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# Invisible Women: Sex Trafficking in the Context of Post-Soviet Moldova

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INVISIBLE WOMEN: SEX TRAFFICKING  
IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-SOVIET MOLDOVA

by

Sarah Elizabeth Dean

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for a Degree with Honors  
(International Affairs)

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## ABSTRACT

Over a century after the majority of the globe has abolished slavery, scholars, human rights agencies, and national governments generally agree that there remains about twenty-seven million slaves in the world, with modern slavery taking a contemporary form in human trafficking (“11 Facts About Human Trafficking”). This thesis will focus specifically on sex trafficking, or the exploitation of primarily women and girls through coercion, force, or fraud to engage in sexual acts for the profit of the trafficker. More precisely, this text will concentrate on the underlying causes of sex trafficking in Eastern Europe, particularly in the post-Soviet state of Moldova, where many young girls fall victim to this crime. Research will be conducted in terms of how the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the ensuing Western economic reforms in Moldova worsened poverty, how patriarchal structures contribute to high rates of domestic violence, and how corruption in the financially unstable government of Moldova all tie in together as leading causes of sex trafficking in the region.

This thesis will provide a general and relatively recent history of Moldova in order to equip the reader with applicable background information before embarking on a deeper analysis. Discussion of Moldova’s government will include discussions on the possibility of internal corruption, as well as the causes of such, and any legal actions taken to combat the issue of global sex trafficking. Societal characteristics, such as access to education, lucrative careers, and financial progress, will be analyzed through a feminist lens, which explains the systemic oppression and standardized inequality that maintain a lack of opportunity for individuals in the country.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the city of Blagoevgrad, located in the southwest region of Bulgaria, there is a town square that serves as a visual representation of the intersection between Eastern and Western Europe. Crumbling, grey buildings stand as relics of communism, covered in graffiti and grime. They are plain, angular, and aesthetically unpleasant. Beside them stand modern buildings in sleek black and blue, new construction born from the ashes of another fallen empire. Still among these contradicting structures are homes in pastel blues and yellows, with curving balconies and blooming window boxes, which have been holding their ground for over a century.

The contradictions continue among the people themselves. Young Bulgarians wear Western brands and shirts with English phrases on them. Stars and stripes hail from clothing and accessories in the windows of boutiques, and the faces of American celebrities smile from posters plastered along the main street. In contrast, the older generations harbor a visible reluctance to globalisation, dressed in plain blacks and browns as they sit on park benches and frown as the students from the nearby American university walk past. American and Western European students studying temporarily in Blagoevgrad learn within the first few weeks, via word of mouth from faculty and staff at the American University in Bulgaria, that most middle-aged and elderly Bulgarians begrudge Western people and institutions. The disparity between generations is vividly clear in this sense; where the young see modernization, the old see the loss of their culture.

This clash between East and West lives on despite Bulgaria's recent inclusion into the European Union in 2007. While Western Europe boasts modernity and progress rivaling that of the United States, those in the East are struggling to keep up. Sofia, the capital city of Bulgaria, is home to an extensive underground metro system, at least three Starbucks Coffee shops, and the most modern architecture of any other Bulgarian city. It is like a Western hotspot in an otherwise ancient country still drowning in its long and turbulent history. However, the cities and villages surrounding progressive Sofia remain relatively untouched by extreme Westernization.

Founded in 681 AD, Bulgaria has endured invasion and conquering by the Greeks, Scythians, Romans, Byzantines, and Turks. Most essential to this thesis, however, is the region's domination by the Soviet Union from 1946 until 1990, during which time it was called the People's Republic of Bulgaria. In Mimi Chakarova's award-winning documentary *The Price of Sex*, Chakarova, a native Bulgarian, recalls her childhood in the 1980's: "We shared equal poverty under communism. Our lives were restricted, but I remember feeling safe [and] protected" (*The Price of Sex*). When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, there was a massive wave of migration from Eastern Europe to the West, resulting in extreme population decreases and the complete disintegration of all previous, communist-supported equalities. Chakarova and her family left Bulgaria for the United States, and in the aforementioned film, she revisits her old village twenty years later as an adult. Once teeming with life and bustling with people, it became barren and rundown. Many of those who remained behind after the iron curtain was lifted became unemployed, depressed, and stuck in a country that struggled to develop at the same pace as those in the West. Poverty rates and living conditions worsened, especially without the

social welfare programs that had existed under Soviet control. Alcohol and drug abuse skyrocketed under such conditions which stifle opportunity, thereby leading to a massive increase in organized crime and corruption.

Today, Bulgaria remains among the ten poorest countries in Europe (DiVirgilio, Andrea), with a GDP of \$14,200, which is a fraction of powerful Western nations like the United States (\$16.77 trillion) and the United Kingdom (\$2.678 trillion). In fact, all of the nations listed as the poorest are not only located in the East, but were all once either part of the USSR or under Soviet control, suggesting a correlation between the rise of economic misfortune and the fall of the Soviet Union. This is not to say that the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was a positive structure that epitomized prosperity, but that the loss of such a structure--which maintained firm control of most things--created an unmanageable turmoil that turned millions of lives upside down in the span of only a few years. Regarding the collapse of communism, Mimi Chakarova remarks, "Life as we knew it forever changed" (*The Price of Sex*).

Once Eastern Europe was opened up to the influence of the West's booming culture of commodities, capitalism, and global enterprise, it buckled under the weight of so much power and money. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank instituted reforms known as structural adjustment programs (SAPs) with the alleged intent to bring the former Soviet bloc up to par with the rest of Europe, though these have had devastating and long-lasting consequences. The outcome of this Western monetary policy has been a severe drop in economic prosperity, education rates, and overall opportunity. Paired with a sharp increase in alcoholism following the collapse of the economy, historically high rates of violence against women, and increasing government corruption (largely due to low wages

for public officials), Eastern Europe gave birth to a whole new market after the dissolution of the Soviet Union: a flourishing international venture that has successfully established itself in every nation on the planet, and has raked in billions of dollars every year. This wildly profitable endeavor is more commonly known as human trafficking.

Human trafficking involves many types of exploitation, ranging from forced begging to debt bondage, though this thesis will focus specifically on the facet of human trafficking which involves the disproportionate abuse and oppression of women: sex trafficking. This particular brand of trafficking is defined in this thesis as the exploitation of, primarily, women and girls through coercion, force, and/or fraud to engage in sexual acts for the profit of the trafficker or pimp (“What Is Modern Slavery?”). Sex trafficking may also occur in situations where women are fully aware that they are going abroad to engage in sex work, but soon learn that their autonomy is stolen by pimps who take their travel documents from them and force them to work under harsh conditions they previously were not made aware of, such as servicing dozens of men a night and not being permitted to keep the money earned. Sex trafficking differs from prostitution, which is defined by Merriam-Webster as “the act or practice of engaging in sexual intercourse for money” with the consent and willingness of the prostitute being the key aspect that sets it apart from sex trafficking. In sexual slavery, consent is not present.

Sex trafficking is a global issue, with exploitation occurring from Thailand to Amsterdam to downeast Maine. Though it does not discriminate geographically, it often flourishes with higher prevalence in regions of the world which lack privilege or esteem. These regions or countries are often, for lack of a better word, *invisible* to mainstream society. The term “invisibility” has been used by numerous scholars and journalists to



describe human trafficking itself, due to its mysterious and back alley nature, but it is also a useful word to describe actual places that have taken on an underground character through similar lack of attention. For example, places like Algeria or Venezuela are written off as economically irrelevant and socially problematic because they cannot compete on the same scale as successful capitalist Western countries. They have been constructed as “other,” in this globalised world, and thus these unseen places suffer for their invisibility in a global society which has constructed success as having a positive correlation with GDP and military power. Such vulnerability is, of course, not merely a product of their own personal failings, but the result of Western disenfranchisement of these parts of the world, often on the grounds of political disagreements and resources, such as with the situation of socialism and oil production in Venezuela, and our role in the suffocation and downfall of that country (Maupin, Caleb).

Eastern Europe in particular has a considerable degree of invisibility. Though it has been twenty-five years since the fall of the Soviet Union, it is undeniable that the vestiges of that era maintain a heavy influence on the ability for post-Soviet states to interact prosperously with Western entities. This thesis explores the relationship between the chaos that ensued after 1991, the resulting surge in poverty and decline of opportunity, and how various characteristics of the developing Eastern European nations have combined to create the ideal environment for the sexual exploitation of women and girls to thrive.

Particular attention will be given to Moldova, the poorest country in Europe. It is argued in this thesis that this nation epitomizes the economic ruin that descended upon the former Soviet bloc after the destruction of communism, as it experiences the worst and most frequent consequences of poverty in Eastern Europe. An incredibly small country

nestled between Romania and Ukraine, Moldova has a GDP per capita of \$3,800, which is less than half the GDP per capita of the next poorest country, Kosovo (DiVirgilio, Andrea). Moldova's history has been both turbulent and mysterious. Much like Bulgaria, Moldova is steeped in a metaphorical war between East and West. As the West creeps in, Moldovans see their lives and their country irrevocably altered. Much of the youth will do whatever it takes to leave the small nation. In fact, migration is so common that many Moldovans see leaving the country as nothing more than leaving one's house for work in the morning (Kara, 109).

In general, very few details can be found about Moldova, both in the past and present, contributing greatly to the overarching theme of this thesis: invisibility. Thus, it is the main argument of this piece that the concept of invisibility within the global system, which is created by a combination of factors encompassed by the overarching theme of poverty, such as lack of education, alcohol abuse, and corruption, is the leading cause of the epidemic of sex trafficking that has blossomed in Moldova, as well as Eastern Europe in general.

