

TRAFFICKING OF CAMBODIAN WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO THAILAND

October 1997

by

Annuska Derks

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17 route des Morillons

1211 Geneva 19

Switzerland

Tel: +41.22.717 91 11

Fax: +41.22.798 61 50

E-mail: hq@iom.int; or

iomphnompe@iom.int

Internet: <http://www.iom.int>

#6D, Street 57

Phnom Penh

Cambodia

Tel: +855.23.21 44 94

E-mail: cas@forum.org.kh

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	1
Chapter One	
Introduction	3
Chapter Two	
What is Trafficking?	4
Chapter Three	
Trafficking for Prostitution Within and Across Borders	7
Entering Prostitution	7
Voluntary entry into prostitution	8
Bonded prostitution	8
Involuntary prostitution	11
Recruiting woman and girls for prostitution	13
Crossing the border	16
Risk Factors	17
Issues related to trafficking for prostitution	19
Chapter Four	
Trafficking of Women and Children in Begging and Servitude	24
Recruitment for begging	24
Working situation	24
Recruitment of children for criminal purposes	26
Women and girls recruited as domestic servants	27
Chapter Five	
Trafficking versus Illegal Migration	31
Recruitment process	32
Trafficking and slavery-like practices among migrant workers	34
Abusive recruitment and brokerage practices	35
Abusive working and living conditions	36
Cambodian women working in Thailand	39
Incentives for going and restraints on returning	41

Chapter Six	
Conclusion	44
Recommendations	46
Long-term measures for prevention	46
Short-term measures for prevention	47
Glossary	48
References	49
Map of Cambodia	53

FOREWORD

Trafficking of women and children is a phenomenon which has received increased attention from nongovernmental organizations, governments and the international community over the past few years. Nevertheless, the legal and sociological discussion as to what constitutes trafficking is still at its beginning. As for Cambodia, the study of concrete facts of actual patterns of trafficking in migrants has only begun.

The goal of this study was to get a more solid base of knowledge about the actual patterns of trafficking. The study focuses especially on the recruitment process of Cambodian women and children trafficked to Thailand. By limiting the scope of the study to this precise aspect the publishers are trying to take a step forward from the rather general descriptions of the phenomenon to a more solid foundation of actual knowledge based on solid research. This knowledge will help to design targeted strategies to combat exploitative forms of trafficking and to promote orderly and legal migration. The research report was especially commissioned to provide necessary information for the design of effective prevention strategies against trafficking in women and children.

It is understood that trafficking in women and children represents a global as well as a regional problem. This study must therefore be seen as one step in a broader endeavor to learn more about the phenomenon of trafficking in the Mekong Region. This study will be immediately followed by another study on trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia.

The study was financed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), World Vision International (W.V.) and Catholic Refugee Services (CRS). It was implemented by the Center for Advanced Study (CAS) where it was coordinated by Ms. Annuska Derks, M.A., a United Nations Volunteer and anthropologist seconded to the CAS. IOM assisted the researchers with technical support.

It is hoped that this report and the recommendations made will contribute to improving efforts to tackle the problem of trafficking in migrants and its increasing negative consequences.

Phnom Penh, October 10, 1997

Hans R. Beckers
(IOM Representative)

Prof. Everett Kleinjans
(President of CAS)

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

More and more Cambodian women are nowadays leaving their villages in search for work in Thailand. The economic needs at home, a bad family situation, the promises of the recruiter and optimistic accounts of returnees are important factors influencing women to make the decision to leave their village and make the journey to Thailand. The high demand for women as workers, prostitutes, beggars, etc. together with the perceived wealth in Thailand are important pull factors. Within this flow of women to Thailand, some have gone voluntarily and ended up in the situation pictured to them before they left their homes. Others, however, were deceived or forced to work under miserable circumstances.

Over the past years the phenomenon of trafficking has received growing attention in Cambodia. International organisations, non-governmental organisations as well as the Royal Government of Cambodia have conducted surveys, held seminars, developed strategies, adopted a trafficking law and set up shelters in order to deal with the problem of trafficking. So far, the prime focus of these studies, strategies and shelters has been women and children trafficked into prostitution within Cambodia. This study seeks to provide more information on the phenomenon of trafficking of women and children to Thailand not only for the purpose of prostitution, but also for begging, or work in construction, fisheries and domestic work. The study focuses primarily on the recruitment process, although the follow-up phases of transportation, employment situation, and possibly arrest and return have not been neglected.

The research team consisted of Mrs. Lim Sidedine, Mr. Lor Monirith and was led by Annuska Derks M.A.. The research started in Phnom Penh, collecting information and documentation from organisations and persons working on trafficking issues and interviewing women in shelters in Phnom Penh. There followed fieldtrips to Battambang, Banteay Meanchey, Koh Kong and Prey Veng. During the survey a broad range of people were approached and interviewed, such as police, governors, women's affair departments, human rights organisations, district, *khum* [commune] and *phum* [village] leaders, monks, nuns, brothel-owners, prostitutes, beer-girls, (ex-) workers in Thailand, families of women who are or were in Thailand, recruiters, as well as more informal interviews with taxi-drivers, shop owners, market-women, guesthouse-owners, villagers, etc. I would like to thank all for their helpful and kind cooperation in the survey.

Given the limited budget and time, it was not possible to conduct a more extensive, in-depth survey on the recruitment of women for trafficking and related issues. Trafficking is a very sensitive topic and a careful approach is needed. So far, little in-depth research has been conducted on trafficking in Cambodia. This survey could be a starting point for more research on this reprehensible phenomenon.

CHAPTER TWO

What is Trafficking?

While conducting research on trafficking of Cambodian women and children to Thailand, it is necessary to pay careful attention to the question which activities or processes should be defined as trafficking. There exist a lot of confusion and varying opinions with regard to how the phenomenon of trafficking should be defined and combated. Since the beginning of this century a whole range of definitions has been developed within various national and international bodies. Each definition emphasises a different aspect and reflects different interests based on different agendas.^[1] However, not only for analytical reasons, but also in the interest of finding proper solutions to combat the phenomenon, it is important to find a clear answer to the question ‘what is trafficking?’.

In Cambodia trafficking is often associated with especially women and children being sold, deceived or otherwise lured into prostitution. The Cambodian Women’s Development Association (CWDA) describes trafficking as ‘the practice of taking people outside their support structure and rendering them powerless’^[2]. The Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women (GAATW) uses the following definition for trafficking:

The recruitment and transportation of (a) person(s) within and across national borders, by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of actual or perceived authority arising from a relationship, or deception, in order to subject them to the actual and unlawful power of (an)other person(s).^[3]

This is a very broad definition of trafficking. It includes (1) the process of recruitment and transportation, (2) the means by which men as well as women are recruited (violence, abuse, deception) and (3) the final circumstances in which they end up after being recruited and transported (often described as slavery-like circumstances). This suggests that within what is defined as trafficking, all three elements can be found.

In reality, however, these three elements of trafficking do not necessarily come together in all circumstances. We found people who went on their own initiative to Thailand, but ended up in slavery-like circumstances, as well as people who were recruited and transported by deception, but never reached the place of work, and others who were recruited and transported to Thailand and actually ended up doing well-paid decent work. In order to distinguish between the ‘abusive recruitment and brokerage practices’ and the ‘abusive working and living condition in both public and private spheres’, Wijers and Lap-Chew^[4] developed the following working definitions:

Trafficking in Women^[5]:

All acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of a woman within and across national boundaries for work or services by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion.

Forced Labour & Slavery-like Practices:

The extraction of work or services from any woman [or man] or the appropriation of the legal identity and/or physical person of any woman by means of violence or threat of violence, abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage or other forms of coercion.

Wijers and Lap-Chew^[6] state that coercion, in any possible form, is a crucial element in both definitions. This includes, but is not limited to:

- violence or threat of violence, including deprivation of freedom (of movement, of personal choice)
- deception: with regard to, amongst other things, working conditions or the nature of the work to be done
- abuse of authority or dominant position: this can range from confiscating personal documents in order to place another person in a dependent position, to abusing one's dominant social position or natural parental authority or abusing the vulnerable position of persons without legal status
- debt bondage: i.e. pledging the personal services or labour of oneself or another person as a security for a debt, if the value of those services or labour as reasonable assessed is not applied towards the liquidation of the debt, or the length and nature of those services or labour are not limited and defined.

A distinction between the recruitment and the work or services that women end up doing is made, as Wijers and Lap-Chew explain, because trafficking and situations of forced labour and slavery-like practices to which women are subjected do not necessarily go together. They write:

Trafficking can be a means to bring women into slavery-like situations, but this is not necessarily the case. On the one hand, women can be recruited and transported under conditions of coercion but not end up in a forced/slavery-like situation. On the other hand, women may find themselves in forced labour/slavery-like situations without having been trafficked.^[7]

This does not mean, however, that a study, a policy or a legal framework related to trafficking can or should ignore the working conditions in which victims of trafficking end up. It is the practice of trafficking as well as the forced labour and slavery-like situations that should be combated. Therefore, this study, although making a distinction between the recruitment and living/working conditions, will pay attention to both.

In addition to the distinction between the abusive recruitment and brokerage practices and the abusive working and living conditions, this study will describe certain issues that have come up during the research. Given the specific Cambodian context, and taking into consideration the work that has been done so far in this field in Cambodia, it is useful to distinguish between trafficking in-country and trafficking across the borders (in this study limited to Thailand); between trafficking for prostitution and trafficking for other purposes; and between trafficking and illegal migration.

Initially this research was focused primarily on trafficking to Thailand. The results have shown, however, that, although it is useful to recognise the distinction between trafficking in-country (within Cambodia) and across borders (to Thailand), this distinction is not always easy to make. As regards trafficking for certain specific purposes, most importantly prostitution, the actual recruitment processes do not always differ significantly. Therefore, this study will not be limited to trafficking to Thailand only. Where relevant, attention will be given to practices related to in-country trafficking.

Although most of the research done so far was focused on trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, it has been acknowledged that women and children, as well as men, are trafficked for other purposes. This study will make a clear distinction between the different purposes of trafficking. Trafficking for prostitution has specific characteristics with regards to the recruitment procedures, the target groups for the traffickers, the working and living circumstances, and the background situation related to this phenomenon. Therefore, issues related to trafficking for prostitution will be detailed in chapter three, separate from trafficking for other exploitative purposes, like begging, criminality or domestic work which will be described in chapter four.

Related to the distinction between trafficking for different (economic) activities, is the distinction between trafficking and illegal migration. Not all the people in the flow to Thailand in search for work and high salaries are victims of trafficking, although some might end up in slavery-like circumstances. In chapter five the abusive recruitment and brokerage practices and the abusive working and living conditions for those working in Thailand in construction, fisheries, factories, farming or other kinds of economic activities, will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

Trafficking for Prostitution Within and Across Borders

Studies on trafficking of women in Cambodia so far focused primarily on trafficking for prostitution. Prostitution and the problems related to it have received increasing attention. Prostitution is not a recent phenomenon in Cambodia. However, the increase of this practice in recent years has followed periods in which prostitution was banned -under the Khmer Rouge regime - or strictly controlled under the Vietnamese backed socialist regime. Only after the economic liberalisation and opening up of the country, and especially with the arrival of UNTAC, did Cambodia see an explosive growth in prostitution. Although the number of prostitutes has decreased after UNTAC left, studies have indicated that problems related to it, like the number of young girls in prostitution, the number of trafficked women and HIV/AIDS infection rates among prostitutes, have risen.

A recent research conducted by the Commission of Human Rights and Reception of Complaints of the National Assembly^[8] has indicated that over 14,000 women are working as prostitutes in brothels throughout the country. Of these about 15,5 percent are under 18 years old. Besides prostitutes working in brothels, the research identified women who work as prostitutes from their own house or private rented accommodation, as well as dancers in discotheques, beer-girls, masseuses, karaoke singers, or those prostitutes without fixed accommodation living on the street. Those women who are trafficked into prostitution most often end up living under the control of a brothel-owner, but may have been recruited out of the other mentioned working situations.

Although the focus of this survey was mainly on the recruitment of women and girls trafficked to Thailand, we found that in the case of recruiting women and girls for prostitution it is hard to make a clear distinction between in-country and cross-border trafficking. The actual procedures through which women are recruited for commercial sex work seem to follow the same pattern for in-country and cross-border trafficking. Therefore this section on trafficking for prostitution will describe more generally the ways of, people involved in, and factors underlying trafficking for prostitution.

Entering prostitution

In a study of on trafficking of Burmese women and girls into brothels in Thailand, Hnin Hnin Pyne is quoted for her classification of the means by which women enter into prostitution, i.e. voluntary, bonded or involuntary:

Voluntary indicates that the woman, prostitute-to-be, approaches the owner/manager of a sex establishment herself; bonded implies the involvement of parents or guardians, who receive money from an agent or owner for giving away their daughter; and involuntary conveys the use of deception and coercion of the women by an agent or owner/manager.^[9]

These three different means by which women enter into prostitution are related to the different ways through which women are recruited for prostitution and the different people involved in the recruitment process.

Voluntary entry into prostitution

Although the term voluntary entry into prostitution suggests free will, it does not always mean a free choice among the economic alternatives for those women who decide themselves to enter prostitution. Most often these women entered because of dire economic needs within a specific social context. A prostitute in Battambang explained that for her prostitution seemed to be the only way to earn some money to feed her poor mother and her 5 year-old child. She was the oldest daughter of a poor family of which the parents were divorced and she herself was divorced from her husband who left her for another woman. She recounts:

“I heard that in this job one can earn a lot of money. I had no other way. I didn’t tell my mother, step-mother and sister that I came here to work as a prostitute. I just told them that I went to Poipet to sell fruits for two months. But I decided I wanted to do this work, because it is the only work with which I can earn much money.”

Although she comes from Kandal province, she decided to go to Battambang to find a job as a prostitute, while “in Phnom Penh there are many people who know me, so I must find an empty place to work. If not, it is shameful for me.” In Battambang she found a place to work by asking a motortaxi to bring her to a brothel. In the beginning she felt uncomfortable about her reputation in the future, but as she said:

“Now I am not afraid anymore. I don’t want people to say that I am a woman who can’t find money. I just try to work hard to get a lot of money and I will go back home to start some business, like other people.”

