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I. Introduction

Bookends. They support and protect the books that lie in between. They preserve the content of the books, regardless of how good or bad it may be. If a book is deemed unsatisfactory, it can be replaced with a better one. In this paper, I show how consumers act as bookends for the production of goods and services. Between their initial desire for a product and their final purchase of that product, consumers support, protect, and preserve supply chains. Just as books can be good or bad, so too can supply chains - good ones are characterized by gainful employment and sustainability while bad ones are characterized by slavery and ecocide. If a supply chain is deemed unsatisfactory, then consumers, positioned at both ends of the production process, can use their influence to replace a bad one with a better one.

To show how consumers bookend the production process and how they can impact supply chains, I use evidence from Kevin Bales' *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World* (2016).¹ In it, Bales describes the production process of a variety of products that contain slavery and ecocide, emphasizing the relationship between slavery, ecocide, and consumerism. In one part of the book, he describes a four-step process that illustrates how consumerism leads to slavery and ecocide, and in another part, he describes a supply chain that begins with slavery and ecocide and ends with the final consumer. In this paper, I begin by summarizing the four-step process and the supply chain and then link the two to show how consumers are found at the beginning and the end of the production process. I then describe the 'books' of slavery and ecocide and conclude with the 'bookends,' suggesting ways that consumers can impact the supply chain to reduce, and possibly eliminate, slavery and ecocide.

¹ Bales, Kevin. *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World*. Spiegel & Grau. New York. 2016.

II. Four-Step Process

In chapter two of *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World*, Bales outlines a four-step process that illustrates how consumerism leads to slavery. The process begins with consumers, who initiate the production process with their demand for products. Whether it's a smart phone, a granite countertop, or jewelry, the desires of consumers are almost unending. Businesses reinforce these desires through advertising, claiming the product they develop "will transform our lives and, suddenly, we can't live without it"². To produce these products, natural resources are needed, which are found all over the world. Throughout the book, Bales describes these natural resources: coltan for cell phones is found in The Congo³, granite for countertops is found in India⁴, and gold for jewelry is found in Ghana.⁵ For most countries, having natural resources is a blessing because they bring jobs and money. However, if proper infrastructure, laws, and law enforcement are not in place, then having natural resources can actually be a curse.

In Step 2, Bales describes the "resource curse" found in countries abundant in natural resources but lacking in economic prosperity and law enforcement. As people compete to find and control the natural resources, law enforcement is needed to maintain order. However, corrupt government workers spend more time accumulating weapons and wealth than protecting people. At the same time, government leaders try to stay in power because, as Bales says, "for every bloated dictator there are ten lean and hungry outsiders who also know how to use guns, and they lust for the money flowing down the product chain"⁶. For people living in the country, civil war creates unrest, the deterioration of infrastructure limits their access to education and health care, and, without protection, they are defenseless. These conditions leave people and the environment vulnerable to being exploited.

Bales describes the third step as one of stability and order, at least for the local gangs. After all, he says, "a little chaos is good for criminal business, but too much is disruptive, even for warlords"⁷. Gangs begin to function like businesses - establishing hierarchies, conquering territories, and focusing on profits. In order to

² Ibid., 18.

³ Ibid., 16.

⁴ Ibid., 4.

⁵ Ibid., 159.

⁶ Ibid., 18-19.

⁷ Ibid., 19.

maximize profits, they employ the cheapest labor they can find: slave labor. Instead of pointing their guns at other gangs, they point them at their enslaved workers, who are used to extract the natural resources. This stability allows businesses to thrive and gang leaders to prosper.

In the final step, gang leaders grow their businesses by increasing production. To do this, they need more natural resources and workers and therefore, more slaves. Bales describes the areas of the country where this occurs as "lawless, impoverished, unstable" - conditions that allow people to be enslaved and the environment to be destroyed.⁸

This four-step process, which begins with consumerism ends with slavery and ecocide, can be summarized as follows. Consumers initiate the production process with their desire for products (Step 1). Competition for natural resources, combined with a corrupt government, create conditions for slavery and ecocide (Step 2). Local people are enslaved and forced to extract the natural resources (Step 3). And finally, as gangs increase production, they find new sources of natural resources and workers, destroying ecosystems and enslaving people in the process (Step 4).

III. Eleven-Step Supply Chain

In chapter three, Bales outlines an eleven-step supply chain that begins with slavery and ecocide and ends with the consumer. He refers to each step as a "link" in the chain, and for each link, he identifies the main people and describes their involvement. The supply chain he describes is for electronics, but below I generalize the steps to represent a supply chain that can be applied to many products.

