

Caring for Caregivers

by Carina Morita



About Saalaa

Carina Morita has been with Saalaa since 1994 as a counsellor and Tagalog staff member both for the shelter and for the hotline. Carina's background is in Psychology (Counselling Psychology). She has been doing counselling work with Filipino migrants in Japan since 1994, with a focus on domestic violence, cultural adjustment problems, family and women's issues.

In May 1991, a letter of request was sent via fax from Thailand to a foreigners' support group in Kanagawa, Japan. The request was for the rescue of and assistance to a Thai woman who had been sold for prostitution and was being held against her will. It turned out that the Thai woman had been sold to a bar in the north Kanto area. With help from a local group, she was successfully rescued and given assistance to return to her home country safely.

Following this incident, four foreigners' support groups in Kanagawa pooled their knowledge and resources to establish a crisis shelter for foreign women, particularly those who have been victims of violence either from their own families or from the society at large as in the case of victims of human trafficking.

With the generous support from various individuals and groups, the House For Women Saalaa, a crisis shelter for foreign women, was finally established in 1992. After more than 10 years, House For

Women Saalaa became a full-fledged non-profit foundation.

'Saalaa' is a Thai word meaning "a place to rest". Such places are found in many Thai Buddhist temples where people on long journeys can take a short rest from their travels, and then move on again with renewed spirits for the rest of their journey.

Saalaa aims to assist and support foreign women in crisis by providing a temporary shelter, particularly for those who fall prey to human trafficking or are victims of domestic violence and may not be guaranteed their full basic human rights in Japanese society. The organisation also aims to find ways of articulating the problems faced by residents which may directly or indirectly result from inherent problems in Japanese society. In this regard, Saalaa aims to raise public consciousness and awareness on issues and problems faced by these women.

Whatever reasons these foreign women in crisis may have for requiring a temporary place to stay, Saalaa ensures their safety and provides both a place where they are able to rest and recuperate their spirits, and assistance as they

prepare for another start in their lives. Aside from taking care of basic needs, counselling and consultations are also given to assist our residents map out their short, medium, and long-term plans for life after the shelter. These plans differ for each person. Some women focus more on legal matters, others on health or returning to their home country. For most, their general well-being is of utmost concern. During these consultations, practical advice on various topics and concerns is also provided.

Counselling and consultations are conducted in the women's native languages: Thai, Tagalog, Cebuano, Chinese, Korean, Spanish, Portuguese, English and Japanese. If the need arises, Saalaa will provide an interpreter for other languages.

In 2003, Saalaa established its hotline arm, the Counselling Center for Foreign Women (CCW). This is open Monday to Saturday from 10:00 to 17:00. Telephone counselling and consultations are also conducted in the caller's native language. In 2004, Saalaa formally established CCW-ATP, an anti-trafficking hotline. The hotlines (CCW and CCW-ATP) are a service for women victims/concerned citizens/other agencies to call for assistance, consultation and general useful information.

Saalaa is also part of and plays a major role in a larger network of groups and individuals who are involved in anti-trafficking activities - The Japan Network Against Trafficking in Persons (JNATIP).

On Being a Worker at Saalaa

It is said that a "counsellor's/helper's tool is herself". Whether we like it or not, issues presented to us by our clients will be seen to a certain degree through a personal lens. It is helpful for counsellors/helpers to be aware of their own personal lenses, and the things that affect them. These may include our own personal beliefs and convictions, our values and our worldview. Present life circumstances may also affect the way we help. Our own physical, mental and emotional conditions also influence our interaction with those we seek to help.

Particularly for those involved in direct assistance, being our own tools means we vicariously experience the "problems and personal issues" of our clients. It is important therefore that we set aside time and make an effort to take care of ourselves. One cannot overstate this fact. A good assistance programme would also include provisions for the care of its helpers.

Saalaa is an organisation run by a core group and a number of volunteers. Particularly for small organisations, having a sound organizational structure

helps in easy facilitation of tasks and avoids confusion about who does what, which may add to the stress of the workers.

We run the shelter on modest resources and this requires multi-tasking for our workers. At the shelter we are trained to be good counsellors/helpers, good managers, excellent baby-sitters and great cooks. These rotations can actually serve as a breather from our usual work as opposed to doing the same things everyday. One may think that her management skills are adequate but may be wanting in the area of folding bed sheets. Doing simple tasks as part of the helping work can serve as a break, a humbling moment and a check for one's groundedness.

At Saalaa we do not have formal peer counselling activities but we do have our 'tea time' every day when we gather to talk about our work, our concerns, ourselves, and just about anything. These gatherings are never structured, but they serve the staff and volunteers well by providing a venue for bonding, for expressing personal concerns and for keeping in touch with each other's lives. This proves very useful especially if you are working as a team. Being aware of where your team member is provides for a better working relationship. A culture of comfortable openness is encouraged in our organisation. This applies not only to our personal views but also to the information that we acquire; we are constantly sharing and exchanging information.