Even though the voluntary entry into prostitution can be forced by the circumstances, it does not imply the use of violence, abuse of dominant position, debt bondage, deception or other forms of coercion as defined in the cases of trafficking. However, voluntary entry into prostitution can bring the women and girls into slavery-like circumstances, such as being forced to work 24 hours a day, receiving no or very little payment, not being able to leave the brothel, being forced to have sex without a condom, being hit or otherwise violated, etc. Besides, those who have already entered prostitution are easy targets for recruiters who have connections to other brothels within Cambodia or in Thailand.

Bonded prostitution

Bonded entry into prostitution entails parents or associates who sell a child or young woman to a person for promised employment in return for cash. Reynolds describes this kind of entry in prostitution as a “fairly consistent and quite distinct model of trafficking”.^[10] Reynolds continues that the use of bonded labour to repay a debt incurred either directly by the labourer or by an associate of the labourer was a traditional common form of slavery in Cambodia. Osborne writes about how in the western view the widespread existence of this practice throughout Southeast Asia often is misinterpreted:

Western observers to the traditional world of Southeast Asia seldom understood the difference, for instance, between 'true' slaves, condemned to a life of servitude, and those who had voluntarily, but temporarily, given up their freedom in order to meet a debt or other unfulfilled obligation.^[11]

Marjorie Muecke relates this practice to the present situation in which young women are 'sold' into prostitution. She states that the 'historical practice of selling women' can be found in Southeast Asia and provides an important precedent for the current practice whereby adults, predominantly men, sell family members, particularly daughters, for economic gain^[12].

Most information available on trafficking in contemporary Cambodia relates to women and girls trafficked into prostitution inside the country. Although it is hard to get reliable data on trafficking and prostitution, surveys of 1993-1994 conducted by Vigilance and CWDA indicated that about half of the women and girls were sold into prostitution, mostly by parents

or other relatives^[13]. However, as Reynolds, Osborne and Muecke have indicated, one has to be careful in interpreting the concept of sale in these cases. In Prey Veng province, we talked to a brothel madam and when asked how she recruited the girls for her brothel she explained:

"The parents bring their daughters here, but they do not sell them. They come to borrow my money, 40,000 or 50,000 or 60,000 riel^[14]. The women usually have worked as a prostitute before. Their parents brought them to different places. When other people come here to search for women they want to buy from me, I do not dare to do that, because the parents of these women trust me."

Many of the reports written on trafficking and prostitution focus on this involvement of parents or other relatives in trafficking of young women in prostitution. This leads to the question how is it possible that parents are involved in the trafficking of their own daughters? Why is it not problematic for these parents to bring their daughters into prostitution or any other bonded labour situation? Usually, poverty is given as the main reason to these questions. The Situation Report on Trafficking and Prostitution of Children states: "Poor families are by definition more susceptible to promises of jobs for their young daughters, often desperate enough to sell their daughters or other relatives to pay of a debt."^[15] However important, economic reasons alone cannot explain the involvement of parents in this practice. There are several factors coming together with the economic factors that make it possible for parents to bring their daughters into prostitution in order to relieve poverty.

In Thailand the problem of trafficking of young women for prostitution has existed much longer and on a much bigger scale than in Cambodia. Much more research has been done in order to find out the causes and cultural background of this phenomenon. Marjorie Muecke spent several extended periods of time since 1972 conducting fieldwork in the northern part of Thailand. She writes about the 'cultural continuity of prostitution', which also explains why it is possible for parents to be involved in bringing their daughters in bonded prostitution:

[T]he economic rewards of contemporary prostitution have enabled young women to support not only urban-based profiteers who control prostitution, but more importantly from a cultural perspective, to remit funds home to their families and villages of origin. Prostitution today is accomplishing what food vending did for the young women's mothers: both of these otherwise disparate endeavours have the effect of conserving norms by which women support the family, village and other basic institutions in Thai society.^[16]

As in Thailand, also in Cambodia, prostitution has become an important possible activity through which daughters can fulfil their expectations of providing financial support for the family. Parents will allow their daughters to work temporarily as prostitutes to pay back the money borrowed from the *meebon* [brothel-owner] through which the family can relieve their financial burden. Women who work as prostitutes recognise their role in providing financial support for their families. One prostitute working in Prey Veng explained she is the second daughter among nine children. Her parents are construction workers, but cannot earn enough to support the whole family. She decided she would agree with her parents to work as a prostitute:

"..because I saw the people who work here have money and they have new clothes. They can help their parents...I cannot save money for myself, because my mother comes every time to take it. She takes 40,000 or 50,000 riel."

According to a *meebon* in Battambang, some parents are making a lot of money by making their so-called virgin daughters work as prostitutes in exchange for a loan from the brothel-owner:

"When these parents came to bring their daughters here, they assured me that they were virgins. I did not examine them carefully at the time, but later I find out that they had already lost their virginity. These girls were about 15 or 16 years old. I loaned their parents some money. But after four to ten days the father and mother came back to visit their daughters. Then they ask me to get their daughter

back, because their grandmother has come from overseas and wants to meet them. They took their daughter back home. Later, when I started searching for them, I saw that they brought the girls to a hotel. It is so bad..”

In order to prevent arguments about the amount of the loan provided by the brothel-owner and about the voluntary agreement of the woman or girl to work as a prostitute, some brothel-owners make the women sign a contract. Another *meebon* in Battambang said:

“Sometimes the women are sold by their parents or relatives. In these cases I only accept them if the women themselves agree to do this work... I make the contract as a proof that the women work voluntarily and that there is no one who forced or sold them.”

Involuntary prostitution

Involuntary entry entails women who are lured, deceived, kidnapped or in any other way tricked into prostitution. According to surveys of CWDA^[17], conducted in 1994 in Tuol Kork, over 40 percent of the women interviewed (total 399) were not aware that they would be involved in prostitution. In a Human Rights Task Force report^[18] of 1995 based on 310 interviews with related people in 13 provinces, it was estimated that 45 percent of the prostitutes interviewed were deceived by pimps or abducted into prostitution. A survey on Cambodian and Vietnamese sex workers along the Thai-Cambodian border^[19] considers the general belief that the motives of women for following the trafficker are often based on false promises of well paid jobs in restaurants or hotels. The other well-known variant they mention is kidnapping or otherwise forcing women into prostitution. Their findings did, however, not confirm these general beliefs, since the women they interviewed had left their homes voluntarily and with the hope of being able to earn a higher income.

There exist no reliable statistics on how many women and girls are deceived or lured into prostitution within Cambodia, nor across the border. More is, however, known about the way women and girls are recruited for prostitution. The typical story is of recruiters, especially female recruiters, who come into a village and try to gain the trust of a girl. Her promises of a decent job with high income somewhere in a city fosters wishful thinking that there is a way to escape poverty.

This is what happened to one informant in a shelter in Phnom Penh, a 16 year-old girl from Battambang. She has five brothers and sisters, of which she is the fourth. Her father used to be a *meekhum*[commune leader] in Bavel district. However, the Khmer Rouge attacks made him sell his land and move to a safer area. Now her parents do not own their own ricefield, but they rent some land to grow rice. This is, however, not enough to feed the whole family. That is why she went to work at Kbal Khmoch, where she cut bricks. Her parents allowed her to work there and stay with her uncle and aunt. She recounts:

"One day, one of the workers told me about a lady who needs a person to take care of her child. She is willing to pay 150,000 riel per month. I think this lady was his relative. I immediately agreed to come to Phnom Penh with this lady, because I was angry with my uncle and aunt who were always blaming me. I did not tell my mother that I was going with her, because the lady ordered me not to tell anybody else.

The lady brought me to Phnom Penh. When we arrived, she brought me to a place where I saw a lot of people going in and out, perhaps a hotel. Here I was sold by the lady to a *meebon*, who was interested in me because I was still a virgin. I do not know for how much she sold me. Then I was brought to a room and a bit later a man came in. I asked him to help me get away from this place, but he did not want to help me; he wanted me to sleep with him. After that, he wanted to buy me from the *meebon* to take me as his wife. The *meebon* did not agree, because he had paid a lot for me. I had to sleep with a lot of other men.

But soon I became very weak. They used make-up to make me look beautiful and gave me medicine to make me feel better. But it got worse, I was bleeding. First the *meebon* told me that it is just my menstruation and she hit me for complaining. Only later, five days after, they took me to the hospital. The *meebon* told me not to tell the doctor, but I decided to tell him about my situation and asked him to help me. He told the *meebon* that I had to stay in the hospital, because I was still unable to walk. Then he informed an organisation who helped to arrest the *meebon*."

In order to recruit the girls, the recruiter will take advantage of situations in which a woman or girl feels maltreated by her parents, other relatives or boy-friend. In her ignorance and in her drive to escape her present situation, she will easily agree to come along with an acquaintance who promises a well-paid job, a new adventure in a big city. Another informant from a shelter in Phnom Penh explained that she used to work as a day labourer on a soya-bean farm, but decided one day to leave her home not to return, because her mother blamed her for doing something wrong. On the way she met a woman with whom she used to work at the farm. She commented:

"The woman did not persuade me to leave home. I just met her at the market place, where the bus stops. She asked me where I was going and I told her that I left home. She said that she could find me a good job, so I followed her."

The woman brought her first to a house in another village, from where she was brought to Kampong Cham town. There she was brought in a guesthouse and forced to sleep with a guest. When she refused, she was hit with a stick and told that if she continued to refuse, she would be hit to death.

Stories about the disappearance of young girls being kidnapped for prostitution in Thailand as well as in Cambodia has scared many parents, who have become afraid to leave their daughters unguarded. In Koh Kong we came across several such stories and some parents have taken preventative measures. One mother told us she has her daughters brought to and from school by one known *motodup*[motortaxi] and she has warned her daughter not to go with anyone else. From the stories we heard, it seems that the kidnapping involves not so much girls who are simply grasped from the street -as their parent might perceive their disappearance- but girls who are deceived by someone who perceives when a girl is unguarded and receptive for his or her proposals. A police official in Banteay Meanchey remarked that for the case of child trafficking, no force is used. They persuade the children to go with them to visit Thailand, to look for a job or to continue studying. When the children agree to come along, their parents are not informed and start looking for their lost child. One father in Koh Kong told us about the disappearances of his 12 year-old daughter:

"My daughter disappeared three times, and I did not know what happened to her. The first time, she disappeared in the evening, while my wife and I were away. That day, she had broken a hot water pot and her sisters told her that she would be punished once we came back. When she heard that, she ran away. I thought she went to the house of my brother, but when I went there to look for her, she was not there. I could not find her, so I went to the fortuneteller. He told me that my daughter would not be lost. She came back home later that night. When I saw her, I noticed she had lost one earring. I asked her about it and she replied that the person who brought her with him took off her earring. He brought her by motorbike to a house near Psar Chah where she watched video. But at night, she missed home and decided to go back.

The second time she disappeared was a few months later. She disappeared for three nights. I went out for work in the morning. She was at home, because she only had class in the afternoon. When I came back at about eleven I didn't see her. I asked her sisters, but they didn't know where she went. I went to the fortuneteller again and he said that she did not disappear. She just went to play with some friends. I continued to look for her everywhere. Only two days later I saw her buying some bread at the market. When she saw me, she came to me and told me that the same man as before took her by motorbike. He had given her 20 baht and then he went to the other side of the river.

The third time she disappeared, was when I brought her to school in the afternoon. However, she did not go to class. When I found out she had not attended class, I first thought she went to play in the garden. I went to look for her. When I could not find her, I started to worry. I went to the fortuneteller again and he told me that if I did not hit her after the second time she disappeared, she would be lost again. If I could not find her within 10 days, she would be lost till she was 25 years old. The fortuneteller told me that she had left to the west. I had not hit her after the second time, because I like her too much. Someone else told me that my daughter went to the west and it would not be possible to take her back, because it will cost millions of baht.

However, four days later, she came back to meet her brother and sister at school. She told me later that two men brought her to the wharf and allowed her to go back, because she told them that she missed her brother and sister. I think they allowed her to see her younger sister, because they wanted her to persuade her younger sister to come with her. When she met her brother and sister, they told her to go home, because her mother is sick. At first she did not want to. She said she was ashamed to go back.

At the time she disappeared she was wearing a white shirt and blue skirt and when she came back, she was wearing trousers and had painted her nails. When she came home, she seemed very scared and kept herself inside the house. So my niece applied garlic on her body, which made her feel less scared. When I asked her who took her and where she went, she answered she did not know the people or the place. She told me the same people of the first and second time picked her up when she was standing in front of the video-place. They brought her somewhere in Thailand. There were a lot of people, some older, some younger than her. They had video with porn-movies. They gave her food and let her watch television. She was not maltreated, but I think, by the way of her behaviour, that they gave her drugs.”

There are stories in newspapers, magazines and other sources about the use of drugs as a means to traffic girls for commercial sex work. These stories tell of girls being given drugged sweets and kidnapped to be sold into commercial sex work. We have, however, not encountered any of such cases ourselves, although we did encounter cases of women or girls who were deceived into commercial sex work and became addicted to drugs in order to be able to stand the difficult circumstances of their work.

The different means of entering prostitution -voluntary, bonded or involuntary- refer specifically to the initial entry of women into prostitution. As such, voluntary entry does not fall under the definition of trafficking. However, trafficking of women for prostitution continues in the brothels, which puts all women working as commercial sex workers in one form or the other at risk of being deceived and sold to another brothel within Cambodia or in another country.

Recruiting women and girls for prostitution

Different means of entrance into prostitution can be distinguished and involves different recruiters and recruiting procedures. According to the findings in this survey, the recruitment of women and girls into prostitution follows the same process for trafficking whether in-country or across the border to Thailand. These recruitment and placement processes are often thought to be highly organised through well-established criminal networks. Mu Sochua^[20] quotes senior officials working with Interpol as saying "behind every child prostitute is a web of criminals, cruelty and corruption." A survey on Cambodian sex workers on the Thai-Cambodian border^[21] did, however, not agree with this generally held view of an international centrally organised criminal network of traffickers. Although it is hard to get a real overview of the situation, the findings of this research also did not lead to the impression that there exists such a highly organised (inter) national criminal network of recruiters and brothel-owners. There exist links between brothel-owners and the police, between different brothel-owners, and between brothel-owners and recruiters. However, they seem to be based more on a personal, sometimes familial, set of relationships than part of a well-established criminal network.

