

TRAFFICKING OF VIETNAMESE WOMEN AND CHILDREN TO CAMBODIA

March 1998

by
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IOM International Organization for Migration



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FOREWORD

Today the issue of trafficking of women and children receives increased attention in the public and the mass media. Confronted with the complexity of the problem and under the shock of sometimes cruel individual stories of victims, one is tempted to concentrate almost exclusively on the criminal aspects of the trade and on the issue of rescuing victims. While this approach is indeed important, it nevertheless falls short of understanding and considering the underlying social, cultural and economic causes. Only by exploring and addressing these root causes can sustainable and efficient activities be developed and implemented against the trafficking of women and children.

In this second report of a series of IOM/CAS publications, the researchers undertook again to thoroughly assess the issue of trafficking in women and children in Cambodia and neighbouring countries. This report concentrates on the trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to and within Cambodia. Like in the last report on trafficking of Cambodian women and children to Thailand, the researchers put emphasis on the recruitment process of victims of this trade and provide suggestions as to how to tackle the problem in a holistic and pro-active way. By publishing this new report, IOM and CAS try to contribute to a broader understanding and consequently more efficient actions against the phenomenon of trafficking in women and children.

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

It is hoped that this publication will prove to be a useful tool for policy makers, authorities, organizations and individuals who are interested in the problem, to come to a better understanding of the complex issues involved. The report will also be used as a basis for further IOM prevention activities against trafficking of women and children in the region.

Phnom Penh, March, 1998

Hans R. Beckers
Chief of Mission, IOM Phnom Penh

Dr. William Collins
Acting President CAS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This survey on the trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia is designed as a follow-up on the survey on the trafficking of Cambodian women and children to Thailand.^[1] Together, these surveys strive to gain more insight into the cross-border trafficking processes in Cambodia, being a sending as well as receiving country. At the same time, they will provide more insight in the sending and receiving processes in the neighbouring countries, Vietnam and Thailand. In both surveys the focus has been especially on the recruitment procedures related to trafficking. For both surveys the research was primarily conducted in Cambodia.

In this survey the focus is on the different ways, routes, reasons and perceptions of trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia. The fact that this research was conducted in the receiving country has led to a very different perspective on the topic of trafficking compared to the earlier survey on trafficking from Cambodia to Thailand. As the circumstances, actors and processes involved could not be approached within the 'recruitment environment', some issues could not be explored as intensively, whereas other topics became more salient. Accordingly there is a relatively modest discussion of the recruitment processes and related issues, while greater focus is placed on the situation of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia, as migrants as well as victims of trafficking. Also more attention is paid to the perspectives and wishes for the future for those Vietnamese women and girls who have become victims of trafficking.

Although many of the research findings might correspond with the research on trafficking to Thailand, we also found some significant differences. These differences are related to the different economic, political and historical realities of the countries involved. A broader understanding of these situations will help gain more insight into the push and pull factors, the rationale, the role of social and cultural factors and the selection processes related to the trafficking in general and the trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia in particular.

The survey was conducted by Mrs. Lim Sidedine and Ms. Annuska Derks, with additional help from Mrs. Rakline and Mrs. Tean Sophorn for the Vietnamese and Khmer translations. Some information was collected through organizations working on the topic in Ho Chi Minh City. The survey itself was conducted in Cambodia, in different shelters and areas in Phnom Penh and Kompong Som and in the border provinces Takeo, Svay Rieng and Ratanakiri in order to find out more about the movement of people from Vietnam to different places in Cambodia.

The experiences, knowledge, reasons and consequences of the trafficking of Vietnamese women and children were explored through interviews with Vietnamese women and children, especially girls, who had been victims of trafficking. Because the police had raided many brothels in different parts of Phnom Penh, many of these women and girls

could be contacted in the various shelters. Other women and girls were interviewed in brothels, dancing halls, massage places and karaoke bars. For more background information, family members of the girls and women, brothel owners, police and other authorities, representatives of Vietnamese and Vietnamese migrants in Cambodia, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations (IOs) working in this field and other resource persons were also interviewed. This survey could not have been conducted without the kind cooperation of these different organizations, authorities, related persons and, especially, the Vietnamese women and girls who shared their experiences with us. We would like to thank them all.

The following report describes the different issues related to trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia in specific geographic foci. Chapter two discusses the trafficking situation within Vietnam, with some background information on the economic and social changes that have taken place within Vietnamese society in the past years. Chapter three describes the patterns and background of the different forms of migration - i.e. legal, illegal, trafficking - of Vietnamese to Cambodia. Chapter four focusses on the situation of the Vietnamese in Cambodia and how they are related to the issue of trafficking of Vietnamese women and children. Since this trafficking is mostly for the purpose of commercial sex work, a major part of chapter four is dedicated to Vietnamese commercial sex workers. In chapter five attention is paid to issues related to returning to Vietnam and moving out of sex work. After the conclusion, recommendations are made based on the insights that came out of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

THE TRAFFICKING ISSUE IN VIETNAM

In the report on ‘Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand’^[2] a clear distinction was made between the different purposes for trafficking and between the ‘abusive recruitment and brokerage practices’ and the ‘abusive working and living conditions’. Using the definitions^[3] of Wijers and Lap-Chew^[4], trafficking was described as:

All acts involved in the recruitment and/or transportation of a person 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 and slavery-like practices were defined as:

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

A distinction between trafficking and slavery-like practices in relation to migration makes it possible to also pay attention to those victims of trafficking who did not end up in slavery-like circumstances, as well as to those in slavery-like circumstances who were not victims of trafficking. This distinction is of much value for understanding the different practices and processes related to trafficking in general, and especially for those found in the flow of Cambodians to Thailand. However, some of these processes and practices are specific to the historical, political and economic situation of the countries involved. Very distinct patterns can be observed in the flow of Vietnamese to Cambodia, although some patterns are similar to the Cambodian-Thai situation.

Trafficking and illegal migration from Cambodia to Thailand included a broad range of purposes. Women and children were trafficked for commercial sex work, as domestic servants, beggars, construction labourers, or as labourers in fisheries, on farms, or in factories. While some of these migrants volunteered to go, others were deceived or abducted and forced to work in Thailand. Here the flow of migrants was clearly from a poor, war-torn country to a more developed wealthier neighbour where there was a pull in the form of a great demand for cheap, unskilled labourers. However, with the present economic crisis in Thailand, this demand has decreased, which has resulted in Thailand taking measures “to force back foreign workers illegally entering Thailand in an attempt to secure work for Thais who have lost their jobs recently as many companies collapsed.”^[5]

The situation between Cambodia and Vietnam is quite distinct. The migration of Vietnamese to Cambodia is not a new phenomenon. But the trafficking of Vietnamese, especially women and girls, to Cambodia has only come to the attention of non-

governmental and international organizations, and the governments of Cambodia and Vietnam, in the past few years.

Recent changes in Vietnam

Vietnamese have migrated to Cambodia during different times in history and for different reasons, as will be described in chapter 3. Migration was at times facilitated by political ties between Cambodia and Vietnam but is nowadays especially facilitated through familial, geographic and cultural ties. Besides these ties, economic motivation is an important impetus for Vietnamese to migrate to Cambodia. Cambodia is perceived as a country where money can be easily earned, especially since the opening up of the country for the liberal market economy induced an economic boom which was stimulated through the large-scale UNTAC^[6]-operation in 1992-93.

Vietnam has undergone a similar, although not as far-reaching reform process from a socialist to a more market-oriented economy since the late eighties. As a result of this 'renovation' or *doi moi*, Vietnam has experienced enormous economic growth rates. Irvin^[7] states that this "breakout"^[8] to the market has benefited mainly the poor, i.e. the peasantry. Vietnam is still a predominantly agricultural country, with 80 percent of the population living in rural areas and 72 percent of the labour force being engaged in agricultural activities, while little more than one-tenth is involved in industry.^[9] The growing privatization of land use from 1988 onwards as well as the increasing role of the private sector has brought economic opportunities to many farming families. However, for those families who did not have the capability or the access to the capital or the technology to farm their plots successfully, the reforms created more economic difficulties. As a result, Vietnamese farmers who cannot earn enough to support their families in agriculture seek additional employment somewhere else, in urban areas or even abroad. This is, according to several authors, not necessarily a consequence of growing poverty, but also of growing expectations brought about by economic growth and a broader view on the outside world through more open (trade) relations with other countries. Rigg writes that:

[G]rowing expectations and an absence of sufficient opportunities within agriculture are creating the conditions in which rural households are looking further afield, both spatially - beyond the village - and in sectoral terms - beyond agriculture.^[10]

Although growth rates have been high in Vietnam during the past years, they have not been equally high in different regions among different sub-groups of the country, causing relative poverty to increase. Income disparities are rising, while at the same time the quality and quantity of some social services are declining.^[11] Therefore, the economic benefits are often set against the social costs of the adjustment policies. Truong^[12] writes regarding this:

Vietnam has always been proud of the fact that despite being [one] of the poorest countries in the world, it has an extensive social infrastructure and relatively high rates of access to education and health. But this position is being threatened by fiscal reforms introduced since the beginning of [*doi moi*].

These social costs are not only observed within the social service sector, which is still comparatively very strong, but also in social relations. Truong argues that the introduction of *doi moi* has accelerated the process of gender disparity in many ways. Whereas women made gains in rights and political space during the struggle for independence and revolution, the recent reforms have caused women's alternatives and options to narrow, which could erode further their socio-economic position. Truong argues that to some extent the gains in gender equality were sacrificed through a trade-off for economic sufficiency, which allowed what she called "patriarchal culture" to re-emerge.^[13]

This means that the shift in responsibility of reproduction as well as production from the cooperatives to the household has caused an increased workload for women on the farm and at home. Statistics show that women's visible employment in the agricultural sector is declining. Besides, women working in the industrial sector are moving towards positions that are more labour-intensive, are lower paid and have less security.^[14] These developments have created "a constant and rapid turn over of women workers."^[15] Truong argues that the lack of sustainable alternatives for these women has given rise to increased poverty and bonded labour, which leads again to other social costs, such as women being driven into prostitution, international trade of sexual slavery and the mail-order-brides market.^[16] In a Unicef report^[17] similar concerns are raised:

The introduction of an open door policy and a market economy has had both positive and negative results in society and economy. Traditional values may be deteriorating, as families are faced more and more with material desires, which they cannot meet. As a result, child employment and the sale of children for labour (and eventually other forms of exploitation) have been increasingly noticed in Vietnam.

The deterioration of so-called traditional values is often mentioned as an important determinant of an increase in trafficking and prostitution in Vietnam. The introduction of a nascent market economy and the broadening relations with other countries are said to stimulate consumerism and promotion of enjoyment, but also a loss of social control and family functioning. However, others reason that the re-emergence of so-called traditional traits -like growing disparities between rich and poor, men and women, but also between different groups in the society- are contributing to practices regarding trafficking and prostitution. In reality, neither the loss of certain values nor the re-emergence of other characteristics can explain completely the issues related to trafficking in Vietnam. Therefore, a careful look at all issues involved will be necessary for a real understanding of the problem.

Trafficking in and from Vietnam

Attention to the problem of trafficking in women and children has increased considerably over the past years. More and more attention has been given to the different routes, motivations and consequences of trafficking. In Vietnam, although the problem has been recognized, little information is available. It is therefore difficult to estimate the number of women and children trafficked every year. However, some clear patterns of movement have been identified.^[18]

In-country trafficking

In-country trafficking within Vietnam is taking place from rural and ethnic areas to urban areas for adoption, forced labour or prostitution.^[19] Most documents on the trafficking of women and children in Vietnam have focussed on trafficking for prostitution. Young girls from the poorer rural areas are kidnapped, deceived or brought by their parents to brothels in the big cities. Commercial sex work is practiced in different price-ranges in brothels, mini-hotels, cafe or beer *om* [cuddle] places or on the street. Some young girls are initiated into commercial sex through the sale of their virginity, which is believed to help the customer remain virile or succeed in business.^[20] Also boys have been reported to engage in commercial sex, but they are often working more individually on the street whereas girls are usually working in the more organized commercial sex business.^[21]

The growth of prostitution is often explained to be a result of the growing numbers of foreigners, and especially sex tourists, visiting Vietnam. However, as Anja Nitzsche^[22] notes, the overwhelming majority of customers of prostitutes are local. She asserts that commercial sex work in Vietnam is not only the result of poverty, i.e. women and girls pushed into prostitution because of poverty, but also the consequence of increased wealth. Greater purchasing power resulted in increased local demand for commercial sex work. The economic growth since 1986 has thus provided a large group of new customers for commercial sex workers.

Unicef reports that, in order to serve customer demand for women, several small private agencies have been set up to recruit women in the rural areas. The women are promised highly paid jobs in factories and restaurants, which sounds appealing to both the young women and their parents who can receive a high-interest loan for the arrangement of their daughter's trip.^[23] Once brought to some city, the women are forced to work as prostitutes. It is estimated^[24] that over half of the child sex workers started working as prostitutes by advice or persuasion of recruiters using deceiving methods to convince families in villages. These recruiters, in turn, work on behalf of brothel owners in order to be able to offer new 'fresh' girls for their brothel. Another non-negligible part of the supply were those women deliberately brought into prostitution by relatives of the girls.

Besides trafficking for prostitution within Vietnam, children have been reported to be trafficked for adoption purposes. Hopkins^[25] mentions kidnapping of babies from a hospital with the purpose of selling them to childless Vietnamese and Viet Kieu^[26] families as well as foreigners. In the same line, children are said to be sold for their organs. However, there is no evidence of the truth or prevalence of these practices.

Cross-border trafficking

Trafficking of women and children is not only an internal problem. Women and children have been trafficked abroad, especially to neighbouring countries China and Cambodia. The distinctive geographical, cultural and economic relations of northern and southern Vietnam are related to the routes of trafficking to these neighbouring countries. Trafficking to China takes place predominantly from the northern provinces of Vietnam, whereas the southern provinces are more linked to Cambodia.

