

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN MINDANAO, PHILIPPINES

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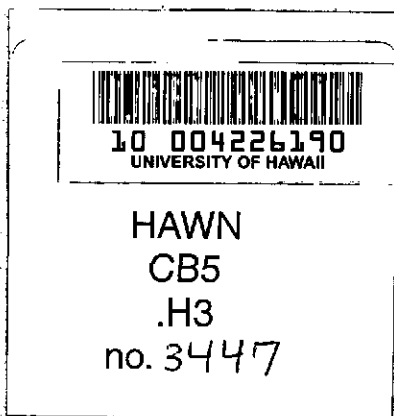


TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	2
LIST OF FIGURES.....	3
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	5
The Problem	6
Literature Review	7
Methodology.....	9
CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND.....	14
General Santos City	15
Mindanao	16
Philippines	17
Global Problem.....	18
Transit.....	20
Profile of Victims and Traffickers.....	22
CHAPTER 3. POVERTY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING	24
Poverty in Mindanao	25
Indigenous Women and Human Trafficking.....	26
<i>Discrimination</i>	28
War and Conflict	31
<i>Human Trafficking In Conflict Zones</i>	32
Prostitution in the Nineties	37
Migration	39
CHAPTER 4. THE BUSINESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING.....	42
Demand for Prostitution	43
Human Trafficking: A Complex Business Operation	45
CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION	48
APPENDIX	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. The Number and Age Distribution of Victims from SOCKSARGEN.....	16
2. Educational Level of Victims from SOCKSARGEN.....	23
3. Process of Entering into Prostitution.....	55

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>FIGURES</u>	<u>Page</u>
1. Map of the Philippines.....	4
2. Graphical Presentation of Random Data of Trafficked Girls.....	17
3. Reported Countries of Origin, Transit, and Destination of Trafficked Beings.....	19
4. Mindanao Exit Points for Trafficked Beings.....	21



Figure 1. Map of the Philippines.¹

¹ "Philippine Travel Destination Guide," <http://www.philsite.net> (accessed Dec. 1, 2007).

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Problem

“My mom sold me into prostitution when I was 12 years old. I would not have minded so much if she also allowed me to go to school, but she didn’t. She told me that it would interfere with my work.” Sheila* relayed her story without any emotion in her voice. If the social workers did not say she was only 16 years old, I would have never guessed her real age. Her gaunt face and tired eyes made her look so much older.

Sheila, an orphan from Davao City, is among the thousands of young women from Mindanao trafficked into prostitution. Human Trafficking, for the purpose of this thesis, is defined as the legal or illegal transportation and trade of women and girls under the age of 18, through the use of threat, deception, and fraud for the purpose of sexual exploitation or forced labor. It is also commonly called modern day slavery.

Human trafficking exploded into the Filipinos’ consciousness during the early twenty-first century, yet it is nothing new. For decades, many provinces in the northern and central regions of the Philippines such as Bicol and Leyte have been identified as the source and destination of trafficked victims.² The southernmost Philippine island of Mindanao and Sulu Archipelago have now become a significant source of trafficked beings in the Philippines, and this appears to be a new development.³ Why are Mindanao women and girls more susceptible to trafficking than those from other parts of the Philippines? I propose that they are more susceptible to trafficking because of the marginalization of Mindanao by the Philippine government, which has led to extreme poverty, war and conflict, and the breakdown of families and communities.

*Not her real name. Her story appears in the appendix.

² Leopold M. Moselina,, *Olongapo’s R&R Industry: A Sociological Analysis of Institutionalized Prostitution* (Manila: Asian Social Institute. 1981), 8.

³ Visayan Forum Foundation Inc, “Philippines,” <http://www.visayanforum.org/> (accessed Aug. 5, 2006).

This thesis will examine the following issues: poverty (Chapter 3), war and conflict (Chapter 3), and demand for prostitution (Chapter 4). It will study the period between 1990 to June 2007. This thesis will be based on empirical data, narratives of three survivors, and on the historical events that led to the marginalization of Mindanao and eventual escalation of trafficking.

Literature Review

Despite the severity of this problem, there are no in-depth studies on trafficking in Mindanao. In fact, there is no published analysis on this topic as of this writing. Most literature is information-based published in popular media such as newspaper, magazines, and presented on television news reports.⁴ The most significant source of information came from the proceedings of the “Multidisciplinary Seminar Against Trafficking in Persons in Mindanao” organized by the Visayan Forum, a non-profit organization.⁵ This report cites that this island is a hotbed for trafficking activities. These reports as well as the lack of in-depth studies piqued my interest because I am a native of Mindanao.

There are, however, a number of literature on Filipino women trafficked overseas. For example, Aida Santos in *Women in the International Migration Process: Patterns, Profiles, and Health Consequences of Sexual Exploitation: the Philippine Report*, argues the link between migration and human trafficking in the Philippines. She also provides profiles of trafficked women as well as the physiological and psychological effects on

⁴ Al Jacinto, “Prostitution, Human Trafficking Main Mindanao Problems,” *The Manila Times*, <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2005> (accessed August 3, 2006).

⁵ Visayan Forum Foundation Inc, “Philippines,” <http://www.visayanforum.org/> (accessed: Aug. 5, 2006).

victims.⁶ Similarly, the Ateneo Human Rights Center's *The Philippine-Belgian Pilot Project Against Trafficking in Women* gives a general overview of the causes of trafficking of Filipino women to Europe particularly Belgium.⁷ In *Halfway Through The Circle: The Lives of 8 Filipino Survivors of Prostitution & Sex Trafficking*, by Louie C. Amilbangsa, Amilbangsa weaves the stories of eight Filipino women trafficked for prostitution and forced labor in Africa, Asia and Europe.⁸

The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, on the other hand, has produced a gender-focused book compiling essays and reports on human trafficking from several Asian nations including the Philippines.⁹ It is entitled *Women Empowering Women* from the proceedings of the "Human Rights Conference on the Trafficking of Asian Women." These publications provide an analysis of trafficking of Filipino women in the global context, a significant contribution to this research. However, they fail to include studies on trafficking at the domestic level. The book, *Endangered Generation: Child Trafficking in the Philippines for Sexual Purposes*, remedies this deficiency. It is particularly useful to this study because it offers a thorough analysis of the profile of victims and traffickers of children from several cities across the Philippines. It also

⁶ Janice G. Raymond and others, *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process, Patterns, Profiles, and Health Consequences of Sexual Exploitation: the Philippine Report: Part of a Five-Country Study, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand, Venezuela, and the United States*, <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/CATW%20Comparative%20Study%202002.pdf> (accessed August 5, 2006).

⁷ Ateneo de Manila University, *The Philippine-Belgian Pilot Project Against Trafficking in Women* (Makati City: Women's Education, Development, Productivity and Research Organization (WEDPRO), 1999).

⁸ Louie C. Amilbangsa and others, *Halfway Through the Circle: the lives of 8 Filipino Survivors of Prostitution & Sex Trafficking* (Quezon City: WEDPRO, 2001).

⁹ Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women-Asia, *Women empowering women: Proceedings of the Human Rights Conference on the Trafficking of Asia Women, April 2-4, 1993* (Manila : Coalition Against Trafficking in Women-Asia, 1993).

includes Cagayan de Oro City and Zamboanga City in Mindanao.¹⁰ This book suggests that poverty is the major cause of trafficking, but it does not explain why females from Mindanao particularly those from indigenous groups are more likely to be trafficked and sexually exploited. This thesis will attempt to fill this gap. The major contribution of this thesis is to provide an analysis of human trafficking in a militarized zone such as Mindanao. This area is not frequented by researchers from outside, particularly foreigners.

Methodology

A grant from the Center for Philippine Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa allowed me to go to Mindanao, Philippines from June to July 2007. I conducted my fieldwork in General Santos City. I chose this area because of my personal connection to this city. I was born here, but left when I was five years old. Despite spending most of my childhood in the other parts of Mindanao, I remained close to my relatives here. For 27 days, I sought their invaluable help in gathering possible informants and assisting with introductions.

I was particularly interested in two types of data. First, I wanted to gather government and non-profit literature including statistics on the profile and number of victims, survivors, and traffickers. Second, I was interested in finding survivors of trafficking. I wanted to document their experiences.

¹⁰ *Endangered Generation: Child Trafficking in the Philippines for Sexual Purposes* (Quezon City: ECPAT, 2004).

