

SLAVERY THROUGH THE AGES: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ONE OF HUMANITY'S OLDEST PRACTICES

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Summary

The article "Slavery Through the Ages: A Historical Overview of One of Humanity's Oldest Practices" explores the evolution of slavery from ancient times to the present, analyzing its impact on different societies and historical periods. Using a comparative approach, the study examines slavery in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, the Middle Ages, and the modern era, highlighting its role in the economy and society. Topics such as the transatlantic slave trade, slavery in wartime, and contemporary human trafficking are discussed. The article emphasizes how slavery has taken different forms over time, adapting to socio-political and economic contexts, and concludes with a reflection on the persistence of human trafficking today, despite legal efforts to eradicate it.

Keywords: slavery, history, human trafficking, transatlantic trade, exploitation, human rights, modern slavery, social impact.

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Introduction

Slavery as a practice implies a relationship of domination where one person subjugates others through degrading treatment, threats and violence. Throughout history, those who are known as slaves have been stripped of their humanity and reduced to mere merchandise or objects destined to comply with the orders of those who are considered their master and owner.

By exploring the current regulatory bodies, it can be seen that slavery has been prohibited and penalized in most countries for decades, which would lead us to believe that this practice has been completely eradicated.

However, the forced exploitation of other human beings has been an activity that dates back to the dawn of humanity, its long existence is due to the numerous benefits and advantages that can be obtained from it; in addition, due to the high demand that has existed throughout the ages -despite the drops that it may have suffered in specific periods- records of the use of human beings for slavery purposes have been found from Ancient Mesopotamia to the present day, finally shaping the global phenomenon of human trafficking.

This article will explore how this practice has evolved over the centuries, adapting to fit the customs of the times and fulfill a need, whether for labor, sexual or as a response to a conviction that certain men were inferior to others and were predisposed to be exploited. It will also be seen how slavery (both in ancient times and today) has always been motivated by the demand for people to be exploited by clients and that this phenomenon, however widespread it may be, without a constant demand is doomed to disappear.

1. Slavery in the ancient world

1.1 Mesopotamia and Egypt

The exploitation of one human being by another, in order to perform a specific job or provide a service that benefits whoever is defined as his “master” can be traced back as far as ancient Mesopotamia (7,000 B.C. - 539 B.C.), where it is reported that slavery served mainly for economic or war purposes. Among the practices developed by this civilization, it is stated that, due to the frequent war expeditions that characterized it, the prisoners captured as a result of these expeditions were turned into slaves due to the need for labor to build temples, palaces and public works.

In fact, there came to be two types of slaves, the natives who fell into slavery for debts, for committing crimes or for working as domestic slaves (wardum); and the slaves obtained from wars (asiru). The former were acquired by private individuals, who were usually merchants, artisans or farmers; who could acquire people to work in their activities; and the latter were public slaves, property of the king, that is, he was their master and owner and they worked in public works (University of Cantabria, n.d.). (University of Cantabria, s/f).

The main source for the treatment of slaves is the Code of Hammurabi (1750 B.C.), which was one of the first criminal and civil documents of mankind. This body of law states that people who were acquired in conflicts of war (wardum) had certain basic rights, such as the right to marry free persons, to request manumission or to visit a doctor.

However, they continued to be treated more as objects, saleable, interchangeable and replaceable, an example of this is found in certain articles of the Code, where it is stated that the slave could be “replaced” if he suffered some illness that prevented him from performing the work for which he was bought: “[Article] 278 If anyone has bought a male or female slave and if he is afflicted with an illness before the end of a month, the buyer shall return him to the seller and recover what he paid” (Franco, n/d, p. 356). (Franco, n/d, p. 356) in addition to the fact that they were visibly marked on the body, so that they would be easy to recognize among the common people: “[Article] 226 If a surgeon, without the owner's permission, imprints on a slave the indelible slave mark, his hands shall be cut off.” (Franco, n/d, p. 353). Given these circumstances, it can be said that they were beings differentiated from others, subject to certain specific laws and therefore to different treatment, however, there is no evidence whether the masters were particularly brutal with their slaves or whether the treatment was more similar to a “labor” relationship.

