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Sex Trafficking: Social Constructions and Stereotypes of Recovery in Viet Nam

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**SEX TRAFFICKING:
SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONS AND STEREOTYPES OF
RECOVERY IN VIET NAM**

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ABSTRACT

The research attempts to reveal how labels of victimization of trafficked returnees can actually harm socialization efforts of reintegration. Although men are trafficked for sexual purposes as well, the study will focus only on the acclimation of women in An Giang province, on the border of Cambodia. The paper discusses the stories of three returnees and analyzes their social reintegration through social events such as cooking and through informal conversations. This is turn, is compared to other populations that may be susceptible to trafficking, but have not yet been. All work and research is based on the participant observation form of ethnographic writing. This work has the ultimate aim of bringing a humanistic emphasis to stories of sex trafficking, ultimately to provide a balance against the sensationalistic journalistic accounts of returnees.

INTRODUCTION TO TRAFFICKING IN VIETNAM

In Vietnam, the three main forms of trafficking include labor trafficking, forced domestic servitude, and sex trafficking or forced prostitution.¹ The first form, labor trafficking, assists in the migration of Vietnamese men and women to other countries, mainly in Southeast Asia and a few such as the United Kingdom and some East European nations. This method brings many migrants into factories, farms, and construction work, arenas where there no pre-learned skill is required. One of the most recent examples of labor trafficking in Vietnam lies in bauxite. This controversy unfolded when the Vietnamese government signed approval for China to mine bauxite, one of the raw ingredients of aluminum, in the Central Highlands, near Da Lat. This issue finally ignited due to China's decision to provide jobs only for their own nationals. This textbook case of labor and migration shows the easy access of foreign workers in the web of Southern Asia, where hazardous forms of manual work are competitive and highly sought after. Internally, the acquisition of labor in factories and construction work can be seen clearly in and around Ho Chi Minh City. In the streets of Saigon, near bridges and overpasses are Khmer day laborers who stand on the pavement and wait for menial labor work such as moving furniture. In the province of Dong Nai, a short distance from the city, many factories exist and house only workers from the rural areas of Vietnam. This example not only displays the shift in migration from rural to urban sectors, but also exists to show how relocation for jobs is the norm in all parts of Vietnam. This serves as one of the many mechanisms in contemporary society that aids to the process of human trafficking not only in country, but internationally.

In many Vietnamese households, housekeepers are hired for the upkeep of domestic affairs such as cooking, cleaning, and looking after children. The “housekeeper” can be an unwed relative,

¹ “MTV Networks in Asia & Pacific and MTV Europe Foundation Launch Youth-Focused Anti-Human Trafficking Campaign.” 12 August 2009. 3 December 2009. <<http://humantrafficking.org/updates/690>>.

a young woman from the countryside, or hired by word of mouth from other families. In all of these instances, the worker is of a lower class, whether it be in economics or relationship status. This norm of domestic servants even among the middle classes paved the way towards domestic servitude overseas. Unlike manual labor, which is targeted towards men, domestic servitude across borders is targeted at women. For Vietnamese people, the idea of coming to a more industrialized nation may be something synonymous to the phrase given to America: “the land of opportunity.” In these foreign lands, the currency exchange rate is greater than the Vietnamese dong. This enticing desire for money and opportunity is what lures Vietnamese workers overseas. Much of what a migrant finds in the new country is that without decent communication skills and education, the only job in abundance is in the field domestic affairs for families who are able to afford such services.

Another recruiting mechanism for domestic labor is the promise of foreign marriages to rich customers overseas. In the summer of 2008, one of the largest illegal marriage brokerages was halted by Vietnamese authorities. In the raid, 112 women from the Southern provinces of Vietnam were found in a 15 square-meter room, awaiting their turn to parade and display themselves in front of a group of South Korean men and women, in order to be selected for marriage in the Korean market.² The main reasons for this disciplinary action against illegal matchmaking are the increase in rate of divorce and spousal abuse and suicide in South Korean society. Although arranged marriages and predetermined spouses are common in many Asian countries, the recent crackdown of such businesses is a contemporary cry to uphold the sanctity of marriage and fighting against the mistreatment of women.