After a difficult telephone consultation or a particularly challenging case intervention, the staff manager/co-worker will make herself available to the counsellor/helper for an informal discussion of the case. This provides for clarification of issues about the case for the counsellor/helper. It also demonstrates Saalaa's policy of sharing responsibilities. Working on a particular case requires a multidisciplinary approach. Some workers will have a better orientation in specific areas, such as legal or social welfare issues. Discussing the case after an especially difficult intervention with a staff manager/co-worker will give the counsellor/helper a better and more objective view of the issues in the case as well as a venue for exploring other entry points for intervention. It will also identify and clarify what can and what cannot be done. This also enriches self-knowledge for the counsellor/helper, identifying strong and weak areas in her interventions.

To further facilitate the sharing of responsibility and a team approach for the cases, we maintain a written log of the details of developments in the cases that we handle. This case log is regularly updated and serves as the basis for intervention by other workers when the caseworker is unavailable. This system moves the burden and responsibility for a case from the individual caseworker to the team as a whole. This is helpful in particular when running a shelter, where there is a physical rotation of staff and volunteers to cope with a 24 hour working day.

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Workers at Saalaa

Working as a team requires that we look after each other. We know that we can depend on support from each team member and vice versa. We work for a constant awareness of our present condition, our own limitations and what we can do at the moment. A schedule is worked out taking those factors into consideration.

Saalaa organises educational and awareness-raising activities twice a year for the general public and also for the staff and volunteers. In 2004, we organised a small discussion group and invited a counsellor who worked in a different setting. The choice for the resource person was deliberate. Listening to a counsellor/helper coming from a different applied field was both a

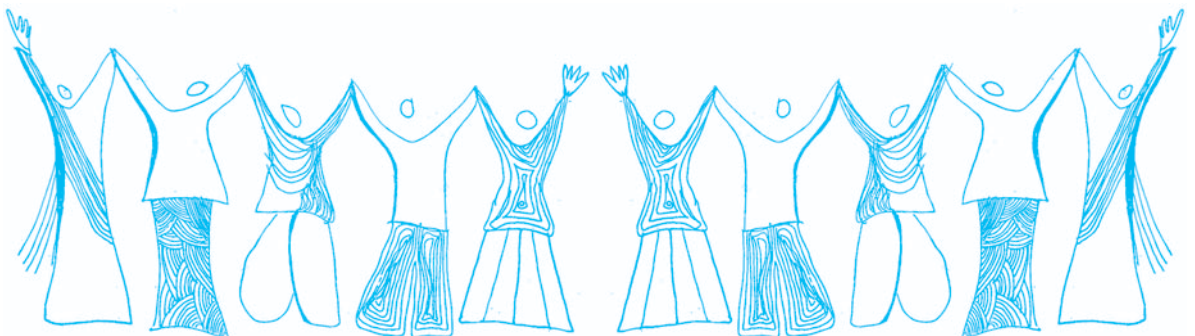
refreshing and enriching experience. Sometimes counsellors, helpers and others involved in direct assistance experience a narrowing of their lenses when they become too focused for their own good on what they do. Taking care of ourselves may also mean periodically stepping out of our own shoes and seeing things from a different perspective.

We also hold conceptual clarity workshops/seminars on topics such as trafficking which have a bearing on our work. This provides for a widening of knowledge for the staff/counsellors/helpers. Updating knowledge and skills leads to more confidence for the counsellor/helper, and to a better way of helping the clients.

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Another strategy for self-care used by Saalaa is organising parties for fellowship among the staff. We usually hold two parties a year. For counsellors/helpers, it is definitely recommended that we take time out to have fun and enjoy relaxed moments when we can be just ourselves and not think about our work. This also becomes a venue where we can socialise with members of other assistance agencies like lawyers, doctors and philanthropists.

Working at Saalaa is like running in a marathon. Sprints are discouraged; constant and regular steps are favoured. The constancy, stability and equitableness of our work takes priority. Keeping this in mind helps us to pace our time and work schedule. Maintaining a healthy perspective towards work, which includes taking care of ourselves, goes a long way in improving the way we can and will help others.



The Role of Cultural Differences in Psycho-Social Assistance Work with Women Victims of Trafficking

by Maria Koleva

We are all foreigners here but not for each other -
in our differences we are the same



Caregivers Working with Trafficked Persons from Different Cultures

Providing psycho-social assistance to trafficked people often means working with people from many different countries and cultures, as cross-border trafficking by its very nature includes departure from the home land and transportation to a foreign country which is often unknown to the trafficked person.

For many trafficked people, returning to their country of origin is not an option because of the danger they might face (including the danger of being re-trafficked), stigma, and discrimination. They cannot return home, and therefore

only choose to stay abroad by default. This dilemma explains in two ways why most trafficked people have difficulty adjusting to the life, people and culture of the destination country. First, they find it hard to let go of the strong connection they feel with their own country and culture, which gives them a sense of identity, belonging and grounding, but to which they can't return. And second, they remain in the destination country not because they really want to, but because they have no other option. Over time, the destination country and culture do become familiar to them, but continue to have the negative associations of all the traumatic experiences that happened there.

Working with trafficked people from different countries of origin raises many questions and challenges for caregivers

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because of the cultural differences our clients present us with. How much do we know about the culture of our clients? How much do our clients know about the culture of the destination country? How much do they know about our own culture when we are also immigrants in the same country? How often do we misunderstand each other? How often is there a risk of stereotyping and marginalising? How easy is it to assume that there is one universal way of thinking and working and to impose it on every case? How tempting is it to believe that our own way is the right way and that others need to get used to it? And in the end, how difficult is it to have a respectful, open attitude and curiosity towards these differences?