I was able to gather statistical information through library research in local university libraries, as well as through interviews of government and non-profit agents. Literature including books, scholarly journals, newspapers, and the resources made available on the websites of organizations were also used as references for this thesis.

I went to non-profit organizations for assistance in finding survivors. I used the exploratory interview method to interview them. It is an indigenous method called *pagtatanong-tanong* in Tagalog, which also means to question.¹¹ This is commonly known as *chika-chika* in the Philippines. *Chika* is derived from the Spanish word *chica* or woman.¹² Women *chika* to share stories and air out frustrations and grief.¹³

With limited time to gain rapport with the women and girls, I had to engage in *chika*, which took longer than a regular interview. In this method, the women could get to know me first and feel comfortable sharing their life stories. Researchers have found this method extremely difficult because it does not follow any set direction. However, I found this to be the most appropriate method. I am familiar with the Philippine culture and fluent in Tagalog and Cebuano that the subjects speak. As part of the confidentiality of this research, the names of interviewees and non-profit organizations will be changed or omitted as indicated to protect the identities of the survivors and victims.

Limitations

My personal connection to the city was both an advantage and disadvantage. It was an advantage because my relatives were able to introduce me to the local community

¹¹ Marita De Guzman Vilorio, "From Exclusion to Compassion: An Interdisciplinary Study for Sexual Trafficking Among Filipinas," (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1999), 30.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

leaders engaged in anti-trafficking campaigns. They also assisted in finding relevant informants. One of the disadvantages was that, I could not probe particular topics such as the profile of traffickers, because I had to protect my family from retaliation.

Even with my relative's assistance, it was still difficult to gather information. For example, the General Santos City Social Welfare and Development Office withdrew a report on human trafficking from me when they found out that I was a student from the United States. They feared that the mayor will not be happy if they released this particular information. They were concerned that it might tarnish the reputation of the city. This report was finally released to me after gaining the mayor's seal of approval.

Security was one of the biggest limitations for this research. Finding informants was not an easy task because of safety issues on both my part and my informants. I was advised on several occasions that I go to clubs to interview prostitutes. I decided against this idea. It was dangerous, particularly having their managers and pimps around. Besides, I also thought that the prostitutes would not tell the truth in their presence. Taking these prostitutes out would generate too much attention. The most effective way to gather stories on trafficking would be from women who have been or at the process of being rehabilitated.

I was able to do this by gaining access to the secret location of a transition home for abused and trafficked women. This happened out of sheer luck. My informants and I met a social worker who accompanied us to this shelter. Many of their clients were in hiding. For some, this was the last place that will take them. Their perilous situations made it too risky for anyone to take them. Fortunately, I located this organization

towards the last week of my stay in General Santos. Although I only had half a day to meet with them as a group, it was a successful meeting.

Unfortunately, time was also a major limitation. The political situation in General Santos City forced me to cut my research time short. I was uncomfortable with the fact that many activists and journalists had been murdered and arrested. I became very concerned when I was beginning to get unwanted attention from the local media. The periodic bombings of city buses also hindered me from traveling to other cities to gather information.

My age and socio-economic background was also a limitation. Part of this process was being able to relate to each other. It was difficult to engage the younger women in conversation, because they saw me as an authority figure. The social workers were very helpful in encouraging them to talk. I was able to get more information from those who graduated from college. They were able to open up to me, because we have something in common. I was also able to get more information from the women around my age, who also happened to be college graduates.

Weather played a part in this research. I left General Santos City on July 23. I resumed my research work in Manila from August 11 to August 22, 2007. My research was halted by the Super Typhoon Egay (Sepang) that left the city immobilized for three days (August 13-15). As soon as the typhoon waned, I visited the Visayan Forum in Manila to interview survivors and rescue workers. I was also able to use the University of the Philippines Main Library at Diliman and the Philippine Social Science Center Library for further research.

The subject of pedophilia and trafficking of young boys will not be included in this research because of limited time and materials. These are important topics that require a separate study. Finally, this research comes from the lens of a Filipina born and raised in both Mindanao and California. I bring my own biases into this research.

CHAPTER 2. BACKGROUND

General Santos City

General Santos City is located in South Cotabato. It sits at the head of Sarangani bay (see map on page 4). This bay provides good trading access to countries comprising the major trading markets of the world.¹⁴ The city has a bustling world-class port used by international and domestic businesses to transport tuna and other products in and out of the country. It has also been used to transport victims out of the country.¹⁵

This city's economic success attracts migrants from neighboring cities and from all over the Philippines. As a result, it experienced a population growth rate of 2.64 percent annually for the last five years.¹⁶ This means that its population increased by ten thousand people per month.¹⁷ Migrants seek employment in canning factories and sashimi-exporters for the Japanese market.¹⁸

The influx of migrants, fishermen, and businessmen also increased the demand for prostitutes. Migrants lacking in skills and education who were not absorbed into the workforce ended up in prostitution. Reports on trafficking incidences also plummeted. The City Social Welfare and Development Office in General Santos City reports that out of the 151 victims from 2003 to 2006, 64 were from outside of the city.¹⁹

¹⁴ General Santos City, "Fishing Industry," <http://www.gensantos.gov.ph/fishing/growth.php> (accessed Aug. 25, 2007).

¹⁵ Sannie Sombrio, "Human Trafficking In Gensan Seaport," ABS CBN TV Patrol Socksargen, http://www.probefound.com/ppfe_video.htm (accessed May 31, 2007).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ General Santos City, "Fishing Industry," <http://www.gensantos.gov.ph/fishing/growth.php> (accessed Aug. 25, 2007).

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "Profile of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, General Santos City," (General Santos City: City Social Welfare and Development Office General Santos City, 2006.)

The following table depicts the total number and age distribution of victims in General Santos City and surrounding areas (SOCKSARGEN: South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Saranggani, and General Santos City).

Table 1. The Number and Age Distribution of Victims from SOCKSARGEN.

	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total
Below 7 years old	0	0	3	3	6
8-14 years old	1	1	5	6	13
15 years old	0	4	4	3	11
16 years old	1	3	2	4	10
17 years old	6	8	4	6	24
Above 18 years old	4	4	38	41	87
Total	12	20	56	63	151

* "Profile of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, General Santos City," (General Santos City: City Social Welfare and Development Office General Santos City, 2006.)

Mindanao

The trafficking in General Santos City is a microcosm of the bigger problem in Mindanao. As indicated at the beginning of this thesis, trafficking on this island has reached an alarming height. A recent survey on victims show that the highest number of women trafficked domestically and internationally came from Davao and General Santos City. They were trafficked to Japan, Saipan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Cyprus.²⁰ The Visayan Forum, a non-profit organization, also reports that 75 percent of the sex workers

²⁰ Ibid., 91

of human trafficking annually.²⁵ In fact, the Philippines ranked fourth among nine nations with the most number of children trafficked for prostitution in 2005.²⁶

The country was also on the Tier 2 Watch List on the U.S. Department of States' "Trafficking in Persons Report" on June 2004.²⁷ Being on the Tier 2 Watch List means that the Philippines did not comply with the minimum standards in eliminating human trafficking, but has been making significant efforts to address the problem. It was taken off this Watch List in 2006 for achieving significant progress in combating trafficking. However, the Philippines has been criticized because of its failure to arrest perpetrators.²⁸

Global Problem

The Philippines plays a significant role in the bigger and complex global problem of human trafficking. It is a major source of women and girls for the sex industries of Japan, Malaysia, and Korea. Hence, human trafficking is a transnational crime.²⁹ The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reports incidences of international trafficking in 264 countries.³⁰ Trafficked beings have been exploited in 137 destination countries.³¹ This includes the United States of America, Japan, Thailand, Netherlands,

<http://www.humantrafficking.org> (accessed Jan. 5, 2007).

²⁵ UNHCR, "U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2005" [http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.html?tbl=RSCCOI\\$Id=4418219234\\$count=4](http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/rsd/rsddocview.html?tbl=RSCCOI$Id=4418219234$count=4) (accessed July, 15, 2006).

²⁶ Mars W. Mosqueda Jr., "Philippines is 4th in Trafficking of Children" *Online Newsdesk*. <http://www.ecpat.net> (accessed March 7, 2007).

²⁷ "Philippines (Tier 2 Watch List)" <http://manila.usembassy.gov/wwwfps20.pdf> (accessed June 4, 2007).

²⁸ "R.P. deleted from human trafficking list" *Filipino Reporter* June 16-22, 2006, pg. 68.

²⁹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/notesanddefs.html#2196> (accessed June 4, 2007).