## CHAPTER I

### SEX TRAFFICKING, AN OVERVIEW

The U.S. Department of State's Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons refers to human trafficking as "modern slavery" and defines it as "the act of recruiting, harboring, transporting, providing, or obtaining a person for compelled labor or commercial sex acts through the use of force, fraud, or coercion" ("What Is Modern Slavery?"). In terms of sex trafficking specifically, the U.S. Department of State (DoS) claims that a victim of such is an "adult [who] engages in a commercial sex act, such as prostitution, as the result of force, threats of force, fraud, coercion or any combination of such means." In regards to minors who are "recruited, enticed, harbored, transported, provided, obtained, patronized, solicited, or maintained to perform a commercial sex act," any evidence of force or threat is not necessary for the situation to be classified as a case of sex trafficking (*Trafficking in Persons*). The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defines trafficking in a similar fashion, as do many non-governmental organizations such as Not For Sale, based in San Francisco, and Amnesty International, headquartered in London.

Since 2001, the U.S. federal government, via the Department of State, has published annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) reports, detailing the prevalence of modern slavery in each country, as well as the methods, if any, that are being used to alleviate the issue. These reports contain nearly two hundred pages of information about countries both powerful and invisible, and have been utilized in this thesis as a general source of information regarding

the context (in terms of national GDP, form of government, and current, if any, social upheavals) of each nation's human trafficking situation.

A crucial aspect of the TIP reports are the tier-based classifications, created by the DoS to categorize countries according to the quantity and severity of human trafficking incidences. The tier system refers to a set of standards outlined in the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act, passed by the United States government in 2000 and reauthorized in 2003, 2005, and 2008. The Act was established "to combat trafficking in persons, especially into the sex trade, slavery, and involuntary servitude, to reauthorize certain federal programs to prevent violence against women, and for other purposes" ("Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000"). Features of the TVPA include measures to prevent trafficking, to assist victims of trafficking, to prosecute and punish traffickers, and to act against foreign governments failing to uphold these standards as outlined by the U.S. government.

The human trafficking tier classification system is as follows: Tier 1 (T1) countries fully comply with the TVPA standards, including the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and most Western European nations. Overall, a large majority of countries around the world are classified under Tier 2 (T2), meaning that they do not fully comply with the TVPA, but "are making significant efforts" to do so ("What Is Modern Slavery?"). Most Latin American and Eastern European nations are T2.

Tier 2 Watch List (T2WL) is the purgatory between the second and third tiers; this classification is given to countries where the number of human trafficking victims is significant, and where "there is no evidence that countries are making significant efforts to improve" despite commitments to do so (*Trafficking in Persons*). T2WL countries can be

found on most continents including states as geographically diverse as China, Kenya, Ukraine, and Bolivia.

Nations that are classified as Tier 3 (T3) do not fully comply with the lowest standards of the TVPA. Coincidentally, T3 countries tend to be nations that are universally known to be disliked or distrusted by the United States, such as Russia, Iran, and Cuba.

It is important to note that the U.S. government is one of the only institutions that utilizes the tier system. Other governmental organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations do not even mention tiers in their official publications on human trafficking, and generally refrain from ranking nations in regards to how pervasive human rights injustices may be. Furthermore, non-governmental organizations also avoid using the tier classification system. It is conjectured in this thesis that the tier system is largely unfavored because it promotes a hierarchal system in which certain countries are given status over others, placing emphasis on the alleged virtue or civilization of nations rather than on the crime and victims.

Crucial to this analysis is an exploration of the unequal power dynamic that arises when one of the most influential countries on the planet begins pointing its finger at others to make claims of humanitarian inadequacy. By implementing a system that places some countries above or below others in regards to injustice, violence, and corruption, the proliferation of inequality extends further. It is the same brand of disparity which exists between those who were born with the privilege of living in a developed, relatively safe nation and those who grew up in less ideal conditions and are therefore at a higher risk for exploitation.

Furthermore, the United States' act of classifying itself as T1 implies self-imposed authority. According to an article published by the CNN Freedom Project, between 14,500 and 17,500 people are trafficked into the U.S. every year, suggesting that this fully complying nation continues to have seriously high rates of trafficking, not to mention the domestic trafficking that is assumed to occur between individual states (*Trafficking in Persons*). Moreover, if we consider each U.S. state as a separately functioning nation, California could be classified on its own as T2 or T2WL because, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Diego are among the highest areas of child sex trafficking in the entire country. In summation, the U.S. holds the power to classify nations, and in order to maintain its image as "the best country on Earth," it is likely that, regardless of how much the U.S. attempts to comply with the TVPA, the annual TIP reports brush over the true severity of human trafficking within the United States. The U.S. therefore constructs itself as the ultimate authority on human trafficking; owning up to domestic failings would weaken its ability to claim which countries are immoral, corrupt, and dangerous.

Thus, it is arguable that the U.S. DoS's TIP tier system emphasizes inequity and shines a spotlight on the difference between the developing and developed world rather than on the real, human victims of this horrific crime. As such, this thesis will not utilize the tier classification system as a means of categorizing nations' prevalence of human trafficking. Instead, this thesis will focus on the situational struggles of individual nations, and how systems of inequality (including TVPA tiers) only hinder a country's progress toward ending modern slavery.

Rather than employing the tier system to determine the global prevalence of sex trafficking, it is more beneficial to build on various statistics collected by organization such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and shine light on the individual and global effects of sex trafficking, rather than on a national government's ability to gather the appropriate funding and resources needed to eradicate it. According to the ILO, about 21 million people have been victims of human trafficking and forced labour, of which the majority are women. Such estimates on the actual number of exploited humans differs greatly among organizations, as it is essentially impossible to keep track of the precise amount of humans being trafficked internationally, especially considering that research on the topic is a fairly recent occurrence.

It is important to note that, throughout the research process, many different quantitative values have been given by various organizations in order to define the prevalence of sex trafficking. Some entities, such as the U.S. Department of State, insists that the large majority (about 80 percent) of human trafficking cases involve the sex industry ("What is Modern Slavery?"), while the ILO argues that sex trafficking is actually only about 22 percent of the total of modern slavery ("Statistics on Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking").

Furthermore, the ILO estimates that, while the majority (approximately 60 percent) of labour exploitation is experienced by men, about 98 percent of victims of sexual exploitation are women (Laczko, Frank, and Elzbieta Gozdzia). Thus, sex trafficking disproportionately affects women, and this is therefore the reason why is it often to referred

to as a women's issue by activist organizations like Amnesty International, and why it is included in the category of violence against women.

In regards to economics, human trafficking is allegedly the third most profitable illegal industry in the world behind illegal drugs and arms trafficking (though the Ricky Martin Foundation claims it is the second most profitable behind drugs and before weapons), generating about \$32 billion annually ("11 Facts About Human Trafficking"). This figure is generally accepted by the U.S. and European governments, but many researchers and non-governmental organizations claim that the profits are actually much higher. Siddhartha Kara, economist and author of *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*, calculated that the "total revenue generated by all forms of contemporary slavery in 2007 was a staggering \$152.3 billion, with profits of \$91.2 billion." He also argues, through extensive economic analysis, that those trafficked into sex slavery produce more profits than all other exploited humans. Kara claims, "Only 4.2 percent of the world's slaves are trafficked sex slaves, but they generate 39.1 percent of slaveholders' profits" (Kara, 17).

It is estimated that about 800,000 women and children are trafficked internationally for sexual exploitation every year; this is perhaps one of the only statistics that has remained consistent among various sources of information. Regardless of which entity has the most precise statistics, it is more important to acknowledge that the number of victims of exploitation and the amount of profits falling in the hands of traffickers is tragically high, making this an issue that is impossible to ignore. It is a horror that touches nearly every nation on the planet and destroys the lives of millions of innocent humans, while simultaneously pouring money into the pockets of countless immoral beneficiaries.



## CHAPTER II

### IN THE CONTEXT OF MOLDOVA AND THE FORMER SOVIET BLOC

The Republic of Moldova has experienced centuries of turbulence and upheaval, and for the majority of its history has lacked a single, unifying national identity (Drakulić, Slavenka). The territory currently recognized as Moldova was first occupied by the Romans in the second century CE, and thus was nearly always fending off the threat of foreign rulers. For centuries, control of the region was traded off between the Romans, Huns, Bulgarians, and Mongols until 1349 when the Romanian empire created the state of Moldavia. Following this, the region was then conquered in pieces by the Hungarians, Poles, and Turks until 1792, when the Russian empire gained the area from the Ottoman empire. Moldova was eventually included as part of Romania after Russia was defeated in the Crimean War, but then in 1924, the newly formed Soviet Union incorporated Moldova as part of Ukraine. In 1941, the Soviet Union was attacked by the Romanians and the Germans, resulting in the reannexation of the Moldovan territory, but then three years later, the Soviets reclaimed the area (Kara, 114).

Following this, Moldova was considered a part of the Soviet Union, with Russian as the official language, until 1989 when the Moldovan language (a dialect of Romanian) and the Latin alphabet were reintroduced to the country. Moldova declared full independence in 1991 after the fall of the USSR, but was given less than a year to stabilize itself when the market economy reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) caused the small nation to plummet into complete socioeconomic turmoil.

Regarding the IMF's role in the economic downfall of Moldova and Eastern Europe in general, it is important to understand the methods that were utilized to force post-Soviet states away from planned economies and toward economic liberalization. These Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) were designed by the IMF and the World Bank, organizations largely controlled by the United States and other Western powers, to help former communist states to transition smoothly into the global capitalist economy. While some may argue that the IMF had good intentions when attempting to usher the former Soviet bloc into the modern economic era, we can clearly see that the long-term effects of the SAPs have been disastrous for most of the countries in which they were implemented, especially in Moldova.

