial. Men often use physical force to control their wives (Prevost and Vanden 2011, 126).

In the greater political context, women have very limited opportunities in a macho culture (Gilbert 1990, 81). Prevost and Vanden reported that only around 40 percent of Mesoamerican women work in the work force (Table 2; 2011, 3).

Mesoamerica remains gendered. Many women who work in the work force tend to work as domestic or labor workers and make considerably less money than their male counterparts (Gilbert 1990, 81).

| Countries | Estimated Total Population 2009 (thousands)* | Annual Population Growth Rate (2009) %* | % Urban Population (2009)* | Cities with 100,000 or More Inhabitants (2007)*** | Per Capita Gross National Income (US \$)* | Life Expectancy at Birth (2009)* | Literacy Rate (15+ years old)* | % of Women in Adult Labor Force (2008)** | Estimated Infant Mortality Rate (2009) (per 1000 live births)* |
|--------------------|--|---|----------------------------|---|---|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|--|--|
| Argentina | 40,276 | 1.0 | 92.2 | 34 | 6,040^ | 75.5 | 97.6^ | 41 | 12.8 |
| Bolivia | 9,863 | 1.7 | 66.1 | 8 | 1,260^ | 66.0 | 90.7^ | 44 | 42.6 |
| Brazil | 193,734 | 0.9 | 86.1 | 257 | 5,860^ | 72.7 | 90.0^ | 44 | 22.3 |
| Chile | 16,970 | 1.0 | 88.7 | 24 | 8,190^ | 78.7 | 96.5^ | 38 | 6.9 |
| Colombia | 45,660 | 1.4 | 74.8 | 58 | 4,100^ | 73.2 | 92.7^ | 36 | 18.0 |
| Costa Rica | 4,579 | 1.3 | 63.8 | 6 | 5,520^ | 79.0 | 95.9^ | 35 | 9.7 |
| Cuba | 11,204 | 0.0 | 75.7 | 12 | ... | 78.8 | 99.8^ | 38 | 4.9 |
| Dominican Republic | 10,090 | 1.4 | 69.7 | 7 | 3,560^ | 72.7 | 89.1^ | 39 | 27.8 |
| Ecuador | 13,625 | 1.1 | 66.3 | 16 | 3,110^ | 75.3 | 84.2^ | 38 | 19.7 |
| El Salvador | 6,163 | 0.5 | 61.0 | 13 | 2,850^ | 71.7 | 82.0^ | 42 | 19.9 |
| Guatemala | 14,027 | 2.5 | 49.0 | 5 | 2,450^ | 70.5 | 73.2^ | 38 | 27.1 |
| Haiti | 10,033 | 1.6 | 48.2 | 4 | 520^ | 61.5 | 62.1^ | 43 | 46.7 |
| Honduras | 7,466 | 2.0 | 48.4 | 3 | 1,590^ | 72.4 | 83.6^ | 34 | 26.9 |
| Nicaragua | 5,743 | 1.3 | 57.0 | 2 | 990^ | 73.4 | 80.5^ | 38 | 20.2 |
| Panama | 3,454 | 1.6 | 74.0 | 2 | 5,500^ | 75.8 | 93.4^ | 37 | 17.2 |
| Paraguay | 6,349 | 1.7 | 60.9 | 7 | 1,710^ | 72.1 | 94.6^ | 39 | 30.7 |
| Peru | 29,165 | 1.1 | 71.5 | 21 | 3,410^ | 73.5 | 89.6^ | 43 | 20.2 |
| Puerto Rico | 3,982 | 0.4 | 98.6 | 7 | 10,950^^~ | 79.0 | 94.1^^ | 42 | 7.0 |
| Uruguay | 3,361 | 0.3 | 92.4 | 1 | 6,390^ | 76.5 | 97.9^ | 44 | 12.5 |
| Venezuela | 28,583 | 1.6 | 93.7 | 26 | 7,550^ | 74.0 | 95.2^ | 39 | 16.3 |
| NAFTA countries | | | | | | | | | |
| Canada | 33,573 | 0.9 | 80.5 | 27 | 39,650^ | 80.9 | 99.0^^^ | 47 | 4.7 |
| Mexico | 109,610 | 1.0 | 77.5 | 47 | 9,400^ | 76.5 | 92.8^ | 36 | 15.5 |
| United States | 314,659 | 0.9 | 82.0 | 220 | 46,040^ | 79.4 | 99.0^^^ | 46 | 6.2 |

Sources: *Regional Core Health Data Initiative Table Generator System (online: <http://www.paho.org/English/SHA/coredata/tabulator/newTabulator.htm>).
Note: Literacy rate data for Puerto Rico, Canada, and U.S. was accessed from CIA World Factbook (online: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/us.html>).
~ indicates data for 2001 ^ indicates data for 2007 ^^ indicates data for 2002 ^^~ indicates data for 2003
... = data not available
** United Nations Statistics Division. Statistics and Indicators on Women and Men. (online: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/indwm/tab5a.htm>).
*** United Nations Statistical Division. Population of Capital Cities and Cities of 100,000 or More Inhabitants. (online: <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2007/Table08.pdf>).

Table 2: Basic Statistics for Latin America, Canada, and the United States

Source: Prevost and Vanden 2011, 3

Governments of Mesoamerican countries often simulate compliance with human rights standards for women that are imposed by international forces (Noble Women’s Initiative 2012, 9). In the courtroom, women face discrimination (Noble Women’s Initiative 2012, 9). If the woman is of native or indigenous heritage, the situation becomes more problematic. Police forces are often to blame for some of the worst violations against women (Woodward 1999, 206). In patriarchic societies, where the extreme majority of police officers are male, sexual violence and rape are used habitually to subdue and intimidate women (Noble Women’s Initiative 2012, 9). The military, another male-dominated paragon of macho culture, is to blame for countless

attacks against women; a correlation was found between military spending and the number of femicides in the region (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 18).