The final and probably most well-known form of trafficking is forced prostitution or sex work. This area of trafficking can also arise from the previously mentioned marriage brokerage

² “Vietnamese police raid illegal marriage agency.” 18 July 2008. 4 December 2009. <<http://www.thanhniennews.com/society/?catid=3&newsid=40330>>.

scams. According to UNICEF's "The Children in Vietnam" report, as much as ten percent of weddings to Chinese nationals may be another avenue for sex trafficking across borders. Beyond these falsehoods and betrayals of marriages lies the other arena of sex trafficking where young women and children are encouraged to leave their homeland to go to neighboring countries by a stranger's promise of job security and easy business. The vulnerable population in these instances is often young men and women who are at adolescence. Because of this, sensitivity arises in terms of government and international response to sex trafficking. For many, the circumstances of their trafficking are beyond the issue of politics and centered more alongside familial relationships and economic status. Based on street interviews with lottery kids, children who are in households of poorer circumstance will often try to look for work to provide money for the family. When they are approached by neighbors, relatives, or strangers who recruit migrants for undocumented cafe work in the neighboring country, many young adolescents will trust that there is real employment. Only once they are in that foreign land do they realize the employment includes much more work than that of a cafe hostess or busboy. Thus, the vulnerability of young children to being lured by false promises of helping the family is one of the major reasons for why children are so easily trafficked from Vietnam to Cambodia.

INTRODUCTION TO THE NATURE AND EXTENT OF TRAFFICKING IN AN GIANG PROVINCE

In all areas of the world, the realm of sexual trafficking has two main elements: acquisition and exploitation. The acquisition of sexual prey begins at the familial and local level, where perpetrators or former victims acquire women and children through false promises, abduction through force or seduction, or sale by family or friends. The second element, exploitation, simply refers to the uses of these persons in an unjust manner, most commonly as sex slaves involved in sex tourism, entertainment, or pornography. Migration, whether forced or voluntary, links

acquisition and exploitation.³ It leads to the establishment of complex trafficking networks in different sections of the world, making the route for escape very difficult once a person is caught in a predator's web.

Despite some documented returns, however, the statistics on trafficking for sexual exploitation still have a broad range from as few as 400,000 victims, reported by the International Organization on Migration (IOM), to as much as 4 million people, reported by the United Nations in 2000. Thus, it is difficult to determine the total number of victims. And because these are only estimates of reported cases, the numbers of *missing* women and children that may have been lured into this "business" have been crucially neglected. Conversely, the numbers may be overestimates including all sex work, even those in voluntary, commercial arenas.

In the Mekong Delta, the most virulent form of human trafficking is prostitution, whether it is forced or voluntary. The provinces of Dong Thap, Kien Giang, and An Giang are the hot spots for migration of sex workers in and out of Cambodia and its neighboring countries. In Kien Giang, the primary smuggling route is by water to the brothels of Cambodia or Thailand. In Dong Thap and An Giang, migration to Cambodia consists of traveling to the other side of the Mekong River, something very easy to do when certain stretches of the river are only tens of meters across. This paper will be limited to An Giang province, specified to Long Xuyen, a newly industrialized city on the stretches of the Hau Giang branch of the Mekong Delta.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much confusion also arises in the media as to the definition of the term *trafficking*: whether it is the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons... for the purpose of

³ Kara, Siddharth. *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. Columbia University Press, 2009.

exploitation⁴,” which denotes that sex trafficking is a process, or rather than simply the act of prostitution itself. In addition, the searches of the present-day publications of this topic all seem to center around the causes and also the supposed long-term psychological ramifications of the survivors of the “business.”

Melissa Farley, one of the most outspoken feminist-abolitionists against prostitution, claims that the trafficked live in “social and legal contexts defining them variously as hated and filthy women, criminals and ‘sex workers’⁵”, which thereby facilitates the onset of psychological problems such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. On the opposite spectrum lie social anthropologists who look at sex work in terms of its commercial benefits for the individuals, especially among societies of the West.

Despite the large numbers of potential workers in the sex trade, little information other than that of feminist-abolitionists has been published about what occurs when they leave the “business.” In my proposed research I will attempt to focus on Farley’s and many other abolitionists’ assumptions of immediate psychological fragility among those that were deemed to be “trafficked,” rather than those who are sex “workers.” In addition to this, I will attempt to provide a medium of discussion about returnees that does not sensationalize or desensitize the experiences of the trafficked.

SIGNIFICANCE

Although there is a lively discussion debating whether sex workers are innocent victims or free agents, the fact remains that those trafficked in the sex trade have not been adequately represented in their recovery. Through researching the amount of literature about recovery, I

4 What is Human Trafficking." *United Nations: Office on Drugs and Crime*. United Nations. 10 Nov 2008. <<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/human-trafficking/what-is-human-trafficking.html>>.

5 M Farley, I Baral, M Kiremire, U Sezgin - *Feminism & Psychology*, 1998. <thehousegroup.org>.

became aware that there were very few in regards to how trafficked victims become socialized back into society.

