

Studying Modern Slavery: It Is Time for IB Scholarship to Contribute

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Introduction

In 2016, an estimated 40.3 million people worldwide were living in a form of modern slavery, of whom 16 million were victims of forced labor in the private economy (ILO, Walk Free Foundation, & IOM, 2017). Modern slavery includes forced labor, bonded labor, human trafficking, and other forms of exploitation (Lake, MacAlister, Berman, Gitshaw & Page, 2016). It exists not just in commodity-based labor-intensive industries but also in high-tech sectors, generating an estimated US\$150 billion in illegal profits annually (ILO, 2016). Modern slavery is found not only in underdeveloped economies, but also in developed countries. In the UK alone, it is estimated that 10,000-13,000 people are victims of modern slavery at any point of time (Lake et al., 2016). In the US it is estimated that there are in the vicinity of 57,500 people currently enslaved (Walk Free Foundation, 2016). While modern slavery is growing at an unprecedented rate (Bales, 2012; 2016), International Business (IB) research has so far been silent on the subject (Michailova & Stringer, 2018a). This is not only puzzling; it is worrying, and disturbing. Hence, this call for papers!

Modern slavery often operates across borders (Michailova & Stringer, 2018b; Stringer, Whittaker & Simmons, 2016). First, globalizing forces increase the number of migrant workers as well as the opportunities to exploit them and others. Second, modern slavery is a by-product of our global production system (Gold, Trautrimis & Trodd, 2015). It is often a part of the activities of the multinational corporation (MNC). Slavery is widespread, although often concealed, in the MNCs' supply chains which link multiple layers of supplier-firms with global buying firms and retailers. The fragmented nature of these internationally connected supply chains often obscures slavery practices and leads to them not just existing, but growing and thriving (Greer & Purvis, 2016).

The neglect (so far) of modern slavery by/in the IB discipline opens opportunities for studies that are both interesting from

a researchers' and educators' viewpoint, and powerful in terms of changing existing policies and practices. We suggest a few avenues and indicative research questions that we find promising—they not only provide a fruitful opportunity for IB scholars to start and engage in interesting scholarly conversations, but also educate IB students as the next generation of business people, as well as shape and influence policy debates that really matter.

IB Research

What does modern slavery look like as an IB? And in turn what does the IB of modern slavery look like? What are its key features and who are the key actors involved? What practices do these actors adopt and what skills do they possess that allow slavery to flourish across borders?

Has the structural design of the MNC become so complex that it 'naturally' creates opportunities to breed slavery? Or, rather is it the fluidity and fragmentation of the multiple institutional contexts in which the MNC operates that allows slavery to come into existence and to flourish?

Can MNCs protect themselves against modern slavery? If so, how? If not, why not? How are new transparency requirements shaping not only codes of conduct, but also the actual activities and behaviors of MNCs in regard to modern slavery?

IB Teaching

In 2017, the University of Nottingham introduced an online course on modern slavery, attracting 10,400 enrolments from 150 countries. These numbers speak for themselves.

How can we increase students' awareness and knowledge on issues related to modern slavery in our IB courses? What modules can we include in our undergraduate IB courses as well as in more specialized postgraduate courses on MNCs? What opportunities do we have at the PhD and post-doc level to tackle the issue of modern slavery?

What can we, as IB scholars, do to educate the public about this crime against humanity? How can we help bring about a change in society through our teaching?

Impact of IB Research on Policy Debates

Modern slavery has a corrosive effect throughout society on respect for the rule of law and the rights of individuals. Efforts to address forced labor abuses amounting to slavery are compromised by a lack of public prioritization of the issue in many countries.

To what extent can governments influence MNCs to combat modern slavery in their supply chains? How can governments hold MNCs to account? How can MNCs help governments reduce modern slavery?

Is globalization leading to a disconnect between transnational and national institutions? If so, what does such a disconnect mean for MNCs with slavery in their supply chains?

How do government policies in the host country of an MNC affect the level of vulnerability of low-skilled and/or migrant workers at risk of forced labor, in other countries?

Submission Process and Timeline

Colleagues interested in submitting their work to this Special Issue should consult the *AIB Insights* Editorial Policy and use the Online Manuscript Submission System, which you can access via the AIB Insights website at <https://aib.msu.edu/publications/insights>. Please select “Special Issue: Modern Slavery in IB” under ‘Track’ when submitting your manuscript.

Timeline: Please submit your work on or before November 1, 2018. Expected publication of this Special Issue in 2019.

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