The negative aspects of Machismo, and the violence and distain they create for women, have deep social, economic, and political roots. Hunger, poverty, inequality, and illiteracy affect many people across the area (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 9). During times of war, such as in the civil wars of the 1980s, rape and enslavement were rampant (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 9). Despite a lack of war and an era of democracies in Mesoamerica, levels of femicide and violence have risen more than 40 percent in the last few years (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 8).

Violence against women has many causes. The main causes include the military and its power, the patriarchic macho culture, and foreign policies from countries such as the United States and Canada (Noble Women's Initiative 2012, 9). Violence affects the lives of Mesoamerican women in a variety of ways. A lack of governmental strides taken to promote equality and rights for women continues to be problematic (Noble Women' Initiative 2012, 34). In Guatemala alone, only 1 percent of perpetrators of violence against women receive a sentence (Noble Women' Initiative 2012, 21). Justice, even in a court of law, is still beyond the reach of thousands of Mesoamericans. Defenders of women and women's rights are often targets for victimization and violence in Mesoamerica (Noble Women' Initiative 2012, 14).

Conclusion

Mesoamerica has a tumultuous history of exploitation and enslavement. The people of Mesoamerica have endured thousands of years of patriarchic hierarchy, hundreds of years of European exploitation, and countless generations of subsistence, submission, and desperation. By exploring the three factors of Maya history, colonial legacy, and Machismo, it becomes clear why Mesoamerica is such a prime area for the recruitment, buying, and kidnapping of victims of human trafficking.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis

The results of this study provided invaluable information concerning the instances of human trafficking in the state of Florida, where the victims were trafficked from Mesoamerica. Although some statistics offer a quantitative analysis of the situation, the qualitative cases demonstrate the true nature of the crime, offering insights and knowledge beyond numbers and figures. Prevalence of human trafficking is far from quantifiable. Evidence of this criminal activity has created a wide array of official estimates which range from the hundreds to the thousands (Polaris Project 2013). Yet, due to the nature of the crime, law enforcement can only ascertain prevalence by finding survivors and prosecuting cases. The real number of victims still in captivity remains unknown.

Trafficking Statistics

Although quantitative data are difficult to obtain regarding human trafficking in Florida, some statistics were collected which provide an overview of the situation (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013). Florida state government researchers did obtain some basic information for a sample of those rescued in the state. Unfortunately, this research has not been updated since 2010. Although the findings are neither

conclusive nor inclusive, they show that Florida has made some headway in providing assistance to survivors of human trafficking who are non-legal residents.

Certification as a victim of human trafficking permits foreign national victims to be treated as refugees, with the same rights, benefits, and services (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 1). In order to receive certification, victims must be willing to assist in the prosecution and investigation of the trafficker(s) and have completed a T visa application. In 2010, of the 793 national certifications issued, Florida issued 32 of them (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 1).

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement offers assistance to victims of human trafficking via their Trafficking Per Capita Services Program (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 2-3). Aid includes case management services and economic assistance. In 2010, of the 380 national Trafficking Per Capita Services Program recipients, Florida serviced 55 of them (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 2).

The National Human Trafficking Resource Center receives thousands of calls each year. Some calls are for information on trafficking while others are concerned parties reporting tips to investigators (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 3). The hotline is part of a national campaign to spread awareness and to involve the community in the fight against human trafficking. Since the creation of the tip line, Florida has maintained the third highest place amongst those calling to report tips. In

2010, of the 11,974 national calls made to the hotline, 620 originated from Florida. As well, of the roughly 1,140 tip calls made, 88 came from Florida (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 3).

As many victims are sick and/or dying at the time of rescue, the Florida Department of Health offers screening of survivors after rescue (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 4). This service is available via the county health department. There are no national level statistics as this is a state-sponsored program. However, in 2010, Florida Department of Health screened 34 persons (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 4).

Public Assistance has also been made available to victims of human trafficking in the state of Florida through ACCESS Florida, a government program intended to aid individuals and families on the road to recovery (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 5). Such benefits include food, cash, and medical assistance. Once certification is complete regarding survivors' status as victims of human trafficking, the survivor is qualified. In 2010, ACCESS Florida served 59 victims (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 5). Of those, 19 were from Central America and Mexico (Table 3).

| Country of Origin | Survivors Served |
|-------------------|------------------|
| Haiti | 25 |
| Mexico | 8 |
| Philippines | 7 |
| Guatemala | 6 |
| Cuba | 4 |
| Honduras | 3 |
| India | 2 |
| El Salvador | 2 |
| Jamaica | 1 |
| Colombia | 1 |

Table 3: ACCESS Program, Certified Trafficking Victims Clients

Source: Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 5

Other survivor-specific governmental programs include Continued Presence, a temporary immigration status from the Department of Homeland Security, and T visas, a temporary visa provided by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013, 1). However, although both of these programs are instrumental in reestablishing survivors of human trafficking into the real world, no state statistics are available at this time. The issue of human trafficking is still new in many respects in the United States and will take some time to become embedded in the legal system fully.

The Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking did create a snapshot of its progress in the mid-West coast of Florida. 2012 records show that 131 arrests regarding human trafficking were made, with 47 leading to convictions. As for victims, 197 were reported as potential, with 45 confirmed. 35 survivors were granted Continued Presence while 4 victims received T-Visas (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014).