In much of Western literature, there is an ideology of terminal psychological disorders among the trafficked. Through my previous work in the Mekong Delta, the fragility of the girls⁶ with whom I interacted with was seen through their blank stares into the distance, their quietness in a loud birthday bash, and their shyness when meeting new volunteers. Although there are often serious conflicts that arise with these girls coming back to their homeland, much of what the media and literature portrays of the young sex workers includes the description that I just wrote about, full of emotion-provoking adjectives on the state of mind of girls that are already labeled “sex victims.” In addition, these portrayals also illustrate men to be the perpetrators, linking to the stereotype that returnees are unable to speak about the opposite sex in any way, much less interact with them. These descriptions only label the women, with no real investigation of the variation that arises around their mental statuses.

The term “victims” is not only a label but also a metaphorical “branding” of the girls as pawns unable to rid of themselves of their past and unable to go forward to their bleak, predetermined futures. In my study, I will attempt to explore the preconceived notion that women suffer from irreversible damage due to their time as sex workers. I will also show that the topics of “men” and the returnees’ relationships with them can still be talked about, in an effort to dissolve popular media regarding such topics as “taboo” among female sex victims. This research into the incorporation of returnees to their homeland is an attempt at recognizing the similarities that the trafficked have to their non-trafficked counterparts, thereby acknowledging their humanity amidst their stigmatization.

⁶ I must mention that I would prefer to use the term *girls*, which is a directly translated term for the returnees that the local NGO workers use to refer to the women by.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the start of the SIT program, I was working for Pacific Links: ADAPT, a nonprofit organization devoted to (1) the education of potential trafficking victims, (2) the reintegration of recent returnees, and (3) the vocational training of those already trafficked. Most of what I have done since my arrival to Long Xuyen in November of 2009 consists of working with fellow NGO volunteers and officials in the three aforementioned arenas.

My observations of sex workers began at bars that seemed to be recruiting centers for prostitution around Ho Chi Minh City. In these areas, I started conversations with the waitresses and tried to observe the mentality of the workers. Although I am not an expert in psychology, especially in anything that may be considered trauma, my main objective in these interactions was to see how the sex workers treated patrons of the bar who were not men. Because these are casual conversations during fleeting moments, I did not find it necessary to record any crucial information.

In Long Xuyen, my interaction with the girls who were trafficked is limited and only consisted of events such as karaoke night, American and Vietnamese cooking nights, and just informal conversations that I had with the girls during the time of my stay. These observations only attempt to discover their level of socialization back into their native environments through their topics of discussion, which may or may not include the normal gossip around the office or town. Because of the unexpected nature of any informal conversations and the confidentiality that must exist, I did not be recording them in any of our interactions. Due to the subjective nature of participant observation, I tried to attain as much reflexivity in my daily writing as possible.

In addition to gathering such field notes about the informal social reintegration of girls back into society, I also obtained data through interviews with young students who are considered “at-risk” for trafficking, that is, children who are from poor, rural as well as urban families. As another aspect of work that the NGO offers, I was able to travel to semirural secondary schools and interact

with students who needed additional education during the summer. As for other "at-risk" populations, I informally interviewed street children and their families as the chance arose. This was done in the backpacker's district of Ho Chi Minh City on the streets of Pham Ngu Lao and De Tham. For this population of interest, I also based my experiences through extensive field notes after each interaction. As with the returnees and bar workers, I did not use any type of recording technology to document these informal conversations.

My third area of research consists of interviews with my fellow volunteers. Through informal sessions with some of the long and short-term workers, I attempted to understand their motivations for working at the NGO. I also asked them about their take on sex trafficking and whether or not it is comparable to sex work, in which there is an international debate as to the real vulnerability of the "victims." Their interaction with the reintegrated girls and how their "progress" through reintegration is seen through the "informal" NGO events such as karaoke and cooking nights was another object of emphasis. I am also aware of the partiality that I may already possess through my history with the NGO and I am ready and willing to acknowledge this possible bias in my writing.

In all of my observations in the three groups: sex workers (past and present), street children and children of low economic status, and NGO workers, no recording devices were used. Through this methodology, the only information obtained was based on my experiences with each subject in that population. All notes written after the interactions were recorded in a journal and re-typed for personal use and was not made public. All names and stories of the subjects, especially the returnees, will not be divulged and confidentiality is promised to remain. Because of this, all names used in this paper are changed from the original and not all subjects remain at the location described in the writing. In terms of NGO workers, some are no longer a part of the organization.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATIONS

The research on migration patterns and motivations began in the backpacker's district of Ho Chi Minh City. Further encounters with street children and former street children were made in Hanoi at Koto affiliated businesses and at the Hoa Sua academy in Sapa.

In Long Xuyen, I was housed at the ADAPT office, a branch of Pacific Links dedicated to combating human trafficking to Cambodia and other countries. In this area, there exists one vocational training house, dedicated to the art of tailoring and handicrafts. Two American volunteers for the NGO as well as the vocational training instructor lived in the two housing complexes. All work was centralized through the NGO. All excursions to Kien Giang and Dong Thap provinces were made with fellow NGO volunteers.