First of all, in an attempt to promote economic efficiency, the IMF "mandated fiscal austerity measures, such as cutting government expenditures on health care, education, unemployment benefits, and other social services" (Kara, 26). Austerity is a term used to describe economic policies that are designed to reduce government budget deficits, though often at the expense of public well-being. For example, those who previously depended on the social welfare programs that existed under the Soviet Union were left completely abandoned by the state. Without healthcare, many people became sick or lived with untreated conditions. Without government funded childcare, many mothers were forced to leave work or school to care for children. In general, for a population left without immediate alternatives for sustenance, quality of life suffered greatly. Metaphorically, austerity cut the strings that held up so many lives, which arguably has resulted in the devastation of hope among entire nations of people.

Secondly, while under communism, the prices of products and services had been controlled by a central authority (the USSR) rather than market forces. The IMF ended this practice in attempts to promote competition, a key part of capitalism, but the result was massive inflation and the almost complete devaluation of national currencies. Furthermore, the IMF insisted that markets become open to foreign entities to promote the free flow of money, but the outcome was instead an overwhelming flow of “hot money” that collapsed the local markets. The term “hot money” refers to funds from foreign investors who are seeking large short-term returns. Such investments usually have disparate outcomes, as they tend to strengthen the currency of the country from which the money originates and consequently weaken the currency of the nation being invested in.

In addition, the IMF saw that it was imperative for the public, government-owned companies to be sold to the private sector in order to increase both competition and efficiency. Billions of dollars were then moved into the hands of Western economic entities, i.e. greedy, and often corrupt, politicians and businessmen. Last, but not least, the IMF mandated severe interest rate increases in order “to attract foreign money seeking strong returns... although the net result was pervasive default on loans, bank foreclosures, and deepening economic recession.” All of this culminated in a 44 percent decrease of the former Soviet states’ combined GDP, yet an 11 percent and 18 percent *increase* in GDP in the UK and U.S. respectively (Kara, 27).

By 2001, the Moldovan economy had shrunk to 35% of its size in 1990, and during this same time the number of people in Eastern Europe living on less than \$2 a day increased dramatically from 23 million to 93 million. The United Nations defines extreme poverty as living on less than \$1 a day, meaning that about a third of the region was

incredibly impoverished. Moreover, as a result of the loans given by the SAPs, Moldova's external debt went from \$0 in 1990 to \$21 billion in 2006. Thus, coupled with a devastated economy and shattered people, the shaken Republic of Moldova was also gifted with an overwhelming debt that was nearly triple its national GDP of \$3.5 billion in that same year.

It is interesting to note that many Moldovans perceived this economic mayhem as a democracy-related disaster, and thus elected a communist president in 2001 named Vladimir Voronin. Voronin is well-known for his statement claiming that Moldova, in comparison with Cuba, must protect itself from Western "imperialist predators" (Kara, 28). Therefore, we see firsthand how direct Western intervention (with destructive results) in an Eastern nation has resulted in high levels of discontent toward the West and all that it represents, such as democracy and capitalism.

Alongside the structural adjustment programs, a case study by Jenny Bryson Clark and Denese McArthur argues that much of Moldova's modern woes stem from a series of events in the nineties that resulted in extreme economic downturns and a growing poverty rate. To elaborate, from independence 1991 until 1996, as the consequences of IMF economic reforms took hold, the Moldovan economy decreased by sixty-four percent from its levels in 1989. During these years, inflation averaged 639 percent. When the Russian economy collapsed in 1999, Moldova then fell to a portion of its former economic output, as a large share of the Moldovan economy depended on agricultural exports to Russia (Clark, Jenny Bryson, and Denese McArthur).

Furthermore, in 1992, shortly after Moldova declared its own sovereignty, the territory known today as Transnistria broke away from Moldova and asserted its own independence. Transnistria is not recognized as an official country by the United Nations,

and is known by many as a haven for organized criminals due to very loose border regulations and an overall lack of law and order. This independent region is known as a haven for the trafficking of drugs from Africa, weapons from the Soviet era, and humans from all over the region. On top of these unfortunate facts, the secession of Transnistria further injured Moldova's economy, as a large portion of the nation's industry was located in that territory.

Additionally, between 1992 and 1994, Moldova experienced extreme flooding in its agricultural lands, which, according to Clark and McArthur, "is the source of almost half the country's GDP." Due to all of these circumstances, "the number of people living below the poverty line reached 80 percent of the population in 2001" (Clark, Jenny Bryson, and Denese McArthur). The situation in Moldova was similar to, if not worse than, what the rest of Eastern Europe was experiencing after the fall of the Soviet Union.

When we look at what all of these poor countries have in common, we see that we can connect them all through their history as involved with the Soviet Union. However, it was not the experience of communism which created such widespread and devastating poverty, but rather the aftermath of the fall of communism. The transition away from communism was, arguably, poorly handled by Western organizations, and has dealt lasting scars on an entire region of the world.

Interestingly, Moldova and others in the Eastern bloc experienced quite a lot of stability during Soviet rule. The USSR guaranteed employment for all citizens, as well as social security, healthcare, housing, and childcare. Mimi Chakarova mentions in her documentary *The Price of Sex* that, under communism, women and men were also paid equal wages, a feat still unconquered by most of the modern developed world. Clark and

McArthur write, “With extensive social investment during the communist administration, literacy rates were almost universal and above other countries with comparable levels of per capita” (Clark, Jenny Bryson, and Denese McArthur). However, these high levels of social expenditure suddenly dropped after 1991 and, paired with the IMF’s structural adjustment programs, spearheaded by the U.S. Treasury Department, resulted in the total devastation of a productive society.

When John Maynard Keynes wrote about the aggressive capitalism that had taken hold in the West following the second World War, he declared, “It is not intelligent. It is not beautiful. It is not just. It is not virtuous.” It is thus clear that the imposition of radical market-economy standards on the former Eastern bloc, and specifically Moldova, have resulted in situations and conditions which are also far from beautiful, just, or virtuous. This birth of neoliberalism, or the favoring of free-market capitalism, has created the ideal conditions in which sex trafficking is able to expand and traffickers themselves have been able to streamline their business models and increase profits.

## CHAPTER III

### SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN MOLDOVA

Given the discussion of economic hardship caused by the explosion of the global market-based economy into post-Soviet Eastern Europe, and in regard to Moldova specifically, one should assume that the aforementioned fiscal devastation and structural changes are directly related to high rates of sex trafficking, and thus we must ask why poverty, more so than anything else, has caused sexual exploitation to flourish in the Republic of Moldova.

It is important to know that human trafficking is not an incident unique to the post-Soviet era in Moldova. Under the regime of the USSR, trafficking was largely initiated by the government itself, rather than by organized crime groups. According to an NGO called End Slavery Now, about a quarter of a million Moldovans were trafficked to camps in Siberia in the 1940's and 50's, for forced labor overseen by the Gulag, referred to in English as the Main Administration of Corrective Labor Camps. A trademark of the Stalin era, these Gulag camps boasted millions of prisoners who endured hard manual labor for the sake of the Soviet economy. Women in the Gulag camps unsurprisingly faced the threat of abuse and rape, and often became pregnant during their imprisonment, though their newborn children would frequently be taken from them and placed in orphanages so that the women could continue working ("Gulag: Soviet Forced Labor Camps and the Struggle for Freedom").

In regards to sex trafficking during the Soviet era, both prostitution and sexual slavery existed. The USSR, in an incredibly contradictory manner, provided prostitutes with special licenses to practice their trade, called “yellow cards,” and yet at the same time, consistently denied the very existence of sex work. Regardless, sex slavery and prostitution were among the only stable jobs, meaning that demand for it was continuous and reliable, in an economy that was plummeting in the late twentieth century. Kelsey Ferrell from End Slavery Now states in the aforementioned article, “As the USSR neared social and economic collapse in its final years, human trafficking became an increasingly profitable enterprise” (Ferrell, Kelsey Hoie).

After the disintegration of the Iron Curtain, the business of trafficking moved from the hands of the government to the control of organized criminals. These traffickers and pimps prey on the young women of Moldova who are drowning in their country’s poverty after the collapse of communism and the wreckage of the IMF reforms that followed. As members of the poorest country in Europe, many Moldovans are desperate to leave for more prosperous opportunities elsewhere; The average working person in Moldova makes about 1,000 *leu* per month, which is only about 230 U.S. dollars, or seven dollars a day. As a result, mass migration has occurred as desperate Moldovans search for better economic circumstances elsewhere; now more than twenty-five percent of Moldova’s population of four million people live abroad (Ferrell, Kelsey Hoie). In *The Business of Modern Slavery*, Siddhartha Kara also mentions that, for Moldovans, leaving the country is merely the equivalent of leaving one’s house for work in the morning. In fact, a large part of the Moldovan economy depends on remittances from citizens working abroad. Therefore, this constant movement and intense desire to migrate naturally breeds vulnerability, a condition



brought on by a desperate need to earn money and survive, making it the ideal situation for traffickers to profit from.

La Strada International, an anti-trafficking NGO that runs a hotline for victims of sex trafficking in Eastern Europe, explains in the documentary *The Price of Sex* that many young Moldovan women fall for false job offers that advertise opportunities to study or work abroad in highly romanticized, Western locations. Naive and desperate, these girls and women do not think twice about the suspicious claims that these so-called travel agencies can have all travel documents arranged in a matter of days. They are lured in by promises of thousands of dollars in earnings every month, which they could send back home to their families. However, in some cases, it is actually family members who will sell their daughters, though they may not be fully aware that they are sending them off to do sex work.

Many of those girls and women will end up in brothels in Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, or elsewhere through elaborate trafficking networks in which women are traded between national borders by pimps and organized criminals and smuggled through means as diverse as delivery trucks and speed boats. Many Moldovan victims are brought into Romania and through Bulgaria to Istanbul, referred to by Chakarova in *The Price of Sex* as “the gateway to the Middle East,” where girls and women can then be easily moved to hot spots for sex tourism like Israel and Dubai. Upon arrival, these victims are relieved of all travel and identity documents, often locked in cramped apartments, and forced to have sex with dozens of men per day without being allowed to keep their payments. Often their pimps will claim that the girls owe them a debt for their travel expenses, housing, and food, and will promise freedom upon full repayment of these debts as a tool to manipulate the

trafficked women into working even harder, which, in the end, only maximizes profits for the pimps.

