



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
OIM Organización Internacional para las Migraciones

SEDUCTION, SALE & SLAVERY: TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN & CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

3rd Edition

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Regional Office for Southern Africa**

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FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The issue of trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children, is not a new development by any means in Southern Africa. Like elsewhere in the world, it has a history and roots that go way back. What is new is that it is becoming better known. The present research survey, undertaken by IOM over a relatively short period uncovered graphic details of how pervasive and dangerous this trade can be. Tempted by needs, hopes and dreams, victims encounter their traders who in turn are driven by profit, an often violent need to possess - plus a will to deceive, exploit and violate in order to get it.

As this report was launched in its condensed “Overview and Findings” version in Pretoria on 24 March 2003, it generated a significant amount of publicity in all media, and not only in South Africa, but also in Europe and America. Calls came from people near and far, expressing support, interest, and - criticism. Predictably, also some threats. The challenge now is that with this full report, communities, states, media and civil society find common ground on how to combat this increasing market, and the resulting trauma, terror and bring solace to destroyed lives.

Amidst wars, conflicts, diseases and poverty around us every day - we must not forget that trafficking in human beings is happening right under our noses. Indeed, the fact that a Pretoria newspaper on 8 April 2003 put a local news story on trafficking of Chinese women on the front page so prominently that the attack on Baghdad was dwarfed in comparison, gives cause for hope.

As a short research survey goes, this one has uncovered a whole range of findings that will hopefully engage Governments, and intrigue others, into action in combating crime, often organized, - or in rendering victim support. And not just in Southern Africa, but also in destination countries overseas. As a global migration organization, IOM

has a mission to help, and we intend to do so, now, with the support of donors and other role players.

I thank the research team and present and former IOM colleagues who have rendered them guidance and support in their endeavour, the editors, the layout designers, as well as the media - in particular the SABC 'Special Assignment' TV productions, interviewees in Governments, law enforcement and civil society, for their assistance, interest and publicity. And the victims who spoke up.

The most hidden aspect of this trade in bodies, regardless of origin or of gender or the purpose of the trade, is that within these bodies reside human beings with hopes, dreams, emotions and ambitions - and even a sense of justice; justice which so often eludes them when it matters most.

This work we dedicate to them.

H.P. Boe
IOM Regional Representative
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This report was prepared on behalf of IOM by research consultants, Maciej “Mac” Pieczkowski and Bernadette van Vuuren-Smyth, and by IOM Programme Officer in Pretoria, Jonathan Martens. It was edited by Lynellyn D. Long, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins, School of Public Health. Japie Kotze, Information Technology Specialist, IOM Pretoria, and Nde Ndifonka, Programme Assistant, IOM Pretoria, were responsible for the layout and design for this third edition.

The Rock Art Institute, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, generously contributed the cover painting of the San rock that comes from South Africa’s Eastern Cape province. It depicts a procession of human figures, traversing the spirit world along a thin red line. The thin red line was seen as a thread of light that connected different tiers of the cosmos. San shamans or spiritual leaders, while experiencing altered states of consciousness, would travel along these lines into the spiritual world where they performed tasks such as controlling game, making rain and healing the sick.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	Anti-Slavery International
BCIA	Blantyre-Chileka International Airport
CBD	Central Business District
DHA	Department of Home Affairs (South Africa)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IMP	International Migration Programme
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JIA	Johannesburg International Airport
LIA	Lilongwe International Airport
LCCU	Lesotho Child Counselling Unit
MIDSA	Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
SAPS	South African Police Service
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US-INS	United States Immigration and Naturalization Service
ZAR	South African Rand

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the surge of publicity that accompanied an official request by then-President Nelson Mandela to have the remains of Saartjie Baartman returned to South Africa in 1994, her story may be the most notorious case of African trafficking never to have been named as such, but Saartjie Baartman's experience of recruitment by deception and cross-border transportation for sexual exploitation is one common to millions of women and children worldwide.

Southern Africa hosts a diverse range of human trafficking activities, from the global operations of Chinese triad groups and Russian 'mafia', to the local trade in persons across land borders perpetrated by local syndicates. The region's young women and children are especially vulnerable to the recruitment tactics of traffickers because civil unrest and economic deprivation leave them with few opportunities at home, and make migration a natural and common solution. South Africa, the region's most prosperous country, is an appealing lure. As an historical magnet for job-seekers in Southern Africa, its porous borders make it the obvious destination for migrants and asylum-seekers and, considering its flourishing sex industry, for traffickers as well.

From August 2002 to February 2003, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a research assessment of the trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation in Southern Africa. The methodology was based primarily on interviews with trafficking victims, sex workers, traffickers, police and government officials, grassroots NGOs, and the media. The South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)'s *Special Assignment* programme was largely responsible for documenting and researching the cases and trends of trafficking in Mozambique. Elsewhere, IOM researchers conducted 232 interviews, twenty-five of these with trafficked women and children from eleven countries.

The major findings may be summarized as follows:

- Refugees are both victims and perpetrators of trafficking to South Africa. As male refugees encounter unemployment and xenophobia in South Africa, some choose to recruit female relatives from their countries of origin to South Africa. These women are usually 25 years and older, married and have children. Individual refugee traffickers are assisted by ethnically-based syndicates in delivering a recruiting letter to the victim in her country of origin, escorting her to South Africa, and sexually assaulting her as an initiation to sex work should she resist upon arrival. The refugee trafficker takes the earnings the woman receives as a sex worker and, to protect his investment, he assists her in applying for refugee status to prevent deportation if police detain her.
- In Lesotho, children from rural areas gravitate to Maseru to escape domestic violence, and the effects of HIV/AIDS. As street children, they are coerced or forcibly abducted by white men before being taken across the border with the consent of border officials to border towns and asparagus farms in the Eastern Free State. There they are held captive in private houses where they are sexually and sadistically assaulted over several days by small groups of men. These children are finally returned to the border, or deposited on the streets of towns in the Eastern Free State to find their own way home. Street children in Maseru are also trafficked by long-distance truck drivers, who use them as sex slaves on their routes. These children travel as far as Cape Town, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.
- Mozambican victims include both girls and young women between the ages of 14 and 24. They are offered jobs as waitresses or sex workers in Johannesburg, and pay their traffickers ZAR 500 to smuggle them across the border in minibus taxis either at Komatipoort or Ponta do Ouro. They stay in transit houses along South Africa's border with Mozambique and Swaziland for one night where they are sexually assaulted as an initiation for the sex work that awaits them. Once in Johannesburg, some are sold to brothels in the

Central Business District (CBD) for ZAR 1000. Others are sold as slaves on private order for ZAR 550, or shipped around to mineworkers on the West Rand as ‘wives’ for ZAR 650. An estimated 1000 Mozambican victims are recruited, transported, and exploited in this way every year, earning traffickers approximately ZAR 1 million annually.

- Malawi is characterized by three different trafficking patterns. *Firstly*, Malawian businesswomen recruit young women to pursue employment or educational opportunities in Europe. Sometimes payment is made to the victim’s parents. Upon arrival in the Netherlands, the victim is sold to a Nigerian madam for US\$10 000, and told that she must work as a sex-worker to pay off a debt of US\$40 000. The Nigerian madam will ask for her underwear, hair, and nail clippings in a ritual that threatens death by magic if the victim does not cooperate. The victim is then sold to another Nigerian agent from Belgium, Germany, or Italy, or rented to local brothels. One brothel in the Netherlands brands with an identifying mark the sex slaves who work there. If the victim does not perform sexually to the satisfaction of the brothel owner, she is beaten, and given sex lessons, or resold. *Secondly*, both girls and boys may be recruited in the holiday resorts along Lake Malawi by European sex tourists, who pay money to the children’s parents with promises of educational opportunities in Europe. These children may then be featured in pornographic videos that are transmitted over the Internet with the children’s names and contact details included. In Europe, the children may be sexually exploited in private homes, or sold to pedophile rings. *Thirdly*, women and girl children are recruited along major transportation routes in Malawi by long distance truckers who promise marriage, jobs, or educational opportunities in South Africa. Once in Johannesburg, the victim is held as the trafficker’s sex slave in a flat in the CBD, and he will bring clients to the flat who will pay him to have sex with her. Malawian businesswomen also traffic women and girl children overland to brothels in Johannesburg.

- Recruited by Thai agents in Thailand, victims may be unwitting young women from rural Thailand, or ageing female sex workers from Bangkok. The former are promised restaurant jobs, while the latter are told of the money to be earned in sex work in South Africa. They travel by air, either directly from Bangkok, or through Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore to Johannesburg International Airport (JIA), where they are met by a Thai or South African agent who sells them to brothels throughout the country. Victims from Thailand are told that they must earn US\$7500 for their freedom, and they are confined and forced to work 12 – 16 hours a day, even when ill, until the debt is repaid. South African clients may marry victims by buying their contracts, although some are forced to continue doing sex work after the marriage to earn profits for their husbands.
- Triad-linked Chinese or Taiwanese agents recruit Chinese women by promising work in Chinese-owned businesses in South Africa, or the prospect of studying in English language schools. Women may even pay to be smuggled out of China. When recruited to work in Chinese-owned restaurants, clubs, or on fishing vessels in South Africa, they are forced into sex work indefinitely. If they come to South Africa to study English, they are often allowed to complete their courses before being told that they have a US\$12 500 debt that they must repay by doing sex work. In either case, these Chinese women have no freedom of movement, and their traffickers take their earnings. In addition to being a destination country for Chinese trafficking victims, South Africa is also a transit country for others who are transported onwards to Europe or the United States.
- Russian and Bulgarian mafias traffic Russian and other Eastern European women on South African visas fraudulently obtained in Moscow to upscale South African brothels. These Eastern European women are promised jobs as waitresses, dancers, strippers, and hostesses in South Africa, but are not told that they must pay a debt of US\$2000 per month for six months or more as sex workers until they arrive in South Africa. If they

refuse to cooperate, they and their families back at home are threatened with violence.

Despite the immense profit trafficking for sexual exploitation generates for criminal syndicates, and the lawlessness and social and political disarray to which they contribute, this contemporary slave trade in women and children has yet to be addressed adequately in Southern Africa. To curtail trafficking in persons in the region requires the cooperation of the different states affected to criminalize the trade, share information, protect victims, prosecute traffickers, and raise public awareness in source, transit, and destination countries. Just as organized crime exploits the opportunities presented by globalisation to extend this modern slave trade, so must states, intergovernmental agencies, and civil society exploit that same advantage to turn moral condemnation into collective action.

Pretoria, May 2003

PROLOGUE

Baartman was made to parade naked along a 'stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper and exhibited like a wild beast, being obliged to walk, stand or sit as he ordered'....she was depicted as a wild animal in a cage, dancing for her keeper (Insane Tree Promotions).

Saartjie Baartman was a twenty-one year old South African Griqua woman employed as a servant on a farm near Cape Town. She was already past the traditional age of marriage among her people, and had few, if any, prospects of improving her condition, when a visiting English surgeon, Dr. William Dunlop, promised her fame, fortune, and freedom in a far away land. Baartman readily accepted his offer, and traveled with him to London by ship in 1810.

What awaited her in London was neither fame nor fortune nor freedom; the doctor had had something quite different in mind. Fascinated by her elongated labia and large buttocks, neither of which were uncommon physical features for the people of the Cape, Dunlop chose to exhibit her in the nude in front of large crowds of Londoners, who paid one shilling each to gawk at the "Hottentot Venus" from Africa.

Whether Baartman herself received any of the profits of her exploitation is doubtful. Without family or friends, or the linguistic and socio-cultural background that she needed to fend for herself in Europe, she later turned to prostitution in order to survive. When she died, abandoned and alone in France, only six years after leaving Cape Town, her body was dissected, her skeleton was removed, and her brain and genitals were pickled and displayed as curiosities in the *Musee de l'Homme* in Paris for the next 160 years (Davie, 2002).

With the surge of publicity that accompanied an official request by then-President Nelson Mandela to have the remains of Saartjie Baartman returned to South Africa in 1994, her story may be the most notorious case of African trafficking never to have been named as such, but her experience of recruitment by deception and cross-border transportation for sexual exploitation is one common to millions of women and children worldwide (Marquis, 2003: A3). Typically lured by promises of well-paying jobs abroad, many victims willingly accept enticing offers made by human traffickers without

realising the full nature of their future employment, or the conditions in which they will work. Once firmly trapped within an illegal migration environment, and disadvantaged by their foreign surroundings, they are forced into sex work, or other forms of bonded labour, to earn profits for their traffickers. Victims of trafficking are prevented from escaping by security guards, by violence or threats of violence, by having their identity documents withheld, and very often, by their unfamiliarity with the foreign environment.

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TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN & CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION

▪ General Overview

Saartjie Baartman is one of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of women and children who have been trafficked to, from, and through the African continent for at least a hundred years, and for considerably longer if the African slave trade to the Americas is considered a forerunner to the contemporary trafficking phenomenon. The slave trade depended primarily on wars, raids, and other chaotic theatres of forced abduction, while contemporary trafficking relies to a greater extent on deception and false promises. Despite this difference, the practices are similar because the victim's exploitation is facilitated largely by her relocation from a familiar environment to an unfamiliar one.

Just as plantation owners in the Americas preferred slaves from distant Africa, expecting their displacement and resultant disorientation to limit their options and deter escape, so too do modern traffickers prefer to exploit their victims far from home. Most absorbing for historians, perhaps, is the similarity between the scales of the trades. Between 1540 and 1850, an estimated 15 million Africans were transported to the Americas, while some recent estimates indicate that as many as four million women and children may be trafficked worldwide every year (Marquis, 2003: A3).

Conducted over a period of seven months, from August 2002 through February 2003, IOM's research assessment of human trafficking in Southern Africa reveals a diverse range of trafficking activity, from the well-known global operations of Chinese triad societies and Russian and Bulgarian mafias that touch this region as an afterthought, to the local land-border trade in African women and children. The focus of this paper tends towards these latter – the trafficking of Africans by Africans within and out of Southern Africa – about which little is known, and less has been written.

▪ Definitions

For the purpose of this research assessment, IOM relied on the definition of trafficking in persons that is provided in the Optional Protocol to the *United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime*. Article 3 of the Protocol reads as follows:

(a) “Trafficking in Persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring 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.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered “trafficking in persons” even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) “Child” shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Despite the apparent wide scope of the UN definition, a range of related criminal activities occurring in Southern Africa often challenged IOM researchers to identify them as human trafficking for want of a better appellation. At the same time, the research team has been reluctant to follow the global tendency to interpret the trafficking definition too broadly out of a concern that an overly-broad reading or an attempt to cluster an assortment of other crimes within the trafficking definition may ultimately result in distracting assistance designed uniquely for victims of a more narrowly defined ‘trafficking’.

▪ **Background**

In Southern Africa, scarce but persistent documentation suggests that human trafficking is a contemporary form of slavery that has existed for at least a century between Southern Africa and Europe, and within Southern Africa itself. At the turn of the 19th century, young women were being trafficked into Cape Town from Europe as part of, but distinguishable from, an increased flow of European prostitutes to the city (van Heyningen, 1984:186; Bristow, 1977:173). Others were trafficked to South African mines to meet the demand for European women by white mineworkers (Bristow, 1977:181). In 1966, *Jeune Afrique* reported that some 6, 000 young African girls were being trafficked to Europe each year, and that many of these ended up as sex slaves in French ports (Barlay, 1968:32). In 1990, Anti-Slavery International (ASI) confirmed that children from Mozambique were being trafficked into South Africa where they were sold as “sex chattels” (Vines, 1991), and a year later, ASI noted fifteen cases of young women and girl children who had been trafficked from Mozambique into South Africa, primarily as concubines for South African men (McKibbon, 1992). Most recently, a Cape Town-based NGO published one of the first studies of the trafficking phenomenon in South Africa, noting that victims trafficked into South Africa include women and children from all corners of the African continent, and abroad (Molo Songololo, 2000:21).

▪ **Vulnerabilities**

Despite its rising profile in many parts of the world, and periodic efforts made to raise public awareness to the problem in Southern Africa, the region remains fertile ground for traffickers who capitalize on the vulnerabilities created by war, endemic poverty, minimal education, unemployment, and a general lack of opportunity for much of the region’s population. Women are the most vulnerable, with many having been ‘sexualized’ and/or ‘commoditized’ as young girls within the context of cultural practices that challenge their sexual integrity. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also having its impact, leaving many widows, or orphan-headed households; often teenagers who must provide for a number of younger siblings. Also significant is the effect the region’s on-going food crisis has had in exacerbating the

vulnerability of households, so that it is not uncommon to read stories in the press about parents who have sold their children to passers-by, believing that ‘nowhere could the conditions be worse than here’ (Peta, 2002).

But poverty, unemployment, or lack of opportunity are not sufficient conditions for trafficking to occur; a criminal syndicate is also typically present to exploit the latent vulnerabilities they create. Into this tumult steps the trafficker who, like Dr. William Dunlop did in 1810, offers an escape with realistic promises of opportunities abroad. For communities in Southern Africa which have to deal with difficult or desperate circumstances, migration seems a natural solution, particularly since so many have returned from South Africa fashionably dressed, with stories of wealth and opportunity to be had in the City of Gold.*

▪ **Organized Crime and Law Enforcement**

The range of organized criminal activity in Southern Africa is vast. The Institute for Security Studies (ISS) reported in 1999 that as many as 500 organized criminal groups were operating in South Africa at the time, many with African and global networks which facilitate the cross-border flow of illegal goods and people (Gastrow, 1999). Some of the more notorious, such as the West African/Nigerian networks, Chinese triad societies, and the Russian and Bulgarian mafia, are known to manage global trafficking empires, while other, ethnically-coherent enterprises operate on a smaller scale, using their comparative advantage to traffic women and children across particular borders where they have developed networks of official and unofficial contacts.

It is not known how much human trafficking profits organized crime in Southern Africa, but the conservative global estimate is approximately US\$7 billion per year, making the trade one of the largest sources of profit for organized crime worldwide; only drug trafficking and the weapons trade may be more lucrative (Miko, 2000). While penalties for drug trafficking and weapons smuggling tend to be severe, many countries have yet to criminalize trafficking in persons, despite the obvious consequence of failing to do so.

* i.e. Johannesburg

The money made from the sexual exploitation and often enslavement of trafficked women enriches transnational criminal networks. Trafficking in women has arguably the highest profit margin and lowest risk of almost any type of illegal activity (Hughes, 2000:9).

The recurrent civil and political unrest and gross economic disparities that characterize Southern Africa have long generated a potent mix of push and pull factors that, when coupled with borders so porous as to be nearly irrelevant, have ensured a consistent southward flow of documented and undocumented migrants. In most cases, victims of trafficking are a nearly indistinguishable part of these flows, typically displaced from their communities or motivated by dreams of stability and prosperity abroad. The women and children who are lured by traffickers are neither particularly naïve, nor are the choices they make necessarily foolish, and yet the exploitation they endure is severe. Many are trapped by unexpected debt that they are forced to pay off in the sex industry. For others, there is no pretence of debt; they are slaves, forced into sex work for the financial and/or physical benefit of their masters. In either case, their working hours are long, their right to refuse clients limited, and their freedom of movement severely restricted.

Most countries in Southern Africa have yet to ratify the Trafficking Protocol, and the absence of domestic anti-trafficking legislation offers law enforcement little incentive to pursue the criminal syndicates responsible for the activity. Indeed, in many parts of the region, law enforcement officials are unable to distinguish between human trafficking, which culminates in the sustained exploitation of the victim, and human smuggling, where a client pays a smuggler to assist with an undocumented border crossing. Typically, police and immigration officials who do identify trafficking victims are required to treat them within an illegal immigration regime that offers immediate deportation as its primary solution. Southern Africa also offers little in the way of rehabilitative support for trafficked women and children, and the illegal status of most victims gives them little motivation to seek it. Many shelters for battered women in South Africa, for example, require that an applicant produce a South African Identity Document before she is allowed access.

Increasingly concerned by the excessive human rights violations inherent in the exploitation of trafficking victims and the substantial profits such exploitation delivers to criminal syndicates,

many countries beyond Southern Africa are creating and implementing legislation aimed at preventing the trade, protecting the victims, and prosecuting the perpetrators. This is an example that the countries of Southern Africa should follow.

▪ **Objectives and Strategic Framework: Limits and Methodology**

The impetus for this research was the IOM-sponsored Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) programme. Initiated by IOM and its partners¹ in 1999, MIDSA aims to provide a forum for senior officials from the member-states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to discuss migration issues of common concern. In March 2001, delegates to the MIDSA Workshop in Gaborone, Botswana, identified the assessment of trafficking in persons in the region as a pressing need. Pursuant to this request, IOM's Regional Office for Southern Africa proposed a six-month Research Study on Trafficking in the SADC Region, which was eventually financed through IOM's own funding mechanism.

Given the quick-impact nature of the six-month assessment, and the impression created by several Southern African-based NGOs that an ambitious assistance programme was urgently needed, IOM narrowed the parameters of its research to the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation only. Although there is considerable evidence suggesting the existence of trafficking for other kinds of forced labour, and of men, IOM targeted its assessment on trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation largely because of the extreme vulnerability of such victims, its highly abusive and dehumanizing nature, and the Organization's global expertise in responding to this form of trafficking. IOM further chose to focus on the practice of cross-border trafficking, where the Organization has some comparative advantage, rather than include in-country trafficking with which a number of local NGOs have substantial experience.

At the outset, IOM assumed that South Africa was the primary country of destination for victims of trafficking in the region, given its pockets of extreme wealth, its first class financial and transportation

¹ I.e. The Southern African Migration Project (SAMP); International Migration Programme (IMP); and United States' Immigration and Naturalization Service (US – INS).

infrastructure, and the growing influence of organized crime. As a research strategy, IOM researchers planned to spend three months in four of South Africa's major cities – Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Pretoria – identifying and interviewing victims and other sources whose stories could then be traced back along the trafficking routes to the source countries in the Southern African region. During the second phase of the research, IOM intended to locate source communities in the region to assess the reasons for, and extent of their vulnerability. While this two-part strategy proved successful for the most part, some flexibility was required, and the researchers were often required to return to South Africa during the second phase to fill gaps in the data. As a result, field researchers concentrated on Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Swaziland, at the expense of other countries equally deserving of study, such as Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but about which information was uncovered in South Africa much later. The project began in August 2002. IOM conducted 232 interviews and identified 25 victims; the first of these was in October 2002, with the number multiplying exponentially every succeeding month.

The report that follows is divided into two parts. The first part, 'the Trafficking in African Women and Children', focuses on Refugee Trafficking in South Africa, Child Trafficking from Lesotho, Trafficking from Southern Mozambique, and Malawi as a Source Country. The second part, 'Extra-Regional Trafficking into South Africa', looks at the Trafficking of Thai, Chinese, and Eastern European Women to South Africa. In each chapter, a trafficking flow is discussed in terms of the conditions contributing to the particular vulnerability of the victim, the recruitment strategies employed by the trafficker, the transportation routes and methods, the resulting sexual exploitation and the pressures and mechanisms used to control the victim. The report concludes with a brief narrative summary, followed by IOM's principal findings and recommendations.

Carried out over a six-month period, beginning in August 2002 and ending in February 2003, this research assessment does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of human trafficking in Southern Africa, but rather to construct a snapshot of the trade to which IOM and others may add with future research and operational efforts, and to make recommendations that governments in the region may wish to consider.

PART I. TRAFFICKING IN AFRICAN WOMEN & CHILDREN

2. REFUGEE TRAFFICKING TO SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Introduction

Cape Town stands out as the principal destination point for trafficked victims from refugee-producing countries, although they are undoubtedly trafficked to other South African cities as well. As South Africa's oldest city, and a seaport, it is not surprising that the Mother City has a long history of prostitution and trafficking from the earliest days of white settlement and the introduction of slaves into the Cape Colony. A register of prostitutes living in Cape Town dated October 1868 indicates that there were 213 female prostitutes from varied backgrounds living and working in a variety of brothels and bars in Cape Town at that time (van Heyningen, 1984). By 1890 an influx of women from Europe brought significant changes to the sex industry, including the professionalisation of the trade, and the involvement of organized crime. Trafficking for the purpose of commercial sexual exploitation surfaced shortly thereafter.

The most notorious case was that of Julienne Jacqmin, an 18-year old Belgian girl who was brought to South Africa by her sister Antoinette and Antoinette's fiancé Joseph Davis. On a brief visit to Paris Julienne found herself abducted to Cape Town via London. Only when she was placed in a house in Vendeleur Street did she understand her position, even then she refused to co-operate until Davis had raped her and promised to send her money home to her family (van Heyningen, 1984).

Trafficked for prostitution by her sister and her sister's fiancé, Julienne finally escaped and was given refuge at the Salvation Army before returning to Belgium. Julienne's experience, which was the first of two cases recorded in detail at that time, attracted very little attention in South Africa and even less when she eventually returned to Belgium.

More than a hundred years later, Cape Town continues to harbour a sex industry that is increasingly lucrative and international, and plays host to refugee traffickers who recruit and transport their family members from their home countries for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

2.2 Vulnerabilities

Decades of war, civil strife, and natural disasters have displaced and left homeless millions of people in dozens of African countries, leaving many to struggle daily for the food and water, clothing, and shelter necessary for basic survival. Southern Africa has not escaped this trauma; Mozambique, Angola, and the Great Lakes Region have produced more than 10 per cent of the 4.2 million refugees circulating in Africa today. For many, South Africa is seen as an ideal country in which to seek asylum because of the relative economic prosperity the country enjoys in the region, and because of its proximity to many conflict. Despite its wealth, the population of 23 000 refugees hosted by South Africa remains small in relation to the numbers hosted by neighbouring states (Valji, 2000); Zambia hosts approximately 250 000 refugees, and Tanzania another 500 000.

Mobile populations are always more vulnerable to exploitation than stable populations. Away from home and all that is familiar, peoples that have been forcibly displaced are among the most vulnerable of these, both in their countries of origin and in host countries. Many women and children from refugee-producing countries, in particular, have already survived not only the trauma of war and displacement, but also sexual violence and torture. In addition, the vulnerability created by their mobility is compounded typically by a traditional limitation of their rights in favour of male members of their communities.

African women in particular, are profoundly affected by the Continent's deteriorating macro economic situation, deepening poverty, and the re-occurrence of conflicts and wars. Gender-based violence remains pervasive, increasingly intertwined with situations of conflict and the precarious economic situation that includes new forms of exploitation, such as trafficking of women and girls (UNIFEM, 2002).

While women move, and are moved, for a variety of reasons – political, socio-economic, and environmental, among others – traditional gender inequalities have a great influence over when, where, and how women migrate. A woman may move from her home country partly because she believes that a better life awaits her elsewhere, but also upon request, because of her conditioned cultural subordination to male authority. Desperation makes women from refugee-producing countries highly vulnerable to the deceptive recruitment tactics of traffickers, particularly male family relations.