Unicef^[27] reports that women and girls from the north are recruited as wives or domestic helpers in China. Unicef observed that a growing demand for wives and domestic workers within China has led to the recruitment of Vietnamese women, sometimes through special recruitment or mail-order-bride agencies. Entry into China is easy, since visa restrictions no longer apply, with the result that China, within a short period of time, has become a major receiving country.^[28] Also in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau professional bride-order agencies have arranged marriages between Chinese men and Vietnamese women. According to Lee Chuan-Hsien, Vietnamese women attract Taiwanese men because they are considered to be more submissive and willing to accept their traditional role as housewives than contemporary Taiwanese women.^[29] Estimates indicated that by the end of 1996 about 5,000 Vietnamese brides were living in Taiwan. Some of them ended up in fake marriages and were forced to work in the commercial sex business.^[30]

Women and children from Vietnam are also reported to be trafficked to Thailand.^[31] It is, however, not clear if these are also directly recruited in Vietnam and brought to Thailand or another third country. In some cases, Vietnamese women working in Cambodia are recruited for work or services in Thailand, as described in the report on Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Girls to Thailand.^[32]

The trafficking to Cambodia is, according to some resource persons working on the topic in Vietnam, most extensive. The existing documentation on trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls to Cambodia shows that the victims mainly end up in prostitution. This and related issues will be discussed more extensively in the next chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

TRAFFICKING FROM VIETNAM TO CAMBODIA

Trafficking versus migration

The problem of trafficking of women and children cannot be separated from the other forms of migration, whether legal or illegal, from Vietnam to Cambodia. Therefore, this chapter will describe the background and patterns related to migration from Vietnam to Cambodia. The topic of migration, in whichever form, of Vietnamese to Cambodia is a sensitive one. It touches a range of historical, cultural and political issues in addition to the economic motivations that induce Vietnamese to cross the border into Cambodia. Although this research focussed on the current situation in which Vietnamese, especially women and girls, are brought to Cambodia by force, deception or other exploitative recruitment practices, for a broader understanding of these phenomenon it is necessary to have a look at past experiences and migrations of Vietnamese to Cambodia.

Background on Vietnamese migration to Cambodia

As described by several authors^[33] Vietnamese have settled in Cambodia in several migration flows, starting from the 17th century. Most dominant were the Vietnamese who settled in the Mekong Delta, which has ever since become part of Vietnam. Over the centuries, more and more Vietnamese have migrated into this fertile area, causing the remaining Khmers to become “surrounded by more than ten times as many Vietnamese.”^[34] The earlier settlers in present day Cambodia were rice farmers and fishermen. They settled along the rivers and Tonle Sap and have lived now for generations in Cambodia. New flows of migrants from Vietnam started coming to Cambodia during the Vietnamese occupation between 1835 and 1840. In this period the Vietnamese tried to impose an intensive program of Vietnamization, which affected many aspects of Cambodian life.^[35] Later, under the French protectorate, new groups of Vietnamese settlers arrived. These settlers were recruited by the French as labourers on the plantations and for jobs in administration.^[36] The migration encouraged under the French continued until 1970. At that time, the Vietnamese were present in the urban centers where they earned their livelihood as skilled artisans, petty merchants, professionals, and in the countryside as farmers, plantation workers and fishermen.^[37]

However, after the coup of Lon Nol against Sihanouk, the Vietnamese, some of whom had been resident in Cambodia for generations, came under severe threat. Racist campaigns against the Vietnamese left tens of thousands of Vietnamese dead, and many more left the country. The anti-Vietnamese policy was even further exacerbated under the Khmer Rouge regime, when all Vietnamese were either returned to Vietnam or targeted for execution.^[38]

This changed again after the Vietnamese ousted the Khmer Rouge regime in 1979. During the eighties many of the Vietnamese who lived in Cambodia before 1970 gradually

returned. Along with these returnees came relatives, friends, Vietnamese soldiers and other professionals.^[39] Although officially the Vietnamese soldiers were repatriated after 1989, many of the other Vietnamese who came during the eighties decided to stay. Increasing violence against the Vietnamese before the elections in 1993 forced some of the Vietnamese living in Cambodia to flee again to Vietnam. Yet new Vietnamese migrants came to Cambodia and are still coming to Cambodia, attracted by the economic boom and greater economic freedom as a consequence of the opening up of the country in the early nineties.

Ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia are often divided into different categories that reflect their length of stay in Cambodia.^[40] The category of Vietnamese newcomers is the main focus of this study. However, these new migrants are often related to earlier groups of migrants, especially those who came during the eighties. Attracted by the stories of these earlier migrants, or by the promises of the recruiters, who have experience in Cambodia, new Vietnamese decide to come along and try their luck. These newcomers perceive migration to Cambodia as a chance for earning easy money, having some fun or getting away from certain problems, although in reality this often means fear of expulsion, language barriers and for some extreme difficult working and living conditions.

The history of Vietnamese migrating to Cambodia plays an important role in how the Vietnamese are perceived by the Cambodians, as, according to Goshal^[41] “it is this history that makes the Cambodians obsessed with the destiny of being destroyed by the Vietnamese.” The historic fear of the Vietnamese slowly taking over land and ‘Vietnamizing’ Cambodia has led to anti-Vietnamese feelings. The category of newcomers is especially perceived by Cambodians, as well as by some long-term Vietnamese residents in Cambodia, as mainly consisting of thieves, gamblers, traitors and prostitutes. Thus, for many reasons, migration and even trafficking of Vietnamese to Cambodia is a sensitive issue which is easily used in order to direct political or criminal accusations at ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia.

Myths about Vietnamese women migrating to Cambodia

Vietnamese women have always been regarded as an important tool to be used by the Vietnamese to enter Cambodia. According to the Cambodian chronicles, the first introduction of the Vietnamese to Cambodia took place in the beginning of the 17th century, with the marriage of King Chey Chesda II with a Vietnamese princess. The princess, daughter of King Sai Vuong of the Nguyễn court, brought 500 young court women and 500 young guardian or artisan men along, forming a small Vietnamese colony in Cambodia.^[42] In more popular versions of this story, the Vietnamese King used his daughter as a means to enter Cambodian territory, knowing the Cambodian King would immediately fall in love with his beautiful daughter. This created the opportunity to send Vietnamese settlers to Cambodia, with permission of King Chei Chesda, and therefore “enabled the Vietnamese King to lay the groundwork for overtaking the area.”^[43] The region in question is still known among Cambodians as Kampuchea Krom, or ‘lower Cambodia’. Thion^[44] refers to this particular story as a “mixture of historical facts and legends” that is used as “irrefutable proof of the ‘sordid use’ of young girls” by the Vietnamese.

The idea of the seductive powers of Vietnamese women forms a recurrent theme in explanations of how the Vietnamese will try to overtake Cambodian territory. Because of their seducing skills, Vietnamese women can easily convince border police to let them cross into Cambodia^[45], and their overwhelming presence (especially as prostitutes) could, according to some Cambodians, again lay the groundwork for a major Vietnamese takeover or at least could pose a threat to Cambodian culture and society.^[46] This conspiracy theory or fantasy regarding the influx of Vietnamese women and girls as spies of a greater power that will eventually take over, are a far cry from the stories the women and girls themselves recount about their reasons for and experiences in coming to Cambodia.

General patterns of migration to Cambodia

Migration is often related to many different economic, political and socio-cultural issues which play a role in the perceptions of the migrants as well as the inhabitants of the receiving country. Although the topic of migration cannot be studied in a vacuum, as if there were no such issues, there is no intention to discuss these extensively here. The attention here is focussed particularly on the Vietnamese who were forced or deceived into coming to Cambodia. Therefore a distinction is made between those who decided to come on their own initiative and those who were recruited for specific purposes.

Vietnamese who come on their own initiative

Many of the Vietnamese who decide to come to Cambodia do so because of economic reasons. Most of the Vietnamese who cross the border every day come temporarily to *rook sii* [literally ‘find food’] by selling some vegetables, tiles, house ware or other goods, or to visit their relatives in Cambodia. Some stay only during the day; others come for several weeks or months until they have sold all their wares. There are also those who come to work as day-labourers, often coming during certain parts of the year to supplement their poor income in Vietnam. They have heard from others that it is easy to earn money in Cambodia and want to come along with their relatives, neighbours or others who have experience in Cambodia.

In Takeo we encountered several Kampuchea Krom^[47] families who were working temporarily in Cambodia. Some of them had a piece of land back in Vietnam that could only be cultivated during the dry season because it was completely flooded during the wet season. Others did not have any land at all. They did not have money to start a business, nor could they earn enough to support their family by working for others. During the slack season they came to Cambodia to work as day-labourers, unloading the boats that come with goods from Vietnam. One informant said:

“I came to Cambodia in 1991. I had not enough land to support all my children. From people who had worked in Cambodia before I heard that it is easy to earn money here. At the beginning there were only few people of poor families who came to work here. But when they came back to Vietnam and told that one can earn easy money, other people followed them to go to work in Cambodia. I also came here that way with my children...Here the children also work to carry tiles. They don’t think about age. Those who want to work can work. If they earn 1,000 or 2,000

riel^[48] a day, they have enough to get rice for one day... But some families could not earn enough and only ate rice porridge from *Pchum Ben*^[49] until now [a period of one month].”

Among these families everyone, including children, was expected to work in order to contribute to the family income. Often, the children only later follow their parents to Cambodia. In many cases one family member goes first to Cambodia to follow a relative or neighbour who has been living in Cambodia for a while and who came back with appealing stories about how easy it is to earn money there. These relatives or neighbours know how to cross the border and they often can speak some Khmer and know where one can find places to work and stay. Some of them also provide some initial support, like allowing them to stay in their house and introducing them to a job. A Vietnamese young woman, who was working as prostitute in Kompong Som, explained why she followed a neighbour to Cambodia:

“My family was very poor. We only had five *cong*^[50] of farmland. My mother borrowed money from a moneylender to buy rice grain, fertilizers and to hire people to plough the field. After we harvested the rice, we nearly used all of it to repay the debts. We did not have enough left for food for all of us. My mother has three children and I am the eldest. I wanted to come to Cambodia to earn money for my mother and my brother and sister. So I followed a woman who lived in my village and who had been in Cambodia before... I must sacrifice my body for my family.”

Not only relatives and neighbours help new Vietnamese migrant families go to Cambodia. Specialized leaders also offer their services. These people are experienced in crossing the border. They are responsible for the whole trip and charge money according to the amount of people. A border official in Svay Rieng commented:

“There are Vietnamese from all provinces coming to Cambodia. They can come to work here. Most of these Vietnamese were led by *neak noam* [leaders]. They agreed to sell their rice fields to get some money to pay *theneak noam*. The *neak noam* gathers two or three families and brings them here... It is much easier to earn money here than in Vietnam. Even the vegetable sellers can earn more money here. Therefore the Vietnamese always want to come here... They don't only come to work as prostitutes, but also to sell cigarettes, second-hand clothes or as workers.”

Poor Vietnamese might also try to get some money by going to beg in Cambodia. Especially in Neak Leung one can observe many Vietnamese kids begging for money. Some of them came along with their parents who sell food or toys, while they try to get some extra income through begging. We found no organized begging groups as in Thailand. Perhaps this is because, as a representative of the Vietnamese association in Phnom Penh suggested, they have too much competition from the Khmer beggars of whom they are afraid.

The decision to go to Cambodia is not only made because of financial need, but also because of financial ambition. More money can be earned in Cambodia, according to many informants, because doing business is not restricted with as many regulations and does not require as much capital compared to Vietnam. But also in day labour or in commercial sex work, more money can be earned than in Vietnam. A Vietnamese girl in a brothel in Kompong Som recounts how she was attracted by her friend's wealth earned in Cambodia:

“I followed my friend to come here. She lived in the same village and she had lived in Cambodia before. I saw that she had jewelry and that she had brought money to her home. So I asked her to bring me to Cambodia.”

Besides the attractions of earning easy money, going to Cambodia can for some be a welcome escape from their situation at home. Several women interviewed wanted to be away from their husband, boyfriend, or family and therefore going to Cambodia was an attractive option to them. Often, these women had negative experiences being divorced, violated or betrayed. One Vietnamese woman said:

“My husband and I were divorced and I was very sad. I did not want to meet him anymore. So I came here. There was no-one who forced me to come here.”

Going to Cambodia is a chance to get away from the sad experiences and to live in a completely new environment. Although this escape is often seen as temporary, they hope to benefit from it emotionally as well as financially. For others, the excitement of having some fun or having some adventure and change in their life is the prime reason to come to Cambodia. A 28 years old prostitute in Svay Rieng commented:

“I heard that it is great fun living in Cambodia. I wanted to enjoy myself, so I decided to come here.”

A Vietnamese woman in a karaoke shop summarized why, according to her, Vietnamese are coming to Cambodia:

“There are many complex problems in our society that we cannot understand. There are some people who come here because they were sad, because they had problems. Others came because they were very poor... In Vietnam there are very rich and very poor people. There are mainly the poor people who come to Cambodia... Here one can work for other people and earn much more money than in Vietnam... But [the young girls] mostly were deceived to be sold here.”

Vietnamese men recruited for work in Cambodia

Many Vietnamese who come to Cambodia, temporarily or more permanently, come on their own initiative or by following family members already living in Cambodia. There are no extended networks for recruiting Vietnamese labourers comparable to what was found in the former survey for recruitment of Cambodians to work in Thailand, although there are leaders who provide their services to bring people to Cambodia. In Cambodia there is no such need for unskilled workers from outside since the demand for this kind of labour can be met within Cambodia. Besides, there is not as much development in construction, plantations, factory work, etc. as was the case in Thailand. However, a lack of skilled labourers in Cambodia has led to some informal recruitment of Vietnamese specialist workers, *orcieng*. These Vietnamese are recruited because of their expertise in, among others, machine repair, wood processing or certain new technologies. In Cambodia much of this expertise was eliminated during the Khmer Rouge period and has to date not fully developed again. Vietnamese are brought to Cambodia to use their artisan skills, with the intention that Cambodian workers will learn from them, although some complain that the Vietnamese tend to monopolize these trades and exclude Khmers in order to secure continued employment.

