



IOM International Organization for Migration
OIM Organisation Internationale pour les Migrations
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**SEDUCTION, SALE and SLAVERY:
TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN & CHILDREN
FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA**

**International Organization for Migration (IOM)
Regional Office for Southern Africa**

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May 2003

FOREWORD

Dear Reader,

The issue of trafficking in human beings, particularly women and children, is not a new development by any means in Southern Africa. Like elsewhere in the world, it has a history and roots that go way back. What is new is that it is becoming better known. The present research survey, undertaken by IOM over a relatively short period uncovered graphic details of how pervasive and dangerous this trade can be. Tempted by needs, hopes and dreams, victims encounter their traders who in turn are driven by profit, an often violent need to possess - plus a will to deceive, exploit and violate in order to get it.

As this report was launched in its condensed "Overview and Findings" version in Pretoria on 24 March 2003, it generated a significant amount of publicity in all media, and not only in South Africa, but also in Europe and America. Calls came from people near and far, expressing support, interest, and - criticism. Predictably, also some threats. The challenge now is that with this full report, communities, states, media and civil society find common ground on how to combat this increasing market, and the resulting trauma, terror and bring solace to destroyed lives.

Amidst wars, conflicts, diseases and poverty around us every day - we must not forget that trafficking in human beings is happening right under our noses. Indeed, the fact that a Pretoria newspaper on 8 April 2003 put a local news story on trafficking of Chinese women on the front page so prominently that the attack on Baghdad was dwarfed in comparison, gives cause for hope.

As a short research survey goes, this one has uncovered a whole range of findings that will hopefully engage Governments, and intrigue others, into action in combating crime, often organized, - or in rendering victim support. And not just in Southern Africa, but also in destination countries overseas. As a global migration organization, IOM has a mission to help, and we intend to do so, now, with the support of donors and other role players.

I thank the research team and present and former IOM colleagues who have rendered them guidance and support in their endeavour, the editors, the layout designers, as well as the media - in particular the SABC 'Special Assignment' TV production, interviewees in Governments, law enforcement and civil society, for their assistance, interest and publicity. And the victims who spoke up.

The most hidden aspect of this trade in bodies, regardless of origin or of gender or the purpose of the trade, is that within these bodies reside human beings with hopes, dreams, emotions and ambitions - and even a sense of justice; justice which so often eludes them when it matters most.

This work we dedicate to them.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared on behalf of IOM by research consultants, Maciej “Mac” Pieczkowski and Bernadette van Vuuren-Smyth, and by IOM Programme Officer in Pretoria, Jonathan Martens. It was edited by Lynellyn D. Long, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins School of Public Health. Japie Kotze, Information Technology Specialist, IOM Pretoria, was responsible for the layout and design, assisted by Camille Pillon, Publications Unit, IOM Geneva.

The Rock Art Institute, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, generously contributed the cover photograph of the San rock painting that comes from South Africa’s Eastern Cape province. It depicts a procession of human figures, traversing the spirit world along a thin red line. The thin red line was seen as a thread of light that connected different tiers of the cosmos. San shamans or spiritual leaders, while experiencing altered states of consciousness, would travel along these lines into the spiritual world where they performed tasks such as controlling game, making rain and healing the sick.

ISBN 92-9068-162-4

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASI	Anti-Slavery International
BIA	Blantyre International Airport
CBD	Central Business District
DHA	Department of Home Affairs (South Africa)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
IMP	International Migration Programme
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
JIA	Johannesburg International Airport
LIA	Lilongwe International Airport
LCCU	Lesotho Child Counselling Unit
MIDSA	Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAMP	Southern African Migration Project
SAPS	South African Police Service
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US-INS	United States Immigration and Naturalization Service
ZAR	South African Rand

PROLOGUE

Baartman was made to parade naked along a 'stage two feet high, along which she was led by her keeper and exhibited like a wild beast, being obliged to walk, stand or sit as he ordered'....she was depicted as a wild animal in a cage, dancing for her keeper (Insane Tree Promotions).

Saartjie Baartman was a twenty-one year old South African Griqua woman employed as a servant on a farm near Cape Town. Already past the traditional age of marriage among her people, and with few, if any, prospects or opportunities to improve her condition, when a visiting English surgeon, Dr. William Dunlop, promised her fame, fortune, and freedom in a far away land, Baartman readily accepted his offer, and traveled with him to London by ship in 1810.