On the other hand, going forward to the Egyptian civilization (3,150 B.C. - 31 B.C. approx.), the slave relations do not seem to present major changes, the slave, usually obtained also as a prisoner of war, was still considered as a movable good that could be sold and exchanged for other goods and destined to serve another person, considered superior to him and with the right to be his owner throughout his life.

However, it is stated that Egyptian slaves, although they lacked the freedom to make decisions about their own destiny and the work to be performed, possessed certain rights and were not completely objectified. It is reported that they were allowed to provide for their basic needs, allowing them access to basic necessities and lodging in their master's house. In short, they were dependent on their owners but were provided with a legal status, this conception being far from the panorama portrayed in the Bible and in current thinking, focused on the existence of a slave society par excellence, where all kinds of mistreatment of this social stratum were experienced (Barros, 2019).

In Ancient Egypt, although slavery was a widespread phenomenon, there was also a labor that shared certain similarities, but where the person enjoyed greater prerogatives; this was servitude, according to Zingarelli (2004):

Economically, we can say that slavery and serfdom served the same purpose: to provide labor. But legally and socially, one and the other tended to be different: slaves were excluded from society as members, while serfs provided governments with fiscal and military provisions, meaning that they were recognized as members of the social body. (p.18)

With this we can differentiate two different classes of people who practiced activities based on receiving orders from a master, but with very different recognitions at the societal level. Slaves were in a relationship of dependence with their master, marginalized from community activities and relegated to the bottom rung of the social ladder; while serfs were Egyptian citizens perceived as "free men" who performed the work of serving a master, either for the purpose of paying a debt or as a way to receive some remuneration.

Likewise, another group partially subjected to exploitation were the peasants (one of the lowest social strata, not counting slaves), they were subject to the *corvadas*; these were special days determined by the Pharaoh, where all peasants and slaves were forced to submit to regimes of labor exploitation, as they had to work outside their lands, on certain days of the year, without pay, in order to build monuments.(Cuervo, 2017)

In view of this, it can be said that there were various types of slaves, who enjoyed different levels of exercise of basic rights. Although there are no concrete testimonies on the treatment of these beings in the Mesopotamian and Egyptian era, it is clear the relationship of submission to which a large number of people were subjected, which shows that the use of human beings for the purpose of exploitation, based on the stripping of the most basic freedoms of a person, has been present since the beginning of the history of mankind.

1.2 In ancient Greece

In classical times, this activity continued, but with a newfound rejection of the slave; an entity that was not celebrated in previous years, although ancient Greece was marked by an ac-

centuated disdain for this role. An important testimony of this is Plato's "Republic" (370 B.C.), where a hierarchy was established in which certain people of the polis, because of their innate natural abilities, were destined to the activity of contemplation, while others, tormented by their desires and subjected to them, were relegated to a last class of unfree people:

(...) a true slave is he who is a true tyrant, a slave of extreme vileness and servility and a flatterer of the most wicked men, and, powerless to satisfy his own desires, but visibly destitute of a multitude of things and truly poor in the eyes of anyone who can read to the depths of his soul (...) being envious, distrustful, unjust, friendless, ungodly and possessing all the vices, of which he is the host and which he feeds them and which cause him to be the cause of his being a slave to the most wicked men...) being envious, distrustful, unjust, friendless, impious and possessing all the vices, of which he is the host and which he feeds them and which are the cause of his being the most wretched of all men (...) (Plato, 2003, p.189).

This first approach to the thinking of the time shows how this activity was considered degrading for the person who exercised it, which also relegated him to the bottom of the social pyramid, given how important freedom was for this civilization; to conceive that someone was not and that this would be his mandate of life, was something worthy of rejection. In fact, the Greeks had the conception that the work where they were forced to submit to the directives of another, were considered humiliating and therefore avoided at all costs. (Pomeroy, 2011).