These specialist workers from Vietnam are more expensive than Cambodian labourers, but the good and efficient results of their work are considered to be well worth the money. A taxi-driver in Takeo told us that when he started a bakery to make bread, he asked a Vietnamese residing in Takeo to help him find specialists in bread-making. He argued that Vietnamese know how to make bread more efficiently, i.e. make more bread with the same amount of flour. A government official in the same province recruited some Vietnamese to cultivate his land. According to this official, Vietnamese use better techniques for rice-cultivation and therefore can produce higher yields per hectare. The Vietnamese were only hired for one season; afterwards he and his people knew how to use the methods for producing higher yields. In Banlung, Ratanakiri, a team of about ten Vietnamese were working on the construction of a new house. The *meecieng*, or foreman, was a Vietnamese who had lived in Banlung for a long time. The owner of the house hired him and sent him to Vietnam to recruit different kinds of specialists for building the house. Cambodian workers were only hired to do the unskilled labour.

The recruitment process for these kinds of *cieng* goes often through a series of contacts within Cambodia and Vietnam. The person in Cambodia who needs certain expertise from Vietnam approaches someone who he knows has contacts in Vietnam and therefore could help recruit the persons in Vietnam. This person can be a Cambodian who is often in Vietnam for business or other reasons, but is most often a Vietnamese who has been living in Cambodia for some time. He will return to his own village or district, where he knows how to recruit the people with the right skills. In some cases temporary migration papers are arranged with the provincial migration department, but most often the specialist labourers are from neighbouring provinces in Vietnam and therefore are easily “allowed” (after paying some money to border officials) to cross the border into Cambodia.

A border official in Svay Rieng mentioned that, regarding labourers who are recruited in Vietnam for work in Cambodia:

“There are not so many workers from Vietnam who come here. There are only workers in the rubber plantations. They are all men and have legal papers to enter. They make these papers in Vietnam. The boss of the rubber plantation first went to Vietnam to find specialist workers who can cut down rubber trees. Cambodia lacks the specialized workers and the means to cull the old rubber trees. If the trees are too old, they dry out and spoil the fresh trees. Therefore, we need skilled workers and also the machines for sawing... We have adequate laws that permit temporary workers from Vietnam to work here. The workers only need to make the papers themselves in Vietnam.”

Vietnamese women trafficked to Cambodia

A better known purpose of recruiting Vietnamese is the recruitment, often deceptive or exploitative, of women and girls for prostitution in Cambodia. The recruitment processes in these cases are more similar to what was described in the survey on trafficking of Cambodian women and girls to Thailand. Unicef writes that “criminal groups” which are “highly organized, extremely violent, and often involved in other criminal activities”^[51] sometimes control the trafficking in women. Since this survey was geographically limited to Cambodia, it was not possible to find out about the extent and activities of the “criminal groups” that are involved. A representative of the Vietnamese in

Phnom Penh estimated that every month about twenty young Vietnamese girls are brought to brothels in Cambodia. However, another Vietnamese representative in Kompong Som expressed concern about getting too involved in this issue, because “they will hire people to kill me.”

In this survey, we found that in most cases the recruitment of young Vietnamese women for prostitution in Cambodia operates on a small-scale level. Recruiters target one or a few girls at a time, in order to provide a family member, friend or other acquaintance some extra women in their brothel. The recruiters often approach poor, desperate or divorced women or girls who are receptive to promises of well-paid work in Cambodia. A Vietnamese woman in a karaoke shop in Kompong Som recounted that after her husband left her with her three-year-old child, a woman in her village told her to come with her to work in Phnom Penh. She and five other young women were brought to Phnom Penh, where they were all together sold to a shop in Tuol Kork. Later this woman opened her own shop using the money she got from selling the girls. A 17-year-old Vietnamese girl described, out of own experience, how the recruiters operate to recruit young girls:

“The people who persuade young girls to come to Cambodia are mostly women. They are like friends, but they sell their friends. They tell the girls that they can sell merchandise or work as a waitress... They only take young girls, of 16 or 17 years old.”

For the recruiters it is necessary to know the language, the places where to go and which way to bring the women and girls to Cambodia. Therefore, the recruiters are often Vietnamese with contacts abroad. These can be Vietnamese women who have worked themselves as prostitutes in Cambodia or “specialist” recruiters who recruit women and girls on behalf of *meebon* [brothel owner] in Cambodia. The Vietnamese word for recruiter is *mai môi*, which is like the Khmer equivalent *neak noam*. A brothel owner in Takeo explained how they operate:

“The *mai môi* are people from Vietnam who have connections with *meebon* in Cambodia. The *meebon* has contacted the recruiter, so that he or she knows to which brothel to bring the women. These recruiters are always Vietnamese, because the Khmer don’t dare to cross the border.”

Although it is important to have connections in Vietnam, not all recruiters are necessarily Vietnamese. A Khmer brothel owner in Svay Rieng explained how she recruits herself the girls in Vietnam for her brothel:

“My husband used to go to Vietnam very often to bring goods. So he knows many people there, also the authorities of the villages and communes. Now I go to these villages and I ask every family in the village. I ask whether they want to work in Cambodia as a waitress. I don’t mention the word prostitute, but if I say “waitress”, they understand what I mean. When the parents agree, we make a paper with the authorities which states that I will not resell the girls and that I will give them a certain amount of money every month for a certain period, like one *chi*^[52] per month. I also lend money to the parents. Sometimes I give them three bundles of dong^[53], which is 300,000 dong. For them it is a lot of money.

I go to Vietnam once or twice a month, whenever I need new girls. When there are many girls in my house, I don’t go. Sometimes I bring back three girls, but that also depends on the parents. When other people see later that the girls come back home with a lot of money, they also want to

send their daughters. I do not necessarily want virgin girls. Sometimes I bring back one virgin, other times three. If these girls agree to come with me I can call customers for them. The customer can pay \$450. They give me \$50 and the rest I split with the girls.

Sometimes other *meebon* also ask me to bring girls to their shop. But to do that is against the law. If I brought these girls to other *meebon*, and if they mistreat the girls, the girls will say that I brought them there. So I will be in trouble... I keep the girls in my house and I am responsible for them. Everybody knows me, so I don't dare to bring them to other places."

The shades of morality and responsibility and 'legal obligation' as formulated by this *meebon* are interesting. What seems important is that the girls are working under a known and trusted brothel owner, not that the girls are going to work as prostitutes. Several brothel owners interviewed stressed the importance of having some kind of contract or relation of trust with the parents, especially the mothers, who send their daughters to work in their brothel. This is to contrast with those brothel owners who are involved in re-selling a girl to an unknown third person, which runs counter to the 'rules' of morality, responsibility and legal obligation of the brothel owner.

Recruitment of women and girls for commercial sex work has been given more and more attention over the past years. Whereas the overall influx of Vietnamese to Cambodia seems to have decreased, there are no signs that the trafficking of women and girls is in line with this decrease. A representative of the Vietnamese association argued:

"Now there are less Vietnamese people who come to Cambodia than last year. They went back, because there is no work here and there is more work in Vietnam. But the number of Vietnamese women who are brought here to work in prostitution is the same as last year. Here they don't get arrested, while prostitution in Vietnam is restricted."

Also other informants have confirmed that there are fewer Vietnamese coming to work in Cambodia. Some mention that after 1993 fewer Vietnamese came to Cambodia, because of fear for their security during the elections, while others observed declining numbers of new migrants coming to Cambodia since 1995. Several reasons are mentioned, such as decreased employment opportunities in Cambodia (among others because more and more Cambodians are becoming skilled to do certain jobs formerly restricted to skilled Vietnamese), rising employment opportunities in Vietnam, and rising complaints about security and taxation in Cambodia. Another reason mentioned is that the border police have become stricter in screening Vietnamese to enter Cambodia. In reality we still found lively border traffic between Vietnam and Cambodia. Vietnamese are entering Cambodia as Cambodians are entering Vietnam. Although on the Cambodian side this traffic of people is very much associated with the fear of Vietnamese encroachers on Cambodian soil, the Vietnamese are more preoccupied with those who cross the border from Cambodia to smuggle cigarettes and other goods into Vietnam.^[54] A border official in Svay Rieng mentioned:

"There are still a lot of Vietnamese crossing the border into Cambodia every day. But the number of people who enter equals the number of people who go out. That means that there are also many Khmer people who go to Vietnam. But for the Khmer, when they go to work in Vietnam, they don't stay for a long time. Whereas for the Vietnamese when they come here, they come to live here forever."

Crossing the border

The Vietnamese migrants who come to Cambodia are predominantly from the southern provinces in the Mekong Delta, such as Long An, Tien Giang, Dong Thap, Vinh Long, An Giang, Kien Giang, Minh Hai, Ca Tho, Soc Trang, Ta Vinh, Ben Tre, and from Southeastern provinces as Ho Chi Minh City and Tay Ninh. This is not surprising considering the regional proximity. Besides, there is a cultural proximity with those Khmer from the Mekong Delta. They are ethnically Khmer, speak the Khmer language and often have relatives in Cambodia. Migration from Vietnam to Cambodia is very much limited to those of this southern part of Vietnam. People from the north of Vietnam are not only geographically too far apart; they are also in other ways considered to be different. “They don’t come here, because they speak another language”, as a representative of the Vietnamese association formulated. He referred here to the fact that most Vietnamese in Cambodia speak southern Vietnamese (as opposed to northern Vietnamese) and, in the case of the ethnic Khmer population from the Mekong Delta, Khmer.

These southern provinces from which Vietnamese migrate border with the Cambodian provinces of Takeo, Svay Rieng, Prey Veng, Kampot, Kandal, Kompong Cham and Kratie. Most Vietnamese are crossing the border into these provinces, where the roads leading into Cambodia are also better than those in, for example, Ratanakiri and Mondolkiri. It seems that the major flow of Vietnamese enter through the southern provinces in Cambodia, heading predominantly to Phnom Penh, from where some again spread to other provinces in Cambodia.

The only official international overland border crossing is Bavet in Svay Rieng. Crossing the border here requires officially a passport or at least some kind of legal papers that allow them to enter Cambodia temporarily. According to the immigration law^[55], non-immigrant aliens are allowed to stay in Cambodia if they have a passport with visa, or with special permission papers granted by the government of Cambodia. Besides travelers and tourists, foreigners who come with the purpose to do some kind of business or other professional work, and those who live along the border can be granted permission papers. To make a passport and visa is very expensive. “Nobody has the money to do that”, according to a *meebon* in Svay Rieng. However, the permission papers for temporarily entering Cambodia can be easily obtained for some thousands of riel. How much depends on the border official, or as one border official remarked “on the charity of the people, because we are not allowed to tax them”. They are designed for people who want to do some business or to visit their family in Cambodia. Most of these people have been crossing the border for years. They live near the border and are known among the border officials. A border official in Takeo said:

“Our job is to check on immigrants and verify those who have no paper. I am responsible for 500 meter each side from here. Outside of it is the responsibility of the border security officials. This way is only permitted for Khmer and Vietnamese who live near the border. For example, they cross the border to sell goods in the morning and we make them a paper. They come back in the evening. For the people who live far from here we must make a ‘laissez-passer’. This is valuable for two weeks or one month. People who want to go far into the country need a passport.”

Vietnamese who are pretending to do some business or to visit some relatives usually have no problems obtaining permission papers to enter Cambodia. A Vietnamese woman in Kompong Som related:

“There are many ways to cross the border. We just don’t tell the border police that we go far away from the border. We tell them that we only go to sell fruits or pork and that we will come back afterwards. Or sometimes we can make a permission paper to stay for two or three months, but then we stay for two or three years. It is easier to go back than to come here. It is also possible to pay people at the border to help us cross.”

Those who have crossed the border frequently or who have family members who know the ways to cross do not need the leaders to cross the border. A border official in Svay Rieng said:

“The Vietnamese who come for the first time to Cambodia are all brought by a leader. They don’t dare to go alone, because they are afraid. The Vietnamese officials are much stricter than ours are. The Vietnamese who have never been in Cambodia don’t know that it is easy to cross the border. They only know this when they have been living here for some time... The vegetable sellers, who always bring their vegetables to sell here, know it is easy. They are not afraid of being arrested. But these people don’t dare to bring other people across the border. Only people who have been living here dare to do that.”

The seducing skills of Vietnamese women are also in these cases thought to be very effective. A border official in Ratanakiri called this a ‘sentimental contract’ between the Vietnamese woman who wants to enter Cambodia and the border official. Another border official commented:

“If Vietnamese women want to cross by this way, they just sleep for two nights with the border officials. For example, when they want to cross and the border officials ask one million dong, they beg the officials to let them enter without paying. Then they sleep with them for one or two nights, and the border officials will agree to let them cross the border.”

A Khmer *meebon* in Svay Rieng commented:

“The Vietnamese girls who come here don’t need to go by secret path. Sometimes they just sleep a night at the police station and then they are allowed to enter to Cambodia. So in order to get into Cambodia, they just sleep with the Vietnamese and Khmer police.”

There are many ways to enter Cambodia, without having the ‘right papers’ and without bribing or seducing the border officials. Crossing the border by ‘secret path’ is maybe the most common way. This means that not the road through the official border post is taken, but some *robeang* [secret] path through the forest, rice fields or water. The border officials are very much aware of these paths. One commented:

“The border line between Cambodia and Vietnam is very long. So there are many places where the people can cross secretly. They do this especially when the border police people are asleep.”

There are motorbike drivers who know these ways and help people cross for some money. They also have connections with some police along the border, whom they can bribe if

they are noticed while crossing the border. They cross especially during at dusk, when it is difficult to control. The motorbike driver charges \$20 to \$50 and is responsible for the whole trip across the border. A Vietnamese woman living in Phnom Penh explained:

“I paid 500,000 dong to cross the border. I had to rent someone who could bring me across the border. Then he brought me by a secret path through the forest. But he also had to pay the police on the way.”