³⁰ United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), "Trafficking in Persons Global Patters," http://www.unodc.org/unodc/trafficking_persons_report_2006-04.html, (accessed August 5, 2006).

³¹ Ibid.

they rescued came from this island.²¹ Additionally, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) statistical data also indicate 57 incidences of trafficked beings from Region X, Misamis Oriental, in Mindanao in 2005. However, figures are expected to be much higher due to inadequate data banking and profiling of victims.²² The following table is a graphical representation of a random data of trafficked girls in the Philippines.

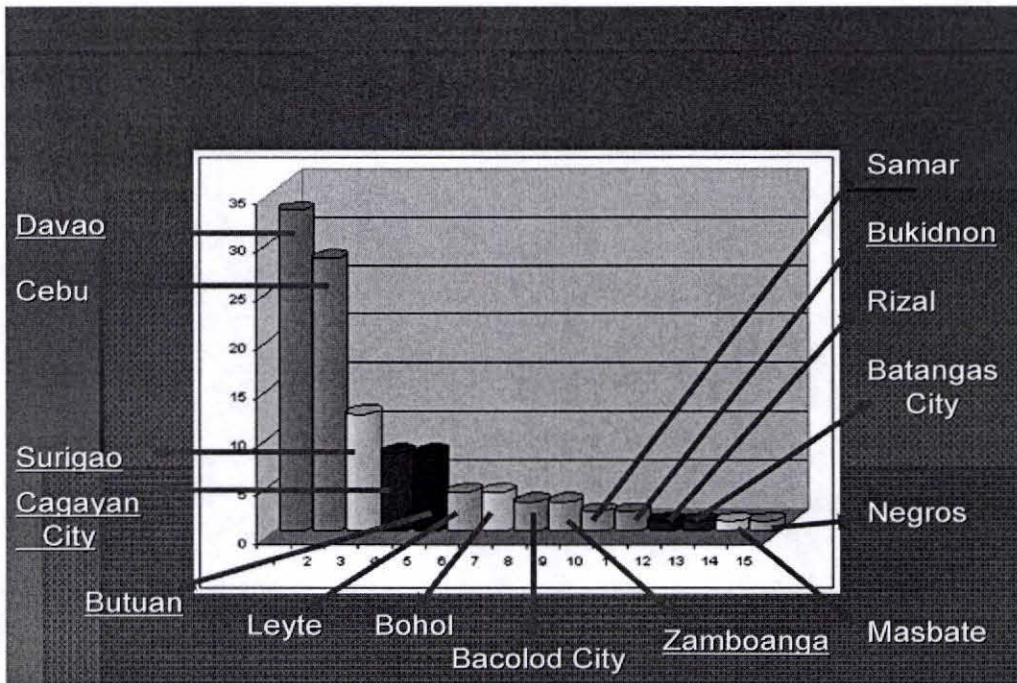


Figure 2. Graphical Presentation of Random Data of Trafficked Girls.²³

Philippines

Mindanao is part of a larger picture that involves the entire archipelago. The Philippines is a major source, transit, and destination country as far as this problem is concerned.²⁴ Between 300,000 to 400,000 Filipino women and children become victims

²¹ Visayan Forum Foundation Inc, "Philippines," <http://www.visayanforum.org/> (accessed Aug. 5, 2006).

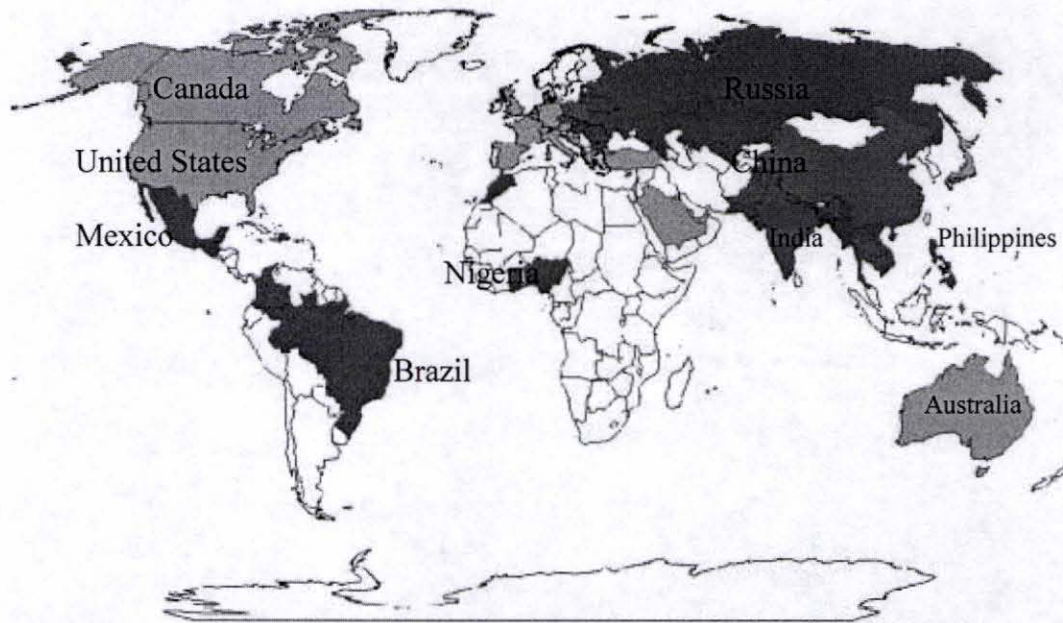
²² Ibid.

²³ Arlene Bag-ao, e-mail message to the author, September 29, 2006.

²⁴ Humantrafficking.org, "Philippines,"

Italy, Germany, and Turkey to name a few.³² Trafficked beings are mainly from 127 origin countries. Among these countries are Albania, China, the Russian Federation, Thailand, and the Philippines and many others.³³

The following figure depicts the most frequently reported origin and destination countries based on the UNODC Citation Index.



Black – both origin and destination
Grey - destination

Figure 3. Reported countries of origin, transit, and destination of trafficked beings.³⁴

Human Trafficking is also fueled by the global market in prostitution and pornography. It earns roughly US\$20 billion yearly making it the third largest organized

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.,17.

crime behind trafficking of narcotics and weapons.³⁵ Moreover, Maggie O’Neill, author of *Prostitution and Feminism*, reports that a small percentage of entrepreneurs own and control the global sex industry, some of whom have amassed a considerable amount of fortune and political power.³⁶ For instance, O’Neil claims that “California’s pornography industry wields considerable political clout.”³⁷