Despite the fact that one of the basic requirements of the caregiver is the ability to show acceptance, empathy and unconditional positive regard for her clients, in practice there are still professionals who listen to the stories of their clients from their own cognitive schemata and personal point of reference.

We enter into the relationship with the client as representatives of our own culture and this influences the way we listen to their stories, the way we interpret their gestures and non-verbal signals, the way we store the information they share with us, and even the questions we ask, the way we ask them, our modes for interaction, and so on.

We caregivers need to bear in mind that our clients often see things differently from us, experience situations and events differently, think about relationships in different ways and may feel differently than we would even in a similar context.

It is our professional responsibility, part of our code of ethics, to show them unconditional respect for their backgrounds and sincere interest in their cultures.

In this essay, I will express my personal position on how important cultural knowledge and sensitivity towards cultural differences are in work with trafficked persons. My argument is that cultural differences play a very important role in the work of caregivers offering psycho-social assistance, and they need to be considered with respect and professional understanding. We need to be aware of the cultural differences between us and our clients and try to find a way to bridge them with one aim: improving the encounter with the other, which is the most important prerequisite for the development of the therapeutic relationship.

Working in The Netherlands with Women Victims of Trafficking

Being a foreigner in The Netherlands myself, it is easier for me to relate to the difficulties my clients face in the process of adjusting themselves to this new and unknown Western European culture. When I came to The Netherlands four years ago, I thought I was coming to a world not so different from the world I grew up in. Bulgaria and The Netherlands are, after all, two European countries. Who would expect big differences between their cultures? Yet despite this, I can honestly say that I am still learning, still getting to know the culture, the norms and the people here better. In life abroad, small things like how people greet each other, what behaviour is considered polite and what arrogant, which are the proper ways for expressing gratitude, and many more become issues to consider and investigate for the newcomer.

In the support groups for women victims of trafficking which I facilitate, women from different parts of the world meet each other and receive recognition of their difficulties to feel at home abroad. With each other's input and efforts, we create a safe space where the broken sense of belonging is slowly rebuilt.

This is a slow process that begins with the simple shared identification of the fears and difficulties of the people in

the group: "I find it difficult to say "No" and it is so necessary to be able to do so here...", "I miss the closeness in the interpersonal relationships which I am used to...", "I can't adjust to the tempo of living here", "I don't have enough contacts and often feel awkward in conversations with people because they stare at me...". The typical reaction that follows this kind of sharing is: "Oh, this means I am not alone...Let's think together how to manage with all this." Realizing that we all face the same challenges makes us feel similar to each other.

Group facilitators or care providers are facing different challenges. Even knowing the basic principles of human behaviour from the perspective of psychology, we still end up asking ourselves simple questions. When a client enters the room and just looks down, is this her way of greeting me or is she depressive? Why doesn't she speak about her feelings, doesn't she trust me or does she lack the reflective ability for introspection? When meeting new people, why does she immediately offer them a hug, isn't she aware of her personal boundaries? And the truth can be as simple as the questions are. For Nigerians, it is a sign of respect to lower your posture when meeting an older person, for Sierra Leonean looking straight into someone's eyes is considered offensive, for Chinese people speaking about your feelings with others is not common, and for Armenians the personal space boundary is much smaller and a lot of physical contact is normal.

We may not be able to see this simple truth clearly, but we can stay open to hearing it. As a prerequisite for this, we need to be willing to stay in the confusion for a while, to admit that we don't know what this means in the specific case of this client and to listen carefully to what our clients have to say. They are the only ones who can teach us.

The Role of Cultural Differences in the Work with Trafficked Persons

The clients I work with at BLinN are of different nationalities. The two groups representing the majority of people can be classified as follows: Eastern European (Bulgarian, Moldovan, and Ukrainian) and West African (Nigerian, Cameroonian, and Sierra Leonean). Very often in my practice I have been faced with cultural differences - both between the participants in the group and between me and them. These differences are distinguishable not only at a behavioural level, but at a cognitive and emotional level too. Let me clarify this with some examples from my practice.

Once, at the end of an intake interview for the support group, a young Nigerian woman told me: "Maria, you are asking too many questions. In our culture, this is not considered respectful. We believe that if the person has something to share, she would do this when she feels like." Her remark made me feel awkward, but

I appreciated her honesty and learned an important lesson on behaviour because of her. Now every time I have an interview with a Nigerian woman I first ask if she would mind if I ask questions, allowing her to say "No" and also showing her respect.

Another example, which clearly shows the importance of cultural differences at the cognitive level of interaction, is taken from another group which I facilitated. At the end of the seventh session, a client from West Africa told me: "I know now what you are doing here with us. Finally I understood! You are a native doctor and you try to heal our souls!" I had to answer with a question: "What does "native doctor" mean?" And then she simply said: "A psychologist or whatever you people call it here..." When I heard her say this, I remembered our first session when I introduced myself to the group members very clearly, from my own perspective, by telling them that by profession I am a Clinical Psychologist. Why did I assume that these women know what 'psychologist' means? Now I am reading about native doctors in Africa!