I was married at 15 years to a man who was older. He treated me with cruelty and terrible violence. After he had stabbed me, I returned to my parents. My mother informed my uncle, my father's brother who had moved to South Africa, and he said 'send her to me in Cape Town. We can live together and I have a good job for her'. My mother said that I must go and help them.²

UNHCR estimates that five per cent of refugees in South Africa are women (Valji, 2000). While many of these may ultimately resort to prostitution to survive, they are to be distinguished from victims of trafficking who are recruited by deception, coercion, or force in their home countries to be sexually exploited in South Africa.

The profile of victims of trafficking from refugee-producing countries varies widely. They are markedly older than trafficking victims elsewhere, aged between 25 and 44, and are often widowed, divorced, or single parents with little economic means. Older victims are typically married and educated, while younger ones are orphaned by war or HIV/AIDS. All come from cultural backgrounds in which gender roles favour their fathers, husbands, boyfriends, and sons. With war and other disasters fragmenting and dispersing families, many have assumed the role of breadwinner and *de facto* head of their households as male relatives fall victim to violence and forced migration.

Prior to being lured to South Africa, many women from refugee-producing countries survive by foraging for food and firewood in the rural areas where they live, and they earn a small income from selling vegetables in nearby markets. Others are assisted by sporadic financial remittances from family members living abroad. They are particularly vulnerable to roving bands of soldiers who often rape and rob them of what few supplies they have.

² Interview with trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 22 October 2002.

I went and bought things out of the capital and brought it into the capital and sold them. It could be jewelry or it could be corn or green beans. Because in the capital food is expensive so it is better to buy out of the capital and sell in the capital, then when the rebels came they took all our money and I was without any money or any work when my husband sent for me, so I went.³

2.3 Recruitment*

South Africa's refugee population is overwhelmingly male at 95 per cent. Many of these men have fled the violence and persecution in their homelands only to find that neither the law, nor the widespread xenophobia among South Africans, make basic survival in South Africa easy. Without easy access to employment, and frequently required to stand for many days in long queues to renew their asylum-seeker permits or wait years to have their status determined, the promise of a good life in South Africa, and their dreams of prosperity are soon replaced by a new struggle to survive.

The battle to find work, and to integrate into what can be a hostile South African society makes life unpredictable and dangerous for refugee men. Many turn to their ethnic 'clan'⁴ for protection, support, and access to opportunities. While the clan offers shelter, and shares income and income-generating activities, this kinship network also provides the opportunity to make and retain contact with family at home through members involved in cross-border trade of goods between their home countries and South Africa.

Harsh living conditions among refugee men in South Africa, high unemployment, and the clan system, often coalesce to facilitate extra-legal survival strategies and tactics, such as the trafficking of women for commercial sexual exploitation. The *modus operandi* of the refugee trafficker is straightforward and easily executed. "She didn't know she was being brought here to do prostitution. But her husband knew - it's what he had planned because his friends were doing the same thing to their women. That's where he got the plan."⁵

³ Interview with trafficking victim from the DRC: Cape Town, 4 January 2003.

* Of the thirteen women interviewed for this chapter, only one – from the DRC – did not have refugee status in South Africa.

⁴ Term used by women interviewed to describe groupings of refugees from the same ethnic communities.

⁵ Interview with trafficking victim from Angola: Cape Town, 5 January 2003.

The sexual exploitation of women, as a means of earning an income, soon becomes an attractive and viable option for some refugee men, particularly those living in cities where there is an obviously profitable sex industry. While this option may sometimes require a reversal of gender roles to allow the woman to become the family breadwinner, the male retains his traditional authority and control over the earnings.

“A lot of husbands are working out that there is a lot of money to be made in prostitution in Cape Town, so they are calling their women to come and work in Cape Town. They take mothers away from their children and they force them to do this thing which they have never done before.”⁶

The trafficker’s role in recruitment is both simple and low cost, without any risk to himself. He typically finances part of the cost of his female relative’s transport to South Africa, while she is expected to make up the difference with assistance from her family at home. Women take this risk firmly believing that they will be able to reimburse and support their families once they start working in South Africa.

He sent me a letter, ‘Sell everything and come quickly. I have a good job waiting for you here in Cape Town. Come first and send for your children later.’ So I sold all my valuables in the world and I got US\$600. I took US\$500 for the journey and left US\$100 for my children. I thought that soon I can send for them before the US\$100 runs out.⁷

Although the recruitment of the female relative is carried out primarily by the male family member in South Africa, the clan may play a role both in the recruitment and transportation. Clan members who travel to trade goods between the home country and the country of destination may assist with the delivery of a letter that ultimately deceives the woman to leave her home, and sometimes her children, for a job that awaits her in South Africa. In addition, clan members are often the first to exploit the woman sexually upon her arrival in South Africa.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Interview with trafficking victim from the DRC: Cape Town, 10 December 2002.

I will never be safe in Cape Town. You cannot find me a safe place in Johannesburg or Durban, even in the whole of Africa. I will never be safe again.⁸

2.4 Routes and Transportation

Although many women from refugee-producing countries travel alone to South Africa, some are accompanied by their husbands, boyfriends, or by the clan escort who delivered the recruitment letter. “We travelled together. He’s the one who paid for everything. He paid my money and everything. We came direct. We came by road”.⁹ They use a variety of modes of transportation including cars, long distance trucks, taxis, boats, and some travel on foot. For those who are escorted, the journey may be safer than those who travel alone, although it is not uncommon for the escort to take advantage of the victim’s vulnerability en route.

Women are trafficked from a range of refugee-producing countries, and the routes they take to South Africa vary considerably. Their journeys may take days, weeks or months during which they usually cross international borders without the proper travel documents.

I walked from Bukavu to Burundi. Then I took the boat for two days to Mbala in Zambia, then to Lusaka by taxi. In Lusaka I paid for a visa to Zimbabwe. After arriving in Harare by truck, I left for Messina where I took the train to Johannesburg and then to Cape Town. For the whole trip I paid US\$500.¹⁰

From traditional refugee-producing countries such as Angola, those in the Great Lakes Region, and others further north, local guides will assist migrants to cross borders illegally into Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia, and from there into Malawi, Mozambique, and South Africa in exchange for a small fee. Zimbabwean borders are relatively expensive to cross in this way and migrants report having to bribe border officials with as much as US\$50 to enter or leave Zimbabwe. Botswana’s borders are the most difficult to cross as the officials are said to be

⁸ Interview with trafficking victim from the DRC: Cape Town, 4 February 2003.

⁹ Interview with trafficking victim from Ethiopia: [Location withheld], 10 January 2003.

¹⁰ Interview with trafficking victim from Rwanda: [Location withheld], 23 December 2002.

more vigilant and less corruptible, particularly at the Tlokweng Gate, which often means taking a circuitous route to avoid detection. South African borders are comparatively easy to cross, with the most porous points of entry reported to be at Beitbridge, and Komatipoort.¹¹



Whether travelling with or without escort, many refugee women start their journey on foot and risk travel through areas infested with roving bands of soldiers and criminal gangs. If they are caught, they are often subject to rape, mutilation and murder. When accompanied by their children, their movements are slowed and risks increased.

I came through Rwanda, through the forests with my children. We slept when we could. At times, we were followed by rebels with machetes. We lived in fear and we ran faster and faster

¹¹ As recounted by thirteen victims from refugee-producing countries in interviews conducted between October 2002 and February 2003.

because of that fear. When we reached Tanzania, I felt, now, we could live again.¹²

To protect their babies and young children from wild animals, mothers may wrap them in bundles, and tie them high in the trees at night. If attacked by rebels, the mother may have to flee, leaving the child trapped in its place of safety. Occasionally children are left to die because mothers are unable to find their way back or are caught and murdered by the rebels. “It was the end of the world, we walked through the forest for days, we saw babies in the trees, half eaten by vultures...terrible things.”¹³

Despite having left their warring homelands behind them, women remain vulnerable throughout the remainder of their journey.

In 2000 my husband sent for me, I came by an illegal route through the forest with lots of war. My life was in terrible danger. I saw some terrible things. I came with truckers via Kinshasa, Lubumbashi then to Namibia at Sesheke. I crossed the Zambezi River by boat. I got into a truck and paid a white guy to take me by truck to Upington. But he raped me, threw me out at the border because he said I did not have any papers. He took my money and my food and would not let me back in the truck.¹⁴

Many are raped and robbed several times before reaching their relatives in South Africa, and men, notably long-distance truckers, are reported to require sexual favours in exchange for any kind of assistance.¹⁵ Refugee women who do provide them are often robbed of their possessions and dumped by the roadside before they reach their agreed destination.

2.5 Exploitation

Once in South Africa, a woman recruited from a refugee-producing country will travel directly to Johannesburg or Cape Town

¹² Interview with trafficking victim from the DRC: [Location withheld], 22 October 2002. Her journey began in the DRC, and she passed through Rwanda, Tanzania, and Mozambique before she arrived in South Africa. She was raped and robbed twice en route.

¹³ Interview with a trafficking victim from the DRC: Cape Town, 4 February 2003.

¹⁴ Interview with trafficking victim from the Republic of Congo: Cape Town, 5 February 2003.

¹⁵ See Chapter 5: Malawi as a Source Country.

where the trafficker will meet her. Initially, she may receive a warm welcome, lasting from a few days to two weeks during which time the trafficker will escort her to the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) to complete an asylum application. While traffickers elsewhere typically use the illegal immigration status of their victims as a means of control, the refugee trafficker prefers to legalize the stay of his victim in South Africa as a means of securing his investment, particularly since he does not have a near-endless pool of eligible female relatives that he can exploit. His victims are always known to him, and are most often close family relations. An asylum-seeker's permit or refugee status will protect her from deportation, especially if he forces her into sex work on the street where she is more likely to encounter police. Shortly after temporary legal status has been issued, the trafficker forces his victim into commercial sex work.

When we arrived, my husband received us well. After two weeks he went to the Home Affairs to get our documents. Then he said to her, 'now don't think that you can just sit here and be a housewife. You must sort out and find work here. I am going to show you what work you must do.'¹⁶

My uncle was good to me. I stayed with him and he introduced me to his friends. He fed me and after one week he said, 'yes...now you must go and find the money to feed us and to pay me for my troubles.' He told me I must do the prostitution thing.¹⁷

The refugee woman is typically disbelieving as the reality of the situation sets in. After a hazardous journey through a number of countries, often having being raped and robbed along the way, she arrives at her destination expecting her male relative to protect and support her. She is disoriented, having only been in South Africa for a few weeks and unable to speak the language. She knows only a few people, all of whom may be friends of her trafficker. She is completely dependent upon her male relative partly because of the traditional authority he wields, and even more so because the victim is culturally, linguistically and socially isolated. This realization leaves her with little choice but to comply with his demands.

¹⁶ Interview with trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 23 December 2002.

¹⁷ Interview with trafficking victim from Rwanda: Cape Town, 22 October 2002.

‘Here in South Africa there is a business that we do, and I am not going to be jealous, but I am going to show you what business it is.’ One night he took me to Sea Point. I saw other women standing there in short skirts. My husband said ‘you see those women? This is what you are going to do. When a white or black man approaches you, give him this condom and you go into his room and this is what you do with the condom.’ I was terrified that first day.¹⁸

The trafficker’s clan plays an important role in breaking the will of the victim. When a woman resists the enormous pressure with which he makes his demands that she become a sex worker, clan members will force her into compliance by becoming her first paying clients. Not only does the frequent rape of the victim serve to expose her to sex work, but it also undermines her resistance by making her feel used and dehumanized. Her children may also be used to force her into compliance. “I began to feel my body, my life, myself were nothing, I can never ever be the same. My children still look at me ‘Mama, I am hungry’. They don’t know about this thing. They don’t know me now.”¹⁹

Once broken in this manner the victim is usually taken back to the streets without further resistance.

He told me I must do the prostitution thing with the men and he will take me to the street and I refused I cannot do this thing, I said to my uncle. I refused and then he made me to sleep with his friends and I discovered that the friends are paying my uncle. After he took me to the streets again.²⁰

At first, the trafficker escorts the victim to the streets where she joins other women engaged in prostitution. Eventually, however, the victim is left to work unsupervised, but will be subjected to harsh physical punishment if ever she returns home without adequate earnings. “He said you have to make much money. There are many tourists. They like you. We make money. You make much money or I kill you”²¹

¹⁸ Interview with a trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 5 February 2003.

¹⁹ Interview with trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 22 October 2002.

²⁰ Interview with trafficking victim from Rwanda: Cape Town, 22 November 2002.

²¹ Interview with trafficking victim from Angola: Cape Town, 4 February 2003.

Cape Town and Durban are said to have the most potential for substantial earnings because of their high profile as South Africa's premier tourist destinations, and Cape Town's appeal is further bolstered by its reputation as the sex capital of South Africa. Refugee victims merge into the sex scenes of these cities, joining others who are pimped by gangs or are on the streets of their own accord. Competition for clients is fierce, both on the streets as well as in surrounding clubs and escort agencies. Refugee victims work long hours and in dangerous conditions to earn the nightly sum demanded by their traffickers. They are subject to abuse by clients who may refuse to pay them, and police who sometimes take their earnings, but they face violence should they return home without the required sum. "He beat me, even if I give him two or three hundred rand. I don't even eat food. I just give him...let him go and buy the food."²² Apart from the sex work on the streets by night, some refugee women are also sexually exploited by individuals within their own ethnic communities by day. This further isolates them, and acts as a powerful disincentive for the victims to attempt to escape or seek alternate solutions.

After some time the situation may seem normal. While the trafficker networks and socializes within the clan, the victim may make friends with the partners of other clan members, who are often sexually exploited in the same manner as the victim herself. The sexual exploitation of wives, girlfriends and family members is apparently widely known in a number of refugee communities in South Africa.

I know lots of women in the same situation ...the same stories as mine...I could take you to lots of women who are suffering. The men are doing terrible things to us...some of these women have even gone to the police and they have been given no solutions.²³

While their slave-like conditions may become normal for those who reconcile themselves to lives in South Africa, others will attempt to escape after several months, or even years of sexual slavery; often once they have identified a place of safety outside the community to which they can go. The attempt is rarely successful, and the victim soon discovers that the clan is able to track her down almost immediately through its network of contacts.

²² Interview with trafficking victim from Ethiopia: [Location withheld], 10 January 2003.

²³ Interview with trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 5 January 2003.

So one guy I met at Home Affairs. He said ‘you should not be staying there. It is bad.’ And he sent me to this safe place with other refugee women. But my husband found me and he said, ‘you come back to work with me or I will get the Xhosas to come here to take you and kill you.’ So I moved from that place. I run away, but he follows me. So my friends they tell me, ‘they are looking for you. Hide in a new place.’ But always he finds me. I keep moving, like only yesterday I move to that place and last night he knew already I was there. So today I move again. I don’t know, he can kill me when I am asleep. I am afraid to sleep.²⁴

Refugee women in need of assistance are always referred to the general refugee shelter in Cape Town, known as ‘Bonne Esperance’, since few other South African shelters for abused women can accommodate the special needs of refugee women²⁵: high-level security, translation services to assist with communication and counselling, legal assistance, and English lessons and skills training to facilitate access to employment opportunities.

For refugee women who have been trafficked, neither Bonne Esperance nor most other South African shelters can offer the required combination of refugee support services with the anonymity and security needed to protect them from the trafficker and his clan. With so few options, and in fear of what might happen to them should they be discovered, victims who have attempted escape often return to their traffickers of their own accord.

I have to go back to my husband, even though I have been afraid to go home for two days because when I come with no money he beats me and locks me up. I have to make money today because I have heard he is looking for me. I have a five-year-old daughter who I want to take to safety, but where can we be safe? Who can guarantee me my safety even in a shelter? Cape Town is extremely dangerous. I can’t believe that anyone can guarantee us

²⁴ Interview with trafficking victim from Angola: Cape Town, 4 January 2003.

²⁵ Five out of eight South African shelters for abused women contacted indicated that they felt their programme would be inappropriate for refugee women for several reasons including language and communication, and length of programmes required, which they felt would be too short for refugee women who had no support outside of such shelters. Many felt that shelters were specifically for South African citizens only. Three shelters included refugee women as part of their target group.

safety. As long as I am in Cape Town where this man is I will never be safe.²⁶

The women usually return to lives of sexual slavery. Insecure in their own communities because of the power of the clan network, some trafficking victims from refugee-producing countries remain captive within their communities until they become too ill to do sex work any longer. For others, the trafficking nightmare continues.

He's got friends here. I always hide from his friends. I always...because the moment they see me they call him and tell him, 'she's here' and he will come after me. I'm scared. That's why I am even hiding. Even I change my name. Now I'm using another name. And before I never used to dress like this. I just used to put on jeans, now I dress different.²⁷

I know he had other women from our home. He said so, and he did not stay with us. Every day he took my money, the money from the children for their food. He had drugs all the time. We had nothing, nothing. Some days I begged for fish or oil or rice from friends.²⁸

I can never feel safe in Cape Town, Johannesburg, or Durban. You don't know the refugee community; they are all where everybody is. Lots of people speak Lingala. I won't feel safety in the country where my husband is. I don't feel security in the whole of Africa. I am tired of this life. We have no choices for safety in this life.²⁹

She is just lying there in a room in the back she cannot move she is naked on the floor. There is no furniture. She has no clothes. The clients come, they pay the husband, and they have sex with her. She just lies there. When the clients complain, he beats her

²⁶ Interview with trafficking victim from DRC: Cape Town, 5 January 2003.

²⁷ Interview with trafficking victim from Ethiopia: [Location withheld], 10 January 2003. She had recently escaped from her trafficker and moved to another South African province where she believes that she is still in danger from members of her community.

²⁸ Interview with trafficking victim from the DRC: Cape Town, 4 January 2003; a mother of three children.

²⁹ Interview with trafficking victim from Angola: Cape Town, 5 February 2003. She is too afraid to make an escape from the sexual slavery she suffers at the hands of her husband and his friends.

again and then locks the door. Everyone knows what he is doing.³⁰

2.6 Conclusion

The struggle to survive in South Africa in the face of unemployment and xenophobia pushes some refugee men to pursue opportunities from within the relative security of the clan, which may entail engaging in illegal activities. The trafficking of female family members for sexual exploitation is one such activity. Although the woman is typically lured by her male relative in South Africa, the clan often plays a pivotal role in her recruitment and transport, and, if necessary, her initiation to sexual slavery. Clan members may also be part of the victim's paying clientele, and will ensure her captivity. Should she escape, the clan will assist in her recapture, and will return her to her trafficker.

The refugee trafficker is a vulnerable individual who preys on his even more vulnerable female relatives to survive. The ethnically-based clan, to which he belongs, emerges as an organized criminal syndicate which will rely on trafficking women and profits earned from other illicit activities to increase their influence in South African society.

³⁰ Interview with trafficking victim from Angola: Cape Town, 5 January 2003. She was reporting on other victims in her community.

3. CHILD TRAFFICKING FROM LESOTHO

3.1 Introduction

“Just as Sesotho transcends Lesotho,” one writer has observed, “the Basotho are a borderland and cross-border people” (Coplan, 2001a:206). Popular imagination would perhaps exclude Basotho women from such a characterization due to their sharply restricted movements to South Africa in the three decades prior to 1994, thus, recognizing as “cross-border people” only generations of Basotho men who have laboured in the country’s mines over the past 100 years. Yet the migration of Basotho women to South Africa - to seek fortune and survival – dates back to the 1870s.

From the turn of the 19th century, Basotho women migrated to South Africa and often engaged in prostitution as a means of escape from oppressive marriages and rural impoverishment in Lesotho. Authorities on both sides of the border did everything to suppress the migration of these “runaway women” to South Africa (Bonner, 1990). Bloemfontein attracted Basotho women “in droves...for the sexual services they could provide” and led to large-scale prostitution in the city and some smaller towns of the eastern Free State (Bonner, 1990). At the same time, large numbers of young Basotho women eloped or were seduced and fled across the border with their lovers, some only to be abandoned later in South Africa. Together with women migrating to South Africa to escape the devastating social and economic effects of the male migrant labour system, they contributed to the “massive flight” of women from Lesotho, which quickly spread to every urban centre in South Africa. By the early 1930s, parts of the Witwatersrand teemed with young, single Basotho women engaged primarily in illicit commercial beer-brewing - and thus they were known as “*skokiaan* queens”³¹ - and prostitution, two activities “that provided an economic base for independent Basotho women’s life and have set the pattern for their urban enterprises ever since (Coplan, 2001a:189).”

The lure of employment remains as powerful today as ever before, and continues to attract Basotho women to South Africa, whether as domestic workers, farm hands or sex workers.

³¹ *Skokiaan* is a type of alcohol brewed illegally by black Africans in South Africa and most often consumed in township *shebeens* (bars).

Retrenchments in the South African mining industry during the 1990s have largely reversed the trend of male labour migration to South Africa and placed added pressure on women to find work there while their men stay home (Coplan, 2001b).³² The internal migration of young women and children in search of employment to Lesotho's border towns is an emerging trend. Despairing of the lack of formal employment, many eventually take up life on the streets. It is on the streets of these border towns, and in Maseru, in particular, where they may fall prey to human traffickers.

3.2 Recruitment*

The Internet website, "Where to Find Sex Worldwide"³³, advises globe-trotting sex tourists that, "Maseru is the place to be for some good action and beautiful girls...If African women are your thing, Lesotho is considered a Mecca." Yet of Maseru's roughly 170 "beautiful girls" (Family Health International, 2001) – and boys - a high percentage are child sex workers, some as young as 13 years of age, who face a constant danger of recruitment by South African child traffickers combing the streets of the capital.

As in other cities in the Southern African region, there is little public awareness in Maseru about the methods used to abduct or lure children into sexual exploitation. The recruiters operate with stealth and discretion, and in a manner calculated not to raise an alarm. Thus, child victims often disappear without a trace.

When I was there one day, I was left alone on the street...I was left alone...two guys came. They were speaking Afrikaans.... They told me, 'Let's go to Ladybrand, I'll give you this and that'. I told them, 'no, I can't go.' So they just took me, they forced me

³² More than 45 000 mining jobs belonging to Basotho were lost in the decade 1989-1999.

* The data gathered for this chapter consisted of interviews with two girls who had been trafficked to South Africa, an interview with Lydia Muso, a social worker at the Lesotho Child Counselling Unit (LCCU) in Maseru, and a study of ten victim files from 2002 as recorded by the LCCU. Of the ten, six were female, and four were male. The average age of females reporting was 17 years, and the average age for males was 16.5 years. The youngest victim was a 14 year old female. All ten cases were reported between 14 March and 19 August 2002. Cases were referred to the LCCU by Lesotho's Department of Social Welfare and the Maseru Urban Police *et al.*

³³ www.dexterhorn.com.

into the car. Then we left. Nobody saw the number plate. Nobody saw anything. But I still remember their faces.³⁴

During a call-in show on Radio Lesotho where child prostitution was being discussed³⁵, a suspected trafficker received instant notoriety when vigilant but angry members of the local community telephoned to describe what they had observed to be the recruitment of children at the Maseru Bridge border post. The suspect, a white South African man, had identified a derelict house near the border post where young girls would often loiter and he was reported to have forced them regularly to cross the border with him, destined for a “specific venue” in Ladybrand where:

He is making a lot of money out of these children who are hanging out there, in the night...[he takes] them over to some white guys in South Africa and they pay him.³⁶

The radio programme broadcasted the callers’ impassioned warnings about the brazen recruitment of Basotho girls in early 2002 – but almost a year later, a trafficking survivor who counsels recent victims observes, “Yes, it’s still happening.”³⁷

Social workers’ records and victim testimonies attest that the traffickers are white, Afrikaans-speaking men in their 30s and 40s who live in small eastern Free State towns such as Ladybrand, Fouriesburg or Qua-Qua, or in Bloemfontein. None live further away from Maseru than a two hour drive, and Ladybrand is a mere 20kms distant. Some are reported to be farm owners in the same part of the Free State; others have well-established business interests in Maseru. The recruiters of the children are in most cases also their exploiters, although not all the sex exploiters are involved in the recruitment.³⁸ In addition to white male traffickers are two separate reports of female traffickers from Bloemfontein.³⁹

Traffickers most commonly come into contact with their child victims on the streets of central Maseru. However, child sex in Maseru

³⁴ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

³⁵ Interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

³⁸ “Trafficker(s)” shall henceforth refer to the category of recruiter(s) described in this paragraph, unless otherwise specified.

³⁹ Interview with Basotho girl, Lesotho Girl Guides Association: Maseru, 15 January 2003; trafficking case documented by the LCCU, Maseru, January 2003.

is also purchased at a variety of other sites and venues frequented by traffickers from South Africa. These sites reportedly include a hotel in Maseru (a documented former recruitment ground) that attracts primarily tourists, and the Maseru Bridge border post. An up-market hotel on the outskirts of Maseru is another popular haunt of white South African men who want to buy sex from young Basotho girls (Lesotho Child Counselling Unit workshop, 2002). At least seven other locations, districts and brothels throughout the city and its surrounds have been identified as centres where children engage in prostitution (Lesotho Child Counselling Unit workshop, 2002).

Recruitment takes place in two ways: either children are forcibly abducted, or they are lured to South Africa on false promises of employment. Both methods are effective and equally popular with traffickers. Some victims report to have been held up at gunpoint or “forced” into a truck or car, while others were promised jobs in South Africa.

They promise to give them work, that they will pay them...it does not happen, unfortunately. Then they are involved in sexual activity...against their will.⁴⁰

Other unconfirmed reports suggest that children were made genuine offers of jobs on farms but were first (and sometimes continuously) required to submit to sexual abuse by their employers.

They would come with a big car like that and [tell] them they are going to work on the farms. When they reach there, it's only sex... especially asparagus farms.⁴¹

In another case, an 18-year old girl who met a trafficker at a hotel was promised a job as a domestic worker. She was then taken to Bloemfontein and performed this job for three weeks before she was sexually exploited.⁴²

Recruitment may also be taking place in the border town of Maputsoe, 70 kilometres to the northeast of Maseru and adjacent to the South African town of Ficksburg. While the capital is an easy

⁴⁰ Interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

⁴¹ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

⁴² *Ibid.*

recruitment ground for children, traffickers in Maputsoe are alleged to target young women in their early and middle 20s.⁴³

Child sex workers and other children of both sexes, 12 to 18 years of age, who live and work on the streets of Maseru are most vulnerable to recruitment. Without exception they come from broken and fragmented families where they have already been subjected to sexual and physical abuse, neglect and abandonment. Many of these children are among Lesotho's 14 300 AIDS orphans who wander the country in peer groups seeking a means of survival and for this purpose, often migrate to Lesotho's border towns (Family Health International, 2001). Whether they live in Maseru or elsewhere, the decision to leave home at a young age is a decisive factor that exacerbates the vulnerability of these children to trafficking. Domestic troubles and migration to Maseru (if children live outside the capital) may require them to drop out of school; only two of twelve victims were noted as being at an appropriate educational level for their age. The children attempt to find employment in factories or as domestic workers in Maseru, but often end up on the streets, earning money as car guards, traders or sex workers. They are often introduced to the trade by friends and lured by the superior earnings. Child sex workers in Maseru can earn US\$7 to US\$53 per night compared to the US\$13 to US\$26 per month earned by domestic workers, with boys reported to earn more through sex work than girls (UNICEF, 2001:40).