Trafficking Cases Summaries

Human trafficking is a secretive crime, difficult to codify, impossible to measure accurately, overwhelming in its presence; however, looking into individual cases of survivors and arrests with direct links to human trafficking is of vital importance. It is one of the single most important contributions to the fight against human trafficking. Of the tens of thousands of victims of human trafficking in the United States, only a handful will be successfully rescued and relabeled “survivors.” Yet it is in their words, in the power of their testimonies, as they stand before microphones and when they speak candidly to human rights workers, that the audiences can imagine a glimpse of the life of a human trafficking victim. Combined with the arrests made by law enforcement, and records placed on display for champions of human rights to peruse, these stories of horror, of action, and of hope, bring a new dimension to the situation that numerical data could never grasp. Some cases of human trafficking have more details to offer, but every case is a reminder of the struggle and the triumphs.

Case One—Melchor and Monsalve

Charged and convicted in 2008, the Melchor and Monsalve sex trafficking business began in 2004. These two Colombian traffickers, along with other hired help, established a sex trafficking ring which stretched across Florida, with brothels in Jacksonville, Orlando, Clearwater, Tampa, and Miami (Florida State University n.d., 10). This particular ring was developed to cater to single Latino migrant males. The large workforce of Latino migrants became even larger during the reconstruction work after Katrina. In order to meet client demand of his prostitution business, Carlos Monsalve, the leader and founder, lured women from Mesoamerica and beyond with false promises, charged them exorbitant smuggling fees, and then forced them into prostitution to repay their debt (Florida State University n.d., 10). Victims were brought from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, but some also originated in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Colombia (Florida State University n.d., 11).

The business flourished for years. Monsalve used “mobile brothels.” His prostitution ring was run out of trailers. Traffickers relied upon word of mouth and business cards to reach out to prospective clients (Florida State University n.d., 10). By targeting undocumented clients, the ring was able to stay out of sight of law enforcement for years (Florida State University n.d., 12). “Johns” would phone in to request a prostitute; the traffickers would then deliver them to the homes of the clients. The price was set at 30 dollars per 15 minute sexual encounter. However, in order to

maximize profits, prostitutes were not delivered unless a minimum quota of “johns” was met—three.

Each woman was forced to perform for around 30 clients per night. The money was then divided, half for the trafficker, and the other half used to pay off the smuggling fee (Florida State University n.d., 10). The women received little to nothing. Many reported having to survive on any tips received by clients in order to procure food and other necessary supplies. Phone records indicated that the Monsalve prostitution ring had a large clientele of repeat customers, some having phoned for prostitutes more than 67 times in five months (Florida State University n.d., 11). No clients involved in the investigation and court proceedings testified to having any knowledge that the women were being trafficked.

After a two year investigation, which reached multi-jurisdictional levels, the operation was finally dismantled. The “franchise” operation was classified as organized crime, due to the fact that it, “bore all the hallmarks of organized crime: varied recruiters, multiple smugglers, organized safe houses, and telecommunications that crossed not only state but also national borders (Florida State University n.d., 11).” Police and military in the home countries of the victims were reported as taking bribes to facilitate the smuggling process. The operation ran with varying degrees of exploitation of the victims. Some victims supposedly consented to their role as sex workers, while others reported being force and coerced into the prostitution operation.

Some women even reported that after having paid off their smuggling fees, they remained sex workers for economic reasons.

Law enforcement began the investigation of Monsalve when officers encountered his business cards in local Hispanic stores and restaurants. They were able to move against him after two Guatemalan victims escaped and sought assistance (Florida State University n.d., 9). After two years, the case against Carlos Monsalve concluded with his sentencing of 20 years in prison and restitutions to be paid to the courts and the victims. The identities of the victims remain concealed. However, they are receiving assistance from the Florida government.

Case Two—Navarette

In November of 2007, a new case of labor trafficking arose in Immokalee. The Navarette family, comprised of the head recruiter and conspirator, Cesar Navarette, the enforcer and guard, his brother Geovanni, and a cohort of complicit family members, which included their mother, ran the slave labor operations (Florida State University, n.d., 14).

The victims had all been recruited for farm labor, which included promises of room and board at reasonable prices. However, the reality became a nightmare for the laborers, who were locked in box trucks nightly (Florida State University, n.d., 13). The victims were forced to urinate and defecate in the box trucks, as they had no toilets and no water. The enslavement was monetarily compounded when the system of debt

increased their fees daily. Everything from the cost of the box truck dwelling, to two meals a day, to a shower in a garden hose cost the victims exorbitant amounts of money (Florida State University, n.d., 14). Victims were forced to work until their debts were paid off.

Conditions were deplorable. Victims were forced to work 10 hour days. Threats and violence culminated in torture and punishment as victims who refused to work were tied to posts, cut with knives, or chained in shackles (Florida State University, n.d., 14). Sometimes, victims who did work were still chained at night to prevent escape. Oddly, most victims were legitimately “hired” in the United States; smuggling was rarely involved. The Debt Bondage which the traffickers used was primarily incurred after victims were in the custody of the traffickers (Florida State University, n.d., 15).

The Navarette case is a harsh case of labor trafficking which demonstrates that trafficking cases of Mesoamericans rarely involve organized crime. The traffickers in this case were Mexican. They “employed” all Mexican and Guatemalan victims. Although the traffickers did not use smuggling methods to obtain victims, they still sought out victims from their region of origin, promising them better work and better conditions.

This case proved difficult for law enforcement and social service workers due to the gender of the majority of victims. In most instances of trafficking, victims are women and children; however, the majority of the victims were male in the Navarette

case (Florida State University n.d., 15). As such, the challenge to care for the survivors was in finding suitable housing. This case work relied upon the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, an organization established to ensure human rights of workers.

This case, which began when one victim punched through the box truck and sought the assistance of law enforcement, culminated when Cesar and Geovanni pled guilty to their charges of forced labor, Social Security fraud, felony re-entry, and harboring undocumented foreign nationals for personal gain (Florida State University n.d., 13). The other family members pled guilty for lesser charges as well. The brothers received 12 years of prison. Their mother was released for time already served. Together, the family was sentenced to pay restitution to the victims in the amount of 240,000 dollars.

