

# Methodological Challenges in Research with Trafficked Persons: Tales from the Field

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## INTRODUCTION

This article is intended to discuss methodological challenges to conducting research with trafficked persons in the United States. It draws from my experiences as an anthropologist involved in an ongoing book project on life after trafficking.<sup>1</sup> By exploring the methodological difficulties and ethical concerns that I have faced as an anthropologist, I hope to lay bare some of the methodological challenges that researchers across disciplines, particularly social scientists who rely on ethnographic research, are likely to confront when examining this issue. The central focus of this article is on the possibilities of collaboration between academic researchers, trafficked persons, and social service providers on advocacy, research and writing projects, as well as on the possibilities of trafficked persons speaking and writing for themselves. It also considers the role trafficked persons can play in building what the media and activists loosely term the “anti-trafficking movement” and asks what would have to happen for them to move beyond their “victim” status where they are called upon to provide “testimony” about trafficking, to participating in the decision making of the direction of the movement. Since it identifies obstacles to trafficked persons (to whom I refer to in this article as ex-captives)<sup>2</sup> taking the podium and picking up a pen, it explores ways to mitigate potential problems when researchers “speak for” ex-captives.

While much media attention and dialogues among nations have focused on the origins and prevention of trafficking, my own ongoing research project picks up where these discussions leave off. It explores what happens once women

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and men are trafficked, and seeks to explain – through ethnography – how they begin to rebuild their lives and regain agency in the wake of being trafficked. By not focusing on the origins of trafficking, but on its effects, this research contributes to ongoing debates among front-line social service providers, labour advocates, and attorneys on how best to protect the rights and facilitate the well-being of ex-captives. Although there has been a great interest in trafficking in the media and by the Bush Administration at a national policy level, attention seems to fizzle out once trafficked persons have escaped or have been rescued and their stories *in* trafficking have been told. Perhaps this is so because their story after their emancipation is one similar to so many immigrants, one about the challenges of the daily, mundane struggles to build a new life in a new place. It is an ongoing story, less finite and flashy than the story of their escape or rescue.

## ANTHROPOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION

Researchers on trafficking find themselves writing on an issue that has been sensationalized, misrepresented, and politicized. With the bulk of media treatment only sensationalizing trafficking – especially in stories of sexual exploitation<sup>3</sup> – social scientists must, in contrast, provide carefully researched on-the-ground accounts of life in and after trafficking. While the issue of trafficking for sexual exploitation has been over-explored in the media – including their use of images that exemplify what Kleinman and Kleinman refer to as the “commercialization of suffering”, the raw spectacle-making of violence, abuse, and suffering – other forms of slavery have gone ignored (1997: 19). The Bush Administration, too, not only has focused on trafficking for sexual exploitation, but also has conflated voluntary prostitution with sex trafficking.<sup>4</sup> And, perhaps nothing is more disputed than the numbers of persons who are trafficked worldwide and to the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Anthropologists can make critical contributions based on first-hand interviews to this environment where ideology passes as knowledge. To date, there is a scarcity of research on trafficking to the United States. Outside of legal scholarship, reports in the media, and organizations' documents, there exists little academic writing on trafficking to the United States.<sup>6</sup> Notably absent is writing by trafficked persons themselves, with one exception, the powerful account written by ex-child slave Jean-Robert Cadet (1998). Nor is there much scholarship on their experiences after trafficking. While making his case for the usefulness of anthropologists' writing, Jeremy MacClancy writes that “transmitting words of the marginalized, the poor, and the ignored can bring high-flying approaches back down to the ground and reintroduce the concerns of ordinary people into

the equations of policymakers” (2002: 13). In the case of trafficking, legislation already has been passed to protect trafficked persons (the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) passed in October 2000) and a new visa has been created that allows them to stay in the United States (a T visa). Anthropologists, with their ground-up perspective, have much to contribute to this issue that most often has been discussed from the top-down.<sup>7</sup> Since “trafficked persons” are spoken of as one entity, anthropologists’ focus on “the particular” can help begin to document the many differences among each trafficking case.