Children beginning life on the streets are often unaware of the dangers associated with street sex work.

I started doing sex work near the end of last year. A friend used to come here to get clients...and she asked me to join her. She told me it was easy to make money through sex work...I work almost everyday...I don't like my job because it is easy to catch a cold at night [Girl sex worker, aged 16] (UNICEF, 2001:41).

Others are already more aware of the dangers posed by clients:

You never know what kind of man you will meet next...the job would be better if we operated from a house instead of a street...I would like protection from those kind of men [Girl sex worker aged 16] (National University of Lesotho and UNICEF, 2000:23).

⁴³ Interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

Other recorded statements from street sex workers refer to “cruel men” who physically abuse them and “vulgar and abusive men who leave us in strange places.” Yet continued recruitment from Maseru’s streets suggests that few children know enough about traffickers and trafficking, or they simply ignore the warnings of their peers who have survived trafficking experiences. Either way, their vulnerability persists.

3.3 Routes and Transportation

The 20 kilometres which traffickers travel from Ladybrand to Maseru to recruit children may constitute the world’s shortest international trafficking route, making cross-border transportation of victims incomparably easy and cheap, requiring no exorbitant airfares, elaborate itineraries or demanding logistical planning. There is also little chance of prosecution and illegal immigration penalties are minor.

The two most popular border crossing posts among traffickers – the Maseru and Ficksburg Bridges – are also the two busiest and among the easiest to cross. A recent study observed that:

The physical, social, economic and regulatory environment in place at Maseru and Ficksburg Bridges creates an environment in which circumvention of immigration and passport control regulations for personal gain is greatly facilitated...There is no document, permit, regulation, or procedure required by South Africa at the border that cannot be obtained, ignored, or circumvented at a price (Sechaba Consultants, 2002:2).

Illegal crossings at Lesotho’s border posts are facilitated by the reported tendency of “favouritism towards certain known individuals” (Sechaba Consultants, 2002:3):

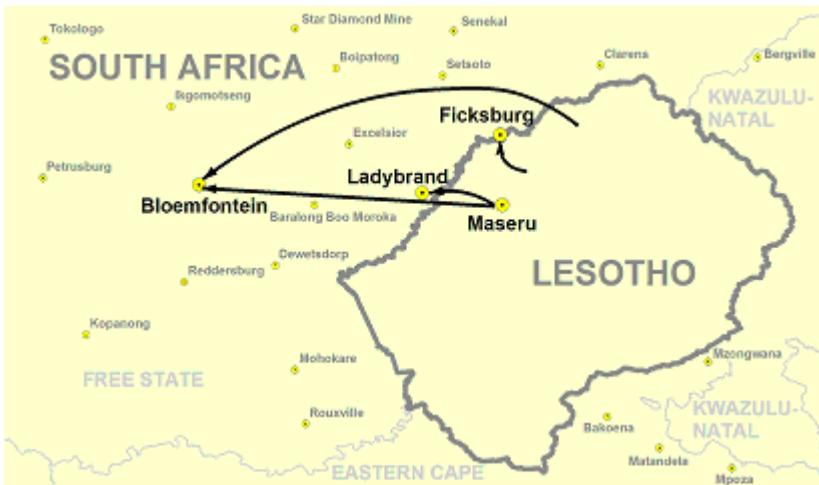
What I’ve seen is that these white guys, they’ve got contacts with these policemen - there at the borders. They just cross, no passport. They don’t have passports – they just cross!”⁴⁴

Another victim who recently crossed the border at the hands of South African traffickers observes:

⁴⁴ Interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

So we just crossed the border...without a passport, without anything...through the border post. They just passed, nobody asked them about any passport or anything.⁴⁵

The short distances between most of Lesotho's border towns and the towns of the Eastern Free State – including Bloemfontein – allow traffickers from any of these towns to drive across the border to Lesotho, recruit victims, and re-enter South Africa within a day, if not an evening. Ladybrand lies within 20 kilometres of Maseru while Ficksburg and Maputsoe are actually adjoining towns, allowing South African traffickers to recruit on their doorstep.



The 157 km drive from Bloemfontein to Maseru takes no more than two hours, allowing traffickers to recruit children, and transport them back to the Free State quickly. Opportunities for escape decrease considerably once victims have left Lesotho and are held in conditions of strict captivity in South Africa. It is, indeed, common and easy for traffickers to be “in-and-out”: cross the 24-hour border at Maseru at night, recruit victims and return to South Africa a few hours, if not minutes, later, barely noticed. The traffickers do little to avoid detection: they drive passenger cars or pick-up trucks along the main routes and take victims directly to their private, suburban homes where sexual exploitation often begins immediately.

⁴⁵ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

The traffickers' 'track'⁴⁶ is a narrow corridor anchored at three points - Maseru and Butha-Buthe in Lesotho and Bloemfontein in South Africa - covering a portion of the South African interior to the west of the border and the major frontier towns of Lesotho and the eastern Free State dotted along a North-West axis.

3.4 Exploitation

Trafficked children held in captivity in quiet suburban neighbourhoods of Ladybrand, Fouriesburg and Bloemfontein experience a full range of sexual exploitation.

According to one 20 year old Basotho woman:

So we just went to their house. When we went there, I just met a lot of people inside...There were white guys...they rape me the whole night. They were just beating me there and doing all those things. And they even burn me [...] with their iron. The second day they just give me only that bread in the morning, the dry one, and leave. They locked me and left me the whole day. The whole day I'm just left like that without water, even without going to the toilet or anything, staying there with my hands tied and my legs...nowhere I could go. Even my mouth like this [indicates gag cloth tied around her mouth]...

I would bath in the evening when they come, the time they even kick me, push me inside the bathroom for me to bath, tell me that 'you are smelling like this and that'. I would bath and after bathing they would start, doing what they did...And [one guy] would never even [talk], would just [say], 'come, open your legs like this' and spit...sores like this...see how it's smelling, open the windows', just mocking you like that. So I have to stay there for three days....

The fourth night, they still came, they raped me, then put me out. Luckily enough I got a [lift]...He took me to the border...I swum through the river, by myself in the night...

I didn't report anything to anybody. I was scared. I never said anything. But it was something that was still in my mind. I wasn't able to say anything....

⁴⁶ According to Estes (2001), a 'track' is a geographical area covered by the traffickers' activities: "a network of cities and communities regularly travelled to by pimps, traffickers and sexually exploited youths and adults."

Common to all documented accounts of Basotho victims are three elements: (1) the use of private homes for exploitative purposes under conditions of strict captivity; (2) the particularly sadistic and macabre nature of the exploitation; and (3) the use of verbal and physical assault in the process of sexual exploitation.

The severity of crimes committed against children recruited in Lesotho is increased by the privatisation of the locale. Rather than crowded clubs or brothels open to the public, common venues for the exploitation of trafficked women, these children are held in private neighbourhood homes, where traffickers arrange get-togethers with small groups of close associates and friends. The use of such private homes for non-commercial sexual exploitation in the eastern Free State is common to more than half of the twelve cases recorded in 2002 by the Lesotho Child Counselling Unit (LCCU) in Maseru.⁴⁷

The private house also creates a false sense of security that deceives victims. According to one girl of 18, she was recruited in Maseru for domestic work in a trafficker's home in Bloemfontein, a job she had for three weeks. While somewhat suspicious during that period, she was totally unprepared for the sexual exploitation she eventually experienced. Her statement exemplifies how a private domestic venue is more likely to dupe victims into believing that the trafficker's offer of employment has been genuine:

He promised that I'll earn better than I was earning [in Maseru]...I was given a room, outside the home... Time goes on, I was doing my work and there was nothing wrong with him ...Then he started to say, 'No, I love your boobs'...I started to feel scary but I said that's how life is, let me do my work. So the other night I was about to sleep. Then he knocked on the door and I allowed him to come in because he's my boss. I'm not expecting anything wrong from him. Then he said, today, I'm going to sleep with you. Then I said, why? He said you cannot ask me that question. You are here to work for me as a sex worker, nothing else. Then that night, that guy raped me and about 30 minutes thereafter, other three men came. This Afrikaans. And they said to him, 'we are here for that woman...we also need that woman.' Then he said, 'ah, there she

⁴⁷ Records of trafficking cases documented by the LCCU: Maseru, January 2003; interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

is...do whatever you want with her.’ Then I was raped [by] four guys that night.⁴⁸

While incarcerated in private houses, Basotho children are often bound and kept behind locked doors, and some report that they are given only bread and water or milk. Sexual exploitation takes place almost exclusively at night. The victims often spend the daytime in captivity, sleeping, and alone in the house. In most of the documented cases, victims spend a minimum of one night and never more than a week at the hands of their traffickers, before being dumped close by to find their way back home alone.⁴⁹

The nature of sexual acts inflicted upon victims is severe. All documented cases involved sex with children whose average age was 16.75 years⁵⁰:

Two girls (16) reported being held up at gunpoint by two white men in Maseru. They were taken to a house somewhere in Qua-Qua. Another two white men were waiting at the house. The men forced the girls to perform oral sex and drink their urine. One girl vomited and was terribly beaten. The two girls were kept captive in the house for three days and given only hard bread and milk as food. During the day the two girls were allowed to sleep – during the night they were sexually abused.

The boy (18) met a white man in Maseru who promised to help him find his lost parents.... The boy crossed the border with the man and was taken to a private house. There he was beaten and forced to smoke dagga. The man forced him to have anal sex. He was kept captive for two days, given no food and had his hands and legs bound. On the third day he was thrown out of the house. Because of an “aching anus” and an empty stomach he was unable to move and stayed close to the house. That night, the same man came and punched and kicked the boy who eventually lost consciousness.

⁴⁸ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003.

⁴⁹ Records of trafficking cases documented by the LCCU: Maseru, January 2003; interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003; and interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

⁵⁰ Selection of records of trafficking cases documented by the LCCU: Maseru, January 2003.

A boy (15) was offered a job by a white man in Fouriesburg. When he arrived at the house he was forced to have sex with a group of men. They then forced the boy to masturbate them.⁵¹

The documented sex acts experienced by Basotho children in the Eastern Free State range the continuum from child sexual abuse to child sexual exploitation to commercial sexual exploitation of children:

Concept	Subtypes	Definition	Reported in these cases
Child Sexual Exploitation	<i>Type 1</i> Child Sexual Abuse	Rape and Molestation	Yes
		Pornography	Yes
		Exposure of children to the sexual acts of others	Yes
Child Sexual Exploitation	<i>Type 2</i> Child Sexual Assault	Forcible Rape	Yes
		Forcible Sodomy	Yes
		Sexual Assault with an Object	Yes
Child Sexual Exploitation	<i>Type 3</i> Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Forcible Fondling	Yes
		Child pornography	Unconfirmed report
		Child/Juvenile Prostitution	1 case
		Trafficking of Children for Sexual Purposes	Yes

Source: Estes, R. The Sexual Exploitation of Children: A Working Guide to the Empirical Literature (.pdf version), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 2001.

The exploitation experienced by these children can also be construed within a particular social context and period in South Africa's history, which gives larger political significance and meaning to these events. The victims are black children from poverty-stricken Basotho families, while their exploiters are comparatively well-off white men. The traffickers use their status to gain the initial cooperation of their

⁵¹ All four cases were documented in counselling records kept by the LCCU in Maseru, Lesotho.

victims during recruitment. Once they are captive, the attacks on victims appear to be motivated not merely by personal sexual gratification, but also by a “need to degrade, punish and exploit victims.”⁵² According to a forensic psychologist specialising in sex-related crimes, the nature of these sexual attacks may be characterized as “a feeding frenzy for fantasies of hatred, humiliation and revenge” while the gang rapes and “sharing of the ‘booty’ appear to be a ritual of male bonding.”⁵³ In this professional’s opinion, the attacks go beyond individual pathology and suggest that given the recent demise of apartheid, the traffickers are motivated by the desire for social revenge and retribution.

Physical and verbal assault on the children often takes place alongside sexual exploitation in the private houses of traffickers. Accounts of punching and kicking are common to a number of children’s experiences, as well as the attendant physical scars, burn marks and bleeding. Traffickers also humiliate and mock captive children:

They mock you...like they say whatever they want to say...they will just insult you, ‘you bitch, there’s nothing we can do with you, we’re just here to f--- you and feel you out’...sit there and smile, ‘look at that whore’...they would just take food and throw it to you, ‘you dog.’

These verbal and physical attacks physically and psychologically weaken the children, preparing them for subsequent sexual exploitation. Such verbal abuse also effectively silences victims, discouraging them from reporting the events later on.

3.5 Conclusion

The scale of trafficking of Basotho children to South Africa for sexual exploitation remains unknown. Although the first recorded case was documented in 1999, and the most recent in December 2002, there have been few previous studies conducted in Lesotho, nor are there any baseline data to indicate either an increase or decrease in trafficking activity during this time.

⁵² Marcel Londt, Department of Social Work, University of the Western Cape, 10 March 2003 [by email].

⁵³ *Ibid.*

According to Lydia Muso at the LCCU in Maseru, Maseru, police in Lesotho and Ladybrand, South Africa, have received some reports of cross-border trafficking and have made referrals to the LCCU, but law enforcement officials are afraid to report these cases personally and some victims suspect officials of cooperating with, or turning a blind eye to, the activities of the traffickers.⁵⁴ Others appear to have little sympathy for the experiences of trafficked children. In 2002, two girls returning to Lesotho by foot after three days of captivity claimed to have been raped by two policemen at the border.⁵⁵

The LCCU , which has had close contact with victims, had an average of 2 referrals of trafficking cases per month during 2002. Referrals were made by the police, churches both in Maseru and Bloemfontein, parents, neighbours and the Lesotho Department of Social Welfare. Victims themselves confirm that the recruitment of both boys and girls for purposes of cross-border sexual exploitation is continuing in Maseru.

⁵⁴ Interview with two Basotho trafficking victims: Maseru, 16 January 2003; interview with Lydia Muso, LCCU: Maseru, 15 January 2003.

⁵⁵ Trafficking case documented by the LCCU: Maseru, January 2003.

4. THE ROAD FROM MAPUTO

4.1 Introduction

“This man is a slave,” proclaimed the November 1990 *Weekly Mail* headline, next to a photograph of a Mozambican boy, “and we bought him for ZAR 200.” It was a major exposé of the trade in people from war-torn Mozambique, which uncovered not only the trafficking of boys for labour to the tobacco farms of South Africa’s then-eastern Transvaal province but also the widespread buying and selling of Mozambican girls, some as young as 14 years. These girls were reportedly being sold regularly as “concubines” and child labourers to local men in the Komatipoort border region and businessmen in the townships of the Witwatersrand. Thirteen years later, the trade in Mozambican women continues to thrive, and is well known to many people along the Maputo corridor. Mozambique is no longer at war but its younger generation appears just as desperate for opportunity and employment, which leads many young women to take up false offers of employment in South Africa, where they are sold into sex slavery, primarily as concubines to South African men.

4.2 Vulnerability and Recruitment

Trafficker: Once we are there [in Maputo], we convince... [women] and we take them.

Informant: How much do you charge?

Trafficker: To bring them across is R200. I must go and look for them...I come back here [to Komatipoort] with them and then I phone you to say we are here...the number [of women] that you want... I can get because I’ve spotted them somewhere already...⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Exchange between informant and trafficker, filmed in Schoemansdal, Mpumalanga province, by *Special Assignment* (SABC), 2 December 2002, for the television documentary *Sold Sisters*, aired in South Africa on 1 April 2003.

This trafficker runs one of two identified operations involving the recruitment of young Mozambican women for sexual exploitation in South Africa. His operation includes Mozambican men who have developed small networks, using minivan taxis both to smuggle migrants and traffick women. They are based at transit houses in the border region between Mozambique, Swaziland and South Africa where they are well-known in their communities as cross-border guides and *mareyane*, in Shangaan meaning ‘one who sets clever or devious traps’ (McKibbon, 1992:3). The traffickers have accomplices in Maputo, in the Lebombo border region, and in Johannesburg, who help recruit women, transport them to South Africa and run various transit houses where they are accommodated.

The traffickers own or hire small fleets of minivan taxis that they use primarily to smuggle people into South Africa. These fleets travel from the taxi ranks in Maputo to Johannesburg two or three times per week and the passengers are mainly Mozambicans visiting relatives or looking for work. Many Mozambicans rely on these taxis not only as the cheapest form of transportation but also to gain undocumented entry into South Africa. They may have passports but often cannot afford to pay for a visa to enter the country. For ZAR 500, the taxis not only transport them directly to Johannesburg but the taxi drivers also assist their passengers in undocumented border crossings at Ressano Garcia on the South African border.⁵⁷

▪ **Passive and Active Recruitment**

Recruitment of victims can be both passive and active, and occurs as follows:

(i) *Passive Recruitment*

With the passive approach, traffickers do not go out hunting their victims. Instead, young women approach drivers at Maputo’s taxi ranks for transportation to South Africa where they hope to find work or visit relatives. Their families have often helped them to save ZAR 500 for the cost of the trip in the hope that by travelling to South Africa, they will find work and remit money back home. Among the throngs of travellers at the taxi ranks in Maputo are agents associated

⁵⁷ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

with Mozambican traffickers. From the many women looking for transport to Johannesburg, the agents identify those for whom they can get the best price – young, attractive and preferably travelling unaccompanied. Then they persuade their intended victims to travel on the traffickers' taxis.

They check out which ones will probably be most successful to be trafficked...They say among themselves, 'Okay, these girls will probably work for our purposes' and they start talking among themselves about how they're going to use them on the way [to Johannesburg]. Those girls will be kept aside. They say, 'Ja, we will be your transport to Jo'burg'...These agents roaming the taxi ranks are there all the time. They sit on the streets everyday.⁵⁸

These young women agree to travel to Johannesburg in taxis owned by traffickers. Many suspect nothing upon departure from Maputo and may not even know that they will be entering South Africa illegally. They travel amongst other Mozambicans who will also be entering South Africa without documentation. Apart from the taxi drivers' intention to sell them in Johannesburg, which only becomes apparent in South Africa, there is nothing about these women prior to the border crossing which distinguishes them as trafficking victims. Like their fellow passengers, they appear to be ordinary migrants on their way to South Africa to look for work.

Traffickers running the operation also recruit women more actively in and around Maputo with offers of jobs in South Africa. The profile of their victims is identical to those who unwittingly accept rides from traffickers at taxi ranks: school-going or jobless, young women in their teens or 20s, who want to find work in South Africa, speak very little English and are poorly educated. The traffickers use other women, sometimes their girlfriends, to approach young women in their homes with attractive offers of employment. In some instances, the young women being recruited may even know their recruiters.

I was just surviving when I was told there was work in Johannesburg. Then I came and told my father...He said, 'Go my child because you are suffering. I can't support you and the baby.' I had to abandon my baby against my will saying, 'I must go and work to support my baby and my sisters...in Johannesburg.' I

⁵⁸ Interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

trusted because Sophia [the recruiter]...worked in Jo'burg and it was not the first time she was working and sending money home. I knew nothing bad about her. That is what gave me confidence. That gave me the courage and I said, 'yes, I'm going.'⁵⁹

A waitressing job in a Mozambican restaurant in Johannesburg is the standard job offer; one that would plausibly require Portuguese-speaking young women. A female recruiter usually makes the offer, and convinces young women that she herself works in a restaurant in Johannesburg that is looking to hire Mozambicans.⁶⁰ Victims and their families often accept the promise of an income without any idea that they are being misled.

Informant: They all think they are going to work in a restaurant.

Trafficker: Ja.

Informant: Is that what you've told them?

Trafficker: Ja.

Informant: And when do you tell them the real story?

Trafficker: I tell them at my house, in Komatipoort.⁶¹

Once two or three victims have been recruited, they are taken to a transit house in central Maputo and kept together. During this time, victims suspect nothing and trust that the traffickers' offers have been genuine. They understand that the trafficker has been legitimately commissioned and appropriately remunerated by a restaurant in Johannesburg to recruit Mozambican waitresses. Transportation to Johannesburg is arranged within a day or two and victims travel in taxis with other undocumented migrants.

(ii) *Active Recruitment*

The second recruitment approach bears some similarities to the first, but is more active, and run by a group of Mozambican traffickers based in Maputo: young women are recruited with job offers

⁵⁹ *Special Assignment* (SABC): interview with Mozambican victim #1 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003.

⁶⁰ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁶¹ *Special Assignment* (SABC): undercover film footage of a Mozambican trafficker based in Komatipoort, South Africa, 7 February 2003.

in South Africa, female recruiters are used, and women are kept in transit houses in Maputo prior to departure for South Africa.⁶²

Recruitment targeting both sex and non-sex workers takes place at two different locations. Firstly, attractive job offers are made to young women working at markets in Maputo, where many of them make a living running stalls, selling basic commodities, and offering food and drink at informal 'bars'. The traffickers who frequent these markets may have links to broad-based criminal networks that trade not only in women, but also in guns and drugs.⁶³ Traffickers recruit with the help of a female relation or friend in a manner resembling the first operation: victims are offered waitressing jobs in South Africa and sometimes know their recruiters.

He came to her and said he's got a much better job for her, [that]...she's going to earn a lot of money in Johannesburg. She had no idea. She said she's heard of [trafficking] before but for some reason, because she knew [the trafficker] and had seen him many times at the market...she thought it was going to be fine.⁶⁴

Sex workers in Maputo are also actively sourced and recruited for sale to brothels in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal.⁶⁵ These women and girls, some as young as 12 years⁶⁶, are recruited at two well-known nightclubs in the city where they are told that they will earn considerably more money as prostitutes in Johannesburg.

A lot of the girls that he brings in are prostitutes. He transports them from the brothels there [Maputo]...That's where he recruits a lot of his girls. [Two clubs in Maputo]... are full of prostitutes. So he takes them from there and offers them better things in Johannesburg.⁶⁷

⁶² Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁶⁶ Interview with Alex Stellanios, former police informant: Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

⁶⁷ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

Young women are also actively recruited from the Mozambican province of Nampula. Prostitution in Nampula is common, owing in part to the pre-independence occupation of the province by the Portuguese army that created a market for sex workers.⁶⁸ Girls in the area are sexualised at an early age in a matriarchal culture (they are considered women at the age of 14) and prostitution for many becomes a means of survival, which they often seek by migrating.⁶⁹ Traffickers from Maputo travel to Nampula, where they recruit these young women. According to one source:

Nampula is the place to go. There are markets in Nampula where you can buy girls. That's how open it is. And José [a trafficker], he's been there at various times to get girls. You go and get your girls in Nampula, put them on a bus. It takes a few days and they get to Maputo.⁷⁰

Little is yet known about how young women from Nampula are recruited, whether these young women include both established sex workers and girls with no experience of sex work, and in what proportion the two are recruited. What is certain is that they are recruited by Mozambican traffickers, and sold to South African brothels for ZAR 1000 each.⁷¹

Poverty in Mozambique, as in other parts of Southern Africa, is the most significant factor in making women and children vulnerable to trafficking. Traffickers approach young women living in both urban and rural areas and prey on their desperate economic situation with promises of a better life and employment. Many are attracted to these kinds of opportunities to make a living and support their families, and agree to travel to South Africa. They often grow up in rural communities in Mozambique, which recognize the benefits of migration⁷² and fail to question potential dangers. "I don't think the parents ask the right questions. They're just too happy that there is suddenly an income," observed one source.⁷³ If they are aware of the

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ Interview with Julio Bica, Maputo-based journalist: Maputo, 11 November 2002.

⁷⁰ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Interview with Benjamin Dambo, ADPRUM: Maputo, 11 November 2002.

⁷³ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

dangers, many, it appears, choose to take the risk. The South African Rand (ZAR) to many:

...is the American dollar and yes, they would like to earn that South African dollar...They hear about and see on television the glitz and glamour of Johannesburg and think that's heaven. They would all like to go there for an easier life...not to carry water...carry firewood.⁷⁴

While familiar with cross-border smuggling, many young women and their families also appear never to have heard of trafficking, especially in the rural Mozambique.⁷⁵

We went out to the rural area north of Maputo and we found a lot of people who knew about cross-border smuggling of people, crossing the border to look for work... They did not know anything about trafficking. They didn't know about situations where girls are recruited for sex in South Africa.⁷⁶

Of those who have heard of trafficking, most do not think that it could happen to them. In one recent case, a Mozambican woman rescued from traffickers in Maputo before she could be taken out of the country, could not believe that the man who had promised her a job in Swaziland was planning to sell her into sexual slavery: "I had heard about it but I had never seen it, never experienced it. I am shocked now that it happened to me."⁷⁷ Interviewed later with her family in Maputo, her father, uncle and aunt all confessed to having heard about trafficking on the radio and on television, yet no one appears to have warned or prevented her from taking up the job offer made by a stranger.⁷⁸ Another young woman trafficked from Maputo had been warned about trafficking prior to her departure for South Africa, but took the chance because she knew the trafficker's wife.

⁷⁴ Interview with Alex Stellanios, former police informant: Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

⁷⁵ Interview with a Mozambican youth: Magude district, 13 November 2002.

⁷⁶ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁷⁷ *Special Assignment* (SABC): interview with a Mozambican victim #3 (rescued before sale): Maputo, 10 March 2003.

⁷⁸ Terre des Hommes, an NGO in Maputo, has established a national counter-trafficking campaign, led by Lea Bonaventura and Carlos Manjate, to raise awareness of trafficking activities among young women.

We were once told by some people in our village that we are going to be forced to sleep with men wherever we were going [in South Africa]. We were scared when we learnt about this... [but] we never suspected that [the recruiter] may sell us as sex slaves... I told myself that I have no reason to doubt him because I know his wife very well.⁷⁹

A long history of child migration in Mozambique may also play a role in exposing young women and children to traffickers. In the process of looking for any type of work, and habitually migrating to do so, some children, oblivious to the dangers, may more readily accept offers of work from strangers. As they migrate within the southern, central and northern regions of Mozambique, as well as to neighbouring states, many Mozambican children have been reported missing. Yet migration is considered a feature of Mozambican life and some parents are not overly concerned when their children disappear.⁸⁰ The common assumption of family and friends is that they have gone to South Africa and have found employment there.