The fact that most of the land along the border is rice field, part of the year flooded, gives other possibilities to cross the border without too many problems. Some disguise as farmers who work the rice fields, or in the flooded season, cut water plants, and walk across the border into Cambodia. A Kampuchea Krom woman described how she crossed the border with her leader:

“We left at four o’clock in the morning. We took the car till the border at Phnom Den. It was difficult to cross the border. It was raining and everything was flooded. We dressed as farmers, to make sure that the border police would not catch us. We had to swim part and afterwards walking by secret path further into Cambodian territory. Then we took the car again. Besides us there were four men in the car. One of them was a police manager. He asked me why I went to Phnom Penh. As the leader had ordered me, I told him that I went to visit my aunt. The police manager suspected something and asked why we didn’t look alike. But he was too busy with his work to really pay attention. At seven o’clock in the evening we arrived in Phnom Penh where the leader brought me to her brothel.”

There are also possibilities crossing the border via the several waterways connecting Vietnam and Cambodia. Boats with goods from Vietnam arrive daily through the waterways in Takeo, Kandal, Svay Rieng and Prey Veng. Some hide under the goods brought to Cambodia by Vietnamese salesmen. Others come with the fishing boats over sea south of Ha Tien.

In the Report on the Problem of Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Cambodia^[56] another way for Vietnamese to enter Cambodia, besides by land or water, is mentioned: travelling by air. For this option a passport, visa and plane ticket are needed which means that this way of travelling requires relatively much money and administrative organization. Therefore, it is not an often-used way to enter Cambodia by the kind of migrants discussed in this paper. According to the above mentioned report, it is only used for pretty girls who can attract a high price, which are mostly those whom the *neak noamhas* abducted or bought from parents in northern Vietnam. After arrival in Cambodia, they are brought to secret locations, mostly in Phnom Penh, where they are kept for clients who take them to a hotel.^[57] During the survey, none of the Vietnamese women interviewed came to Cambodia by air. The most general way to travel from Vietnam to Cambodia is either by land or by boat.

The fact that it is relatively easy to cross the border does not mean that closing the borders through tight police and military control is an adequate solution to preventing illegal entry in general and cross-border trafficking in particular. Hundreds of people cross the borders daily from Vietnam into Cambodia, and the other way around, for business, family visits, or work. Closing the borders would therefore negatively affect social and economic

relations between Cambodia and Vietnam. A border official in Svay Rieng commented that "...if we were very strict on the border, our economy would seriously suffer."

CHAPTER FOUR

VIETNAMESE AND TRAFFICKING WITHIN CAMBODIA

The description of the different processes and purposes of migration from Vietnam to Cambodia in chapter 3 shows the variety of factors and actors involved. In order to understand the full nature of the problems related to trafficking, it would not be adequate to concentrate solely on those who have been trafficked from Vietnam to Cambodia. The distinct processes, aspects and people involved in the different forms of migration from Vietnam to Cambodia are very much interrelated. Besides, the problem of trafficking and exploitation does not stop in Cambodia. Not every Vietnamese victim of trafficking comes ‘fresh’ from Vietnam. Some are recruited or otherwise forced within Cambodia, among the so-called newcomers as well as among the long-term residents.

This chapter focusses especially on the Vietnamese living in Cambodia and their relation to the trafficking issue. As the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls from Vietnam as well as within Cambodia is predominantly for the purpose of commercial sex work, an important part of the chapter will describe this specific issue.

Trafficking by and among Vietnamese in Cambodia

The ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia are in three main ways involved in the trafficking to and in Cambodia: as recruiters, as employers and as a source for these recruiters and employers. Especially important are the Vietnamese who came, or returned, to Cambodia during the eighties and early nineties. Some of them still have contacts in Vietnam and are involved as recruiters going to bring Vietnamese *cieng* or ‘fresh’ girls to Cambodia. They form important intermediaries because of their contacts in Vietnam as well as in Cambodia. A Vietnamese woman in Cbah Ampeu, living in Cambodia since the eighties, frequently goes back to Vietnam to visit her relatives. Sometimes she brings people from the same village back along with her to Cambodia. She related:

“In Vietnam there are many people, but the arable land is small. The poor people cannot live off their land and sell it to the rich. They become labourers for the rich... Some of the poor people want to come to Cambodia, because they heard they could earn money easily. I brought some people along, to sell merchandise like me... I paid for them to cross the border. When we came here, they had to earn money and pay me back.”

This woman served as an intermediary for people who volunteered to come to Cambodia hoping to earn easy money, as was promised by those Vietnamese with experience in Cambodia. In chapter 3 several examples were given of Vietnamese who were asked to go to Vietnam to recruit specialized workers. These specialized labourers, as well as commercial sex workers, are often recruited through Vietnamese who have the necessary contacts, language skills and familiarity with the Vietnamese situation, as well as with the Cambodian situation. A Cambodian-born Vietnamese girl from Neak Leung recounted

how some of the Vietnamese living in her neighbourhood were involved in recruiting girls for prostitution in Cambodia:

“Before there was a lady near my house. She had a Cambodian husband who worked with the police, but the lady was Vietnamese. She had lived in Cambodia for some time and could speak some Khmer. She had worked as a prostitute before. She went several times to Vietnam and when she came back, she brought Vietnamese girls with her. She had told their mothers that they would work as waitresses or hairdressers. When the police at the border asked about the girls, she would reply that they were her nieces. She wanted to sell the girls in Neak Leung...”

Another group of Vietnamese in Cambodia is involved as employers for whom these recruited *cieng* or women end up working. They are ethnic Vietnamese who have their own business and prefer to employ Vietnamese whom they recruit through others or by themselves from Vietnam. The most obvious of these are the ethnic Vietnamese or Kampuchea Krom *meebon* recruiting young girls from Vietnam for their brothels. Svay Pak, 11 kilometers north of Phnom Penh, is probably the best-known example of an area where Vietnamese dominate the business as brothel owners as well as commercial sex workers. One brothel owner explained how she got involved in the business:

“I had been living here before 1970, but I left because of the war. I came back with my parents in 1981. They were fishermen and I sold the fish at the market at Psar Touc [Svay Pak], where many other Vietnamese live. I saw that many people opened a shop [brothel] and I saw that it was easy to earn money. I knew one of the shop owners and she advised me also to open a shop... At that time I had no women, but the other shop owner brought some women here to help me. Later I brought myself a girl from Vietnam. I didn't buy her, but I loaned some money to her parents... I saw that it was easy to earn money like this, so I continued. This was five years ago. Now there are many more shops.”

Lastly, Vietnamese migrants living in Cambodia are a source among which recruiters and employers recruit specialist workers and commercial sex workers. The recruitment of Vietnamese women and girls for commercial sex work does not only take place in Vietnam. Many of the ethnic Vietnamese, especially most recent migrants live together in easily identifiable areas.^[58] Also in these areas *meebon* try to recruit Vietnamese women and girls to work in their brothel. A brothel owner in Ratanakiri explained:

“The Vietnamese women who work as prostitutes here came from different provinces in Cambodia. For example, when a *meebon* knows some Vietnamese people in Kompong Cham, she asks them to inform the Vietnamese women that they can come to work in her shop. There are also some Vietnamese women here who come directly from Vietnam, but they hide. They sell in the market or have a laundry shop and they work at their house. They don't work in a brothel.”

Some of the Vietnamese women recruited within Cambodia for prostitution were born in Cambodia, whereas others followed their families who chose to go to Cambodia attracted by the stories of earning easy money. A young Vietnamese woman working in a brothel in Ratanakiri came to Cambodia to follow her mother, who worked as a tailor in Phnom Penh. Her mother had been working in Cambodia for some time, while she and her sisters stayed in Vietnam with her grandmother. When she came to Cambodia, she first stayed with her mother to help her cook and do the laundry. There she met a woman who asked her to come with her to work in a coffee shop in Stung Treng. She related:

“I did not tell my mother that I would leave with my friend for Stung Treng. But when we arrived there, she brought me to a brothel. Then I understood what my friend had done. I wanted to take the car back to Phnom Penh, but the brothel owner did not allow me to go. She bought me for 50,000 riel. I could not say anything, because I could not speak Khmer.”

Among the Vietnamese migrants who came to Cambodia not everybody has been as successful in earning money as vendors, construction workers, or other kinds of labour. Especially when faced with difficulties, like illness, family problems, rising debts, etc., some of these migrant families become easy targets for brothel owners who are interested in their daughters. A Kampuchea Krom woman, living in Cbah Ampeu, showed some houses next to hers where Vietnamese families had brought their daughters to ‘sell’ to brothels. She said about one of her neighbours:

“I know that one of my neighbours sold three daughters because of poverty. The three daughters also wanted to do that. The mother sold her daughters to get money to buy gold to go back to Vietnam. There she wants to buy land and build a house. The daughters always give the money they earn to their mother, so that she can buy gold to go back to Vietnam. She said that when her daughters stop to work, they will all go back to Vietnam and she will let her daughters marry and distribute the land and houses.”

By no other means do parents have the opportunity to earn so much money in such short time as by bringing their daughter in prostitution. Although several informants stressed that parents bring their daughter to a brothel as a desperate move to ‘solve’ their financial problems, frequent exposure to this practice makes them perhaps more agreeable to actually bringing their daughters into prostitution. In areas where neighbouring families have daughters working as commercial sex workers, but especially in those areas where the brothels are around, Vietnamese families in dire financial need are exposed on a daily basis to the relative wealth that can be obtained in prostitution. A Vietnamese woman who lives with her three daughters in Cbah Ampeu, told that she was approached by recruiters trying to convince her to let her oldest daughter come with her. She related:

“Some people came here to ask whether there are girls who are old enough to be ‘sold’. They also came to ask me, but I said I have no daughter. They are sometimes former prostitutes who still have a relationship with the brothel owner. For example, there was one girl in this *phum* [village] who has worked as a prostitute before. Then others saw that she has earned a lot of money. Some mothers told this girl that she should bring their daughter to a *meebon* for \$500. After the girl told the *meebon*, the *meebon* came to see whether the daughter is pretty. Then she was taken to the brothel where she got good food and white make-up to make her more beautiful.”

However, about her own daughters she said:

“Even if I have no money, I will not sell my daughters. If I have no money, I am prepared to die. My husband and I agreed already about this. My daughter saw close to our house parents selling their daughter. When she came home and went to sleep, she had dreams about this. She dreamed that we agreed to sell her in order to relieve our poverty. She cried so much....”

In the brothel areas Svay Pak and Tuol Kork in and around Phnom Penh, we encountered some cases where Vietnamese families, especially mothers, had brought their daughters to a brothel. One 15-year-old girl related:

“When I came from Vietnam in 1991, my parents and I first went to Siem Reap. I helped my mother work in construction. But my father drank very much and he had a second wife, so my mother ran away from him. We went to Phnom Penh. There she got a second husband, from whom she got a child. But he also drank very much. And when my mother fell ill, we could not earn enough money to support ourselves. So she brought me to a shop to sell me for \$200. She took the money to repay the debts and to treat her disease...I didn't want to do this work, but I needed to earn the money to buy medicine for my mother and to repay her debts. The creditor came every day to insult her. I couldn't take it, so I had to do this work.”

For her mother, bringing her daughter to a neighbouring brothel was a desperate move. She commented:

“I wish that all this had not happened in my life... I thought that after my daughter had worked for three months in the brothel, I would bring her back to Vietnam. I was so afraid that she would get ill. I cried a lot, because I pitied her.”

Another mother, living in Tuol Kork, explained why she brought her daughter to a brothel:

“I came to Cambodia five years ago, because I had divorced from my husband. In Cambodia I met my present husband. He sells noodles to earn money. We had many debts, because we had to repay the loan we got for buying a television. I had no money and a lot of debts. The owner came to disturb me every day to ask for the money. But my husband could not earn enough money. That's why I decided to bring my daughter to a shop. I got \$200 for she was still a virgin.”

Although it is important to recognize these different categories of Vietnamese involved in the trafficking issue, it does not mean that the trafficking of Vietnamese to and in Cambodia is only a matter of Vietnamese, being the “victims” as well as the “offenders”. Trafficking of women and girls is a regional problem which often involves people from the different sending and receiving countries. It is the cooperation between Vietnamese and Cambodians that makes trafficking possible, according to a border official in Bavet. This is related to officials who are involved, as “some of them do everything for money” as well as to the cooperation between Vietnamese and Cambodian recruiters and employers. The same border official remarked about the trafficking of Vietnamese women for commercial sex work in Cambodia:

“In general the people involved are both Cambodian and Vietnamese. They cannot do it alone... For example, the Vietnamese *neak noam* brings the women until the border and the Cambodian *neak noam* comes to receive the women from the border into Cambodia.”

Besides, within Cambodia cooperation between the Vietnamese employers and the police or other government officials is necessary. This is especially true in the case of the commercial sex business. This business is by many Cambodians perceived to be dominated by Vietnamese, although these -as well as the Cambodian establishments- could not survive without some kind of cooperation from local authorities and/or law enforcers.

Khmer and Vietnamese attitudes toward commercial sex work

The results of this survey gave a strong impression that although there are many different purposes for Vietnamese to (temporarily) migrate to Cambodia, those being forced or deceived are mostly ending up in commercial sex work. An earlier report on Vietnamese prostitutes described that for a lot of Cambodians there is a clear link between prostitution and Vietnamese women.^[59] Not only are Vietnamese women considered to be very beautiful because of their whiter skin, they are also considered to be more sexually skilled than Khmer women are.^[60] Therefore, Prasso writes, prostitution is considered to be ‘un-Khmer’: “The rationalization is, because all Khmer women are virtuous, all prostitutes must be Vietnamese.”^[61] A *meebrom*, or group leader, in Cbah Ampeu even argued that it is a cultural trait of Vietnamese families to bring their daughters into prostitution. He said:

“Nearly 100 percent of the Vietnamese girls here are prostitutes. It is their tradition, even if the daughter is from a rich family...They mostly sell their daughters themselves. For example, they sell the girl to work with *ameebon* for a while. Then she has to work for many months or years to repay her parent’s loan. There is often a money problem between the *meebon* and the parents.”