End Slavery Now claims that about “1 in every 100 [Moldovans] has been trafficked to date,” both within and without the borders of the small nation. Furthermore, in regards to victims trafficked abroad, trafficked Moldovans have been found in at least forty countries. While most of these citizens are women and girls who have been made victims of sex trafficking, there are also a number of victims of labor trafficking and forced begging, a quantity which totalled about twenty-five thousand in 2008 (Ferrell, Kelsey Hoie).

These statistics have shown that Moldova is one of the largest suppliers of sex slaves in Europe, and is therefore referred to as a source country. The fact that Moldova is also the poorest country on the continent suggests a clear correlation between the prevalence of both poverty and sex trafficking. As the latter flourishes, the former continues to feed on the Moldovan population, particularly in rural areas where there is very little awareness about the issue in the first place. Furthermore, in the capital Chisinau, awareness of sex trafficking has only led to further corruption.

Thus, if poverty is the cause of trafficking, then corruption is the catalyst. While Moldova does have anti-trafficking legislation, it is not often fully implemented or abided by. This lack of access to justice for victims only worsens the problem, but corruption is not only evident in terms of human rights; it proliferates among all branches of the government.

In a dinner conversation with a Moldovan exchange student at the American University in Bulgaria, Corina Ursu (with full consent given to be mentioned in this thesis)

discussed the rampant misconduct in her nation's supposedly democratic elections. According to Ursu, election fraud is so common in Moldova, that many people will view successful politicians as snakes who must have done something immoral or dishonest to achieve what they have. A regular occurrence in elections is the practice of what Ursu refers to as "dead people voting," meaning that the identifications of deceased Moldovan citizens will be used to cast votes for a particular politician. Ursu also claims that poll station workers, especially in small villages, will be paid to switch the vote totals so that preference for one candidate will be fraudulently switched to the other. It is through these practices that Ursu alleges the most recent Moldovan president came to power, a man named Igor Dodon who is known as being pro-Russian and highly corrupt.

As the IMF and World Bank reforms tore away at the fragile leftovers of post-Soviet Moldova in the 1990's, corruption dug its teeth into the governmental affairs of the nation. While the Western capitalist countries stood as the epitome of what destroyed their livelihoods, Moldovans turned away from democratic practices. Public officials could be paid to ignore the increase in trafficking with ease. As stated in the End Slavery Now piece, "By the mid-2000s, there was rampant corruption among senior government officials, police, border guards and judges (including the deputy director of the Center to Combat Trafficking in Persons) who were complicit in human trafficking" (Ferrell, Kelsey Hoie).

As Moldova struggles between allegiance to the West or the East in the twenty-first century, tension between neoliberalism and isolationism clash and form a monster that rears its ugly head as the vessel for a corrupt public system that cares little for ending the sexual exploitation of its women and girls. In *Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*, Siddhartha Kara discusses a conversation he had with a Moldovan trafficking attorney who

suggested that corruption finds its root in poverty and, more specifically, low wages. Kara writes, “Wages for police officers, state prosecutors, and judges are barely above subsistence level.” Therefore, a bribe from a trafficker is a welcome respite from the poverty that will not lessen its grip on the nation. According to the aforementioned attorney, a few hundred dollars to a trafficker “is little more than a minor cost of doing business, but an irresistible boost in income to a prosecutor or judge” (Kara, 126). Furthermore, when judges refuse to take bribes, witnesses often tend to mysteriously disappear, an assumed “plan B” for traffickers hoping to escape conviction. This situation in Moldova has led to slave traders being virtually impossible to stop. In short, as money flows from the hands of pimps to judges, traffickers will rarely see a day in jail, let alone face prosecution in the first place. This results in extremely low risk for organized crime syndicates seeking out new business ventures, and thus sex trafficking networks continue to thrive in Moldova. With poverty, and the ensuring corruption it encourages, in mind, it is essential to go deeper and seek out the circumstances surrounding those who are either victims of or at-risk for sex trafficking: the young girls of Moldova.

## CHAPTER IV

### MOLDOVA'S YOUTH AT RISK

While poverty breeds the necessary conditions for sex trafficking to thrive, and corruption allows it to carry on and prosper, the children of Moldova in particular are at an extremely high risk of being trafficked because of societal circumstances which are also exacerbated by profound and adamant poverty, i.e. domestic abuse.

Though survivors of domestic violence come from all socioeconomic backgrounds, it is undeniable that there is a clear link between poverty and abuse. Economic stress is a powerful demon that is capable of bringing out the worst in people; likewise, economic instability also flourishes in violent homes and situations. According to an article in Borgen Magazine, “Being trapped in poverty or violence often implies being trapped in the other, because the two are so synonymous with human suffering and function to dehumanize individuals in a similar fashion through similar mechanisms” (“The Connection Between Poverty and Domestic Violence”). Moldova is no stranger to domestic abuse. The high prevalence of the issue is, arguably, one of the main reason why so many girls and women are eager to accept offers to go abroad for work; they desperately want to escape both their abusers and the overarching culture of violent homes.

End Slavery Now claims that “90% of victims of sexual exploitation from Moldova report that they had experienced violence at home prior to being trafficked” (Ferrell, Kelsey Hoie), thus showing a direct correlation between domestic abuse and vulnerability to sexual exploitation. What is worse is that there is an almost complete lack of resources for victims

of violence, even young children. Furthermore, alcoholism has grown to be a serious issue in Moldova, to the point where the tiny Republic is considered one of the world's largest consumers of alcohol. This alcohol abuse likely contributes to abusive homes, as abusers will be fueled by the effects of the dangerous substance, and it is doubtful that any alcoholic bystanders would attempt to stop this behavior.

While there are a small number of NGOs in Moldova working to rescue abused children and teens from dangerous homes, most youth become runaways and either live homeless on the streets or find themselves in orphanages that lack the appropriate public funding to provide victims with the counseling and education they require. An article detailing the stories of Moldova's abused youth describes the young life of a 14 year-old girl named Karina who was sexually abused by her father from the age of nine. Karina tells the reporter that her father was always under the influence of alcohol when he raped her, and that her mother was also drunk, and therefore could not hear her daughter's protests. However, even when her mother or neighbors witnessed the abuse with their own eyes, the police would not be contacted because they would likely not even arrive. As discussed, the justice system in Moldova is incredibly broken, and little is to be done for victims of violence against women in particular.

Luckily, Karina's father was eventually sentenced to prison for eighteen years, and she was taken away from her alcoholic mother to be placed in a crisis center, a temporary shelter that is home to about five hundred victims of domestic violence. However, this does not mean that Karina is no longer in danger. The aforementioned article states, "Moldovan social workers say that such kids are easy prey for human traffickers." Because there is such a lack of funding to support Karina's full recovery, the crisis center has no choice but

to “send Karina to a permanent orphanage in a poor and remote southern region of Moldova.” These orphanages also lack the appropriate resources to ensure that young girls will not fall prey to traffickers. Karina’s psychologist, a woman named Lidia Gorceag, had said, “She is so traumatized, she is a potential target for traffickers.” The author of the article commented on this statement as having an almost blasé quality about it, “as if such a fate is inevitable” (Nemtsova, Anna).

The orphanage that Karina will be sent to, much like the others, will be more like a holding cell for future trafficking victims rather than a real home. In these centers, it is not only abused children and teens who struggle to overcome their pasts, but also youth who have been left behind by parents who have gone abroad to find jobs. The International Organization for Migration has stated that “nearly every third child in Moldova grows up without their parents” because of these circumstances. Many of the latter children likely have mothers who have fallen prey to sex traffickers in their attempts to leave Moldova.

Furthermore, because there are so many abused and abandoned children in the country, orphanages are often filled to maximum capacity, meaning that once teenagers reach their eighteenth birthday, they will be turned out to the street without knowing how to fend for themselves. Orphanages rarely have programs that offer youth education, let alone job training, and thus much of Moldova’s desperate young women will be immediately snatched up by a pimp the minute she leaves the orphanage. There is a devastating lack of opportunity for orphans to receive proper schooling or guidance, and they are also sadly unaware of the traps traffickers will lay for them.

While economic hardship is the obvious cause of many Moldovans’ urgent desire to leave the country, the high rate of domestic abuse, worsened by an epidemic of extreme

alcoholism, makes matters even worse. It is arguable that poverty breeds violence, and that violence flourishes within poverty, and therefore we see a whole nation of people crippled by unending economic woes searching for escape through any avenue they can, whether it is violence against women, substance abuse, or walking right into the arms of traffickers. Lidia Gorceag, the aforementioned psychologist assigned to young Karina's case, explained that the girl's father could not be categorized as a pedophile, and instead referred to the man as an "ultimately degraded personality" (Nemtsova, Anna). It is therefore possible to see the tragedies of Moldova as a symptom of the deprivation and degradation of its people.



## CHAPTER V

### THE MEDIA AS AN ENEMY TO ANTI-TRAFFICKING EFFORTS

When discussing the extent to which sex trafficking has tightened its grip on the modern world, it is essential to examine the role that the media has played in shaping a mass viewpoint on the issue, as well as how the media has made the efforts of traffickers easier through both misrepresentation and the rise of online pornography (and the internet in general). While it is the focus of this thesis to demonstrate poverty as the root cause of sex trafficking, it is also vital to the framework of one's understanding of the issue to see how the media acts as a catalyst for this issue to spiral into further gravity.