Discussions about “public anthropology”, along with work in critical medical anthropology, are areas of scholarship from which researchers working on trafficking could draw and contribute (Scheper-Hughes, 1995: 410). Medical doctor and anthropologist Paul Farmer’s writings are among the best examples of research labelled “public anthropology”, in which he not only analyses the workings and consequences of structural violence,<sup>8</sup> but is also, in Scheper-Hughes’ language, “politically committed and morally engaged” (Farmer et al., 1996; Farmer, 1999, 2003).<sup>9</sup> Building on these discussions of structural violence and public anthropology, as well as liberation theology, medical anthropologist Jennifer Hirsch calls for critical medical anthropologists to conduct research on migrant health within a framework of “liberation anthropology”. Such an approach would not just involve a “sensitive form of ethnographic storytelling” in which the ethnographer-writer gives “voice, as best she can, to those who have been silenced”, but also, much like liberation theology, would involve “a commitment to social analysis which reveals the underlying causes of suffering and ill health” (Hirsch, 2003: 231). Similarly, I argue that trafficking researchers not only are tasked with telling ex-captives’ stories until ex-captives are ready and safe enough to do so for themselves, but also with laying bare and analysing the structures through which modern-day slavery – and less-severe forms of exploitation – thrive.

## THE “GOLDEN MIDDLE”

The central issues of this article emerge from the challenges to doing research with ex-captives who are both an extremely vulnerable population, as well as one that is extraordinarily diverse and geographically dispersed. Since research with ex-captives in the United States is in the initial stages, researchers, social service providers, and attorneys are still working through the difficulty of balancing ex-captives’ safety and well-being with the political need to bring attention to the conditions of trafficked persons.<sup>10</sup> I believe the sustainability of an anti-trafficking movement in the United States hinges not only on ex-captives telling their own stories but also on their taking an active leadership role in its

direction, agenda-setting, and policy formulation. As Kleinman and Kleinman observe, bringing “local participants (not merely national experts) into the process of developing and assessing programs” not only facilitates “policy making from the ground-up” but also underscores “what is at stake for participants in local worlds” (1997: 18). Ex-captives’ participation in the struggle to end trafficking also could wrest the anti-trafficking message away from a sensationalistic media. This reorientation could help frame the issue as a labour issue that involves a spectrum of abuse, with trafficking at one end of the spectrum.

Researchers and social service providers currently are working through how best to reach what anthropologist Elzbieta Gozdziaik refers to as a “golden middle”, a kind of middle research ground in which researchers have access to ex-captives (and vice versa), while ex-captives’ safety and privacy are assured (Personal Communication, 2004). Decades of research with women who have experienced domestic violence – as well as activism by them – offers one model of how best to secure ex-captives’ safety and how to collaborate with “victim” advocates.<sup>11</sup> Social service providers and attorneys need to protect ex-captives not just from their traffickers, but also from exploitation in the media. Since trafficking became a favourite topic in the media, ex-captives’ case managers and attorneys have had to handle a barrage of media requests to “present victims”. Case managers and attorneys have been understandably reluctant to parade their clients in front of the media. Considering their clients already might have had to tell their stories not only to them, but also to the police and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), it is no surprise they seek to protect clients from re-telling their story to journalists – or to researchers. Trauma counsellors, in particular, warn of the risk of “secondary trauma” that may occur with multiple recounting of painful memories.

## METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

The methodological challenges are daunting when studying trafficking to the United States. The first challenge is the diversity of trafficking contexts: trafficked persons come from a variety of source countries, end up scattered throughout sites in the United States, and are forced into different forms of labour and servitude. They speak different languages, have different socioeconomic backgrounds, varying education and work histories, as well as differences in age, sex, and race/ethnicity. They also have different experiences entering and exiting their trafficking experiences, including experiences of transit. The length of time they were held in servitude varies from weeks to years, and while some experience psychological coercion others also undergo physical brutality. As Sue Shriner, the Victim-Witness Coordinator for the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement describes, “Agents ask me for profiles

of traffickers and their victims. I tell them there is no one m.o. of a typical trafficker, there is no typical victim, and the paths that lead them here are varied. I've never seen anything like this before." In sum, a researcher who works in one site, or on one kind of forced labour, or with trafficked persons from one source country, can not easily extrapolate to speak of experiences in other sites, other forms of forced labour, or trafficked persons from other source countries. General portraits can be drawn, and below I discuss some characteristics that cases sometimes share, but for researchers these generalizations can be frustratingly imprecise. Indeed, some trafficking cases are so vastly different from one another that it may not be instructive to draw many connections among them.

To conduct research on trafficking to the United States that highlights the perspective of trafficked persons themselves means working closely with social service providers. Because the fight against trafficking to the United States is relatively young, and persons designated as "trafficked" only have been under the care of social service organizations for the past few years, researchers often can make only preliminary analyses. Three large trafficking cases led to the development of trafficking programmes at three service providers, all of which have emerged as national leaders in assisting trafficked persons: the El Monte sweatshop case in Los Angeles gave rise to the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (CAST); the "deaf Mexican" panhandling case was handled by Safe Horizon, New York City's largest non-profit victim assistance, advocacy, and violence prevention organization; and the American Samoa sweatshop case has been handled by Boat People SOS. Although other organizations have handled trafficking cases over the years (even before the US Government labelled them as such), such as the Break the Chain Campaign in Washington, DC; Heartland Alliance (Midwest Immigrant and Human Rights Center) in Chicago; the Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Anti-Slavery Campaign in Immokalee, Florida; and the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center's LUCHA programme in Miami, few other service providers have had much direct, hands-on experience with trafficked persons. Indeed, some service providers only came into existence over the past couple of years, in the wake of the passage in 2000 of the TVPA.

### **Participant observation – a possibility?**

Since, to date, there are no communities of resettled trafficked persons in the United States, my ongoing research project is not based on participant observation of a usual kind, the hallmark of which is staying in one place and talking to the same people over time (Peacock, 1986). Even those who were resettled after the largest case in the United States – the American Samoa case – are not living together in any one place in the United States.<sup>12</sup> I have chosen to conduct inter-

views in different cities where ex-captives have come forward to their case managers requesting to be put in touch with researchers and journalists,<sup>13</sup> or their case managers have identified them as psychologically and emotionally ready to – and interested in – speaking with researchers. At any given time, service providers may have only a couple of clients who have “graduated” from their case management (CAST in Los Angeles has an actual graduation ceremony), let alone interested in speaking with researchers.

The dilemma for the researcher (who inevitably has limited time and resources) is whether to focus on one resettlement site – one city – or to conduct multi-site interviews. The former means the interviews with trafficked persons in one site could be so specific that they would not necessarily clarify a bigger picture of life in or after trafficking in the United States. The latter means the researcher could risk forgoing the ethnographic richness that accompanies conducting research in one place over time (participant observation). And, without conducting informal interviews over time, the researcher is left to rely on the vicissitudes of the scheduled “interview moment”. The researcher might miss out on what can be learned by what MacClancy describes as “serendipity”, those “chance events” and “accidental encounters” that “may be surprising and at first incomprehensible” (MacClancy, 2002: 6). When possible, I keep in touch with ex-captives I meet in scheduled interviews through social service agencies. In this way, I engage in participant observation in the traditional anthropological sense, by following how they have been settling into their new communities, jobs, and housing, as well as how they create and maintain new social networks of friends, neighbours, and co-workers.