The practice of parents giving their children to wealthier families in exchange for educational and other support for the child is another migration-related trend that creates trafficking risks. Contact between the two parties is easily made among rural communities and parents know who is best able to offer their children opportunities. Accompanying such 'adoptions' are exchanges of money or gifts, such as cattle, after which parents may have little or no contact with their children. The adopted child's new guardians often take the child to other parts of the country and even across borders in the southern African region.⁸¹

4.3 Routes and Transportation

Trafficked women are transported from Mozambique to South Africa in taxis together with other documented and undocumented

⁷⁹ Interview with Mozambican victim #2 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003, for the television documentary, *Special Assignment: Sold Sisters* (SABC 3), aired in South Africa on 1 April 2003.

⁸⁰ Interview with Justina Cumbe, Women and Children's Protection Unit, Ministry of the Interior, Mozambique: Maputo, 12 November 2002.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

migrants. These other migrants are mainly Mozambicans and, recently Pakistanis, who pay ZAR 500 to get into the taxis, often expecting to be smuggled into South Africa as part of the fare.⁸² Young women identified at Maputo's taxi ranks and encouraged to travel in taxis owned by traffickers pay for the journey in Maputo just like the other passengers and, while they are still in Mozambique, do not suspect that the men accompanying them are traffickers. Other women, recruited with job offers in Johannesburg, and sex workers promised better earnings in South Africa also travel by taxi.

Two distinct trafficking operations make use of three different routes to transport victims from Mozambique into South Africa.⁸³



The first route is used to traffick women from Maputo to Gauteng Province by way of Ressano Garcia. Young women travel by minivan taxi along the main toll road from Maputo until they near the Lebombo border, at which point, they disembark to follow a footpath that bypasses the border post, before picking up the minivan taxi again once in South Africa. From there, they are taken to Gauteng along the

⁸² Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

N4 highway.⁸⁴ There has been one unconfirmed report suggesting that once in South Africa, traffickers use back roads to travel from Komatipoort (a South African town that borders Ressano Garcia) to Johannesburg and Pretoria.⁸⁵

The second trafficking route supplies trafficked women to both Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal, and crosses the border into South Africa at Ponta do Ouro, a coastal town to the south of Maputo. The trafficker:

...says he's been using that route for years and that is his trusted route. He doesn't like the Lebombo route...he says it's much easier to cross the border at [Ponta do Ouro].⁸⁶

From Ponta do Ouro, taxis travel either to the south of Swaziland and then directly to Johannesburg and Pretoria or, in a southerly direction along the KwaZulu-Natal coast towards Durban and Pietermaritzburg. The trafficker's ease of access across the Ponta do Ouro borderline might be explained by his links to broad-based criminal syndicates active in the area. The Ponta do Ouro border crossing has in the past been associated with criminal organizations involved in smuggling stolen vehicles, and this may be facilitating trafficking operations.⁸⁷

Whether crossing into South Africa along the Lebombo or Ponta do Ouro borderline, traffickers and their victims enter South Africa illegally. Traffickers using the Lebombo-Komatipoort route to Johannesburg normally depart from Maputo between 10 am and noon:

[The trafficker] has to leave the taxi rank [in Maputo] at a very, very specific time because the moment he leaves, he phones his contact in South Africa, a border patrol guy so that he...can take the people through.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁸⁵ Interview with informant who wished to remain anonymous: Johannesburg, 5 October 2002.

⁸⁶ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁸⁷ Interview with man who wished to remain anonymous: Maputo marketplace, 14 November 2002.

⁸⁸ Interview with Jacques Pauw, executive producer, *Special Assignment*, 5 March 2003.

Full with passengers, the taxis travel on the main toll road towards Ressano Garcia. About a kilometer from the border post, they stop and all passengers are told to get off.

Then we went into the bush...we walked and suffered that day. We climbed the mountain till we reached the fence...we crawled underneath with our bags. We emerged on the other side [but]...met the police on the way.... [the recruiter] went to talk to them...[he] said those others [smuggling clients] must pay R20...that money was for a bribe. We left after paying. We walked through sugar cane plantations till we reached a hiding place where we were supposed to get taxis to Jo'burg...while hiding there he phoned his friends...he said, 'I'm here, I have my people. Come and get me with a taxi.' We remained there till the taxi came to fetch us.⁸⁹

The police referred to in this woman's account are South African or Mozambican soldiers who patrol the border region. The trafficker has a contact among them to whom he pays ZAR 150 to allow the whole group to pass, "much cheaper than going through the border post itself. [The traffickers] laugh at passports."⁹⁰ The soldiers often take any valuables and money being carried by the young women and migrants from which, according to one source, traffickers receive a share.

One girl said...when the soldiers took their stuff and whatever valuables they've got - watches and money - [the trafficker] stayed behind with the soldiers. She thinks he shares in the loot...He leads them to the soldiers, they get robbed and he takes a cut.⁹¹

After the Lebombo borderline has been crossed, usually around late afternoon, the women and other migrants are taken to transit houses located in Block B in Tonga, a township close to the Jeppe's Reef border post with Swaziland. By this time, the women's suspicions about the men transporting them begin to surface. Many had

⁸⁹ *Special Assignment (SABC)*: Pretoria, 12 February 2003, interview with Mozambican victim #1 (rescued before sale).

⁹⁰ Interview with Jacques Pauw, executive producer, *Special Assignment*, 5 March 2003.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

not expected to cross the border illegally and the experience is a frightening one.⁹² Together with other undocumented migrants travelling in the taxis, they are split between several houses in the area. At this time:

[The trafficker] takes whatever they've got, all their documents, everything. He says this on camera: 'Then you've got them because they're at your mercy and you can do with them what you want.'⁹³

Traffickers begin to harass and threaten the undocumented migrants with whom, a few hours before, they had been very friendly. They demand more money from them, having made them pay the full ZAR 500 fare to Johannesburg back in Maputo earlier in the day.⁹⁴ Many young women witness these threats and harassment.

The young women's one to two-day stay at the Tonga transit houses marks the beginning of their sexual exploitation. Many are forced to have sex with their traffickers, 'as a way of showing their gratitude for the well-paid jobs that traffickers allege to have organized for them in Johannesburg.'⁹⁵ Although there has been an unconfirmed report that the women are sometimes prostituted to local men⁹⁶, traffickers in general do not appear to make money from these rapes. Instead, as one Tonga trafficker told an informant, it is a way of 'breaking the women in' and letting them know exactly what lies in store for them in Johannesburg, where they will be sold as 'wives'.⁹⁷ One recent victim narrowly escaped this sexual initiation.

[The recruiter] called me and demanded that I should thank him for finding me a job...He said he wanted to have sex with me. I

⁹² *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 February 2003, interview with Mozambican victim #2 (rescued before sale).

⁹³ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

⁹⁴ *Special Assignment* (SABC), interview with Mozambican victim #1 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003.

⁹⁵ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003; *Special Assignment* (SABC): interview with Mozambican victim #2 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003.

⁹⁶ Telephonic interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): 15 January 2003.

⁹⁷ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

refused...He insisted on sleeping with me. I started to shake in fear. I could not even eat. [The recruiter's] brother also approached me, also demanding to sleep with me. I said to him I was not there for men but for work. He threatened me...and said he would kill me if I refused...I kept on refusing.⁹⁸

It is also possible that the transit houses afford traffickers an opportunity to sell their young victims to local men as wives and domestic servants. Apart from the thriving trade in Mozambican women catering for the market on West Rand mines, there have been reports of these women being sold in the vicinity of the transit houses in eastern Mpumalanga province.⁹⁹ They may also be forced into 'marriages' with South African men, who abuse them, force them into domestic work and often dump them when they are no longer wanted.¹⁰⁰ Two non-governmental organizations (NGOs), in Malelane and in Schoemansdal, have assisted and counselled Mozambican victims trafficked and sold in this manner.¹⁰¹

The trafficking operation using the Ponta do Ouro route does not appear to use transit houses. Instead, women are taken directly from Maputo to Gauteng or KwaZulu-Natal. Traffickers are reported to break the news to victims that they will be sold during transportation. There is no record of sexual abuse en route.¹⁰²

4.4 Exploitation

The sexual exploitation experienced by young Mozambican women at transit houses near the Lebombo border lead some to

⁹⁸ *Special Assignment* (SABC), interview with Mozambican victim #2 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003.

⁹⁹ Interview with Mozambican victim (sold as a wife to a South African man living in Schoemansdal): Schoemansdal, 11 November 2002; interview with Daphne Nkosi, Nkomazi Advice Centre: Schoemansdal, 11 November 2002.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with Daphne Nkosi, Nkomazi Advice Centre: Schoemansdal, 11 November 2002.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Grace Machaba, Malelane Care Centre: Malelane, 4 November 2002; interview with Daphne Nkosi, Nkomazi Advice Centre: Schoemansdal, 11 November 2002.

¹⁰² Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

suspect that they will be sold in Johannesburg.¹⁰³ Yet until their arrival in Johannesburg, their transportation has the appearance of a smuggling, rather than a trafficking, operation. For the entire length of the journey they are rarely separated from the other undocumented migrants travelling with them, and the traffickers may not reveal the intention to sell them until the very end.

In Johannesburg, the young women and other migrants are taken to transit houses in Soweto and Lenasia. These transit houses are run by associates of traffickers apparently for the purpose of accommodating travellers without their own lodging or holding them until friends or relatives arrive to settle outstanding taxi fares. It is only at these transit houses that a separate plan for the young women becomes apparent. Many migrants, both men and women, who have arrived on the taxis, are free to leave the transit houses and thus remain as clients who have been smuggled. Yet some young Mozambican women are kept captive at the houses and are later taken to the mines on the West Rand, where they are sold as wives to mineworkers.¹⁰⁴

Not all young Mozambican women travelling in taxis to South Africa are sold. Many appear to be collected or dropped off at friends' or relatives' homes in Johannesburg without incident, although smuggled young women who are not collected in Johannesburg, or who have an outstanding transportation debt that they are unable to pay may also be sold.¹⁰⁵

The Mozambican traffickers running transit houses in Tonga and Johannesburg sell their victims on the mines of the West Rand, around Carletonville. "The mines are [their] big market," reports a source.¹⁰⁶ One trafficker takes his 'stock' of young women to a housing compound at a Carletonville mine, and displays them to potential buyers to whom they are sold for ZAR 650 each. 'Wives' can also be ordered on demand.

¹⁰³ Interview with Mozambican victim #1 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003; interview with Mozambican victim #2 (rescued before sale): Pretoria, 12 February 2003.

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003; interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

Trafficker: I sell them at the mine.
Informant: Selling at the mine?
Trafficker: At the mine.
Informant: Which mine?
Trafficker: Any mine. Carletonville.
Informant: And then they pay for her?
Trafficker: They pay for her.
Informant: How much?
Trafficker: ZAR650.
Informant: If I live in Jo'burg and I want a wife, can you bring if I order?
Trafficker: Ja.

The buying and selling of Mozambican women does not appear to be a clandestine activity but “an accepted way to live” on the mines.¹⁰⁷ One Mozambican woman living on the mines and earning a living as a sex worker observed this activity on many occasions.

I used to see them. They took them and smuggled them across fences, at Ressano Garcia or Namaacha [border post between Mozambique and Swaziland]. They sell them to men. Some were Zulus who had no wives and they would sell to them. [The women] knew nothing. They just sold them and said, ‘Stay here’, not telling them what was taking place.¹⁰⁸

Once the women have been sold, they are seen as belonging to their new ‘husbands’, Mozambican or South African mineworkers. The sense of ownership seems to be legitimized in the minds of the buyers by a perversion of the traditional practice of paying *lobola* before a marriage. The buyers believe that the purchase price was in fact *lobola* and that the women are now their wives (Weekly Mail, 1990b). The ‘wives’ live with their buyers in small family units on the mine properties, where they become the sex slaves of their so-called husbands as well as their unpaid domestic servants.¹⁰⁹ The women live under difficult conditions and often have no option of escape or return to Mozambique.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with a Mozambican sex worker: Maputo, 22 February 2002.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003; Interview with Anna-Maria Lombard, Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

They...suffer because someone sells you to a man. You stay with him by force and he does not buy you anything, he does not care about you. When you left home they said you were going to work but when you arrive there, you get no job. You are sold to a man...you find that you are suffering...you want to get back to Mozambique but you have no money to do so.¹¹⁰

It is unclear whether the mineworkers ever make money from the women they have purchased, either by pimping them to other men or reselling them. The 'marriages' into which the women are forced often do not last long with many women being 'dumped' by their buyers after about three months. This short period of forced cohabitation with mineworkers may be one factor in creating constant demand for Mozambican women on the mines as one woman is dumped and another procured. Another factor may be the general popularity of Mozambican women in South Africa.¹¹¹

Little data has yet been collected on the exploitation of women trafficked into the country using the Ponta do Ouro border crossing. The traffickers using that particular route are associated with a number of brothels in Hillbrow and Pretoria as well as in Pietermaritzburg in KwaZulu-Natal to which they regularly sell Mozambican women for ZAR 1000.¹¹² The women are kept as sex workers at the brothels for approximately three months before new Mozambican women are ordered from the traffickers. The women sold to these brothels are mainly Mozambican sex workers, who are recruited at nightclubs and brothels in Maputo. Although the form and degree of sexual exploitation to which they may be subjected is not documented, they are brought into the country by a known trafficker, who is said to deceive young Mozambican women with false job offers and recruit "very, very young girls" on demand.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Interview with a Mozambican sex worker: Maputo, 22 February 2002.

¹¹¹ Interview with Alex Stellianos, former police informant: Pretoria, 12 March 2003.

¹¹² Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

4.5 Conclusion

An estimated 1000 Mozambican women per year are entering South Africa by way of the two trafficking operations described above. This figure is based on reliable reports of the numbers of Mozambican women travelling to South Africa in taxis that are employed in two known operations and the weekly frequency of their entry into the country.¹¹⁴ One of the taxi owners is believed to have been involved in trafficking “for a long time.” While only two trafficking operations were uncovered, there are said to be “lots of people doing this.”¹¹⁵

Two other factors may be indicative of the scale of the activity. Firstly, the border region around Schoemansdal, close to the Swazi border, is littered with transit houses used for the transportation of Mozambicans into South Africa. Within one hour during a visit to the area, two NGO workers pointed out half a dozen such houses and stated that they are very common.¹¹⁶ It has not been established that trafficked Mozambican women are among those passing through the houses, but it is worth investigating further because of the sheer scale of trafficking that they suggest. Secondly, the *Weekly Mail* trafficking exposé published in 1990 provided evidence that women are sold in Gauteng on a far greater scale than merely to the West Rand mines. Buyers of young women at that time were shown to be businessmen living in at least five large townships around Johannesburg: Soweto, Daveyton, Thembisa, Thokoza and a township near Vereeniging (Weekly Mail, 1990). Little has been done in South Africa over the past thirteen years to suppress the trade and, given the more porous border between the two countries, if anything, it is now easier to bring women into the country than in 1990. It is likely that Mozambican women are being sold in South Africa in greater numbers today.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Interview with Jacques Pauw, Executive Producer, *Special Assignment* (SABC): Johannesburg, 5 March 2003.

¹¹⁶ Interview with two volunteers at Nkomazi Advice Centre: Schoemansdal, 11 November 2002.

5. MALAWI AS A SOURCE COUNTRY

5.1 Introduction

As he was sitting under a big tree near Mponda's village, he witnessed the passage of a slave caravan. The Arab slave traders who headed the caravan...offered to sell him three small black girls at the price of one shilling each (Balakamalawi.net).

The offer to David Livingstone was not his first encounter with the slave trade in the region that is present-day Malawi. Some time earlier, when he arrived at Lake Malawi for the first time in December 1859, he recorded that the lakeshore was "covered with human corpses and decomposing bodies." (Balakamalawi.net). The human remains he saw were those of slaves who had been brought to the Lake during an arduous trek to East Coast markets but had perished en route from exhaustion, hunger or thirst. While their captors were primarily Arab merchants who dominated and derived great profits from the trade in spices, ivory and slaves in present day Malawi, Tanzania and Mozambique, indigenous Ayao traders were thought to be some of the principal slave recruiters, and their domain included the inland area east of Lake Malawi in modern Mozambique. In exchange for cloth and firearms, the Ayao forcibly abducted men, women and children from rural villages at the southern shores of the Lake and the banks of the Shire River. Captured villagers were chained together and transported in "sad caravans...of suffering and death towards the coast" where they were then sold to Arab merchants (Balakamalawi.net). There they were held in captivity in large barracks pending their sale to Portuguese plantations in Mozambique, the sugar cane fields of French islands (such as Reunion), or Zanzibar, the most important slave market on the East African coast.

Almost 150 years since David Livingstone recorded the misery and suffering of the East Coast slave trade, the wholesale markets on the Tanzanian coast are no more; nor are the violent pre-dawn attacks and abductions of Lake villagers by the Ayao. Yet Malawi continues to be a source of modern-day slaves sold for profit. Today, as during Livingstone's time, locals and outsiders collaborate in the trade of

Malawian women and children, who are recruited in the same rural villages along the shores of Lake Malawi as occurred centuries earlier.

Malawi is the source for three streams of trafficking in persons for sexual exploitation: (i) victims trafficked to Europe; (ii) child victims trafficked to Europe by sex tourists; and (iii) victims trafficked across land borders to South Africa.

5.2 Vulnerabilities

The vulnerability of women and children in Malawi to trafficking is due, at least in part, to the desperation that results from endemic poverty, and also from a perversion of certain cultural practices that commercialise and sexualise girls. Selling children to obtain food and alleviate poverty, for example, is not simply a recent response to the ongoing food crisis in the region. Rather, it is an established cultural practice, known as *kubaha*, which involves the exchange of young girls for basic goods and necessities as a means of survival.¹¹⁷

It is called *kubaha*. . . . In Karonga, for example, if I am poor, I will go to any man who has money and I will say, 'I want some money. You give me KW 5000* and you can take my daughter,' even if the daughter is ten years. . . . eight years old.¹¹⁸

Another practice, known as *kutomera* ('betrothed'), may result in girls being exchanged for money from an even younger age, virtually from the day they are born. According to the custom, families receive payment for their daughters in a manner similar to the payment of *lobola* for a bride in Nguni cultures. An older or wealthy man within a community approaches a family and identifies a very young girl to be his future wife. A price is negotiated and the girl is taken from the family when she is sexually mature.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Interview with Mary Khonje, Department of Social Services: Lilongwe, 14 January 2003; Maxwell Matewera, Executive Director, Eye of the Child: Blantyre.

* KW = Kwacha, Malawi's national currency unit. At the time of writing, KW5000 was valued at approximately US\$1.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.; Maxwell Matewera, Executive Director, Eye of the Child: Blantyre.

Communities and employers may contribute to the commodification of children, recognising the economic value of child labour. In a climate of rural unemployment and high HIV/AIDS infection, many children are forced to drop out of school to become breadwinners. They migrate to towns, border regions and holiday resorts to support their families through informal jobs and often sex work. Others are recruited as cheap labour to be exploited in bars and restaurants in the two main cities, Lilongwe and Blantyre, and towns such as Kasungu, Mwanza, Mangochi and Salima.

Cultural practices such as *kuhaba*, which commodify girls from a young age, further expose girls to traffickers. They legitimise the selling of young girls to seemingly successful and charming strangers who make surprise offers to educate and employ them (All Africa News Agency, 1999).¹²⁰ Local businesswomen also, well known as recruiters of Malawian girls for international trafficking operations, understand these local cultural practices and prey on girls with an assortment of attractive offers of education, jobs and marriage. Bar and restaurant owners from Blantyre reportedly make offers of employment as baby-sitters to families and their daughters, only to exploit their labour at 'joints' in the city frequented by traffickers and sex tourists (Pan African News Agency, 2000). This cultural commodification of girls in Malawi is aggravated by the current conditions of rural poverty, unemployment, famine and HIV/AIDS, which is creating many child-headed households. In such devastating socio-economic circumstances, young girls are often the last remaining "possessions" of value that families can sell to buy food and other basic necessities. Far from being an aberration, for many affected families it is a calculated, albeit tragic, decision to ensure their own survival.

Equally relevant to increasing the vulnerability of young women to traffickers' lures are practices that sexualise girls at an early age. Common among the communities living along the shoreline of Lake Malawi, these practices are initiation rites, called *chinamwali*, two of which are known as *nsondo*, aimed at prepubescent girls, and *ndakula* ('I have grown up') in which menstruating teenage girls participate (Stamm, 2001).¹²¹ Both aim to introduce girls to the responsibilities of

¹²⁰ Mangochi, Salima and Nkhatha Bay are districts lying adjacent to Lake Malawi in which such recruitment methods, employed by European tourists, have been reported.

¹²¹ Interview with Mary Khonje, Department of Social Services: Lilongwe, 14 January 2003.

adulthood, although *ndakula* focuses especially on instructing girls to become dutiful wives and pleasing sexual partners. In secret rites, the initiates are taught a variety of sexual skills, but first and foremost to suppress their own feelings and sexual desires and to work to please men. They are encouraged to find sexual partners with whom to 'practice' their sexual technique, and to marry quickly - usually from 15 years of age onwards. An older man, or *fisi* (hyena), is often employed to break the girl's virginity and to teach her about sex in preparation for marriage. These initiations often take place against a backdrop of high levels of domestic violence and sexual abuse in Malawi (Mbilizi, 2001).

For many trafficking victims, the process of early sexualisation seems to play a vital role in normalising prostitution so that it is not unusual for young women to migrate to holiday resorts, border regions and cities to earn incomes from sex work. Others, who find work in restaurants and bars at the same locations, supplement their meagre earnings by having sexual encounters with patrons, many of whom are foreigners (Pan African News Agency, 2000). One way or the other, prostitution brings girls into contact with traffickers who have often travelled to Malawi specifically for recruitment purposes. There are two ways in which girls' early sexualisation exposes them to the dangers posed by traffickers. Firstly, it deprives young women of schooling and job opportunities because of pregnancies, confinement to households as cooks and cleaners, the promise of easy money as sex workers, or similar consequences. This makes offers of study and work in Europe or South Africa, commonly made by traffickers during recruitment, irresistible to many young women. Secondly, sexual rites encourage early marriages such that offers of marriage from traffickers are favourably received both by young women and their families. These offers of marriage are often accompanied by generous gifts of money, a practice that resembles and is legitimised by the custom of *kutomera*.

A. Trafficking from Malawi to Europe by Malawian Business Women and Nigerian Syndicates

▪ Introduction

It is the last thing she does before her departure for Europe: a visit to David. He also lives in Lilongwe's Area 23, close to the house where the girls have been kept for the past few weeks in preparation for their trip. David is a *sing'anga*, a traditional healer. He knows why the

local woman has come and prepares the small package of mixed traditional herbs. She pays and departs. No doubt she will be returning for more of the mixture before her next trip, as usual.

What David does not know is that thousands of miles away, in a suburban house in the Netherlands, the herbs form part of a ritual used by traffickers to frighten Malawian girls recruited for sexual exploitation into submission. This practice came to light when a 16-year old Malawian victim jumped from a second story window in a small Dutch town and reported her experiences of enslavement to the police.¹²² The investigations that followed, and the testimonies of repatriated Malawian victims have revealed the recruitment and widespread sexual and commercial exploitation of Malawian girls by Nigerian syndicates connected to clubs and brothels across Europe.

▪ Recruitment

(i) *Malawian Businesswomen Traffickers*

The recruitment methods of Malawian businesswomen have been documented both by the Malawian government and by the media, and have been recorded in a series of high profile court cases (Binoculars, 1999; National Newspaper, 1999). Malawian girls are offered jobs by female recruiters (or their male partners) who are, or pretend to be, local businesspeople with interests and contacts in Europe. The employment opportunities include jobs in European factories, restaurants, hair salons, shopping malls, hotels, homes or fashion boutiques which many young women find attractive.

Me and my friend were introduced to this lady. She promised me, 'you can go to Europe and work in a shop...selling clothes.' I said, 'I want a job. I am tired here. Can you find a job for me?' She said, 'yes, in a shop in Holland.'¹²³

I was in district 43 with my friends. We were going to meet my boyfriend outside a hotel when Nora came and talked to us about

¹²² Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 14 November 2002; Trafficking victim case record, Department of Social Welfare: Lilongwe, 1 May 1999.

¹²³ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

work in Europe, in fashion...She said we would get US dollars and she could give us US\$2000 before we left.¹²⁴

The victims are Malawian girls and young women between the ages of 15 and 25 living in Lilongwe. Few have completed their secondary schooling and are either working or unemployed at the time of the recruitment. Women and girls who are sex workers and girls with no experience of prostitution are recruited in the same way: both are offered formal jobs and prostitution is never mentioned. The young women who are targeted are usually living independently in Lilongwe, sometimes sharing accommodation with friends rather than living with family.¹²⁵ Many have their own sources of income at the time of recruitment, either as sex workers or as traders at the local markets.

Recruitment takes place in Lilongwe and appears to be most common at the city's night clubs, budget hotels and markets, places where young women are to be found loitering, selling goods or procuring clients as sex workers. This takes place against a backdrop of child prostitution in the city at the numerous drinking 'joints', bars, social venues, taverns, bottle stores, and on the streets. These venues are frequented both by child sex workers and by teenage bar maids who supplement their meager incomes with sex work.

Once they have been recruited, women and girls are taken to transit houses in Lilongwe's Area 23, Area 47 and Area 49 where they stay with their recruiters for periods between one and seven weeks prior to departure. During this time, they continue to believe they will be travelling to Europe for the employment opportunities promised by the trafficker. It is likely that traffickers use this interim period between recruitment and departure to arrange fraudulent travel documents for their victims.¹²⁶

(ii) *Malawian-based Nigerian Traffickers*

Nigerian traffickers appear also to be based in Lilongwe where they target girls at the Lilongwe market and other locations with job

¹²⁴ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 14 November 2002.

¹²⁵ Of six trafficking victim case records held by Malawi's Department of Social Welfare, not one Malawian victim who had been recruited to Europe had two living parents.

