What Predicts Human Trafficking?

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For any case of trafficking there is a unique set of causes and effects. The broad variation of trafficking in persons across regions and cultures means that there can be no uniform answer to the question "what causes trafficking?" That said, there are number of commonalities in trafficking. Root causes of trafficking in persons include the greed of criminals, economic pressures, political instability and transition, and social and cultural factors. Many traffickers are involved in other transnational crimes. Criminal groups choose to traffic in persons, in part, because it is high-profit and often low risk, because unlike other "commodities" people can be used repeatedly, and because trafficking in persons does not require a large capital investment.

Many, if not most, trafficking victims fall prey to this practice because they seek a better life or enhanced economic opportunities. They are, therefore, vulnerable to false promises of good jobs and higher wages. Political instability, militarism, civil unrest, internal armed conflict, and natural disasters may result in an increase in trafficking. The destabilization and displacement of populations increase their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse through trafficking and forced labor. War and civil strife may lead to massive displacements of populations, leaving orphans and street children extremely vulnerable to trafficking.

In some countries, social or cultural practices contribute to trafficking--for example, the devaluation of women and girls in society, and the practice of entrusting poor children to more affluent friends or relatives. Some parents accept payment for their

children, often rationalized as an "advance on wages", not just for the money, but in the hopes that the children will be escaping a situation of poverty and move to a place where there will be a better life and more opportunities. The fear of HIV/AIDS also influences those who traffic victims into sexual exploitation, as children become more attractive to them and to their customers due to the belief that the children are free from the disease.

While the broad picture of human trafficking may be understood, and while NGOs, international and governmental agencies, and law enforcement around the world are concerned with the traffic in human beings, there is a serious need for more information and deeper analysis of that information if we are to achieve an understanding of trafficking. We believe that in the last fifteen to twenty years there has been an increase around the world in the numbers of people being trafficked for the purpose of prostitution and other forms of illegal and coercive labour exploitation. This phenomenon has been associated with the impoverishment of Russia and many Eastern European countries, a rise in economically driven migration around the world, the displacement of persons due to civil conflict or natural disaster, and increasing use of temporary labour contracts. As defined by both international instruments and most national laws, trafficking is a process by which a person comes into a situation of slavery: the people concerned are controlled by force or by debt bondage, or are tricked into doing work they would not choose and for which they are not paid; and they are often subjected to some form of captivity or physical abuse. Fundamentally, an act is defined as trafficking by what occurs at the end of a process of transporting a person from one place to another. Whether an individual believes that they are being smuggled, entering another country legally, or is transported with their own cooperation within or between countries, if that

person finds that they are in a situation from which they are not allowed to walk away, in which they are being paid nothing beyond subsistence, and in which they are being economically exploited, then human trafficking has occurred.

In recognition of this problem the United Nations General Assembly has promulgated a Convention Against Transnational Organised Crime (2000), which includes a specific protocol to "Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children". One of the key aims of the Convention and the Protocol is to standardize terminology, laws, and practices. This agreed standardization aims to resolve many of the problems arising from the existence of more than 300 laws and agreements that have been written concerning first the slave trade, then trafficking, and which have defined the crime of human trafficking in different ways[2]. For the first time the international community, in the Protocol, has an agreed standard definition of trafficking in persons.

<u>Defining Trafficking in Persons</u>

The *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children* defines trafficking in persons in this way:

Trafficking in persons is (Art. 3.a)

- **the action of**: recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, or receipt of persons
- **by means of**: the threat or use of force, coercion, abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power or vulnerability, or giving payments or benefits to a person in control of the victim

- **for the purposes of**: exploitation, which includes exploiting the prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labor, slavery or similar practices, and the removal of organs.

