The root causes of human trafficking: A Critical analysis of the contemporary approaches to human trafficking

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Root causes of human trafficking

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**Trafficking Facts**

- Human Trafficking (HT) is the third most profitable crime after drugs and arms smuggling.
- Traffickers earn approx. $150 billion USD annually in illegal profits through exploiting vulnerable individuals.
- Commodification of human bodies & PROFIT accumulation is at the centre of trafficking.

- HT affects almost EVERY country in the world as states of origin, transit & destination.
- Victims from at least 127 countries are being exploited in 137 states.

**Current Anti-trafficking Efforts**

**Criminalisation**

- Reduces HT to a study of perpetrators, victims and modes of operation.
- Views HT as an instance of individuals that act outside the bounds of a liberal society (a deviation from the norm).
- Upholds the capitalist political economy by placing the blame outside the economic structure of society.

**Human Rights Approach**

- Emphasises the emancipatory effect of rights in protecting victims of HT and giving them a platform to assert their rights.
- Accused of treating symptoms of HT (rights violations) rather than the illness itself in turn insulating the political economy from scrutiny.

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**Research Questions**

- What are the root causes of HT?
- Does the structure of international law contribute to the reinforcement of modern-day exploitation?

**Conceptual Framework**

- Critical legal approaches (Marxism & TWAIL) will lay a foundation upon which the research questions will be investigated.
- A Marxist analysis will be useful in understanding the relations of domination (under capitalism) that fuel the commodification of human bodies for profit in HT.
- TWAIL will be used to critically assess how the relationship between the State & international law is being reconstituted in the globalisation era to exploit the ‘third world’.
- Adopting an external view of the law will allow the research to unpack the contradictions in the law, the power relations and interests that are being privileged in defining HT.

**Contributions to knowledge**

- Critical perspectives such as Marxism and TWAIL have been used to facilitate human emancipation, a condition that is denied to HT victims.
- The absence of a conceptual framework for examining root causes of HT has led to inadequate responses that only treat the symptoms while leaving intact structural inequalities/injustices that feed the problem.
- Through utilising Marxist and TWAIL insights the research will provide an alternative perspective on the causes/structural issues at the heart of HT that are masked by the traditional (positivist) approach.