Transit

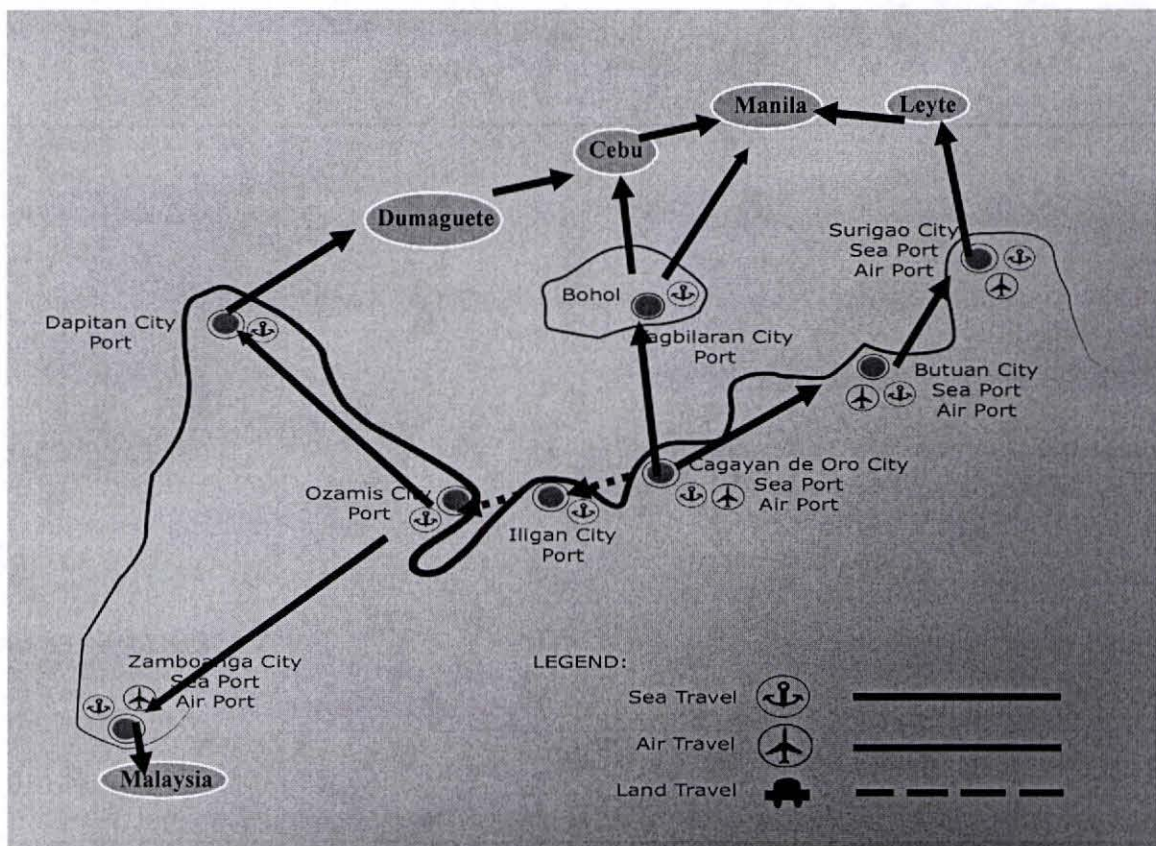


Figure 4. Mindanao Exit Points for Trafficked Beings.³⁸

³⁵ Maggie O’Neill, *Prostitution and Feminism: Towards a Politics of Feeling* (Cambridge: Polity Press 2001), 150.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Arlene Bag-ao, e-mail message to the author, September 29, 2006.

The diagram above illustrates the source and destination points of trafficked women. Trafficked victims from Leyte, Bacolod, Samar, Negros, Bohol, Bacolod and several areas in Mindanao are taken to Cebu and Manila. Rings and syndicates use the Agusan and Surigao provinces in the Caraga region in Northern Mindanao as routes to traffic women and children. ECPAT, a non-profit organization, also identified Davao del Sur and del Norte, Agusan del Norte, Pagadian City, General Santos, Zamboanga, Dumaguete and Sultan Kudarat as local trafficking routes.³⁹

Traffickers transport groups of 5 to 10 individuals in boats and buses.⁴⁰ The recruits are then passed from one handler to the next. Those who are going across international borders are given fake passports when necessary.⁴¹ The age of the younger girls are falsified so they can leave the country.⁴² Once they reach their destinations, they can be sold for an average of US\$1,500 in Europe and US\$1,185 in the Philippines.⁴³ For every US\$24 the bar owners spend for a female, they can earn as much as US\$240 to US\$2,400 pesos.⁴⁴ Trafficked beings also incur exorbitant amounts of debt to their recruiters and managers. Often, they would attempt to buy their freedom by gradually paying the amount they owe. However, once they almost reach their full payment, they

³⁹ ECPAT International, "Caraga Becoming Child Trafficker's Favorite," www.ecpat.net (accessed: July 5, 2006)

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Coalition Against Trafficking of Women, *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process*, <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/CATW%20Comparative%20Study%202002.pdf> (accessed: August 5, 2006)

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Andrew Cockburn, "21st Century Slaves," *National Geographic Magazine* 204, no. 3 (2003): 1-2. Coalition Against Trafficking of Women, *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process*

⁴⁴ Aileen Bag-ao, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2006.

are resold to another brothel where their new masters charge them the price that they paid for them.⁴⁵

Profile of Victims and Traffickers

Most victims belong to rural and poverty stricken families. Many are between the ages of 12 to 30.⁴⁶ Most have achieved only primary to secondary level of education while others have never set foot in school.⁴⁷ A number also come from broken and abusive families and have experienced childhood sexual abuse, incest and rape.

Table 2. Educational Level of Victims from SOCKSARGEN.*

Not yet in School	5
Pre-school	1
Elementary Level	46
Elementary Graduate	11
Secondary level	50
Secondary Graduate	8
College Level	11
College Graduate	3
Undetermined	16

* City Social Welfare and Development Office General Santos City, "Profile of Victims of Trafficking in Persons, General Santos City. (General Santos City, 2006)

⁴⁵ Andrew Cockburn, "21-st Century Slaves," *National Geographic Magazine* 204, no. 3 (2003): 1-2. Coalition Against Trafficking of Women, *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process*

⁴⁶ Aileen Bag-ao, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2006.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

Most often recruiters are someone with whom the family has direct association. They are usually members of a trusted group of people.⁴⁸ For instance, recruiters in the Bicol Region were old women whom the families trusted. These women happened to be *mama sans*, who were prostitutes, and were connected to a syndicate.⁴⁹

Traffickers also use different strategies for recruitment. For example, they offer the parents “advance salaries” in exchange for their daughters.⁵⁰ Deceit is also commonly used to convince the women and their families that jobs are waiting in the city.⁵¹ Recruiters also use blackmail, threats, and vulnerable situations such as sickness in the family, family abuse and disagreements to lure their victims. Many women, children, and their families have been deceived by recruiters, but many are also aware of the situation. Sadly, parents have done the deplorable act of selling their own children to prostitution to make ends meet.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Aida Santos, “The Philippines: Migration and Trafficking in Women.” *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process*, <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/CATW%20Comparative%20Study%202002.pdf> (accessed Nov. 4, 2006).

⁵⁰ Aileen Bag-ao, e-mail message to author, September 29, 2006.

⁵¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 3. POVERTY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Poverty in Mindanao

An overwhelming consensus among social workers and researchers blames poverty as the main cause of human trafficking. For instance, a social worker in General Santos City's contends that poverty is the main reason for trafficking. This is a contention that Mahfuzur Rahman supports in his study on trafficking in Bangladesh. He states that "Unless the fight against rural hunger takes priority now, trafficking of women and children will continue to rise."⁵² In a similar vein, sociologist, Kamala Kempadoo, suggests that the right approach to trafficking would be to advance the rights of the poor.⁵³

With poverty as an underlying cause of trafficking, Mindanao women have a high risk of trafficking because of extreme poverty. Mindanao is rich in natural resources. It is the top producer of bananas, pineapple, durian, lanzones, mangosteen, papayas, langka, pomelo, cassava, marang, and major crops such as sugar cane, coconut and corn in the country.⁵⁴ In addition, its metallic mineral reserves are placed at some 3.6 million tons and non-metallic mineral reserves are placed at some 8.6 billion tons. Potential coal reserves are estimated at 37.5 million metric tons and or 18.2 percent of the national reserves.⁵⁵ It is the largest producer of nickel and cobalt, iron ore, limestone, 100 percent of the aluminum ore in the Philippines and not to mention 50 percent of the

⁵² Mahfuzur Rahman, *Human trafficking, children and women are the Worst Victims: Bangladesh Must Act Fast to Stop the Scourge* (Dhaka: News Network, 2004), 10.

⁵³ Kamala Kempadoo, *Trafficking and Prostitution Reconsidered: New Perspectives On Migration, Sex Work, and Human right*, (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), ix.

⁵⁴ Romulo A. Virola, "Statistically Speaking" Philippine National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB) <http://www.nscb.gov.ph/headlines/StatsSpeak/101005>.

⁵⁵ Cora Fabros, "Philippine Country Report," *In International Meeting on Human Development and Security* (Manila, November 22-27, 2004), 19.

country's fish.⁵⁶ Despite this immense contribution to the Philippine economy, it suffers from government neglect. Mindanao is largely underdeveloped. Most of its people do not have access to basic and important commodities such as potable water. Some of its regions scored extremely low in the Human Development Index Report that measures values such as literacy and access to safe water, toilet facilities, electricity supply, and health care services.⁵⁷ The largest proportion of families living in makeshift homes is also found here.⁵⁸

Mindanao also has the most poverty stricken regions in the nation. The highest incidence of poverty, exceeding 50 percent, is in the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) and the Central and Northern Regions of Mindanao. These areas happen to have the highest incidences of reported trafficking.

Indigenous Women and Human Trafficking

A growing concern, albeit an ignored issue, is the increasing number of *Lumad* and Muslims in prostitution. Mindanao is home to roughly 3,254,549 *Lumad* and Muslim groups.⁵⁹ They comprise about 25 percent of the national population. Of this number, five percent belong to the *Lumad*, the non-Christianized or Islamized group, making them the largest grouping of indigenous Filipinos. Indigenous Muslims make up twenty percent of the island chain.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gloria, Heidi K. and Magpayo, Fe R., *Kaingin: Ethnological Practices of 7 Upland Communities in Mindanao*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishing, 1999), 5.