One brothel-owner in Koh Kong explained to us how he recruits the women who work for him:

"I go to a village in Kampong Cham, because I have family living there. I inform them that I need to find a prostitute and they will help me find someone. They will look for a woman who broke up with her boy-friend, who was cheated or who has a broken heart. Not only will my family look for me, but also some other villagers whom I know personally help me find someone. When one woman hears that I need women who can work for me in Koh Kong, other women want to come as well. Before I bring them to Koh Kong I guarantee them that I will not sell them to another *meebon*. So I find the women through my family. It is not so difficult to find women, because they know which women *mien kue kbaal tik* [have little brains]. If someone persuades them, they are easily convinced to come. Now I have five women working here. One of them is the leader and *meekcol*[recruiter]. If I want to recruit new women, I can discuss with her and give her some money. She has the ability to persuade women. For example, I discuss with the recruiter that I want her to bring me a woman for 20,000 or 30,000 riel. Then she looks for a woman who was already working as a prostitute. She tells them that they can earn more money in Koh Kong than at their present place. Then usually most prostitutes want to come with her. When the recruiter goes to one brothel to ask about a prostitute, the *meebon* of this brothel can help find someone through his or her connections."

Recruiters can either recruit the girls to fill an order of a *meebon* who needs new girls in his or her brothel, or independently. In the latter case, the recruiter will go to different brothels to offer the girls as prostitutes for a certain amount of money. A *meebon* in Battambang commented:

"Earlier there were people who came to bring women here. They wanted to sell these women for \$100 or \$200 each. But I didn't buy these women. I am afraid of getting into problems [when I buy these women]. Sometimes they deceive the *meebon*. They sell the women to a brothel and the next day they come to take them back. I am afraid of losing money."

Another *meebon* in Battambang said he usually gets his women through those recruiters who come to his brothel and offer a woman for 3,000 to 5,000 baht^[22]. He also borrows women from a neighbouring brothel for a certain amount of time. Sometimes women come voluntarily to his brothel. Often they were raped by their boy-friends [*kouc sangsaa*] or introduced by an older sister who knew from experience that one can earn a lot of money as a commercial sex worker and therefore convinced her sister to work in a brothel.

The persons who recruit the women, by convincing and/or deceiving them to enter prostitution are called *meebon* -a term also used for brothel-owner-, *neak noam* or *meekcol* -more general terms for 'recruiter'. A representative of the Women's Department in Koh Kong described how these people go to the provinces to recruit girls. They look for the beautiful girls in secondary school, girls whose mother has a second husband, girls who have quarrels with their parents, or girls who just broke up with their boy-friends. They ask parents of the girls whether they will allow their daughter to come to work, for example, in Koh Kong, as a cleaner, food seller, etc. When they agree, the girls are brought to Koh Kong. The most beautiful girls continue for Thailand; the less beautiful ones stay in Koh Kong. The *neak noam* have relations with the police or other authorities who can protect him. They pay some money to the police. Some police are corrupt and will accept the money, because they have a low salary. When the parents complain to the police about the disappearance of their daughter, the police can try to find her back, but only seldom will they be able to do so. Most of them disappear in brothels in Thailand and when the brothel-owner knows the police are looking for one particular girl, she will be sold to another brothel.

The attraction of the money that can be earned is high for the girl or woman as well as for the parents. A police officer in Koh Kong explained:

"There are recruiters who divide into four or five groups, to go to Phnom Penh, Kampong Som, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng or other provinces. This is the job for people in the provinces who have connections

with the brothel-owners. For example, there is a poor family who has a daughter. The recruiter does not tell the parents that she will be working as a prostitute in Koh Kong, but as a waitress. The recruiter tells them that as a waitress she can earn 40,000 or 50,000 baht a month. When you compare this amount of money with what one can earn as a farmer.. it maybe equals the income of five years farming. This makes poor families decide to let their daughters go to Koh Kong. They think she will only go to Koh Kong and not cross the border to Thailand, because they think that will be too far.”

It is difficult to tell how extended the network of recruiters and brothel-owners is for the recruitment of women for commercial sex work in Thailand. Although it has become apparent that several layers of people are involved in the process, they do not seem to be part of one huge criminal network that extends its web throughout the country. There are many recruiters, usually women, who follow each other up. They are each individually related to different *meebon* in Cambodia and Thailand. Those with connections in Thailand will persuade women to go to Thailand, saying that it is easier to earn money there. The most beautiful girls who are brought to work in border towns, are likely to continue to Thailand. A *meebon* in Koh Kong explained:

“The *meebon* who takes the prostitute girls [to Thailand] are mostly women. She tells the girls that she will bring them to Thailand for work. But when they arrive, she sells them to a Thai *meebon*. The Thai *meebon* pays 5,000 baht for each girl. The girls have to work till they have earned twice their price. Then the *meebon* sells them again. This way they continue to pass the prostitute from *meebon* to *meebon*.”

Some girls or women, after hearing about the (financial) advantages of working in Thailand, decide to go themselves. They ask around in Koh Kong or Poipet and get information from *motodup*. The *motodup* can explain to them how to go to Thailand. Once the *motodup* knows the woman wants to go to Thailand, he can bring her, for some commission, to the people who can bring her to there because they are very familiar with the way to Thailand and the places to work.

Recruiters who recruit women for prostitution in Thailand are not only targeting 'fresh' girls, directly from the villages, in the literature usually called the one-step pattern. They also try to convince women who are already working as prostitutes, dancers, or beer-girls, called the two-step pattern. By working in Thailand, the recruiters promise, they can earn a lot more money than on the other side of the border. Three beer-girls told about being approached by woman who came in their restaurant to asked them whether they wanted to work in Thailand. The girls said they did not want to go, because they were afraid she would sell them as prostitutes. However, the method of the recruiters is to *chliet okah*, to steal time. This means that the recruiter will come back again and again to gain trust among the girls, till they agree to go along to Thailand. Also several *meebon* have said that they were approached by Thai or Khmer with relations in Thailand who wanted to buy their most beautiful young women to bring to Thailand. A prostitute in Battambang was actually brought to Poipet by a soldier-customer who told her and her friend he wanted to bring them to Svay Sisophon for *dai leeng* [a trip]. However, he brought them to his Thai boss in Poipet. His boss told them that they were sold to him to work in his brothel. She remembered:

“I knew that I was deceived, but I didn’t know what to do. The boss had more than ten guards and my friend and I were locked inside the house. I didn’t know how to escape. They obliged us to sleep with guests and threatened to hit us, but we did not agree. We begged and cried to let us go back, and in the end the soldier who brought us here convinced his boss to let us go.”

Crossing the border

Although the recruitment processes of women and children into prostitution follow similar lines, crossing the border involves more organisation with regards to transportation, relations with corrupt officials, and more bribes to pay. Risks are higher for those involved in cross-

border trafficking^[23]. Recruiters and receivers of trafficked women and children will therefore demand higher profits for their activities. According to a police official in Banteay Meanchey, the girls sold to Thailand are mostly very young, below 13 years old. In Thailand they can be sold to a customer for 20,000 baht for one week. But not all these girls stay in Thailand, some are sold even further. A police official in Battambang explained that it is difficult to find the children who are trafficked to Thailand because the big traffickers do not keep them in a brothel. They bring them to other countries, like Hong Kong, Singapore, Europe, etc.

As long as the trafficking of women and children for prostitution is profitable for those individuals involved, it will be hard to stop the practice. Besides, the lack of attention by, and also the involvement of, police, border officials and military, make continuance of the practice of cross-border trafficking possible. A police official in Banteay Meanchey commented on the problem of child trafficking:

"..it is impossible for us to solve the problem. Our armed forces are involved in this. They secretly transport children in their personal cars and reach the border of Thailand. They cross by the two main gates O'Prick and O Ta Chang. After the parents find out their children have disappeared, they come to complain to us. But we cannot take action when we only know that a child is inside some car going to Thailand."

A police official in Battambang explained why it is so easy nowadays to cross the border for traffickers:

"Before, the trafficking of human beings across the border was a rare problem, not like it is now. After the civil war, the Cambodian people lack education, they are poor, so they are inclined to do anything illegal... There are a lot of *robeang* ways, these are small, illegal ways to cross the border. Some belong to Pol Pot soldiers, some to the governmental army. But the problem is, do we work for the government, or do we work for ourselves...? Only if our policemen are really neutral and have good morals, can we defeat the problem of trafficking."

There are several places and opportunities to cross the border. Most often, the women are led through Poipet in Banteay Meanchey province and Koh Kong. The main border gates are open for Cambodians and Thai alike, who want to cross the border for one day. At the border station they can receive a paper, for ten baht, which allows them to cross the border for 24 hours. Some traffickers will act as though they are accompanying the woman or girl for *dai leeng* in Thailand, but without planning to come back within a day. Besides the main ways, there are several smaller crossing points, without or with little border control. Some of them require a long trip through the mountains. In Koh Kong the border with Thailand can be crossed relatively easily by boat, especially at night.

According to one police official in Battambang, crossing the border is not difficult for traffickers, but in meetings with the Thai and Khmer border police, the problem of how to combat the trafficking of women and children was discussed. He remarked that:

"..when someone enters Cambodia, the Khmer police control; when someone enters Thailand, the Thai police controls. But now the traffickers choose small ways in the forest to enter and exit. In the meeting we have talked about how to do our work seriously, so we can catch the traffickers. But we have to know whether the police themselves serve the government or themselves.."

Risk factors

There are some factors, most often a combination of them, which put certain women or girls at risk for being lured into prostitution^[24]:

- An older sister, relative or friend is already involved in prostitution.
- The parents of the girl have separated or are divorced and remarried.

- One or both of the parents are dead and the girl is living with relatives or friends.
- One or both of the parents are drug addicts, alcoholics or gamblers.
- The family is dependent on unpredictable casual work for their income, the family is in debt, or the family lives for other reasons in extreme poverty.
- The girl is of suitable age for the sex industry.
- The woman is herself divorced or separated from her husband.
- The woman or girl is psychologically weak.

Young women in unstable family environments are especially prone to believe and follow those who promise them nice jobs, with the intention to bring them into prostitution. A human rights worker in Battambang said that from his experience, most of the girls who are trafficked into prostitution have step-mothers or step-fathers who abuse them. Also, the children are not taken care of well enough. They are disappointed with their parents and will not obey them anymore. The recruiters take advantage of the situation by persuading the girls to follow them. Sometimes the girls follow their neighbours or boy-friends and find themselves cheated by the very people they trusted.

A prostitute in Prey Veng province recounts how she got involved:

"My father remarried after my mother died. But my step-mother didn't like me, she only took care of her own children. When my step-mother saw that other people have a better life, she ordered me to marry. I married a soldier, but he maltreated me, he did not give me any money and no rice to eat. His parents did not care for me, because they knew that we were poor and that I did not have a mother. So I ran away from him. I went to live with my grandmother in Phnom Penh. Next to her lived a woman who was my friend. We used to play together and always went out together. She had another friend. This friend liked me very much, she always gave me something, such as new clothes. So I considered her as a good friend. One day she told me to come with her. She told me that she sold coffee. I also wanted to sell coffee and work with her. She would give me a salary. However, the place was not a real cafe. I saw a lot of customers and my friend got a lot of money from them. I did not understand, so I asked her to work like her..."

Poverty is often mentioned as the number one cause for entry into prostitution. A combination of the risk factors mentioned above with poverty provides, however, a more complete picture of the reasons for getting involved in prostitution, either voluntarily, or trafficked. An unstable family background plays an important role for women entering prostitution. When talking about a 16 year-old girl who left her family to follow a *meebon*, a relative remarked:

"Other girls are easy to educate, but this girl is difficult. This is because the other girls are from stable families, whereas her mother is in a miserable state."

According to some other villagers, the mother is indeed in a miserable state. She had been working as a prostitute before. This is how she met her husband, with whom she had six children. Her sixth child died shortly after birth. She got very ill and her husband sent her to her mother to recover for a while. When she returned, her husband had taken another wife. She was left with the care of her five children. She could not handle it by herself. She started drinking and is now considered by the villagers as *chqout* [crazy]. Although she is the mother, the grandmother takes care of the children. They sold their ricefield, because there was no one who could farm. The grandmother goes out to nearest towns to beg, sometimes with her youngest grandchild; this is how she gets the money to feed the children.

The oldest daughter is supposedly a beautiful girl. According to the judge in Prey Veng, her mother wanted the girl to go to Neak Leung with a woman who was recruiting young girls. The woman brought the girl to a brothel in Prey Veng. The girl got scared and ran out to the police where she told them that she was cheated by the *meebon*. The police arrested the *meebon*, but could not bring her to prison since she and also the mother testified that the girl was supposed to be brought to Neak Leung with the consent of the mother and the girl.

Villagers explained that the woman who recruited the girl was living in the same village and was once herself working as a prostitute. Now she recruits other girls for prostitution and gambles. She is known in the whole village. Some mothers expressed concern about her leading their daughters away to sell. But as one villager remarked:

"The other mothers are strong, so they can protect their daughters, while the mother of this girl is crazy and she cannot protect her daughter from going away."

We heard many rumours from villagers, NGO-workers and government officials about people, especially women, going to different villages to recruit pretty young girls in all the provinces we visited. In Prey Veng, one of the poorest provinces of Cambodia, the severe floodings of the past years have placed a lot of farmer-families in difficulties. This makes these families more vulnerable to the accepting the offers of these women. Also the IDPs -internally displaced people- in Battambang and other war-torn provinces form a potentially vulnerable group, since they are without their important means of existence, land. Other sources of income have to be found. An NGO-worker working with IDPs in Battambang remarked that most of the young men go to Thailand for work, whereas a lot of pretty young women end up as beer-girls.