POPULATION STUDIED

In Ho Chi Minh City, the informal interactions were conducted with sex workers from the late evening hours into early morning. Information about my presence in the bar was disclosed to the waitresses when they asked. My purpose there was to interact more with those who are still in the trade, especially those that have continued to do so in the backpacker's district, catering mainly to foreigners and ex-pats. In Long Xuyen, the customers are mainly men from the surrounding areas. Although the purpose of the massage or karaoke bar is known, it is not verbally admitted among the patrons and workers that sex is indeed the purpose for their existence.

In the streets of Ho Chi Minh City, there are many vendors and mobile street sellers, who have small baskets of gum, nail clippers, tissue, fans, and other knick-knacks. These women often have children with them. In Hanoi, there is a huge baby-selling market, but in Saigon, there is a smaller market where children are borrowed and brought to work. The appearance of a small child in the arms of some of these women is a device to sell more, creating the feeling of need in order to

get more customers. This population represents is the ideal group in terms of recognizing migration for the sole purpose of economics.

In Hanoi and Sapa, I had informal conversations with workers of Hoa Sua and Koto hospitality training schools. In this interaction with former street children, the reasons for migration were able to be slowly recognized. Other populations were informally interviewed in field excursions. These populations include those in these fields: lottery ticket sales, garbage dumps, and summer school students in the rural areas.

In Long Xuyen, the majority of the returnees sent to the shelter have come from Cambodia, with occasional cases stemming from Thailand. The young women range from the ages of 17 to 32, with many on the younger spectrum of this age range. The type of trafficking faced by each of the returnees is distinct, with many coming from all the aforementioned forms especially that of forced sex work. This creates a complex sensitivity around interviews, which is why all interactions and analysis are based on participant observation.

DISCUSSION

To get a deeper understanding of the recovery for returnees, I observed and interacted with children and adults from the lower economic classes. These groups include lottery ticket sales people, street sellers, and garbage dump families, with the latter being the most economically disadvantaged from the group. In these interactions, I analyzed the social components of each person, i.e. how well they would hold conversations and the level of humor and interest seen in their speaking. In order to understand the social reintegration of the returnees, I compared them with this low economic status group as well as with sex workers and the young student population. These comparisons are discussed through each short biography and analysis of the returnees. Once again, because of the sensitive nature of the young women's lives, certain details from each case have

been changed to keep their identities confidential. Although my analysis is based only on participant observation, the experiences written provide a good amount of information on the societal integration aspects of trafficking recovery. No formal interviews were needed to be conducted among the returnees for the simple reason that the purpose of my study period was not to retell their trafficking stories. My aim, instead, is to document my own social experiences with the women in order to represent the social aspects of reintegration, something so often glazed over by sensationalist accounts of sex trafficking. This is a crucial point that validates any changes made to protect the identity of the trafficked persons, for it is the social interactions of the returnees, not their background, which is being explored.

BIOGRAPHICAL STUDIES

The following sections include three different cases based on several experiences from the fourteen returnees:

Case I

Viet Hoa is a 29 year old woman with sharp eyebrows, almond-shaped eyes, and long black hair. When offered food, she politely refuses, wanting to “keep her figure.” Hoa is learning the art of handicrafts and is currently making dolls for overseas craft distributors. She returned to Vietnam from Singapore because of mistreatment in the hands of the patron family for whom she did domestic work. Upon our first meeting, I noticed her to be the quietest person in the vocational training office. Because of her age, she did not strike me as a returnee. In the few minutes I was at the office, she continued to work on finishing her paper doll. When other groups of visitors from other organizations came, Hoa was the first person to immediately go into the kitchen, not coming back into the main room until the visitors were gone.

From first impression, social anxiety would be at the forefront of a stranger's perception of Hoa. She is reclusive and escapes situations of social interaction among new groups or even singular people. The anxiety that she exhibits is linked to mistrust in someone new. Furthermore, all of these observations may be a result of trauma faced through her trafficking. Because her actions in these few moments and her label as a returnee, the woman is thought to have psychological difficulties due to her past experiences. The type of analysis aforementioned is common to the writings in much literature on trafficking as well as from feminist abolitionists of the United States. In terms of Vietnamese mentality on these stories, a student named Hong from Dong Thap University sums it up perfectly, "I feel so sorry for them, it's such a sad story." Of course certain cases may affect one more than others; it is known that people feel connected to stories that prove similar to themselves. Hearing a story someone tells or a seeing a photo someone takes can evoke such empathy even though the viewer and the returnee are strangers to each other. The strong problem in situations like this is that the sadness, whether it be pity or compassion, is directed towards an entire group of people (the returnees) rather than its individuals. The societal pity or compassion is thus given blindly, without any concept on the psychology and personality of the returnees.