Case Three—Cadena

One of the largest human trafficking rings to be disassembled, the 2004 Cadena case involved 25 to 40 young Mexicans who had been trafficked into Florida. The Cadena trafficking ring was comprised of prostitution in trailers at migrant communities throughout Florida. The severity and egregiousness of the Cadena case marked a monumental step in the fight against traffickers (Florida State University 2003, 38).

The Cadena case enabled an in-depth analysis of the situation of the family-run trafficking business. The Cadena family worked together to recruit, traffic, and exploit

many victims from Mexico across the border and into their brothels across Florida, such as in Lake Worth, Okeechobee, Fort Pierce, West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, Fort Myers, Fort Pierce, Avon Park, Boynton Beach, Ocoee, Zolfo Springs, and Homestead. The business was lucrative, as human trafficking usually is, with estimates of the family's income racing past 2.5 million dollars (Florida State University 2003, 38).

Each family member had a role in the trafficking exploits. The women in the family would lure unsuspecting young girls and women from across the border with promises of a better life. The Cadena women appeared well-dressed and successful in the eyes of the would-be victims. The deceptive sales pitch of the Cadena women was that they were looking for workers to move to the United States, either as waitresses or nannies for the family's businesses and children. Estimates of pay to be received were around 400 dollars a week plus tips. Of course there was a 2,000 dollar smuggling fee which would need to be repaid. With ten times the income of the girls' hometown offered by trustworthy-looking Mexican ladies to Mexican girls, many girls and young women were ensnared (Florida State University 2003, 39).

Then the men would enter the scene. They would smuggle the females across the border into the United States. Usually, safe houses were used at first to smuggle the girls. However, once the girls and young women were securely in the custody of the Cadena family, the veil of deception would quickly be withdrawn and the trafficking would begin. Brutal rapes and beatings would tear down their resistance to their future

work. Brutality and egregious acts of force were non-stop, from days spent in a brothel forced into sex with ten men each to rapes and beatings at the hands of the Cadena men. The eventual destination of the newly conditioned girls was Florida, where numerous trailer-brothels awaited their arrival (Florida State University 2003, 40).

The lives of the girls were one chaotic and hideous mess after another. They were moved to a new brothel every two weeks for security reasons. Each sex act was timed at 15 minutes for increased profit. Guns were used to ensure compliance. The number of “johns” was in excess of 25 per day. Work days ran 12 hours a day for six days a week. Victims received 3 dollars per every “john” serviced. Sex with captors and methods of violence, such as isolation in dark rooms, were common occurrences. Unknown locations and an inability to communicate in English hindered any goals of escape for most all the victims. In the rare encounter with outside individuals, the girls were identified as prostitutes, but not as victims of human trafficking (Florida State University 2003, 41).

Although the methods imposed by the captors were cruel and grueling, many escape attempts and methods for freeing the victims were attempted. Some “johns” realized the situation and called the police. At one point or another during transit from one brother or area to another, victims would encounter other women in the bathroom and attempt to reach out for help. Trips to the hospital for severe issues offered minimal contact. Police arrived at one or more of the trailers for various reasons and

were convinced that the victims were daughters or wives of the traffickers.

Unfortunately, on each attempt, the inability to communicate in English and the fear of the traffickers were proficient at preventing rescue (Florida State University 2003, 47).

The survivors of the experience proved most resilient. Although trauma and physical and emotional injuries are slow to heal, often leaving scars, the women continue on in their freedom. Autonomy and security prove a tricky balance to navigate for victims of trafficking. Some wish to forget, others feel responsible, and still a fair few have trouble viewing themselves as victims of human trafficking. The path back to redemption, security, and in finding a place in the greater world is marred with obstacles for these women (Florida State University 2003, 50). The Cadena family members received sentences of 15 years and were forced to pay restitutions to the courts and the survivors.

Case Four – Tecum

The case of a Guatemalan trafficker and his underage Guatemalan victim demonstrate one of the variations that human trafficking takes. The trafficker was named José Tecum, and he kidnapped the victim, “María,” from their hometown of Patachaj, Guatemala before smuggling her to Florida, where she resided with him, his wife, and his three children (Florida State University 2003, 52). She became a victim of both sex and labor trafficking, working to give him her earnings in the tomato fields

during the day and being forced into sexual relations with him at night (Florida State University 2003, 52).

His methods of enslavement were tailored to her situation. First he charged her smuggling fees to pay back for the cost to bring her to the United States, even though she had been smuggled against her will. Second, he destroyed her identification card, leaving her vulnerable and stranded. He also employed threats to keep her subdued. Lastly, he employed psychological manipulation based on their shared indigenous religious beliefs, using “witchcraft” to maintain power and influence over her (Florida State University 2003, 52).

Eventually she was discovered and freed by police answering the wife’s domestic violence call. All of María’s belongings fit into one grocery bag. Her psychological well-being was severely diminished at the time of her rescue. She had problems accepting that she was free to leave unattended by her trafficker. Once coaxed out, her main concern was the debt that she still owed him for the smuggling fee. Eventually he was prosecuted and sentenced to nine years. He openly threatened her in the courtroom. She is still working with her case workers and federal officers on the road to recovery (Florida State University 2003, 52).

Case Five—Ramos

One of the larger labor trafficking cases involved the Ramos brothers, Ramiro and Juan. These men used violence, intimidation, and force to create slave-like

conditions for their Mesoamerican field workers. Victims were forced to work from sunrise to sunset, seven days a week, picking fruits and vegetables on the Ramos' farms (Rondeaux 2002). Their pay never exceeded 15 dollars a week. Guards on tractors patrolled the perimeter of the fields, constantly supervising and watching for escape attempts. Threats of violence and death kept most from trying (Rondeaux 2002).