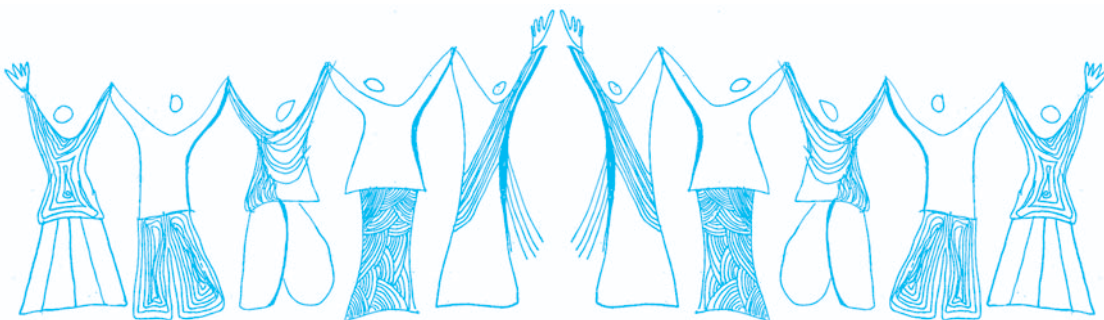
Methods of expressing and showing emotion also vary greatly across countries and cultures. Not long ago, a Chinese woman felt very emotional in one of the group sessions after talking about her traumatic experiences as a trafficked person. Most of the other women in the group felt deeply touched by her story and shared tears. The client herself didn't cry though, she only said: "I feel so sad now. When I get back home (to my room

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in the shelter), I will lock the door and will cry.” Later on during a creative exercise in the group process, this same woman drew a symbol of herself on a plate and presented it to the group: “This in the middle in the form of a fire is my passion. It is very powerful and wild. The blue circle around it represents my emotions, deep as the ocean. And the green circle outside stands for my balance. We Chinese people value and strive for personal containment, balance and control. Whatever happens in your soul, you don’t let it be expressed, you don’t let others see.” Hearing this helped me understand her way of dealing with feelings, which is very different from the way I am used to. Through the group therapy, we found a way to reach each other - she helped us find the proper way for giving her support and for receiving the support she wanted to give us too. Words and tears were not her

form of expression, but she highly valued the moments when we silently stayed next to her with our hands on her shoulders.

In all these examples, there was a point of connection, a valuable moment of encounter, and this made them special. That wonderful experience of bridging all the differences and misunderstandings, of reaching out and getting in touch with each other was realised. My strong belief is that knowledge about the life and culture of the client and an open attitude in communication are of paramount importance in getting to this point. Only then can the behaviour and world vision of our clients be grasped fully, as complemented by their background, cultural heritage and context. Personal experiences again support this statement.



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Maria during her Staff Exchange Trip to Nigeria

Last October I went to Nigeria for a month as part of GAATW's staff exchange programme and worked for Girls Power Initiative, a local organisation. The experiences I had during that visit have stimulated and improved my work in The Netherlands to a large extent. I learned a lot about the culture of Nigeria by meeting the people and taking part in their everyday life, and this has incredibly improved the contact with my Nigerian clients here. Simple things like saying

"Good afternoon" instead of "Hi" (considered a disrespectful way of greeting), asking about their families and listening to their prayers improved my contact with them and made us feel closer. Knowing about our clients' country of origin is a way to show them respect and understanding. One Nigerian woman told me once: "I am so pleased you've been to Nigeria. You can't imagine how happy I feel. There is no need to explain now. You've been there. You know my world."





A View of a Different Culture

I am not trying to say, however, that caregivers must visit all countries in order to really understand their clients who come from abroad. We can learn a lot about the worlds of our clients by simply asking them to tell us, and they will be very happy to answer. To speak about their countries is as important for them as it is for us. Recognition of this fact has motivated me to make some changes in the format of my work. For example, I changed the structure of the support group sessions I run to better reflect the needs of the participants in this way. Every session now begins with 15 minutes of social warming up, during which the women speak about their countries of

origin, what they miss from their countries, their upbringing, their families, communities, societies, their favourite food and special memories, etc. Almost every participant views this change positively, and it has an empowering effect on the women by helping them reconnect with significant parts of their life stories (before the trauma) and with important aspects of their identities.

These warming-up parts of the sessions are also very important for me as the group facilitator. I listen very carefully to what the women are sharing, absorbing every detail and remembering every

example. Most of the things disclosed are very interesting and help me understand my clients much better. I often think about their way of being in the group and compare it to what they share about their culture and their countries. I also often directly ask questions to check if I understand them well, rather than simply assume I do.