The same statements can be made for street children and families that live in garbage heaps in Rach Gia. In this city, where trash disposal plants have not yet eliminated city landfills, the children in these communities often have low to no education. Through conversations with the mostly Khmer adults, it was revealed that elementary education was not free in this area even though some have claimed the universality of public education. Also being told that the clothes on their backs, the jewelry on their bodies, and the houses which they sleep are all scavenges from their garbage shows how economically disadvantaged they are. Because living on these sites is similar to living day by day, there is no concept of saving up money for the future. A family may be in debt

after spending all the money they just earned on a “required” wedding for their daughter. Through this opportunity to visit the Rach Gia landfill, I was able to see the situation first-hand and not through sensationalized brochures and compassionately-edited documentaries. The imagery portrayed in the pictures tells thousands of different stories, where each new viewer is able to encapsulate the image into what seems adequate for their own mind to process. My interpretation of the photos was indeed different from my experience while I was standing in the garbage. The picture evoked imagined stories, characters, and lifestyles, whereas my actual visit gave me the concrete details of life at a trash site. In such places, stereotypes of poverty are abundant, more so when looking at pictures and hearing a visitor's stories than when visiting the area and hearing and seeing life lived before one's eyes.

The visit to Rach Gia shows that stereotypes run abundant. Not all impoverished families necessarily need nor want outside help. Issues of neighborhood quarrels and stealing run rampant in the society. When showing compassion for a group of lower privileges, one must understand each individual case, rather than showing blind compassion for a whole community.

Stereotypes are used to classify and simplify when issues are too abundant or too hard to relate to. The possible stereotypes given to Hoa are preconceived notions that surface after meeting. These notions represent the first level in the creation of public stereotypes. Just as looking at garbage dump photos generalizes situations, not learning more about a person one meets is also unfair. After this first interaction with Hoa, I was afraid to hear her story. Because a majority of those in the reintegration house were trafficked for sexual purposes, I placed the same label on her. In my second encounter with Hoa, several months after seeing her for the first time, she was clearly friendlier, asking me about my travels and my health. In the last month of staying at Long Xuyen, I visited the open house of the NGO. The four-story complex was very clean and spacious, having enough living room area for 15+ bikes without crowding the space. Because of my long-term

connection with ADAPT, I was able to set up nights out. On one night, I biked Hoa to grab Sinh To (Smoothies) on a very bumpy road as she held on tight, for I was not the best at biking passengers. Thus, in this third interaction, it was obvious that my often, though intermittent, presence made her feel more comfortable around me, comfortable enough to socialize with me.

In the following weeks, I visited the training house and had always come back and forth to socialize in between my work at the NGO. I could tell that Hoa was more comfortable with me, being able to eat meals (although few, she was keeping her figure) and snacks during her desired breaks. Although this situation is very personalized, the nature of Hoa's social interactions with a new person in her life can be analyzed in two ways. The first is a determination of her personality based on her being a trafficked person. This shows that she may have the social anxiety previously mentioned and through time, she is slowly able to get over her fear of strangers. The second analysis is of Hoa as any other Vietnamese woman. In this version, Hoa, upon seeing five to six Americans, finds it uncomfortable to be in a room where the language spoken is foreign to her. Instead, she would prefer to go concentrate on her work at hand or go to a different environment where things are more comfortable. Because I am around the NGO often, Hoa would like to get more acquainted with me, and hence, agrees to start a social relationship with someone that she knows she will understand and possibly see again in the future.

These two versions of the same story are only different in that one places the label of "trafficked victim." It mistakenly says that any hesitation or common anxiety felt is a reflection of trauma when the anxiety can just as well be a reflection of the mentality of the person in general, despite her experiences.

Case II

Khanh Linh is 19 years old. She has a very round face and small eyes. Linh has been at the open house for over nine

months and was in Cambodia for a little less than two years. The Vietnamese government in An Giang had brought her to the organization. As of November 2009, Linh is learning how to cut and color hair. More heavyset than the others, she also takes Judo classes three times a week. She proved her skills by kicking high enough to catch the 1.81 m tall staff member at ADAPT. Luckily, he was not harmed during this performance. Because of her fierce eyes, I first assumed she was emotionally troubled and always asked her if anything happened. Out of all the young women at the open house, she was the only one to willingly help with the chores of cleaning and cooking. During these nights, it was also Linh who was the only one to show prior cooking skills.