This was the case until the implementation of the Draconic Reforms (624 - 621 B.C.), when this humiliation was ratified in the law, since it opened the possibility that anyone could become a slave despite being an Athenian. This occurred for two main reasons: for not paying debts or, in the case of peasants, for not delivering the promised crops to the rich landowners. (Muñoz, 1977).

These reforms gave rise to serious discontent, since the people, unprotected by the measures taken by the State, and now prone to fall into slavery, were in tension, so that if the necessary measures were not taken to reverse this, a revolt would be generated. Therefore, it was decided to appoint a mediator, who would prohibit mortgaging one's freedom to pay debts, Solon (6th century B.C.), would introduce reforms in Athens that would grant the Athenian population the right to social freedom, which could not be taken away to pay debts or meet other commitments.

However, this prohibition did not help inequality in Athens; the slaves, who, not being able to work in exchange for paying debts, ended up being day laborers for the Athenian landowners; the only thing that Solon achieved was to give legal independence to the Athenians, that is, they could not legally belong to someone else (Muñoz, 1977).

It would seem at first glance that this novelty from the legal point of view, would limit the advance of slavery throughout history, but, still with these laws in place, slavery would be an

important part of Greek society, since the possession of slaves allowed for contemplative activities, not having to worry about household chores or other tasks that were not productive. This activity was so normalized that, "An average Athenian had at least twelve slaves: a porter, a cook, a pedagogue (who took the children to school), and several maidservants who took care of household chores." (National Geographic, 2014). Slaves despite being part of the daily life of the Greeks, had no right in terms of self-determination and were seen as merchandise, the only prerogative they possessed was not being able to be subjected to too cruel treatment that would cause their death.

1.3 In Roman times

With the emergence and establishment of the Roman Empire, the situation of slaves worsened, since the basic rights granted in the past were completely neglected and the mistreatment of these groups intensified, until the approval of the Cornelia Law in the 82nd century B.C., which prevented mistreatment by the masters from even leading to the death of the slave.

This situation changed towards the late Roman period, when the expansion of the Roman Empire reached its peak, which transformed the way in which the people living in the annexed territories were treated, who came from being subjected to exploitation by the Roman conquerors, to not necessarily being their slaves.

According to Bravo (1998), it is reported that the aim was no longer to convert the locals into slaves, but rather to exercise control over these areas for strategic reasons or to exploit their resources. This caused the slave markets - outside and inside Italy - to stop offering cheap labor, which, added to the manumissions promoted at the end of the Republican period, would allow a large number of slaves to be declared free.

At first glance, manumission would seem to be an opportunity to achieve freedom and climb the social ladder. However, according to Alföldy (1998) this practice could benefit the master more than the person subjected to exploitation, firstly, because usually the slave, by living all his life in the master's house, created a relationship of economic dependence with him, which meant that he could not abandon his condition of submission.

Next, it is believed that the hope of liberation increased productivity in slaves, who were usually freed around the age of 30, making them more interested in the work they performed, compared to those who had no prospect of being freed and had accepted that their destiny would always be to serve their master for the rest of their lives. In addition, manumission benefited masters socially since they needed clients composed of freedmen as a way to increase their social prestige. Likewise, it played a social control function, since the promise of being freed around the age of thirty prevented revolts among the population; considering the treatment to which slaves were subjected and the high percentage of slaves in Roman society, this also made them more obedient and compliant towards their masters.

Given all this, one might think that the conditions of slaves had improved in the late Roman period given the possibility of being freed, however, manumission was only a more sophisticated slavery practice. Slaves still belonged to the bottom rung of the social hierarchy and were seen more as a tool or a possession than a person with rights and free will. They continued to be subjected to arduous hours of work and mistreatment by their masters, since, due to the difficulty involved in becoming economically independent from them, manumission simply changed from a relationship of slavery to one that could be understood as “labor” since the now freedman would continue to produce for his patronus.