There is a strong conviction that most of the commercial sex workers in Cambodia are ethnically Vietnamese. The numbers presented in the report on “The Problem of Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking in Cambodia”^[62], however, show a very different picture. According to this report 18 percent of the prostitutes working throughout the country are Vietnamese. One has to note that some underreporting is possible, since Vietnamese women might have covered their identity out of fear of expulsion. Moreover, Kampuchea Krom women are ethnically Khmer, although with Vietnamese nationality.

Although there are brothels where both Vietnamese and Cambodian girls and women work, in some areas one can find a clear preference to employ either Cambodian or Vietnamese women. A Cambodian *meebon* commented that she never employs Vietnamese girls “because it is difficult to talk to them and they always have disputes with Khmer girls.” This is different for the Kampuchea Krom women who come from Vietnam, but usually speak Khmer as well as Vietnamese and connect therefore easier with the other Khmer girls. The negative attitudes towards Vietnamese in general and Vietnamese prostitutes in particular makes the lives of these girls doubly hard.

According to several informants, there are significant differences between the Vietnamese and Cambodian prostitutes. In most cases, the Vietnamese are considered to be less ashamed, smarter when it comes to earning money, and more hygienic. A health worker in Ratanakiri commented:

“In general the Vietnamese recruiters who bring Vietnamese women to work as prostitutes in Cambodia, give some money to the parents of the women. When the women stay in the brothel, the *meebon* takes a certain percentage for food and shelter. The rest is for the women. For Khmer women this is 100 percent different. The Khmer women are all deceived, by the recruiters and the *meebon*. When a Khmer woman comes to brothel, the *meebon* gives some money to the recruiter and provides her some clothes. After that she is not free to go. The money she earns goes to the *meebon*, but the woman does not receive any money. If she wants to leave for another brothel, she has to pay the *meebon* and sometimes she is just sold to another *meebon*.”

This view on the differences between Vietnamese and Cambodian prostitutes fits very well in the stereotype of Vietnamese being clever business people, whereas Cambodians are the simple farmers and casual labourers. However, in the report on trafficking of Cambodian women to Thailand it became clear that Cambodian women were also calculating commercial sex workers. A health worker in Svay Rieng argued that Vietnamese women, besides being able to save much more money, are also thinking much more about their health:

“The Vietnamese women only work for one or two months and they have a lot of jewelry. The Vietnamese women are usually changed often by the *meebon* and therefore they can attract more customers. The Khmer women work for two years and have nothing left. They spend their money on games and their *sangsaa* [boyfriend]. Khmer women also get more often sick, because they don’t think of sexually transmitted diseases when they are with their *sangsaa*, or when customers refuse to use condoms. The Vietnamese prostitutes finish ten boxes of condoms in a month, whereas Khmer prostitutes cannot finish even one.”

A *meebon* in Svay Rieng related:

“The Vietnamese women don’t take care about their honor, because they know that when they go back to Vietnam, they will still become wives. It is very interesting, they earn money for a motorbike, or a new house and when they get married they stop to work here... The Khmer women can’t earn money, while the Vietnamese women can earn a lot of money and after three or four months they go back to Vietnam. When they come back here again, they are new again and can receive a lot of customers. They can receive ten customers per day. For them the most important thing is to earn money and they don’t spend it. The Khmer women, after receiving two or three customers are afraid and don’t want to receive more. The Khmer women spend all their money. In the end, only their body remains.”

These comparisons lead very much to the image of Vietnamese women doing everything for money, with a clear goal and without shame or fear of losing honor. This is explained by the idea that Vietnamese women who have worked as prostitutes remain marriageable once they return to Vietnam. The Khmer women are, to the contrary, described as victims of deception and exploitation who have no idea how to get money out of such a dishonorable situation that makes them a *srey kouc*^[63] forever. This view may be used by Khmer to confirm a negative image of Vietnamese and the ideal image of Cambodian women, but it fails to see the many similarities regarding the processes, attitudes and causes of the prostitution of Vietnamese and Cambodian women and girls.

In the report on Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand, several factors were mentioned that combined with economic factors to put certain women and girls at risk for being lured, or being convinced, to enter prostitution.^[64] These could be summarized as factors related to some way of prior exposure to commercial sex work, weak or unstable family situations, and individual characteristics. In many cases we encountered, a combination of these factors was causing women and girls to be receptive to being deceived or to make the decision (by the woman or girl herself or her mother) to enter prostitution. Interestingly, many informants mentioned that women are mostly involved in bringing young women in prostitution as recruiters, *meebon* and mothers. The recruiters are often women, sometimes former prostitutes, who try to convince other young women in her village, just as the *meebon* themselves are often women. Where

family members were involved in bringing a young woman to a brothel, it was most often the mothers of the young women themselves who made the deal with the *meebon*, took the initial loan and in some cases came back several times to collect more advances from the *meebon*.

In many reports about the role of women in Southeast Asian societies, women are described as being responsible for the family economy and controlling the family finances. It is maybe therefore that many young women working as prostitutes stress their responsibility in contributing to the family economy. It might also explain why *meebon* or former prostitutes recruiting and employing girls for prostitution justify their activities in the responsibility they bear for supporting their family. The same line of argumentation can be observed among mothers who brought their daughters into commercial sex work because of the financial needs of their family.

A Kampuchea Krom woman commented that being sent to Cambodia as prostitutes is how daughters can fulfil their responsibility for the family economy:

“The girls are weak, they can’t work hard like the boys. For example, my neighbours have sons who worked very hard, while their daughters had no job. So they sent their daughters to work in Phnom Penh.”

A Vietnamese woman living in Phnom Penh commented that the girls who become prostitutes do this because of a good cause, i.e. to help their families:

“Actually, some Vietnamese girls are good. They are grateful to help their parents... I have never seen a girl who cried because her parents obliged her to work as a prostitute. They agree to do this themselves.”

It would require more in-depth research to understand these relations between mother and daughter within the family, but also in relation with the recruiters and *meebon* who employ the young women. These relationships may not be the same among Vietnamese and Khmer and therefore need separate attention, although they are very much interrelated because of the specific situations where Vietnamese migrants and ethnic Khmer from Vietnam live in Cambodia.

Trafficking in virgins

According to the report on sexual exploitation and trafficking in Cambodia^[65], child prostitutes (under 18 years old) constitute about 15.5 percent of the total number of prostitutes in Cambodia. In the youngest age group, that is from 9 to 15 years old, about three-quarters were reported to be Vietnamese. Although we did not encounter cases of girls under 13 years old in this survey, child prostitution is definitely part of the commercial sex business in Cambodia. The very young girls are worth a lot of money as virgins. Deflowering a young girl is, among some (especially Chinese) groups, believed to have a rejuvenating effect on men. The word used in this context is derived from the Vietnamese word ‘*khui*’. Literally, *khui* means to open a bottle, to uncork or to make a hole. The term *khui* is also used figuratively to describe having sex with a girl or woman

who is still a virgin. Some men even use the term in the meaning of having sex with a woman, without especially referring to her virgin or non-virgin status. However, women or girls who have had sex already are worth a lot less in the sex business. The first time they can receive \$200 to \$1,000, depending on the age and beauty of the girl. The second time, she is worth already a lot less, after which her 'value' diminishes even further. These girls or women are so-called *khui haey* or *kouc haey* [deflowered already] and therefore have lost their special 'value'. The idea prevails that especially Vietnamese girls are sold to be *khui*-ed, as a *meebon* in Svay Rieng commented:

"The Vietnamese people don't mind about virginity. They don't care about their daughter losing virginity. They are glad that their daughter can earn much money..."

For the very young girls, being forced to be *khui*-ed is often a traumatic experience. They usually do not know what awaits them. A Vietnamese girl, who lived with her mother next to Svay Pak, was brought to a brothel when she was 14 years old. She remembers:

"My mother sold me for the first *khui* for \$500. I did not know what to do, but she told me I had to stay in that place for four to ten days and that she would bring me back home afterwards. Then the *meebon* ordered me to sleep with a guest. I hurt so much. I cried, I had heavy bleedings. I was so afraid."

The bleeding after deflowering is an important sign of virginity of the girl for the *meebon* and especially the client. In some cases, the *meebon* will have a doctor do a check-up in order to see whether a new-brought girl is still a virgin. A Vietnamese girl who was 15 years old when she was brought to a brothel was checked by a doctor and declared not to be a virgin. This was not because she had had sex before, but according to the doctor, possibly because she rode a bicycle. Therefore, the *meebon* put the girl among the "ordinary place" and not among the virgins. A client, who agrees with the *meebon* to pay a high price for deflowering a virgin girl, expects the virgin girl to bleed. If not, the client will refuse paying anything at all. A 16-year-old Cambodian-born Vietnamese girl interviewed in a shelter recounted how she 'devaluated' after the *meebon* found out that she was not *khui*:

"At that time we were very poor. Everyone looked down on us, even my sister. My mother told me to try to earn money, so that we did not need to be ashamed with our neighbours who had a lot of jewelry. My mother didn't know that I was deflowered with my boyfriend. She thought that I was a virgin. She talked with a *meebon* to bring me to *khui*... They didn't know that I was *khui haey*. But after sleeping for the first time with a customer, I did not bleed. After this the *meebon* gave my mother only \$50 to take back home."

Some girls are sold only to be *khui*-ed. They are not sold to a brothel owner who, after an initial high price, will keep on employing the girl as a 'regular' prostitute. This can happen in individual cases, when parents agree with someone to let their daughter spend a week in exchange for some money or when girls decide by themselves to be *khui*-ed, as the money offered is often way above their imagination. A Vietnamese girl in Ratanakiri recounted how, when she was working in a coffee shop, she was asked to be *khui*-ed:

“There was a customer who came to ask me whether I was a virgin. When I told him that I was still a virgin, he asked me to sleep with him. He would give me \$600. I thought that \$600 was a lot of money. It’s over *onedomlung*^[66]! So I agreed with him.”

However, those girls who are sold to be *khui*-ed only often do end up as a ‘regular’ commercial sex worker in a brothel or dancing hall. For those who are deceived and completely left without any money, there is no other way to get some money to go back home. For others once *khui*-ed already, prostitution is an attractive option for earning easy money.

Although some girls are (made) aware of their worth as a virgin and therefore agree to be *khui*-ed, many are deceived and do not get anything for losing their virginity. There are more or less specialized middlemen or -women who recruit virgin girls in Vietnam for individual customers or brothel owners. A Kampuchea Krom girl told how she, four years ago, was brought to Phnom Penh by a woman from her village in order to be *khui*-ed. Every one or two months, this woman brought virgin girls from Vietnam to Cambodia and offered them to soldiers or other (rich) men who want virgin girls. The girls are forced to stay with the man for one week in a hotel. The woman receives \$350, of which the girls do not even receive a small share. After having been *khui*-ed, the girls have often no other possibility but work as a prostitute in a regular bar or brothel, in order to save some money to go back home.

Also some brothel owners are, either directly themselves or through certain mediators, interested in recruiting young virgin girls. Some will order mediating recruiters to find virgin girls; others pay huge amounts to mediators who come to offer virgin girls. A Vietnamese girl in a massage place in Kompong Som recalled how she was deceived when she was 17 years old to be *khui*-ed in a brothel in Phnom Penh:

“A woman told me that if I could work in Cambodia as a cook for other people and earn one *chi* of gold a month. So I followed her and the man who was working with her. They ordered me not to tell my mother, because she would not allow me to go with them and then I would not get a good job in Cambodia. When we came in Phnom Penh, they brought me to a shop. I saw many prostitutes of my age. I saw that the *meebon* gave 7 *chi* to the people who brought me there and then they left. Later the *meebon* told me that these people brought me to his shop to sell me for seven *chi* to *khui* me. The same day I was *khui*-ed. I first didn’t agree, but they hit me and they used electricity shocks to force me.”

Working and living conditions of Vietnamese sex workers

Vietnamese women and girls who work as commercial sex workers in Cambodia can be found in brothels, karaoke shops, massage parlors, dancing halls, and *kokh-chol* [coin-rubbing] places or in their own rented places. Not all of the Vietnamese women working in these places are victims of trafficking, although it is hard to draw a line between those who came voluntarily and those who were forced or deceived. They sometimes end up in the same places with similar working and living conditions.

Among the various places where Vietnamese commercial sex workers can be found, many different classes in price, beauty of girls, hygiene practices and openness can be distinguished. We visited brothels where the rooms were not more than some partition-walls made out of cardboard, whereas other brothels were big stone houses. These differences in brothels are related to the different price ranges and the different categories of customers for whom they are catering. As many studies have shown, the majority of the brothels are catering to Cambodians and charge prices varying from 2,000 riel to 20 dollars or more. In Phnom Penh and Kompong Som the most expensive places can be found, especially those catering for foreigners. It is often thought that the women working in dancing halls enjoy the most freedom of movement. A Kampuchea Krom woman working in a dancing hall explained:

“When we are dancing girls, we can go everywhere. But the prostitutes in a brothel are obliged to receive customers even when they are sick. Prostitutes also receive more customers than dancing girls. They are more exploited than the dancing girls. They cannot run away, because there are guards. If they try to run away, these guards will hit them till they die... But I also cannot go anywhere, because I have no money.”

Some of the women working in these dancing halls are, indeed, independent, whereas others are working under the strict supervision of a *taipan*. A *taipan* is described as the *boang* [elder sister] of the girls. She is sometimes an ex-prostitute who has been assigned by the owner of a dancing hall/restaurant to facilitate between the clients and the prostitutes. A Vietnamese girl who worked in a dancing hall in Phnom Penh argued that her colleagues under supervision of the *taipan* are controlled like prostitutes in a brothel. They are not free to go, whereas she rented her own room and decides for herself whether she wants to go with clients, who are mostly tourists from different countries. When she thinks a customer is not good she doesn't go with him. Others are nice and take her for *dai leeng* [a trip] to Kompong Som or Siem Reap.