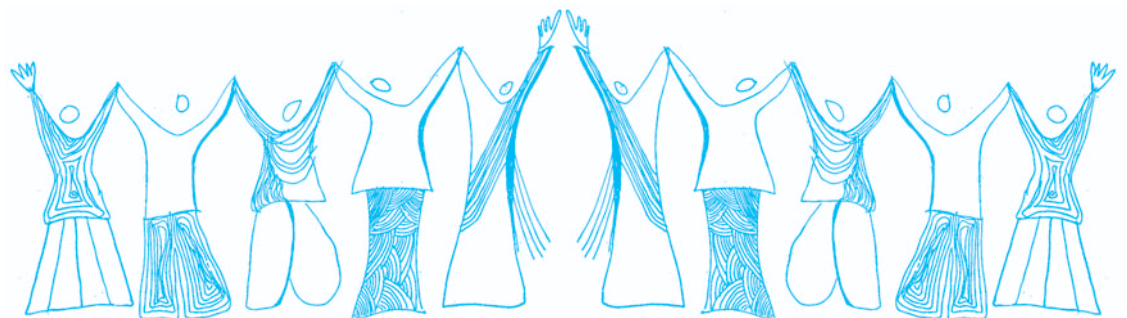
In this specific problematic area - trafficking in human beings - we practitioners are often faced with painful traumatic experiences, which as a consequence lead to very unstable and fragmented Ego structure. But my clients have helped me see that most of them hold one healthy part of the self, untouched by the trauma, which contains the culture and the world of this person. This part holds the norms and the values, the belief in the order in the world, the ability to belong, to be loved and to be a creator.

It is our task to help this part be reborn and to use it as a partner in the process of recovery.

Conclusion

There is a huge amount of literature and research focused on cultural differences and cultural knowledge and yet it still seems like there will never be too much written on the topic. My goal with this essay was to share my personal understanding about the importance of cultural differences in the work of the caregivers supporting trafficked people. I am not trying to be thorough and exhaustive in my descriptions and analysis. Rather, I would like this essay to provoke more attention and sensitivity towards the topic.

For me, working with the cultural differences which exist between me and my clients means staying curious and open to meeting the world of the client, and being ready and willing to connect with the other person. It feels like a privilege to do this work, and it enriches me as a person.



Human Trafficking in Brazil: Initiatives to Assist Victims

by Luciana Campello and Frans Nederstigt



Human trafficking is not a new issue within Brazilian society. From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century the slave trade exported millions of Africans all over the world, including to Brazil, the last country in the world to abolish the practice in 1888. Today however, many Brazilians are facing modern slavery. The largest country of South America, bordering ten different nations, is now a source and destination country for men, women and children trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labour.

Only recently, however, has the problem of human trafficking begun to be seriously studied¹ and reached the media and political agendas. As a booming issue, the problem requires special attention in order to create a more comprehensive understanding able to foster effective strategies.

Migration within Brazil

Triggered by economic push factors, millions of Brazilians have migrated since the late sixties in hope of a decent job in the highly industrialised urban zones such as São Paulo, or at the fazendas (huge farms) in Brazil's fertile rural zones. Economic migrants from the dry areas in the North-East of Brazil crossed distances comparable with Turkish migrants who went to work in Western Europe. Even today, many people are easily recruited with promises of decent wages, and end up in forced labour on these huge and often very distant farms in the Brazilian interior. Thousands of impoverished workers were (and still are) trapped in a system of debt bondage, lured away from small villages and impoverished city slums to be exploited by powerful landowners.

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¹ 2002 PESTRAF-study on Human Trafficking for Sexual Purposes, Especially of Women and Children (www.cecra.org.br).

Frans Nederstigt is the director of Projeto Trama, where he works fulltime as an international lawyer and is responsible for networking. Frans trained as a lawyer in The Netherlands, specialising in human rights, children's rights, international relations, immigration law and development. He has also undertaken a Master's in Political Development at the University of Manchester (United Kingdom) and is currently attending Brazilian law school at night with the aim of becoming a practicing lawyer in Brazil by the end of 2007.

Under the government of President Lula, the Labour Ministry's mobile anti-slavery teams recently managed to free thousands of forced labourers. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) at least 5,100 people were freed from slavery-like conditions in Brazil in 2003. According to the ILO, Brazil is now a "reference country" that shows others what can be done. A National Action Plan against forced labour brings together all the anti-forced labour initiatives, so that the various bodies are coordinated and work together. The renewed Article 149 of Brazil's penal code (Law N° 10.803, in force since December 11, 2003) prohibits landowners from holding workers' documents or using control over their transportation to and from remote farms to imprison them, although it does not make any reference to human trafficking.

Risky Emigration

External migration became a significant issue in Brazil more recently. Official figures indicate that the number of migrant Brazilians was 1.5 million in 1997 and almost 1.9 million in 2001². However,

most migrant workers migrate through unofficial channels, end up working in non-qualified activities and in the informal economic sector, and therefore are not included in official statistics. These informal migrants in search of a better life elsewhere are most likely to experience at least some kind of exploitation, harm or mistreatment, being vulnerable to traffickers and coyotes (human smugglers).

Although the Government has been putting great effort into anti-slavery strategies, only recently has human trafficking entered the political agenda of different ministerial sectors within the government. In 2002, the National Justice Secretariat of the Ministry of Justice³ and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) initiated a partnership to develop a pilot project to combat international trafficking in women for sexual exploitation. Four Brazilian states were contemplated for the initial actions: Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Goiás and Ceará⁴.

In the next paragraphs this essay will try to unfold a few brave governmental initiatives to assist victims of trafficking, and identify some of the problems, misunderstandings and lessons to be learned.

² Source: Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³ www.mj.gov.br/trafico

⁴ Ceará and Goiás were chosen because they are locations of intense trafficking activity, while Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo have the main international Brazilian airports, which serve as departure points for many trafficked persons.