⁶⁰ Ruffa Manaligod, ed., *Tribal Filipinos and Ancestral Domain: Struggle Against Development Aggression* (Quezon City: A Tabak Publication, 1990), xviii.

There are 18 *Lumad* ethnolinguistic groups recognized by the Philippine government. However, there are probably about twenty-five or more.⁶¹ The Philippine census has never been consistent because of the isolation of these groups.⁶² The *Lumad* are the Bagobo, Banwaon, B'laan, Bukidnon, Dibabawon, Higaonon, Mamanua, Mandaya, Manguangan, Manobo, Mansaka, Subanen, Tagakaolo, Talaandig, T'boli, and Tiruray.⁶³ Traditionally, they have occupied most of the provinces in Mindanao, but are concentrated in varying degrees in the hills and mountains of Davao, Bukidnon, Agusan, Surigao, Zamboanga, Misamis, and Cotabato.⁶⁴ The Moro people in Mindanao are the Badjaw, Iranun (Ilanun), Kalibugan, Magindanaw, Maranaw, Pullun Mapun, Samal, Sangil, Tausug and Yakan.⁶⁵ They live largely on the Sulu Archipelago and western part of Mindanao mainly in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The rest of the population is made of Christian settlers from the northern parts of the Philippines and Filipino-Chinese.

The *Lumad* and Muslims are the most affected by poverty and war in Mindanao. Anecdotal evidence shows that there is a large number of B'laan women in prostitution in General Santos City. This is supported by a report by the feminist organization GABRIELA. This report reveals that seventy percent of the *Lumad* population in South Cotabato, which includes the B'laan are in prostitution.⁶⁶ It is not clear, however, how many of these women have been trafficked. A social worker in Manila says that women

⁶¹ Heidi K. Gloria and Fè R. Magpayo, *Kaingin: Ethnological Practices of 7 Upland Communities in Mindanao*. (Quezon City: New Day Publishing, 1999), 5.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ruffa Manaligod, ed., *Tribal Filipinos and Ancestral Domain: Struggle Against Development Aggression* (Quezon City: A Tabak Publication, 1990), 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Cora Fabros, "Philippine Country Report." In International Meeting on Human Development and Security, (Manila, November 22-27, 2004), 19.

⁶⁶ "Fleshing Out the Flesh Trade," Gabriela, http://members.tripod.com/~gabriela_p/8-articles/980224_prost.html (accessed August 5, 2007).

and girls from Muslim areas constitute the most number of trafficked women and girls in Davao.⁶⁷ Zarate, a volunteer lawyer in Mindanao, also supports this contention.⁶⁸

The *Lumad* and Muslim women are susceptible to trafficking because they live in dire straits. They face extreme poverty because they are marginalized and discriminated against by the Philippine government and the settlers from the north. The *Lumad* and Muslims, according to Karl M. Gaspar, author of *The Lumad's Struggle in the Face of Globalization*, are the "most disenfranchised and marginalized communities in the country today."⁶⁹

Discrimination

The government's neglect of Mindanao is largely due to longstanding discrimination. The Muslims and *Lumad* (IP) suffer from oppression that has been formally institutionalized by the Philippine government. The state under its constitution has an extensive control over the land that belongs to the ancestral domain of the Muslims and *Lumad*. This was a legacy of the Spanish and American colonization of the Philippines.

Unlike the northern islands of Luzon and the Visayas, Spain had very limited control of Mindanao. The displacement of the indigenous and Muslim people began early in the 20th century during the American occupation. The Philippine-American War began on February 4, 1899 and officially ended in 1902. Guerrilla warfare ensued in

⁶⁷ Visayan Forum Rescue Worker. Interview by author. Manila, Philippines, August 2007.

⁶⁸ Walter Balane, "Women, children in conflict areas prone to trafficking," *MindaNews*, <http://mindanews.com/index.php?option=com> (accessed November 5, 2007)

⁶⁹ Karl M. Gaspar, *The Lumad's Struggle in the Face of Globalization*, Davao City, (Philippines : Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2000), 2.

Mindanao.⁷⁰ In 1903, the Americans and Muslims engaged in a fierce battle that became the Moro Campaign.⁷¹ The Americans eventually forced Mindanao to become part of the Philippines. As part of the pacification of the island, Captain Irving Edwards, one of the American officers, stayed in Mindanao. His presence also encouraged the influx of settlers.⁷²

The defeat of Mindanao resulted in the loss of untitled ancestral lands to the state by the indigenous people and Muslims.⁷³ The Philippine colonial administration opened up Mindanao to settlers from the north and offered these lands for homestead. Rural and poor people started migrating along with businessmen and bureaucrats. Land for agriculture and mining, and timber also became available to Philippine citizens as well as to multinational companies.

The state awarded lands with the underlying assumption that most of island's natural resources came under the rights of the state. This assumption was based on the Regalian Doctrine institutionalized by the Spaniards, which claimed all lands of the public domain belong to the state.⁷⁴ Under this doctrine, the Kings of Spain owned all lands not otherwise registered or titled in the name of private properties.⁷⁵

The American Colonial Government in 1898 adopted the same concept, claiming all untitled land under its property rights. The Regalian Doctrine also made its way to the

⁷⁰ Agoncillo, Teodoro, *History of the Filipino People*. 8th ed. (Quezon City: Garotech Publishing, 1990), 247.

⁷¹ Schlegel, Stuart, *Wisdom From the Rainforest*, (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 6.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Cora Fabros, "Philippine Country Report." 7.

⁷⁴ Ruffa Manaligod ed., *Tribal Filipinos and Ancestral Domain: Struggle Against Development Aggression*, (Quezon City: A Tabak Publication, 1990), xv.

⁷⁵ Ruffa Manaligod ed., *Tribal Filipinos and Ancestral Domain: Struggle Against Development Aggression*, (Quezon City: A Tabak Publication, 1990), xv.

1973 constitution of the independent Philippines. It was expressed in Article XII, Section 8, stating that all agricultural, timber, and mineral lands of the public domain, waters, mineral, coal, petroleum, and other mineral oils, all forces of potential energy and other natural resources of the Philippines belong to the state.⁷⁶ Similarly, the revised constitution of 1987 under the Aquino Administration states the extent of the states control over natural resources, including forests, timber, wildlife, flora and fauna, and other natural resources which are owned by the state.⁷⁷

The doctrine poses major problems. A few powerful and influential individuals or families acquired vast tracts of land through inheritance or purchase in the name of the Crown or State during the Spanish and American Colonial Periods, respectively.⁷⁸ These areas were mainly within the ancestral domains of the *Lumad* and Muslims. The Doctrine was also used to legalize the acquisition of lands, natural resources from indigenous groups for “national development, security, integration, and or for the sake of nationhood.”⁷⁹ The influence of the Doctrine on the Philippine Constitution allowed the displacement and exclusion of indigenous communities from their lands.

The most damaging legacy the Americans and Spanish left was the division between the natives: those who converted into Christianity and became “civilized” as opposed to the “uncivilized” people. These “uncivilized” people are the groups known today as the Muslims and the *Lumad* of the archipelago.

Like their colonizers, western educated Filipino political leaders continue to pass legislation that undermines the rights of indigenous people. The events of the nineties

⁷⁶ Ibid., 113

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

that will be discussed under the section on “The Escalation of Trafficking in the Nineties,” are examples of the systematic oppression that has cost the lives and livelihood of indigenous people and the prostitution of their women.

War and Conflict

The settling of Mindanao by immigrants from the north caused violent ethnic conflicts. The years of neglect and repression also pushed the *Lumad* and Muslims into rebellion. Armed groups such as the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) in the seventies forced the Philippine government to pay attention to the people of the island, particularly the Bangsamoro.

The Bangsamoro groups are composed of Muslims from Mindanao who claim a separate ethnic identity and struggled for independence. The Government of the Philippine Republic (GRP) and the MNLF fought on the battlefield as well as on the negotiating table. Their dominance waned after their leader Nur Misuari signed a peace treaty with the Ramos Administration in 1996.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) picked up where they left off. They continue to organize under the banner of a separate and independent Mindanao. Several militant organizations such as *Abu Sayyaf* have also surfaced to assert their power on the island. They gained international notoriety when they kidnapped a group of 20 tourists in Palawan in 2001. The New People’s Army (NPA), the armed component of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), also remains active. These groups continue to recruit from disenfranchised communities.