The Ramos family charged exorbitant prices for transportation, food, lodging, and other of life's necessities. The workers were guarded and observed all day, every day. Overall the Ramos family held 700 workers across their various farms. The victims came from Mexico, Guatemala, and El Salvador (Rondeaux 2002). In search of a better life and better wages, victims sought work in the United States. They were then smuggled to the Ramos' farms from their home countries by third parties.

Eventually, a small band of workers escaped and found assistance from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers. After the case was brought to the attention of law enforcement, previously freed victims arrived at the coalition's offices to testify against the Ramos family (Rondeaux 2002). Their testimonies helped prosecutors convict the Ramos brothers, and their cousin, José, "of conspiring to enslave hundreds of workers on citrus farms near Lake Placid in Highlands County (Rondeaux 2002)."

Once caught and sentenced to 12 years in prison, the Ramos brothers had their illegally obtained funds confiscated. The total amount exceeded 3 million dollars

(Florida State University 2003, 56). The cousin, José, was sentenced to 10 years. The survivors have received assistance from government and social service agencies.

Case Six—Pascual

Fernando Pascual was charged in 2006 with labor and sex trafficking of a minor. The girl, known as “María,” and Pascual were both from Guatemala (Florida State University n.d. 23). Pascual was 19 when he first met María, while working as a driver for her stepfather. She was ten. By 20 and 11, Pascual had bought her from her mother and stepfather for roughly 250 dollars. He forced her to become his sex slave and domestic worker (Florida State University n.d. 23). She became pregnant, but lost the child at birth due to the physical violence and abuse that was routinely inflicted upon her by Pascual.

After several failed attempts, Pascual was finally able to smuggle them both into Florida, where they lived with his extended family. María was forced into domestic work at the home, working grueling hours every day and servicing Pascual’s sexual desires at night; María never left the home (Florida State University n.d. 24). When the rest of the family would leave, she was locked in a bedroom. María was isolated physically, culturally, and linguistically from anyone other than Pascual and his family (Florida State University n.d. 24). Eventually, Pascual used María as a prostitute, offering sex with her as payment to his brother in exchange for debt forgiveness.

In 2003, at 13, María became pregnant again. Despite routine beatings during pregnancy, Pascual did not kill the second child. María did eventually seek help for her delivery from her neighbor, and she was taken to a hospital. There she had her first interactions with law enforcement and social service workers (Florida State University n.d. 25). Due to María's minor status, they were alerted to her situation. However, during her interactions with social workers and law enforcement, María was not forthcoming about her situation and attempted to protect her trafficker. Eventually, after a year and many visits with police and social service workers, one social worker gained her trust and was able to break through the Stockholm's Syndrome and uncover the story.

Initially, the case was treated as a sexual battery. Investigations continued, and eventually a plea agreement was reached. Pascual pleaded guilty to his charges of harboring an illegal immigrant for commercial gain and sex trafficking. This case was handled delicately, due to the age of the victim. "[Pascual] received a ten year sentence—lighter than the charges might normally warrant—in return for the young victim not having to testify in open court (Florida State University n.d. 24)."

The Pascual case was a clear example of the issues and complexities involved in a human trafficking case involving a child. For the first year of the investigation, María acted protective of her trafficker and feared law enforcement officers and social service workers (Florida State University n.d. 24). She even called Pascual her husband. It was

not until one particular worker was able to gain her trust that she finally opened up and provided the true story. In this instance, the plea bargain was viewed as the best option in order to save the survivor from the trauma of testifying.

Methods of Force, Fraud, and Coercion

As these cases demonstrate, the international trafficking of Mesoamericans into Florida is inventive, powerful, and pervasive. Traffickers are experts at knowing their victims, from needs, to desires, hopes, and fears. Laura Hamilton, president of Bridging Freedom, reports that a trafficker requires only 90 seconds to evaluate a potential victim and to offer that victim what he or she appears to need (interview, June 6, 2013).

Although their skills in this area are detrimental to the victims initially, it is the traffickers' ability to use force, fraud, and coercion to induce a world of fear, helplessness, and manipulation which results in a cage of terrifying power, not merely physical, but psychological as well.

Mesoamerican victims arrive in the destination state of Florida via various methods, ranging from consent to kidnapping. Many international victims are smuggled over the border of their own free will and desire and then become enslaved once they are separated from friends, family, and familiar settings (Florida Department of Children and Families 2012). Often they are persuaded to cross the border with promises of a better life. Once trafficked, victims are often moved regularly and remain unaware of their exact location. Traffickers are experts at creating an environment of

hopelessness and deception. Corporal Wilkett stated that emotional, physical, and psychological methods are used to maintain the level of fear necessary to dissuade the victim from escaping the trafficker (interview, November 20, 2013). In many cases, children trafficked into the United States are bought in their home countries, sold by family members or human traffic dealers in the country of origin (Florida Department of Children and Families 2012). In many cases of a parent selling a child, promises of a better life for the child by the trafficker are enough to push socio-economically deprived families into making such a desperate choice (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013).

Victims of human trafficking are held by a trafficker or traffickers, who may manifest as pimps in cases of sex trafficking or masters or bosses in cases of labor trafficking. According to sex trafficking survivor Edie Rhea, traffickers become very adept at controlling the lives and wills of their victims (interview, November 20, 2013). Various methods are used in order to keep the slaves submissive and useful to the trafficker. According to Detective McBride, some of the methods most prevalent in the cases presented include taking and holding identification cards or passports of victims, threats of violence and force, and brainwashing tactics (interview, June 6, 2013).

Identification

International victims who enter the United States either legally or illegally can be effectively held against their will by controlling important documents. Traffickers use “Document Servitude” in the majority of the cases uncovered by law enforcement

which included non-citizen victims (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013).