What awaited her in London was neither fame nor fortune nor freedom, and the doctor had had something quite different in mind. Fascinated by her elongated labia and large buttocks, neither of which were uncommon physical features for the people of the Cape, Dunlop chose to exhibit her in the nude in front of endless crowds of Londoners, who paid one shilling apiece to gawk at the "Hottentot Venus" from Africa.

Whether Baartman herself received any of the profits of her exploitation is doubtful. Without family or friends, or the linguistic and socio-cultural skills of Europe that she needed to defend herself, she later turned to prostitution in order to survive. When she died, abandoned and alone in France, only six years after leaving Cape Town, her body was dissected, her skeleton was removed, and her brain and genitals were pickled and displayed as curiosities in the *Musee de l'Homme* in Paris for the next 160 years (Davie, 2002).

With the surge of publicity that accompanied an official request by then-President Nelson Mandela to have the remains of Saartjie Baartman returned to South Africa in 1994, her story may be the most notorious case of African trafficking never to have been named as such, but her experience of recruitment by deception and cross-border transportation for sexual exploitation is one common to millions of women and children worldwide (Marquis, 2003: A3). Typically lured by promises of well-paying jobs abroad, many victims willingly accept the services offered by human traffickers without realising the full nature of their future employment, or the conditions in which they will work. Once firmly trapped within an illegal migration environment, and disadvantaged by their foreign surroundings, they are forced into sex work, or other forms of bonded labour, to earn profits for their traffickers. Victims of trafficking are prevented from escaping by security guards, violence or threats of violence, by having their identity documents withheld, and very often, by their unfamiliarity with a foreign environment.

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TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN & CHILDREN FOR SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

1. INTRODUCTION

▪ General Overview

Saartjie Baartman is one of tens, if not hundreds of thousands of women and children who have been trafficked to, from, and through the African continent for at least a hundred years, and for considerably longer if the African slave trade to the Americas can be considered a prelude to the contemporary trafficking phenomenon. Although the slave trade depended primarily on wars, raids, and other chaotic theatres of forced abduction, and contemporary trafficking relies to a greater extent on deception and false promises, with both practices, the victim's exploitation was and is facilitated largely by her relocation from a place with which she is familiar to one with which she is not.

For the same reason that plantation owners in the Americas preferred slaves from distant Africa, expecting their displacement and resultant disorientation to limit their options, and deter escape, so too do modern traffickers prefer to exploit their victims far from home. Most absorbing for historians, perhaps, is the similarity with respect to the scale of the trades. Between 1540 and 1850, an estimated 15 million Africans were transported to the Americas, while some recent estimates indicate that as many as four million women and children are trafficked worldwide every year (Marquis, 2003: A3).

Conducted over a period of seven months, from August 2002 until February 2003, IOM's research assessment of human trafficking in Southern Africa reveals a diverse range of trafficking activity, from the well-known global operations of Chinese Triad societies and Russian and Bulgarian mafias that touch this region as an afterthought, to the local land-border trade in African women and children. The focus of this paper tends towards these latter – the trafficking of Africans, by Africans, within and out of Southern Africa – about which little is known, and less has been written.

▪ Definitions

For the purposes of this research study, IOM has relied on the definition of trafficking in persons that is provided in the Optional Protocol to the *United Nations Convention on Transnational Organized Crime*. Article 3 of the Protocol reads as follows:

(a) "Trafficking in Persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.

(b) The consent of a victim of trafficking in persons to the intended exploitation set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article shall be irrelevant where any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) have been used;

(c) The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve any of the means set forth in subparagraph (a) of this article;

(d) "Child" shall mean any person under eighteen years of age.

Despite the apparent wide scope of the UN definition, the range of related criminal activities occurring in Southern Africa often challenged IOM researchers to identify them as human trafficking in the absence of another name for them. At the same time, the research team has been reluctant to follow the global tendency to interpret the trafficking definition too broadly out of a concern that an overly-broad reading, and an attempt to cluster an assortment of other crimes within a trafficking definition may ultimately result in distracting assistance designed for the unique plight of victims of a more narrowly defined 'trafficking'.