A young woman with a melancholy stare is learning martial arts. Learning Judo may be a critical life skill for some of these girls. It reinforces the idea of self-defense in the case that the girls are ever attacked. Linh also knows how to cook and clean very well. Because of her feisty personality and homemaker skills, she is the perfect candidate for forced prostitution as well as domestic labor in her brothel. For many stuck in Cambodian brothels, this makes perfect sense: their everyday chores went beyond sex work and into servitude. However, although it is likely, this is a complete assumption made on my part to show how easy plausible generalizations can be to cultivate out of few clues.

From my experiences with Linh, she is very easy to get to know. However, her stern and serious face is often intimidating for many. Having set a rapport through pad thai night during the summer, my return in November was met with open arms. Linh as well as many other open house residents remembered my pad thai beyond the memory of me. Because of the long-term remembrance and success of the one cooking night over the summer, I had a few informal ones to socialize with the young women. On my last day at the office, Linh walks in ready to change her schooling clothes for the Judo uniform. I stop her in her tracks and tell her, with my brows furrowed, that I would be leaving the next day. She looks at me with the corner of her eyes and says

that she would see me again, because she knows that I always come back. She then walks aside and from the kitchen, rumbles that she wants instant noodles. Because it was my last day, I had bought quick food to cook for the office and vocational training house. Linh, of course, was anxious to help make the food and immediately began to peel vegetables for the noodle stir-fry.

Because of her availability and willingness to help even when not asked, she struck me as someone who has initiative. After her readiness to cook in the kitchen, a few other young returnees came and also helped. It is a concept of reciprocity that is often the key to Vietnamese relationships. In this aspect of socialization, there is a “give” and “take” ideal that both parties must exhibit for the friendship to begin to legitimize. Thus, in order for the girls to be able to eat, they must help with the cooking.

Through my interactions with Linh, I found out her faith. She was strongly devout to her religion and that was the fuel she lived by daily. In terms of reintegration, the aspects of a returnee’s life, such as religion, should be acknowledged and even cultivated. Because she was unable to return to her family, the only other element that was still in her life was religion. Many organizations have chosen to be either free from religion or starting from a religion. Thus, there is no room for a person who is a believer of one faith to be allowed to cultivate their beliefs. Because of this, many returnees opt to stay to the faith of their past, reinventing themselves through their faith for the present. This idea of forgetting one’s past is also another fault in many programs of reintegration. Due to the sensitive nature of many returnees’ stories from Cambodia, there is a tendency for members of non-governmental organizations to isolate their residents from the outside world. They simply do not want to rehash any potentially painful memories of the returnees by allowing them to talk about it freely.

In Vietnam, there is also a huge distrust of the Vietnamese overseas, especially from America. In my experience with proposal writing for the province of An Giang, many difficulties

arose as to who would fund the program proposed and whether or not the money was in the hands of a pro-democracy group member, who is more likely to be a foreigner rather than a Vietnamese national. In this example, when a licensed rape therapist from America came to work for the NGO, there was a lot of fear that her therapy sessions with the girls were: 1) pro-democracy, 2) painful for the girls to rehash, and 3) against Buddhist teachings.⁷ Thus, because of this xenophobia, it was often difficult for any foreign person to try and provide services in areas that are not used to foreign investment. Thus, the pushing away of trained professionals due to this fear is something that in the end may be a form of victimization itself, where offered help is not taken due to political reasons. This hurts the emotional recovery of many of the recent returnees. To what extent is this ideology and fear of government restriction changing? The same psychological therapist stated that she does not see change in the attitudes of reintegration from many government and non-government run “open houses.”

For the fourteen women currently living at the reintegration building in Long Xuyen, there is a strict curfew of 9 pm. Having the lives of 17, 18, and 19 year olds restricted is something common, especially among Vietnamese parents. However, the same criteria exist for the eldest of the returnees, who is 32 years old. This restriction of the young women means that their actions are being monitored. They are also not allowed to bring friends over to the house, due to confidentiality and important safety reasons. In many reintegration centers, who house returnees for several months before sending them to housing similar to ADAPT's, the returnees are often isolated from the outside world. Because their social interaction is limited to NGO workers and fellow returnees, it may be a difficult process for the young women to re-socialize with the external population.

In this way, reintegration homes may not actually hasten the recovery of the sex work

⁷ Interview with psychologist in Long Xuyen (anonymous)

experiences of the women. It may be a factor that leads to a different form of victimization, where isolation from the home society may postpone or even prevent a smooth transition from returnee into resident of the area in which they now reside.