The first link of the chain includes workers who extract the natural resources. These people are enslaved and only appear in the supply chain because "they were forced to, ... they have no choice".⁹ They are the ones who suffer the most from the production of the final product. Bales refers to the people at the next link of the supply chain as "thugs and criminals".¹⁰ They are the ones who enslave the workers and consist of people in rebel groups and armies, as well as moneylenders and corrupt government officials. At the higher ranks, their motive is to gain money, wealth, and power. Common soldiers are found at the lower ranks and in some cases, include people who are enslaved themselves, "trapped in a cruel

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 52.

¹⁰ Ibid., 53.

system and trying to survive it".¹¹ In addition to exploiting people, the thugs and criminals also exploit the environment, damaging and destroying local ecosystems. As the natural resources are extracted and moved, the thugs and criminals leave the ecosystem in shambles. Most of the slavery and ecocide along the supply chain is found at these two links - at the source of the natural resources. I provide a more detailed account of this later in the paper when I describe the 'books' of slavery and ecocide.

The next people along the supply chain are those who buy and transport the natural resources. Bales refers to this group as the "mineral-dealing middlemen and their pilots and truck drivers, their bookkeepers and other employees".¹² Unlike the thugs and criminals, the middlemen and their employees tend to be educated and do not "carry weapons or dress in combat fatigues".¹³ They are aware of the slavery and ecocide, often buying on location and seeing the conditions firsthand. As a result, according to Bales, they are "*willing accomplices* in the crimes of slavery and ecocide".¹⁴ The middlemen deliver the minerals to the people at the next link - exporters and businessmen at trading houses who purchase minerals from many different middlemen, some tainted with slavery and ecocide and some clean. Since tainted minerals are cheaper to buy and clean minerals command a higher price when sold, there is an incentive to buy tainted minerals, mix them with clean minerals, and sell them all as clean. Even though these people do not typically see the slavery and ecocide firsthand and therefore "don't dirty their own hands with the violence of slavery or the destruction of the environment," they are usually aware of it and therefore complicit in "*aiding and abetting* the crimes of slavery and ecocide".¹⁵ It is here where the supply chain typically leaves the country and goes overseas.

The next five links along the supply chain include people who work at the companies that use the minerals to manufacture and assemble the parts that go into the final products. Some of these companies care about whether slavery and ecocide are a part of the supply chain and some do not. Bales labels the companies that do not take steps to address the problem of slavery and ecocide along the supply chain as "*morally culpable*," even if they are not "guilty of slavery or ecocide in any direct way".¹⁶ For companies that do take steps to address the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 54.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 57.

problem of slavery and ecocide along the supply chain, claiming so poses a challenge because it is difficult to prove the minerals they use are clean. This is in part because as minerals move along the supply chain they are combined, so an assembled part likely contains minerals from several sources, making it nearly impossible for companies to claim with certainty that the entire part contains exclusively clean minerals. Some organizations have emerged to help verify that no slavery or ecocide was present when the natural resources were extracted, but certain complications, including government corruption, create problems. All of this makes it difficult for companies with social responsibility statements to make precise statements that address slavery and ecocide, and therefore, according to Bales, those statements are usually "nothing more than cobbled-together vague generalizations".¹⁷ In addition, some companies are concerned that posting these statements will have the unintended consequence of casting doubt about the cleanliness of their supply chain. Because of the challenges in identifying and addressing the problem of slavery and ecocide along the supply chain, it is difficult to assign levels of responsibility and culpability to the people who work at these companies. However, Bales makes it clear that given all the evidence of slavery and ecocide in supply chains, companies that do not take any responsibility share in the culpability.

The people at the tenth link of the supply chain are those who work at the retail stores that sell the final product. As with the companies that use the minerals to assemble parts, some retailers care about slavery and ecocide along the supply chains of the products they sell, and some do not. Some have social responsibility statements, and some do not. Of those that do, their statements tend to be difficult to find on their websites and the language used is vague. It is understandable why this is the case, especially for larger retailers that sell hundreds or even thousands of other products, each with their own supply chains. Proving the supply chains of all those products is clean would likely be infeasible, if even possible.

Many people mistakenly believe the supply chain ends with the retailer but, according to Bales, the last link is the end consumer who purchases the product. In other words, "it ends with you and me".¹⁸ Fortunately, there are many things we, as end consumers of a product, can do to impact the supply chain. I provide a more detailed account of what consumers can do when I describe the 'books' of slavery and ecocide.