▪ **Background**

In Southern Africa, documentation is scarce but persistent, and suggests that human trafficking as a contemporary form of slavery has existed for at least a century between Southern Africa and Europe, and within Southern Africa itself. At the turn of the 19th century, young women were being trafficked into Cape Town from Europe as part of, but distinguishable from, an increased flow of European prostitutes to the city (van Heyningen, 1984:186; Bristow, 1977:173). Others were trafficked to South African mines in response to the demand by white mineworkers for European women (Bristow, 1977:181). In 1966, *Jeune Afrique* reported that some 6, 000 young African girls were being trafficked to Europe each year, and that many of these ended up as sex slaves in French ports (Barlay, 1968:32). In 1990, Anti-Slavery International (ASI) confirmed that children from Mozambique were being trafficked into South Africa where they were sold as "sex chattels" (Vines, 1991), and a year later, ASI noted fifteen cases of young women and girl children who had been trafficked from Mozambique into South Africa, primarily as concubines for South African men (McKibbin, 1992). Most recently, Cape Town-based NGO, Molo Songololo, published one of the first in-depth studies of the trafficking phenomenon in South Africa, noting that victims trafficked into South Africa included women and children from all corners of the African continent, and abroad (Molo Songololo, 2000:21).

▪ **Vulnerabilities**

Despite its rising profile in many parts of the world, and periodic efforts made to raise public awareness to the problem in Southern Africa, the region remains fertile ground for traffickers who easily capitalize on the vulnerabilities created by war, endemic poverty, minimal education, unemployment, and a general lack of opportunity for much of the region's population. For women, vulnerabilities are particularly acute, with many having been 'sexualized' and/or 'commoditized' as young girls within the context of cultural practices that challenge their sexual integrity. The HIV/AIDS pandemic is also having its impact, leaving many widows, or orphan-headed households; often teenagers who must provide for a number of younger siblings. Not to be discounted is the effect the region's on-going food crisis has had in

exacerbating the vulnerabilities of households, so that it is not uncommon to read stories in the press about parents who have sold their children to passers-by, believing that nowhere could the conditions be worse than here (Peta, 2002).

But poverty, unemployment, or lack of opportunity are not sufficient conditions for trafficking to occur; a criminal syndicate is also typically present to exploit the latent vulnerabilities they create, and so into this tumult steps the trafficker who, like Dr. William Dunlop did in 1810, offers an escape with realistic promises of opportunities abroad. For communities in Southern Africa having to deal with difficult or desperate circumstances, migration seems a natural solution, particularly since so many have returned from South Africa fashionably dressed, with stories of wealth and opportunity to be had in the City of Gold.*

▪ **Organized Crime and Law Enforcement**

The range of organized criminal activity in Southern Africa is vast, with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) reporting in 1999 that as many as 500 organized criminal groups were operating in South Africa at the time, many with African and global networks which facilitate the cross-border flow of illegal goods and people (Gastrow, 1999). Some of the more notorious, such as the West Africa/Nigerian networks, Chinese Triad societies, and the Russian and Bulgarian mafia, are known to manage global trafficking empires, while other, ethnically-coherent enterprises operate on a smaller scale, using their comparative advantage to traffic women and children across a particular border where they have developed a network of official and unofficial contacts.

It is not known how much human trafficking profits organized crime in Southern Africa, but the conservative global estimate is approximately US\$7 billion per year, making the trade one of the largest sources of profit for organized crime worldwide; only drug trafficking and the weapons trade may be more lucrative (Miko, 2000). While penalties for drug trafficking and weapons smuggling tend to be severe, many countries have yet to criminalize trafficking in persons, despite the obvious consequence of failing to do so.

The money made from the sexual exploitation and often enslavement of trafficked women enriches transnational criminal networks. Trafficking in women has arguably the highest profit margin and lowest risk of almost any type of illegal activity (Hughes, 2000:9).

The recurrent civil and political unrest and gross economic disparities that characterize Southern Africa have long generated a potent mix of push and pull factors that, when coupled with borders so porous as to be nearly irrelevant, have ensured a consistent southward flow of documented and undocumented migrants. In most cases, victims of trafficking are a nearly indistinguishable part of these flows, typically displaced from their communities or motivated by dreams of stability and prosperity abroad. The women and children that are lured by traffickers are not particularly naïve, nor are the choices they make necessarily foolish, and yet the exploitation they endure is severe. Many are trapped by unexpected debt that they are forced to pay off in the sex industry, while for others, there is no pretence of debt; they are slaves, forced into sex work for the financial and/or physical benefit of their masters. In either case, their working hours are long, their right to refuse clients limited, and their freedom of movement non-existent.