Case III

Minh Giang is 21 years of age. Her skin is fair and her complexion is clear. She has what many would call a very delicate Westernized face, with small eyes, full lips, and a very straight nose. She is regarded as very beautiful among the staff at ADAPT. Many say that because of her beauty, she was an immediate target. Giang was recruited to go to Cambodia by a stranger with promises to give her a job as a hostess at a cafe. She refused many times before finally accepting, believing that her parents needed her to help in any way. Her family immediately reported her missing, and when she home almost six months later, they were happy to receive her. However, by that time they could no longer afford for her to live with them. Giang's family thus brought her to ADAPT, a 50 km bike ride's away, in order for her to become a part of the reintegration program of the agency's. Several months after Giang's relocation, her father biked her 9 year old sister to the ADAPT office as well. He stated that his young daughter, Trinh, had been approached by three different strangers, telling her of job opportunities in Cambodia. Trinh was placed in a special orphanage that catered to poorer families and street children. She is currently 12 years old.

Giang's recovery is exemplary of the mission and purpose of the ADAPT. The organization offers itself as a service to the community and as a resource when the outlook is bleak. When placing Giang into the open house, she was able to also utilize the vocational training services allotted to her. Thus, in the two years that she has been a part of the vocational training school, she is able to work to earn a living. This proved a slow but successful growth from reintegration to vocational training. Although it shows current success for Giang, what if the agency had allowed for more social integration and professional psychological counseling? In terms of recovery, this

question cannot be answered unless there are organizations that sprout up to provide that needed support.

Because Giang's sister Trinh was placed in the same predicament, the family decided that it would be better for their other daughter to be taken in by the NGO as well. The organization found a special home for Trinh at the local orphanage, where families would send their children if they did not have enough monetary support to sustain their child-rearing. For Trinh, because of her youthfulness, the transition into communal orphanage living was more fun than her solitary life at home, with her sister away from home. And because of her young beauty, many of the boys at the orphanage would tease and make fun of her. She became a very talkative young woman and continues to be the role model sister in the group of over 150 children. At this time, Giang says that her younger sister is in the beginning stages of puberty, which requires that she now be very aware of her body and anyone who approaches her. Having public education that the orphanage pays for, many young children such as Trinh still attempt to leave.

Many of the lottery ticket sales children in Long Xuyen are young drop-outs. Lien is 12 years old and dropped out of school at the second grade level. She currently sells lottery tickets on the streets with her younger sister, Mai, who is only 8 years of age. Mai is luckily still in school and may surpass her sister in a year or so. When asked why she does not study anymore, Lien shyly replies that it is because she's dropped out. Upon hearing this, her still-in-school co-seller, Yen, corrects Lien, and tells me it is because Lien has a poor mother, so as a daughter, Lien wants to get her mother out of her current circumstances. She does this by walking the streets from 8:30 am to 9 pm, everyday, with two hour-long breaks for meals. Because of the extensive amount of time spent in specific areas of Long Xuyen, the selling routes of the girls are very predictable. This means that they are more likely to be surveillance by potential traffickers. One young girl mentioned that she was approached by a woman who attempted to take the girl to her place, which had lots of toys for

the young girl to choose from. In hearing this story, it is no wonder that a population that ADAPT looks after is the lottery ticket sales children, who because of their routine on the streets, are more likely to be trafficked than others.

Although this is a reality, there are many other areas of the country where children who live or sell on the streets have more support from the community. In Hanoi, there are training schools for these young children that specialize in food and hospitality training. The first called Hoa Sua, specializes in restaurant training in Chocolat & Baguette restaurants in Hanoi and in Sapa. The other training school is Koto, which specializes in not only food, but hospitality, training former children of the streets so they can get jobs at local bars, restaurants, and high-class hotels. From my experience, those trained in these schools often have a place to stay and because of their job location, are paid more than some others. This success shows that although street children and lottery kids may be a huge target, if given the opportunity for them to work and learn, many are less likely to resort to leaving the country.

Even though migration makes trafficking in humans possible, it is mainly due to the economic situations of the families that make certain populations more susceptible than others. However, the stereotype in these conditions is that potential vocational training may be the factor that dissuades young women (and men) from turning to sex work as a viable industry of moneymaking. One warning is that what may be successful in one area, such as Hanoi, may fail in another, perhaps in areas near the border of Cambodia. This is simply due to the differences in regional thought, culture, and economics that may affect the decisions of a person to migrate to find other opportunities that may bring quicker money.

Another major difference is in the livelihoods of families in the Mekong Delta. The key to understanding why children drop out of school and are lured into sex work is centered upon the environmental conditions themselves. In the central region of Vietnam, there is major flooding that

makes consistent livelihoods less dependent on the environment. There is no way to predict when natural disasters are to occur and thus, working in the fields for the family is less of a necessity than schooling. According to ADAPT, rice farming success is one of the main culprits to trafficking.