- **Consent of the victim is irrelevant** where illicit means are established, but criminal law defenses are preserved (Protocol Art. 3.b, Convention Art. 11.6)

The definition is broken down into three lists of elements: criminal acts, the means used to commit those acts, and the forms of exploitation. While the new definition is crucial to an international response to trafficking in persons, it is important to remember that it is not an exhaustive definition, and that the Convention and Protocols are limited in scope. The Protocol is intended to "prevent and combat" trafficking in persons and facilitate international co-operation against such trafficking. It applies to the "prevention, investigation and prosecution" of Protocol offences, but only where these are "trans-national in nature" and involve an "organized criminal group", as those terms are defined by the Convention. The Convention, Protocol, and the definition of trafficking in persons they put forward are essential to the fight against this crime, but they are not, and should not be, the only tools available. All countries must attack this problem from a criminological standpoint, and be willing to address trafficking in any and every form it takes. Some trafficking in persons will not cross national borders, at other times it will be carried by individual criminals who are not part of an "organized criminal group". National laws, law enforcement strategies, and services to victims must respond to all forms of this crime, from small-scale and local trafficking to large-scale trans-national trafficking.

If we are achieving agreement on what trafficking is, we still have only partial understanding of what drives it. We know that poverty and vulnerability are powerful predictors of whether a person will be trafficked. We know that governmental corruption plays an important part, that 'pull-factors' entice the vulnerable and 'push-factors', like lack of employment opportunity, propel them across borders and into the grey zone where they become controlled by traffickers. But which of these factors is the most important? Clearly, the answer to this question will vary from country to country, but trafficking is a global phenomenon and it is also worth trying to find a global answer. That is the aim of this article.

Methods

To address the question of what factors were the strongest predictors of trafficking I assembled a data set with information on all the countries of the world (but excluding geographical entities that were dependencies of other states). This information came from a number of sources[3], but primarily the United Nations statistical handbook, and the 76 variables collected included measures of:

- economic activity

- energy consumption

- basic health measures

- food production

- tourism movements

- the distribution of the population into various industrial sectors

- the population profile

- the cars and telephone lines per capita

- the gross domestic product per capita

- population growth in rural and urban areas

- the extent of censorship

- the extent of governmental corruption

- the country's international debt loading

- indices of political and civil liberties

- the level of conflict and social unrest

And to those variables I added from my own research files, the best estimates I could construct of:

- the amount of slavery in that country

- the amount of trafficking FROM the country

- the amount of trafficking TO the country.

These variables I showed to other professionals working on trafficking and asked them to help me to refine and correct my estimates for each country. They are not precise numerical measures of the actual number of people trafficked (such measures do not exist), but represent trafficking on a five point scale:

Trafficking (TO or FROM) this country is:

- Unknown

- Rare

- Occasional, but persistent

- Regular, but in small numbers

- Regular, and in large numbers

For example, I have no evidence of trafficking TO or FROM Iceland, so it is listed as unknown. Likewise, some countries like the Ukraine have more trafficking FROM than TO, and Western European countries are more likely to have greater trafficking TO than FROM. This is very much a preliminary exploration of trafficking on the global level, but it is based on the best evidence that could be found.
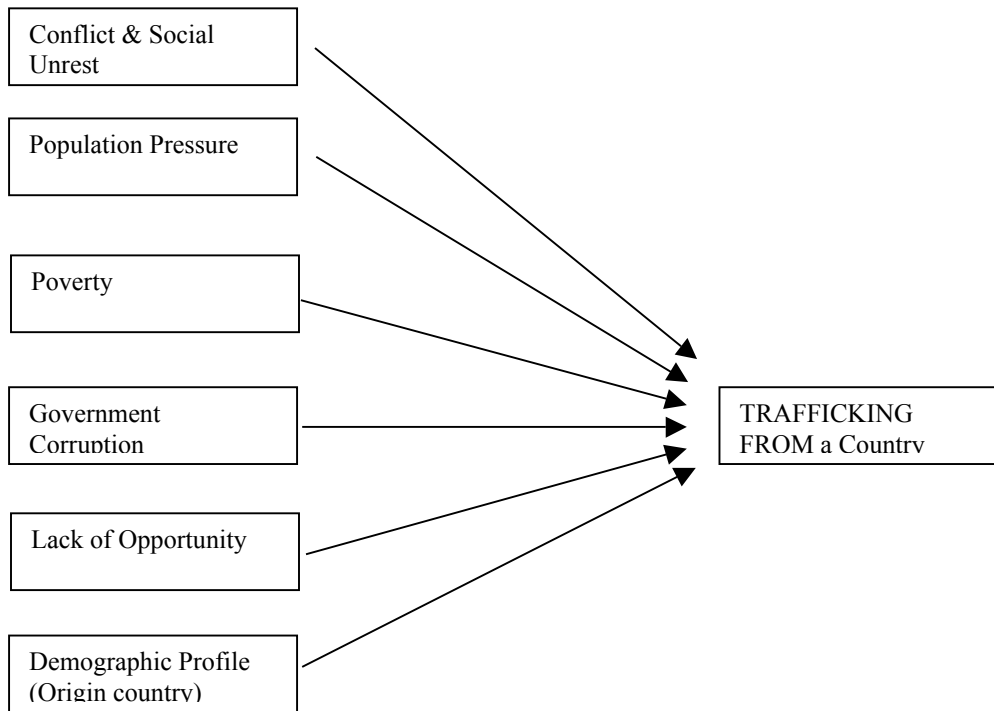
The Questions