For the recruitment of young women who are especially vulnerable because of the difficulties with regards to economic or family situation, the line between voluntary and involuntary is often difficult to draw. As one human rights worker remarked:

"..most of the victims of trafficking [into prostitution] do not want to collaborate with us, because they earn a lot of money in their jobs....There are some victims who were molested, but they do not dare to complain, because they are afraid of the persons who have power...Often the prostitutes will protect the *meebon*, so we cannot arrest them. I met cases of girls of 17 or 18 years old who first were afraid when they were caught into a brothel. But after two weeks or more they feel okay and they feel as if the *meebon* has stopped maltreating them."

The prosecutor at the Prey Veng court expressed similar concerns about the problem of trafficking of women. He has received several stories about women and girls who were recruited to be sold to brothels, but lack of evidence obstructed real prosecution of the traffickers. Often the girls and their parents will testify they followed the recruiter voluntarily. He said:

"I heard that there exists women and child trafficking to Thailand, but no one has come to prosecute. So we do not know what to do to solve this problem. Parents want their children to earn money. When these children get arrested by the police, they say that they went by themselves, that no one led them to cross the border to Thailand. The police cannot do anything when the parents and children agree with each other, then we consider that they go voluntarily."

Issues related to trafficking for prostitution

Cambodia is still struggling to overcome the heritage left by the past decades of civil war and political instability. Although the past years of economic liberalisation have brought economic growth, this growth did not benefit the whole population. Outright poverty persists, which is a main underlying cause of the problem of trafficking. However, many other factors have made it possible for the trafficking of women for prostitution to exist and persist in Cambodia, touching a wide range of inter-linked factors that all together make the elimination of this practice a complex undertaking. Economic, political, social, cultural and psychological factors all play a role in the existence and continuance of this problem.

The political factor is related to the will and ability of the government and other political institutions to address the problem of commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and children^[25]. In a report on sexual exploitation and trafficking in Cambodia^[26] several of the flaws that exist in this political sphere are mentioned. Most importantly these flaws consist of the insufficient dissemination and implementation of the Law on Suppression of Abduction, Trafficking and Exploitation of Human Beings^[27], as well as other related laws, and the weak structures of the state which hinder active involvement of the police in the combat of trafficking and proper border controls. The lack of attention from police authorities and custom officials, and especially their supposed involvement in the flesh trade, is in turn caused by problems such as lack of instruction, low salary and lack of means to combat the people who are involved.

The social factors involved in the existence of trafficking for prostitution are less visible and require a deeper understanding of Cambodian society and culture. Often mentioned are the fragmentation and disruption of families, the traumas, mistrust among neighbours and weakening of community spirit caused by the experiences of the past decades of war, oppression and bordercamp-life. Traditional values are said to have been lost, which together with poverty have caused growing family problems like divorce, alcoholism, death or desertion of a parent. This in turn leads to weakening ties between child and parent resulting in the child's being sold, running away from home, or leaving (with a recruiter) to look for work^[28].

However important these factors may be for the present reality of Cambodia, other countries without these horrible experiences deal with similar problems regarding trafficking and prostitution. In a paper addressing sexual exploitation from a gender point of view^[29] one of the causes mentioned is the 'systematic undervaluation of females in terms of "property" or ability to earn in the market.' These relate to the cultural values regarding the role and status of women and men. In a Vigilance report on women trafficking and child prostitution, it is stated that ".. in the context of this [Cambodian] culture, women are generally viewed as sex objects, and women are particularly taught to accept their roles as house wives, submissive to the law of the male world."^[30] Although this is a generally held view, in reality the role of cultural values regarding gender relations and sexual exploitation are much more complex.

Without entering into a discussion about myths and realities of gender roles in Cambodia^[31], it does make sense to question why the rapid growth of female prostitution and trafficking is not considered culturally problematic for Cambodians. Permitting a daughter to go for work far from her village, as a prostitute or any other economic activity through which she can help support her family, seems to be in contradiction to the so-called traditional Khmer ideals. According to these ideals a young woman needs to be protected and can not leave her house too far without the company of her relatives. The Venerable Monichenda remarked on this:

"In our society, we have to take care that our daughters be good daughters. A good daughter, from the Khmer point of view, does not go far from home. As the Khmer saying goes 'Do not keep a good dessert for tomorrow; do not allow a woman to go far'.... Our society gives value to virginity of women. It is not like Europe or America, where they don't care about daughters who go away. But Khmer men love virgins and if parents do not allow their daughters to go to study far from home, we can not blame them, because they know their daughters will lose their future if they lose their virginity."

As in any society or culture at any time, present day Cambodia has to deal with these conflicting ideals. Ledgerwood states that "on the one hand daughters are supposed to be protected, on the other, the teenage daughter must bicycle all the way to the city and sell her goods in order to support the family."^[32] Changing circumstances, opportunities and practices have forced women to undertake all kinds of employment, even far away from their own family. The need to support the family financially has left young women with no other choice but to leave their home village and enter jobs that are not considered to be respectable, like

prostitution. Although this may not be in accordance with some ideals held in Khmer culture, as the young woman is far from her protected home as well as losing her virginity, the young woman can fulfil the obligation to support her family. There is a saying in Khmer: *koun proh cencem kmein baan kaa, koun srey touh ci'e sampheng sewchey kaa kut mdey dai* -a son does not feel responsible to take care of his parents, whereas a daughter, even when she works as a prostitute, will still think of her mother. As one prostitute explained:

“In general, for Khmer children, the sons do not take care of their families very much. The girls are mainly responsible to support their family. People think that for the boys, all responsibility for their family will be finished after he gets married. For the girls even if they become prostitutes, they will always take care of their family.”

Marjorie Muecke connects this 'cultural' obligation with Buddhism in the Thai context. She concludes that "beliefs that Thai laity tend to associate with Buddhism and village morality paradoxically enable the practice of prostitution in their society. The beliefs provide an ideology that justifies parental and village complicity in and denial of the prostitution of their daughters."^[33] Muecke reasons, as several other authors writing on Buddhism and prostitution, that Theravada Buddhism^[34] is linked to prostitution through the concepts of *karma* and merit making. According to the law of *karma*, good actions earn moral merit and wrong actions demerit. The amount of merit and demerit that a person has earned in past and present incarnations is that person's *karma*, and determines how much or little suffering s/he has in the present life. A person can change her/his *karma* by purposefully making merit. Through a boy's ordination as a monk, he shows gratitude and respect to his mother and family, since they will earn Buddhist merit and gain in social status. A girl shows gratitude and gains merit through raising money to support the family, which can also be used for providing food and money for the monks. As such, proper daughters are expected to fulfil a cultural mandate^[35]. With the rising demand for women in the growing sex industry, daughters can fulfil this cultural mandate by working as prostitutes and their parents, who either consciously brought them into prostitution or remain ignorant of the nature of the work their daughters are involved in, can be gratified.

This reasoning from the Thai experience may come from interpretations of Buddhist values among lay people in Thailand. These interpretations of Buddhist values and practices do not necessarily comply with the interpretations of the 'academic' Buddhism regarding *karma*, merit and morality. Muecke's interpretation of the link between Buddhism and prostitution contradicts Buddhist morality regarding sexuality embodied in the five precepts^[36], i.e. to refrain from sexual misconduct. This precept discourages the practice of prostitution, although such practice is not actively prohibited by Buddhist monks, as “[i]n Buddhism, there is no personal judge either to condemn or to reward, but only the working of an impersonal moral causation and natural law”^[37].

Like Thailand, Cambodia is also predominantly a Theravada Buddhist society, although with different specific Cambodian adaptations. According to an elderly *doun chii* [nun] in a pagoda in Battambang the power of *karma*, or the working of 'impersonal causation', directs one's life. She explained, regarding the role of sons and daughters in the family, that it is true that "...when we are of old age, our daughter takes more care for us than our son. However, it depends also on our *karma*, the fruits of our deeds in the past." According to the head-*doun chii* one has to realise that:

"[I]n Buddhism, we know that we do not need to be angry with someone else about what he or she did to us. If we encounter suffering, we can not blame someone else. It is the power of our *karma*... I don't know clearly about the problem of trafficking of women for prostitution. This is also the power of *karma* which gives bad medicine to a woman which causes her to be sold... It is our *karma*, our actions in the past, that make us do bad things... It is our *karma* and even if we go away, we will still get it... That is why we have to do good actions."

The results of *karma* can be influenced and merit can be earned by performing good deeds, such as taking good care of one's parents or by supporting the pagoda. As such, the intentions of giving are important and will be accepted. The Venerable Monichenda noticed that it is the deed that is important:

"...Buddhism assures women that although they are prostitutes, they can construct a pagoda. And now there are many pagodas which were constructed with money from prostitutes. Buddha never prohibited prostitutes from using their money to construct a pagoda. I think that is not a wrong thing for these women to do."

This does not mean that Buddha supports the practice of prostitution. However, there exists a liberal stance within Buddhism not to moralise and interfere in one's 'immoral' activities, which allows the acceptance of someone's (good) intentions of giving, without moralising about its source. This stance, combined with a discrepancy between the ideals in Buddhist spirituality and the reality of practice of some Buddhists, has led to many diverse and even contradictory interpretations concerning the 'Buddhist view' on prostitution.

The psychological perspective of trafficking for commercial sex is discussed in a report of the Physicians for Human Rights.^[38] They write that sexual violation, shame, the betrayal of trust, the separation from the family, fears and depressions make a deep impact on the women's and girls' lives. The bad stigma of being a prostitute can somehow be paid off through offerings at the pagoda and through being able to help relieve their families' financial problems. Still, the fact that a woman has already lost her virginity, and therefore is considered *kouc* [broken] may make it difficult to return to the life she had before. Being *kouc* already, she might decide to stay in prostitution, thereby furthering the possibility of trafficking to other brothels within the country or across the border to Thailand.

Trafficking for prostitution is related to many different issues, which within the limited amount of time for this survey could not all be extensively addressed. The economic, political, social, cultural and psychological factors each play a role in the existence and prevalence of this phenomenon. Therefore, no one factor can be held solely responsible, nor will a solution for only one of the inter-related problems terminate its existence. In order to develop meaningful prevention measures, it is important to get a deeper insight in these issues and how they are related to one another.

CHAPTER FOUR

Trafficking of Women and Children in Begging and Servitude

Trafficking of women and children is most commonly associated with prostitution. The studies conducted so far on trafficking in Cambodia reflect this same focus. However, a survey on Cambodian and Vietnamese women and children in detention for illegal entry into Thailand^[39] mentioned especially women and children who are trafficked to Thailand for other reasons than commercial sex work, mostly begging and construction.

As mentioned in chapter two, it is important to distinguish between trafficking on the one hand and forced labour and slavery-like practices on the other hand. Women who end up in forced labour or slavery-like circumstances are not necessarily trafficked. This is especially true for those who were recruited, or decided by themselves, to work in Thailand for work in construction, the fishery-industry, factories, or as domestic workers. Although there is a certain resemblance between the processes of recruitment of illegal migrants and the recruitment of women and children for trafficking into prostitution or begging, the deceptive and forceful nature of the latter is significantly different.

This chapter will focus on women and children who were deceived, or forcefully brought into begging, domestic work or other kind of services. For these kinds of servitude, young children, girls as well as older women are recruited. The recruitment procedures vary, using methods as described for the recruitment for commercial sex work, as well as those related to the (illegal) labour migration. Within the timeframe of the research, it was, however, not possible to get an all-encompassing view on how organised and widespread these practices are.

Recruitment for begging

Old women, handicapped, children and mothers with babies are typical targets for recruiters of beggars. Although the recruiters will know how to reach these target groups throughout the country, the provinces which border Thailand seem to be the most frequented by recruiters who want to bring potential beggars to Thailand.

A 72 year-old lady in Battambang province told how she was approached by a man who invited her to come along to a ceremony by the King. She remembered:

“He told me that the King organised a ceremony and that he would make donations. I am very poor, so when I heard about this, I wanted to go there. I didn’t tell my children, because the man was in a hurry. He said he didn’t want to stay here for a long time, because he didn’t want the car to wait. I didn’t know him before, but I thought he was kind, so I believed him...”

She was, however, not brought to any ceremony, but to Poipet where she was handed over to another person. The recruiter received 5,000 baht for bringing her and left. Then she together with four other persons were brought to Bangkok. There she was put to work as a beggar.

A 70 year-old *yeey* [grandmother] in another district in Battambang, was approached by a woman who came to her village and told her that she could earn money in Thailand:

“It was last year during the rainy season, and everything was flooded. I wasn’t earning a living, so I followed her. She charged 5,000 baht, which I had to earn in Thailand. She told me to go to Poipet. There I met a lot of other people, and there were many guides. We all walked through a ricefield from five in the afternoon till midnight. Then we slept till five in the morning and continued walking until the sugarcane fields. Here we stopped again, because the guides were afraid of being caught. The next morning, very early, we left for Bangkok. There they brought me to a *youn*^[40] and sold me. He gave us rice to eat and a place to sleep in his house. During the day, we went out to beg money for him.”

Recruiting, especially old women, for begging has become an activity that includes the involvement of several layers of people, very much like that described in the next chapter for illegal labour migrants. An informant who works as a *motodup*, was once approached by a recruiter who wanted old people:

“I had never met him before. He wanted me to gather old people. He said that he would be at the motortaxi station and if I brought old people there, I would receive 500 baht for each person. He said they needed the old people, but also blind and handicapped, for begging. He also asked the other motorbike drivers.”

Also people living on the street, especially children and handicapped are recruited to beg in Thailand. In Battambang-town, a group of families, orphaned children and otherwise abandoned people are living on the street under an old hotel. The children had been approached by a man who asked them to come with him to Thailand. One of the women had tried herself to go to Thailand, but only reached Poipet. She wanted to cross the border, because she had heard that in Thailand one can earn a lot of money by begging. However, she didn’t have enough money -2,500 baht- to pay a guide who could bring her across the border.