Meanwhile, the Philippine government continues to perceive Mindanao as a gold mine where it can extract as much profit as they can. They refer to the insurgencies in Mindanao as the “Moro Problem.” Instead of pouring money into economic development, they spend billions of pesos in military operations. For instance, the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) spent 73 billion pesos to “fix” the “Moro problem” since 1970.⁸⁰ This is an average of 40 percent of its annual budget.⁸¹ Thirty percent of the Philippine Air Force and 40 percent of the naval budget and 60 percent of the Philippine Army goes into this region.⁸²

Mindanao continues to face war and conflict that has destroyed many of its communities. In fact, while I was in Mindanao, the Philippine government sent thousands of families packing into relocation sites as they prepared to combat insurgents who allegedly beheaded a troop of Philippine soldiers in Basilan.

Human Trafficking In Conflict Zones

Carlos Isagani T. Zarate, a volunteer lawyer for anti-trafficking cases, argues that conflict prone areas such as the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) are major sources of trafficked victims.⁸³ He asserts that poverty alone is not a cause of trafficking. The displacement of women and children due to war makes them more

⁸⁰ B.R. Rodil, *Kalinaw Mindanaw: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Process, 1975-1996* (Davao: City, 2000), 8.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Walter Balane, “Women, children in conflict areas prone to trafficking,” *MindaNews*, <http://mindanews.com/index.php?option=com> (accessed November 5, 2007).

vulnerable to the dangers of trafficking.⁸⁴ Human trafficking in conflict zones is beginning to attract more attention from government agencies. For example, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has published the *Literature Review and Analysis Related to Human Trafficking in Post-Conflict Situations in 2004*. This report states, "Immediately before and during conflict, human trafficking is primarily related to the recruitment and use of child soldiers....At this stage, there is also human trafficking of refugees and displaced persons, especially for sexual exploitation or labor."⁸⁵

Many Mindanao women and children are vulnerable to trafficking because a large proportion of Mindanao's population has been displaced due to war. More than 120,000 lives have been lost in over three decades of armed conflict.⁸⁶ These unrests also have displaced thousands of families. According to a research conducted by Balay Mindanaw, a group of non-profit organizations in Mindanao, 150,028 families consisting of 797,838 individuals have been affected from March 1, 2000 to March 1, 2001.⁸⁷ This amounts to seven percent of the total population of Mindanao. The affected areas are Region IX (Western Mindanao), Region XII (Central Mindanao), Region XI (Southern Mindanao) and the Autonomous Region for Muslim Mindanao --areas also with the lowest literacy rates for women and the highest incidence of trafficking.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Walter Balane, "Women, children in conflict areas prone to trafficking," *MindaNews*, <http://mindanews.com/index.php?option=com> (accessed November 5, 2007).

⁸⁵ Sue Nelson, Jeannine Guthrie, and Pamela Summer Coffey, *Literature Review and Analysis Related to Human Trafficking in Post Conflict Situations*, United States Agency for International Development http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/wid/pubs/trafficking_dai_lit_review.pdf (accessed January 16, 2006)

⁸⁶ B.R. Rodil, *Kalinaw Mindanaw: The Story of the GRP-MNLF Peace Process, 1975-1996*, (Davao: Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2000), 8.

⁸⁷ BALAY Research, "Diaspora: Notes on the Displacement Situation in Mindanao," *Human Rights Network on the Web* [Http://www.hrnow.org/monitor/m2001_0424_02.htm](http://www.hrnow.org/monitor/m2001_0424_02.htm) (accessed January 16, 2006).

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

The military strike against *Abu Sayyaf* in Sulu in September of 2005 is not included in this data. A fact finding mission to Jolo confirms a total of 82,437 individuals spread all over 12 evacuation centers in Jolo, capital of Sulu province.⁸⁹ Many more are staying with relatives.⁹⁰ This data only accounts for conflicts up to 2005.

Families in evacuation centers are in dire straits. They depend on government subsidies and donations, but even these are hard to come by. Evacuees complain of overcrowding, loss of livelihood, loss of sense of community, lack of food, poor sanitation, sickness, and most importantly the disruption of their children's education.⁹¹ Professional traffickers make their rounds in these areas offering families generous payments and promises of high salaries or decent wages for their daughters and young children.⁹²

The Escalation of Trafficking in the Nineties

The nineties were a particularly difficult year for the Philippines especially Mindanao. Indigenous communities lost a sizable amount of land under President Ramos' Medium Term Agricultural Development Plan (MTADP) or "Philippines 2000." According to Lindio-McGovern, "MTADP transformed rice and corn lands into non-

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Erlinda Burton, *Women for Peace: A Study on the Impact of the Armed Conflict Among the Women in Mindanao* (Cagayan de Oro City: Research Institute for Mindanao Culture, 1992), 34.

staple export crops and the rest in pasture for cattle breeding.”⁹³ By mid-1995, people were experiencing rice shortages.⁹⁴

The IP such as the B’laan of South Cotabato, Ibaloi in Baguio, Manobo of Davao del Norte were also battling the government against further issuing Industrial Forest Management Agreements (IFMA).⁹⁵ IFMA holders controlled 516, 412 hectares. Of these, 64.9 percent of which were in Mindanao and on IP land.⁹⁶ These areas covered Regions IX, X and XI in Mindanao. They were corporate and private investors. They reached 228 in the country by the end of 1994.

Many people were in desperate situations by 1997, a year also known as the “annus horribilis” or horrible year for the Philippines. The peso plummeted with the increased interest rates. As a result, manufacturing slowed down and laid-off thousands of workers. Inflation rates also soared. This continued on to 1998. Mindanao was also hit hard during the liberation of the corn market.

Mindanao is the main corn-producing area and corn is the second most important crop in the country after rice, with around 1.2 million mostly impoverished households involved in production.⁹⁷ Poverty levels among these households are intense and pervasive. Many of the poorest households derive over three quarters of their income from corn sales. Many of them faced starvation when corn production in the Philippines

⁹³Ligaya Lindio-McGovern, *Filipino Peasant Women: Exploitation and Resistance*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 5.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Gaspar, 132.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sharma, Devinder, “WTO and Agriculture-The Great Trade Robbery,” *Countercurrents.org*. <http://www.countercourents.org> (accessed Nov. 5, 2006).

plummeted between 1994 and 2000 due to opening up of the corn market in 1997. It reduced the corn prices by one-third.⁹⁸

As if Mindanao had not been hit hard enough, it experienced an eight-month drought in the same year. The drought had a debilitating effect on the people since roughly 50 percent of the island's population is subsistence farmers.⁹⁹ News of starvation began to surface in the international media. Around 98,000 families were affected.¹⁰⁰

The El Niño weather phenomenon also caused the ocean temperature to rise. It forced the fish to swim farther into the deep where the water was cooler. This made it harder for fishermen to catch them.¹⁰¹ Pump boat operators even halted their operations due to the decline in catch.¹⁰² Roughly 30,000 families who rely on fishing were affected.

The *Lumad* and the Muslim faced a grimmer predicament. They were left to survive in evacuation centers or in small lands to cultivate their crops. Many died of starvation by eating poisonous root crops.¹⁰³ The *Lumads* used to survive on root crops such as *camote* and cassava during the periodic droughts on the island. The drought of 1997 was so severe that it dried up their water sources. Apparently, the Philippine government did not build potable water facilities in their communities to supply them with this basic necessity.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Carmelo Enriquez, "El Nino and Socsargen's Fishermen," *BRC Newsletter IX*, no. 1 & 2 (1998): 4.

¹⁰⁰ Carmelo Enriquez, "El Nino and Socsargen's Fishermen," *BRC Newsletter IX*, no. 1 & 2 (1998): 4.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 2

Prostitution in the Nineties

As the situation in Mindanao worsened, thousands of women migrated into the cities to find jobs. During the same period, the Philippines also experienced a surge in prostitution. In Davao City, the number of sex workers doubled between 1993 and 1996.¹⁰⁵ Many were street children. These children numbered some 3,000 by 1998.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, many street children were also involved in prostitution in Zamboanga City and General Santos City.¹⁰⁷ However, it is not clear how many of them have been trafficked into prostitution.