Given these data I aimed to answer two very basic questions:

- What are the strongest predictors of trafficking FROM a country on the global scale?

- What are the strongest predictors of trafficking TO a country on the global scale?

Trafficking FROM a country

Given the general and anecdotal nature of our understanding, it is still fair to say that there is a theory of trafficking. The evidence we have points to poverty, social unrest, government corruption, population pressure, and the perception of opportunity (of lack thereof) as determinants of trafficking FROM a country. Of course, many of these factors are related. If a country has a 'young' population profile, that is, a large proportion of the population is below the age of 18, there can be intense competition for employment and a concomitant lack of perceived opportunity. Likewise, there are well known links between poverty and higher levels of fertility. Graphically, we might posit our theory or model of the factors that drive trafficking FROM a country in the following way:

This then is the general theory of trafficking FROM a country that we can test with statistical estimates. Put into this form, the testing of our theory or model of trafficking requires that we find measures of each of the factors and examine the statistical estimates of their ability to influence or predict trafficking FROM a country. We must also include any other factors that might conceivably predict trafficking.

The Results

Because this is an exploratory test of this model or theory, I have used a relatively simple statistical operation called multiple regression. Regression allows us to examine a number of factors at the same time and calculates the independent effect of each of these factors on the dependent variable, which in this case is the amount of trafficking FROM a country. In other words, regression tells us the relative strength of each of the factors that

we suspect predict trafficking FROM a country. It will also tell us if the factor does not affect or predict trafficking. Since regression tells us the relative strength of predictive factors it also allows us to then rank them, determining which are the most important.