An NGO-worker in Poipet had received several children, mostly boys, who were arrested by the Thai police for begging. She complained about those parents who let their children go:

“Some people are not truthful. When they have money, they play cards. And when they lose all the money, they order their children to find money. So the children must nourish their parents... Some parents send their children with other people to beg in Thailand. They send them by a leader who brings them to a house. There the boss pays the leader 2,000 or 3,000 baht for each person. This boss manages a group of people whom he sends to beg on the street. He tells them that they have to repay all the expenses he incurred for them. So when the children get some money, they cannot send it to their families. The boss takes all the money. The boss only gives food and a little bit of money. The boss not only manages children, but also old and handicapped people.”

She remarked, however, that some children are attracted by the easy money they can earn through begging in Thailand. If they get arrested and are brought back to Cambodia, they will try to go back to Thailand by themselves or by someone who works for their ‘boss’. In her shelter, she has seen many children come and go. She said:

“The first time, the children follow someone to Thailand, because they have seen others who earn a lot of money as beggars. They are brought to Khmer or Vietnamese bosses who have a house in Bangkok where the children stay. They give them food, but after breakfast and lunch they order the children to go out to beg. If the children are arrested and brought back to Cambodia, they know who is missing. They send someone to bring the child back.”

These children are not always deceived or abducted to go begging in Thailand. They are attracted by the amount of money they have heard one can earn as a beggar. In Klong Jai we met an elderly ethnic Vietnamese woman from Phnom Penh. She said she came by herself to Thailand, with money borrowed from her children. She planned to stay in Thailand for one month, hoping that by then she will have begged enough money to pay the trip home and support herself and her family for a while.

Working situation

Once the people are recruited, they are brought to Thailand and put in a house together with other beggars. Every morning and afternoon they are distributed over certain spots. They are not allowed to walk around by themselves, since they might lose their way. Therefore they are brought and picked up by car. In one day, they can beg and receive up to 500 baht, or sometimes more. One elderly woman said:

“In the house where I stayed there were 10 or 20 old women. But where we went begging there were a lot more. There was also one old woman who lost her foot. She is 80 years old and didn’t know about the money. She was very pitiable. I didn’t dare to say anything, because they might accuse me of causing trouble. She always received a lot of money. Every time she could earn 400 or 500 baht. She got a pot full of money every day. Sometimes when her pot was full, they took the money and put her back at that place to beg more.”

The agent takes all the money earned by the beggars. A *yeey* commented:

“The boss is very serious, he checked on us. I gave him all the notes, but I concealed the coins from him. But one night, when I slept close to him, he could hear the coins. I could not hide it anymore. He said ‘Don’t conceal money from me’. But for food, he gave me enough to eat.”

For most, being forced to beg is a humiliating experience. One old woman who was deceived to go to Thailand said that she was forced to wear Thai clothes in order not to get arrested while she was begging, but as soon as she came home, she would change to her own clothes. She commented about what she experienced being a beggar:

“For me, I only sat down at one place. If one wanted to give me money or not, I didn’t care. It’s up to them. I was shy. But fortunately no one knew me. I cried many days, before going to beg.”

Informants did not only complain about the humiliation of having to beg, but also about the fear of getting arrested and of repercussions from their managers. A *yeey* told us she got injured in a car accident two months after coming to Thailand. Her ‘boss’ gave her several kinds of medicine, but her leg did not heal:

“And then, at midnight he gave me a walking stick and brought me to another boss. He is also *youn*. My boss sold me to this new boss. I did not know whether he was good or bad, so I cried. I didn’t want to go, I begged him to give me 300 baht and to let me go. But he told me that if I went out, he would not allow me to come back again, because if the Thai police know who makes old or injured people work as beggars, they will arrest them.”

The old women who are brought to Thailand to beg, are completely dependent on their managers for their own survival. They don’t know the city, cannot speak Thai and are often too old and weak to try to escape from their situation. The place of their ‘boss’ is the only ‘safe’ place where they can sleep and get something to eat. Their bosses will prevent them from running away or purposely becoming sick by making them afraid of the consequences. One elderly woman said:

“I had to repay 5,000 baht, but when I only had repaid 700 baht I could already get out. I was arrested by the police, when they saw me on the bridge where I was begging. I thought that if I could not escape, I would die... I had heard that for old people when they get ill and cannot recover, they are made as food for the crocodiles. I was afraid of becoming crocodile-food, so I didn’t mind being arrested by the police. They asked me if I was Khmer and what I was doing in Thailand. I explained them that I followed other people. They brought me in the car to the police station and wrote a letter. They told me to keep this letter safe, because it would bring me back to Cambodia.”

Recruitment of children for criminal purposes

It is difficult to get valid information on the recruitment of children, mostly boys, for organised crime networks in Thailand. We found no cases of children who could tell us their story in person, but during the research we talked to several representatives of NGOs and the police who could provide us some information.

Representatives of different NGOs working with children on the street expressed their concern about the children whose parents left for Thailand to work. Sometimes they bring the children along and let them beg on the street to earn some money. If they get arrested and are brought back to Cambodia, there is no one to take care of them. Some can go to relatives or stay in the pagoda, but others live on the street. They stay with other friends and are easily persuaded by one leader to go to Thailand in order to get money. A street children's center in Battambang informs children living on the street about the problems related to trafficking. One representative remarked:

“We educate street children, but we don't dare to do anything. If we do an investigation about the traffickers, it will become dangerous. These children have their *baong thom* [big brother] who leads them. He has relations with the recruiter who can lead them through Poipet to Thailand. We know him, but we don't know what to do against him. The children under his control divide into two or three groups. During the day, they walk around to beg money; during the night, they steal objects from cars... Two or three children from our center were brought to Thailand by this *baong thom*. They were very bad, they stole things from us and they persuaded other children to leave our center.”

According to the representative of this street children's center, the people who try to persuade the children to go to Thailand give ‘bad medicine’, i.e. drugs, to the children. In Poipet the problem of sniffing ‘rubber cement’, a kind of glue that can be bought for 10 baht by street children, has increased dramatically. An official of the police in Banteay Meanchey remarked about the problem of glue-sniffing children:

“For children it is easy to cross the border. They cross through the small gates. At first they only bring some goods across the border from the Thai market to the Khmer market. Later, when they get to know the Thai police, they continue to Aran [Aranyaprathet] until Bangkok. In Thailand the children learn how to smell ‘rubber cement’. When they smell strongly, they forget everything and then they feel happy. When they are deeply intoxicated by the substance, they do everything they are ordered to do and they don't feel it when someone beats them.”

According to an informant in Poipet this glue makes children ‘strong in their head’, which makes them able to do everything without fear. Some Thai leaders make children addicted to this glue in order to use them for criminal purposes. However, little information is available about the specific purposes and operations of these criminal groups.

Women and girls recruited as domestic servants

Women and children are not only recruited and sold for prostitution or begging, but also for domestic work or other kinds of servitude inside the house. Those women and children are, however, not as visible as those working in brothels, on construction sites or on the street. It is, therefore, difficult to find information on the prevalence of this practice either inside Cambodia or across the border in Thailand.

Poverty, lack of means to support all the children, or just pure adventure are reasons for young women becoming involved in work as domestic servants, either on their own accord, forced by their parents, or deceived by a third person. Research so far, has not found widespread kidnapping for the purpose of domestic work or other kinds of servitude. There are, however, some individual cases of children or girls being kidnapped as domestic servants or playmates.

In Koh Kong we talked to a woman who was in prison for trafficking a child to Thailand. She came to Koh Kong to sell bread with meat in a small shop. Her employer had two daughters, eight and five years old. He was drunk very often. One night, he came home drunk again. She was sleeping in her hammock, but he woke her up and raped her. She could do nothing to stop him. The next day, he left for his shop at the market as if nothing had happened. She was, however, very angry and wanted to take revenge. Her employer had done something bad to her, and now she wanted something bad to happen to him, or his child.

She took the 5 year-old child and brought it to the harbour where boats cross to Thailand. She told the girl that they would go for *dai leeng* and gave her some sweets to keep her quiet. At the harbour, she talked with some boatmen and one of them told her that he had family in Halek to whom he could bring her and the child. This family in Halek was interested in having a playmate for their daughter, who was about the same age. They were willing to give the woman 5,000 baht for the child. She would have gone back to Phnom Penh with the money to sell vegetables, but the police arrested her before she could even arrive in Koh Kong.

This is an extreme case of trafficking for the purpose of being a playmate or servant to others, caused by feelings of revenge. Most of the cases we encountered were not caused by an emotional reaction. Delia Paul^[41] writes about the practice of buying and selling children as servants in Cambodia:

“It is an accepted traditional practice to adopt or informally foster orphan children to serve as domestic helps. At best, this system offers protection and some degree of care to children who might be otherwise destitute. At worst, it deprives children of their liberty and any opportunity of education.”

In some cases, poverty forces a family to agree to send one of their children to another, richer family to help with the housework in exchange for nourishment and shelter. In other cases the challenge of working in another country combined with a promise of earning good money makes women decide for themselves to go to Thailand.

One young woman told us her cousin brought her to Thailand. He had worked in Thailand before and had many contacts through which he arranged a job for her as a housemaid in a Thai family with three children. She said:

"In the province where I live, Pursat, I was not happy. I was bored in my heart, so I decided to go to Thailand...In Thailand, I did the same work as at home: washing, cooking, going to the market.. I didn't miss my parents there. At night I could go to the movie, or go out for a walk with my boyfriend."

She was arrested by the Thai police when she decided to go back to Cambodia for two weeks. Now her wish is to go back to Thailand as soon as possible.

The story of this woman indicates that one has to be careful to judge all domestic workers as being trafficked or living under slavery-like circumstances. Some go by their own choice and find a good place to work. An NGO-worker for street children in Battambang knew, however, of a young girl who did not have the choice:

“I know of one 12 year-old girl who was sold by her mother. She did not sell her daughter to a brothel, but changed her for 2 *bave* [200 kilo] of rice to serve the owner of the rice. When I asked the owner of the rice, he said he gave the mother 4 *bave* of rice. He said the mother was poor and needed rice to eat. At first he gave her 2 *bave*, but later the mother came back to take more. Her daughter had to serve and do everything she was told to do. The girl stayed with this family for four years. Then she ran away, because they treated her badly. But she didn't want to go back to her mother, because she was afraid her mother would sell her again.”

One informant told us that she stayed with another family for over four years. Her parents were too old to support all their eight children. When a rich family in the village offered to let their daughter stay at their house, they agreed. She said: “I was ten when I went to live with them. At first I didn’t want to go, but when they offered to send me to school to learn, I agreed.” She had to help with the household chores and take care of the three little children. After she failed her exams for the second time and she got into an argument with her ‘aunt’ who accused her of stealing some money, she decided to leave the family. She commented:

“I was very angry with her, especially because she looks down on my family. In my family it is very difficult, because I have many brothers and sisters and there is not enough to eat. I missed them when I stayed with the other family. Now my aunt said she wants me back, because she cannot find a servant like me.”

Girls who are placed in another family close to their own and in agreement with both the parents and the receiving family, often have no choice but to agree. Some will be treated as a member of the receiving family, others become mere domestic slaves. The specific agreement through which these domestic servants become assigned to their receiving family differs from the recruitment procedures through which girls and women are attracted to work as domestic servants in Thailand. Often, recruitment for domestic work in Thailand takes place through those who recruit people for any kind of work there. These women voluntarily follow the recruiter, with payment of a recruitment fee, or go by themselves to find work as servants. This kind of organised recruitment is like the (illegal) labour migration for other kinds of work in Thailand, which will be described in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

Trafficking versus Illegal Migration

Migrant workers have become an important labour-pool throughout Asia. The economic growth in some Asian countries has created a demand for labour that can not always be met from within. This demand includes especially jobs that require manual and/or unskilled labour -on construction sites and plantations for instance, or in homes, restaurants and brothels. Widening disparities between regions in Asia guarantee that these jobs will be done for less and less money through a steady supply of migrants.^[42]

Thailand has become a sending as well as receiving country of migrant workers. While Thai workers are spreading out to the richer countries in the region, workers are imported from the poorer neighbouring countries like Burma, Laos and Cambodia. Fairclough^[43] mentions that many of Thailand's labour-intensive industries have become dependent on low-wage, illegal immigrants.^[44]

In order to solve the labour shortage problems, the Royal Thai Government decided to allow registered workers from Laos, Cambodia and Burma to work for two years in Thailand. This decision was made June 1996, to regularise the over 700,000 alien workers expected to be needed.^[45] However, opening the doors for cheap labourers from neighbouring countries did not just result in a well regulated migrant workforce, but contributed as well to the rise in illegal migrant workers. According to government figures of 1996 more than 500,000 illegal immigrants are working in Thailand; unofficial estimates put the number at more than 1 million.^[46] Although most of these illegal migrants are Burmese, a large flow of Cambodians, men and women, work or go to work in Thailand, attracted by the wealth and higher salaries in this neighbouring country.

As a result of this high demand for cheap labourers, a whole network of employers, facilitators and recruiters has developed. The whole recruitment and transportation process from the remotest villages in Cambodia to the workplaces in Thailand is organised. The majority of the workers recruited are male and therefore this section on trafficking and illegal migration for labour, will not exclusively focus on women.

Recruitment process

The recruiter, man or woman, is referred to as the *neak noam*, the person who brings, or the *meekcol*.^[47] Literally *meekcol* means 'leader of the wind'. An informant explained that a *meekcol* is like a "researcher who follows the line":

"A *meekcol* is someone who recruits people through people he already knows, who include in turn people they already know, gradually extending the network of people. Like the wind, the information about the need for labourers in Thailand spreads.

Another informant defined the *meekcol* as the bringer:

"He can earn money from the people who he brings to Thailand. If the people go with the *meekcol*, they will have good security on the way and they will not be maltreated or be put in prison. If they go with the *meekcol*, there will be no problem and if there is a problem, the *meekcol* can solve it."

The people whom the *meekcol* recruits are referred to as *kamiko* [worker], *koun kcol* [child of the wind/child or *meekcol*], or *koun cruuk* [child of pig], referring to the way the workers are transported packed in big trucks.