One of the most crucial aspects of conducting feminist research is to identify power structures in the given situation and to determine if there is a hierarchy in play. Through such analysis, we uncover the intricate dynamic between the hegemon, or the dominant identity or ideology, and the less privileged members of society. In *Gender, Race, and Class In Media*, James Lull writes, "Hegemony is the power or dominance that one social group holds over others" (Lull, James). Lull argues further that the media decides what we see and hear and, in turn, what we think. The crucial point of this analysis is that, due to a hegemonic patriarchal society, the voices that are in charge of the media are largely male. Thus, social power structures based on privileges translate into corporate media, meaning that those with the most privilege are the most powerful players in media networks, and therefore the ones making decisions. In our society, the identities that hold the most privilege are male, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender, and wealthy. A healthy

combination of any of those things gives one a social location capable of amassing and exercising great power.

The point of this exploration is to uncover the overwhelmingly male narrative that exists in the media (including film, television, and the internet) about the topic of sex trafficking, and how this unfair power balance, regardless of intention, results in an environment in which the problem is able to thrive. The Women's Media Center, founded by Jane Fonda, Robin Morgan, and Gloria Steinem, conducted an in-depth study about the media gender gap, specifically for the year 2015. Researchers found that, in regards to news media, men generated about 62% of news, were on camera 68% of the time, wrote 62% of stories in the most popular newspapers, and wrote about 58% of online content. Men also held the majority of the share of jobs in film and television entertainment, with women representing only 27% of that particular workforce. Furthermore, "Men were 83 percent of all directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers and editors for the 250 most profitable films made in the United States in 2014" (Gray, Katti). Overall, this report clearly illustrates the harmful lack of gender equality in the creation of media, which scholars such as Lull claim is the most powerful societal influencer.

It is not only in news media where women's voices are given limited space, but also in film and television. In terms of the film and television industry gender gap, women are seriously underrepresented as directors, producers, and writers, and were cast in only 28.7% of movies in the year 2014 (Gray, Katti). More harrowing is the fact that, in terms of sex trafficking, the majority of films and documentaries on the topic are either produced and/or directed by men. When conducting research via documentary films, this thesis strove to avoid this situation and pulled insight from films such as *The Price of Sex* and

*Anonymously Yours*, both of which were directed by women. The problem with having a majority of male perspectives, in the form of directors and producers, but also via mostly male media reporters, on the subject of sex trafficking is that it creates a conversation about a women's issue (meaning that 98% of victims of sex trafficking are women) that is seriously lacking in women's voices. Thus, discussion of the topic is skewed in favor of the male gaze, further silencing women who have been victims of a taboo and untouchable crime that has already stolen their autonomy and personhood. Keeping women quiet and dependent is, after all, the root cause of violence against women in general.

Furthermore, when men are left in charge of women's issues, the products of their discussions, though well-meaning, are reminiscent of patriarchal views that they cannot seem to shake off. For example, documentaries about sex trafficking directed or produced by men, tend to focus more on sex, rather than trafficking. Compared to pieces by women, these productions often accidentally glamorize sexual slavery by equating it more so with sex work and the consensual sex trade. Flashy camera angles on fishnet stockings, high heels, and red lights are often features of these pieces, with male-voiced narration intent on making the world of sex trafficking appear like a dramatic underground carnival, rather than a devastating and violent crime. Often the titles of the films themselves are inappropriate, again placing emphasis on the selling of sex than on the exploited women themselves, such as in *Whores' Glory* and *Nefarious: Merchant of Souls*. These films feature action-movie music and unnerving interviews with johns and pimps, alongside artistic shots of scantily clad women twirling lacy umbrellas on street corners or dancing in clubs. It is undeniable that these films have the potential to raise awareness on the issue,

but their framing of sex trafficking only serves to contribute to a conversation in which the victims and the exploitation are snubbed, while the sex and money are emphasized.

Another issue that arises in regards to the male gaze and media depictions of sex trafficking is misrepresentation. It is arguable that improperly portraying the issue and using it as a method of increasing the shock factor and a sense of drama makes it more difficult for anti-trafficking efforts to succeed. If the public does not understand the problem, and only views it as a really intense episode of *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*, there will be less people to understand the reality of the crime and become meaningful activists. For example, the *Taken* saga tells the story of a former CIA agent, played by Liam Neeson, whose daughter is abducted by sex traffickers while on vacation in Paris and the ensuing action-packed journey he embarks on to rescue her. There are countless issues with this film's portrayal of sex trafficking. Firstly, the assumption that traffickers and pimps are snatching privileged, white, American girls from swanky hotels in Paris to feed the industry is, as discussed throughout this thesis, completely inaccurate. Traffickers are most likely to prey on vulnerable girls who lack most privileges, and are often ensnared through coercion and fraud, rather than abducted in the dead of night (although this can occur). Secondly, the idea that a single man can take on an entire ring of traffickers with a bit of CIA training and heroically save the day is so beyond the realm of reality in actual sex trafficking situations that it shines a light of simplicity on the very complicated and twisted work of sexual slavery. Overall, the *Taken* saga is an example of a male-dominated Hollywood using this global crime as a topic of sensation and excitement to capture the public's attention and generate profit, while doing nothing to actually help eradicate sex trafficking around the world.

Scholarly articles and journals could also be considered a form of media, and so it is also vital to examine ways in which the male gaze has affected previous research on this topic in the more academic realm. In regards to this thesis, of the approximately fifty sources cited, the majority has originated from government entities, non-governmental organizations, and female academics or journalists. Only a handful of the resources have been male, but two in particular have contributed significantly to building a general framework on the functioning of the sex trade and the experiences of sex trafficking victims: Siddhartha Kara's *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery* and Victor Malarek's *The Natashas*.

These two texts provide in depth descriptions of the functioning of sex trafficking rings, including travel routes, major source cities, and general practice. Both Kara and Malarek base their arguments and discussions on their travels through countries and regions known for particularly high rates of sex trafficking, such as Eastern Europe and Southeast Asia. Using their male privilege to their utmost advantage, they explore infamous red light districts and sex trade hotspots like Kamathipura in Mumbai and the E-55 highway on the Czech Republic-Germany border. The two men write of their explorations into the brothels themselves, and their conversations with pimps and trafficked women. Kara described the apprehension that was clearly felt by the women he met when he began speaking to them instead of having sex with them; they often did not trust him because they feared that their pimp was trying to trick them into disloyalty, which would result in extreme violence against them (Kara, 48).

Malarek also entered brothels, including one experience in which he had a lengthy discussion with a pimp about how the man was transitioning his "business" to the internet

by posting advertisements for the women he had trafficked. When asked whether online advertising has helped increase customers, the pimp replied, “Business has tripled with the internet. Customers see what I have to offer... I have visitors from America, Canada, Britain, Europe, and some from Japan. They all found me on the internet” (Malarek, 83). Through this conversation, Malarek’s eyes were opened into a digital world in which men from all over the world shared their experiences and opinions of various sex tourist hot spots from Thailand to Turkey. Online forums have risen up as guides for sex tourists, such as the popular World Sex Guide, which boasts advice from men all over the world about their experiences in various countries with different nationalities or ethnicities of women. There is advice on where to get the “most” for your money, detailed travel directions, and what type of girls tourists can expect to find in certain countries. In response to a question on the latter, one contributor wrote, “Istanbul is a heaven for Ukrainian girls. And you’re not limited to them at all. There are also Romanian, Russian, Bulgaria, Moldavian,” (Malarek, 85). Mimi Chakarova also has discussed in the *Price of Sex* how Istanbul is a major destination for girls trafficked from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

Some pimps and traffickers have even gone so far as to arrange tours for their clients, with promises of accommodation, food, and women all for one inclusive price that can be booked with the ease of the internet (Malarek, 92). Thus, it is undeniable that the rise of the internet has contributed greatly to the increased exploitation of women and girls, by allowing pimps to streamline their business plans and reap more profits from a wider range of global consumers. While the internet has certainly improved our lives in terms of opportunity and efficiency, it has clearly also been used as a tool for evil due to these very characteristics. When forums such as World Sex Guide and its compatriots grow in

popularity, the abuse of trafficked women increases, and it is unlikely that any voice of reason or justice will be heard in such online communities. Malarek writes of a young man who visited the United Arab Emirates and expressed concerns that the women he had seen in brothels were forced to be there and had been abused by their pimps. In response, one man wrote, “This is a board for men who wanna get laid, not for those who wanna hear slash wrist, sad violin stories” (Malarek, 95). The man continued on to suggest that the original poster’s sister, for example, would never deign to enter such work because of assumed “family values” and a sense of self respect, which apparently trafficked women have no semblance of. It is evident from this that the large majority of men consuming sex from trafficked women and girls are either completely unaware of the violence and coercion that has occurred, or they choose to remain blissfully ignorant of such horrifying exploitation.

It is essential to consider Kara’s and Malarek’s gender when interacting with their research. As men, both have the privilege of being able to enter brothels safely, presumed to be merely customers. Furthermore, due to the fact that it is extremely rare for sex trafficking victims to be male, neither researcher ever has to fear that he will become a victim of the crime he is are studying. Contrastingly, photo-journalist Mimi Chakarova makes the bold and dangerous decision to pose as a prostitute in the red light district of Dubai in *The Price of Sex*, and fears for her life and freedom throughout the entire experience. Thus, if male scholars are more able than female scholars to enter the brothels and red light districts themselves, we can therefore assume that the large majority of this primary research would be from a male perspectives. Furthermore, female researchers like Chakarova would be unable to converse with pimps about the intricacies of their business

plan, nor would they have the opportunity to communicate with the trafficked women themselves without raising suspicions and putting their life at risk. Kara's and Malarek's male privilege make both of these activities safer and more accessible. In short, while it is useful for men to utilize their gender-based power to investigate sex trafficking in a face-to-face manner, it is important to understand that any product of such research would come from a male perspective, and may therefore fall to the same tendencies as aforementioned films and television series have to focus more so on sex than trafficking, and to trade an accurate depiction of victims' vulnerability for profit-generating sensationalism. Despite this possibility, both Kara and Malarek, among the only male scholars whose work has been utilized in this thesis, adequately acknowledged their ability to enter and leave brothels as free and privileged men, and appropriately communicated the situations to the reader without silencing women.