Besides that, and maybe even more importantly, trafficked people are not eager to step forward because they might have lost confidence in others, especially the authorities, be traumatized, ashamed, afraid, or receiving threats, or just want to forget what happened as if it were a bad dream or an unlucky choice in the search for a better life. Opening an *Office to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking*, even when offering a range of services, will not be effective without a clear strategy on how to address and identify trafficked people in a non-discriminatory and supportive way.

In the second place, the Offices to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking prioritized quite different foci in each of the four Brazilian states where they have been implemented.

The different objectives of the Offices include:

- Offer and/or indicate legal, social and psychological assistance to trafficked people in difficult circumstances (including orientation and support for reintegration);
- Articulate a network of local services on health, education and social assistance in order to attend to the demands of the victims of international trafficking;
- Organise educational and informative 'warning' campaigns;
- Action-research and diagnostics.

In this sense, the Offices were idealised to provide immediate assistance, indicating and offering victims the assistance of an articulated network of already existing services. The main concern regarding mid- and long-term assistance is that the support network is not yet prepared to assist trafficked people. In the city of Rio de Janeiro, for example, there is just one government shelter to protect women. However, this shelter is designed for victims of domestic violence and, therefore, does not automatically include (or accept) highly stigmatised victims of sexual exploitation or trafficked people. Training and qualitative preparation of relevant professionals, and monitoring and evaluation of their work, should be integrated parts when articulating a network of already existing services.

The *Office to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking* in São Paulo opened in May 2003 within the headquarters of São Paulo's Secretary of Justice and Defense of Citizenship. São Paulo's state government provided staff and an office, while the Ministry of Justice promoted training and workshops about human trafficking. The case of São Paulo's Office, which assisted very few trafficked people, helps us understand the complexity of the assistance service in Brazil.

Research

In 2005, São Paulo's state government and two NGOs⁵ conducted research as per a plan developed by the Secretary of Justice and Defense of Citizenship, the federal Ministry of Justice and the UNODC. The research was entitled "Signs of human trafficking within the group of deported and non-admitted Brazilians that return through São Paulo's international airport of Guarulhos"⁶, and tried to detect the socio-economic profile of deported and non-admitted Brazilians, their motivations to leave the country and their possible involvement in human trafficking. Through this work, fifteen Brazilians were identified as being somehow involved in the European sex industry and had some information about criminal networks. Maybe more important was that the research concluded that the number of deported or non-admitted Brazilians will probably increase, given migratory flows.

According to this same report, the low rate of trafficked people that are actually assisted by the São Paulo Office confirms the idea that only 30% of the cases of human trafficking are known by authorities⁷. A reason for the small number of people assisted by the São Paulo Office was already mentioned: the

fact that trafficked persons do not automatically identify themselves as victims of trafficking or actively ask for help as they might be reluctant or ashamed to come forward. The fact that the Office is hosted by a governmental service easily associated with crime-fighting might also account for the low levels of confidence in the initiative. Another practical reason might be that the office is located in the city-centre of São Paulo, while the great majority of the women who (forcibly) return to the country arrive in São Paulo International Airport, a two hour drive from the city-centre.

In order to improve direct assistance to trafficked people and reach a larger number of cases, the *Office to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking* in São Paulo is planning to offer services within the restricted area of São Paulo's International Airport, assisting deported and non-admitted Brazilians who were forcibly sent back. The biggest challenge will be to inform those Brazilians whose human rights might have been violated in such a way that trafficked people will feel safe enough to step forward. The Office is also planning to focus on prevention and disseminate educational information about trafficking in persons.

⁵ Serviço de Mulher Marginalizada (www.smm.org.br) and ASBRAD (www.asbradguarulhos.org.br)

⁶ Piscitelli, A., *Indícios de tráfico de pessoas no universo de deportadas e não admitidas que regressam ao Brasil via o aeroporto de Guarulhos*, Ministério da Justiça/ UNODC, São Paulo: 2005

⁷ Ministério da Justiça/ Nações Unidas, *Escritório contra Drogas e Crimes: Tráfico de Seres Humanos no Brasil*, Brasília, 2004.

The Offices in Goiás and Ceará, as with the one in São Paulo, did not encounter a large demand for the services provided by the bureaus, even though the research at São Paulo's Airport identified that the majority of Brazilians who were forcibly returned originated from the state of Goiás. The Office in Goiás has been focusing on the organization of preventive and informative campaigns and workshops, e.g. at schools, in order to raise awareness on the issue. Ceará, on the other hand, launched in March 2006 the first Office to be effective at a Brazilian international airport.

Other Changes

Rio de Janeiro is the only state where the implementation of an *Office to Assist Victims of Human Trafficking* was postponed, since the federal Ministry of Justice found it difficult to identify a willing state organisation to take responsibility for the regional project. Instead of focusing on governmental partners within the state's persecutory or repressive authorities, whose main responsibility and concern is to combat crime, the federal Ministry of Justice - after some diplomatic NGO-mediation - found an eager partner in the Women's Rights Council of Rio de Janeiro (CEDIM/RJ). The first strategy was to involve some NGOs working on the issue, including Projeto Trama, a consortium of four human and women's rights organisations and the main non-governmental actor in Rio. The delayed implementation of the Office in Rio de

Janeiro was positive in a way, since it made it possible to identify the main problems that the other three Offices had faced and then implement a well-founded and broad plan of action.