The *meekcol* who recruits labourers for Thailand, are usually men (sometimes women) who have worked themselves in Thailand before or have established relationships in Thailand through other means. *Ameekhum* leader in Battambang distinguished three types of *meekcol*:

"There are three types of *meekcol*. The first *meekcol* is in Thailand. He has a good relation with Thai employers and earns a high salary. This is the big *meekcol*. The second *meekcol* is the person who brings the people from Cambodia to Thailand. This *meekcol* takes 3,000 or 3,500 baht from each person he brings to Thailand. The third *meekcol* is responsible for recruiting people from the *phum* and *khum*. They receive 100 baht per recruited worker."

The same *meekhum* explained how the recruitment process works:

"For example, a Thai company needs 50 labourers. The employer will contact the *meekcol* in Thailand whom he knows and trusts to arrange the recruitment. This *meekcol* will contact his Khmer counterpart, who then will contact the (smaller) *meekcol* who live in the *phum* and *khum* where they will gather the labourers. They will persuade workers to come to Thailand by telling them that if they pay 3,500 baht, they are brought to Thailand where they can earn a lot of money. For example, they tell the villagers "I need twenty labourers. I will take 3,500 baht from each person and I assure you that if you can't find the job in Thailand, I will pay the money back." This *meekcol* is usually someone who lives in the same *khum*, so people trust him. When these *meekcol* have recruited the workers, they will bring them together to the big *meekcol*. This big Khmer *meekcol* will bring the people to the Thai border. There they are handed over to the Thai *meekcol*, who will bring them to the Thai employer who needs the workers."

It seems that several networks of *meekcol* operate throughout the country. The relations between the different *meekcol* and their Thai counterparts are, however, not necessarily controlled through an all-encompassing (criminal) network. Most of them seem to be based more on personal relations and different smaller networks of *meekcol* operate alongside each other. Some *meekcol* have connections with the same counterparts in Thailand. These *meekcol* each bring their recruits to the border where they group together to cross the border. The *meekcol* do not only recruit labourers on request of Thai employers who need workers on their construction sites, farms, fishing boats or in their factories. Some *meekcol* recruit people and ask potential interested Thai employers whether they need workers. If they need some, the *meekcol* will bring his recruits to this workplace. An IDP-man in Battambang told about how he was recruited for work in Thailand:

"I was asked by a *meekcol* who came to my village whether I was interested in going to Thailand. His son had worked in Thailand before and came back with 7,000 or 8,000 baht. He told me that it is easy to earn money in construction. I could earn 4,000 baht a month. So I thought this was enough to nourish my family. I sold my motorbike to pay the *meekcol* 3,000 baht. I went with the *meekcol* to the border at Boung Trakuon. There were other *meekcol* who each brought five to ten people. Together in a group of about 40 people we walked through the forest on Dut An Deak mountain. There were Thai *meekcol* who could guide us into Thailand through the forest. When we reached a village in Thailand, the Thai brought us to a car and then we were distributed to different working areas. They just asked Thai employers if they need workers and if they need them, they led us to his working place."

Meekcol can be found throughout the country and those who are interested in going to Thailand will, after inquiring around, have no difficulty finding the right person who can help him or her to be brought to Thailand. In a *wat* we visited in Koh Kong several men were waiting for their family members to send money to go home. They were brought back from a Thai detention-center, after being arrested while crossing the border. One informant from Battambang explained that he decided to go to Thailand to find a job, because he has no land

and no work back home. He went to Sisophon, where he came in contact with a *meekcol* who could bring him to Thailand for 3,000 baht. The *meekcol* brought him and several others to Poipet, where he met with several other *meekcol*. Each *meekcol* brought five to ten people, and totally about one hundred people set off to cross the border. Some *meekcol* stayed behind, while other led the group through the forest. They crossed the border at 'Noung Chan', a small border crossing point, where they had to walk through the forest for one night. Then there was a Thai *meekcol* waiting with a big truck to bring them all to Bangkok. However, on the way they were arrested. Although all *meekcol* managed to escape, all the recruited workers were arrested and brought to detention-centers.

Sometimes workers who return to Cambodia are asked by their Thai employers to recruit new workers. One informant in Prey Veng said that when he went back to Cambodia after working in Thailand for one year, his employer told him to find workers back home. He recruited around ten persons in his village and brought them to another guide, who would bring them to Koh Kong. There they take the boat to Thailand. In order to make sure the Thai police will not check on them, they go at night and change to another boat in the middle of the sea. Then they come ashore at Khlong Sun, in Thailand.

Recruitment takes place especially in the border-provinces, like Battambang, Banteay Meanchey and Siem Reap where a lot of temporary migration takes place. A *meekhum* in Battambang estimated that up to forty percent of the population in his *khum* is or has been working in Thailand, although the number decreases during the farming season. Another informant in Battambang declared that from his village almost all men had been, or are still working in Thailand. However, recruitment of labourers is not limited to the border-provinces alone, but takes place throughout the country. In our research, we came across a widespread practice of people being recruited for work in Thailand.

A 38 year-old woman in a village in Prey Veng told us about how in her village people are recruited. In her village a lot of people went to Thailand for work. In some cases the husbands went first and the wives followed later. In her village two women who followed their husbands recently came back from Thailand. She relates:

"They asked me whether I would want to go to Thailand, because it is easy to work there and one can earn a lot of money, especially for women who know how to sew. They also asked me if I know people who want to go to Thailand. They will pay 5,000 riel for every person I can find. They said that Thai employers accept all, 30 or 40 persons and that the *meekcol* would come to pick all up by car."

These women were recruiting people for their *meekcol*. Three days before we arrived in the village, this *meekcol* had collected the people who the women managed to recruit in this and neighbouring villages, nearly twenty men and women. However, our informant decided not to go:

"One has to pay 300,000 riel to go there. That is a lot of money. Poor people don't have that amount of money, so they cannot go. Some borrow money from other people, like the *meekcol*, but they take high interest...But I told them I am not sure. I heard that there people are being sold, so I am afraid. They told me that they will be responsible for all, even all the expenses on the way. They told me that I can earn much money there, which made me want to go, but I also want to farm."

It is questionable whether this process of recruiting people for work in Thailand should be defined as trafficking, since it includes people who go voluntarily, and are even prepared to pay, for work in Thailand that will give them a high salary, sometimes three times as much as in Cambodia. Therefore, this movement of people to Thailand is mostly defined as illegal labour migration. However defined, practices of deception and exploitation by the recruiter as well as the Thai employers are not uncommon. Therefore, it is useful to pay attention to this form of labour recruitment for Thailand.

Trafficking and slavery-like practices among migrant workers

In their book on trafficking in women and forced labour and slavery-like practices, Wijers and Lap-Chew^[48] mention several characteristics of modern forms of forced labour or slavery-like practices. Among the characteristics^[49] mentioned are: confinement; no pay or not enough pay; debt bondage; nice promises about salary and working conditions do not comply with reality after arrival; physical punishment and sexual abuse; due wages are withheld for all kinds of reasons; no control over daily life.

During our survey, we encountered several cases of these kinds of abuses, deception or exploitation. Going and working in Thailand is not always as easy and favourable as many *meekcol* want their *koun* to believe. We were told several stories about fear of or actual deception and exploitation by the *meekcol* and/or the Thai employer, that is during recruitment as well as in the work situation. Although the recruiter is the one who gives people a rosy picture, complaints about situations that turn out not to comply at all with this picture are not so much directed towards the recruiter, but more often towards the Thai employer or Thai police. The *meekcol* is seen as simply the person who facilitates the transportation to Thailand. He is usually not held responsible for what happens after arriving at the workplace.

Abusive recruitment and brokerage practices

The recruiter, or *meekcol*, is, however, in an easy position to deceive their *koun*, while his *koun* are completely dependent on him and huge amounts of money have to be paid for his services. In some cases, people are persuaded by the *meekcol* because of the promising prospects he pictures. They do not have the money to pay the recruitment fee, but arrange with the *meekcol* that they will pay the money once they have earned enough in Thailand. This causes a huge debt burden on the workers, who have to work the first months to pay off their debt.

After paying the recruitment fee, the *meekcol* is responsible for all the expenses during the journey. He will provide food, shelter and pay for transportation and the bribes on the way. Some *meekcol* guarantee their recruits to bring them to Thailand and promise to pay the recruitment fee back if they cannot reach their destination. Other *meekcol* first take 1,000 baht and if the people can enter in Thailand, he takes another 2,000 baht from the family. However, not all *meekcol* fulfil their promises. A *meephum* in Prey Veng complained about a *meekcol* who came to recruit people from his village:

"The *meekcol* doesn't meet me, he just talks to the people. He persuades them to go with him. They have to pay 120,000 or 130,000 riel, plus pay all the costs for transportation. My son was also led by a *meekcol*. He came several times to persuade people from my *phum*. Each time he brought five to ten people by car. My son gave him 120,000 riel and more for the travel. In total he paid 280,000 riel. But when he arrived at the Thai border, he could not enter. My son told me that he was kept like a prisoner. He can't go anywhere and they gave him food as in prison. When he asked the *meekcol* when they could enter Thailand, the *meekcol* always replied 'tomorrow, tomorrow'. And the day after he asked again, and the *meekcol* told him 'after tomorrow'. After ten days, my son did not want to stay anymore and he came back. Now he lost 280,000 riel."

A *meekhum* in Battambang related that a few weeks before we talked to him, about twenty people came to complain about a *meekcol* who was living in his *khum*. The people came from another district in Banteay Meanchey. The *meekcol* in his *khum* had persuaded the people to come with him to Thailand for work. He had assured them that he would bring them to the working area. However, when they arrived in Thailand, the police came to arrest them. They had to stay in prison for one month. After they came back, they came to complain to the *meekhum*, since the *meekcol* refused to pay the money back. Although the risk of arrest is

always there, people feel deceived if the *meekcol* promises he can bring them to a workplace in Thailand, because he has the right connections with Thai employers and Thai authorities. However, as one informant formulated:

"The *meekcol* has connections with the Thai police, but not all Thai police are the same. Some are corrupt and others are not. When we give money to corrupt police to lead us through, we still can get arrested by non-corrupt police."

An informant in Koh Kong told us how he was deceived by a *meekcol*. The *meekcol* persuaded him and 17 other people to go to Kho Sdech, where they could earn a lot of money by working as agricultural labourers. Because he was in financial problems at the time, he agreed to come. However, when he got on the boat they were all brought far out in the sea, near the Malaysian border:

"We could not go anywhere. Then the *meekcol* told us we had to work as fishers, because he had sold us for 500 baht per person. They gave us a kind of drug to swallow, *yama*. This drug made us feel strong. We could work longer and did not miss our families. Fishing is not like any other job. We had to work continuously, day and night...I stayed there for seven months. I escaped after I got my salary. The Thai maltreated us. They overruled us morally, physically and economically."

Since the people who are led by a *meekcol* run a high risk while paying a lot of money as a recruitment fee, trust is an important factor in deciding whether to go with this *meekcol* or not. Therefore, the 'big'*meekcol* uses people who return to their villages after working in Thailand to recruit others. For the recruitment of especially young women, this trust is even more important. As one female informant explained: "I do not worry so much about the danger of going there, but I worry about being deceived and sold by the *meekcol*."

Abusive working and living conditions

Deception and exploitation by the Thai employer are often-heard complaints. Complaints vary from working conditions and the abusive exploitation of labour, sometimes by forcing the labourers to take certain drugs to make them work harder and longer hours, to the (intentional) failure of paying the money earned. Sometimes the employer does not pay all the money to the workers, but since they are illegally in Thailand, without speaking the language, they do not dare to complain. As everywhere, there are good and bad employers. As one informant formulated: "Bad Thai employers treat Khmer workers as slaves." Another informant said:

"Thai employers have tricks to cheat Cambodian workers... They usually work for nothing. For example, they want to take their salary on Saturday, but the employer tells them he will give it on Monday. But on Sunday, the police comes to arrest them."

The view that working in Thailand can bring people in slavery-like circumstances has become more widespread among those who work in the border area and have some experience with returned workers. An NGO-worker in Poipet commented:

"Generally these people [who are recruited for work in Thailand] are deceived. In fact, they go to work for nothing and they are sold to be slaves till the end of their life."

Although we did not get the impression that there exists such trade in slaves across the border, we did meet a lot of people who had to work under extreme harsh circumstances. One woman construction worker told about her experiences with a former Thai employer:

"Four days after we arrived in Thailand, we found an employer who needed *koun day* [workers]. First, he only wanted men. After one week women could come to work as well. My work was carrying bags of cement, maybe fifty kilo each. I had to work from ten in the morning till ten at night. It was very hard work, but the employer cheated on me. I didn't receive one baht."

Since the woman is illegally in Thailand and she did not speak the Thai language, it is impossible for her to go to her employer and demand the money. Even if they know people who could help translate, they are unwilling to interfere:

"If you want other Khmer people who work in construction and know the Thai language to come with you to ask for the money, they will not do it. They are afraid that the employer will stop them from working or call the police to arrest them."

Stories about Thai employers making their workers take drugs are widespread. Although we did not encounter any case ourselves, we were told by several informants that the Thai put *nam* [drugs] in the drinks of the workers in order to make them feel stronger. After taking the drugs, often mentioned are *yama* or *kochul*, the workers will be able to work hard. They can carry 50 kilo of cement without a problem and endure this for a long time. But after the effect of the drug has ceased, the workers become very exhausted. They want to take more and more. They get skinny, pale as if they were very sick. But the employer makes them keep on working hard for only a little salary.

As such, illegal migrants are in constant fear of losing their job, being arrested by the police or not receiving the money they have worked for. These are also the threats Thai employers can use to make the workers accept the exploitative working and living conditions. In Khlong Jai, 20 kilometres across the border from Koh Kong, we talked to some women who were staying at a construction site. They came with their husbands and one woman brought her 10 and 12 year-old sons. They were staying in a small wooden hut, which they had to share with eight people. Since the Thai employer only wanted to employ their husbands, these women had no work to do and nowhere to go. One woman commented:

"The employer only takes *koun day chah chah* [experienced workers]. The employer can do as he pleases; if you don't have a good relation with the employer, he will not give you a job. I cannot go to another place to find work, because I'm afraid of the Thai police. They will arrest me, because I have no *ban* [identity card]. So, we have to stay at home all day...Only before the sun rises or at night-time, when it is a bit dark, we can go out to buy some food. During the day we cannot go out, because then the Thai police are working. Sometimes they arrest Cambodian people and put them in a car to bring them to prison. Therefore, we only stay in our room...It is very difficult for us to stay here."