## CHAPTER VI

### GLOBAL AND REGIONAL SOLUTIONS

Refocusing on Eastern Europe and Moldova specifically, despite endless proliferation of this issue through enforced poverty and the conditions that arise from socioeconomic instability, as well as the unhelpful effects of the media on decreasing the prevalence of sex trafficking, there have been a large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) devoted to the eradication of trafficking and the exploitation of women and girls.

La Strada International is one of the more well-known organizations in the region of Eastern Europe, with offices in countries such as Bulgaria, Moldova, and Ukraine. La Strada places an emphasis on human rights and grassroots organizing, as well as relationships with similar organizations throughout Europe. One of their projects, titled the European Action for Compensation for Trafficked Persons (COMP.ACT), aims to provide victims of sex trafficking with compensation for the suffering they experienced and for the unpaid labor they performed. According to the La Strada International website, approximately 50 trafficked women have been compensated, which the highest amount provided being almost \$60,000 ("La Strada International"). La Strada International also supports research on the topic of human trafficking through grants, and also co-sponsors conferences in which governmental officials are invited to engage in discussions about the solution to global trafficking.

More specifically, the La Strada office in Moldova is geared toward assisting potential and current victims in terms of the specific conditions faced by people in the country, as discussed throughout this thesis. The website states that, “About 80% of interviewed female victims of trafficking from 2005 to 2010 confirmed that they had experienced violence in their own family,” and therefore this specific branch of the organization has focused its efforts toward preventing domestic violence, as well as operating a hotline for victims to call when they are in need of help (“La Strada International”). There is general agreement that women who have experienced domestic violence are much more vulnerable to exploitation, due to fear or a sense desperation to escape their current situation. As mentioned previously in this thesis, domestic violence occurs at a high rate in Moldova, arguably due to in part to widespread alcoholism, which is in turn influenced by inescapable poverty. Thus, by providing specific resources for those affected by domestic violence in Moldova, La Strada is effectively seeking to end sex trafficking by going to the root of the issue, an idea which runs parallel to the premise of this thesis that attacking the most basic and foundational causes of a global issue, rather than providing metaphorical band-aids for the symptoms, is a much more effective method to enact social change.

On a more global scale, End Slavery Now was founded in 2007 to combat human trafficking around the world and has contributed a large number of the facts and figures to this thesis. By providing numerical data and quantitative research on the issue of sex trafficking, it is easier to quantify the extent to which this tragedy has dissipated across the world and also to deduce which parts of the world are more seriously affected. End Slavery Now also provides annual Impact Reports and Financial Reports, a level of transparency

which is difficult to find in government-based agencies. According to their 2015 Impact Report, efforts by End Slavery Now supported 1,940 “survivors and at-risk individuals” of trafficking, the majority of which were female and 70 percent of which were children. Their support comes in the form of housing, education, and training for work, and was focused in 2015 on the specific countries of the Netherlands, Romania, Thailand, and the United States (“2015 Impact Report”). Dissimilar to La Strada International, End Slavery Now focuses less on the causes of trafficking and more so on the aftermath. Regardless of their methods, the work that they have done for those affected by trafficking, both for sex and labor, has undeniable improved lives in the ten years since they were founded. Overall, it is arguably most effective to have both type of organizations: one to stop sex trafficking where it begins, and one to ease the suffering of that which has already occurred.

An intergovernmental organization that works closely with NGOs and provides in-depth research and lengthy reports on trafficking, is the International Organization for Migration (IOM). This organization is similar to End Slavery now in the sense that it places more emphasis on assisting those who have already experienced trafficking and, according to their website, “operate(s) from the outset that trafficking in persons needs to be approached within the overall context of managing migration” (“Counter-Trafficking”). The organization claims that it has assisted about 70,000 victims of sex trafficking, mostly in terms of help with reintegration back in their home countries through methods such as providing them with resources to find stable and safe jobs, as well as housing and legal protection. Several reports published by the IOM have examined migration patterns throughout the entire Balkan region and also specifically in regards to Moldova, with

references to trafficking particularly through the highly porous border that Moldova shares with the unrecognized breakaway nation of Transnistria, mentioned in previous sections.

Methods to combat trafficking by the IOM include active communication channels through which authorities can be contacted if a Moldovan victim is identified abroad; the IOM will then assist with returning the trafficked person to their home country and refer them to their Assistance and Protection Centre, which will provide them with the resources they need to resettle safely back into their community and to decrease the circumstances that led to the victim's previous vulnerability. The IOM appears to a midway point between La Strada International and End Slavery Now, as it not only provides support for those who have been trafficked, but also seeks to prevent trafficking by seeking out at-risk people based on the situations experienced by previous victims. At-risk populations for trafficking, according to the IOM, are "vulnerable single-parent families, children, victims of domestic violence, persons with a low level of education, and those from poor rural areas with minimal opportunities" ("Preventing Trafficking and Protecting Victims in Moldova"). This thesis argues similar causes of trafficking, and acknowledges that many of these aforementioned conditions are either created or worsened by a lack of socioeconomic stability not only in regards to individuals, but also in terms of the condition of the nation in general and its monetary ability, or lack thereof, to provide the resources necessary to ease the vulnerability of its citizens.

Other non-governmental organizations which are focused on the more general topic of human rights, but which have promoted campaigns against sex trafficking include Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Human Rights Action Center. Though not specifically devoted to ending the injustice around the world, these

organizations have published articles or reports on the subject, and have promoted campaigns either about or related to sex trafficking, such as Amnesty International's fervent promotion of legalizing prostitution and protecting the rights of sex workers, which is argued by this organization to be a valid solution to sex trafficking ("Amnesty International Publishes Policy and Research on Protection of Sex Workers' Rights").

In regards to the efforts of government bodies to combat sex trafficking, the United Nations has created a number of agencies involved in anti-trafficking endeavors on a more policy-related scale. The United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is directly involved with development in nations where human rights abuses are prevalent, including efforts to curb the trafficking of vulnerable people, particularly in the developing world. Furthermore, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) deals directly with human trafficking, with efforts to “punish and suppress” the practice through the Convention against Transnational Organized Crime by not only assisting victims, but also by targeting the criminals themselves and exercising legal and political authority in ways that NGOs cannot always do. The main feature of the aforementioned convention is that it established a uniform intergovernmental definition of sex trafficking and protocol for both investigations into and prosecutions of sex trafficking cases, with an emphasis on the human rights of the victims ("Convention on Transnational Organized Crime"). However, the United Nations does not have its own army, and its police, or peacekeeping, forces are acknowledged loyal to their own member nations above all else. Thus, while the UN can adopt resolutions and draft firm suggestions for other countries, its governmental actions are not always highly effective.

The United States, while adhering to the UN's agreed upon definition of sex trafficking and the procedures needed to appropriately combat it, still utilizes the tier system (as outlined previously in the thesis) when dealing with sex trafficking on a global scale. Domestically, the United States is active in conducting police raids against traffickers, which often result in hundreds of arrests (Malo, Sebastien). However, many of these arrests are of sex trafficking victims themselves, over the age of 18, who are detained because they have participated in prostitution, regardless of any coercion, fraud, or force that was employed to get them in such a position. Arresting those who have been forced into the sex trade only deepens their vulnerability and only makes it more difficult for them to gain stable lives with safe jobs, as it gives them a criminal record. While pimps and traffickers are also arrested in these raids, it would be ideal if the victims were given the resources needed to improve their lives rather than treated as a lawbreaking miscreant shamed for their non-consensual participation in the sex trade. Furthermore, when these raids result in the rescuing of minors, the United States provides very few resources for children escaping from sex traffickers. The young girls who become victims of sex trafficking in the United States are often orphaned, in the foster system, and/or the children of abusive and/or drug-addicted parents (Lloyd, Rachel). Because there is such a lack of government programs for minor victims of sex trafficking and forced prostitution in the U.S., such as aid with housing, school, and counseling, these young girls often end up in the foster system or homeless, i.e. right where they were before being trafficked.

In regards to the Moldovan government, the U.S. DoS claims that the country has not met the minimum standards (according to U.S. guidelines) required to effectively move toward the elimination of sex trafficking, but apparently “are making significant efforts to

do so” (*Trafficking in Persons*). A significant roadblock in their accomplishing this is what the U.S. claims to be judicial corruption, which is a valid conjecture, according to the research of various experts on the subject. For example, in *The Price of Sex*, Mimi Chakarova speaks with the director of a shelter for trafficked women who tells her that it is incredibly difficult in many post-Soviet countries, like Moldova, for victims to get any real justice in the form of compensation or jail time for their pimp because the traffickers often pay off the judges in charge of deciding the cases, resulting in extreme corruption. Siddhartha Kara cites that the reason judges in this region are so easily bribed is because their salaries are so low that they are barely considered livable, much like the rest of the country. Thus, the judges in Moldova trade the law and morality for economic stability, out of pure poverty-driven desperation.

However, the Moldovan government has not completely slacked off in regards to anti-trafficking efforts, and has drafted a regulation meant to offer better protections for victims of sex trafficking, though this policy does not mention actual prevention of the issue. According to the Republic of Moldova’s website, “people asking for help will receive psychological and legal counseling, as well as assistance to help them reintegrate into the social life and prevent them from becoming victims again” (“Moldovan Human Trafficking Victims Will Have Better Protection Assistance”). While this is definitely a step in the right direction, the fact that a victim would first have to be in a position where they were not afraid to ask for the service in the first place makes it difficult to access, as many trafficked women and girls have been told by their traffickers that if they ever escaped, they would be found and killed (Malarek, 31). Furthermore, the quality of this service, in short, depends on the government’s financial contribution to these resources,

and because Moldova is the poorest country in Europe, it is unlikely that such support could be effective without external assistance from entities such as the European Union or the United Nations.