2. Slavery in the Middle Ages

With the fall of the Western Roman Empire the history of the world would enter a new stage which would be called the “Middle Ages” in posterity. It has already been observed how the institution of slavery functioned before this period, however, from this moment on slavery would undergo great changes.

However, in order to effectively understand this transformation process, it is necessary to subdivide the Middle Ages into two parts: the High Middle Ages, which includes the years between the 5th and 10th centuries, and the Low Middle Ages, which goes from the 10th century to 1492 with the discovery of America or 1453 with the fall of Constantinople.

It is evident, then, that slavery is an inheritance from the Roman Empire to the Germanic kingdoms that would be established in the territories that the Empire came to encompass. Thus, “both in continental Europe and in Byzantium slavery endured, although it was not immune to the changes experienced as a result of the decomposition of the Empire and the arrival of the Peoples of the North (...)” (De la Torre, 2006, p. 19).

2.1 High Middle Ages

Although the Romans bequeathed slavery to the Germanic kingdoms, the beginning of the Middle Ages was characterized by the loss or disappearance of a large part of the different economic markets -which meant a profound change in the way of trading- together with a significant lack of labor.

The response to this reality was to free slaves because of the high costs involved and the growing tensions, instability and likelihood of invasion.

The arrival of the peoples from the North and the decomposition meant more wars and instability. For this reason, the owners of the rural estates preferred that their slaves be tied to the land, so that they would not flee. The free peasants, faced with this instability, also preferred to be tied to the land, in exchange for protection from the lord (...). Thus, farm workers became almost all serfs, with obligations towards the lords who protected them, at least in practice. (De la Torre, 2006, p. 19).

Despite such liberation, slavery did not cease to exist, in fact, the situation and living conditions of these individuals would not change to a great extent, as they remained the property of the feudal lord, could not own property and did not enjoy any rights other than to protect them from death, so that, from being considered as slaves per se, they became serfs strongly tied to the land.

Moreover, even in the Islamic world, this practice was well known and, unlike the Catholic-Germanic kingdoms, for the former slaves had a clearly defined legal status and better living conditions, and were mostly destined to be soldiers or even servants, artisans and helpers, something not very common for what we know today as the West. They were mostly destined to be soldiers or even servants, artisans and helpers, something not very common for what we know today as the West (De la Torre, 2006).

Such distinctions probably have their origin in the very justification of slavery by each of the two great religions representing these peoples. While the Church perceived slavery as a regrettable fact that produced great economic benefits. On the other hand, according to Welton (2008), Islam moderated slavery, and there were even those who initially sanctioned the practice.

The Sharia was created, which would be the legal body that regulated slavery, it compiles rules whose main source are the Koran and the Sunna, which deal with issues related to marriage, private property, punishments, judicial testimony, the prohibition of mistreatment towards them and encourages their emancipation. It was also established that no Muslim or non-Muslim living under Muslim rule could be enslaved, those who converted to Islam could eventually obtain their freedom.

2.2 Low Middle Ages

In the first centuries of this second half, the European panorama changes significantly, there is a substantial increase in its population, its economy prospers, its borders are consolidated and even for a brief period of time they recover the Holy Land, however, the Ottoman Empire abruptly blocks the trade routes with Asia (De la Torre, 2006). This fact would cause the use of slaves to be greatly reduced throughout the length and breadth of the continent.

However, here a new variable is added to the equation: although slavery has always been part of African culture, and in fact since the beginning of the Middle Ages slaves from sub-Saharan Africa were traded, when sugar was introduced to the region through the Islamic world, the context began to change as it even displaced the use of some spices, which positioned it as a highly valuable product, so that investment in sugar cane plantations began.

The Portuguese Crown, for its part, upon studying the panorama, realized that it had to find another market niche or form of commercialization, since the Mediterranean was already overcrowded and the routes to Asia were blocked, so it began to explore Africa with the possi-

bility of finding great riches (De Torre, 2006). Thus, it began to explore Africa, having as its north the possibility of finding great riches (De la Torre, 2006).