Part of the plan included conducting research at the International Airport of Rio de Janeiro in order to understand the complexity of the problem of human trafficking and to identify the human rights violations suffered by deported and non-admitted Brazilians who return home. The idea here is to organise a permanent information-service on guidance and initial assistance for Brazilians who are forcibly returned home and whose human rights might have been violated while migrating or travelling. When compared to the Offices, such a service would focus on the immediate needs of returnees, not necessarily identifying trafficked people at first glance (and hence opening them up to stigmatization), but instead investing in some confidence-building and focusing on identification and possible restoration of the rights that were violated. Authorities at the International Airport in Rio de Janeiro, such as the Federal Police, have already shown their cooperation and interest in this initiative.

At this very moment, however, the allocation of sufficient governmental funds and an extension of UNODC's Global Program to Prevent Trafficking in Human Beings will decide the extent to which these changed and growing ideas might really become effective and accessible for those trafficked people who need concrete actions to be taken.

Joint Action

Civil society groups have already been organising themselves at a local and a national level to address human trafficking, sometimes working together with governmental authorities. Anti-trafficking measures should be inspired by the already existing *National Plan to Confront Sexual Violence against Children and Adolescents* and the *National Plan to Eradicate Slavery Work*.

The main Brazilian non-governmental organisations concerned with anti-trafficking measures⁸ met earlier this year at the VI World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela with some Latin-American partners.

A key event at this meeting was the participation of the Brazilian Minister of Women's Rights (and President of the Interamerican Women's Rights Commission of the Organization of American States) Nilcéa Freire in two workshops on human trafficking. GAATW's coordinator, Bandana Pattanaik, gave her a copy of GAATW's Manual on Human Rights and Human Trafficking translated into Portuguese, symbolically showing that a human (and women's) rights focus when dealing with human trafficking issues, an international concern, should be adopted by Brazil, in its own Brazilian way.

Since the human trafficking issue in Brazil seems to have been framed through the paradigm of children and adolescents'



Frans Nederstigt, Director of Projeto Trama, speaking at the VI World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela



Bandana Pattanaik, GAATW International Coordinator, presenting Nilcéa Freire with a copy of the GAATW Manual on Human Rights and Human Trafficking in Portuguese

⁸ Projeto Trama - www.projetotrama.org.br; Serviço Mulher Marginalizada - www.smm.org.br; Chame - www.chame.org.br; Projeto Jepiara; IBISS-Co; ASBRAD

rights⁹, the Brazilian Ministry of Women's Rights has put great effort into developing National Politics to Confront Human Trafficking together with seventeen other Ministries that should be involved with the issue. As a consequence of the Caracas-workshops, the main Brazilian non-governmental organizations concerned with anti-trafficking measures were invited by the Minister to discuss some themes related to adult women's trafficking, such as migration and prostitution. Promising developments show the interaction necessary between governments and civil society when discussing anti-trafficking measures.

Although the Federal Government has not yet found a clear and common definition of public policies or minimum guidelines to direct those policies, National Politics to Confront Human Trafficking, according to government officials, are planned to be declared before the Presidential elections later in 2006. Civil society is able to suggest changes and improvements, and will therefore have to play an important and critical role in the development process. NGOs must be aware that the already largely committed political agenda in this election year will probably leave little space and time to claim for the effective implementation of National Politics to Confront Human Trafficking, including little space and time for the necessary and decisive allocation of governmental funds.

There is still much work to be done when talking about effective and concrete actions that really benefit trafficked people. The federal Ministry of Justice 'traditionally' has been the main governmental actor involved in networking between governmental and non-governmental organisations and programmes concerning human trafficking, but recently the space for other ministries, such as the Women's Rights Ministry and the Human Rights Ministry, seems to have increased. Shared ministerial responsibility for a multi-dimensional problem such as human trafficking should be welcomed, although it also raises the risk that some ministries responsible will simply wash their hands and not take any lead.

The issue of human trafficking needs a permanent discussion on the operational concepts that guide each intervention and will always have to respect the way in which the individual involved looks upon her (or his) situation. In this sense, it is still necessary to investigate, together with those who are directly involved, how concepts of human trafficking, migration, exploitation, slavery, forced work, sexual exploitation and (forced and voluntary) prostitution relate to each other, in order to prevent repressive measures being taken where affirmative, supportive and emancipatory measures are more desirable and effective.

⁹ E.g. the 2002 PESTRAF-study on Human Trafficking for Sexual Purposes, Especially of Women and Children (www.cecria.org.br).

Mutual Support Systems

by Jacqueline Tan



In the search for a better life, many migrants face exploitative and unfair labour conditions. In this article, Jacqueline Tan details how a group of migrant domestic workers are providing assistance to each other and their compatriots to improve their circumstances.

Indonesian domestic workers in Singapore have come together to set up a support group for their compatriots. Its vice-president, Sumarni Markasan shares with GAATW the vision and aims of Indonesian Family Network.

The rain in the late morning did not dampen the mood of a group of Indonesian domestic workers who were

Jacqueline Tan is a freelance writer based in Singapore.