Most countries in Southern Africa have yet to ratify the Trafficking Protocol, and the absence of domestic anti-trafficking legislation offers law enforcement little incentive to pursue the criminal syndicates responsible for the activity. Indeed, in much of the region, law enforcement officials are unable to distinguish between human trafficking, which concludes with the continued exploitation of the victim,

* i.e. Johannesburg

and human smuggling, where a client pays a smuggler to assist him with an undocumented border crossing. Typically, police and immigration officials who do identify trafficking victims are required to treat them within an illegal immigration regime that offers immediate deportation as its primary solution. Southern Africa also offers little in the way of rehabilitative support for trafficked women and children, and the illegal status of most victims gives them little motivation to seek it. Many shelters for battered women in South Africa, for example, require that an applicant produce a South African Identity Document before she is allowed access.

Many countries beyond Southern Africa are increasingly concerned by the excessive human rights violations inherent in the exploitation of trafficking victims, as well as substantial profits such exploitation delivers to criminal syndicates, and are implementing legislation aimed at preventing the trade, protecting the victims, and prosecuting the perpetrators. This is an example that the countries of Southern Africa should follow.

▪ **Objectives and Strategic Framework: Limits and Methodology**

The impetus for this research was the IOM-sponsored Migration Dialogue for Southern Africa (MIDSA) programme. Initiated by IOM and its partners¹ in 1999, MIDSA aims to provide a forum for senior officials from the member-states of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) to discuss migration issues of common concern. In March 2001, delegates to the MIDSA Workshop in Gaborone, Botswana, identified as a pressing need an assessment on trafficking in persons in the region, and it was pursuant to this request, that IOM's Regional Office for Southern Africa proposed its six-month Research Study on Trafficking in the SADC Region, which was eventually financed through IOM's own funding mechanism.

Given the quick-impact nature of the six-month assessment, and the impression created by several Southern African-based NGOs that an ambitious assistance programme was needed sooner rather than later, IOM narrowed the parameters of its research to consider the trafficking of women and children for sexual exploitation only. Although there is considerable evidence suggesting the existence of trafficking for other kinds of forced labour, and of men, IOM targeted its assessment on trafficking for sexual exploitation of women and children largely because of the extreme vulnerability of such victims, its highly abusive and dehumanizing nature, and the Organization's global expertise in responding to this form of trafficking. IOM chose to focus further on the practice of cross-border trafficking, where the Organization has some comparative advantage, rather than include in-country trafficking with which a number of local NGOs, such as South Africa's Molo Songololo, have substantial experience and a considerable field presence.

At the outset, IOM assumed that South Africa was the primary country of destination for victims of trafficking in the region, given its pockets of extreme wealth, its first class financial and transportation infrastructure, and the growing influence of organized crime. As a research strategy, then, IOM researchers planned to spend three months in four of South Africa's major cities – Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, and Pretoria – identifying and interviewing victims and other sources whose stories could then be traced back along the trafficking routes to the source countries in the Southern African region. During the second phase of the research, IOM intended to locate source communities in the region to assess the reasons for, and extent of their vulnerability. While this two-part strategy proved successful for the most part, some flexibility was required, and the researchers were often required to return to South Africa during the second phase to fill gaps in the data. As a result, field researchers concentrated on Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, and Swaziland, at the expense of other countries equally deserving of study, such as Botswana, Namibia, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, but about which information was

¹ I.e. The Southern African Migration Project (SAMP); International Migration Programme (IMP); and United States' Immigration and Naturalization Service (US – INS).

uncovered in South Africa much later. Since the project began in August 2002, IOM has conducted 232 interviews and identified 25 victims, the first of these in October, with the number multiplying exponentially with every succeeding month.

The report that follows is divided into two parts. The first part, 'the Trafficking in African Women and Children', focuses on Refugee Trafficking in South Africa, Child Trafficking from Lesotho, Trafficking from Southern Mozambique, and Malawi as a Source Country. The second part, 'Extra-Regional Trafficking into South Africa', looks at the Trafficking of Thai, Chinese, and Eastern European Women to South Africa. In each chapter, a trafficking flow is discussed in terms of the conditions contributing to the particular vulnerability of the victim, the recruitment strategies employed by the trafficker, the transportation routes and methods, the end result sexual exploitation and the pressures and mechanisms used to control her. The report concludes with a brief narrative summary, followed by IOM's principal findings and recommendations.

Carried out over a six-month period, beginning in August 2002 and ending in February 2003, this research study does not aim to provide a comprehensive picture of human trafficking in Southern Africa, but rather attempts to construct a snapshot of the trade to which IOM and others may add with future research and operational efforts, and supplemented by recommendations that governments in the region may wish to consider.