In calculating the regression I included, through several iterations, all of the various types of information I had collected on the world's countries. For example, while I was doubtful that the number of televisions per 1000 of population in the country of origin was a significant predictor of trafficking FROM that country, I still treated it as a predictor until it was excluded statistically by the regression procedure. The factors listed below, then, are those that have 'survived' and have been denoted as significant predictors of trafficking FROM a country.
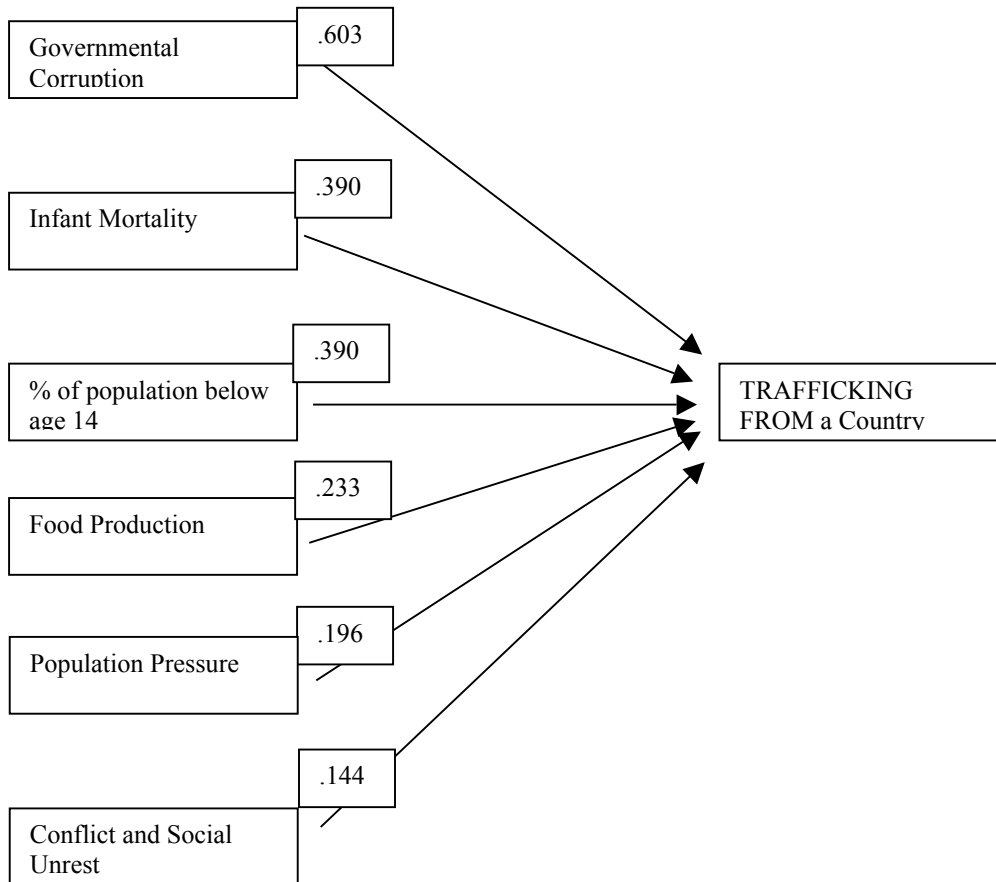
Regression also calculates how much of the dependent variable is actually being explained by the factors assembled. In any study involving human beings a 100% explanation is virtually unknown, there are always problems caused by our inability to collect perfect information. In this case, the regression is telling us how much of the variation in trafficking FROM any country is explained by the factors we have identified. For these data, the following factors explain 57% of the variation in trafficking between countries.

The following individual variables were found to be significant predictors of trafficking FROM a country, and are given in order of their power to do so:

- governmental corruption

- the country's infant mortality rate

- the proportion of the population below the age of 14

- the country's food production index

- the country's population density

- conflict and social unrest

Given these results we can then specify the precise relationships between our predictive factors and trafficking in this way:

Governmental Corruption	.603

Infant Mortality	.390

% of population below age 14	.390

Food Production	.233

Population Pressure	.196

Conflict and Social Unrest	.144

TRAFFICKING FROM a Country

The fractional numbers in the small boxes are the *beta coefficients*, these give the relative strength of each of the predictive factors. All of the beta coefficients shown are statistically significant at the .05 level or better.
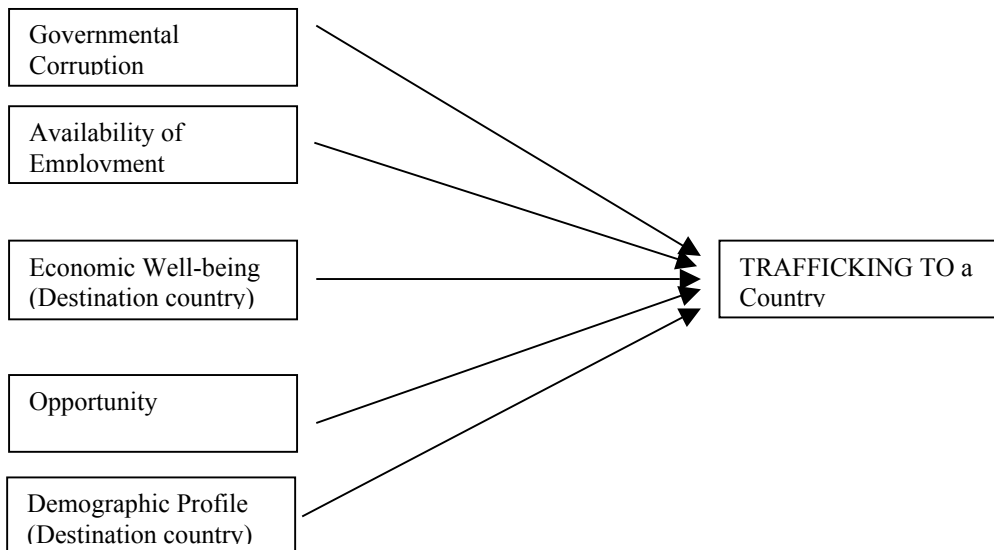
In terms of understanding the nature of trafficking, this test confirms many of the assumptions generally held about what predicts trafficking, and it also adds new