They would then discover that two things originated in Africa: gold and slaves, so in order to establish their control in the region they began to establish coastal bases and continued going further and further south. They became the most important maritime power of the time and managed to set up a new route to India by skirting the entire African coast and thus avoiding the Ottoman blockade. According to De la Torre (2006),

The main target was gold from Sierra Leone, rather than slaves. What happened was that the gold was exchanged with local kings and tribal chiefs who asked for slaves in exchange, slaves that the Portuguese obtained at the mouth of the Niger River, further east. Thus they formed a very profitable triangular trade, consisting of European manufactured goods, gold and African slaves (p. 27).

However, Portuguese protagonism would undergo major changes with the end of the Middle Ages and the discovery of America in 1492, because, thanks to their experience in the African territory, it was possible to see how, with the appropriate geographical and climatic conditions, the equation between plantations and the use of slaves represented a suitable combination for the work, thus, "slavery flourished in the haciendas and mines of the Americas, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century" (Welton, 2008, p. 55). This duet would be key to the development of European economies, which would make the Spanish, English, Dutch, French, among others, join this market by transporting slaves from one end of the ocean to the other.

3. Slavery in modern times

Slavery as it was known changed and expanded drastically after the discovery of America and now slaves were transported to the New World. Trade that would boost the European economy and, according to Blanco (1814), "the Black inhabitants of Africa have been regarded by the Europeans as the object of a very lucrative mercantile speculation" (p. 1).

The information that has been gathered about the atrocities committed through testimonies and recorded data has helped to understand the magnitude of its scope. However, the number of people subjected to this practice is difficult to determine because the transatlantic slave trade represented a major boost - in different areas - in many of the European economies that joined this form of trade.

Slavery in the Modern Age was unlike any experience before it, highlighting in particular the cruelty with which slaves were treated. This can be observed in such a way that "slavery in the Caribbean was more than an institution with its laws, its customs, its police; it constituted a truly "totalitarian" system of economic, political, social and sexual exploitation, based on force, violence and an ideology, racism" (Lara, 1994, p. 9).

Such actions justified with the statement that, “in the most evolved areas of the African continent, domestic slavery has always existed and everything suggests that some kingdoms employed slave labor in craft industries” (Garcia, 2005, p. 3).

With Spain’s dominance over much of the New World, it was Spain and Portugal who - at the beginning - would be most involved in this activity. Thus, Spain developed a policy called *asientos*, which according to Morgan (2017) granted permission for other nations to introduce slaves to the Spanish colonies.

Initially, “Portugal obtained the first official seat in 1595, whose validity lasted until the Portuguese revolt against Spain in 1640” (Morgan, 2017, p. 33), after the break in the relationship between Portuguese and Spanish, the Spanish crown continued to grant seats, to countries such as: England, France and Holland.

Slavery during this period was not seen as immoral because blacks were considered inferior for not being Christians and it was said that they had no soul. There were four centuries of slavery where little was done about it, at least not until the late eighteenth century when speculation about this practice began and a whole wave of anti-slavery emerged.

Despite having decided that the natives of these newly discovered lands had souls and should be evangelized, it made little difference, since they continued to be enslaved, which led to an abrupt reduction of their population due to the diseases brought by the Europeans to America, the punishments and other inhumane treatment to which they were subjected.

But, even if the immorality of the matter was discussed, they were only words, because nobody did anything to change the situation of these people, at least not until slavery was abolished in England.

Some claim that the slave trade was the first great economic globalization, fostering interaction and commercial transactions between Europe, Africa and America. In fact, in Barbolla (2013), this was “called by Immanuel Wallerstein the “first world-economy” (p. 14).

3.1 England

The slave trade in England experienced its greatest apogee from the end of the 17th century until 1807, when slavery was abolished in the English territory. As stated by Morgan (2017), “England was the nation that transported the most slaves in the 18th century. London was the main slave port from the mid-17th century until about the 1720s” (p. 34).