Identification cards, passports, and other important documents are of precious value to non-citizens abroad. These documents may not even be genuine. Detective McBride argues that by controlling them until an unspecified, promised time in the future, traffickers use coercion to trap victims into performing labor, sex, or domestic work in exchange for the return of these documents (interview, June 6, 2013). Often, they will never actually be returned, and they might even have been destroyed.

The trafficker may add additional layers of power to the coercion involving identification. In cases involving victims who were smuggled across the border, often persuaded by promises of a better life, the trafficker may use Debt Bondage as a motivator (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013). The victim is forced to work for the smuggler/trafficker in a brothel, store, factory, field, on the street, or in other venues in order to pay back the debt owed for the initial smuggling, which was accumulated during the crossing. The trafficker holds the victims important documents until such time as the debt is paid back in full. Corporal Wilkett notes that the victim eventually discover that there is never a payoff amount (interview, November 20, 2013). The debt increases with each payment. Victims are charged for their room, board, meals, and other necessities while living trapped under the oppression of the trafficker. Debts increase daily as slavery consumes the victim. Although the technicalities involved in Debt Bondage and Document Servitude create a method of control which appears less

than sufficient to enforce the conditions of slavery, coupled with other devastating techniques, it is a powerful agent of human trafficking.

Threats and Force

The most obvious and some of the most powerful methods of control used by traffickers are those of threats of force and force itself (Center for Public Safety Innovation 2013). Survivors of human trafficking paint hideous pictures with their words of recollection regarding their time as slaves. Survivor reports range in severity and magnitude of atrocities from repeatedly being raped by individuals and groups of women and men, to being stomped upon to the point of blacking out, to being burned and tied up (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013). There is no end to the various methods traffickers use to subdue, intimidate, and break their slaves. Medical care is usually out of the question or rudimentary. Pregnancies are aborted by physical abuse to the pregnant women or *ad hoc* surgeries. And death itself occurs, on average, after roughly seven years of life as a trafficking victim (Wilkett 2013; Smith 2013, 15).

Rapes and beatings are the most common forms of force in use by traffickers. Human trafficking survivor Edie Rhea reports that keeping the victim submissive and afraid for his or her life enables the trafficker to maintain absolute dominance (interview, November 20, 2013). Victims do not have the rights to their own bodies. Trafficking survivors report that time spent as victims afforded an immense lack of feelings of true safety and security (Florida Department of Children and Families 2012).

Traffickers are slave owners; victims are treated as property, seen as inhuman and valuable only as a resource. According to Corporal Wilkett, using force to enslave another person and to violate his or her human rights tears at the fabric of the victim's physical health and mental well-being (interview, November 20, 2013). Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are unattainable goals and dreams for victims of human trafficking.

Even in cases where the psychological manipulation is enough to hold the victims in the cycle of trafficking, the threat of physical abuse maintains a powerful presence. The threat of force on either the victim or on the victim's friends and family is a potent agent in creating an iron cage of bondage. Verbal abuse and psychological battering can leave victims broken and mentally unstable. In many instances, even when those rescued report believing that their situation was a choice, survivors still express fear of their pimps or masters. The threat of punishment and the fear of retribution on loved ones mentally crush victims' security, agency, and autonomy. Detective McBride argues that even if the trafficker has no real power over the victims' families and may have no method for extracting the threats on loved ones back in the home countries, the world of malice and cruelty that has been built around the victims creates enough influence that they are unable to break free of the dominance of the trafficker in order to ascertain if the trafficker can actually make good on his or her

threats (interview, June 6, 2013). Threats of violence and force are just as powerful in controlling behavior as the actual acts.

Sometimes neglect can be as powerful of a force as force itself. In most instances neglect of the victim's basic needs is common (Florida State University 2003, 58). Food, water, and medical care are almost always kept to a minimum or below minimum. Shelter and safety are controlled by the traffickers, who ensure that the victims remain aware of their inferior positions and lack of agency. Neglecting basic needs of victims is a means of force by which traffickers maintain superiority over even the rudimentary and essential aspects of life.

Brainwashing

The least obvious and most devious of all forms of victim enslavement is the brainwashing aspect of the human trafficking system. The very world of the victim becomes a creation dealt by the trafficker. Traffickers use various physical and mental methods for altering the perception of reality of the victims, which might include force, threats of force, Debt Bondage, and Document Servitude. Despite being physically isolated and psychologically coerced, most victims of trafficking are unaware that they are in the U.S. and are brainwashed into believing that they have no rights under the law (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014). Detective McBride found that victims are trained to fear law enforcement and public servants

(interview, June 6, 2013). Often after being identified as a trafficking victim, many survivors will lie to police regarding their condition.

Brainwashing is a manipulative tool which is present in many different forms. In most cases names of victims are changed (Florida Department of Children and Families 2013). According to Laura Hamilton, they are convinced of a plethora of disjointed and harmful “truths” (interview, June 6, 2013). They cannot return to their homes for reasons of shame and disgrace. Law enforcement and social service workers are enemies who are seeking to hurt them and jail them. This new life of a labor or sex worker has its rewards. The traffickers love them. The traffickers and trafficked victims are a family just trying to survive against the world. One day soon, the sex work or labor work will end and the promise of a new life is just around the corner. Spiritual powers keep the victim a virtual slave to the trafficker. All of these examples and more are fed into the hopeless and broken minds of the victims (Shared Hope International 2013).

Coupled with beatings, rape, and threats, the situation becomes a confusing situation of uncertainty for the victims. As is often the case with victims of kidnapping and capture, Laura Hamilton reports that victims often develop Stockholm Syndrome, leaving victims attached and protective of their traffickers (interview, June 6, 2013). Victims bond with their traffickers in a way which is rudimentary to their survival (Florida State University 2003, 41).