¹²⁶ Two trafficking victim case records, Department of Social Welfare, Malawi, 19 February and 1 May 1999.

offers in Europe. They may enter Malawi from Zambia on fraudulent or fraudulently obtained Tanzanian and Kenyan passports, which allow them entry into Malawi without visas.¹²⁷ Once in the country, they may assume Malawian names, obtain Malawian passports by bribing officials, and apply for business permits to create the impression of legitimate entrepreneurial activity. Some marry Malawian women with whom they later enter into trafficking partnerships.¹²⁸ Their Malawian wives or girlfriends are often used during recruitment to persuade girls in Malawi to travel to Europe.¹²⁹

The Nigerians say to their girlfriends, ‘Tell your friends I can get them work in my shops in Europe and they will get a lot of pounds’ and sure, the woman’s friends will believe her because she is their friend.¹³⁰

One official was quite emphatic about their activities:

They are telling girls, ‘Come to Europe, you can make good money, have a good life, work in fashion and trade.’ This is a group of women, the syndicate with the Nigerians...Yes, right now. What I have been telling you has been happening in the last few weeks. It is happening right now, right here in Lilongwe.¹³¹

Nigerian traffickers are said to venture frequently to Salima and Mangochi where they offer to marry young women. The women are reportedly taken to Lilongwe, kept in transit houses in Area 47 and Area 49, and later trafficked out of the country to Europe.¹³² Their recruitment drives also stretch beyond Malawi’s borders. Zambian

¹²⁷ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [Location withheld], 14 January 2003.

¹²⁸ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹²⁹ There is some indication that the Malawian wives or girlfriends of Nigerian traffickers do not know of the trafficking operations so that they are not always aware that by offering jobs in Europe to friends, they are recruiting women for the purpose of sexual exploitation.

¹³⁰ Interview with a Malawian immigration official at a Malawian land border post: [Location withheld], 25 January 2003.

¹³¹ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

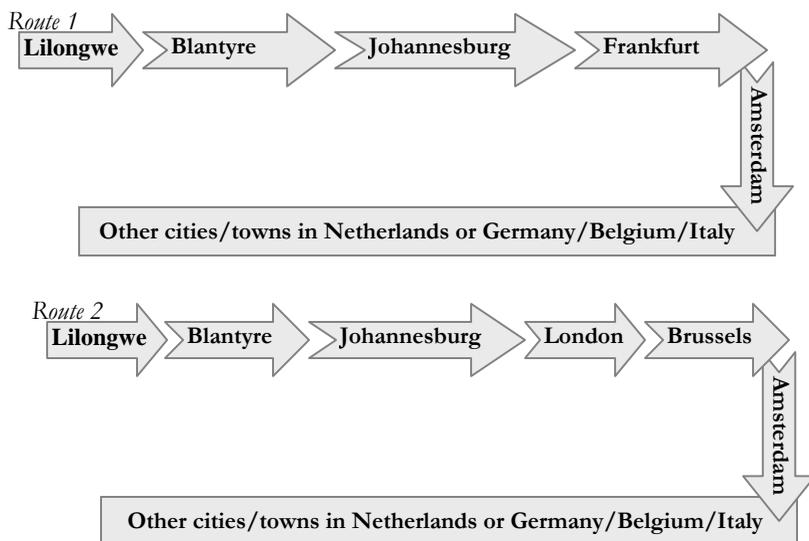
¹³² Interview with Malawian immigration official: [Location withheld], 23 January 2003.

women are targeted by the same recruiters with job offers and trafficked into Malawi near the Mchinji border post. Once in Malawi, fraudulent Malawian passports are arranged for the women that they use to enter Europe. Repatriated Malawian victims have confirmed the presence of Zambian women in Nigerian-linked transit houses and brothels in the Netherlands.¹³³

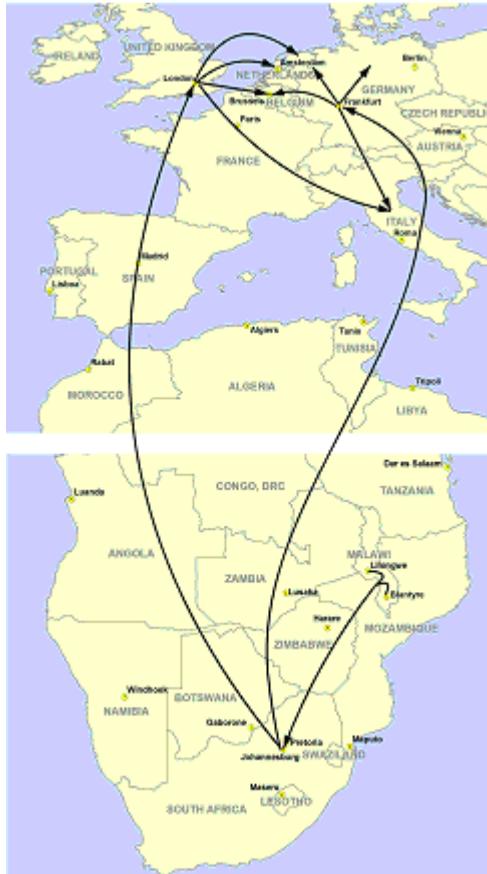
▪ Routes and Transportation

The trafficking routes to Europe usually consist of three to five legs per trip. They involve both land and air transport and transit through at least one African and/or European country before arrival in the Netherlands. Soon after arrival, victims are sold, many to Nigerian traffickers in Belgium, Germany or Italy.

Malawian traffickers who are connected to Nigerian syndicates in Europe may use one of two different routes:



¹³³ Interviews with four Malawian trafficking victims: Lilongwe, November 2002 – January 2003.



It appears that traffickers escorting women with fraudulent Malawian passports avoid the direct flights from Lilongwe to Europe because immigration officials at Lilongwe International Airport have detected their use of falsified travel documents and are more vigilant in checking the passports of Europe-bound passengers. Traffickers therefore prefer to exit the country at the Blantyre-Chileka International Airport (BCIA), which necessitates a connection through Johannesburg. Whether Malawian or Zambian, victims have Malawian passports, which are held by the trafficker, who usually escorts between one and four victims to Blantyre by road using public or private transport. Once in Johannesburg, traffickers and their victims make connections either to Frankfurt or London en route to their final destination in the Netherlands.

Some traffickers avoid using Malawian airports altogether because they have been recognized by immigration officials. One Malawian immigration official, speaking on condition of anonymity, reported that a police alert was issued for the apprehension of a Malawian man and a Tanzanian couple involved in trafficking young Malawian women to Europe in November 2002. Since their identities had become known to Malawian airport officials, the traffickers began to transport women out of Malawi across the Mchinji or Chitipa land borders into Zambia and again across a land border to Tanzania prior to transportation to Europe by air.¹³⁴

Malawi also acts as a transit country for Nigerian gangsters recruiting women in Zambia. They bring young Zambian women into Malawi through the Mchinji and Chitipa land borders and escort them to Lilongwe. In contingents that may consist of both Zambians, traveling on fraudulent or fraudulently obtained Malawian passports, and Malawian women, victims leave Malawi from Lilongwe and fly to London from where they are sold to agents in Germany and the Netherlands.¹³⁵

Victims recruited by Malawian businesswomen traffickers often enter Europe using Malawian passports, which are falsified or fraudulently obtained in Lilongwe in one of two ways. The first method involves circulating one passport among many women. Once a victim has arrived in Europe, traffickers send back her passport and insert the photograph of a new recruit in Malawi, allowing her to travel on the same document.¹³⁶ “They just bought Malawian passports and changed the photographs, slipped out the old one and put in the new and left the name the same.”¹³⁷

In some cases, traffickers appear not to have bothered with a new photo. On one occasion, a Zambian victim was returned to Lilongwe after Dutch immigration officials detected discrepancies between her physical appearance and her passport photograph.¹³⁸ The recent computerization of passports in Malawi, however, has led to the

¹³⁴ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [Location withheld], 14 January 2003.

¹³⁵ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [Location withheld], 23 January 2003.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Interview with Malawian immigration officer: [Location withheld], 23 January 2003.

¹³⁸ Trafficking victim case record, Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 19 February 1999.

lamination of passport photographs, putting an end to this practice. In its place, Malawian businesswomen traffickers appear to have turned to bribing Malawian immigration officials to obtain passports quickly and fraudulently. One female trafficker, using her connections at the Lilongwe immigration offices, was able to arrange new passports for two teenage girls within three days, circumventing a process that normally takes between 6 and 18 months.¹³⁹

Like the Malawian businesswomen traffickers, Nigerian traffickers also fraudulently obtain Malawian passports for their Zambian, and sometimes Malawian victims by bribing immigration officials.

They [Nigerian traffickers] recognize some immigration officers and they pay them...If they simply say, 'I will give you US\$50', they [immigration officials] will accept it and many, many Malawian passports have gone into the wrong hands in this way.¹⁴⁰

Malawian citizens do not require visas to enter the United Kingdom (UK), which allows Malawian girls and young women, and their Nigerian traffickers who often travel on Malawian passports, to enter the country with relative ease. Less is known about the way in which women enter the Schengen zone when they are transported onwards to the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Though far from conclusive, there is some suggestion that they legally obtain holiday visas from European consulates in Africa which traffickers allow to expire once recruited women and girls reach their destination in Europe.¹⁴¹

▪ **Exploitation**

The sale and commercial sexual exploitation of Malawian women and girls occurs within a week of their arrival in Europe. Recruiters deliver girls in groups of two or three to the private homes of Nigerian gangsters where they are sold for US\$10 000 each, in cash. After the sale, the recruiter usually returns to Malawi immediately, while

¹³⁹ Two Trafficking victim case records, Department of Social Welfare: Lilongwe, 19 February and 1 May 1999.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Malawian immigration officer: [Location withheld], 23 January 2003.

¹⁴¹ Interview with a South African victim: Johannesburg, 20 March 2003.

the new owners break the news of the intended exploitation to their victims.

She put me in a room upstairs and she locked the door. Then after some time I called for Sandra [the recruiter]. Nobody came. I slept on the bed and then called again. Nobody came. I was hungry...[Then the Nigerian trafficker] took me downstairs and she said... 'You are staying with me now. You will do prostitution and you will pay me US\$40 000.' Then a lady came. She said she will take me to work in a club the next day.¹⁴²

Debts are imposed once the young women have been told that they will be taking part in prostitution. Based on documented cases, the size of the debt is approximately US\$40 000. Only in two cases did amounts differ; a US\$45 000 debt reported by one 19 year old Malawian victim and another, the highest on record, of US\$65 000, imposed on another 19 year-old woman in the Netherlands.¹⁴³ The debts do not appear to have had a defined repayment period except in one case where repayment of a debt was demanded within six months.

Whatever the debt size, "this is the work and you have to do it. You have to pay me my money," one trafficker is reported to have threatened.¹⁴⁴ To force compliance, victims are locked in a room and subjected to the enactment of a ritual intended to frighten and intimidate them. The trafficker first cuts the victims' fingernails and strands of hair and places them in a clay pot already containing snail shells and herbs. The women are then stripped naked and their underwear is added to the pot. Each woman is made to hold the pot while a photograph is taken of her. During the enacted ritual, the trafficker makes threats about the consequences of not repaying the debt or running away.

She take my hair, my panties and she put some magic there...she said 'When you run away, I am going to kill you like this' and she take it and she put it somewhere. She took some of my blood [points to her finger].¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 14 November 2002.

¹⁴³ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (1): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

Another woman had a similar experience at the hands of the same trafficker:

They wanted our hair and nails...She said, 'If you run away, you will turn into a dog first and then you will die.' I was scared and so were my two other friends.¹⁴⁶

With many of the victims having grown up in rural villages in which rituals and magic are a part of daily life, they are often genuinely fearful of the threats of retribution by magic made by their captors. "We were very scared...we believed," confessed one woman.¹⁴⁷ When a group of Malawian women were liberated in 1999, and their traffickers arrested, a Malawian victim claims to have pleaded with the police about the danger posed by the clay pot still standing at her trafficker's house.

I was telling the police, help me because she will kill me this way. They went to that place and they took it away.¹⁴⁸

There are some variations in the rituals, equally frightening to the victims. In one case, a woman was made to drink a potion made from the herbs that their recruiter had brought from Malawi.¹⁴⁹ In a second case, at the hands of another trafficker, a woman was forced to bathe in the herbal mixture.¹⁵⁰

Following the ritual, women are placed in clubs to begin repaying their debts. In some instances, traffickers have connections with clubs or brothels through other members of the syndicate and are able to place women and girls easily. In others, women are forced to telephone various clubs to ask for work. Once they are placed and working, agents share profits with brothel owners, often on a 50/50 basis. One 19 year old woman claims that a brothel owner in Zwolle, the Netherlands, was collecting €70 for every 30 minutes of sex, €20 for oral sex and €12 for private strip shows. The agent would collect her

¹⁴⁶ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (1): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 14 November 2002.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Malawian victim (1): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

half from the brothel owner at the end of each week, and the victims would receive no payment.¹⁵¹

Women and girls repay their debts under conditions of commercial sexual exploitation in brothels run directly by, or associated with, a network of Nigerian traffickers in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy. Victims are forced to engage in homosexual activity and group sex, use sexual aids, take hard drugs, and very often, have unprotected sex. In one case, five Malawian girls were trafficked to a German brothel where at least one stayed for eleven months:

We were employed as sex slaves and we had no choice but to do it. At times we were forced to perform sex with over five men in a row (Binoculars, 1999).

There was no declining as we were in forced employment and did not know how to get away. Our passports were taken from us as well as our return tickets...Sometimes I would cry, sometimes I was comforting my friends. That is how we lived (Binoculars).

We worked like slaves. We were forced to have sex with any man (National Newspaper, 1999).

In the Netherlands, women report similar levels of exploitation:

I was forced to sleep with men in the clubs. Many men, all day and night... All the time sex and sex and I am like a slave.¹⁵²

One day this guy came and took me and my friend to a gay club. My friend had clothes same as mine but a different colour. A woman came to my friend and when see me in the same clothes, she says, 'you are both Malawians, hey? You are sisters. Come, you are going to do bad things.' I said 'No' and she beat me and they force me to sleep with this guy...Then he sent for my friend and we had to be like lesbians for all the men and then they do what they want with us. And we have to do it because if we don't

¹⁵¹ Assuming an average debt of US\$40 000 (equivalent to €37 000) and earnings of €70 for every session of thirty minutes, a trafficking victim would have had to accept 528 clients in 264 hours of work in order to pay off her debt.

¹⁵² Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (2): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

do it, then we get beaten and we have to pay the money back. We got sent to the gay club many times after that.¹⁵³

A group of Malawian women working at a brothel in the Netherlands were forcibly branded on their left upper torsos with the words “Sex Club”, the name of the establishment at which they claim they were being sexually exploited. Others were given permanent tattoos of naked women or flowers.

An equally exploitative and unique feature of Malawian trafficking to Europe is a process of sexualisation to which women are subjected in the Netherlands. Strangely reminiscent of the cultural practice of *ndakhula*, it is usually a response to girls who appear unable or unwilling to attract clients at the brothels, and who fail to earn enough money for their traffickers.

[The trafficker] said I was making bad business. So the older brother of her husband came to show us the sex. He was a big man, like my father.¹⁵⁴

One woman reported that a trafficker had the brother of her Dutch husband coach two Malawian women in sexual practices at her home. The trafficker converted an entire room to look like a pub and everybody was assigned a role. The recruiter played the role of a bar lady and the trafficker was the sex worker. They acted out the way in which the girls should approach customers, flirt with them, and propose sex in the rooms upstairs at the brothel. The girls were shown pornographic movies as part of their training. Throughout the training, which lasted two days, the trafficker’s brother-in-law was having sex with the girls, training them in various techniques and methods.

Two further consequences face women who perform poorly at brothels, refuse to cooperate or bring insufficient earnings. First, they may be beaten and physically assaulted at the homes of their traffickers, and away from the brothels. This abuse, occurring in a private space, are often more violent and abusive than those occurring at the brothel.

She took me to her house and started beating me with [points to an iron rod]...She was beating me. I said ‘Why are you beating me?’ She said ‘You are stupid, you don’t want to work. I want my

¹⁵³ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (1): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

money. I buy you. You must do everything for me'...She locked me like a prisoner on my own. I stayed alone for a week. Sometimes she gave me food. She was beating me, beating me maybe for two and a half months. She was giving me lots of scars [shows scars on face, arms, stomach and legs].¹⁵⁵

Alternatively, women who prove problematic are resold to Nigerian traffickers operating in other parts of the Netherlands or Europe. “They are all friends,” said a Malawian victim.¹⁵⁶ These traffickers form part of a network spanning at least four European countries - the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and Italy – and are continuously on the market for African women and girls. The Netherlands appears to be a hub to which they travel to purchase their victims. Documented cases indicate that victims who refuse to cooperate with their owners or who are less profitable than expected are sold and resold many times over within the network. It allows owners to profit from non-compliant victims despite their lack of cooperation, and they provide a constant supply of women for others in the network who do not have direct contact with recruiters.

▪ Conclusion

The scale of trafficking of young Malawian women to Europe is difficult to estimate at this stage. The Malawian government, like many others in the region, does not collect specific data on trafficked women and girls. The Department of Social Welfare’s reception centre at LIA, although not specifically designed for trafficked women and girls, was previously able to welcome, debrief and reintegrate victims in Malawi, but has closed due to a lack of funds. Trafficked women who may be returning to Malawi, therefore, are rarely identified or assisted.

Anecdotal accounts from returning victims suggest the possible scale of the trade in Malawian women and girls in Europe. In 1999, five Malawian victims were repatriated from the Netherlands. Together they had come into contact with 11 different traffickers, both Nigerian and European, throughout the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. They reported sexual exploitation at clubs in at least four different locations

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003.

in the Netherlands: Zwolle, Roosendaal,¹⁵⁷ Deventer, and Amsterdam. Two victims confirmed that their traffickers had also recruited young women from at least three other African countries: South Africa, Zambia and Nigeria.¹⁵⁸ When a victim who had been repatriated to Malawi from the Netherlands was asked whether she had seen other Malawian girls sexually exploited in Dutch brothels, she answered, “Yes, plenty...maybe 20.”¹⁵⁹ Another young Malawian woman was emphatic about the number of Malawian girls present in the brothels: “Plenty, plenty Malawi[ans],” she said.¹⁶⁰ She also referred to “Nigerians who own other girls.”¹⁶¹

These trafficking activities are likely to be on-going. In November 2002, the police issued an alert involving a Malawian man and a Tanzanian couple, trafficking women from Malawi by way of Zambia and Tanzania. In the same month, a Lilongwe taxi driver working from LIA reported a trafficking operation involving a Malawian woman living in Area 47 of the city, associated in the past with transit houses for trafficked women and girls. A victim interviewed in Lilongwe in January 2003 had little doubt that trafficking was a continuing problem: “A lot of men and women are doing it here in Malawi.”¹⁶²

B. Child Trafficking by Sex Tourists

■ Introduction

In 1998, Malawi’s Ministry of Tourism warned parents to check their sons’ “unusual relationships with tourists” after they discovered that Malawian boys were being peddled in European capitals by organized pedophile rings (Pan African News Agency, 1999). Subsequent reports indicate the sexual exploitation of Malawian children by foreign nationals; exploitation that includes using children

¹⁵⁷ There are a number of locations in the Netherlands with names similar to “Roosendaal”. It is unknown which of these is the site of the exploitation described.

¹⁵⁸ Interviews with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003; and Malawian trafficking victim (2): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Lilongwe, 28 January 2003.

¹⁶⁰ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (2): Lilongwe, 30 January 2003.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

as sexual partners, and in the production of pornography (All Africa News Agency, 1999).¹⁶³

Malawi is a popular tourist destination with the whole of its approximately 500 kilometer lakeshore speckled with holiday resorts and tourist hotspots. Most Malawians living along the Lake make their livings fishing and selling crafts. Although poverty is the norm for most communities on Lake Malawi, the tourist season brings with it a small economic boom, and children are expected to help support their families in whatever way they can, with many dropping out of school at an early age to do so. Commonly, children frequent tourist areas and befriend the tourists, often becoming guides for the duration of the tourist's holiday. While boys usually meet tourists while working along the lakeshore, girls encounter them in the bars and hotels of the holiday resorts (Pan African News Agency, 1999).¹⁶⁴

Poverty affects girls differently than boys, and the girl's sexuality may become a means by which to earn income for her family. By the age of 15 years, many girls have undergone the adulthood initiation ritual known as *ndakbula* – or “I have grown up” – and may be encouraged to be sexually active as preparation for married life (Stamm, 2001). While boys contribute to the family survival with income earned from fishing, or selling goods, many girls in this age group are found outside the hotels in the tourist areas, with some offering sex in exchange for money.¹⁶⁵

Lured by regular meals, gifts, and promises of jobs or educational opportunities overseas, some children are slowly seduced into a sexual relationship with tourists for the duration of their holidays.

Parents in the district were surprised to see their sons bringing home expensive gifts; parents were shocked to later discover that the gifts were in exchange for sexual favours for foreign male tourists. The tourists take advantage of the youths' poverty and illiteracy, and woo them into sex. Some of these tourists have actually built houses for these young men (Pan African News Agency, 1999).

¹⁶³ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry for Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry for Gender, Youth and Community Service: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹⁶⁵ Observation of IOM field worker while carrying out interviews in Salima, Mangochi and Nkhata Bay, November 2002 and January 2003.

Malawi's Ministry for Gender, Youth and Community Services reported that these sex tourists come primarily from the Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, that they include both men and women, and that these tourists engage in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships with Malawian children.¹⁶⁶

▪ **Recruitment, Transportation, and Exploitation**

Having spent much of his or her holiday in the company of a Malawian child, the tourist-trafficker will eventually ask to meet the child's family. Already impressed by the expensive gifts the child has received, family members are often overwhelmed by the tourist-trafficker's further offer to take the child to Europe to pursue educational or, in the case of an older child, employment opportunities. Little thought is given to the child's exact destination, or to the logistical obstacles, and the parents are often not yet aware that the child has been sexually exploited. Rather, the family is pleased that the child will be receiving or earning regular income. When parents do eventually become aware that their son has been sexually active with a male tourist, they are more likely to be concerned with the issue of homosexuality, rather than the sexual exploitation of their child (Pan African News Agency, 1999).

It's a big problem with tourists from Germany and the UK who come for holidays. They like to mix with the local women and children. The young people make lovers for the tourists, and sometimes travel with them. Other tourists leave with the children age from 14 to 16 years to educate them overseas. Parents don't ask where they are going, or how to make contact. They are happy that the child is getting an opportunity, and may become important.¹⁶⁷

But there is a relatively new trend where [the tourists] spend a week or two here with the children, and then carry them back with them to Europe.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Simeon Nyirenda, Volunteer at Civil Liberty: Nkhata Bay, 11 November 2002; also interview with Traditional Authority: Nkhata Bay, 11 November 2002.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Traditional Authority: Nkhata Bay, 11 November 2002.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Affairs: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

Customarily, families would have consulted the local traditional authority before making a major decision concerning the child, such as marriage or traveling overseas, but this practice is slowly eroding as families are increasingly influenced by prospects of their own financial gain. Parents are rarely suspicious of tourists offering euros or dollars to take their child to Europe nor, according to one traditional authority from Nkhata Bay, do they know what questions to ask.¹⁶⁹ “Maybe they will never see dollars again and now, maybe their child will have the means to send dollars for the other children to survive and do well.”¹⁷⁰ Even the gifting of a child to someone else is not unusual, as it parallels the traditional practice of *kuhaba*, in which a child is given to a wealthy man in exchange for food, or other necessities. The tourist-trafficker is able to exploit these conditions of poverty and traditional practice, and many families never hear again from their children following their departure for Europe.¹⁷¹

Little is yet known about the methods used by tourist-traffickers to transport their victims to Europe, but it seems likely that Malawian children enter the European Union legally in the company of their traffickers. At present, Malawian nationals, unlike nationals of the neighbouring commonwealth countries of Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia, need only a valid passport to enter the UK, and the tourist-trafficker may have little difficulty in securing the required parental signature on the child’s passport application.

Details of the nature of the exploitation suffered by children taken to Europe remain unclear because children typically disappear, and have no further contact with their families after leaving Malawi. The few that return are reluctant to speak about their experiences, and families often feel a sense of shame or failure that prevents children from reporting their exploitation to Malawian police.¹⁷² Some insight into their experiences in Europe may be gleaned from reports of exploitation that have occurred in Malawi, where pedophile rings target these children for the purpose of producing child pornography for international distribution. In some cases, material filmed in Malawi is

¹⁶⁹ Interview with traditional authority: Nkatha Bay, 11 November 2002.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Mrs. L.H. Chalara, Deputy Commissioner of Police: Nkatha Bay, 11 November 2002.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Simeon Nyirenda, Volunteer at Civil Liberty: Nkhata Bay, 11 November 2002.

¹⁷² Interview with Mrs. L. H. Chalara, Deputy Commissioner of Police: Nkatha Bay, 11 October 2002.

put on the Internet, including the names of the children victims and where they might be found. According to Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director in the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Affairs:

We have received reports saying that tourists are engaging in acts of immorality with local children in the Lakeshore districts of Salima and Nkhata Bay. Some tourists have been discovered shooting video films of such, including homosexuality. Such films are distributed through electronic mail. Along the lakeshore, a lot of tourists come to the lakeshore, both women and men, and they go for the young boys and the girls. Some of them take them through a pornographic movie, both homosexual and heterosexual, then, take the films away back to Europe where they pass on the name of the child, and where they can be found for other tourists coming this way – ‘a ring’, so to speak.¹⁷³

Members of Malawi’s expatriate community have also been implicated in using local children in the production of child pornography.

They take the boys to the lounge and show them normal videos that children enjoy, and then they would switch and put on a pornography movie, and while the children are watching, the men would take a boy to the bedroom and perform sex on him while a video is recording what they are doing – making his own videos, that was one aspect... Two of them were arrested. There was no court case. They were just sent out of the country.¹⁷⁴

Whether the videos were intended for electronic distribution, or for the exclusive use of the perpetrators is unknown, although it is clear that the sexual exploitation of children by foreign nationals in Malawi, including tourists, is a growing problem (Ligomeka, 2001).

▪ Conclusion

Sex tourism appears to be well established along the shores of Lake Malawi where foreign nationals come to prey on the teenage boys

¹⁷³ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Affairs: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Affairs: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

and girls who live there. Poverty and some traditional practices, such as those that predispose parents to accept gifts in exchange for their children, create the conditions that are exploited by the tourist-trafficker. Other traditional practices that could deter this new threat are being eroded, as survival strategies give rise to new value systems to guide parental decision-making. Families are typically unaware of the exploitation already suffered by their children at the hands of the tourist-trafficker, or the exploitation that awaits them abroad, and may not know what questions to ask the tourist offering financial gifts and opportunities for their children. While tourism in Malawi offers seasonal prosperity to lakeshore communities and contributes to the economic development of the country, it has also brought sexual predators who exploit the vulnerabilities of local children.

C. Trafficking Across Malawi's Land Borders

Ten girls had been found stranded in South Africa and Swaziland, lured by a Malawian businesswoman, who promised them jobs in restaurants, hotels, and as nannies. On arrival in the destination country, the girls were handed over to a third party who forced them to work in brothels and homes as prostitutes. Since the girls are left without any money in a strange country, they are forced to obey the orders (Tenthani, 2001).