The very young girls working in brothels are perhaps least free. They are often not allowed to go out, especially those who are trafficked to be *khui*-ed, since they are among the most valuable for the *meebon*. Besides, their appearance might alarm police or NGO-workers, who could come to rescue the girls and arrest the *meebon*. These brothels were, therefore, most difficult to approach during this survey. However, in more open brothels and in shelters we talked to girls who had been forced to work in such environments. A 15-year old girl in a shelter remembered:

“We were not allowed to sit outside and call the guests with our hands. This was done by the *meebon*. If there were foreign guests, the *meebon* let my group receive the guests. The *meebon* let us only receive Taiwanese and foreign guests. If Khmer guests came, the *meebon* let the other prostitutes receive them.”

A young Kampuchea Krom woman recounted her experiences working as a prostitute:

“I followed a woman who was the daughter of the *meebon*. She told me that if I worked as a prostitute in Phnom Penh, I could get gold and earn a lot of money. She told me that I only had to work for two or three months and then I would have saved already a lot of money. But when we arrived in Phnom Penh, she sold me. I didn't see any money... The customers paid \$5 or 10,000 riel, but I didn't get any money. The *meebon* only gave me 1,000 riel each morning to buy some

cake. She ordered me to receive up to 10 customers a day and complained that I only received two or three customers. It still hurts when I think of this. Sometimes she hit me with her shoes on my head. I stayed there for two months and then she sold me for \$150 to another *meebon*.”

The working conditions vary from brothel to brothel. This does not count only for the degree of freedom and the percentage of the money one is receiving, but also for the quality and quantity of food, hygiene and health practices, and protection against clients. Many prostitutes interviewed complained about monotonous food, drunken clients, being bored and mistreated by, especially, their former *meebon*. Some of them were only slightly aware of the health dangers of their work. Although health departments and women’s departments are providing some information about sexually transmitted diseases, such as HIV, this is not very effective everywhere. A Kampuchea Krom woman in Svay Rieng reasoned:

“I am afraid of getting diseases since I came to do this work in Cambodia. But I was more careful in Phnom Penh, because there are many girls... With my *sangsaa* I don’t use condoms, because I know him.”

During the survey we talked to several brothel owners in the provinces and Phnom Penh. Some of them are surprisingly open about their own, but more often others’, practices regarding the recruitment and working conditions of women. However, many of them keep a strict control on what the women and girls say during the interview, by hanging around, keeping eye-contact from a distance or through other girls sitting with them. Some of the girls are obviously very much aware of the (dis)approval of the *meebon*; others dare to speak out more freely. This is not only related to personal characteristics, but also to the length of time and amount of brothels the woman or girl has been working for as a prostitute, which is in turn related to the degree to which she is working ‘voluntarily’ for the *meebon*. These factors again determine the financial relationship and degree of dependency on the brothel owner.

Matron-client relations

The relationship between the *meebon* and prostitutes is very much based on a mutual dependency. The *meebon* cannot earn money without the girls and women, and therefore they are in many different ways made dependent on the *meebon*. The dependency of the women and girls already becomes clear in the term used for employing commercial sex workers. *Meebon* prefer to use the term *ceñcem*, or to nourish, which implies almost a parent-child relationship. It means that the *meebon* provides food and shelter for the women who work in her brothel. Also, the *meebon* will provide money for medicine, clothes, police protection, etc., which are all expenses that add to the financial obligations of the women and girls towards the *meebon*. They are not allowed to go before fulfilling their financial obligations. These are even higher for those women or girls who got, often through a mother or other relative, a loan as an advance for their earnings or for whom a high recruitment fee was paid. In these cases the *meebon* will keep all the money earned. In the best cases, the *meebon* takes half of the money earned. Some keep a strict accounting of the money, as a *meebon* in Svay Pak:

“I receive the money from the customers, but the girls know how much they can earn per customer. They know how often they have sex per night. They have their own book and so do I. I note it all myself, because I don’t trust anybody. I also pity the girls, because they must suffer so much. They have to work first for \$300, \$400 or \$500, whatever they took first [as a loan]. When they earn money, I take this off from the loan. If their parents come to borrow more money, I have to add it... The customers sometimes give money to the girls to buy some cake. When they use all of this, I lend them more money. At the end of the month, I verify in my notebook how much their income was and how much they still owe me. Then I call them in to set the accounting, to make clear how much money still needs to be earned in the next months.”

In cases where young women are brought to a brothel by their mother, the mother makes the financial arrangements concerning the loan that leads her daughter to be bonded to the *meebon*. These bonds are extended when additional loans are requested by the mother. As such, the daughter is temporarily put on loan with the brothel owner, who then has the responsibility to *ceñcem* the girl.

For those Vietnamese women and girls who came to Cambodia without knowing the language, people or places to go, non-financial bonds are easily created by the *meebon*. The *meebon* can end up as a kind of ‘rescuer’ for Vietnamese girls who are deceived by other *meebon*, or who fall into the hands of police. A Vietnamese prostitute in Takeo decided to go to Cambodia after her elderly father fell ill and had no means to earn money for the treatment. Her other brothers and sisters had left already their parental house, leaving her with the responsibility to take care of her parents. Others in her village had told her that it is easy to earn money in Cambodia. As she was still very sad because her boyfriend who made her pregnant had left her, she decided to go to Cambodia. She took the boat and at the border she walked through some secret path to enter Cambodia. But the police caught her when she wanted to continue her way by boat. She recounted:

“I told them that I came to find my mother who sells cucumbers in Cambodia. But they didn’t believe me and charged me 100,000 riel. I did not have the money, so I told them the truth. I asked them to call the *meebon*, whose name I had heard from a lady who knew her. This lady had told me that if I worked for this *meebon*, I could earn a lot of money. The police brought me to this *meebon* and she paid them 30,000 riel to let me work in her bar.”

This young woman did not only become financially dependent, as she had to pay the bribe back to the *meebon*, but also emotionally, since the *meebon* was her ‘rescuer’. For many girls and women who come from Vietnam, the *meebon* becomes a kind of matron figure who expects services in exchange for food, shelter and protection. This matron figure is especially important for those Vietnamese girls and women who came without knowing anyone in Cambodia nor the Cambodian language, which leaves them in a very vulnerable position. For these women and girls the *meebon* will also provide some kind of security against arrest and being sent back to Vietnam by the Khmer police or military. The girls who came from Vietnam without residence papers will not leave the ‘protected’ environment of the brothel, out of fear of being caught by police. The feeling that there is someone who, as a Vietnamese prostitute in Svay Pak formulated, can ‘guarantee’ them this protection, is very important. A *meebonin* Svay Rieng assured that she does provide this guarantee for Vietnamese women who stay in her brothel:

“When they come to stay in my brothel, they are not afraid of the police, because I support them. The police also don’t disturb them, because they know that they are under my supervision.”

This kind of protection is, however, not only necessary for the Vietnamese prostitutes who stay illegally in Cambodia, but also for the brothel owners themselves. Many of the brothel owners interviewed were married to police, military or border officials, or were otherwise on good terms with them. They are expected to pay for being allowed to keep a brothel either in cash or in kind, i.e. a box of beer or sleeping with her prostitutes without paying. This is not only a ‘loss’ for the *meebon*, but it makes the women and girls work longer to repay their loan. A *meebon* in Svay Pak noted that girls have to work longer in order to compensate the ‘taxes’ she has to pay the police:

“Most of the girls here were brought by their mothers... I give them a loan of \$500 or \$700, depending on the beauty of the girl. The girl can go back home, when she has repaid the loan. In general they work for three months, but if the police come often to cause troubles, they have to work for five months.”

In some cases, the police charge more for the presence of Vietnamese girls in a brothel. For a brothel owner it is therefore important to have the right contacts with the police and military, or to pay the money. A *meebon* in Svay Rieng complained:

“It is very difficult. There are many different kinds of police who come to tax me. They say they want to take statistics. If I had enough money, I would stop working with this shop, because I hate these police so much. I have no money to give them. They charge me so much that it is difficult to stay in business.”

Repeated trafficking

Many trafficking stories continue in different brothels at different places. Girls and women who start working as a prostitute in one place, in many cases Phnom Penh, often move, forced or voluntarily, to other brothels. The freedom of movement according to one’s own choice, as well as adaptation to the kind of work, seems to increase the longer the women stay in ‘business’. The women working in brothels in the provinces can tell their stories more freely and more self-confidently than those who are new arrivals under the strict supervision of the *meebon*. A prostitute interviewed in a brothel in Kompong Som was sold several times to different brothels. She related:

“I am a Cham woman. I was born in Vietnam. My parents have a small farm in Moat Chruk. I used to sell food to earn some money. At that time I had a boyfriend. I thought that he would be faithful with me, but he left me. I was very disappointed. Later, a lady who was the mother of a friend came to see me. She explained that it is very beautiful in Phnom Penh, and persuaded me to go with her to visit Phnom Penh. She ordered me not to tell my parents. I believed her, so I followed her. She brought me to a brothel in Tuol Kork. I cried. The brothel owner bought me for \$300. She suspected that I was deceived to be sold. She bought me, because she didn’t want me to go anywhere. I had to work as a prostitute to repay her the \$300.

I stayed with her for eight months. Then I got out and she gave me \$100 to go back to Vietnam. But I didn’t know where to go. I could not speak Khmer. Then I met a lady who let me to dance in her bar and taught me some Khmer. I danced in the bar with my girl friends with whom I rented a house. The lady first planned to sell me at ‘Kilometer 11’ [Svay Pak] for \$1,000. But when she

met the *meebon*, they could not come to an agreement. Then she brought me back and sold me to another *meebon* for \$500. I stayed there for one year. I worked as a prostitute and also as a servant. The *meebon* locked me in the house and didn't let me go out. It was like in a prison. I worked there for one year without earning any money.

Fortunately, I could escape from this place. I lied to the *meebon* that I was ill and that I wanted to see a doctor to treat my disease. The *meebon* agreed. She lent me \$10 and let another girl come with me. The girl was also sold to the brothel, like me. When we got out, I told her that I wanted to run away. She wanted to come with me. So we both left for Kompong Som."

Commercial sex workers do not change brothels, dancing halls or bars only because they are forced to do so by being sold. A *meebon* in Svay Rieng noted:

"When the old women go from my brothel, they tell other women to come here, because they know I am good. The women who are here a long time want to go somewhere else, because they become new again and can earn much money. They often go for a while, but after some time they come back here. Then they are new again."

After the women or girls have earned enough to compensate for the loan or recruitment fee, they are relatively free to go to another place. For the business of the *meebon* as well as the girl herself, this is even more profitable, since clients want change in the supply of women. Brothel owners do not always have to search actively for new women. They can use the women who worked for them to recruit new women, as a *meebon* in Ratanakiri mentioned "when the women who worked for me have earned enough money, they leave and inform their friends about my place." But also motorbike drivers are involved. The same *meebon* remarked:

"A motorbike driver can usually earn only 10,000 riel a day. But when they bring a prostitute they can earn more. So, when they know a woman has left my brothel to work somewhere else, they will bring me a new one."

Motorbike-drivers and taxi-drivers can function as intermediaries between women and brothel owners. They have contacts with certain brothel owners and therefore know where to bring women who ask them. They sometimes borrow the money for transport to the brothel, knowing the brothel owner will pay them back. There are also contacts between brothel owners themselves to guarantee a certain flow in their supply of women. A *meebon* in Ratanakiri explained how brothel owners among each other exchange women working for them:

"When a *meebon* wants to take a woman from another shop, she must pay the other *meebon* according to how much the woman still owns the other *meebon*. For example, if the woman owes the *meebon* 50,000 riel, the *meebon* must pay the other *meebon* 50,000 riel. It is also according to the feelings of the woman whether she wants to leave her brothel or not."

Although most women say they do not want to continue working as prostitutes, they also do not necessarily quit the sex business as soon as they are declared free to go. Some of them are at that point left without any money at all, while others view this work as the only possible option for earning a lot of money. The women and girls, who already had to go through the shame this work puts on them, do not want to return home empty-handed.

They want something to show for their absence, and money is probably the most suitable. For many women, the economic motivations for continuing working as a prostitute are very strong. Some women go back home every once in a while to bring back the money earned and return later to their brothel madam in order to earn more money. A Vietnamese prostitute in Svay Rieng mentioned that she had been back to Vietnam two times during her one-year stay in Cambodia. Every time she took back some money, one or two *chi* gold. She planned to go back again for Vietnamese New Year, but said she might decide to work again for some time in the same brothel:

“I can say that when my family is still very poor, I will come back here. But when I see that my parents are too old, I will stay in Vietnam to help them... The people back home don't know that I do this work, they think I work casual work for other people... I agreed to suffer myself, but I don't want my sister to work like me.”

Even when the *meebon* does share the income with the prostitutes in her brothel, it is not always easy to save enough money to bring back home. According to several *meebon* interviewed in Phnom Penh and in different provinces, the sex business has slowed down over the past year. This can partly be explained by a crack-down on brothels as part of a government policy. Some *meebon* blamed the decrease in customers and therefore their and the prostitutes' income on the slackening economy, because of which clients do not have as much money to spend. Other brothel owners accuse the increasing numbers of beer promotion girls of taking over the business of prostitutes in brothels. Although beer promotion girls are supposedly not commercial sex workers, it is generally known that some are sleeping with their clients to earn some extra money. This tends to happen more among the beer promotion girls who work in the provinces than among those who work in Phnom Penh. Perhaps this is because many beer promotion girls coming from Phnom Penh are rotated to different restaurants in different provinces, which means that they are out of the direct control of their own environment and among other girls who are doing the same. Clients are attracted to the beer promotion girls, since they have spend the evening drinking with them and since they think beer promotion girls do not sleep as often with clients as prostitutes do. Therefore clients perceive having sex with beer promotion girls to be safer with regard to contracting sexual transmitted diseases. Health workers have, however, expressed serious concerns regarding this attitude, since the beer promotion girls are not as easily reached by health education as prostitutes working in brothel areas.