From the beginning they realized that it was not going to be easy, since they found a highly competitive trade, in continuous expansion and above all very profitable, which made it even more desirable. They became the major power in the trade, left the Dutch behind and operated as a kind of monopoly.

3.2 North America (British)

North America contributed, likewise, to the slave trade, “Newport became the major North American port associated with transatlantic slavery, becoming more important than the much larger port of New York” (Morgan, 2017, p. 34).

They sailed to the Caribbean to land slaves, but, on the other hand, they had a special attraction for slave traders. The rum obtained in a series of distilleries located in Rhode Island was used as barter to acquire slaves from traders in Africa.

3.3 France

According to Morgan (2017), the French were responsible for at least 11% of the slave trade. Nantes was the port of choice in France, which was responsible for almost 50% of the French trade. Its heyday came to an end at the end of the 18th century with the French Revolution, and the abolition of slavery. When France began to make inroads into this market, there was some tension on the part of the Spanish due to the differences that existed between the two, but they managed to obtain the seat of blacks as a consequence of the War of Succession. (García, 2005, p. 40).

3.4 Netherlands

The Netherlands was perhaps, one of the least developed countries in this area, so, “the heyday of the Dutch slave trade was in the first three quarters of the 18th century, when the traffic was concentrated in Middelburg and Vlissingen” (Morgan, 2017, p. 36), like most other nations, although this was diminished due to the American War of Independence.

It gradually displaced Portugal and positioned itself as an economic power. However, tensions between Spain and Holland before they became interested in the slave trade, reached a point where Holland attacked Spanish ships to prevent a shipment of slaves from reaching port, succeeded and immediately became interested in this promising new branch of trade.

This directly affected Spain, since “it was the Dutch expansion along the African coasts that provided the sources of slaves essential for the American sugar cane farms” (García, 2005, p. 30).

3.5 Denmark

The most important port used for the slave trade was Copenhagen, and it is estimated that more than one hundred thousand slaves were shipped on slave ships belonging to Denmark. However, the role of the Danes in the slave trade was not as significant as that of England or France.

Thus, we can see how the great powers of the time participated to a greater or lesser extent in the transatlantic slave trade, which translates into millions of people enslaved during the four centuries of the Renaissance. In this sense, the importance of this form of economy for the European economies is perceived, that is to say, its scope transcended the magnitudes that could - in comparison to reach - slavery in previous times.

4. Contemporary slavery

4.1 World War I

World War I, in addition to being one of the bloodiest conflicts in recent history, also took place in the context of colonialism, which sought control by European forces of certain regions of Africa in order to exploit its natural and human resources.

In 1914, when the conflict formally began, the African colonies were used for military purposes, subjecting their inhabitants to fight a war that they did not initiate and that, considering the origin of the conflict, did not correspond to them. Among the strategies used to recruit Africans, in Palestine and Syria, recruitment in exchange for wages or European citizenship, such as French citizenship in the case of Senegal. However, in many regions, the African inhabitants were coerced by the chiefs or presented as volunteers for the army against their will, as happened from 1915 in East Africa, where a compulsory military recruitment began (Cortés, 2018). It is related that,

(...) although the figures are not precise, more than one million Africans were enrolled, some voluntarily and most forcibly, in armies in Africa and Europe, more than a million were forced to be porters, about 150 thousand died in the fighting and hundreds of Africans were wounded or disabled. (Díaz, 2014)

That is, although there were strategies for recruiting Africans as soldiers in the war, which could be considered voluntary, many were coerced to do battle on behalf of the Europeans and suffer the consequences first hand.

These actions left numerous sequels in the African colonies to which not only colonialism, but also the ravages of war, propelled changes in their societies, among which stand out the transformation of their means of subsistence, which went from being small plots to large plantations, and the passage from local chiefdoms to a colonial administration, which relegated these African leaders to mere intermediaries of the interests of the Europeans.(Cortés, 2018)

Thus it can be seen how the First World War served to expand and cement the colonialist process of the European powers, according to Díaz (2014) the allies expanded their strength by extending their territory into Africa, examples of this were Belgium which was favored by extending its colonial rule to Uganda, England who reinforced its presence in Egypt, the Suez

Canal and the Near East (as a way to protect India) and in general seeking to wrest territories from Germany.

