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Human trafficking in Mindanao
personal narratives and local perspectives

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy
in
Social Anthropology

at Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

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2018
Figure 1: Crumbling sculpture in Davao City
Abstract

Academic as well as popular attention to human trafficking has increased dramatically in recent years, while the demands for immediate action have meant that counter-measures, from political legislation to direct intervention, have often preceded research-based insights. Researchers have demonstrated the value of close research in understanding this phenomenon. However, such in-depth local research is still an emerging area, and little work has been done on the Philippines specifically. In Mindanao, known issues include various forms of labour trafficking, sex trafficking, underage soldiers, and trafficking of migrants. Human trafficking in Mindanao is a complex problem, both in terms of the multiple forms of trafficking that occur and the Philippines’ unique social setting. The purpose of this research has been to explore how human trafficking in Mindanao relates to wider social processes. I lived in Eastern Mindanao for five months of fieldwork, from December 2015 to May 2016. During this time, I talked with and interviewed people who had experienced exploitative labour, human trafficking, or trafficking-like practices, whose life stories are at the centre of this research. I also spoke with government and NGO workers from anti-trafficking and related agencies who provided insights into trafficking and local conditions, as well as relevant community members such as former migrants and sexual labourers. In this thesis, my original contribution to knowledge is an exploration and analysis of the social context which influences human trafficking in Mindanao, based on first-person accounts which are contextualised in the wider society and theoretically analysed through a framework of structural, symbolic, and compounding violence. Drawing on anthropological approaches to violence, I have considered human trafficking as a form of violence in the context of multiple violences. Within this framework I also present the idea of compounding violence as a lens to explore and conceptualise the ways that violence often leads to further violence. My findings suggest that human trafficking in Mindanao is an outcome and extension of local social conditions, not separate to normal social processes and realities, and one manifestation of wider compounding structural violence. At the same time, I argue that the narratives from those who have experienced trafficking also reveal deep and complex cultural, social, and personal expressions of meaning, resilience, and hope within constrained, unequal, and even violent circumstances.
Salamat and Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank my participants including the organisations who contributed to this study. The participants who so generously shared their stories and their lives with me each inspired and taught me, and allowed me to write this thesis. Many thanks as well to the multiple organisations and workers who helped me in ways too numerous to count, from granting me interviews and information, introductions, accessing participants, and building friendships. Thank you also to my mga maestra, Ate Mercy and Ate Bebe, who taught me so much more than language, and to Mercy for her work in translating and transcribing the interview recordings.

Salamat kaayo, akong mga higala ug mga magtutudlo, ako anaa sa kamong utang.

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AMOSUP</td>
<td>Associated Marine Officers and Seamen’s Union of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALS</td>
<td>Alternative Learning System (High School Equivalency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLES</td>
<td>Bureau of Labor and Employment Statistics (Philippines)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPP</td>
<td>Communist Party of the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSEC</td>
<td>Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GO/NGO</td>
<td>Government Organisation/Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GRO</td>
<td>Guest relations officer; euphemism for club-based sexual labourers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IACAT</td>
<td>Inter-Agency Council Against Trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MILF</td>
<td>Moro Independence Liberation Front</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPA</td>
<td>New People’s Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OFW</td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OWWA</td>
<td>Overseas Workers Welfare Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>Philippine Peso (PHP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POEA</td>
<td>Philippines Overseas Employment Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSA</td>
<td>Philippines Statistics Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STI</td>
<td>Sexually transmitted infection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIP Report</td>
<td>Trafficking in Persons Report (US State Department)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNODC</td>
<td>United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VAW/C</td>
<td>Violence Against Women and Children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ako, ko</td>
<td>Me or I, short form 'ko'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amerikano</td>
<td>American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apo</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ate</td>
<td>Older sister</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bago</td>
<td>New</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bagong bayani</td>
<td>Modern-day hero (Bago - new + bayani - hero)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balay</td>
<td>House</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barangay</td>
<td>Municipal division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayad / walay bayad</td>
<td>Payment / no payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayani</td>
<td>Hero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bukado</td>
<td>Avocado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cebuano</td>
<td>Language of the Southern Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CR (Comfort room)</td>
<td>Toilet (Lavatory)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copra</td>
<td>Dried coconut meat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daghan</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daog-daog</td>
<td>(To) oppress/Oppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davao</td>
<td>Capital city of Mindanao</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dili</td>
<td>No or not</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dili maayo</td>
<td>Bad (literally, not good; there is no word for &quot;bad&quot; alone)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diri / diha / didto</td>
<td>Here / there (near) / “over there” (far)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estudyante</td>
<td>student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filibusterero (from Spanish)</td>
<td>Pirate or subverter; in the Philippines, implies inciting sedition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filipino/Filipina</td>
<td>Person or man from the Philippines/woman from the Philippines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gago(ng)</td>
<td>Stupid, silly, idiot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikaw, ka</td>
<td>You, short form 'ka'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ispatay pangpang</td>
<td>Killer (pangpang) cliff (ispatay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeepney</td>
<td>Specific local transport, small bus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kaayo
Very
Kamote
Kumara/sweet potato
Karenderiya
Small restaurant
"Ka sarili mong bulsa"
"Out of your own pocket"
Katabang
Helper; generally a domestic helper
Katsila
Spanish
Kaya/Dili kaya
Can or able/cannot or unable
Keso
Cheese
Kulata
(To) beat with great violence
Kuya
Older brother
Lang
Only
Lola
Grandmother
Lisod / lisod gyud
Difficult/very difficult
Lumad
Indigenous rural people
Maayo
Good or well
Maayong Buntag
Good morning
Udto
Noon or lunchtime
Hapon
Afternoon
Gabii
Evening
Maestro/a
Teacher (male/female)
Malunggay
Moringa (edible plant “superfood”)
Mama-san
Female manager of sexual labourers
Matarong pamatasyan
Ethics, correct or moral behaviour
Mindanao
Southern region of the Philippines
Mga
Plural (added before the word)
(Mga) Numero:
Numbers:
usa, duha, tulo, upat, lima… 1, 2, 3, 4, 5
uno, dos, tres, kuwatro, singko… For some situations the Spanish-derived numbers are used
Pancit
Noodles

Salamat
Thank you

(Daghang salamat/
Salamat kaayo)
(Many thanks / thank you very much)

“Sa kadtong mga tao nga
akong nautang ang kinabuhi
nila”
"Those people whose lives are my debt"

Sakripisyo
Sacrifice; Suffering

Sundanon
Prolific

Suroy-suroy
(To) roam or wander

Tindahan
Small shop

Trisikad, sikad
Tricycle, short form; pedicab/rickshaw, motorised or pedal
powered

(mga) Tsinelas, slippers
Jandals (inexpensive, plastic thong-style sandals)

Utang
Debt

Visayas
Central region of the Philippines, north of Mindanao

“Wala ka kahibalo unsay
mahitabo”
“You don’t know what will happen”

Zamboanga
City in south-west Mindanao, common transit point to
Malaysia
Images and tables

Note: all photos were taken by the author during fieldwork unless otherwise indicated. All maps and tables created by author.

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