CHAPTER FIVE

RETURNING TO VIETNAM

As has been discussed in the previous chapters, the problem of trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia is not limited to the actual cross-border trafficking of young women and girls for the purpose of prostitution. The problem is also relevant as an in-country issue. One could argue that the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls within Cambodia is part of Cambodian in-country trafficking. However, within this Cambodian situation the ethnic Vietnamese are in a special position: first, because of the relations that some of the Vietnamese resident in Cambodia have with Vietnam; second, because the status of ethnic Vietnamese, especially the newcomers, in Cambodia is not clear, which means that they may all be perceived as illegal migrants.

Deportation or repatriation

So far, the Cambodian authorities have not developed a consistent policy regarding the presence of illegal migrants in Cambodia, although some have very outspoken ideas about the bad influences of the illegal Vietnamese on Cambodian society. Sambath Kang^[67] writes, “[t]he most noticeable aspect of the society is the problem of the Vietnamese settlers who illegally come to live in Phnom Penh and throughout Cambodia.” He continues that these illegal Vietnamese create many problems in Cambodian society, and that the Vietnamese were the first to open brothels and therefore have brought the problem of prostitution into Cambodia. Furthermore, he argues that Vietnamese goods are flooding into Cambodia, which combined with the Vietnamese settlers entering Cambodia causes the “Vietnamization” of Cambodia.

The legality of ethnic Vietnamese in Cambodia is a controversial topic. The Nationality Law and the Immigration Law should ideally define the different status of ethnic Vietnamese of Cambodian origin and Vietnamese migrants. In reality, these different groups of ethnic Vietnamese are often reduced to the same denominator. This is partly because of the many upheavals in the passed twenty to thirty years that caused Vietnamese to flee back and forth to Vietnam, losing their right to Cambodian identity papers. Leonard^[68] writes that the Nationality Law “may be interpreted as the culmination of recent attempts to completely eradicate any remnants of Vietnamese political influence thought to be lingering from the PRK/SOC^[69] regime.” She quotes Sou Sophornara^[70] as saying that by means of this Nationality Law “sooner or later the government will deport all illegal Vietnamese immigrants.” This is a fear for even those Vietnamese who have been living in Cambodia for a long time, although the present political situation might have brought some more security to the Vietnamese living in Cambodia. A Vietnamese woman in Svay Rieng commented:

“I have no identity card that gives me the right to live in Vietnam. No one allows me to live there and I don’t want to live there. I am familiar with this country [Cambodia] and I would not know

what to do if I had to go back to Vietnam. All of my six younger siblings live here. One lives in Koh Kong, one in Svay Chrum and another is a taxi-driver in Phnom Penh. If I had to go back to Vietnam, I would be alone. Here, I try to work hard every day to earn some money.”

According to a Kampuchea Krom woman living in Takeo province, many Vietnamese came to live in her village during 1992. But in 1995 the police started to send back all Vietnamese who could not speak Khmer. Other deportation cases reported were of not necessarily illegal Vietnamese who were said to be involved in anti-Vietnamese government politics. According to an UNHCR representative, the Vietnamese and Cambodian governments made an agreement in March 1997, leading to closer cooperation regarding to deportation of criminals. This has even led to allowing Vietnamese police to enter Cambodian soil to arrest Vietnamese criminals, especially those involved in activities opposing the Vietnamese government.

To date, there has been no consistent policy on the deportation of illegal Vietnamese. Although the police threaten it, there seems to be no organized deportation policy for illegal Vietnamese in Cambodia. This is related to the unclear status of Vietnamese in Cambodia, as well as to the limited means with which the Cambodian authorities have to operate. This enhances the use of bribes which offers Vietnamese without residence papers the means to stay and work in Cambodia, whereas the police use the unclear legal status of many Vietnamese migrants as a way to earn some extra money. A Vietnamese woman in Takeo-town said:

“It is easier to live in Vietnam, because it is quiet, but it is difficult to make a living. In Cambodia it is easier to sell things, but we are always worried about the police. The police always comes to ask for money... Those who have permission papers have to pay 5,000 riel a month and those who don't have permission papers have to pay 20,000 or 30,000 riel a month... If we don't have the money, they bring us to the station. They take everything, even our clothes, or otherwise they will arrest us.”

Thailand has a higher number of illegal migrants and tries to follow a more organized policy regarding deportation of illegal migrants. Illegal prostitutes, construction workers, beggars, servants and others, when arrested by the police, are brought into detention centers and sent back to their home countries. The Cambodian police have been trying to do the same regarding prostitution. A representative of the Vietnamese association recounted that in 1994 over 100 Vietnamese prostitutes were sent back to Vietnam. They were arrested from different places in Cambodia and held in prison for several months. In collaboration with the Vietnamese government, the women were brought back to Vietnam. In another case, two girls rescued out of a brothel in Svay Pak were brought back to a boarding school for children in out of problematic situations in Vietnam. In this case, the Vietnamese Embassy and government were involved in order to fulfill the right procedures and papers for their final repatriation. One of the problems was the clarification of the girls' identity as Vietnamese citizens from Vietnam. It took the involved NGOs, IOs and government departments in Cambodia and Vietnam about one year to complete their repatriation.

This shows that the legal requirements as well as the support mechanisms for such cases will need to be further improved. Both the Vietnamese and the Cambodian governments

have made public statements regarding their intention to combat the problem of child trafficking. Cooperation between both governments and supporting NGOs and IOs will be necessary to realize a more holistic approach to the problem. It will not be enough to rescue girls from brothels as long as the implementation of the legal procedures and the support mechanisms for shelter and repatriation are not developed correspondingly. This is currently an important issue since a task force of the municipal police in Phnom Penh has organized several raids in brothels “in an attempt to enforce the two-year-old law aimed at human trafficking.”^[71] By the beginning of December 1997, the police ‘rescued’ 189 Khmer and Vietnamese girls and women who were working as prostitutes and arrested 19 brothel owners. Whereas the brothel owners were often kept for a short time, many of the rescued women and girls were brought to different shelters with a longer-term vision. Some of the women chose, however, to go their own way. Although older women are often free to make this decision on their own, younger girls are usually given less choice and spend a longer period of time in a shelter, where they receive literacy education and some vocational training.

The girls who are rescued from the brothels represent a financial loss for the *meebon* who have often paid a lot of money to the recruiter or parents. In one reported case, a brothel owner took action to overcome this financial loss. A total of eight girls were arrested from her brothel, of whom two Cambodians and six Vietnamese. They were all brought to specialized centers for shelter and education and eventual repatriation to their families. However, a few weeks after her brothel was raided, the *meebon* decided to take the girls back to her brothel. She arrived several times at the shelter with three military police and three armed guards. Over the fence of the shelter, she called the girls who used to work in her brothel. When the girls came out, she convinced them to come back to her, telling them that if they stayed longer in the shelter the staff of the shelter would eventually kill them. Five of the girls, fearing this prospect more than working for their brothel madam, allowed themselves to be lifted over the fence and taken back to the brothel. On a later occasion, another Vietnamese girl was called and threatened that imprisonment would wait her if she decided to stay in the shelter. Then also she ran away with her ‘rescuer’.

It is not only the fear of being killed that makes ‘rescued’ girls easily convinced to go back with their brothel owner to commercial sex work. It requires a lot of effort and a long time to learn the skills necessary to be able to earn a living as a dressmaker, hairdresser or any other profession. For those who are used to earning a lot of money in a short time, the option of having to learn for a long time in order to be able to make a relatively moderate living is not that attractive. Several NGO-workers have complained about the short-term vision of these women and girls regarding their future. But, as *ameebon* in Svay Rieng remarked, the need is very short-term as well:

“If you send these women to study, to learn sewing for example, they cannot earn money for their family. Their mothers are maybe 60 or 70 years old. They cannot earn enough money for all the siblings. So the women cannot concentrate on learning for such a long time. You can tell them it is better for their future, but if they see their mother crying in despair, they cannot study. Maybe we can educate the daughters of rich families, but not the poor ones.”

Considerations regarding going home

Many of the Vietnamese ‘newcomers’ have the intention to stay in Cambodia temporarily to earn some money. The length of their stay is in many cases determined by their success or failure in earning money to take back home. As such, the motivations of the Vietnamese newcomers are very much like the motivations of Cambodians who go to Thailand to earn money. But whereas Cambodians are recruited for various kinds of unskilled labour in Thailand, many Vietnamese come to Cambodia on their own initiative to do some business, establish a repair shop, or use their skills as labourers in wood processing, construction, etc. Even those Vietnamese women and girls who come on their own initiative to work as prostitutes view this as a temporary way of earning money to support their family. As one prostitute in Kompong Som remarked:

“I know it is not good to work as a prostitute. I only want to do this work for a while. I will go back home once I have earned enough money. No one wants to work like this.”

What is considered “enough” is dependent on every individual situation. In some cases the debts caused by a destroyed rice harvest need to be repaid. Others come to earn money for specific expenses in the family, such as education for younger siblings, a piece of land, or a house. A Vietnamese *meebon* in Svay Rieng used to visit the women who had worked in her brothel during her trips to Vietnam. She therefore knows many of their family situations:

“Some girls who used to work here brought back money for their parents to buy a boat. But then they came back to earn more money for their parents to build a house. Also some come here who have enough money. For example, when they want to build a house but they do not have enough money for it. Then they come to work here to earn enough money. Or sometimes their parents have borrowed money from other people to pay for a boat. Then the daughter comes here to earn money to repay the loan.”

The Vietnamese women and girls who were trafficked from Vietnam for the purpose of commercial sex work are very much dependent on the brothel owners regarding the length of their stay in Cambodia. Even after these victims of trafficking are ‘rescued’ by the police, some of them decide to continue working as prostitutes. A Vietnamese girl in a massage-shop in Kompong Som recounted how she was sold to a brothel in Phnom Penh where she was treated badly without earning any money. However, she did not return to Vietnam when she was released from the brothel by a police team. She explained:

“They sent me to jail for one or two days. Then the *meebon* came to buy me back. I heard that the Cambodian police would send all women back to Vietnam. So I escaped. I ran off to Kompong Som, because I couldn’t earn money with my former *meebon*. Here, the *meebon* divides the money with me. But I do not yet have enough money to go back to Vietnam.”

To stop working as a prostitute and to return home either in Vietnam or Cambodia is the desire for most Vietnamese women and girls who are or have been working as prostitutes. Returning empty-handed is at the same time one of their greatest fears. A Vietnamese woman working in a karaoke-bar in Kompong Som commented:

“I stay here to earn money and when I have enough money, I will go back. If I went now, it would be shameful for me. People there heard that it is easy to earn money here and why then did I come back without money?”

The economic motivation for entering prostitution, be it voluntarily, forced, deceived, or bonded, may be clear. The money earned is not only valuable to fulfill certain financial needs or desires, but it is also important as compensation for the loss of virginity, reputation or as explanation for a women’s or girl’s absence from home. In cases where the women or girls get a loan in advance, the money is often already taken back home by the mother or another relative. In other cases, part of the money is sent home regularly, through former visits back home or through visiting relatives, people from the same village, returning prostitutes or even by the recruiters and *meebon* who regularly go back and forth to Vietnam. There are also telephone companies with services for sending money by telephone. They take a certain percentage for their service, but it is guaranteed that the rest of the money will reach the family. There were, however, not many informants who said they used this method, indicating that the other ways are trustworthy and safe enough. This is related to the fact that it is relatively easy to go and come back from Vietnam to Cambodia without being harassed too much.

Interestingly, several prostitutes and girls in shelters mentioned that failing to bring back money is an important cause of shame. It is thus not only the kind of work they did, but especially the fact that they did not succeed in earning the money necessary to support the family. A Kampuchea Krom prostitute formulated why she thinks it is important to work until she has earned enough to bring home:

“I am very ashamed of working as a prostitute. I don’t want everybody to know this. Other people will look down on me. The people will look down on my parents too, because I worked as a prostitute but I have no jewelry.”

Jewelry is an important sign of wealth that is highly valued by women and girls who work as prostitutes. One of the attractions of working in Cambodia in general, and as a prostitute in particular, is the possession of jewelry. It shows openly that one can earn a lot of money which can be used for personal adornment, while this adornment at the same time serves as relatively inflation- and flood-safe investment. For the women and girls, this adornment serves as some kind of compensation for the kind of work they have to do. Returning with some jewelry distinguishes them from the poor women and girls who did not leave their home village for work somewhere else. Although most of the money is usually saved to support their families, some of the money is kept for themselves to be used for clothes, food and medicine as well as jewelry. However, not all women and girls are in the position to keep the jewelry they earned themselves, or were given by the *meebon*. A Vietnamese girl complained that her *meebon* had kept all her jewelry before she was rescued:

“I worked for seven months in a brothel in Svay Pak. My mother came several times to take money, all together maybe \$1,000. She came when she needed money to buy food. I kept some money for myself... When they came to take me, the *meebon* told me to give my jewelry to her. She said that she would keep it for me, otherwise the police would take it all. So I gave her my jewelry, but I never got it back... I sent my mother to take my jewelry back: a necklace, ring and watch. But the *meebon* did not want to give the gold back to me. She took it for my release.”

However, not only money and jewelry, but also some kind of skills are assets that are highly valued. A *meebon* in Svay Rieng remarked how some of the Vietnamese women in her shop are very much focussed on their future:

“They had a good idea. When they came here for the first time, they bought a sewing machine from the money they earned. Then when they came back for a second time, they used the money to study sewing. They asked me to let them go to study for two or three months, and then they came back again to earn money to take back home as capital.”

This is a very business-like approach to working as a prostitute. Prostitution here is seen as a means to achieve certain goals for the future. Most women and girls interviewed in brothels, bars and shelters did not have very high aspirations for the future. However, they expressed a strong desire for being able to do some kind of ‘respectable’ income generating activities, such as vending, hair cutting, sewing, etc. A Vietnamese prostitute from Stung Treng had decided to stop working as a prostitute. She said:

“Now I will stop working as a prostitute. I want to sell fish. I did that before and sometimes it is profitable, sometimes not... I would like to go back to Vietnam to live with my mother.”