One informant living as an IDP along the road to Pailin went to Thailand last year. He remarked:

"I only went there because I was cheated. I heard it was easy to work and earn money there... But I got only a little money. I worked very hard, I worked without stopping every day. We didn't even have time to smoke a cigarette, because the employer didn't allow us to stop. The employer watched us all the time. It was harder work than under Pol Pot time. If someone didn't nail correctly, he was sent to do some other hard work, like carrying wood... I paid 3,000 baht to the *meekcol* to bring me. Then, in the first two months, I didn't receive money for my work, because the employer cut off 4,200 baht to make me an identity card...I thought I could earn a lot of money, but I didn't think of all the costs and everything is more expensive there. I sold my motorbike to go to Thailand and I came back with only some money to buy some rice and repair the roof."

Whether the workers can really earn a lot of money in Thailand depends very much on the employer, or *huna*, they have. As a *meekhum* in Battambang formulated:

"Some people can find a good place to work. Their employer makes them an identity card, to assure them that they can work in Thailand. In two years, they can get 20,000 or 30,000 baht for their families. They earn more than 100 baht a day, sometimes three times more than labourers in Cambodia. However, others don't find a good place to work. They get arrested by the police within a two or three months, because their employer doesn't protect them by paying off the police or by making an identity card. Some of them borrowed money to get to Thailand and after they were arrested

and brought back to Cambodia, they had to sell their land to repay their borrowings... So, some people get rich from their work in Thailand, whereas others become only poorer.”

Many people who were working, had been working or had heard about working in Thailand, mentioned how Thai employers cheat their workers when it comes to paying their salaries. There are many stories about employers who do not pay the salary promised at the beginning of the assignment; employers who do not pay the first installment out of fear the worker will leave; employers who only pay the total salary at the end of the assignment and then inform the Thai police to arrest the worker and take the money. This latter case was an often heard complaint and fear. According to these stories relations between the Thai employer and the Thai police leads them to cooperate in cheating the worker.

In order to prevent the Thai police or military at the border from taking away all the money the workers earned during their stay in Thailand, a system of sending money by telephone has developed. This means that the employer in Thailand has, through the *meekcol*, certain contacts in Cambodia through which the labourer can send his or salary to his or her family. Someone of this local contact point will gather the money in Thailand and bring it, through an intermediary who can legally cross the border or through a bank account, safely in Cambodia. The labourer can make a phone call to the contact point in his area, through which he can contact his or her family. The labourer will tell the receiver in Cambodia to get his wife or another family member to receive the call. The people from the contact point then collect this family member by motorbike and the labourer can talk to his or her family member about how much salary they should receive from the contact point. The contact point will take a commission for these services, about ten percent, but at least there is no risk that the employer in league with the police or the border officials will take away all the money.

Those workers who have an identity card, or *ban*, have more security with regards to their stay in Thailand. A *ban* allows a worker to work in Thailand for a certain amount of time. Prices for these cards vary from 2,000 to 4,500 baht, depending on how much the police charges and how good the employer or *meekcol* is connected with them. However, an identity card is not a guarantee that workers do not get arrested or that their money will be safe from employers or police. Some workers get arrested because of disputes among each other caused by alcohol or gambling. But also disputes between Thai employers can cause the police to interfere, as one informant explained:

“The police come into those working areas to disturb the work and arrest the workers without *ban*, where the employer didn’t pay the police. Also some Thai employers quarrel among each other because their workers run to the place where the employer pays better. Then they accuse each other of taking away their workers and some will inform the police to arrest the workers. Usually, they arrest the workers when they get their salary. Then the workers get drunk and cause disorder about which other Thai people complain with the police.”

The recruitment of Cambodian labourers for work in construction, factories, farms, or fisheries has become a lucrative business for the different levels of recruiters, border officials, as well as the Thai employers who can employ the workers for far less money than Thai workers. Also the Cambodian workers can benefit from the higher salaries paid to unskilled labourers in Thailand as compared to Cambodia. However, the unlucky ones meet *meekcol* who ask high recruitment fees for the nice promises of easy work and high pay in Thailand, without ever reaching a working area in Thailand. Or, if they do arrive at a working area, they end up working under slavery-like conditions, with long working hours, not receiving their whole salary, and under the threat of being arrested at all times. The vulnerable position of the illegal workers makes them an easy target for exploitation by Thai employers as well as some Thai authorities who liaise with the Thai employers. Still, the stories of the lucky returnees, the temptation of the easy money in Thailand and the hope that no deception, exploitation or abuse will fall their way, drives men as well as women to follow their *meekcol* to Thailand.

Cambodian women working in Thailand

Although, according to most of our informants, the demand for male labourers is higher, women as well as men are recruited for work in Thailand. Many Cambodian women can be found working in Thailand in construction, garment factories, the fish-processing industry, domestic and other kinds of work. Women of all ages are recruited. Some women come along with or follow their husbands who work in Thailand. Others are widows who hope that the money earned in Thailand will be enough to support themselves and their families. Young women are recruited for heavy work in construction as well as for different service jobs. Old ladies are told they can earn a lot of money by cooking and taking care of the children of some rich Thai family.

There is a prejudice among those who are working in the field of women and child trafficking, to consider all Cambodian women found working, or arrested because of illegal stay in Thailand, as victims of trafficking. However, they are recruited and transported voluntarily, just as men, and are not necessarily deceived or forced to follow their recruiters. Nor do they always end up working under slavery-like circumstances.

A 23 year-old woman from Battambang who was brought to a shelter in Phnom Penh after arrest in Thailand, did not consider herself to be a victim of trafficking. She comes from a family with eight children, of which she is the sixth. Most of her older brothers and sisters already left their parental home and are married. Two younger brothers still live with her parents. She used to help her father with farming their land. Her parents are poor though and that is why she decided to go to Thailand to work. She met the *meekcol* in her *khum*. He asked her whether she was interested in going to Thailand for work. She could carry cement and earn a lot of money to support her family. The *meekcol* asked 3,500 baht for bringing her. She borrowed 4,000 baht from a Chinese moneylender in her *khum*. First, the *meekcol* brought her, her brother and his wife, and some other people recruited in the *khum* to Poipet by car. Here they had to wait for darkness to come. Then two other men came to guide them across the border. They crossed the border by walking through the forest. When they arrived in Thailand, the Thai *meekcol* had not yet arrived, so they had to wait for a while. She remembers:

"It is very difficult to go to Thailand, to pass through the forest, the fear of the police who could arrest me...I saw they raped one girl after we crossed the border. If they like girls they see, they just force them to have sex, without shame and no one can help. After they rape the girl, sometimes they want to take them as their wife, but not often."

She ended up at a construction site, where she and her sister-in-law were put together in one room. She earned 3,000 baht per month for carrying cement. However, she never received any money. Ten days after they arrived she got arrested and was put in a detention-center. From the detention-center she was brought back to Poipet. Since she was afraid of being blamed for going to Thailand without success, she decided to go to Phnom Penh with some friends, where she was offered the option of learning sewing skills.

During a visit to her parents, she decided with one of her friends to go back to Thailand again. Her mother commented:

"She really wanted to go. I didn't know what to do. She said that she couldn't work in Phnom Penh and that learning to sew was very difficult. I wanted to test her and ordered her to sew me a *sampot*, but she couldn't. So when a *meekcol* and her friend came, they discussed together and decided to go back to Thailand."

For some jobs, women are especially recruited, like for domestic work and prostitution. Recruitment for domestic work goes often through the same persons as recruitment for

construction, fishery, or other work. Thai employers may demand different workers and since recruiters may have contacts with different Thai employers or different possible work sites. As with the other kinds of work, some women are lucky to be employed in a good family, whereas others were deceived into working as domestic workers and ended up as house-slaves. For all types of work, stories of women being abused by their employers are prevalent. A male informant remembered how he was witness to a woman being raped by his manager:

“I just arrived at this working place one week. There were ten Cambodian male workers and one 17 year-old woman working there. One day, the manager gave us all a drink before we entered the front door. He ordered the woman to come inside for some work in the kitchen. There he raped her.”

Although more and more women decide to go to work in Thailand, the reputation of women who decide to do so is not all positive. A *meekhum* in Battambang said:

"Sometimes a woman who goes to Thailand for work gets a new husband, while leaving her old husband and children here. When they go there, they have no right to do anything. Even though they are all Khmer, they put pressure on each other. For example, women who work in Thailand are put under pressure by men. Sometimes a man is already married, but if he likes a woman, he wants to take her as his temporary wife. The woman must agree, even if she doesn't like this... That is why for women who go to Thailand, when they come back, they cannot be loved one hundred percent. The men think that these women could not protect their bodies when they were in Thailand. A lot of men do not want to marry them."

We met an IDP whose wife went to Thailand one year ago to earn some money for the family. He expressed his worries about his wife's long absence from home:

“I wanted to go myself, but I was ill. I suffered from malaria when I came back from cutting bamboo near Pailin. So my wife went with a *meekcol* who told us we can earn a lot of money in Thailand. After the first month she sent me 1,000 baht and later she sent me 1,500 baht more through villagers. But during New Year, I heard through Thu, a woman in the village, that she was cheated and that she lost more than 1,000 baht. She has no money to bring, so she is shy to come back. She told Thu that she worked for nothing. I am very disappointed, because I think that she has a new husband.”

The view that a Cambodian woman who goes for work to Thailand cannot ‘protect her body’, means that there is a worry about the woman's sexual conduct. One man who had worked in Thailand several periods of time remarked:

“Some Cambodian women go to Thailand, but cannot find a job as a cleaner, cook or something else. They don't have the money to live, so they become prostitutes to cater the Cambodian men who work in Thailand.”

Women, especially young women, who leave their villages for work in Thailand, are basically out of view of those who should guard her integrity as a woman. A woman who is far away from this so-called protected environment might therefore be viewed as a *srey kouc*, a ‘broken woman’. One mother in Prey Veng noticed that she will never allow her daughter to go away from the village. In the neighbouring village is a woman who tells people she can help them get a nice, well-paid job in Thailand. She is especially interested in young, beautiful women, who can earn a lot of money selling cakes. The mother said that if she lets her daughter go away from the village, her daughter will be viewed by the villagers as a *srey kouc*.

However, circumstances force some women to take up work outside their village. Many of them follow their brothers, husbands or other family members. Others are just attracted by the promises of easy money in a new challenging country, just as the men are.

Incentives for going and restraints on returning

Although the attraction of earning 'easy' money in Thailand is high, there exists the risk of running into all kinds of problems or circumstances which are not so profitable. Several reasons underlie the decision to go and take the risk.

Abject financial need is a very important push factor. One family noted that their waterbuffalo had died. Their son went to Thailand to earn money to replace the waterbuffalo. A *meekhum* in Prey Veng explained that a lot of people went to Thailand, because their harvest was destroyed by the rats, which forced them to find other sources of income. Dire financial needs make the prospect of earning a lot of money in a short amount of time very attractive, even if it is far away from home and requires some investment with regard to paying the *meekcol*. Especially when there are examples within the village or neighbouring villages of people who came back with a lot of money, the decision is easily made.

One woman in Prey Veng said:

"I heard from other people [about work in Thailand]. We are very poor here. We have no work. We do not farm because it is not yet the rainy season and I have no grain for growing next season. We have nothing, because we spent all our money to treat the disease of our child. She suffers from polio and we brought her to a hospital. When I heard that people who work in Thailand can earn much money, I borrowed money from other people to keep some for my mother and the rest for going to Thailand. I don't want to leave my native land forever, but I just want to get some money to feed my family. I left my child with my mother, but she advised me to wait till my child is a bit older especially because my husband was already gone. But I heard that people who go to Thailand can work in construction, sewing or washing clothes and they earn 300,000 riel a month. I thought that this is enough, so I agreed that my mother look after my child and she let me go, because we are very poor."

A *meephum* in Prey Veng mentioned that he warns his villagers about the negative sides of going to Thailand:

"I remind them of the proverb 'It is better to work nearby than to work far.' I tell them that they have to spend first 300,000 or 400,000 riel to go there. When they come back, they have earned some money, but not enough to repay the loan. It is much better to work nearby. But they don't believe me, because they are trapped by the money."

Dire financial needs are not the only economic reasons for going to Thailand. The lure of a new motorbike, a television, a new house, etc. tempt the better-off as well as the poor in a village. In fact, the \$120 to \$140 prior investment, the price for the transportation and recruitment costs, require a certain capital, which the very poor do not possess.

Lack of any other means of income generation is another reason why people drift off to Thailand. An informant in Prey Veng remarked:

"Here, the students who finish secondary school, can't find a job. They can't continue studying at a university or institute, since there is none in Prey Veng. In our country, from 1979 until now, how many companies or enterprises were opened? How many schools? So, the young people have to look for a job. They go where they can find work. Although they do not intend to do so, they go illegally, because they can find a job in Thailand."

For some returnees from the border camps, farming is not a real option, since the land they were assigned to is mined and therefore too dangerous to use, or the investment in starting to farm is too cost- and time-consuming. Then the most easy alternative is go to work in Thailand. An NGO-worker commented:

"These people go to Thailand because they don't want to farm. They need to get money every day again. They are poor and unemployed. Some people from the camps sell the land that was given to them, because they need the money now."

Besides the lack of other means of income generation, dissatisfaction with the present situation can make people decide to try their luck somewhere else. One informant working at the food stall of her aunt on the market in Sisophon admitted that she would like to try her luck in Thailand. She often has arguments with her aunt, who wants her to work hard without giving her a salary. One day a customer overheard their argument and offered her the chance to go to Thailand. He told her that if she has difficulties living in Sisophon with her aunt, she should go to Thailand where she can earn 100 baht per day as a construction worker. He would take 3,000 baht to bring her. Although she has heard stories of women being deceived and sold in Thailand, she still wanted to go. She said:

“I am not afraid to go to Thailand, because I don’t know whether these stories [about trafficking of women] are true or not. I have never seen this happen in reality. But I do know a woman who went to Thailand to work in construction and she came back with a lot of money. She even met a Khmer man there whom she married.”