She has been contributing mostly food, decor and travel articles to various lifestyle magazines for close to 10 years, but last year a music project that she was involved in, Migrant Voices, sparked her interest in migrant workers' issues. Migrant Voices has since evolved into an arts society involving pioneer members working alongside migrant workers to provide an artistic platform for them to express their many talents.

Jacqueline is in charge of publicity for the group.



The Singapore skyline

gathered at Singapore's Marina Beach (a hop, skip and jump away from The Esplanade) for a Sunday picnic. With picnic mats and pots and containers of mostly home-cooked food in tow, they were not about to let the drizzly weather spoil their day. As long as it wasn't a downpour, the picnic would go on as planned. The skies eventually cleared and more than that, sea breeze-cooled weather was theirs all afternoon.

Copious amounts of food and drinks were shared in between "the best kebaya" (a traditional Indonesian outfit) and poetry-reading competitions, but 21 May was more than just a fun-filled off-day for the domestic workers and their fellow Indonesian friends made up of mostly working professionals and students. It was the day that marked the soft launch of the Indonesian Family Network (IFN).

Founded and run entirely by a group of Indonesian maids working in Singapore, IFN wants to be the voice of the Indonesian domestic worker community. About one in six households in this tiny city-state employs a foreign maid and out of the 160,000 domestic workers, approximately 60,000 are from Indonesia.

Most Indonesian maids do not get off days while the "lucky" ones get one Sunday off each month. Foreign maids working in Singapore are not covered by the Government's Employment Act, hence they do not get a mandatory rest day. The Government recently rejected calls for time off saying it could lead to "rigidities and inconvenience for many families".

Never mind that fewer than 100 of them were at the picnic. For the committee members of IFN, it was an encouraging start nevertheless. "We trust that those who turned up today will help spread the word about us, that we are here to support each other and provide assistance," says Sumarni Markasan, its vice-president. "IFN aims to reach out to the newly arrived domestic workers as well as those who have been working here for a few years. We want to be a group that Indonesian domestic workers can identify with and feel belonged to. We want to speak up for ourselves and be heard."

Sumarni is one of the fortunate few who gets regular off days. The outspoken and outgoing 34-year-old hails from Central Java and has been working in Singapore for the past 10 years - mostly for expatriate families. Her current employer is a Finnish expatriate, who not only gives her an off day every Sunday but on public holidays too. Her off days have given her the time and opportunity to attend religious and self-enrichment courses at mosques and at Darul Arqam (Muslim Converts Association of Singapore). She has not only widened her circle of friends, but also come into contact with local NGOs such as TWC 2 (Transient Workers Count 2).

Together with a few Indonesian domestic workers, she even found time earlier this year to rehearse and record a song track on Migrant Voices, a fund-raising music album initiated by a local theatre company, The Necessary Stage, and featuring different groups of migrant



workers in Singapore. "I've had the opportunity to make friends and also enrich myself during my stay in Singapore," says Sumarni (affectionately known as Mary to her friends). "Those of us who had the opportunity to step out of our daily work and routine to experience all these things just want to share with our compatriots what we have learnt. We know that not many can come out and mingle, but that doesn't mean we can't start something for our Indonesian domestic worker community - even if we start out small."

The group is still at its infant stage, having been conceived just three months before its soft launch at Marina Beach. "The Indonesian community and NGOs here have been supportive and helped

us all these years, but we feel the time is ripe for us to form our own group," enthuses Sumarni. "This will help us build our confidence and self-esteem. Moreover, we are also able to better understand the problems and struggles that our fellow domestic workers go through."

Top on IFN's agenda is to work closely with partners such as the Indonesian embassy, Darul Arqam, TWC 2, mosques and Migrant Voices (an arts group for migrant workers in Singapore) to come up with training and enrichment programmes. And IFN wants to add leadership training, communication and organisational skills to the line-up in addition to the usual computer and English courses. "It's important we pick up these skills as they empower us and help us find our self-worth and dignity," opines Sumarni. "Communication skills will also help us to better interact and communicate with our employers."

With maids often appearing in the local news for the wrong reasons, IFN also wants to work towards changing the public's perception of domestic workers





so that they will be seen and “portrayed” in a more positive light.

A gargantuan challenge lies ahead of IFN. Resources and funding are limited, but they are not about to let that bog them down. “We have to look on the positive side of things, that there are supportive partners like the Indonesian embassy and Darul Arqam who are working closely with us,” adds Sumarni. “The first step is to get the word out about IFN to our compatriots, not just to the domestic workers but also the Indonesian students and working professionals here. Then we have to get started on our training programmes.”

So what about the more “serious” issues such as maid abuse cases and wage disputes? Sumarni admits that the help

IFN can give is limited at the moment as they lack the resources and volunteers. What they can do at the moment is to “channel” such cases to organisations like TWC 2 which deal with abuse and wage problems. “Our group is very new, so we want to take things one step at a time. For now, we just want to kickstart our training and enrichment programmes,” says Sumarni.

The group will launch officially this August - with help from the Indonesian embassy. IFN may be starting out small, but it is a big step for this group of domestic workers who is determined to stand up for themselves and be heard. And who wants (and deserves) to be treated like any human being - with dignity and respect.