information. We see that population pressure and poverty (shown by infant mortality and food production) are important push-factors in trafficking as suspected. This statistical research confirms much of the "common knowledge" held by experts working on trafficking in persons around the world – this traffic is most likely to flow from countries that are poor and suffering from instability and corruption. All of these are powerful "push" factors, causes of the vulnerability to being trafficked. But a key finding is the importance of governmental corruption in predicting trafficking. This analysis suggests that reducing corruption should be the first and most effective way to reduce trafficking. In other words, potential traffickers need to understand that their government perceives trafficking as a crime and that they cannot bribe their way out of prosecution or through the border if they commit the crime.
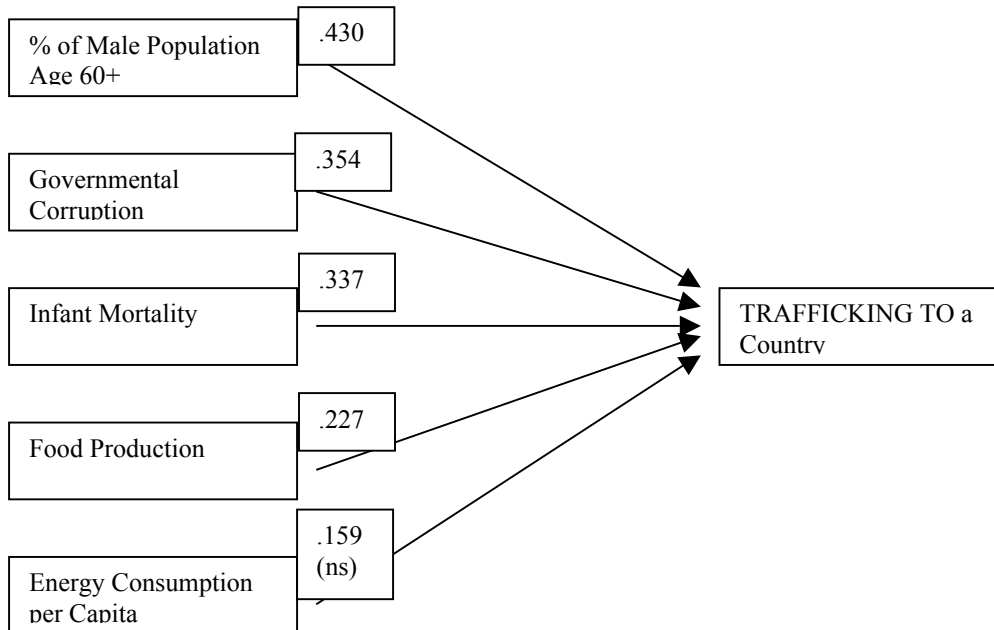
Trafficking TO a country

The discussion of trafficking TO a country must consider the perceived 'pull' factors and the relative permeability of that country's borders. Unfortunately no estimate of permeability exists, but we might think of the index of governmental corruption as one indicator of possible permeability, since corruption often plays a part in the opening of borders to traffickers. Perceived opportunity would be linked to the opportunity of employment, and to the demographic profile of the destination country. The demographic profile, for example, of the Western European countries is much 'older' than that of the developing world, this can lead to a shortage of younger workers who would tend to take up low skill jobs. The shortage of workers for low skill jobs suggests a potential demand for immigrant workers willing to take low skill jobs.

However the perception of such opportunity may be at variance with the reality of such opportunity. Moreover, most of these factors, with the exception of governmental corruption are negated when criminal involvement in trafficking leads to the coercion or enslavement of those being trafficked. When the potential immigrant loses their free will, their perception and pursuit of opportunity becomes moot. That said, the following might stand as our model or theory of trafficking TO a country.