This eleven-step supply chain, which begins with slavery and ecocide and ends with the final consumer, can be summarized as follows. First, enslaved workers are used to extract natural resources and throughout the production

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

process the environment is destroyed (Steps 1&2). The natural resources are purchased and transported by middlemen (Step 3). Exporters and businessmen at trading houses purchase and combine natural resources from many sources - some tainted with slavery and ecocide and some clean (Step 4). Natural resources are used in the assembly of parts that go into final products (Steps 5-9). Retailers sell the final product (Step 10). Consumers purchase the final product (Step 11).

IV. The Books and the Bookends

The four-step process and eleven-step supply chain each shows the relationship between slavery, ecocide, and consumerism. The four-step process *begins* with consumers and *ends* with slavery and ecocide:

Step 1: Consumers initiate the production process with their desire for products.

Step 2: Competition for natural resources, combined with a corrupt government, create conditions for slavery and ecocide.

Step 3: Local people are enslaved and forced to extract the natural resources.

Step 4: As gangs increase production, they find new sources of natural resources and workers, destroying ecosystems enslaving people in the process.

Conversely, the eleven-step supply chain *begins* with slavery and ecocide and *ends* with consumers:

Steps 1&2: Enslaved workers are used to extract natural resources and throughout the production process the environment is destroyed.

Step 3: The natural resources are purchased and transported by middlemen.

Step 4: Exporters and businessmen at trading houses purchase and combine natural resources from many sources - some tainted with slavery and ecocide and some clean.

Steps 5-9: Natural resources are used in the assembly of parts that go into the final product.

Step 10: Retailers sell the final product.

Step 11: Consumers purchase the final product.

Alone, the four-step process and the eleven-step supply chain each tells part of the story of slavery, ecocide, and consumerism. When combined, they reveal that the consumer is at the beginning *and* end of the production process, with

slavery and ecocide in between. In Table 1, I link the four-step process and the eleven-step supply chain to illustrate how consumers bookend the slavery and ecocide story.

Table 1: The Bookends (Consumerism) and the Books (Slavery and Ecocide)

Four-Step Process	Step 1: Consumers initiate the production process with their desire for products.	The First Bookend: Consumers Desire Products
	Step 2: Competition for natural resources, combined with a corrupt government, create conditions for slavery and ecocide.	
	Step 3: Local people are enslaved and forced to extract the natural resources.	
	Step 4: As gangs increase production, they find new sources of natural resources and workers, destroying ecosystems enslaving people in the process.	
Eleven-Step Supply Chain	Steps 1&2: Enslaved workers are used to extract natural resources and throughout the production process the environment is destroyed.	The Books: Slavery and Ecocide
	Step 3: The natural resources are purchased and transported by middlemen.	
	Step 4: Exporters and businessmen at trading houses purchase and combine natural resources from many sources – some tainted with slavery and ecocide and some clean.	
	Steps 5–9: Natural resources are used in the assembly of parts that go into the final product.	
	Step 10: Retailers sell the final product.	
	Step 11: Consumers purchase the final product.	The Last Bookend: Consumers Purchase Products

The books of slavery and ecocide are found in both the four-step process and the eleven-step supply chain - the story unfolds in the second step of the first

process and ends in the tenth step of the supply chain. The scene of the story is set with the conditions that allow slavery and ecocide to thrive. The main characters are the slaves and the environment, with the thugs, criminals, and gangs serving as the antagonists. The supporting characters are the people found in Steps 3-10 of the supply chain, as they do not initiate slavery and ecocide, or even witness it firsthand, but are usually aware of it to some extent. The stories of these books are supported at each end by consumers - with their desire for products on one end and their purchase of those products on the other end. In the following sections, I describe the 'books' of slavery and ecocide and the 'bookends' of the consumers, again using evidence from *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World*.

V. The Books: Slavery and Ecocide

As noted in the four-step process, the conditions created by the resource curse leave people and the environment vulnerable to being exploited. Before the workers are exploited, they are first enslaved. Bales identifies three common ways that people are enslaved: 1) peonage, 2) trickery, and 3) capture. He describes peonage as a situation where someone is falsely accused of a crime and to be freed, they must work as their punishment.¹⁹ Local government officials collude with gang leaders to determine the number of workers needed and arrest people accordingly. People are also enslaved through "trickery" via debt bondage, where a worker cannot leave their job because they are indebted to their boss.²⁰ This happens when someone hears about a job opportunity, travels to the location of the job, but when he arrives he realizes he can only work if he has tools, which he does not. Without money, he gets a loan from his boss, who sells him the tools. Over time, the worker borrows money for other things, such as food and lodging, and his debt increases. His income grows at a slower rate than his debt, preventing him from being able to pay off the loan. With no way out, he is enslaved. The last method of enslavement is capture, which, as the name suggests, is when a person is simply taken against their will.