▪ Introduction

From Malawi, it is easy to walk across international borders into Tanzania or Zambia, then Mozambique, undocumented and undetected, and ultimately to South Africa. For traffickers, the transportation of their victims overland incurs minimal financial costs, attracts fewer risks when compared with the difficulties involved in transporting young women to Europe, and avoids the problems of passports and visas entirely. So porous are the borders between some countries in Southern Africa that only those requiring official stamps for personal or business reasons bother to cross legally.¹⁷⁵

Because of these borders - Malawi and Mozambique, Malawi and Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia - it is not difficult. The borders are

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [location withheld], 25 January 2003.

open. Sometimes they organize for the people to walk across and they get back into the minibus on the other side.¹⁷⁶

At least two types of people are responsible for trafficking women across the land borders of Malawi: South African long-distance truckers, and Malawian businesswoman who also traffic women for eventual sale in Europe. Their recruitment tactics and means of cross-border transportation are similar, but the trucker-trafficker preys on young women along the transportation routes of the country, while the Malawian businesswoman tends to recruit her victims from rural areas. Either type may recruit for personal benefit or at the request of a third party, but for the victim, sexual slavery in South Africa is always the end result. “When they take them to South Africa, usually they do have prior arrangements with people in South Africa who say they would like young girls from Malawi.”¹⁷⁷

▪ Recruitment

(i) *The Trucker-Trafficker*

Of the two identified types of land border traffickers sourcing young women in Malawi, the trucker-trafficker has more ready access to victims. They traffick girls and young women who have dropped out of school at primary level, either because opportunities for further education do not exist or because hazards such as HIV/AIDS have left them orphaned, forcing them to care for younger siblings and grandparents. Many are otherwise unemployed, and hope that the transportation routes to Southern Africa may lead to job opportunities elsewhere.

I used to go for a social and a drink with my friends - that’s where I met him. He was a trucker on his way back to South Africa. After a few times he asked me to be his girlfriend, and come to South Africa. He said he had work for me and wanted to marry me. So I left with him from Mwanza the next day.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [location withheld], 23 January 2003.

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Blantyre, 20 January 2003.

For the trucker-trafficker, young women such as these are available whenever he stops to deliver his goods, clear customs, or sleep. He recruits his victims along the transportation routes, and at truck stops in border towns where they gravitate to socialize, and to sell food and merchandise.

While job seekers often approach long-distance truckers with requests for transportation and offer to pay, trafficking victims are more likely to have been actively recruited by the trucker-trafficker with offers of marriage, or employment in South Africa. “They promise jobs, some promise marriages, some tell them ‘come and flirt with me and I will bring you home again.’”¹⁷⁹ As in many parts of Southern Africa, girls in Malawi are often encouraged to marry from the age of 15 years, thus making the marriage lure a particularly seductive deceit. For a young woman, it appears to be an opportunity to escape her circumstances, while for her family, it lessens the financial burden of another person on the household, and holds the promise of some future financial support should she earn an income abroad.

(ii) *The Malawian Businesswoman Trafficker*

The trafficker posing as a successful Malawian businesswoman recruits young women from rural areas, where the victim’s relative isolation may increase her receptivity to the promises made by a friendly, and seemingly prosperous urbanite. Rural women are more likely to be married at an early age, and less likely to have attended school than their counterparts living in cities or along the transportation routes. Certain initiation practises, such as *kubaba*, and *kutomera*, which are more prevalent in rural areas, may also increase the rural youth’s vulnerability as it legitimises the exchange of a young girl or woman for the necessities for survival. Families in rural areas especially, battling to survive increasing poverty, are often forced to use all available resources to sustain the family. Enticing job offers made to young women and girls in the family are viewed as life saving opportunities in such conditions.

The businesswoman trafficker adeptly exploits the particular vulnerabilities of the rural woman, with offers of educational or job opportunities abroad; offers that implicitly carry the promise of survival for her whole family. “They walk into the communities, easily charm

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the victims, make friends with the parents or guardians and make surprise offers.”¹⁸⁰

In 2001, the Media Association for Human Rights Advancement in Malawi toured South Africa, investigating and identifying 171 victims who were trafficked from the rural areas of Malawi such as Salima, Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Mangochi, Machinga, Phalombe, Mwanza, and Mulanje (Tenthani, 2001).¹⁸¹ According to the Blantyre Synod, a Malawian NGO, many of these young women have returned to Malawi to end up in prostitution in urban areas, despite their rural origins, because of the lack of support and infrastructure necessary for their rehabilitation.¹⁸²

▪ Routes and Transportation

Long-distance truckers-turned-traffickers and businesswoman traffickers use similar routes and methods to transport girls and women across the land borders of Southern Africa, although, for the trucker-trafficker, his *modus operandi* is more restricted, and largely related to congestion at the border crossings and the trucking itinerary that determines his route and points of departure and arrival. At border posts like Mwanza and Mchinji, for example, it may take up to two days before long-distance truckers are able to clear customs, allowing the trucker-trafficking ample time to select and lure victims.

Sex is currency along the region’s transportation routes, and it is not uncommon for long-distance truckers who have no trafficking intention to negotiate for it in exchange for transportation.

She can be between 13 and 25 years. If she does not live in Malawi she can be from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, sometimes South Africa. Like some of them also stay around the border areas and they get border passes so they are allowed to go within 10 kilometres of the border. So they do, and we pick them up there. Sometimes you see them struggling on, and they stop you and she says ‘please can you assist me? I am going to Lilongwe to see my mother, but I don’t have cash,’ and they don’t want to pay. So you say, ‘why are you going to Lilongwe if you don’t have

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Dr. Mary Shawa, Deputy Director, Ministry of Gender, Youth and Community Services: Lilongwe, 15 January 2003.

¹⁸¹ Interview with Prince Jimali, Communications Officer, Blantyre Synod: Blantyre, 20 January 2003.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

money?’ She will say ‘I am going to visit my mother because she is ill,’ and if you assist her, then she will give you sex.¹⁸³

Although sex may be negotiated in exchange for transport, occasionally women will receive the requested transportation and rebuff the trucker’s sexual advances. Such a refusal sometimes elicits rape. ‘It is the deal. She is already on the way. She must pay, and if you have an assistant, he will also share the sex.’¹⁸⁴

This is an ideal context for the trucker-trafficker who uses the request for transport as an easy means of recruitment. Victims may be picked up along the route by the trucker-trafficker, and deceived about his intended destination. ‘Sometimes the drivers pretend, ‘yes I am going to Mzuzu or Mwanza,’ but they are going someplace else, and they want the girl. She is tricked.’¹⁸⁵ When this occurs, a girl or young woman may be deposited by the roadside in places far from home, and faced with the same transportation problem that resulted in her victimization. Children, in particular, may be stranded in border towns long distances from their places of origin, and forced to struggle with issues of language and lack of documentation. In South Africa, many such children are picked up by police and deported as illegal immigrants.¹⁸⁶

Overland migration is a hazardous undertaking in Southern Africa, particularly for women who may be subjected to rape, robbery, and even murder along the region’s major thoroughfares. For one woman, her decision to leave her home country, Uganda, and seek safety in Malawi proved fatal.

I left my country, came to Tanzania, and then Malawi. I didn’t want to travel anymore but I met a man, a trucker from South Africa who promised he would get me a job - a house in South Africa. When we arrived in South Africa, he started to abuse me, wanting anal sex. When I refused, he got violent and brought his friends to sleep with me through the vagina; only he through the anal sex. He said, ‘that woman is a crook. You can use her and

¹⁸³ Interview with South African long-distance trucker: Mwanza border post, 22 January 2003.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with South African long-distance trucker: Mwanza border post, 22 January 2003.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Grace Machaba, Malelane Care Centre: Malelane, December 2002.

pay me certain monies.' I escaped, and fled to Cape Town, but in March 2000, I got sick and was diagnosed as HIV positive. My health is...I am weak, but I hope if I get on treatment I will be ok¹⁸⁷

Although businesswomen traffickers follow the same routes as the trucker-traffickers, their means of transport are more flexible, and may include rented vehicles, their own private cars, or trucks. While the trafficker will cross the border alone with proper documentation, the victim, who still believes that she is going to a job in South Africa, will circumvent the border with the assistance of a guide, and meet the trafficker again on the other side. Women are usually transported in groups of three or four with more than a dozen travelling per month. "In March 2000, fifteen women from the age of 15 years were trafficked [from Malawi] to South Africa."¹⁸⁸

▪ **Exploitation**

With every successive border crossed, the vulnerability and helplessness of these young women increases. For many, their sexual exploitation commences en route to South Africa, while for others their journey will result in a debt, which they are forced to pay through sex work when they reach their destination. Once in South Africa, the final destination for most, the victim is intimidated with threats of legal repercussions or imprisonment as a consequence of her illegal status. Barriers of language and culture, as well as her lack of financial resources reinforce her sense of powerlessness and compel her to comply with the trafficker's demands.

Johannesburg is the final destination for most women trafficked overland from Malawi, regardless of whether they have been trafficked by trucker-traffickers or businesswomen traffickers. As during the recruitment phase of the trafficking operation, however, there are differences in how the two types of traffickers exploit their victims. The trucker-trafficker either delivers a pre-ordered victim to the buyer for an agreed price, or keeps the victim as his personal sex

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Christina, Ugandan trafficking victim: Cape Town, 18 October 2002. Christina contracted HIV/AIDS during her sexual exploitation, and passed away on 31 December 2002 following complications related to her illness. She is survived by her three young children.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

slave, and ‘shares her’ with his friends for money. A trafficked woman recalls, “It was the trucker and his friends, they came again and again. They came with others all the time.”¹⁸⁹ Where the victim was recruited with the promise of marriage, the trucker-trafficker may maintain the pretence of marriage until he becomes bored with the arrangement, at which point he rents her to his friends. Another victim remembers, “Yes, after sometime they get used to the girl. They sell them and abandon them to other men.”¹⁹⁰

Victims who protest their conditions, or resist such treatment take enormous risks. “Some of the Malawian women are being attacked after failing to meet the demands of the truckers. Some are raped by many, and killed.”¹⁹¹

If the trucker-trafficker has to travel again, the victim may be rented out to other men so that the trafficker gains financially for the duration of his absence. “His friends share the flat, when he goes, someone else sleeps there, and someone else again. He tells them to keep me, and they have sex with me. Then he comes back again and so on...”¹⁹²

By comparison, victims trafficked by the businesswoman trafficker are taken to private homes or brothels in Johannesburg or Pretoria where they are sold for a once off fee. Little is yet known about the conditions of their exploitation, but it is likely – given the experiences of victims from other countries – that they are forced into prostitution at these locations to earn money for their buyers. “It was discovered in my interviews with the victims that they are forced to sleep with a minimum of 10 men a day – ‘the more we sleep with, the more money we make for our employers’.”¹⁹³ As has been observed in other cases, particularly of Thai women trafficked to South Africa, some Malawian women eventually come to see their situations as normal and profitable, and await an opportunity to escape so that they may work for themselves in the South African sex industry, rather than return to the poverty they knew in Malawi.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (1): Lilongwe, 20 January 2003.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Malawian trafficking victim (2): Lilongwe, 20 January 2003.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹² Interview with Malawian trafficking victim: Blantyre, 22 January 2003.

¹⁹³ Interview with Prince Jimali, Communications Officer, Blantyre Synod: Blantyre, 20 January 2003.

During the interview, more of the girls were willing to go home, but they lacked the means. Those who could not make up their minds were living in hope that one day they would find something more lucrative away from their employers. They were not ready to come back to Malawi because of the poverty.¹⁹⁴

■ Conclusion

There is no easy way to determine the number of Malawian women and girls trafficked overland to South Africa every year. The few victims who escape their captivity in Johannesburg or Pretoria are likely to remain free on the streets for only a few days before being recaptured by their traffickers or arrested by police. If they are arrested, they may spend a few days in jail, and are rarely, if ever, interviewed for their experiences as victims. Instead, they are treated as criminals in breach of immigration laws and deported.

We see on average two ladies a month who have been trafficked. I never knew at first that they formed this form of trafficking, eh? I discovered that these people, these young girls, are taken there, they are promised marriage, and when they get there some are married for a few days, and then the prostitution begins. They, some of them, manage to run away, get picked up by the police, and get sent back by the authorities to Malawi.¹⁹⁵

The deported victim faces similar stigmatisation in Malawi, where the lack of trafficking legislation perpetuates the criminalisation of the victim, and where few, if any, support services exist to assist with her reintegration. In effect, the trafficked woman who returns to Malawi is greeted by the same conditions of poverty, unemployment, and lack of opportunities that led to her initial vulnerability. Coupled with the trauma of her ordeal, these factors may push her into prostitution in Malawi for the first time.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ Interview with Malawian immigration official: [location withheld], 23 January 2003.

PART II. EXTRA-REGIONAL TRAFFICKING

6. TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN FROM THAILAND

6.1 Introduction

If you live in South Africa's Gauteng province, you may have been there for a working lunch or reserved dinner. The fare at this up-market restaurant is gourmet, the service, courteous and prompt. Polite explanations of exotic dishes are provided. It is a favourite among both South African businesspeople and expatriates.

Later in the evening, the same popular establishment is a cover for traffickers catering to another demand. After the last unsuspecting patrons have settled their bills and departed, groups of young women from Thailand are hustled into the back of the restaurant. It is their first time in South Africa. Two hours earlier they had disembarked from flights from Bangkok, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur or Hong Kong and they believe they have been recruited to work in local restaurants. To keep the women convinced that this offer of work is genuine, they wait in the restaurant whose doors have been locked behind them. Suspecting nothing, the women sit at numbered tables and are offered food and drinks. Behind a one-way mirror an auction for their bodies is taking place: brothel owners and trafficking agents are negotiating the purchase price for each woman to work in the local sex industry. The prettiest and youngest attract the highest bids of around R25 000 and are destined for up-market brothels and clubs; less attractive women are sold for R15 000 and will be leased to cheaper brothels. No time is wasted once the deals are struck and settled. Long after the restaurant's closing time, the women are hustled out again and disappear as slaves into South Africa's multi-million Rand sex industry.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁶ Interview with police officer who wished to remain anonymous: Pretoria, 11 February 2003.

There are at least six types of traffickers who bring women from Thailand into South Africa. These types either belong to a “cottage-industry” or to an international criminal order:

“Cottage industry” trafficking

- a. “Small-time” traffickers. Groups of male Thai agents operating on a small scale often double up as recruiters, escorts (during transportation) and final purveyors of trafficked women in South Africa, selling or leasing them to brothel owners or other Thai agents with whom they also compete. They appear to have only limited contacts in the sex industry and law enforcement and immigration departments. Many have a similar or even identical trafficking *modus operandi* in South Africa to agents working for organized Thai trafficking groups functioning out of Bangkok.
- b. “Second Wave” traffickers (Hughes, 2000). Trafficked women turned traffickers themselves are often referred to as *mama san*.¹⁹⁷ These former victims have paid off their debts to agents, escaped or married South African men themselves, and begun to profit from trafficking. They operate on a scale and method similar to “small-time” Thai agents, travelling to Thailand to lure ageing Thai sex workers with promises of cash they can no longer earn in Thailand.
- c. “Pretty Woman” traffickers. South African men travel to Thailand and offer to marry Thai women. These women then travel back to South Africa where the promises of marriage never materialise. Instead, the women are held captive in private homes for the personal sexual gratification of their traffickers.
- d. Brothel owners as traffickers. These are powerful South African brothel owners with links to international organized crime. In some cases they have their own recruiters and agents based in South-East Asia whom they use to traffic women on a significantly larger scale

¹⁹⁷ The term *mama san* is a Japanese term used commonly to refer to an Asian woman involved in the sex industry, usually as a pimp, bar hostess or ‘surrogate mother’ to sex workers. In the South African sex industry, it refers to Thai victims turned traffickers or Thai brothel madams who assist brothel owners in managing and communicating with sex workers from Thailand or trafficking victims.

than “small-time”, “second wave” or “pretty woman” traffickers. In other cases, they buy women from agents operating on the local scene.

International organized crime

- a. Chinese triads. Triad societies traffic Thai women to South Africa as one of a number of criminal activities with which they are involved. They recruit women with false promises of work and transport them to South Africa by sea or air to work as sex slaves in Cape Town or Johannesburg.
- b. Thai organized crime. These groups are simpler, smaller and less involved in other criminal activities in South Africa than the triad groups. They recruit girls and young women in Thai villages, often from families who have incurred debts with local criminal groups, and transport them to South Africa for debt repayment. Agents who are part of these groups have well-developed connections in law-enforcement and immigration in South Africa, and with criminal associates in Thailand who are able to execute threats made in South Africa against victims’ families.

Irrespective of type, criminal organizations target a wide range of vulnerable women and girl children. In Thailand, victims include those living in rural villages in the north of the country who are seized by traffickers connected to local criminal groups to settle debts incurred by their families, or the teenage daughters of desperate parents who sell their children to recruiters for short-term relief from poverty. Some are runaway or single mothers trying to support their children. Others are ageing sex workers from the streets and brothels of Bangkok. Most are poor, poorly educated, and speak very little or no English. They come from all parts of Thailand, and sometimes from neighbouring countries.

In 1968, Barlay distinguished between ‘game girls’, or young women who are sex workers at the time of their recruitment, and ‘working girls’, who have never been exposed to prostitution. This is the single most apparent distinction between the trafficked women recruited from Thailand (Barlay, 1968). Ten years ago a small percentage of women recruited in Southeast Asia knew they were going into sex work. A decade later, it appears to be more difficult to deceive women about the type of work they will do, leading recruiters to increasingly target those from rural areas who have no previous

experience of working in the Thai sex industry for the higher price they will bring (Skrobanek, 1999).¹⁹⁸

Reports on the particular *modus operandi* of organized crime groups recruiting for the South African market offer an incomplete and limited picture. What little is known about Chinese triad groups suggests that they recruit in the rural areas of northern Thailand, and offer money to parents in exchange for jobs in hotels and restaurants for their daughters.¹⁹⁹ Thai organized crime groups are believed to recruit in the same rural areas of the north. They employ a recruitment method that has become their signature; seizing girls for prostitution whose parents have no other way of paying off debts they have incurred with the traffickers. Sometimes, traffickers identify girls of indebted families as early as the years immediately following birth. The girls' physical features are assessed and many are earmarked for trafficking when they approach sexual maturity.

“Second wave” victims-turned-traffickers recruiting in Thailand employ similar methods yet their power to lure victims is unparalleled. Few traffickers have the same capacity to convince and deceive women to enter what is ultimately a situation of sexual exploitation as female recruiters. These traffickers approach their victims, woman to woman, with credible-sounding offers of jobs in South Africa as waitresses, cleaners and caterers in hotels and holiday lodges, as domestic workers, caterers, au pairs, and sales assistants in shopping malls, always promising a good life and irresistible earnings. Even more likely to fall under their convincing spell are older Thai sex workers whose profits have begun to fall in a sex industry where the biggest earners are teenage girls. These female traffickers present themselves as fellow sex workers and living proof that equal, if not more favourable, work opportunities and earnings await them in the South African sex industry. The scale of such recruitment is small - each trafficker will often bring back to South Africa no more than two or three women at a time to work for her under conditions of debt

¹⁹⁸ The majority of Thai women recruited for the purpose of sexual exploitation in Japan 1994-1999 were sex workers already, reported in Human Rights Watch, Owed Justice, 1999. Sources estimate the ratio of sex worker victims to non-sex worker victims in South Africa at between 60:40 and 80:20. Interview with Thai Embassy official: Pretoria, 2 August 2002; interview with brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

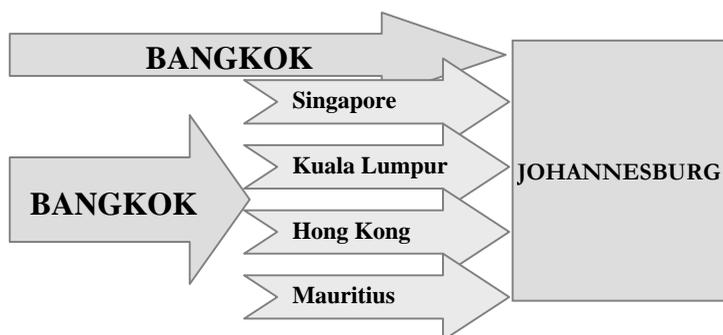
¹⁹⁹ Interview with police officer who wished to remain anonymous: Pretoria, 11 February 2003; interview with police officer who wished to remain anonymous: Cape Town, 19 September 2002.

bondage. Yet the strategy has proved so successful that a number of sources have recognized it as largely responsible for the continual growth in the numbers of women from Thailand working in the sex industry in South Africa.²⁰⁰

Agents promised their recruits large sums of money (ZAR 50 000 per month in one case, ZAR 100 000 in three months in another), accommodation and “free everything.”²⁰¹ Yet the true economics of the captive situation into which women were unwittingly entering, such as the amount of money they would owe and how little they would actually earn, were rarely revealed until their arrival in South Africa. Agents lied about the conditions of work, and the limited time and highly controlled circumstances under which their victims would be forced to repay their inflated debt. Many women were also misled about the *type* of work they would be doing.

6.2 Routes and Transportation

Data from Statistics South Africa reveal that 4699 Thai nationals entered South Africa in 2001; the overwhelming number of whom did so by air through the JIA. Although there is no way of knowing how many of them may have been trafficking victims, it is reasonably certain that they were among the number because Thai passport-holders do not need visas to enter South Africa. Transport routes from South East Asia to South Africa are known to include the following:



²⁰⁰ Interview with police officer: Durban, 12 September 2002; interview with a former trafficker: Johannesburg, 13 August 2002.

²⁰¹ Interview with Thai trafficking victim: Durban, 14 September 2002.



Beyond these five confirmed routes, there exists a sixth possibility. The recruitment of women in rural northern Thailand by Chinese triad groups and their transportation to Hong Kong suggests that flight itineraries originating in Hong Kong and terminating in Johannesburg, whether direct or including a stopover, may also be used by traffickers.²⁰² The route could be unique, possibly being the only air link used for the trafficking of women from Thailand to South Africa that does not originate in, or pass through, Bangkok.

The unconfirmed Hong Kong route apart, most victims' cross-border journeys to South Africa begin in Bangkok. There trafficking agents have developed contacts with immigration officials that allow them to bypass profiling procedures. This, of course, comes at a price and the bribe is reported to be around 5000 Baht per woman.²⁰³ These bribes and other travel costs (return air ticket, fraudulent documentation in some cases, accommodation in Bangkok and food and clothing during possible stopovers) are paid upfront by agents and accumulate as debt incurred by the unsuspecting victims. Immigration procedures, whether legal or involving bribery, are negotiated entirely by agents. Victims' passports and air tickets are confiscated by the

²⁰² Two airlines, South Africans Airways and Cathay Pacific, fly this route direct.

²⁰³ Approximately US\$117 or ZAR 935 at the date this report was published.

agents and returned only briefly during arrival and departure procedures. Most victims travelling to South Africa do not travel alone but in the vigilant company of escorts.

On arrival at JIA, trafficked Thai women gain easy access to South Africa on 30-day holiday permits. Some traffickers are reported to have co-opted border police and immigration officials into their operations to facilitate the entry of larger groups of between 12 to 15 Thai victims.²⁰⁴

6.3 Exploitation

Women from Thailand trafficked into the South African sex industry enter a system of supply and demand for captive women in which they are carefully managed, and follow fixed and often predictable trajectories of commercial and sexual exploitation such that their experiences are often remarkably similar and rarely isolated. “Second wave” Thai traffickers together with powerful brothel owners and Thai organized crime groups connected inside “the system” have similar *modus operandi* and employ consistent methods of profiteering and exploitation which shape the experiences of victims: forced sex work, long working hours, debt bondage, captivity in suburban safe houses, intimidation of the woman and her family members in Thailand, poor and unhygienic living conditions, and physical and verbal abuse.

In Johannesburg, which is thought to host the largest number of Thai victims²⁰⁵, the demand is greatest for “leased” women. These victims will not be sold by their agents but rented out to brothels across the city and the province. The most ideal situation for traffickers is to bring women into the country and to sell them, leaving the buyers to bear the legal risk and additional expenses associated with keeping them captive. Virtually all agents first try to sell the women they have trafficked from Thailand. The few fortunate enough to find immediate buyers arrange sales, often auctions, where the buyers bid between ZAR 15 000 to ZAR 35 000 for the women who are on display.²⁰⁶ The

²⁰⁴ Interview with police officer who wished to remain anonymous: Pretoria, 11 February 2003; interview with police officer who wished to remain anonymous: Durban, 12 September 2002.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Thai Embassy official: Pretoria, 2 August 2002.

²⁰⁶ An unconfirmed report suggested that Thai women were being sold for ZAR 75 000 (approximately US\$9500).

buyers are Thai or South African agents, or South African brothel owners, who will get returns on their investments by imposing debts on the women that will have to be paid through sex work.

Few agents have the luxury of immediate buyers, however, and most must make arrangements to manage the women themselves at suburban transit houses from which they will be leased to brothel owners.²⁰⁷ Such houses are legion in the northern residential areas of Johannesburg and inconspicuously serve as the 'central points' or bases from which agents rotate women between brothels.²⁰⁸ Upon arrival in South Africa, women are transported directly from JIA to transit houses where they are almost immediately confronted with the reality of the captivity into which they have been led: agents inform women of the inflated debt they will have to pay back through sex work, and confiscate their passports and return air tickets. All freedom of movement is restricted in the highly controlled physical surroundings of the safe house. An estimated 20 – 40 per cent of women had no idea they would be entering prostitution in South Africa, let alone the conditions in which they would be working.²⁰⁹

Keeping women trapped as effectively as high walls and guards common to most transit houses is the debt bondage imposed by agents in which victims are bound by a 'contract'. Rather than a mutual agreement between agent and victim, it is a set of unwritten terms enforced by captivity and intimidation, and skewed completely in the agent's favour. The typical contract will bind victim to repay ZAR 50 000 to 60 000 over three to six months through sex work. Such contracts are in the region of 200 – 400 per cent larger than the women's cumulative travel costs to South Africa, the full cost of which many women had agreed to pay back under the favourable conditions promised by recruiting agents.

²⁰⁷ The trend of agents first trying to sell the women they traffic before leasing them out themselves is confirmed by a recorded statement from an informant within the sex industry: "Normally when the agents bring them in...[they] start selling them to the highest bidders. If they can't sell them, they start contacting the clubs." Statement from informant in the sex industry: Johannesburg, March 2000.