Because of the reliance on this staple crop and its never-decreasing demand in the international market, many children are pushed to drop out of school in order to help maintain the fields. This, in turn, blinds them from seeing the successes that may come with advanced schooling. Because of the high drop out rate among children of poor local farmers, the organization has depended on scholarships in order to keep young adults in school. The successes of such a campaign can never be truly known, for there is no way to count the number of girls that *did not* go to Cambodia.

One immediate question to the benefits of such action is why are the rates of human sex trafficking increasing despite these attempts of prevention? In learning about the current economic flourishing of Vietnam, there are two real examples for the country to strive towards, either Japan (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore- industrialized) or Thailand. In the first group of countries, industrialization is rampant and as is sex trafficking. In Thailand, the sex industry is catering towards clients in the more industrialized Asian countries, sending their sex workers overseas to these more Western and modern nations. In fact, according to public records, Japan's sex industry for Asian women has over 100,000 female sex workers, a majority of them Thai and Filipino.⁸

When in discussions of trafficking prevention, most concentrate on the supply side of prostitution. This proves troublesome because without demand, there may be no more sex workers available.

For the majority of the world, Asia is clouded in exoticism making Asian women are considered the most feminine and innocent of the world's women. This generalization is what has been proliferated in Western society ever since I was a young girl who was able to understand these stereotypes. Because of this, women are a major market for foreign and domestic customers.

⁸ Macan-Maker, Mawaan. "Human trafficking: Asia's persistent tragedy." 10 October 2002. Asia Times. 8 December 2009. < http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Asian_Economy/DJ10Dk01.html>.

Conversely in Brazil, gay sex tourism arises because of the need and want of domination of men by men who are taller and stronger in body and build. In Asia, the want of domination is from men towards women, or very feminine men for that matter. Thus, the market for young girls is greater in this area of the world than it may be in other cultures.

CONCLUSION

Trafficking in human beings remains a contemporary fight in most of the world. However, this "fight" has been part of humanity since the beginning of civilization. In Ancient Greek civilization, there was what now would be considered pedophile relationships with teachers and their pupils, as well as the traditional brothel houses. In the major historical wars of the past, women were known to be the spoils of battle, taken as prizes of victory. In contemporary times, women have been paraded for their superficial beauty in mass media.

Some analysts advocate of the legalization of prostitution and sex work in order for women to attain more rights against this exploitation. In providing a mechanism for defense, women are more likely to have control in terms of choice when it comes to doing sex work. This idea attempts to make everything public knowledge so any underhanded abuse would be caught immediately.

Although it sounds ideal on paper for those who are willing and able to support themselves in this field, trafficking is a separate issue. Sexual trafficking denotes coercion, deception, and exploitation without the consent of the weaker party. It violates fundamental human rights when sex workers are abused and subjected to other forms of physical and psychological mistreatment. In legalizing this form of work, many who were voluntary sex workers may not have a voice against their own abuse, for they chose this lifestyle. This represents the main misconception of sex work; those in the voluntary arena are not considered victims, whereas those who described themselves as trafficked will have the branding of a victim.

A person who has been through forced prostitution and has returned to their home society may have already faced the shame, harm, and humiliation placed on being a former sex worker. It is based on these assumptions and widespread clichés that sensationalist representations continue to grab the attention of the public. Labeling or simplifying a person's life story based on what they were classified as for a period of their life largely ignores the universal humanity that is present. Identifying a person as a victim before recognizing them as a woman, daughter, or even stranger places unconscious stereotypes on their personality. Although much sensitivity must exist when near a population that is at higher risk for traumatic reprocessing, the person who is working with the trafficked must also recognize the subjects' humanity amidst their stigmatization.

EXTENT OF RESEARCH

Having more representations of returnees and the process of their recovery will greatly enhance as well as provide a balance from the victimization rhetoric used by sensationalist journalism of the "sex slave trade". The participant observation method of inquiry will look at the returnee's conversational habits in an attempt to see how socialization efforts in recovery may be more beneficial than efforts that immediately diagnose and attempt to correct the "disturbed" psychologies of the "victims." And because psychotherapy may not be a viable option for such developing nations, this research hopes to show how day-to-day socialization efforts may actually work to better accustom the girls back into the environments they were trafficked from. Because any negative portrayals or pity-worthy descriptions of returnees may change how they are treated, when researching or working with this population, recognition of the similarities that returnees have with the general public will ultimately aid in the process of acclimation. The recovery and reintegration organizations must also add to this realization. Treating returnees as victims and not allowing contact with any males may be hazardous to the young woman's trust in men in the future.

Not allowing them to be independent at times also surrounds them with a bubble of dependency. This eventually limits the level of social integration that returnees can be given, perhaps prolonging the process of recovery in the long run.

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