Once enslaved, these people live and work in deplorable conditions. Throughout the book, Bales describes these conditions for many slaves around the world. In the eleven-step process, he describes the conditions for miners enslaved at the Bisie mine in The Congo where cassiterite has been mined for decades. Most of the work is done by men and boys who work without safety equipment. Without safety goggles, their eyes are damaged from shards of rocks. Without helmets, they

¹⁹ Ibid., 24-25.

²⁰ Ibid., 31.

break bones from falling on the rocks, or rocks falling on them. Without masks, they breathe in dust, causing their lungs to fill with "microscopic sharp-edged rock dust" and then "bleed and form scar tissue".²¹ Eventually, their "lungs can't bring oxygen to the body" and they suffocate to death.²² Workers are also susceptible to scabies, rashes, and infectious diseases because they live in tight quarters and sleep together in the tunnels of the mines.

Slaves are subject to abuse by their captors as gang members use fear and intimidation to keep them in line. They threaten violence and death to those who are not working hard enough or who are suspected of stealing minerals. Bales recalls one person who told him that if anyone is "suspected of swallowing precious minerals," they will "cut open their bellies".²³ Although most slaves are male, some females are enslaved for cooking, cleaning, and sex.²⁴ They are repeatedly raped by gang members and even male slaves. And with many men, few women, and no protection, sexually transmitted diseases spread. Many slaves are under the influence of drugs - drugs they are forced to take to induce passivity or drugs they choose to take to cope with these deplorable conditions. Working under the influence of drugs also makes workers even more at risk for injury.

Over time, these conditions take their toll. Bales describes slaves as, "exhausted, hollow-eyed children, wasted sinewy men, and women with blank stares".²⁵ Enduring these conditions may tempt someone to try to escape, but that can result in beatings or death.

The "thugs and criminals" that Bales identifies in the supply chain are generally the same people as the "gangs" and "criminals" he identifies in the four-step process. They are the ones who enslave people and force them to mine the natural resources that they sell to accumulate money, wealth, weapons, and power. Just as easy as it is for them to exploit people, it is just as easy for them to exploit the environment. While mining the natural resources, they destroy the land. And after they have extracted all the valuable natural resources and leave to find more, they leave the local ecosystem in shambles. Bales describes the ecocide at the Red Mountain and the Black Mountain in The Congo where cassiterite has been mined. He describes it as a "hollowed-out pile of debris drenched in human waste, toxic chemicals, and blood"²⁶ where "the trees have all been cut down, boulders and

²¹ Ibid., 49.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 47.

²⁴ Ibid., 49.

²⁵ Ibid., 47.

²⁶ Ibid.

rubble, mud and gravel are everywhere, and no plants grow".²⁷ He continues to say that, "from a distance it doesn't look like a city ... just thousands of discarded plastic bags" and "open pits ... filled with rainwater and sewage, wriggling with mosquito larvae and parasites".²⁸ The ecosystem has been significantly altered, impacting the flora and fauna that can survive in the area.

Damage to the environment expands beyond the location of the natural resources that are being mined, impacting people as well. In a different part of the book, Bales describes the slavery and ecocide found along the supply chain for gold, noting how ecocide creates long-term health problems for people in the surrounding area. When mining for gold in Ghana, mercury is used to adhere to the gold, allowing the gold to be more easily found. In this process, mercury contaminates the water, which flows downstream and is subsequently used for gardens and farm animals. Bales describes the dangers of mercury - it can damage internal organs as well as cause "nerve damage, high blood pressure, and a host of other symptoms, including having your skin die and peel off in layers".²⁹ It can also cause birth defects and "permanent nerve damage" in children.³⁰ Ecocide causes local people to be more susceptible to being exploited "as their normal livelihoods disappear".³¹ Just as slave labor is used because it is cheaper to force a worker to work than to pay them, leaving the environment in shambles is cheaper than preventing environmental destruction or repairing the environment when the natural resources is complete.

The story of slavery and ecocide is unsettling and unacceptable. Fortunately, it can be re-written. Anyone along the supply chain can make different choices and alter the impact of the production process on people and the planet. If we recall what Bales said about the supply chain, then we know that it does not end with the retailer but with the consumer. Instead of relying on other people along the supply chain to change their behavior, consumers can use their influence to replace the bad supply chains with better ones.

VI. The Bookends: Consumers

Consumers initiate the production process with their desire for products. Usually, they do not see the beginning of the supply chain where the natural

²⁷ Ibid., 48.

²⁸ Ibid., 47.