Likewise, the African continent was used strategically by the Allies, since England suggested that the colonized territories would be distributed among the victors once the Germans were defeated. This increased the intervention of these groups, especially in South Africa, perpetuating and accentuating colonialist relations, which, in the context of the phenomenon of human trafficking, can be examined as an exploitation for war purposes; since, although certain groups agreed to belong to the army given the incentives provided (or driven by the situation of vulnerability), many others were forced to do so, having consequences for their personal freedom, propitiated by a cause with which they did not identify.

4.2 World War II

The advent of World War II (1939-1945) is remembered as one of the most important and decisive war conflicts of contemporary times, not only because of the casualties among the military ranks, but also because of the added component of torture and repudiation of specific groups in society. It was a conflict not only fueled by the misunderstanding between countries or forces, but also by the hatred of specific religious groups and propelled by ideas of racial supremacy that would end up killing 6 million people in the concentration and extermination camps alone and another 50 million worldwide as a result of the use of nuclear weapons and the casualties caused.

Germany, after the moral, military and economic defeat represented by the Treaty of Versailles at the end of World War I, was faced with the task of paying the consequences of the conflict, which generated resentment among the German population, who were deprived of any form of post-war recovery, as territories were taken from them and they were forced to pay unheard-of war reparations. In the face of this, Hitler emerged as a leader who promised to restore the old glory to the Germans, reviving national pride and taking advantage of the Great Depression that hit the world economically to impose his ideas of recovery and greatness.

Upon obtaining the government in 1933, Adolf Hitler launched his plan together with the Nazi party, which had been associating Jews, gypsies, people of color, among others, with undesirable social groups; an action that made a dent in the perception of the citizens, who, for the most part, did not oppose the realities behind the Nazi apparatus. At its peak, there were around 60 concentration and extermination camps distributed among Germany, Poland, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Italy and surrounding countries; these mainly housed Jewish prisoners, gypsies, prisoners of war, communists, people with disabilities and members of the political opposition, qualified as traitors or inferior beings for the Nazi ideology.

According to Cuervo (2017) the Nazis, commanded by Hitler and trained under ideas that did not consider groups such as Jews or Gypsies to be even human, practiced daily torture, humiliation and non-consensual medical experiments in concentration camps. The people who

lived in these places were subjected to forced labor, starvation, disease and incessant violence by Nazi soldiers who were charged with dealing with these groups deemed unacceptable by their leader.

In these concentration camps death was omnipresent and it was continuously demonstrated that there were worse punishments than it, the treatment of the prisoners was atrocious and the most remarkable thing is that they had not committed any crime, their only fault was to practice a specific religion or to carry out certain beliefs that were not to Hitler's liking. It is said that among the punishments inflicted were throwing prisoners off a cliff, locking them in cells the size of tombs and leaving them to die of starvation, wild experiments such as introducing ink in their eyes to turn them blue, timing the time it took for a person to die in freezing water, practicing mass sterilizations on women, murdering dozens of prisoners in gas chambers, and generally forcing them to live in squalid conditions of overcrowding, lack of sanitation, and continuous siege by guards. (Cuervo, 2017)

This torture of innocents took place until 1945, when the Allies, specifically the forces of the Soviet Union at that time, arrived in Berlin on April 16 and managed to seize this city on May 2, being this the last great battle in Europe of this War and that would propel Hitler's suicide on the 30th of that month. On September 9 of that year, the end of the Second War would be declared with the surrender of China, the last bastion of the Triple Alliance and, with the Potsdam agreement, the division of German territory among the most important forces of the Entente (Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union) would be declared.