The Vietnamese women and girls who want to step out of the commercial sex business expressed feelings of shame regarding their social environment. Therefore, many of them said they would try to hide the kind of work they had been doing once they returned home. This is possible, since working as a commercial sex worker in Cambodia means for the Vietnamese women and girls who live in Vietnam that they are far away from the control of their neighbours and family. Also, for those Vietnamese women who live in Cambodia, many chose to work in another province. A prostitute from Stung Treng who worked in Ratanakiri did not want to work in Stung Treng, “because I was ashamed for my parents who are very poor and for my *sangsaa* who also lives in Stung Treng.” A Vietnamese woman who had worked for a year in Cambodia as a prostitute commented:

“When I go back, I will tell the people that I worked as a seller in Cambodia. I will tell them that it is not easy to work here. I don’t think I would want to marry, even when a man loves me, because I am not a good woman.”

To keep silent about the nature of the work is an important way to conceal one’s experience while returning to their village in Vietnam or Cambodia. It is not necessarily only the woman’s silence, but also that of her parents and neighbours, for whom the money earned is maybe more important than the way the money was earned. As a *meebon* quoted in an earlier chapter said “..if I say waitress, they understand what I mean.” This survey did not focus on women and girls that returned to their home situation, but it would be worth while to find out more about these particular aspects that are important determinants for the women’s future life. A Vietnamese mother who brought her daughter to work as a prostitute thought that going back to Vietnam, where nobody knows about her daughter’s history, would help her get a future as any other girl:

“I want to bring my daughter back to Vietnam... There is no one who knows about this, so she will be able to marry normally. We don’t worry, because we can keep her story secret when we go back to Vietnam.”

The problem for most women is not returning itself. None of the women and girls interviewed expressed concerns about the actual returning -as it was said before “it is easier to go back than to come...” They take the same informal paths to return that they used to enter Cambodia. The problem lies maybe more in what will happen after the women and girls are back. Did their ‘offerings’ and ‘sufferings’ really help solve the problems back home? If not, what are then the options for these women and girls? Returning into prostitution? There are several organizations helping to prevent women and girls from returning to prostitution again, through skills training, counseling, and credit provision. The question remains, however, whether these strong desires remain, even when confronted with the difficulties in realizing these desires or with urgent financial needs back home. A Vietnamese *meebon* in Svay Pak commented:

“When the girls go back home for a while, they often escape and come back here. They have become accustomed to the comfortable life here.”

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The topic of Vietnamese coming to and living in Cambodia is a sensitive one and touches a wide range of issues that, although not all directly relevant to the actual problem of trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to Cambodia, cannot be ignored. In this study I have tried to show the complexity of the problem, by discussing some of these issues that shape the actions, perceptions and actors involved.

For Vietnamese migrants, the attraction of working in Cambodia lies in the perceived prospects of earning easy money. Many informants noted that business activities in Cambodia are less tied to regulations, require few investments and have relatively high profits. Also as specialist workers, Vietnamese migrants can obtain relatively high rewards. A major part of this particular study, however, focussed on Vietnamese women and girls working in the commercial sex business in Cambodia. Although prostitution exists in Vietnam, it cannot be practiced as openly as in Cambodia. Therefore, both recruiters and potential sex workers find it more profitable to go to Cambodia in the sex business.

As was described in chapters three and four, the trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls to Cambodia cannot be separated from other processes of migration. The connections, possibilities and expectations that have been and still are created by these other forms of migration are very much related to the trafficking issue. Although there were and still are Vietnamese crossing the border to Cambodia for all kinds of reasons, the results of this survey lead to the impression that the victims of trafficking were predominantly women and girls who ended up in commercial sex work. However, not every Vietnamese woman who came from Vietnam and ended up in prostitution is a victim of trafficking. Neither were all Vietnamese victims of trafficking led directly from Vietnam.

The Vietnamese women encountered for this survey ended up in commercial sex work for many different reasons and came from many different backgrounds. There were the women and girls who came “fresh” from Vietnam and were recruited and brought to Cambodia by means of abuse of authority or dominant position, debt bondage, deception, violence or other forms of coercion. Others came voluntarily to Cambodia, either with the intention to work as a prostitute or for other reasons. Some of them became victims of trafficking within Cambodia, being sold from one brothel to another. But the lucky ones worked on their own initiative temporarily in different brothels and returned to Vietnam as soon as they thought they had earned enough money.

However, also among the ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia women and girls have become victims of trafficking within Cambodia. Some of them were deceived by recruiters, whereas others were brought by their mother to a brothel. But also among these women, some decided themselves to work as commercial sex workers, often because of

their financial or familial situation. Many of these women, although often staying in a Vietnamese environment, speak at least some Khmer and are somewhat familiar with living in Cambodia.

It is difficult to estimate the extent of the trafficking of Vietnamese girls and women to and within Cambodia. This is on the one hand because the problem includes both cross-border as well as in-country trafficking, and on the other hand because a lot of the traffic of Vietnamese women and girls goes along many different small-scale recruitment lines. This makes it difficult to get a clear view of the extent of and trends in trafficking of Vietnamese women and girls to and within Cambodia.

Poverty is often mentioned as the prime motivator for the existence of the trafficking problem. It is true that the incidence of poverty is, although declining, still very high in Vietnam. However, incidence of poverty differs strongly by region. The provinces from which most of the Vietnamese are crossing to Cambodia, namely those in the Mekong Delta and southeastern provinces, fall in the regions where the poverty rate is among the lowest of the country.^[72] It therefore cannot be poverty alone that stimulates trafficking. There are many other factors involved that are interrelated and underlie the problem of trafficking. Within the report some of these have been mentioned, although more research would be needed to get a real understanding of these factors involved.

As described in chapter two, the economic growth in Vietnam caused a rise in welfare for a major part of the population which in turn has led to rising expectations, but also to greater differences between rich and poor. This has resulted in increasing economic needs, as well as in increasing economic desires for individuals and families that are part of a changing society in a more and more open world. As such, the growing demand for commercial sex by those who can afford it -and there is a huge variety of prices- has created opportunities in fulfilling these economic needs and desires. The question remains, however, how at the level of the individual, the family and the larger society the fulfillment of these economic needs and desires is related to existence of trafficking for commercial sex.

The answer to this question goes further than the description of the recruitment processes, the relations between the actors involved, the ways of crossing the border, the living and working conditions, or the wishes for the future of the victims of trafficking. It requires an understanding of family relations, the economic value of children, the contradictory moralities related to individual responsibilities as opposed to ideals of proper behaviour, and the practical implications related to cultural concepts of shame and duty for the individual, the family and in the broader society. This study could not explore these issues in depth, although it did reveal some points that need more attention for a broader understanding of the problem. What are the relations within the Vietnamese family and how do these differ from Khmer or even Western views on family relations? More specifically, what is the relationship between mother and daughter, and how is this relationship connected to the relationship between brothel madam and prostitute? How can we understand the concept of shame in relation with economic gain as opposed to nature of the work? And how are these again related to household economics and the responsibilities of different family members in supporting the family?

Addressing the problem of trafficking of Vietnamese women and children to and within Cambodia requires therefore more than designing new strategies for poverty alleviation. It requires a broad understanding of the social, cultural and psychological factors involved for the actors, which will in turn guide strategies for prevention as well as reintegration of the real and potential victims of trafficking. Hopefully, this study can contribute to the start of such an understanding.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There are many different stages at which the problem of trafficking of women and children can be approached. Prevention activities will be especially important for combatting the problem in the long run. Activities that could be useful for prevention are^[73]:

- Dissemination of information on the practices related to trafficking. This information can help warn women and girls, parents and other family members, school teachers, village leaders and other officials about the risks of following those who come with promises of highly paid jobs in Cambodia or, for those Vietnamese living in Cambodia, in other towns or provinces. The different target groups can be reached through school curricula, radio and television programs, poster campaigns, theater groups, training of leader figures and other officials by human rights or women's groups with specialized experience in this area. Where possible, rescued victims of trafficking could recount their stories to strengthen the message of the information through the different media.
- At the community level, awareness regarding the problem of trafficking could be raised through targeted community awareness strategies. In Vietnam, village leaders, women's committees or other local groups could play an important role in targeting those at risk, i.e. young women and girls, poor families or families in especially difficult circumstances. Therefore, these local groups need to be identified in each region and provided with the means to set up prevention efforts based on the local situation. In Cambodia, besides the more general prevention strategies against trafficking of women and children, Vietnamese communities could be targeted through Vietnamese leaders, Vietnamese schools and the Vietnamese association. By using their own language, especially important for those Vietnamese living in Cambodia who do not speak Khmer, and adapting strategies to their own circumstances, these targeted prevention activities will be more effective.
- Education can provide important means to provide children, parents and educators the necessary knowledge regarding the problem of trafficking, as well as the necessary skills to fulfill expectations regarding income-generating activities. Agriculture cannot provide the necessary means for subsistence for everybody. Education focussed on providing the skills for alternative income-generating activities, such as vocational training, can be a useful means to reach young women and girls.
- At the legal and political level, steps could be undertaken to design a proper approach to the prevention of trafficking. Although several laws and regulations regarding trafficking, immigration and temporary migration, have been developed, proper implementation is lacking. Therefore, policies could be developed regarding the strengthening of law-enforcement institutions, the proper dissemination of the laws and regulations, and the instruction on the implementation for police, military, judges and other relevant officials. As the problem of trafficking is not limited to Cambodia,

cooperation between the Vietnamese and Cambodian authorities will be necessary. With the proper means, remuneration and good will, these laws and regulations can have a protective and preventative effect, in combination with the other strategies proposed.

The above-mentioned prevention activities are aimed especially at potential victims of trafficking. However, for a more complete approach to the problem, it is useful to find strategies which are also beneficial to those who are presently victims of trafficking and those who are finding ways to get back into life at home or anywhere else. Activities that could be useful are:

- Targeted services for those women and girls in commercial sex work. Not all the women and girls working in commercial sex work are victims of trafficking. However, they are potential victims for trafficking to other places. Moreover, they are potential victims of all kinds of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. For these women and girls efforts could be made in the provision of services that could help improve their living and working conditions, such as health services, HIV/AIDS education, and eventually literacy or other skills training. This would require a careful approach in which brothel owners would have to be included and made aware of the importance of these services for the women and girls as well as for themselves.
- Strengthening of the services provided by organizations who provide shelter, vocational training and counseling to women and girls who came out of commercial sex work or who have otherwise been victims of trafficking. Girls who have left commercial sex work, being rescued or on their own initiative, without money and without vocational skills are prone to become again victims of trafficking or to end up in slavery-like labour situations. Those who want to return home or start for themselves could be provided the skills training, means and counseling to fulfill their desire not to come back empty-handed. These services would be most successfully provided by a well-trained staff that is knowledgeable about the difficulties that one can encounter in working with women and children who come out of difficult circumstances.
- Coordination between the different organizations, services and government departments could help in finding a more all-encompassing approach to the problem of trafficking. There are presently many international organizations, national non-governmental organizations and government departments working in Cambodia on combatting the problem of trafficking. These different groups focus on one or several issues related to trafficking, such as prevention and advocacy, human rights and legal issues, health services, sheltering and counseling victims of trafficking, providing vocational training, and reintegration of women and girls who have been victims of trafficking. Coordination of all these activities could strengthen each organization's capacities and lead to a more effective approach to combatting the problem of trafficking.

GLOSSARY

<i>boang</i>	elder brother or sister
<i>ceñcem</i>	to nourish, to take care of
<i>cieng</i>	skilled labourer, specialist or craftsman
<i>chi</i>	gold standard worth about US\$ 37
<i>cong</i>	measure for land, 100 m ²
<i>dai leeng</i>	to go out for pleasure, a trip
<i>doi moi</i>	renovation, reforms from a socialist to a more market-oriented economy in Vietnam
<i>domlung</i>	10 <i>chi</i> of gold, worth about US\$ 370
<i>dong</i>	Vietnamese currency; at the time of the research US\$ 1 equaled about 11,000 dong
<i>Kampuchea Krom</i>	Lower Cambodia, term used by Khmers for the Mekong Delta in Southern Vietnam, here used as an ethnic label for ethnic Khmer who are from that region
<i>khui</i>	Vietnamese word also used in Cambodia for deflowering a girl
<i>khui haey</i>	deflowered already
<i>kouc</i>	literally broken, also used in terms of sexuality
<i>kouc haey</i>	deflowered already
<i>kokh-chol</i>	coin rubbing
<i>mai mõi</i>	Vietnamese for recruiter or intermediary
<i>meebon</i>	brothel owner
<i>meecieng</i>	foreman
<i>meekrom</i>	administrative function, leader of a group of families
<i>neak noam</i>	recruiter, or bringer
<i>om</i>	Vietnamese for cuddle
<i>phum</i>	village
<i>robeang</i>	secret path
<i>rook sii</i>	literally to find food, used for doing some business or work for money
<i>riel</i>	Cambodian currency; at the time of the research US\$ 1 equaled about 2,700 riel
<i>sangsaa</i>	boyfriend or girlfriend
<i>srey kouc</i>	prostitute
<i>taipan</i>	leader of a group of prostitutes

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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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- [46] Kim, Chou, 1993, 'The Problem of Prostitution in Cambodia: Is it normal for the Khmer society?', in *Khmer Conscience*, Vol.VII, No. 2.
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- [48] At the time of the survey US\$ 1 equaled about 2,700 riel.
- [49] Ceremony for the Dead.
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- [52] One *chi* of gold is worth about US\$ 37
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- [63] Literally 'broken woman', but commonly used to describe a prostitute.
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- [66] One *domlung* gold is worth about US\$ 370.
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- [73] See also the long-term and short-term measures for prevention as described in the report on Trafficking of Cambodian Women and Children to Thailand.