²⁰⁸ Interview with police officer: Durban, 12 September 2002; interview with former trafficker: Johannesburg, 13 August 2002. Randburg, and its immediate surrounds in the north of Johannesburg, is a favourite location

²⁰⁹ Interview with Thai Embassy official: Pretoria, 2 August 2002; interview with brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

There's no way he won't get his money back because the women will not leave his premises until he's [the agent] got his money.²¹⁰

They lock them up and force them into prostitution and...demand these women earn ZAR 50 000 or ZAR 60 000 before they can have freedom.²¹¹

Some contracts are phrased in terms of the number of clients a victim has to see before she can win her freedom, rather than a sum to be paid off. One woman recruited in Thailand recounted that her female agent, operating from an escort agency east of Johannesburg, demanded that she see 250 clients before she could be set free; in Thailand she had been promised ZAR 50 000 per month and "everything for free".²¹² In other reported cases, girls from poor or indebted families recruited in rural Thailand by organised crime groups are made to pay off contracts to 'honour' debt incurred by their parents.

Everything [travel costs, documents, accommodation]...will be paid for by the mafia and at the end of the day it accumulates on top of the debt of the parents. Then they give them a certain period in which to repay that debt. They say this girl will have to pay us back within 18 months or you're dead...They set the time and normally this time is not sufficient for the girl to pay back the money. Every month that she is late with her payments there is a fine or a build-up of interest on that money that she must repay.²¹³

In a few cases, agents allow women to keep a small percentage of their earnings, though this is never equal to the sizeable earnings that had been promised to them in Thailand.

Speedy repayment of these debts is facilitated by the agents who operate from the safe houses in one of two ways: (1) moving and rotating women among brothels and clubs such that transit houses serve only as living quarters, or (2) advertising or arranging for clients to come to the transit house such that women never leave the premises.

²¹⁰ Interview with brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

²¹¹ Interview with Thai Embassy official: Pretoria, 2 August 2002.

²¹² Interview with trafficking victim from Thailand: Durban, 14 September 2002.

²¹³ Interview with a police officer: Johannesburg, 19 August 2002.

The leasing and rotation of trafficked women to and among brothels is less profitable, per woman, than having them all work from a transit house where agents do not have to share profits with brothel owners. But demand at the transit houses appears low and it is often more profitable to take advantage of the high demand at the hundreds of brothels to be found in and around greater Johannesburg. The cornerstone of this immense system of supply and demand is the relationship that exists between victims' agents and brothel owners. Agents enter the market by going door-to-door, introducing themselves to owners, and making known the availability of women. Successful canvassing by agents among brothel owners leads to deals to supply women. New agents must compete with more established agents and/or bigger, more organized operations with close ties to brothel owners.

Once a deal has been struck, agents drive groups of women daily from the transit houses to brothels across Johannesburg. It is a routine for women belonging to agents.

They are kept at this compound, taken to the brothels and collected again. That is their only movement.²¹⁴

The working hours are very long – confirmed reports indicate that women are made to work from 10am until between 2am and 5am the next morning when they are collected again by their agents.²¹⁵ The captive women work six days a week at the brothels, sometimes seven, as a statement from a former trafficker suggests:

They worked there [in a hotel in Hillbrow] Monday to Saturday. They were never allowed to leave the hotel...they come here as slaves; they have to work, they have to earn money. So if they can work on Sunday also, that's fine. He [the agent] used to transport them, about 12 of them, to Pretoria on Sunday and back in the morning.²¹⁶

At the brothels, women have no choice but to accept clients. The working conditions are tightly controlled and no freedom of movement is afforded the women. Those with no experience of sex

²¹⁴ Interview with a police officer: Johannesburg, 19 August 2002.

²¹⁵ Interview with trafficking victim from Thailand, September 2002, Durban; interview with a police officer: Johannesburg, 19 August 2002.

²¹⁶ Interview with brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

work are “forced into prostitution”²¹⁷ against their will and “are used as sex slaves.”²¹⁸ Those among the women who came to South Africa as willing sex workers are made to endure working conditions which they did not anticipate and about which they were never informed: the sheer number of clients they are forced to accept, the pressure often exerted by brothels owners to make them ‘go the extra mile’ to please clients (which may be against their will but is something they ‘consent’ to do, fearing the brothel owner’s sanction), and in some cases, forced drug use in drug-infested brothels.

Agents and brothel owners profit from abusive sexual practices through shared earnings on a fixed percentage basis that is negotiated up-front. A typical example is a report from a Johannesburg brothel where clients were being charged ZAR 250 for sex of which ZAR 150 would go to the agent and ZAR 100 to the owner of the establishment. Victims would receive nothing.²¹⁹ In another instance, an agent was leasing women to a Sandton brothel each for ZAR 450 per hour, while the victims themselves were given only ZAR 200 for an entire night’s work. Of the ZAR 200 given to each victim, half would then have to be paid to the Thai *mama san* upon the victims’ return to the transit house.²²⁰ Other agents are reported to lease women to brothels for a fixed amount per night, in one case as much as ZAR 4500.²²¹

Women not transported to brothels on a daily basis are made to work from the transit houses. Huddled away inconspicuously in Johannesburg’s wealthier suburbs, abuses at these central points are sometimes worse than at the brothels, and living conditions are often oppressive. In one case, thirty women were found sharing a two-bedroom house.²²² Women are “never”²²³ allowed to leave the safe house alone and their captivity is assured by the removal of their passports and air tickets and the use of guards on the premises. Threats are also made against women’s families.

They get threatened: ‘We know your family and we know who you are so if you disappear...we’re going to sort your family out’...So they [the agents] basically scare the hell out of

²¹⁷ Interview with Thai Embassy official: 2 August 2002.

²¹⁸ Interview with a police officer: Johannesburg, 19 August 2002.

²¹⁹ Interview with trafficking victim from Thailand: Durban, September 2002.

²²⁰ Interview with police officer: Pretoria, 11 February 2003.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

²²³ Interview with a brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

them...They are too scared to escape for reason of their children and family.²²⁴

Instrumental in managing the transit house is the *mama san*; a former victim no longer involved in prostitution who has been co-opted by an agent. The *mama san* shops and cooks for the women, collects money earned from clients, and from time to time, helps agents to pick and purchase newly arrived Thai women at sales and auctions. She ensures adherence to myriad house rules and helps to exert control over the women, normally with an iron fist and frequently using verbal and physical abuse. The agents play their expected part in this.

They have no freedom...They are told what time to sleep, what time to get up...you cannot believe the discipline they have. If he, for example, finds her drinking a Coke and he doesn't want her drinking Coke and gives her a hard time about it, for the three months that she's in the country, you can put that Coke in front of her and she will not touch it. The power they have over them you cannot believe.²²⁵

Importantly, brothel *mama-sans* are used at the safe houses to 'season' or condition women who have never worked in prostitution to agree to sex work at the brothels or transit houses. A source confirmed that the first two weeks to two months are the most traumatic for victims and many sink into depression.²²⁶ A mix of gentle encouragement, persistent influence and coercion from the *mama san* during this initial period, however, is almost guaranteed to achieve the desired 'turn around'. Gradually, captive working girls begin to 'consent' to the work, choosing to believe and pin their hopes to the prospect that their contract will end quickly, after which they will be free to earn enormous profits for themselves.

Ensuring 'consent' among the women recruited from Thailand helps to generate profit at the transit houses. Agents place adverts in the classified sections of well-known Johannesburg newspapers, to which clients respond.²²⁷ The adverts give nothing away as to the

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Interview with a brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ These advertisements appear in the classified section of three daily Johannesburg-based newspapers: *The Star*, *The Citizen* and *Daily Sun*. Adverts entice clients with promises of "Chinese Delight" or "Best Chinese" but may lead to

trafficked status of the women being promoted, and often what appears to be a harmless advert for one woman in a Saturday newspaper opens to clients the door to an entire transit house under an agent's control. At one such house, customers were being charged ZAR 350 for 30 minutes and all the earnings went to the agent, without any unnecessary and complicated profit-sharing with brothel owners. But as at the brothels, women themselves make nothing from their work.

He's got this woman [the *mama san*] that searches them...If the girl gets any extra money from the guy [client], she must hand it over as well, as payment towards her debt. So she's never allowed to have money – that's just to keep her dependent on them.²²⁸

Agents manipulate the legal status of women from Thailand to avoid their arrest and deportation before sufficient profits have been extracted from them. For this purpose, some have contacts among officials at the DHA whom they bribe to get extensions on the 30-day holiday permits on which victims enter the country.²²⁹ When their contracts are completed, victims are either dumped or returned to Thailand to prevent them from working for themselves, thereby limiting oversupply of women from Thailand and competition to agents.²³⁰

Some victims escape their agents by being bought out from their contracts by clients whom they have met at a brothel, and with whom they have fallen in love. It is reported to be a widespread practice in South Africa for clients, exclusively white men, who have met women from Thailand at brothels to purchase them from the agent for the full or remaining portion of her debt (for whom this is yet another source of good profits and 'good-riddance'); others help victims to escape from their agents. For such women, marriage to a South African and the acquisition of citizenship represents the pinnacle of their South African dream. Yet they may, in turn, be pimped by their

women from Thailand held at the safe houses. Interview with former trafficker: Johannesburg, 13 August 2002; interview with police officer: Pretoria, 11 February 2003.

²²⁸ Interview with brothel owner and former trafficker: Pretoria, 2 October 2002.

²²⁹ Interview with police officer: Johannesburg, 28 August 2002; interview with police officer: Richards Bay, 18 September 2002; interview with police officer: Durban, 12 September 2002.

²³⁰ Interview with informant in the South African sex industry: Pretoria, 12 March 2003; interview with police officer: Durban, 12 September 2002.

husbands as sex workers and forced to hand over their earnings, as before. A variation of the trend is reflected in the widely confirmed operation of “Pretty Woman” traffickers. White men recruit women from Thailand on promises of marriage and transport them to South Africa for sexually exploitative purposes.

Sometimes [white South African men] look for a girl to marry...they tell them you'll just be my wife... Then they come to South Africa... the girl must work for him, make money for him.²³¹

In one reported case, the police raided a private house in Sandton, north of Johannesburg, and discovered a group of women brought from Thailand with false promises of marriage. The women were then used by two or three wealthy white South Africans for their personal sexual gratification at the house. The house was allegedly also being used to groom the Thai women for a brothel associated with Asian sex workers.²³²

Some trafficking victims recruited in Thailand manage to repay, or escape from, their contracts and succeed in remaining in South Africa, independently and most often illegally. This leakage of former Thai victims into open society, believed to be on-going since 1994,²³³ is accountable for the significant number of women from Thailand in the South African sex industry, and a share of their sexual exploitation. It has been aptly described as the “second wave” phenomenon.

She finishes her contract.... That woman then brings in two of her own. Now she's a Mama and they work for her...I heard the contracts are now between ZAR 50 000 and ZAR 60 000. So those two finish their contracts [and]...now they want to get their money back...Then they also bring in their women...There are so many agents...because basically every working girl that's out of the business is bringing women to work for her...and that is basically how it grows.²³⁴

²³¹ Interview with trafficking victim from Thailand: Durban, September 2002.

²³² Interview with police officer and a specialist on child sexual abuse: Johannesburg, 28 August 2002.

²³³ Interview with a former trafficker: Johannesburg, 13 August 2002.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

Such trafficking victims turned traffickers operate in a manner similar to other Thai agents, bringing women into the country on contracts to be repaid through prostitution. They, too, attempt to avoid the hassle of managing captive women and try to sell their victims immediately after arrival in South Africa, although most will eventually manage transit houses and lease women to brothels. Their proliferation points to the economic opportunities of which freed victims can take advantage by becoming traffickers.

6.4 Conclusion

The trafficking of Thai women for sexual exploitation in South Africa has been ongoing since at least 1994²³⁵ and it is estimated that between 850 and 1100 trafficking victims from Thailand arrive in the country annually.²³⁶ They are destined for work in brothels and clubs primarily in Johannesburg, but also in dozens of secondary cities and small towns in at least five other provinces.²³⁷ There is no indication that this trade in women from Thailand to South Africa is diminishing or decreasing.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ These figures have been calculated using weekly arrival estimates given by informants in the South African sex industry and migration statistics provided by Statistics South Africa.

²³⁷ Trafficking victims from Thailand have been reported at clubs and brothels in 6 (of 9) provinces in South Africa: Gauteng province (in Randburg, Sandton, Fourways and Blairgowrie to the north of Johannesburg, Hillbrow in the Central Business District, Rossettenville in the south, and Bedfordview to the east. Beyond the city, in Kempton Park, Boksburg and Springs (last two unconfirmed), Pretoria, and Midrand); North-West province (Rustenburg and Klerksdorp); KwaZulu-Natal province (Durban, Pinetown, Amanzimtoti, Pietermaritzburg, Empangeni, Richard's Bay, Newcastle, and Ladysmith); Free State (Bloemfontein); Eastern Cape (East London), and Western Cape (Cape Town).

7. TRAFFICKING IN CHINESE WOMEN

...most of the women were lured to South Africa from China on the pretext that they would be working in an upmarket hotel. But after arriving at Johannesburg International Airport at the beginning of March, they were allegedly brought to the house where they were told that they had to “earn their keep”....A police investigator said the women did not see any of the money that clients paid for “services”....’ They had to have sex with men and then bring the used condom to the owner or his assistant and it would be written down to show they had worked (Pretoria News, 2003:1).

7.1 Introduction

The movement of people out of East Asia began in the mid-nineteenth century, and laid the foundation for a global network of Chinese migrant communities in cities on every continent. By the early 1900s an estimated 30 million Chinese were living abroad, and the number has continued to grow throughout the 20th century with approximately 100 000 to 200 000 undocumented migrants leaving China every year from the coastal provinces of Guangdong, Fujian and Zhejiang; most of these with the assistance of organized human smuggling rings (IOM, 2000:68).

You can go to China now, and a village, the whole village is old ladies and young children. There is nothing in between. Other men and women are gone - they don’t exist anymore. That is how it happened in Fujian.²³⁸

Chinese triad societies direct this multi-billion dollar industry, often charging clients in excess of US\$30 000 per person for assisted transportation and illegal entry into western countries. Most clients are not able to pay the full amount up front, and may rely on their families to collect the money from friends and neighbours, and if necessary,

²³⁸ Interview with Chinese court interpreter who wished to remain anonymous: Johannesburg, 29 August 2002.

borrow from moneylenders who may themselves work for the triads. For the families, it is an investment in the future, and once the client has successfully arrived in the country of destination, their families expect remittances to repay the debts incurred. Other clients may be solicited to work to pay off a debt, and it is within this context that trafficking of women occurs for the purpose of sexual exploitation.²³⁹

Chinese gangs and their enforcers are notorious for being especially brutal with migrants who cannot come up with the money for payments. Their tactics include ransom, extortion, repeated rapes, and sexual assault. Violence, intimidation and brutality are especially common with trafficking victims in the sex industry. (Finckenauer and Schrock, 2000:4).

Although small when compared to overseas Chinese communities in many industrialized countries, South Africa's Chinese community numbers between 200 000 and 300 000 members, with half to two-thirds of these estimated to be undocumented (Gastrow, 2001). These migrants originate from both Taiwan and mainland China.

The history of the community is also closely entwined with the economic and political development of South Africa. In the late 1980s, when much of the international community had imposed economic sanctions on South Africa, the apartheid government enacted legislation to create legal equality between Chinese and whites, and Taiwanese investors were given preferential treatment that allowed them to enjoy dual nationality, and better exchange rates. These incentives encouraged an influx of immigrants, and a subsequent investment of more than four billion US dollars in South Africa. Considered a hard working and law-abiding immigrant community, the Chinese in South Africa kept a low profile throughout the country's many years of political turbulence while winning respect locally for their entrepreneurial skills and business acumen (Gastrow, 2001).

▪ **Chinese Criminal Networks in South Africa**

Triad societies may exist anywhere there is a Chinese community, and South Africa is no exception. Membership in a triad society is restricted to the Chinese expatriate community, and activities

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

are often conducted from 'legitimate' Chinese businesses (Gastrow, 2001).

The *modus operandi* of the triads is to come to South Africa, purchase a restaurant or club, or shops that typically sell electronic equipment as a front for their illegal activities. When we investigated, several of the businesses had very little actual business activity in relation to the focus of their supposed business license and so the police became suspicious.²⁴⁰

Chinese triad societies made their first foray into South Africa in the 1970s with their involvement in the trade of shark fins and rhino horns, and in illegal gambling. By the 1980's, the triads had expanded their illegal activities throughout most of South Africa's major cities to include the abalone trade, drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, diamond smuggling, vehicle theft, extortion, gambling, and prostitution (Gastrow, 2001).

A synthesis of ethnic loyalty and fear in the Chinese community provides considerable security for illicit triad activities, and the unique linguistic and cultural characteristics of the triad societies make them difficult to penetrate for South African police. It is occasionally problematic even to find translation assistance when a triad member has been charged with a criminal offence, let alone to obtain useful detail on triad activities. South African police are currently aware of seven major triad societies operating in the country, with the three most prominent being the Hong Kong-based 14K, the Wo Shing Wo, and the San Yee On triads (Gastrow, 2001).

▪ **Trafficking in Chinese Women to South Africa**

Numerous clubs and restaurants in South Africa are owned and operated by Chinese triads for the exclusive use of the Chinese community. Patrons include Chinese tourists, businessmen, seamen, and members of the local Chinese community. The clubs offer gambling, strip shows, and live sex shows. Both Chinese and South African women work at the clubs, with South African female employees the only non-Chinese allowed on the premises.

²⁴⁰ Interview with ex-police officer involved with investigations of triad activities in the Western Cape who did not wish to be named: Cape Town, 19 September 2002.

One of the best-known clubs has had three names [...]. Most people know it as the [...]. It's there in the city [...]. All the tourists, if you're Chinese that is, know of it. All the seamen know it, the cruise liners, the fishing trawlers; all the Chinese vessels that come into the harbour, that's where they head. Many deals go down there between the Chinese and Taiwanese triads. You can't get in there, only if you're Chinese - except if you're one of the girls, and I am not too sure how that works. Some of them are South African, and the Chinese are aged between 16 and 21. Most work there on full time employment, but others are brought in by special request. The Chinese girls are escorted there and back to their flat by the triads. They have no freedom. Some are even kept on the third floor, in the live sex shows.²⁴¹

Little is known about Chinese women working at the clubs, but they have limited freedom of movement, and are escorted at all times by members of the triads. One informant has alleged that South African-based triads also recruit South African women to work at similar establishments in Taiwan.²⁴²

7.2 Recruitment

The women are recruited from Southern China by individuals linked to one of the triad societies in South Africa. These women are poorly educated and mostly unemployed. Many come from villages with histories of mass migration and aspire to join family living overseas, or to migrate in search of opportunities for themselves. With limited resources to pay their own travel costs, women are asked to sign a contract that requires that they repay the travel debt from the money they earn at jobs provided by the triad in South Africa. Most are offered jobs in Chinese restaurants, shops or businesses where language will not be an issue. Others are offered opportunities to study in an English language school before commencing employment that will provide them with the means of repaying their debt.²⁴³

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² Interview with ex-police officer involved with investigations of triad activities in the Western Cape who wished to remain anonymous: Cape Town, 16 October 2002.

²⁴³ Interview with Taiwanese businessman who wished to remain anonymous: Durban, 11 September 2002.

Normally people from mainland China like to - because they are making so little money in their own country - go to a foreign country. It is an attractive thing for the family. They will go up to paying ZAR 100 000 per person. Maybe they come to South Africa, leave with a China passport and they land with a Japanese passport here, because they do not need visa. While they stay here they arrange for another documentation for them to go to America to Europe. That's how it is done.²⁴⁴

Traffickers also provide the women with all travel documents and tickets before they leave for South Africa. More than one passport may be provided to each, depending on the final destination, which serves to increase their debt burdens.

It is done under the tables - somebody does it here. Every point they land there has to be connection. I know I have translated for the people who have been caught and try to travel from South Africa to America on a false passport. So every point they go and they are in trouble. Somebody has to bail them out because the agent doesn't get paid until the person arrives at the destination.²⁴⁵

7.3 Routes and Transportation

Women travel various routes from China to South Africa. Many travel from Hong Kong and Singapore directly to JIA where they disembark, while others pass through the JIA transit lounge and continue on to Lesotho only to cross back into South Africa illegally through the land border. The latter route appears to be used for smuggling or trafficking groups of migrants into factories, farms and sweatshops, rather than for trafficking of individual victims.²⁴⁶ Mozambique and Swaziland are also used as transit countries, from where the agent may secure visitors' visas for his victims before transporting them overland to Johannesburg or Cape Town.

²⁴⁴ Interview with Chinese court interpreter who wished to remain anonymous: Johannesburg, 29 August 2002.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Information gathered from interviews with Chinese interpreter, ex-police officer involved with investigations of triad activities in the Western Cape, and a private investigator.

South Africa itself is not only a destination country; it is also a transit point for Europe and North America. Having travelled from China on one passport, the victim will spend a short time in South Africa until another passport is provided that allows her easier access to her final destination.

7.4 Exploitation

On arrival in South Africa, a victim clears immigration and customs before calling a telephone number she has been given in advance of her journey. This procedure ensures that she is unable to implicate any of the agents involved in her movements if she is caught.

Whoever brought them from China gives them a telephone number to contact. If they are caught by police, then those people are no longer interested in them and they disappear.²⁴⁷

Once contact by telephone is made with a South African-based agent, the victim is collected at the airport and forced to repay her inflated travel debt with sex work, although those who were recruited with promises of English language training may be allowed to complete an English course prior to beginning debt repayment.

These women are made promises of jobs in South Africa through both Chinese and Taiwanese middlemen who are part of a syndicate. Women sign a contract with agents in China and agents in turn cover all the costs of the trip to South Africa. Such women are apparently also allowed to attend language school, which the agent facilitates, but the agent demands that the cost of the trip now be repaid. The cost of the trip to South Africa and all related costs are estimated to be around ZAR 15 000, and are increased five fold so the average debt payable to the agent would be around ZAR 75 000. The women somehow make contact with agents in South Africa who set them up in a flat and get them clients. The women have no choice – they have to do this work in order to repay this debt. Because of the contract she

²⁴⁷ Interview with Chinese court interpreter who wished to remain anonymous: Johannesburg, 29 August 2002.

signed with agents in China if she runs away the family in China will be targeted.²⁴⁸

If the victim is caught in South Africa without documentation, she is deported back to China, where she may face imprisonment for emigration violations. Thus, in addition to threats of violence made to the victim or her family to force compliance, the trafficker also exploits her undocumented status.²⁴⁹

That girl she told me that the Chinese people lock her up in the house and they bring the customer to them. There were four other women with her, and she told me they hit them as well. She ran away, she came to the petrol station and the people call the police who come to fetch her. The immigration sent her back. Yes, if you leave China illegally and go back by deportation you are sentenced to jail, not just the women, but the men as well - straight to jail for two to three years.²⁵⁰

Women recruited without the promise of English language study are immediately escorted to a triad-run club or private residence upon arrival in South Africa to begin paying off their debt as sex workers. Their passports are confiscated, and they are kept under lock and key until they have repaid their debt.

Some victims serve as waitresses in restaurants, but are also available to provide sex to clients at all hours, seven days a week. Others are taken to Chinese vessels docked in South African seaports where they will be forced to have sex with the seamen for days or weeks at a time. It may take a victim several years before her debt is repaid, and until that time, she has no freedom.

7.5 Conclusion

Human trafficking operations are often found submerged within broader migration patterns with source and destination countries for trafficked women mirroring those of cross border traders, migrant

²⁴⁸ Interview with Taiwanese businessman who wished to remain anonymous: Durban, 11 September 2002.

²⁴⁹ Interview with Chinese court interpreter who wished to remain anonymous: Johannesburg, 29 August 2002.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

labourers, asylum-seekers, and a range of other regular and irregular migrants. With hundreds of thousands of Chinese having migrated successfully to the West in recent years, young Chinese women are easily seduced into leaving Taiwan or mainland China with promises of greater opportunities or family reunification by triad-linked agents. Once in South Africa, they are debt bonded for their travel, confined, and forced into prostitution, with a potent mixture of fear and ethnic loyalty often deterring those members of the Chinese community who are aware of the problem from speaking out. As with other Chinese migrants, South Africa may be either the final destination for trafficked Chinese women, or a transit point for the longer journey to Europe or North America.

8. TRAFFICKING WOMEN FROM EASTERN EUROPE

8.1 Introduction

The transnational trafficking of women from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union began during the *perestroika* of the 1980s during which border controls in Eastern Europe were relaxed to encourage the development of new trade links and tourism between the former Soviet satellite states and the West. While these measures did meet their objectives, they also facilitated transborder criminal activities, and organized crime syndicates were quick to identify lucrative markets for Eastern European women in the brothels, massage parlours, streets and bars of Western Europe. The trade in women for sexual exploitation proved highly profitable, with little risk of serious penalty when compared with those attached to convictions for the illegal trade in drugs and weapons.

Pimps in Western Europe and Israel can buy Russian or Ukrainian women for a few hundred to a few thousand US dollars per month. Then make several thousand dollars from them by selling them in prostitution. Women must repay their purchase price and travel and other expenses before they are allowed to leave. A woman may be sold from one pimp to another, at which time her debt starts all over again (Hughes, 2000:12).

By the 1990s, trafficked women from Eastern Europe could be found in most western countries, as well as the brothels of the Gulf States, and East Asia, and many thousands continue to report their experiences to intergovernmental organizations like IOM and INTERPOL, NGOs, national police forces, and local service providers around the world, including South Africa. Regardless of their nationality, or their countries of destination, Eastern European victims share similar experiences of recruitment, and to a large extent, transportation and exploitation.

When she arrived, her passport was taken and she was sold to a brothel for US\$7000 and forced into prostitution to repay the

purchase and travel costs. When she escaped and went to the police for help, she was arrested and sentenced to three years in prison for working in a brothel (Hughes, 2000:11).

8.2 Recruitment

A common feature of Eastern European victims is their high level of education, which distinguishes them from most other trafficking victims. Well-educated and often professional people, they are vulnerable because of the poor economic conditions and consequent lack of opportunity in their home countries, coupled with the knowledge that their skills are marketable elsewhere. Such women are easily lured with job offers where travel expenses and the costs of secure proper documentation are paid in advance by the trafficker.