According to the Visayan Forum, many young rural women from Mindanao flocked to the cities such as Manila to find jobs.¹⁰⁸ Most of them have never set foot in the city and were open to take risks. A former police officer also contends that many of these women did not have any job skills. Most could not even work as domestic helpers because they could not even operate electric appliances. As a result, they ended up in the streets desperately seeking any type of work.¹⁰⁹

Their desperation made them easy targets for recruiters. Many recruiters promised them jobs as domestic workers. For many uneducated young migrants, domestic jobs were perfect because it did not require any diplomas, birth certificates, and other requirements.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Liza Largoza-Maza, 20.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Raymond Cadorna. Interview by the author. General Santos City, July, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ Visayan Forum, *Looking from Within: A Primer on Trafficking in Persons in the Philippines* (Manila: Visayan Forum, 2007), 8.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 8

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

Gina* was one of these women I was able to interview. Fourteen-year old Gina was recruited in Davao in 2006 and was taken to Manila. Although she traveled with other teenagers, they were not allowed to talk to each other while in transit. Once she arrived in Manila, her recruiter took her and a few girls in a big house owned by a Chinese couple. The house had two gates that were securely locked. She was puzzled by this when she first arrived.

She performed domestic work for the couple but did not receive any salary. She and the other girls were not allowed to go out of the house either. Her male employer would even watch them while they took a shower. After six months in captivity, she was able to escape when she saw the keys to the gates lying around the house.

She eventually ended up in a transition home run by a non-profit organization. They helped her file a lawsuit against her former employers. The judge ruled in favor of her despite her former employers' accusations that she was lying. They eventually paid her a fraction of the salary her recruiter promised her.

Gina was relatively lucky because she was not prostituted. Many trafficked women and children first work as domestic helpers. Many escape because of physical and sexual abuse from their employers.¹¹¹ Traffickers then lure them into prostitution. Many more are promised domestic jobs but are actually taken to brothels to become prostitutes. ECPAT, a non-profit organization, also reports that some victims work as domestic help in the morning and sex slaves at night.¹¹² Fortunately, non-profit organizations such as the Visayan Forum have also intercepted and rescued thousands of

¹¹¹ *Visayan Forum, Looking from Within: A Primer on Trafficking in Persons in the Philippines* (Manila: Visayan Forum, 2007), 8.

¹¹² ECPAT-Philippines, *Endangered Generation: Child Trafficking in the Philippines for Sexual Purposes*, (Jakarta: ECPAT Philippines, 2004), 7.

victims who were pimped by recruiters in brothels*or physically abused by their employers.¹¹³

Migration

Many women have also migrated internationally to find better jobs. Unfortunately, many have also been trafficked in the migration process. Around 71,084 Filipino women with Japan Entertainment Visas were believed to have been trafficked into the sex trade in 2004.¹¹⁴ Thousands more were trafficked through the Mail-Order Bride racket on the internet. Others are taken through the Philippine backdoor in Zamboanga. For example, Nena* an attractive college graduate from Iloilo City, whom I interviewed, was tricked into prostitution by an acquaintance.¹¹⁵

While searching for a job, this acquaintance asked her if she would like to work in Malaysia. She told her that she would cover the cost of the paperwork and transportation payable when Nena gets her job. Nena agreed and soon left for Malaysia. She traveled with other recruits to Zamboanga and took a boat to Malaysia. Once they arrived, they were picked up by a van and driven to Sabah.

She became nervous when she saw the big gates to their new home. Each gate would be locked behind them as the van entered while another one opened. It felt like a prison. She was not entirely sure why she was in Sabah until the first night she was taken to a brothel. A Chinese man forced himself on her.

*Not her real name,

¹¹³Visayan Forum, *Looking from Within: A Primer on Trafficking in Persons in the Philippines*

¹¹⁴ "Philippines," Human Trafficking.com, <http://www.humantrafficking.com> (accessed May 7 2006).

¹¹⁵ Interview by author. Tape recording. Manila, Philippines, August. 2007.

The brothel she worked in was high-end and disguised as a hair salon. She was housed in air conditioned quarters along with the other young women. They were even given food allowance that she did not spend. Instead, she took advantage of the other women's kindness who shared their food with her to make her feel better.

She continued to text relatives throughout her captivity, but could not tell her where exactly she was. All she could think of was the chance to escape. She planned it everyday and was ready at a moment's notice. What astounded her the most was that, the other young women did not try to escape anymore. When she asked them why, they said that at least they could earn some money to send home. Some were even allowed to go home periodically. The woman who recruited her turned out to be the girlfriend of the manager of the brothel and was a former prostitute.

Nena's chance of escaping came six months later. The cook forgot to lock the backdoor. When she noticed this, she quickly bolted out of the door with her saved money in hand. She walked as fast as she could towards the opposite direction that the vans that transported them to the brothel pass. She eventually reached the highway where she hailed a passing car. The driver was kind enough to help her. She cried the entire time in the car, barely able to talk to the driver. But by this time no tears could fall on her face. They have stopped falling after crying so much ever since she arrived. The driver finally took her to safety. She was eventually reunited with her family.

Nena has been free for two years. She has also been employed by the non-profit organization that provides her with counseling. They also helped her file a lawsuit against her former employers. Like most of the survivors I have spoken to, she is also in hiding. She has been threatened by her former employers for taking them to court.

Thousands of women migrate annually despite the danger of migration. This is indicated in the increasing number of female Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) since the eighties. Female hires constitute 12 percent in 1975 to 64 percent in 1999.¹¹⁶ In contrast, men used to make up the majority of the migrant workers in the early 20th century.

Thousands of women also migrate illegally. The Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA) reports that of the 7.29 million overseas Filipinos, 1.94 million are undocumented.¹¹⁷ Ninety-five percent of these mostly female domestic workers did not have permits from the POEA in 1995.¹¹⁸ Their risk of being trafficked is increased considerably. About fifty percent of trafficked women reported by the International Organization for Migration use fake passports.¹¹⁹

Many are also recruited at a younger age, less than 18 years old. The sex industry prefers young women as opposed to those in their late 20's or early 30. The latter are considered old for the trade.¹²⁰ Their passports are tampered to falsify their real ages. For example, in October 2006, ABS-CBN, a Philippine broadcasting network, aired a news report of trafficked girls from Maguindanao who were intercepted in General Santos City. They were told by a recruiter that jobs were waiting for them in Kuwait.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ Raymond, 22.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 23.

¹¹⁹ Tigno, Jorge, "Trafficking in Human Beings from the Philippines: Examining the Experiences and Perspectives of Victims and Non-Governmental Organizations," United Nations Global Programme Against Trafficking in Human Beings http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/human_trafficking/Exec_summary_ISDS.pdf (accessed March, 2, 2007).

¹²⁰ Raymond, 22

¹²¹ Sannie Sombrio, "Human Trafficking In Gensan Seaport," ABS CBN TV Patrol Socksargen, http://www.probefound.com/ppfe_video.htm (accessed May 31, 2007).

CHAPTER 4. THE BUSINESS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Demand for Prostitution

While many people were scrambling to find jobs, the sex industry was having difficulty filling “vacancies.” Cecilia Hoffman contends that numerous signs for “sexy dancers, GRO and attractive girls with pleasing personalities along the streets of Quezon City indicated that there was more demand for prostitutes than the sex industry could supply.”¹²² A medical officer in General Santos City succinctly describes this demand by saying that the four “Ss” make up the biggest customers. These are the soldiers, seamen, students, and salesmen.

Soldiers are one of the major customers for prostitutes. For example, a large brothel is conveniently situated next to a checkpoint manned by soldiers in General Santos City. Local officials in Zamboanga City, a site for a major military camp, seem to be helpless in stopping human trafficking.¹²³ Abdullah Cusain, spokesman for Mayor Muslimen Sema of Cotabato City, Maguindanao states, “Many men and soldiers continue to patronize sex workers in karaoke bars that have mushroomed near the military camps in Maguindanao. The task is difficult, because men usually engage the services of sex workers.”¹²⁴ He adds that the sex workers come as far as Agusan and Zamboanga and have been lured by the presence of soldiers.¹²⁵ Apparently, young women have been seen soliciting in bars and public squares where soldiers frequent.

Anecdotal evidence also suggests that women and girls have been trafficked to Basilan to service American soldiers. This demand may have to do with the deployment

¹²² Cecilia Hoffman, *Questions and Issues on Prostitution: What We Need to Know* (Metro Manila: Coalition Against the Trafficking in Women, 1998) 5.