For victims of human trafficking who have existed in this altered state of existence long enough to lose sight of who they were and how life is on the outside, they often can be set “free” to roam to street looking for “johns” and can be relied upon to return “home” to their traffickers (Smith 2013, 80). The reality for many victims is that brainwashing techniques are very effective at distancing them from their previous lives and from reality. Many sex workers believe that they entered into the industry of their own choice (Ryan and Hall 2001, 49).

Themes

By analyzing the cases, several points can be formulated which weave throughout the various stories of rescued victims. Each case represents one viewpoint and one experience to add to the understanding of the phenomena. Certain themes emerge and aid in understanding the human trafficking situation of Mesoamericans in Florida.

The first notable point is that in the cases of Mesoamerican victims in Florida, many of the traffickers were from the same home countries as the victims. Although some were nationals of the United States, they still came from the same region as the victims. In certain instances, the victims even knew the trafficker prior to the incident. The traffickers were able to use an insider’s understanding of the victims and of their situations and cultures to successfully traffic them into Florida and keep them here (Table 4). This demonstrates that the traffickers are able to rely on culturally relevant

information to brainwash the victim. It also shows that threats of harm to family members are seen as legitimate by the victims. The traffickers' knowledge of the area and the routes of smuggling also make the traffickers experts at seizing and smuggling victims into Florida. Understanding the advantages that traffickers have over their victims is instrumental in combating these crimes.

The second point is that many of the victims were held via similar methods, but no single method was implemented to successfully traffic a victim and to hold him or her in servitude. For most, physical abuse, document servitude, isolation, and brainwashing tactics provided one or more avenue for exploitation and enslavement. The traffickers' methods of control were numerous and powerful. Traffickers were able to beat, brainwash, starve, jail, and threaten victims using individualized approaches. This variety created a unique and effective method of enslavement for each and every victim. Commonalities were present as each method fit under the category of force, fraud, or coercion.

The third point concerns the type of trafficking. Although categories help in determining the type of crime committed, whether it be labor or sex trafficking, this study shows that criminal activity was not so rigidly structured. In many of the cases, the lines between the types of trafficking were blurred. Labor and domestic workers might be forced into sex acts, while sex victims find themselves working in the fields for part of their day. Traffickers used their victims however they saw fit. This often

created the need for multiple charges to be brought against the traffickers. For some cases, the labor or the sex was the sole desired service, while in other cases, the victims fell prey to a variety of tasks demanded by the trafficker (Table 4).

The fourth point is that although each case involves illegal non-citizens of the United States, the survivors were provided for by the United States. The statistics available for Florida show that many T visas, survivors' aid programs, and other victims' services were developed and implemented for survivors. The cases also showed that, once rescued, survivors were still assisted by programs. They were cared for appropriately. Since many did not feel able and willing to return to their home countries, laws and assistance were in place to offer refugee-style accommodations to survivors. Even though many are illegally in the United States, and may have even been smuggled on their own money, based on their own desires, as survivors of human trafficking they are offered status and services which enable them to stay in the United States for the time being. They received the correct and appropriate care. Their identities continue to be well guarded. Several of them have remained in the United States. Most are still in regular contact with their social service worker and/or the agent who rescued them.

A fifth point concerns the traffickers' punishments. Although laws are in effect to better protect and rehabilitate the survivors, such as the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, the punishments for the traffickers remain surprisingly mild

(Table 4). There are many systems in place for the victims, with new laws passed concerning their status as non-criminals and their ability to stay in Florida. However, the traffickers are committing very serious crimes, crimes that break the United Nations' Universal Declaration on Human Rights and the laws of the United States. The actions of traffickers create situations for survivors which include fatal illnesses, aborted pregnancies, loss of virginity and social stigmatization, physical and psychological trauma, and even death. Often, traffickers trick young Mesoamericans, smuggle them into Florida, sell their virginity, beat them, rob them of life and liberty, force them into slave labor, underfeed them, take their income, and rape them repeatedly. After months or years of enslaving others and mentally breaking them, the traffickers receive moderate prisons sentences from 9 to 20 years. They commit crimes which strip humans of their basic human rights to life and liberty, yet they commonly receive minimal punishments.

Limitations

This study is introductory and has several limitations. Due to the criminal nature of human trafficking and its relatively new position as a national issue, the lack of available data causes estimation and case studies to be the most useful means of study. This study is also particularly small in size, focusing on one state and victims from one geographic area. However, as research in this particular area is thin, this study provides an adequate starting point.

| Cases | Country of Trafficker(s) | Country of Victim(s) | Gender of Victim(s) | Sentence of Trafficker(s) | Type of Trafficking |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Melchor and Monsalve | Colombia | Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras (+) | Female | 20 years | Sex |
| Navarette | Mexico | Mexico, Guatemala | Both | 12 years | Labor |
| Cadena | Mexico | Mexico | Female | 15 years | Sex |
| Tecum | Guatemala | Guatemala | Female | 9 years | Both |
| Ramos | (Unknown) | Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador | Both | 12 years | Labor |
| Pascual | Guatemala | Guatemala | Female | 10 years | Both |

Table 4: Case Statistics

Source: Florida State University; Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking

Recommendations for Future Research

The implications of such research create opportunities for future research. This study is preliminary and seeks to promote future research in this particular field. Hopefully, through this research a greater understanding of the causes of the human trafficking can be spread to those who can make positive change and bring about greater human rights for victims.

Further research on this topic is socially and politically necessary. The issue of human trafficking throughout the world continues to be a major concern. Hundreds of thousands of people are living as slaves every day. This study was limited to a

particular cohort of survivors in a specific state of the United States. Research must be conducted on more states, include more types of victims, and delve deeper into ways for decreasing this crime. For years this particular crime went unnoticed by officials. Only after it caught national attention were task forces developed and laws passed to rescue victims and punish perpetrators. Education to inform those unaware of the magnitude of the situation is the first step. Future research will broaden understanding and aid in upholding human rights for thousands around the globe.