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┌─────────────────┐
│ Governmental    │
│ Corruption      │
└─────────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐
│ Availability of │
│ Employment      │
└─────────────────┘                    ┌──────────────────┐
                                       │ TRAFFICKING TO a │
┌─────────────────┐                    │ Country          │
│ Economic Well-being                  └──────────────────┘
│ (Destination country)│
└─────────────────┘

┌─────────────────┐
│ Opportunity     │
└─────────────────┘
┌─────────────────┐
│ Demographic Profile│
│ (Destination country)│
└─────────────────┘
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When we begin to test this model in order to determine which of the factors have the greatest predictive power in understanding trafficking TO a country, the analysis yields much less substantive information. From these data only four variables are significantly related to the estimate of trafficking TO a country, and together they account for only 15.5% of the variation between countries. Of these, the strongest predictor of trafficking TO a country is the proportion of the destination's country's male population in the age 60+ age bracket, the second strongest predictor is the level of governmental corruption. Food production, energy consumption, and infant mortality all indicate the

economic well-being of the destination country. The specified model below gives the predictive variables and their beta coefficients. I have included one variable (Energy Consumption per Capita) that did not make the statistical significance cut-off point of .05, but which at .09 is included for consideration

Conclusion

Every case of trafficking is unique, but all share certain characteristics. At the most basic level are the common elements noted in the definition of trafficking given in the UN Protocol – the action of transporting people by means of force or deception in order to control and exploit them. In can also be said that there are three underlying factors at work that foster trafficking: 1. within the origin countries, a large supply of victims remain available for exploitation; 2. within the destination countries there seems to be an endless demand for the services of the victims; and 3. organised criminal

networks have taken control of this economic "supply and demand" situation to traffic and exploit the victims in order to generate enormous profits for themselves.

It must be stressed that this is a first and exploratory investigation of trafficking on a global level. That said, it would appear that many of our existing assumptions about the determinants of trafficking are supported by the analysis. Corruption, poverty, conflict, and the 'pull' factor of opportunity, are all shown to be significant predictors of trafficking.

Likewise some of the most obvious strategies for slowing trafficking would, on the basis of this analysis, include those activities known to reduce 'push' factors:

- measures to reduce governmental corruption in both origin and destination countries
- population control measures, especially poverty reduction and increasing educational opportunities
- tackling international inequalities in wealth, especially at the sharpest end, so that people have basic means of subsistence and social guarantees

All of which suggest that international financial institutions should give incentives to programmes for land reform, education and training, and health care, rather than promulgate 'austerity' requirements that undermine such programmes

One question that could not be addressed in this analysis concerns the impact of differential severity of migration control policies. Trafficking is, almost by definition, a crime requiring borders of low legal permeability. If people can cross borders to pursue opportunity relatively freely, I would suggest that it is difficult for traffickers to trick or coerce people into being trafficked. It is insufficient to address prediction of trafficking

without reference to people's rights to migrate. The perspective that posits the need for strict border control is held strongly by the governments of the developed world. But the perspective of the landless peasant, displaced by conflict, sequestered in a refugee camp, needing to move on to provide for family and seek opportunity is also valid.

It is important to remember that criminals are inventive and opportunistic. They operate in a context of extreme and violent competition. Their conditions of work are dynamic and liable to dramatic and abrupt change. For all these reasons criminals are good at adapting to new situations and new technologies. As new forms of communication, new methods of transportation, and new ways of controlling and exploiting people emerge; traffickers will rapidly take them up and subvert them to criminal uses. The challenge to all who would address trafficking in persons is to be prepared for such adaptations, both through applicable law and creative enforcement, and through well-grounded, rigorous research.

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[2] For a discussion of the many definition and instruments concerning trafficking and slavery see Bales, Kevin, and Peter Robbins, 'No One Shall Be Held in Slavery or Servitude: A Critical Analysis of International Slavery Agreements' *Human Rights Review,* Vol. 2, No. 2, Jan. 2001.

[3] Variables were drawn from the *World Statistics Pocketbook*, United Nations, Sales No. E.95.XVII.7. New York: United Nations, 1995; The International Corruption Index assembled by Transparency International; 'Human Rights Abuses by Country' a table compiled by the Observer Newspaper, London, 25 October, 1999; Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 1999*, London, 2000; and from my own database of slavery and trafficking.