Overall, Moldova has faced immense pressure from both governmental and non-governmental organizations to put significant effort into anti-trafficking legislation. However, because of the global nature of sex trafficking, the endeavors of a single nation (which is severely lacking in the necessary resources) is not enough to eradicate trafficking. While the Moldovan government is certainly responsible for a large part of how the situation has been handled, in terms of aforementioned corruption, but, as the main argument of this thesis asserts, Moldova has not stumbled upon its current condition of its own accord. Rather, the prevalence of sex trafficking has been a direct result of widespread poverty, and the circumstances that follow from such, which have grown exponentially worse since the fall of the Soviet Union and the ensuing explosion of Western influence into the undeniably weak state.

In short, external pressure from governments for Moldova to change is meaningless without assistance. To alleviate poverty is a nearly impossible endeavor, but conditions can be made less futile with considerable financial support, coupled with strict guidance on how to utilize the given assistance. In terms of the U.S., when a country does not do what we say, we tend to take away essential resources needed for the successful functioning of the country, usually in the form of economic sanctions (i.e. Russia and Iran). In the case of Moldova, the hypothetical withholding of funds, done to encourage domestic government action on sex trafficking, would only worsen socioeconomic conditions in the country, and therefore do nothing to further global anti-trafficking policy.



As discussed previously, the media has often not been a friend to anti-trafficking efforts around the world, but there are situations in which media, specifically the internet and social media, can be an ally to those seeking to end sexual slavery. Referring back to the discussion about the role of the internet and the move toward online advertising in the business of sex trafficking, there is a phone app that has been newly introduced that is aimed at attacking this particular method of furthering the exploitation of women and girls. The app is called TraffickCam, and the premise behind it is to have guests staying at hotels take photos of their room and upload them onto the database. This database is managed by the Exchange Initiative, an organization devoted to raising awareness about the issue in the corporate world in order to encourage more informed business decisions and to avoid contributing to the exploitation of human beings through humane labor sources and supply chains (Scott, Katy). TraffickCam provides law enforcement with essential tools to locate sex trafficking victims because it provides the GPS location of where the photos were taken by guests, and therefore when an advertisement of a trafficked woman in a hotel room is posted online, the victims can then be located using the database of uploaded photos and extracted by law enforcement agencies. Like many other solutions, TraffickCam does have its shortcomings. Firstly, the hotels in which sex trafficked girls and women are likely to be held are often very different from the hotels where casual tourists (meaning those not travelling specifically for sex tourism) will be likely to stay. For example, hotels which serve as brothels are usually located in the red light districts of major cities, and often do not have the same standards of cleanliness and upkeep as hotels specifically meant to service the average, non-exploitive tourist (Kara, 72).

Furthermore, as mentioned in a CNN article, oftentimes when a victim is located using the photos and the GPS location, it is unlikely that they will still be there when the police eventually arrive. This is because pimps tend to post photos of certain locations while they are somewhere else, so the photos of the victim could have been taken at a hotel one week, but not posted until the next when the girl has already been moved. The author of the article also explains that traffickers will also follow a strategy in which they are based in a central location, but will post ads in a number of surrounding places, and then move the girls and women back and forth between the cities in which they receive the most advertisement response (Scott, Katy). Regardless of these roadblocks to the effectiveness of TraffickCam, the very existence of an app dedicated to the eradication of sex trafficking shows that there has been progress in our modern age where we not only use technology to communicate or engage in commercial markets, but to also interact with global social issues and participate in positive actions.

This concept extends particularly to social media and, more specifically, the use of Twitter as a way to communicate with people and organizations from around the world. Twitter provides anti-trafficking organizations with a platform to send out messages in quick flashes (due to the 140 character limit) that can catch a Twitter user's attention and perhaps lead them to more extensive information on linked websites. Most anti-trafficking organizations use Twitter as an activist tool, such as UK-based Human Trafficking Foundation (@HumanTraffdn) and UNICEF's End Trafficking campaign (@EndTraffick). It is arguable that bringing the discussion about sex trafficking to social media platforms that are highly accessible opens up the topic to exposure to audiences that may not have previously sought it out, such as young students or the average Western

citizen. In short, if information about the issue could only be available through scholarly journals published by academic institutions, or, contrastingly, through harmful avenues like sensationalist films such as *Taken*, then sex trafficking would only continue to live in the shadows as a taboo, misunderstood, or altogether unknown tragedy. By normalizing the occurrence of sex trafficking via online platforms that are used every day by millions of people, we lift it up out of the darkness and out from behind closed doors. We present it unapologetically as a global reality and invite people from all regions of world to grapple with the idea of sex trafficking and to engage in conversations; it is from this kind of communication where solutions may be found.

What is also remarkable about the role of Twitter in particular is the use of hashtags. On the platform, one can search for #sextrafficking or #humantrafficking, and receive thousands upon thousands of results of, for example, accounts devoted to raising awareness about the issue or users tweeting about relevant policies that are currently in circulation. Users share articles about how women and girls can potentially protect themselves from being ensnared by traffickers by regularly sharing their location with family and friends on social media and by never accepting job or travel offers that may seem too good to be true. News stories circulate about missing girls with contact numbers for anyone who may have seen them, either in person or in an online advertisement. Infographics containing basic data and statistics are shared, along with emergency hotlines for trafficked women. In fact, a common trick among traffickers who obtain victims through blatant kidnapping was revealed by rapid sharing of stories in which women had been coming back to their cars in parking lots to find clothing or plastic bags tied to the windshield wipers. The tweets urged women to not take the time to remove these items, and to instead get into their cars

immediately and drive to a safe location, as it is in the process of trying to take off the bag or clothing when a trafficker could attack them and take them away. Thus, the public is more aware of one of the thousands of methods used to entrap innocent women and girls into the sex trade, and as a result, fewer people may become victims. Overall, while the internet may serve as an avenue through which traffickers can streamline their businesses and increase profit in more efficient ways, online media also has the potential to combat trafficking if it is utilized in the most effective ways possible.

## CHAPTER VII

### PERSONAL SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The fundamental premise of this thesis has been the idea that sex trafficking is both caused and worsened by poverty and the conditions that it breeds, such as unemployment, lack of education, alcohol abuse, and government corruption. It is through a low socioeconomic status by which women and girls are made vulnerable to sex trafficking via, for example, desperation to leave their home situations or to find work so that they may lift themselves out of the impoverished circumstances that they and others in their community are trapped in. It has also been discussed in this thesis that poverty is the antithesis to many anti-trafficking efforts in the government realm. In regards to Moldova, the small and corrupt government would require extensive financial assistance in order to provide the resources for victims of trafficking to pursue more economically stable and generally healthier lives. With intense pressure from external government agencies for Moldova to do something about the high rate of sex trafficking victims coming from the nation, there is little to be done unless Moldova can be given the tools necessary to repair the damage done by decades under oppressive Soviet rule and the devastating IMF reforms that were implemented in the early 1990's. The economic disaster Moldova has been dealing with for almost three decades was largely the fault of Western capitalist ideologies not well suited for a country that spent so long behind the Iron Curtain, and therefore the weight of responsibility to fix these conditions cannot solely be on Moldova, but also on those who helped to create the situation in the first place.

It is logical to conclude that, if poverty is the cause of a high prevalence of sex trafficking in Moldova, then the solution to ending the practice would be to end poverty. This is, obviously, not a small undertaking. In fact, it is arguable that eradicating poverty is virtually impossible in a world which still functions on a system of imposed inequality, in which a person's opportunities and privileges are afforded based on their nationality or country of birth, a concept that is further tied into race relations and gender inequality (among other things). However, rejection of this world system where developed countries flourish at the expense and exploitation of developing nations would be the ideal first step toward equality, and less disparity between the poor and the rich--with the overall intent being to raise the poor up to a level as close to the rich as possible, while encouraging the rich to utilize their resources to assist in this endeavor, thereby resulting in a balancing of the scales. Although these are charming ideas, to reject this modern structure of nearly inescapable disparity is to atone for centuries of colonialism and imperialism, a task that many developed nations would have difficulty conceptualizing.

Thus, while poverty is almost impossible to eradicate, the systems and structures that depend on the existence of poverty must be questioned and challenged by activists and anyone who hopes for positive social change. Fighting wars over oil, outsourcing labor to abusive foreign factories, partaking in exploitive supply chains, and building both virtual and literal border walls based on discriminatory ideals (as in the case of the aforementioned U.S. tier-based classification system) should all be protested fervently and continuously in order for this fragmented and disparate world to change. Furthermore, resources traditionally allocated to participate in aforementioned wars and capitalism should be redistributed into more humanitarian efforts, such as anti-trafficking initiatives and

legislation. For example, if the United States alone cut their military budget in half, the result would be about 300 billion dollars available for improved conditions not only in our nation, but for assistance with necessary resources in other, less privileged places ("Military Spending in the United States").

Moving forward and taking into account the widespread and profound hold that sex trafficking has on the most vulnerable people on this planet, we must seek out solutions not only to poverty (the proposed root of the issue), but also to trafficking itself. Many non-governmental organizations, most prominently Amnesty International, have promoted the legalization of sex work as a key to eradicating sex trafficking. This particularly NGO favors decriminalization of prostitution for many of the same reasons that most pro-sex work activists do; they claim that, if sex work is decriminalized, “there is better scope for sex workers’ rights to be protected,” meaning that there would potentially be increased healthcare services for sex workers (i.e. STI and HIV/AIDS testing), accessibility to the police to report crimes (i.e. sexual assault and rape), the possibility of safely organizing into unions to advocate further for their rights and policies that will favor their wellbeing, and the idea that any dependents benefitting from the profits of sex work would not be prosecuted ("Q&A: Policy to Protect the Human Rights of Sex Workers"). This translates, in the view of Amnesty International and similar organizations, into improved conditions for victims of sex trafficking in the sense that it will allow them to seek out help from law enforcement without fear of being arrested themselves, and would potentially involve legislation focused specifically on the recovery and wellbeing of those who had been trafficked and forced into sex work. Amnesty International argues that purchasing sex is not a human right, as this act could imply a lack of consent and also contains a

dehumanizing factor for the person offering the services to be purchased. However, they also argue that sex workers themselves, and especially sex trafficking victims, have a human right to protection from sexual violence, lamenting that sex is an act which must be consensual at all times.