As long as the stories of the ones who come back from working in Thailand give a predominantly positive view of working in Thailand, the attraction of taking the risk for high gains will be kept alive. And for those who were in an unlucky situation, the shame of not having been successful in Thailand, is not something to be proud of and rave about after they have returned. Therefore the stories of failure are not as much spread as the success stories.

In fact, those who find themselves working in bonded labour or slavery-like circumstances, leaving is not just a simple decision to take. Although they are in theory free to leave, several constraints prevent them from actually doing this. Many came to Thailand with the idea of returning with a lot of money and the fear of leaving empty-handed makes them unwilling to go back to Cambodia. When asked why they do not return to Cambodia, the women at the construction site in Khlong Jai responded:

"When we came, we wanted to earn money. If we go back now, we don't have money in our hands to bring back. So we cannot return now."

Also those who had to go in debt in order to pay the recruitment fee feel unwilling to go back without even having the money to pay their loan off. This kind of debt bondage puts especially high pressure on those who go to Thailand on the agreement that the first money earned will go to the *meekcol*. One 17 year-old boy went to Thailand on this agreement with his *meekcol*. The only money he earned was used to pay the recruitment fee for the *meekcol*. For the rest of the months, his employer refused to give him his salary. When he complained about this, his employer answered: “Just go back home without money.” Not giving the salary or only part of it, is an well-known trick of the Thai employers to prevent their workers from running away. The only way for the workers to receive their money is to stay until the employer will let them go.

The threat of being arrested by authorities once out of the 'protected' area of the employer, is another bondage that keeps workers continuing to work in exploitative situations. This threat exists always for those without *ban*, but those who decide to leave their employer to look for a better working place, run the risk that their employer will inform the police to arrest them as a reprisal against their lack of loyalty. Moreover, lack of alternative employment possibilities coupled with a language barrier that will hinder them from easily finding another job, are other reasons that prevent workers from getting away from the slavery-like circumstances in their work situation.

Working in Thailand has for several Cambodian migrant workers not proven to be a successful solution to their financial needs and wants back home. This is true for both male and female migrant workers who feel deceived and exploited, physically or materially, during recruitment as well as at the workplace. Although not all migrant workers are victims of trafficking, since not all have been violated, deceived or otherwise forced by their recruiters,

many of those who (illegally) work in Thailand are victims of abusive labour practices. To limit attention to trafficking only, without including these other victims, male or female, of illegal labour migration would also limit a real understanding of these distinct, but inter-related problems. For many migrant workers, however, the problems with regard to illegal labour migration are considered to be related to the good or bad luck of the individual. All hope to be among those who do manage come back home with some money, and therefore view the decision to go to Thailand as a successful solution to their financial needs.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

The study of trafficking of women and children to Thailand touches a wide range of inter-related issues. Within the scope of this survey, it was not possible to address all these issues extensively. However, this study has tried to give some added background information to the practices related to trafficking of women and children to Thailand.

Many women view migration to Thailand as a valid choice to improve their situation back home. On the other hand, there are women who are deceived or abducted and forced to work in Thailand. Women are trafficked, or voluntarily choose to go, to Thailand for a variety of jobs or services. This study has shown that it is not always easy to draw a clear line between those who are trafficked -kidnapped, deceived, forced-, and those who voluntarily choose to follow a recruiter or to go on their own initiative. Either way, the working and living conditions in which they end up vary between, at best, good pay, freedom of movement and good treatment, to, at worst, slavery-like circumstances and bonded labour situations. Although one has to keep in mind this diversity in motivations to go, recruitment procedures and working environments, they are all inter-related and will need common strategies for prevention.

It is important to realise that this kind of migration cannot be stopped immediately, if at all. The poor living conditions in Cambodia and the urgent need for unskilled labourers in Thailand, combined with other political and social-cultural factors will push and pull Cambodian men, women and children to Thailand. Those recruitment processes and working conditions that are deceptive, exploitative or otherwise abusive, will need special attention from the involved governments, international and local organisations, and other related institutions working in the field of trafficking.

Trafficking for prostitution has so far received most attention. Trafficking for prostitution is not limited to Thailand, since Cambodian women and girls are deceived, abducted or used to pay off a loan for commercial sex work within the country as well as for a third country. The recruitment processes for prostitution vary from voluntary entry to bonded and involuntary entry. However, the means of first-time entry into prostitution does not guarantee that the women and girls are safe from being trafficked further along the line or from ending up in slavery-like or bonded labour situations.

Recruitment methods used for begging, criminal purposes or other conditions of servitude involve deception, abduction or bondage practices like the recruitment for commercial sex workers. Although the recruitment for these different purposes often involves several layers of people, the recruitment of migrant labourers seems most organised. A whole network has extended widely through Cambodia for the purpose of recruiting labourers for construction, fisheries factories, logging or other unskilled work in Thailand. Those interested in following their recruiters need to pay huge amounts of money for their services, that is, bringing them to a work place in Thailand where they can earn a lot of money.

Recruitment efforts for the different purposes have spread throughout the country, involving different recruiters targeting different groups of people. Young women and girls are targeted for prostitution; old women, handicapped and young children are targeted for begging; men and women from young to middle age are targeted for construction or other kinds of work.

These different purposes of trafficking were described separately in the different chapters, in order to stress that trafficking is not related to one purpose only -prostitution- nor to one group of people -women and girls. Furthermore, it showed that different groups of people were involved in the recruitment and employment of potential prostitutes, beggars, servants or workers. Therefore, it would not be right to generalise about trafficking for these different purposes.

However, some common underlying factors can be distinguished that make it difficult to tackle the problem of trafficking from one point of view only. Recruiters abuse the poor living conditions, the ignorance, the feelings of trust, or any weak point within the lives of women and children to persuade them to escape from their present piteous state to where the money can be earned easily. Those within disrupted familial circumstances or without family, those without any economic means and are desperate for earning a living, those ignorant of what to expect outside the village, and those deceived by people they trusted, are especially vulnerable to becoming victims of trafficking and/or victims in slavery-like or bonded labour situations.

Addressing the problem of trafficking and related issues requires a broad understanding of the different factors involved. The economic aspect is only one, although very important. Abject financial needs are often mentioned as the prime motivation to follow the recruiter who promises relief of their poverty through well-paid jobs in Thailand, or in the larger towns in Cambodia. From the point of view of those involved in trafficking -i.e. the recruiters at different levels, the officials involved, the employers, etc.- the economic gains to be earned through this practice make it a lucrative business for their own enrichment at the expense of others. This is further facilitated through the lack of political and legal means as well as the active involvement in trafficking by police, military or other government authorities.

The socio-cultural aspects involved are not so much a problem in themselves, since there are no traits or values that are directly responsible for the existence of women and child trafficking. Therefore, the problem lies not within the cultural traits itself, but in the abuse of these traits. The issue here is to approach those who abuse the cultural values that exist with regard to the role of women and daughters in the family and the social disruption within their families. As a consequence of the abuse of these traits and social factors, combined with the growing demand within the female labour market in Thailand as well as in Cambodia, problems related to trafficking as well as slavery-like practices and bonded labour have become more pressing and will need to be addressed adequately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prevention of trafficking of women and children to Thailand, as well as within Cambodia, will be most successful when the different factors involved are approached at the same time. For some, achievements will only be made in the long run, whereas other measures can have a short-term influence on the combat of trafficking.

Long-term measures for prevention

- Economic necessity is often mentioned as the prime motivation for the existence of trafficking as well as illegal labour migration to Thailand. Strategies for poverty alleviation and alternative economic opportunities will contribute to reducing needs for income generation outside the village or familial structure.
- Education is an important means through which children, parents as well as educators can be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their potential and meet life's responsibilities.^[50] Education can provide children, especially girls, the possibility of developing skills for jobs, the necessary knowledge about the rights of children and the circumstances of commercial sex and other exploitative practices. Access to education for all children can provide an important means to reduce the risk of children falling prey to trafficking. Vocational training and employment generation for girls and young women can be a useful means to reach girls and young women at risk. Besides children, whether out-of-school or in-school age, teachers, parents and specific groups of people and institutions whose role is the nurturing, protection and education of children, should be involved in the education efforts.
- Laws and their proper implementation concerning trafficking can have a protective and preventive effect. Law-enforcement institutions need to be strengthened in order to deal with the criminal groups that profit from trafficking practices. This involves proper dissemination of the law and instruction on its implementation through the training of police forces, the military, judges and others within the state structure involved in the maintaining order.^[51] It will take time, energy, means, a lot of good will as well as proper payment of the law enforcers, to make progress in this political and legal field.
- Trafficking of women and children is a regional problem and combating of this problem requires regional cooperation. Governments as well as international and local organisations and related institutions need to work together to develop strategies with regard to the prevention of cross-country trafficking and the existence of slavery-like practices and forced labour among migrant workers. Legal, transparent recruiting agencies, policies and procedures could be established through cooperation between countries in order to assure that the labour demand can be met while at the same time the labourers are provided identity cards, health care, assurance of pay, etc.

Short-term measures for prevention

However important the above mentioned measures for prevention of trafficking are, results will only be achieved in the long-term. In order to make efforts that have an immediate impact, the potential victims of trafficking as well as their social environment need to be targeted.

- Information is a strong determinant in the decision-making processes of people. Therefore, dissemination of proper information on the risks of trafficking, the practices of recruiters, the circumstances of labour in brothels, construction sites or other kinds of servitude, etc., will relieve the ignorance among people concerning the issue of trafficking and slavery-like practices. During the research it became clear that as long as information about the positive side of working in Thailand is stronger than information about the risks and dangers related to it, children, women, parents, leader figures and others tend to make decisions on the basis of a mix of wishful thinking, hope, belief in the promises of the recruiters and in the few success stories of returnees. Proper information will allow people to make decisions with a better background knowledge of the potential risks. Information should be directed at children, women, parents, village and commune leaders, religious leaders, teachers, as well as other villagers. This information can be disseminated to reach the different target groups as wide as possible, through school curricula, radio and television programmes, poster campaigns, travelling theatre groups, etc.
- Strategies for community awareness is an additional means through which information can be disseminated for prevention of trafficking, since not everybody can be reached through schools, radio and television, and posters. This involves the active participation of commune and village leaders, in cooperation with village development committees, monks and other important persons in the village. Meetings can be set-up by these groups to discuss the dangers of trafficking and how to prevent this in their own villages, with special attention to vulnerable families or individuals within the community. NGOs working on community development, human rights training, or other kinds of participatory development programmes can help with these community awareness efforts.
- A special policy for women, girls and families at risk should be developed through a focus group policy. Special attention in the sense of vocational training, credit, social support, counselling for families in extreme poverty, without or with little economic means (such as land in the case of many IDPs), disrupted families, orphans, abused girls and women, etc., can prevent these groups of becoming potential targets for trafficking.

GLOSSARY

<i>ban</i>	-identity card
<i>bave</i>	-100 kilo (rice)
<i>boang thom</i>	-big brother
<i>dai leeng</i>	-to go out for pleasure, a trip
<i>doun chii</i>	-nun
<i>kamiko</i>	-worker
<i>karma</i>	-the (Buddhist) law of cause and effect, action
<i>khum</i>	-commune
<i>kouc</i>	-broken, here used in the sense of lost virginity
<i>koun</i>	-child
<i>meebon</i>	-brothel-owner, sometimes also used for recruiter
<i>meekcol</i>	-recruiter
<i>meekhum</i>	-commune leader
<i>meephum</i>	-village leader
<i>motodup</i>	-motortaxi
<i>neak noam</i>	-recruiter
<i>phum</i>	-village
<i>srey kouc</i>	-woman who has lost her virginity, prostitute
<i>tnam</i>	-medicine, drugs
<i>yey</i>	-grandmother, elderly woman
<i>youn</i>	-derogatory term for Vietnamese

List of Acronyms

AIDS	-Acquired Immunodeficiency Disease
CWDA	-Cambodian Women's Development Association
HIV	-Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	-Internally Displaced People
NGO	-Non-governmental Organisation
UNTAC	-United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
Vigilance	-Human Rights Vigilance of Cambodia

The exchange rate at the time of the research:

US\$1 = 2,700 riel

US\$1 = 25 baht

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IOM

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was established on 5 December 1951 in Brussels to deal with the migration and resettlement of displaced person in Europe, and the orderly migration of nationals to overseas countries.

While the early activities of the Organization were limited to population movements from Europe to North America, Latin America and Oceania, international developments gradually led to an extension of the Organization's activities on a world-wide basis. Likewise, its global role and mandate were reinforced.

IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits migrants and society. IOM acts with its partners in the international community to:

- assist in meeting the operational challenges of migration:
- advance understanding of migration issues:
- encourage social and economic development through migration: and
- work towards effective respect of the human dignity and well-being of migrants.

IOM is an intergovernmental organization based in Geneva. At present, it is composed of more than 110 Member and Observer States. Since its creation in 1951, IOM has assisted more than 10 million migrants worldwide.

CAS

The Center for Advanced Study (CAS) was founded in March 1996 as an independent non-political Cambodian institution devoted to research, education, and public debate on issues affecting the development of Cambodian society. Using an integrative, problem-oriented approach, the CAS seeks to work with Cambodian and international scholars to conduct research programs which will help clarify and shape public policy, inform education and training activities, and lead to people-centred development projects. These activities will in turn provide a focus for Cambodian graduate students.

The CAS' current activities are divided into research programs, capacity building and training programs, and services and publication, in order to:

- Carry out research with an integrative, problem-oriented approach.
- Disseminate research reports with policy recommendations, periodicals and occasional papers to the general public.
- Conduct educational and training programs and seminars, and organize forums for Cambodian academics, policy makers, business leaders, and other interested parties.
- Conduct research programs in which Cambodian researchers work together with international scholars in order to develop their knowledge and skills.
- Develop relations with other academic institutions both at home and abroad.

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