²⁹ Ibid., 142.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 53.

resources are extracted and therefore, may not be aware of the slavery and ecocide there. However, as more evidence is available and consumers become aware of the presence of slavery and ecocide in the supply chains of *some* products, they have a responsibility to determine if slavery and ecocide are present in the supply chains of the products *they* purchase and, if so, stop purchasing those products. Below, I propose five actions consumers can take to influence businesses and impact the supply chains of the products they desire. These actions include: 1) reevaluate initial desire for the product, 2) expand preferences to include information about the production process, 3) consider how important the price of a product is, 4) ask questions and conduct research, and finally, 5) abstain from purchasing products that may contain slavery or ecocide.

First, a consumer can reevaluate their initial desire for a product. They can think about whether or not they *need* a product - many products that are considered 'necessities' are not actually needed. They can also reevaluate products they *want* to determine what role advertising has played in convincing them they desire that product. If a consumer reevaluates their desire and decides not to purchase, then they are certain that they are not contributing to the slavery or ecocide.

If a consumer does plan to purchase a product, the next step is to determine their preferences related to the product, such a color, style, size, etc. Consumers can expand these preferences to include information about the production process. For example, some companies are fair trade certified, which means they do not use slavery or ecocide in their supply chain. There are several fair trade certifying organizations, including Fairtrade International, UTZ Certification, and Fair Trade USA that verify that a company's supply chain is clean. One way companies communicate this information to consumers is to add the organizations fair trade logo to the packaging of their products. Businesses can also be 'B Corps' certified or have a filing status of 'Benefit Corporation,' both of which indicates that the company has adopted a 'triple bottom line' business model, meaning they make decisions not solely on profit, but also on their impact on people and the planet.

Consumers can also consider how important the price of the product is. For most people, given similar products, the driving factor that influences which one they purchase is price. However, low prices can result from companies along the supply chain engaging in slavery and ecocide. After all, it is cheaper to engage in slavery and ecocide than paying workers a fair wage and restoring the environment once the natural resources are extracted. Low prices don't necessarily mean slavery or ecocide was used in the supply chain, and some products with slavery and ecocide in the supply chain may not be the lowest price, but low prices can serve as a signal to the consumer that they need to investigate further. Also, it is more expensive for companies to use fair trade certifying organizations or engage in triple bottom line practices, and those costs are usually passed on to consumers in

the form of higher prices. Because those labels instantly inform consumers that the production process is free of slavery and ecocide, if the consumer wants to be sure they are purchasing a clean product, the information may be worth the higher price.

If it is not clear whether a product's supply chain is clean, then a consumer can ask questions and conduct research. This can be done by asking questions at the retail store or contacting the company that produced the final product. The consumer can also go to the company's website to see if they have a social responsibility statement. This should not be inconvenient for most consumers who have access to the internet on their smart phone (which, ironically, was probably produced with cassiterite). When several companies produce the same or similar product, consumers can research the different companies to determine which ones are committed to cleaning their supply chains of slavery and ecocide. When a company indicates that they are trying to keep a 'clean' supply chain, customers can purchase products from them.

Finally, consumers can take the ultimate stand against slavery and ecocide by abstaining from purchasing products from companies that cannot prove that their supply chain is clean. This may be the ultimate sacrifice - not purchasing a product they desire. If a consumer cannot abstain, then they need to accept the possibility that for some products they buy, they are "mining by proxy" every time they purchase that product.³²

By engaging in these five actions, consumers use their influence to impact the supply chains of the products they purchase. Acting alone, one consumer may not make a difference, but when many consumers alter their behavior, businesses will take notice. When consumers stop purchasing their products and it becomes less profitable for businesses to use slavery and ecocide, then companies will have an incentive to address the problem. In doing so, consumers will become the protagonist of the story.

VII. Conclusion

Using evidence from Kevin Bales' *Blood and Earth: Modern Slavery, Ecocide, and the Secret to Saving the World*, I have demonstrated how consumers bookend the production process and how their decision to purchase a product impacts supply chains. After summarizing the four-step process and eleven-step supply chain that both contain slavery, ecocide, and consumers, I showed how consumers are at both the beginning and the end of the production process. I then characterized the 'books' of slavery and ecocide, describing how people are enslaved, the conditions they endure while enslaved, and how the environment is

³² Ibid., 245.

impacted. I concluded with consumers as the 'bookends,' identifying five actions they can take to impact the supply chains that they support, protect, and preserve. By *supporting* businesses that have clean supply chains, consumers can *protect* the workers who extract the natural resources and *preserve* the environment and ecosystems at the source of those natural resources.