There are many positive aspects to the decriminalization of sex work for sex trafficked women and girls, alongside that which was mentioned above. Oftentimes in legislation for the legalization of prostitution, it is consequently made illegal to purchase sex (referred to as being a “john”) and/or to control or manage sex workers with a portion of their profits as compensation (i.e. pimping). In this case, law enforcement would no longer detain the sex workers or trafficked women, resulting in a criminal record for them and extremely narrowed future prospects. Instead, those who purchased sex or acted as a pimp would be prosecuted, thereby moving the blame away from the mainly female role and toward the mostly male role and subverting patriarchal tendencies to vilify women for actively engaging with and enjoying their sexuality, as well as to blame victims of sexual violence for getting themselves into vulnerable situations. Decriminalization would also lead to the erasure of the taboo on sex work, thereby making it easier for victims to reintegrate into their communities without being ashamed of what they were forced to do, and without being ostracized by family members who might not understand what they went through.

On the other hand, there are also negative implications to the legalization of prostitution. First and foremost, if sex work and brothels are made legal, it is therefore impossible for law enforcement agencies to conduct criminal investigations and raids to save victims of sex trafficking. Decriminalizing prostitution would also not be wholly



effective in stopping the practice of pimping, as legalization of this one issue would not solve the issue of judicial corruption in Moldova and many other poor and post-Soviet countries, where judges are paid very little and are therefore willing to accept bribes from pimps and bosses of trafficking rings.

Regarding this point of view, an advocate for the criminalization of prostitution named Janice Raymond writes in her book *Not a Choice, Not a Job*, that sex work in its entirety should be made illegal. Her overarching point of view is that any form of prostitution, whether consensual or forced, is not a true choice. Raymond argues that, if it is a woman's last resort to sell her body in order to financially sustain herself, then there is a complete lack of agency and therefore any semblance of choice is nonexistent. In her book, she explains her belief that the treatment of a human body as a commodity, whether by oneself or by a pimp, is merely the product of a destructive patriarchal society that devalues the female body as an autonomous entity and instead treats it as a means to a capitalist end. She continues on to refer to all participants in the sex trade as victims and asserts that decriminalization of prostitution will only expand the sex industry, thereby increasing sex trafficking, and also promote organized crime (Raymond, 5).

While the basis of Raymond's argument is understandable, her assumption that prostitution is engaged in only by women who have no other options for survival is simplistic conjecture and denies sex workers their agency. It also groups sex workers into the same realm as sex trafficked women and girls, claiming that the experiences of each are nearly indistinguishable. Rather, sex work is entered into on the grounds of consent and active choice, while being sex trafficked, by definition, implies a lack of consent. It is arguable that it is not beneficial to group these two situations together as one, as it

simultaneously denies women who willingly enter the sex trade their own personal rights and makes light of the circumstances involving trafficking, which is pure and unflinching slavery. Thus, because these are two separate issues with similarity only in the sense that they are the light and dark side of the sex trade (respectively), it is the argument of this thesis that prostitution be decriminalized to offer rights and protections to consensual sex workers. At the same time, decriminalization will mean less women will spend time in jail for prostitution, whether forced or not, and allow them to seek out the assistance of legal authorities should they need protection from traffickers or abusive pimps. Furthermore, legislation must be drafted to offer legal protections for the abused and trafficked, offering them the resources they need to seek out justice (if they want to) and the financial support necessary to build a more stable life beyond sex work. Such policies must be backed up by adequate funding, including loans or grants to nations such as Moldova which will need increased monetary stability in order to offer government programs on par with those of powerful Western countries like the United States.

All in all, sex trafficking is a global issue. While it flourishes in particular hotspots (i.e. Eastern Europe), it is imperative to acknowledge its presence even in the most privileged and proud countries. Sex trafficking is a widespread tragedy; it has sunk its teeth into the United States, Western Europe, Southeast Asia, Central America, and virtually every other place on the planet. It does not discriminate. It is not exclusive. Powerful countries will seek to lessen the obvious prevalence of sex trafficking within their borders to assert their humanitarian prowess over less fortunate nations, and though sex trafficking will thrive in conditions of greater poverty, all governments are guilty of not effectively eradicating this problem.

To decrease sex trafficking in places where it occurs with the highest frequency, such as Moldova, we must go to the root of the issue itself, which this thesis has found to be poverty. Poverty itself breeds conditions of desperation, corruption, and an overall lack of the necessities a human being needs to prosper successfully and have a stable life. Poverty has been so invasive in Moldova that it has corrupted underpaid government officials into taking bribes from organized criminals and traffickers. It has led women to being so desperate for a job that they will enter into a promise of money abroad, only to be ensnared by a pimp and forced into the sex trade. Poverty has contributed to the high rate of alcoholism and depression in Moldova, which has been shown to be influential in high rates of domestic violence, creating dangerous homes for Moldova's young girls and placing many of them in orphanages which lack the resources needed to give them the education and job training they need to thrive on their own once they reach adulthood. Poverty ensures that these girls will be turned out on the streets, with no options other than to accept offers from traffickers. Poverty makes it so that, when a victim returns home after arrest and deportation for prostitution abroad, they do not have a stable support system from their government to recover from their experiences, and therefore remain incredibly vulnerable and will likely be trafficked again a number of times (Kara, 116).

We must end the practices of the Western market-based economy that has thrived on the destruction of developing countries through the aforementioned Structural Adjustment Programs through the IMF and World Bank. We must seek out alternatives to systemic inequality (i.e. the idea that privilege is directly linked to privileges such as nationality) so that a person's value and opportunity is not determined largely by the country they were born in. Rather than build up our borders and utilize language that

enforces an ideology of rank (i.e. the United States DoS tier system), we must instead subvert hegemony and endeavor toward a more egalitarian global system, where poverty can be lessened and, in turn, sex trafficking is more likely to be eradicated.

Thus, ending sex trafficking requires a global effort. However, any large scale movement begins with individual people concerned about a particular issue. It is the hope of this thesis that any reader of this research will be inspired to wonder what they, a single person, might be able to do to promote global anti-trafficking efforts. To reiterate what has been mentioned previously, a contributing factor to sex trafficking survival and growth is its invisibility. Because sex, rape, and prostitution are such taboo topics in our patriarchal society, it flies under the radar as a flourishing underground business that nobody ever wants to acknowledge or talk about. In fact, oftentimes, some people don't even know about the issue itself. Therefore, what the casual observer can do to help combat the severity of sex trafficking is to simply raise awareness about it. Dozens of organizations mentioned in this thesis provide guidelines and advice for grassroots organizing and local campaigns; these resources are invaluable to spreading the message about this issue.

Grassroots organizing is also an effective way to raise awareness about sex trafficking. Organizing small scale campaigns in one's local town or university campus spreads the word about the issue with the intent for a domino effect, meaning that if one town or college is concerned about eradicating sex trafficking, others will be likely to follow suit. Amnesty International has chapters at the majority of U.S. universities, where both students and faculty have the freedom to build their own activist campaigns around Amnesty International's organizational goals and values. They are just one of many global organizations willing to offer local activists the tools needed to raise awareness and spread

information effectively. This is a great positive to our modern era of rapid communication technology. Word spreads fast; all that is needed is a catalyst.

Lastly, a helpful contribution to global anti-trafficking efforts is to donate. Even donations as small as twenty-five dollars can provide, for example, a victim of trafficking in Moldova with food for about one month ("La Strada International"). With poverty as the root of this particular evil, it is therefore clear why any financial assistance one can provide would be useful to the lessening of the prevalence of sex trafficking. Donations can be made to hundreds of anti-trafficking organizations, particularly those mentioned in this thesis such as La Strada International, Not For Sale, and Equality Now. Donating to women's organizations that promote their rights and economic stability, like Half the Sky, would also be effective.

In conclusion, the horrors of sex trafficking can be alleviated. It is a complicated issue, involving many layers of vulnerability such as gender and socioeconomic status, and therefore calls for more complex solutions, with attention to respecting the needs and wishes of victims, while simultaneously seeking out ways in which we can decrease the stigma and invisibility of the sex trade. The idea behind this research has been the premise that, if we seek out the root cause of an issue, we will find the solution. Thus, with poverty as the most significant cause of sex trafficking, in the context of Moldova, we must endeavor to alleviate the prevalence of poverty, as well as the many harmful conditions that arise as a symptom of poverty. These symptoms include, but are not limited to, increased rates of drug and alcohol abuse, increased rates of violence against women, high levels of government and judicial corruption, and a lack of both educational and career opportunities. On top of seeking out the root cause of sex trafficking, we must also value

the experiences and stories of those who have been trafficked, and seek out ways to offer them stable, safe, and prosperous lives. This is a human right, and thus should be fought for by all means necessary.

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## AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Sarah Elizabeth Dean was born in Waterville, Maine on June 12, 1995. She was raised in Dresden, Maine and graduated from Hall-Dale High School in 2013. Sarah is an International Affairs major with a concentration in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies, and also has a minor in Political Science. She is a member of the Student Women's Association, Student Alliance for Sexual Health, Amnesty International, and Phi Beta Kappa Honor Society.

Sarah has participated in the Margaret Chase Smith Maine Summer Government Internship Program and also received the Charles V. Stanhope Study Abroad Fellowship, which was used to travel to Bulgaria in the Fall of 2016. In 2017, she won first place in the Rezendes Ethics Essay Competition. Upon graduation, Sarah will be moving to the U.K. to earn an MSc in International Migration and Public Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science.