4.3 Trafficking in women in the context of the USSR

After the separation of Germany, as a result of the treaties signed after World War II, with the purpose of democratizing, demilitarizing and denazifying this country, the German territory was divided between the United States, England and France in the Western part and the Soviet Union in the Eastern part. Suddenly, the world would be divided in two, separated by the "Iron Curtain" drawn in Berlin, which would separate the side that practiced liberal democracy as a system and its communist counterpart.

Given the unfeasibility of the ideological model and the intensification of economic and social controls that would generate a great uneasiness in the population, communism would fail within the USSR, in 1989 this power would disintegrate, which would gradually end the quality of life of those who lived on that side of the border. The citizens of the Soviet Union would be crushed by hunger, the restriction of political, social and economic freedoms and with it, the advent of trafficking of Slavic women seeking to escape the problems of their context.

Due to the demise of the Soviet Union and the control it maintained over the satellite countries who, due to dependence on Russia, had not developed their own means of subsistence; the newly formed nations lacked institutions, economic plans or stable governments to

progress on their own, so the outlook seemed bleak for their residents, especially women, who, in addition to living in this context, suffered from marked discrimination. These women were attracted by job offers or opportunities to escape from their countries, which led to the creation of a massive network of human trafficking in Eastern Europe, which would feed on Ukrainian, Russian and Belarusian women mainly, who would perform sexual exploitation or prostitution. This network was so extensive and massive that the term (now in disuse) “white slave trade” was coined by the factions of the victims who, coming from these territories, were Caucasian.

It is stated that: “between 1991 and 1998, 500,000 Ukrainian women were taken to the West, meanwhile the export of Russian women for prostitution has expanded to more than 50 countries” (Bryl, 2016) reaching more than 400,000 women under 30 years old displaced abroad in search of better conditions, since in their homelands there was a collapse of the economic system that had generated about 80% unemployment. This shows, also in recent history, the connection between social vulnerability and human trafficking; when people find themselves without the capacity or resources to respond adequately to adversity, they tend to look for quick solutions to improve their quality of life, which usually leads them to accept very attractive proposals. This is the *modus operandi* used by traffickers to find victims and is still very present today.

4.4 Trafficking in Persons Today (21st Century)

In 2000, the first legal statute recognizing human trafficking as a crime to be prosecuted and punished worldwide was enacted; the “Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime” or better known as the Palermo Protocol, defines this problem and its modalities, facilitating its persecution and prosecution by the organs of justice:

Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Such exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs. (UN, 2000, p. 2).

This set a precedent in terms of the commitment of all signatory countries to eradicate this phenomenon within their borders and seemed to be the beginning of the end of these acts of modern slavery, however, human trafficking remains one of the most lucrative criminal phenomena worldwide, after drug trafficking, generating dividends of around 150 billion dollars (Nie-

thammer, 2020) which also affects 24.9 million people a year (Staff, M., n/d) among its different modalities mentioned in the definition.

Due to its furtive nature, this phenomenon may not be evident in people's daily lives, open-air slave markets no longer exist and it is a practice that is legally rejected worldwide. But despite this, it is still a reality for a large number of people, who, usually coming from a situation of vulnerability and recruited under deception, through attractive work proposals, promises of travel or money, can spend their entire lives being exploited for the activity that generates the most income for the trafficker, without considering the long-term physical and mental effects that this exploitation has on the victim.

Conclusion

Finally, it seems that the exploitation of one human being by another has been a practice seen throughout history, which has adopted different forms to suit the different societal contexts of each era and continues to endure. At present, human trafficking is a crime and violates several human rights, yet it is still very prevalent worldwide.

It has been seen throughout history how slavery practices respond to a demand for people, perceived as inferior to serve others and produce dividends, this motive has managed to endure until today, despite being strongly criminalized worldwide. Therefore, knowing how to identify potential victims, avoiding becoming one, understanding the magnitude of the problem to denounce it effectively and above all, not participating in activities that may be subjecting others to slavery regimes, are necessary tasks to eradicate this practice.

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