¹²³ Al Jacinto, “Prostitution, Human Trafficking Main Mindanao Problems,” *The Manila Times*, <http://www.manilatimes.net/national/2005> (accessed May 31, 2007)

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

of American soldiers to the Philippines in 2002. On January 23, 2002 to July 31, 2002, American soldiers and the Armed Forces of the Philippines held the longest Joint Military Exercises in the country. This exercise had the biggest deployment of US Forces outside of Afghanistan.¹²⁶ Among them were 600 military advisers, Special Forces and soldiers.¹²⁷ Basilan, Mindanao, the base of the kidnap-for-ransom bandits Abu-Sayaf, received 160 of these military personnel. Zamboanga City in the Southern tip of the island and Mactan Airbase in Cebu received 250 soldiers each.¹²⁸ These US soldiers along with some 4,000 Armed Forces of the Philippines conducted “Balikatan Exercises” in Basilan, Tawi-Tawi, Palawan and Sulu.¹²⁹

Seamen and fishermen make up a bulk of the demand for prostitutes in General Santos City. The tuna industry employs thousands of fishermen who are out at sea for months and even years. Once they come home, they spend most of their earnings in bars.¹³⁰ Prostitutes also serve a steady but large supply of customers from the local community, which includes students, salesmen, politicians, and the police. In fact, the demand is so great that in the medical officer’s words, “*Pati nalang ang mga labandera pinag-ma-makeup at inaayusan para sumali na rin.* (Even the laundrywomen are made over to look nice so they can join too [sex industry]).”

The internet also had an impact on the sex industry in the Philippines. With this new technology, the sex industry can efficiently communicate with customers with

¹²⁶ Octavio Abbilani Dinampo, “US Interventions in Mindanao and Sulu.” The Asia Pacific Consultation of Movements Against U.S. Military Bases, Tokyo November 25-28, 2006, http://www.dmzhawaii.org/tokyo_consultation_report.pdf (accessed: May 10, 2007).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Lastimoso, Mely. Interview by author. Tape recording, General Santos City, Philippines, July 2007.

amazing celerity. They offer a wide range of services from mail-order brides, commercial adoption, sex tours and pornography.

Foreign customers can simply log on to the web to access specific information on sex services. Websites like *World Sex Guide* provides interactive discussion and archive database on prostitution, tours etc. They claim to be the largest Internet resource for escort service.¹³¹ They also invite patrons referred to as “hobbyists” to add any useful information. This webpage is also categorized according to countries and advertises new tours daily. Among these are tours to the Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand and several Central and Latin American countries.

Additionally, *Asiatours.com*, an on-line travel resource on Asia, developed for sex tourism also has an extensive description of cities in the Philippines. It even provides a description of Lake Sebu in Mindanao stating that the T’boli’s have become millionaires because of mining. Incidentally, the medical officer in General Santos City states that the city is having a problem with prostitution.¹³²

Human Trafficking: A Complex Business Operation

The sex industry is a highly organized network of big and small time entrepreneurs. Gender researcher and Coalition against Trafficking in Women co-executive director Janice Raymond states:

Large (as well as small) scale organized trafficking networks operate across borders, actively recruiting girls and women, especially from villages, city streets, and transportation centers. Hotels, airlines, and charter companies,

¹³¹ World Sex Guide, <http://www.worldsexguide.org> (accessed May 4, 2007).

¹³² Lastimoso, Mely. Interview by author. Tape recording, General Santos City, Philippines, July 2007.

often with direct and indirect government collusion, are involved in the trafficking of women for, among other things, sex tourism. Also influential are global advertising, via the internet, magazines, and tourism brochures.¹³³

In many parts of the world, organized crime groups have a distinct hierarchy that includes government officials in the police and immigration departments.¹³⁴ A study of Filipino women trafficked into Malaysia, reveals eleven West Malaysian criminal groups involved in the smuggling of human beings from the Philippines.¹³⁵ Varying in sizes from 6 to 20 members, these groups comprise four levels:

- (1) Persons whose identities are concealed, but are thought to be powerful and influential members of the community.
- (2) The managers who take orders from the top level and who disseminate information and provide directives to the third level.
- (3) The pimps, madams, or small brothel owners who are responsible for the actual groundwork in organizing. They work closely with police and other government agents who make sure that the process will not be disrupted by the law.¹³⁶

The industry clearly holds tremendous political clout. For example, rumors have it that a brothel in one of Mindanao's major city is owned by a high ranking police

¹³³ Janice G. Raymond and others, *The Comparative Study of Women Trafficked in the Migration Process*, <http://action.web.ca/home/catw/attach/CATW%20Comparative%20Study%202002.pdf> (accessed August 5, 2006).

¹³⁴ Wong, Diana and Gusni Saat, "Trafficking of Filipino Women to Malaysia: Examining the Experiences and Perspectives of Victims, Governmental and NGO Experts," *United Nations Global Programme against Trafficking in Human Beings* http://www.unodc.org/pdf/crime/human_trafficking/Exec_Summary_IKMAS.pdf (accessed March 7, 2007).

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

officer. This brothel not only operates within the city limit-a violation under the local government's law - but is also frequented by police officers and politicians.

The sex industry is also equipped with lawyers to fight for the custody of victims. A social worker at a non-profit organization in Manila tells of an incident that happened recently. A lawyer had actually gone to their office demanding the release of one of the trafficked girls. This company even filed a suit against their agency for custody of the girls that they rescued at the Manila Port. Even though the judge ruled in favor of this agency, the parents of the girls in collusion with the recruiters instructed them to run away from them.

The Philippine government is also part of the sex industry by allowing it to thrive locally and internationally. Domestically, it issues permits and licenses to bars, clubs, massage parlors, and cheap hotels that offer sexual services.¹³⁷ To illustrate this, the city of Olongapo, the site of the former U.S. Naval Base, worked closely with the U.S. Navy to test prostitutes for HIV-AIDS and venereal diseases. This was done not to protect the women but to ensure that they did not infect the sailors.¹³⁸ More recently, the Philippine government also tried to persuade Japan not to narrow the distribution of "entertainment" visas despite high incidences of trafficking of Filipino women in Japan.¹³⁹ At stake is P15.86 billion in yearly remittances.

¹³⁷ "The Children of Innocence," <http://www.preda.org/archives/research/childinnocence.html> (accessed May, 27, 2007)

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Mona Lisa Yuchengco, When the government is a pimp. *Filipino Express*, 155, 14 (2005): 7.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

Judging from Mindanao's turbulent past and economic struggles, it is not surprising, while very unfortunate, that human trafficking would reach a disturbing rate just within the last few years. Mindanao has been a hotbed for would-be-victims for decades. However, the events of the nineties pushed Mindanao's poorest communities to the edge, and this made them more susceptible to trafficking than those women in other parts of the Philippines.

Families, particularly those of indigenous backgrounds, would not have starved if they had enough land to cultivate. Now that they had lost a sizable amount of their ancestral domain, the government could have at least provided them with basic necessities such as potable water, electricity and access to clinics and education. Those young and desperate women who survived would not have been easy targets in the city had they been educated.

In conclusion, Mindanao women and girls will remain in dire straights in the face of war and conflict. The MILF, NPA, and other armed groups will continue to recruit from the disenfranchised and war torn communities. As a result, fighting will not cease and they will remain vulnerable to the dangers of human trafficking. However, their future is not entirely bleak if the Philippine government decides to protect their basic human rights. They can begin by improving the condition of women and enforce punitive actions against perpetrators of violence against women and human trafficking. Importantly, they must allocate sufficient funds for Mindanao's social services and continue to work on a peaceful solution to end the conflict in Mindanao. Only then will the women and girls of Mindanao be safe from human trafficking.

APPENDIX

I summarized and translated Sheila's life story into English. It was shared in the Cebuano language.

Sheila is a 16-year old orphan from Davao. She was raised by her aunt who regards her as her mother. When Sheila was 12 years old, her aunt sold her into prostitution. She was not the first one in her family to become a prostitute. One of her cousins was also sold by her aunt into prostitution.

Sheila yearned to go to school when she was in active prostitution. She pleaded with her aunt to allow her to go, but she refused because it will interfere with her work. Her relatives were shocked upon learning what her aunt had done, but they could not do anything about it. Her aunt was a very strong-willed woman and was feared in her clan.

After four years, Sheila escaped from her employers. She was taken in by Catholic nuns who help rehabilitate former prostitutes. The nuns also helped her file a lawsuit against her employers. Now they are furious and are hunting her down. They want her dead so that the suit will be dropped. Out of fear, the nuns moved her to another home so she could hide. She has been at the transition home for less than a year when I interviewed her.

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