Conclusion

Around the globe humans suffer. Every day more than 11,000 children die of preventable causes (World Vision 2013). In Mesoamerica, crime and economic instability eat away the sustainability of more than 30 percent of the population (USAID 2013). Specifically in Guatemala, more than 4,000 cases of sexual assault are reported to officials each year (Doctors Without Borders 2013). According to Corporal Alan Wilkett of the Pasco County Sheriff's office, human traffickers require hardship and suffering, limited communication abilities, and desperation in order to successfully traffic their slaves (interview, November 20, 2013). As such, Mesoamerica is a breeding ground for humans most at-risk of being trafficked (Clearwater/Tampa Bay Area Task Force on Human Trafficking 2014).

Just as Louise Shelly argued, the increased demand in core areas such as Florida, exacerbated by the deteriorated conditions in periphery regions such as Mesoamerica,

has created a lethal system of economic prosperity for traffickers at the cost of life and liberty for victims (2010). Specifically, many women and girls live in underdeveloped areas where daily life is mere survival. They are often manipulated, sold, or kidnapped into Florida where they are sold as a money-making resource for traffickers who view them as property (Smith 2013, 100-102). Poverty plays a role for both female and male victims; the need to seek employment outside of the home countries can often lead to human trafficking. According to Detective McBride, Mesoamerican victims play a pivotal role in cases of human trafficking in Florida (interview, June 6, 2013). Often, the traffickers can use the extra disadvantages of distance from home and family and cultural isolation to exploit and control victims to a monumental degree. Victims from Mesoamerica find themselves in Florida, geographically secluded from the world they know, lost in the traffickers' constant shuffling. Language barriers create stone walls of isolation wherein the trafficker may be the only translator. Victims encounter a world created by the trafficker, encircled by a foreign country, caged by ignorance and fear, splintered by distance from home.

Despite the proximity of Florida's borders to many Mesoamerican countries, with only the Gulf of Mexico between them, the majority of the trafficking victims identified crossed into Florida legally with visas or illegally through the Texas-Mexico border (Florida State University 2003, 50-58). It seems evident that Florida's place as a top destination state is not due to the geographic proximity to Mesoamerican; victims

were not brought across the water. Mesoamericans are brought to Florida due to more complex social and political issues.

This region of the world, defined here as Southern Mexico and the countries of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, is the beginning point for many victims of human trafficking. To date, a review of the available trafficking cases involving Mexican victims show that the victims have origins from Southern Mexico. The Mesoamerican victims are often indigenous, as they tend to be those in the most deplorable living conditions and desperate situations in their home countries.

This research offers a brief synopsis of several prominent cases, yet hundreds of cases have been brought to the attention of the court systems while thousands more continue, not yet discovered by law enforcement. The issue of Mesoamericans as victims of human trafficking in the state of Florida remains profound, despite more than a decade of forceful investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation (Florida Coalition Against Human Trafficking 2014). Clearly, the human trafficking rings operating inside the state of Florida continue to find suitable avenues for earning profits which make the enterprise worth the risk in their views. In order to successfully fight this criminal activity, actions which strike at the root of the problem are needed.

Since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights first promised the universality of life and liberty in 1948, hundreds of thousands of humans have been robbed of this right by other human beings. Article 4 of the declaration prohibits slavery of any form

(<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>). Yet, within the borders of the Sunshine State of Florida, humans are being enslaved and used for labor and sex purposes.

Mesoamerican victims fall prey to the cruelty and callousness of their traffickers.

However, it is an iconic and powerful moment when victims become survivors, and their stories of slavery bring attention to this mounting problem. Survivors hold the key to solving this monumental issue. That key must be used.

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APPENDIX A: COPYRIGHT PERMISSION

4/24/2014

University of South Florida Mail - Last thing



Adam Golob <golob@mail.usf.edu>

Last thing

Vanden, Harry <vanden@usf.edu>
To: "Golob, Timothy" <golob@mail.usf.edu>
Cc: "Carpenter, Jennifer" <Jennifer.Carpenter@oup.com>

Wed, Apr 23, 2014 at 9:50 AM

I give you permission, but Oxford holds the copyright.

Jennifer,

This an M.A. student who wrote his M.A. thesis under my direction and used the chart from page 3 of Politics of Latin America. He has my permission to use the chart, but I just wanted to run it past you as well. Would it not be sufficient to cite the source (as I believe he has done)?

We are at the deadline for submission, so your immediate attention would be greatly appreciated.

Best,

Harry

From: Adam Golob [golob@mail.usf.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, April 23, 2014 12:07 AM
To: Vanden, Harry
Subject: Last thing

Dear Dr. Vanden,

The Graduate Office emailed me today with the formatting revisions. I have done them all but one. The last one is to get permission to use the chart from your book. He says that I need to attach an email granting permission in an appendix for copyright reasons. Would you be so kind as to give me permission to use the chart on statistics from your "Latin America: An Introduction" (2011)? It is the one on page 3.

Thank you,

Adam

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1/1

A. Email from Dr. Vanden giving permission to use the chart from his book (page 3 of *Latin America: An Introduction*) which is located on my page 41.



Adam Golob <golob@mail.usf.edu>

Last thing

Wheel, Brian <Brian.Wheel@oup.com>
To: "golob@mail.usf.edu" <golob@mail.usf.edu>
Cc: "vanden@usf.edu" <vanden@usf.edu>

Wed, Apr 23, 2014 at 1:28 PM

Adam Golob,

I am granting you permission from OUP to use the single chart on P. 3 from Introduction to Latin America. This assumes that Harry Vanden and Gary Prevost also grant permission for use. Thanks and let me know if you need anything else.

Best

Brian Wheel

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Importance: High

You okay with this—he's talking about your book.

Jen

Jennifer Carpenter

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