I used to study marketing and management in Bulgaria. I studied for three years and did not finish my education because the cost of a year of study was approximately US\$10 000. This is a large amount of money since the economical situation in Bulgaria is very bad. I met him through a friend in a bar in Varna. He said he could organize a job in South Africa for me; the money is good and I could work as a bar lady. He said that he would pay for my air ticket to South Africa and I could repay him after earning some money. I got a business passport through him. I came to South Africa, and he met me at the Airport.²⁵¹

Russian and Bulgarian agents appear to be responsible primarily for recruiting women for the South African sex trade, and may own clubs in various South African cities while maintaining links with criminal syndicates in the victim's country of origin. They employ one or several recruitment tactics to lure unsuspecting women into sex slavery. Those who own clubs in South Africa use newspaper advertisements to attract women by offering attractive work opportunities. Women are promised good salaries for waiting tables, or for work as dancers and hostesses. The agent usually makes friends with the intended victim, often having been introduced by someone already known to her. It is then easier for the agent to gain the woman's confidence.²⁵² 'Second wave' recruitment is also common, whereby

²⁵¹ A Bulgarian victim, interviewed by police: Johannesburg, 4 February 2000.

²⁵² *Ibid.*

former victims of trafficking return to their countries of origin to recruit other women who may be known to them (Hughes, 2000:11). Women who move from victim to perpetrator may do so to escape their lives of sexual slavery by promising their owners money from the new victims they are able to recruit, or may have paid off their debts as sex slaves and see trafficking other women as a viable way to prosperity.

Some [agents] have girls that have friends in Russia who recruit other girls. She says [to her friend], 'this guy is going to come and talk to you about work in South Africa. It's great there. You'll make lots of money.'²⁵³

While the majority of women have no prior experience in the sex industry, some are informed that they will be doing sex work upon arrival in South Africa, and they agree to sign a contract to repay the debt over a six-month period.²⁵⁴ They are not aware, however that their freedom of movement will be restricted; that they will have no right to refuse a client; that they will be forced to work even when ill; that they will be subjected to violence; and that they may be sold again upon repayment of their initial debt.²⁵⁵

8.3 Routes and Transportation

Once a woman has accepted the offer of employment, the trafficker will arrange the visa that will allow her to enter South Africa directly or, alternatively, visas to enter either Lesotho or Mozambique, with South Africa as her final destination. A variety of European airlines have been used to transport victims to South Africa, including Turkish Airlines, British Airways, Lufthansa and Olympic Airlines.²⁵⁶ Upon arrival at the JIA, women with South African visas will clear immigration, while those without them will pass through the transit

²⁵³ Interview with Russian ex-trafficking victim and her South African husband: Johannesburg, 7 February 2003.

²⁵⁴ Interview with police officer: Pretoria, 6 February 2003.

²⁵⁵ The National Department of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) and the Assets Forfeiture Unit conducted a series of interviews with Eastern European women between October 2002 and February 2003.

²⁵⁶ Interview with Russian ex-trafficking victim and her South African husband: Johannesburg, 7 February 2003.

lounge and board flights for Lesotho or Mozambique, from where they will try to obtain a visa for South Africa, or simply cross the land border illegally. Some women are given a cell phone number to call upon reaching South African immigration. , Upon dialing the phone number, they will be directed to a particular immigration booth, and stamped through.²⁵⁷

8.4 Exploitation

After her arrival in South Africa, the trafficker will confiscate his victim's passport and air ticket, and inform her – if she is not already aware - that she will be doing sex work to pay off her debt. The payment schedule is strict and non-negotiable with approximately US\$2000 to be paid per month for six months or more, after which time she is told that she will be free to work wherever she wants.

He took me to a house in the suburbs. He told me that things are going to change. He took my passport and he said I owed him US\$2500 for the ticket and the passport and that I had to repay him. He said I have to work for a year as a prostitute to pay him back. He said if I didn't co-operate he will hit me and nobody will be able to help me. He said I have no choice. I had no friends, no contacts in South Africa so I have to agree since I am scared.²⁵⁸

The trafficker makes sure that the woman understands that his priority is to be paid in full, by whatever means necessary. “He said I have no choice – I have to work. If we don't, he can sell us to somebody and get his money back, and we will just disappear into Africa.”²⁵⁹ The confiscation of her travel documents, the size of her debt, and the threat of physical violence to the woman or her family, compels most victims to co-operate. Criminal syndicates that traffic women from Eastern Europe are not reticent about using brute force should a woman resist sex work, and after a few weeks of threats and physical abuse, the victim starts believing that her only escape is to ensure that the trafficker receives the monthly payments he has

²⁵⁷ Interview with Supt. F. Kloppers, Provincial Commander, Gauteng Border Police: Johannesburg International Airport, 19 August 2002.

²⁵⁸ A Bulgarian victim, interviewed by police: Johannesburg, 4 February 2000.

²⁵⁹ Interview with Bulgarian trafficking victim: Johannesburg, 8 February 2003.

demanded. “He broke a bottle and put it against the girl’s neck. He said, ‘you have a choice.’”²⁶⁰

Women are usually accommodated in groups of four or five near the up-market clubs and brothels at which they will work. Precautions are taken to avoid any suspicion from local residents, and victims may be rotated among several locations.

Agents linked to the mafia normally work in groups and control up to ten women at a time. They have several houses and private flats where they rotate the women. The Russian mafia is involved with every type of organized crime, but prostitution is the easiest way to make money. They have flats everywhere. They rent flats and they move those girls. They got them all over the place. They stay two months then move on, stay two months, then move on.²⁶¹

Within a few days of arriving in South Africa, the women will begin working at one or several nearby brothels. The trafficker collects each victim’s earnings but for the percentage he has agreed to share with the brothel owners. In order to avoid police raids, traffickers may move their victims between different clubs in the area. Some traffickers are reputed to have police contacts who will inform them prior to a raid, allowing them to move their women safely to another club before it occurs.²⁶²

Women are continually rotated between clubs because of the fear of police raids. They always rotate them one week here, one week there, and all of them have got contacts in the police. They know exactly when they will be raided. That’s how it works. A day before they are warned, and what happens? They just take them out of that system quickly.²⁶³

The trafficker will determine each victim’s working conditions to ensure that he receives his required monthly payment. Because of the seemingly high demand for Eastern European women in up-market clubs and brothels, particularly those from Bulgaria and Russia, women

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ Interview with South African husband of Russian ex-trafficking victim: Johannesburg, 7 February 2003.

²⁶² Interview with Bulgarian victim: Johannesburg, 8 February 2003.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

are usually able to meet the US\$2000 monthly payment, although some may work as many as 24 consecutive hours in a single shift to do so. If a victim's earnings exceed the required monthly payment, she may be allowed to keep the remainder for herself, but if she is unable to keep up with the payments, her contract may be unilaterally extended. On top of the initial transportation and documentation debt, she may also have the added costs of accommodation and food, or be subject to a system of fines imposed by brothel owners for misbehaviour, or failing to meet all the demands made of her.

If the girl came late from her break during her double shift, she would be fined. If a girl forgot her card, she would be fined ZAR450. If she did not report for duty, she would be fined a double levy of ZAR900. If she did not report for a double duty, she would be fined ZAR1 800. As a result of these fines, if a girl was sick she would still come to work.²⁶⁴

Fines for minor infractions are used to increase the victim's debt burden, and keep her enslaved. Unless a woman is exceedingly ill, she is not permitted to be absent from work for a single day. In the event that she is sick for more than a few days, the victim may be denied food until she is prepared to return to work and meet her financial obligations. "For two weeks she was sick. She was doing nothing. He didn't buy her food. She was starving..."²⁶⁵

For the duration of her contract, the victim will have no freedom of movement, and will be escorted by the trafficker to and from the brothels each day. The trafficker may work in concert with other agents, sharing the transportation and ensuring that his victims are guarded at all times. Unless the trafficker owns the brothel, most women report feeling safer at their place of work, where despite the fines, life becomes predictable and they are relatively well treated.²⁶⁶ Outside the brothel, however, they are subjected to the violence and intimidation of the trafficker.

²⁶⁴ Extract of statement made to the police by former Russian victim: Johannesburg, February 2000.

²⁶⁵ Interview with Bulgarian victim: Johannesburg, 8 February 2003.

²⁶⁶ Interview with South African husband of Russian ex-trafficking victim: Johannesburg, 7 February 2003; interview with former Bulgarian victim: Johannesburg, February 2003.

While some traffickers disregard the contract, and keep their victims enslaved for as long as she can generate an income, many Eastern European traffickers do release their victims once they have fully repaid their debt. When they have done so, a woman is given back her passport and is free to leave. Alternatively, she may escape her circumstances if she meets a client who wants to marry her, and is willing to pay the remainder of her debt to do so.

8.5 Conclusion

There is little that is unique about the trafficking of women from Eastern Europe to South Africa; these women are recruited, transported to and exploited in South Africa as they are throughout much of the rest of the world. Their plight remains hidden, even when they are released from their captivity after police raids on brothels and clubs, or upon termination of their contracts. Rarely are they interviewed for their experiences as victims of crime, but are more often deported to the environments which made them vulnerable initially, which may result in their being re-trafficked elsewhere.

9. CONCLUSION

There is an immense diversity of trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation in Southern Africa. Victims are African, Asian, and European, from urban and rural backgrounds, some with high levels of education and others with little. They are predominantly female, although where children are targeted specifically, boys are among those recruited. They include Basotho children as young as 12 and refugee woman as old as 44. Their traffickers are also as varied, both women and men, with some engaged in a once-off effort to exploit commercially a female relative as a means of survival, and others conducting small, but regular, land border trafficking as part of larger operations to smuggle undocumented migrants into South Africa. Still others are linked to the multi-billion dollar trade in women and children that touches Southern Africa as an afterthought, or see it as a useful transit point to final destinations in Europe and North America.

Nine distinct patterns of trafficking activity have emerged in Southern Africa:

1. Trafficking of women from refugee-producing countries to South Africa;
2. Trafficking of children from Lesotho to towns in the Eastern Free State of South Africa;
3. Trafficking of women and girls from Mozambique to Gauteng and Kwa-Zulu Natal;
4. Trafficking of women from Malawi to Northern Europe;
5. Trafficking of girl and boy children from Malawi to Northern Europe;
6. Trafficking of women and girls from Malawi to South Africa overland;
7. Trafficking of women from Thailand to South Africa;
8. Trafficking of women from China to South Africa;
9. Trafficking of Eastern European women to South Africa.

Although there is considerable variation both in the profiles of trafficked women and children, and in the profiles of their traffickers, the tactics used to recruit, transport, and exploit victims remain similar. In most cases, women and children are lured with promises of

employment or educational opportunities abroad; offers made appealing and credible within the context of historical migration patterns in the region which flow southwards to the relative prosperity of South Africa, or northwards to Europe. Only sometimes are their situations absolutely desperate. More often, the transnational communication and transportation networks that are the hallmarks of globalization have allowed them an awareness of opportunities that exist elsewhere, and cross-border migration, whether documented or not, is seen as a viable means of reaching for them. Their sexual exploitation is facilitated largely by their relocation from a place with which they are familiar to one with which they are not, and is no less a violation of basic human rights than the exploitation experienced by Saartjie Baartman in Europe in 1810. They are slaves, treated and traded as chattel in the 21st century.

Despite the immense profit that trafficking for sexual exploitation generates for criminal syndicates, and the lawlessness and social and political disarray to which they contribute, this contemporary slave trade in women and children has yet to be adequately addressed in the SADC region. To curtail trafficking in persons requires that states cooperate to criminalize the trade, share information, protect victims, prosecute traffickers, and raise public awareness in source, transit, and destination countries. In Southern Africa, trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation is neither perpetrated by any one group, nor are its victims from any single country or territory. It is a cross-border trade that succeeds because vulnerable women and children may be found anywhere and everywhere, and because of the expedient cooperation of recruiters, transporters and exploiters. Just as organized crime exploits the opportunities and openness of globalisation to perpetrate this modern slave trade, so must states, intergovernmental agencies, and civil society exploit that same advantage to turn moral condemnation into collective action.

FINDINGS

General Findings

1. Trafficking in women and children for sexual exploitation is a significant problem in Southern Africa.
2. Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Mozambique, Malawi, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Zambia are source countries for trafficking activities in Southern Africa. Thailand, China, and Eastern Europe are the extra-regional sources for victims trafficked to South Africa.
3. Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are transit countries for trafficking activities.
4. South Africa is the destination country for regional and extra-regional trafficking activities.
5. Trafficking victims from the region are recruited by deception, coercion, and force. Extra-regional victims are recruited by deception.
6. Victims from the region are transported primarily overland, while extra-regional victims are transported by air.
7. The exploitation suffered by African victims in South Africa ranges from exploitation for the personal sexual gratification of the trafficker, sexual exploitation for the financial benefit of the trafficker, forced 'marriage' to labour exploitation.
8. The exploitation suffered by extra-regional victims is primarily for the financial benefit of the trafficker, and occurs at brothels throughout South Africa.
9. When identified by police in South Africa, victims of trafficking are deported as illegal immigrants without being questioned about their experiences.
10. Victims are afraid of law enforcement, and do not trust police to assist them.
11. South Africa has no public services specifically designed to assist victims of trafficking.
12. The absence of specific legislation criminalizing trafficking in persons in Southern Africa is a main obstacle preventing police and prosecutors from investigating the practice, and charging the perpetrators.

Refugee Trafficking to South Africa

13. The trafficker recruits as a survival mechanism: “vulnerable prey on the more vulnerable”.
14. The trafficker is a close family relation or best friend of the victim.
15. Traffickers have refugee status in South Africa, and have been in South Africa for more than one year.
16. Victims come primarily from refugee-producing countries in Africa.
17. South Africa-based refugee clan members will deliver a recruitment letter, and escort the victim to South Africa.
18. Victims travel undocumented, with no single route, as part of general migration flows.
19. The victim sells all she has to pay for transport, expecting to remit money to her family at home following her arrival in South Africa.
20. The clan is an ethnically-based criminal syndicate involved in recruitment, transportation and exploitation.
21. Exploitation occurs in private accommodation or on the street.
22. Each trafficker exploits one trafficked woman, and she is almost always a family relation.
23. Victims are married women between the ages of 25 and 44, with children.
24. Victims are required to earn ZAR 250+ each night, all of which is taken by their traffickers.

Child Trafficking from Lesotho

25. Victims are male and female street children from Maseru.
26. Traffickers are white men from South Africa’s Eastern Free State province; and long-distance truck drivers.
27. Half of all victims are forcibly abducted in Maseru, while the other half are recruited with job offers.
28. Physical and sexual abuse at home, or the death of a parent from AIDS, forces children from rural areas and border towns to Maseru.
29. Victims trafficked by long-distance truck drivers are taken as far as Cape Town, Zimbabwe, and Zambia.
30. Victims recruited by white men are taken individually, and also in groups of two to four.

31. Victims recruited by white men are transported between 20 and 150 kms from Maseru in private vehicles. Corruption of officials at border post facilitates the trafficking process.
32. Victims recruited by white men are taken to private homes in the small towns of the Eastern Free State, asparagus farms in the border region, and Bloemfontein.
33. Victims are locked up in private houses for 3 to 7 days, and suffer sadistic sexual, physical, and verbal abuse, and food deprivation.
34. All sexual assaults are perpetrated by groups of two to four white men in a “ritual male bonding” and “as a feeding frenzy for fantasies of hatred, humiliation, and revenge”.
35. Abuse of victims is not about sex or money, but power and control, and the “need to humiliate, punish and exploit”.
36. Victims are dumped on the streets of border towns of the Eastern Free State, and make their way back to Maseru on their own.

The Road from Maputo

37. Victims come from rural and urban backgrounds, from Maputo and Nampula provinces.
38. There are three types of victims: (i) sex workers in Maputo who are offered sex work in Johannesburg; (ii) women who are not sex workers who are offered restaurant jobs; and (iii) women recruited at taxi ranks in Maputo wishing to be transported to Johannesburg.
39. Victims are recruited by Mozambican women, working in partnership with Mozambican and South African men responsible for transportation of victims and exploitation.
40. Victims are transported by mini-bus taxi from Maputo to Komatipoort to Johannesburg, Maputo to Ponta do Ouro to Johannesburg, and Maputo to Ponta do Ouro to Durban.
41. Mini-bus taxis transport victims together with other undocumented migrants.
42. For victims taken by way of Komatipoort, they will spend one night in transit houses in Mpumalanga near the Mozambican and/or Swaziland border where their documents and personal possessions are taken, and they are sexually assaulted to initiate and intimidate them into sex work.

43. Transit houses are well known to the local population and police.
44. Victims taken through Ponta do Ouro border crossing are taken directly to Johannesburg or Durban, and do not spend a night in a transit house.
45. Upon arrival in Johannesburg, victims who were expecting restaurant jobs are taken to transit houses in Soweto and Lenasia before being sold.
46. Sex worker victims are sold to brothels in Johannesburg CBD for ZAR 1000.
47. Victims who were promised restaurant jobs are sold on private order in Johannesburg for ZAR 550, or sold as 'wives' to mineworkers on the West Rand for ZAR 650, and for ZAR 950 outside Gauteng.
48. IOM estimates that at least 1000 Mozambican victims are recruited, transported, and exploited in this way every year, earning traffickers approximately ZAR 1 million annually.
49. The same recruitment, transportation, and exploitation methods are used to bring victims from Botswana, and Zimbabwe through Botswana, to South Africa.

Malawi as a Source Country

50. Trafficking in Malawi is characterized by three distinct trafficking flows: (i) victims trafficked to Europe; (ii) land border trafficking to South Africa; and (iii) victims trafficked by sex tourists.

Victims Trafficked to Europe

51. Traffickers are Malawian businesswomen with links to Nigerian criminal syndicates in Europe. Other Malawian women are married to Nigerian nationals living in Malawi.
52. Victims are Malawian and Zambian, and are between 15 and 26 years old.
53. Victims are recruited from Lilongwe with offers of jobs in fashion, sales, fruit factories, hotels, and restaurants in Europe.
54. Victims stay with their traffickers for one to seven weeks in houses in Lilongwe prior to departure.
55. The trafficker pays every expense, and victims travel on passports that have been fraudulently obtained for them by the trafficker.

56. Victims leave in groups of three or four, and travel from Lilongwe or Blantyre to Amsterdam, by way of Johannesburg, Frankfurt, London, and/or Brussels. From Amsterdam, victims are taken to cities and towns by train, and are sold to Nigerian traffickers for US\$10 000 per victim.
57. Victims are told that they must do sex work to repay a debt of US\$40 000 each.
58. Within a week of arrival, the Nigerian trafficker conducts a ritual to convince victims that she can kill them with magic.
59. The Nigerian madam sells victims to Nigerian agents from Germany, Belgium, and Italy, or rents them to local brothels. The Nigerian madam is obliged to take a particular victim back if she is uncooperative.
60. Victims endure abusive conditions of sexual slavery, and must do anything the client demands. If they are uncooperative, they are beaten by the trafficker.
61. One brothel in the Netherlands brands trafficking victims just below the left collarbone with an identifying mark.
62. If victims do not perform sexually to the satisfaction of the brothel owner or clients, they are given sex lessons.
63. Victims can be resold after they have paid off the US\$40 000.

Victims Trafficked by Sex Tourists

64. Victims are boys and girls all under the age of 18 years.
65. Victims live in tourist spots in districts of Nkhata Bay, Nkhotakota, Salima, Monkey Bay, and Mangochi.
66. Victims are recruited with gifts and money by male and female sex tourists from Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, and are lured into sexual relationships with them while in Malawi.
67. Victims feature in pornographic videos that are distributed over the Internet. The names and contact details of the victims are included.
68. The sex tourist trafficker gives the child's parents expensive gifts, including money, and offers employment and educational opportunities for the victim in Europe.
69. In Europe, victims are kept as personal sex slaves by the trafficker or distributed to pedophile rings.

Land Border Trafficking to South Africa

70. Traffickers are long-distance truck drivers and Malawian businesswomen.
71. Victims live in border towns and along transportation routes.
72. Victims are between 14 and 24 years old.
73. Victims are recruited with offers of marriage, study, or employment in South Africa.
74. They cross borders without documentation, and enter South Africa through Beitbridge or Komatipoort.
75. The trucker-trafficker takes his victim to a flat in Johannesburg's CBD, where she is kept as his personal sex slave, or he rents her out for sex to his friends.
76. Malawian businesswomen sell victims to Johannesburg brothels.
77. Trucker-traffickers may gang rape or murder victims who resist.
78. Of the 80 people deported from South Africa to Malawi every month, at least two are trafficking victims.

Trafficking in Women from Thailand

79. Approximately seventy per cent of victims trafficked from Thailand are 25 to 35 year old sex workers who have limited earning power in Bangkok, and are recruited with offers of greater earnings in South Africa. The remaining thirty per cent of victims are non-sex workers, recruited with offers of jobs as waitresses, cleaners, and *au pairs* in South Africa.
80. The trafficker makes all arrangements for victims' travel.
81. Victims travel from Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, and Singapore to enter South Africa at JIA on a visa-free regime.
82. Once in South Africa, victims become the responsibility of Thai *mama-sans* or male agents, and are told that they are expected to pay ZAR 60 000 debt within 6 months.
83. Victims are forced to work 12 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week. They have no freedom of movement, and all earnings are taken as debt-repayment, and are divided among Thai agents, Thai *mama-sans*, and South African brothel owners.
84. Victims are circulated among brothels throughout South Africa.

85. South African clients marry victims from Thailand by purchasing their contracts, and may force them to continue doing sex work so they can keep the profits.
86. Traffickers bribe immigration officials to extend the legal stay of victims in South Africa.
87. IOM estimates that between 800 and 1100 victims recruited from Thailand are trafficked into South Africa every year.

Trafficking in Chinese Women

88. Victims may be recruited actively by Chinese or Taiwanese agents with links to triad groups for work in Chinese-owned businesses, or to study in English language schools, or they may have paid to be smuggled out of China.
89. Victims come from southern China, and enter South Africa through JIA, or over the land borders from Lesotho or Mozambique. They arrive with tourist visas, study permits, or false Japanese passports.
90. Victims recruited to work in restaurants, clubs, and on ships with exclusive Chinese clientele are forced into sex work indefinitely.
91. Victims who come to study at English language schools are told that they must pay at debt of ZAR 75 000 – 100 000 as sex workers.
92. Victims have no freedom of movement and all their earnings go directly the restaurant or club, or in payment of the debt.
93. South Africa is a transit country for trafficked women to Europe and the United States.

Trafficking Women from Eastern Europe

94. Traffickers in Russia and Eastern Europe recruit women for Russian and Bulgarian organized crime syndicates based in South Africa.
95. Victims are Russian or other Eastern European professional women between the ages of 18 and 35.
96. Victims are lured to South Africa with job offers as waitresses, dancers, strippers, and hostesses. Few victims are aware that they will be doing sex work.
97. Victims travel from Moscow to major Western European capitals and then to JIA. Occasionally, traffickers route victims

through Maseru International Airport, before transporting them across the border into South Africa by land.

98. South African visas are fraudulently obtained in Moscow.
99. In South Africa, victims are told of a debt burden they owe the traffickers, and that they must do sex work to pay it. If they resist, they and their families in the country of origin are threatened with violence.
100. Victims are placed in up-market brothels in Johannesburg and Cape Town, and must pay US\$2000 per month for six months.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Legal Framework and Policy Development

1. Sign, ratify, and implement the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children.
2. National legislation on trafficking in persons should, at a minimum:
 - define precisely the crime of trafficking in accordance with international standards, and include expressly all exploitative practices covered by the international definition of trafficking such as debt bondage, forced labour, and forced prostitution;
 - ensure that definitions of trafficking reflect the need for special safeguards and care for children, including appropriate legal protection;
 - ensure that trafficked persons are not punished for any offences or activities related to their having been trafficked, such as prostitution and immigration violations;
 - ensure that victims of trafficking are protected from summary deportation, or return where there are reasonable grounds to suspect that such return would present a significant security risk to the trafficked person or to his/her family;
 - consider temporary or permanent residency in countries of transit or destination (reflection delay) for trafficking victims in exchange for testimony against alleged traffickers, or on humanitarian and compassionate grounds;
 - ensure that victims of trafficking are offered the possibility of obtaining compensation for damages suffered;
 - provide for proportional criminal penalties to be applied to persons found guilty of trafficking in aggravating circumstances, including offences involving trafficking in children or offences committed or involving complicity by State officials; and

- provide for the confiscation of the instruments and proceeds of trafficking, and related offences, to be used for the benefit of trafficked persons.

Investigation, Identification, and Prosecution of Traffickers

3. Identify a national government official as the country's trafficking focal point, and establish a National Task Force on Trafficking in Persons that brings together relevant ministries, agencies, intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, and representatives of civil society to develop and implement policy to combat trafficking.
4. Develop guidelines and procedures for relevant State authorities and officials involved in the reception, processing, detection, and detention of irregular migrants, to permit the rapid and accurate identification of trafficked persons, and ensure that special procedures are in place for the rapid identification of trafficked children.
5. Create a specialized police unit or task force, rather than local police forces, to deal with trafficking cases, including both trafficking investigations and the protection of victims from reprisals.
6. Recognize the important contribution that victims of trafficking can, on a voluntary basis, make to investigations of trafficking and organized crime.
7. Strengthen training for law enforcement personnel, immigration and customs officials, prosecutors and judges, and other relevant officials on the prevention of trafficking, prosecution of the traffickers, and protection of the rights of victims, including child victims.

Data Collection and Information Sharing

8. Standardize the collection of statistical information and field data on trafficking, and related movements, such as irregular migration and migrant smuggling, which may include a trafficking element.
9. Ensure the disaggregation of migration data on the basis of age, gender, nationality, date and place of entry and departure, place of visa renewal, overstay, and deportation.

10. Facilitate access to victims of trafficking for intergovernmental agencies and non-governmental agencies for interview and assistance purposes.
11. Establish direct channels of communication within and between countries linking investigators, law enforcement agencies, regional and intergovernmental agencies.
12. Develop and disseminate information materials on trafficking in persons that focus on raising public awareness.

Assistance and Support to Victims

13. Together with intergovernmental and NGOs, develop the capacity of reception centres to receive trafficked persons by providing physical security, basic material assistance, medical care, psychological counselling, and legal assistance to victims.
14. Ensure that the provision of shelter and assistance should not be made contingent on the willingness of victims to give evidence in criminal proceedings.
15. Develop special witness protection measures to secure trafficking victim witnesses against reprisals.
16. Establish a fund to provide for the voluntary return and reintegration of victims of trafficking to their countries of origin.
17. Adopt policies and programmes specifically designed to protect and support child victims of trafficking.

Regional Cooperation

18. Adopt regional and bi-lateral agreements aimed at preventing trafficking, and protecting the rights and dignity of trafficked persons.
19. Develop procedures and protocols for judicial cooperation and the conduct of joint investigations by law enforcement authorities of concerned states within the region.
20. Introduce standard procedures within the region for the voluntary return and reintegration of victims of trafficking in their countries of origin, and the extradition of traffickers for prosecution.
21. Establish and maintain regular contact with national focal points in the region on all issues pertaining to trafficking operations and victim assistance.

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