Research that focuses on particular cities, such as ECPAT’s “International Trafficking of Children to New York City for Sexual Purposes” by Mia Spangenberg (2002), or on trafficking to a particular state or region, such as Florida State University’s Center for the Advancement of Human Rights’ “Florida Responds to Human Trafficking” (2004), is one other approach to research design that could maximize both breadth and depth of studies. Given the logistical challenges of conducting fieldwork in multiple sites, trafficking researchers also could work collaboratively to produce comparative research across sites within the United States, particularly since trafficked persons show up in large cities and small towns.<sup>14</sup>

### **Early stage of trafficking activities**

The learning curve about trafficked persons’ needs is steep, even for organizations that have experience assisting trafficked persons, since as service providers and trauma counsellors report, each case of trafficking has distinct characteristics. Joy Zarembka, the Director of the Break the Chain Campaign,

an advocacy and direct service organization that works with domestic workers in the Washington, DC area explains, “Every case is a little bit different, even cases that look similar, there is always some twist, some difference that makes each case unlike the others”. Maria José Fletcher, an attorney in Miami at the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center who directs the LUCHA Program, observes that these differences demand that social service agencies treat their clients “as individuals” and not lump them together as “trafficking victims”. She suggests that this can happen in ways similar to the “individual safety plans” that domestic violence counsellors craft for their clients. Nor is it easy to discern the kinds of trauma suffered by trafficked persons. Dr. Judy Okawa, a licensed clinical psychologist who is the former Director of the Program for Survivors of Torture and Severe Trauma at the Center for Multicultural Human Services in Falls Church, Virginia, and Farinaz Amiresi, the Trafficking Project Coordinator at the Center, assert that few are looking at the mental health implications of trafficking. “We are all in on the ground floor,” Okawa explains, since, unlike victims of torture who are a “pure sample” because they must meet the United Nations definitions of torture, “we are seeing a more diverse group of trafficking victims and the symptom response is not as homogenous”.

Locating trafficked persons continues to stymie the “protection” part of the trafficking equation (the US Government has developed a three-pronged approach to fighting trafficking: prevention, protection, and prosecution, which keeps service providers concerned about their future grant success. It remains to be seen whether the Bush Administration’s new public awareness campaign, “Rescue and Restore” will significantly increase the identification and rescue of persons held in slavery. Even when trafficked persons enter emergency rooms, police stations, or call service providers, they usually do not describe themselves as trafficked, but rather seek help for other issues such as for immigration or domestic violence issues. Since trafficking can be part of what Maria José Fletcher of LUCHA describes as “a continuum of violence” and exploitation in trafficked persons’ lives, they may not see themselves as “victims of trafficking”. Fletcher explains, “None of the women tell me ‘I’m a victim of trafficking’, rather they say ‘I need help to not get deported’”. Nadra Qadeer, Director of the Anti-Trafficking Program at Safe Horizon in New York City, echoed this observation: “People do not talk about trafficking ever. They talk about abuse, things like ‘My boyfriend beat me.’”

## OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT

I now turn to the methodological challenges in my own research on life after trafficking. One question central to my research project asks how severely

exploited persons begin to trust others again. It also considers the role community support plays in this process. The issue of trust emerges not only as critical to ex-captives' recovery and resettlement, but also to the role ex-captives can play in trafficking research – and in building an “anti-trafficking movement”. I use the term “trust” in ways similar to E. Valentine Daniel and John Chr. Knudsen who analyse how refugees both “mistrust” and are “mistrusted” (1995). How ex-captives trust and are trusted in their new communities are key to rebuilding their lives after trafficking. Trafficked persons who were freed following raids of brothels, factories, or private homes (in the case of domestic servitude) by law enforcement, almost immediately are asked to trust their liberators. Soon after they might find themselves interviewed not only by the local police, but also by the FBI, immigration officials, state and federal prosecutors, and then, their own lawyers. Julie, an Indonesian woman who was in domestic slavery in California worried that the police and other “authority” figures would traffic her again: “You do not know any one. It’s hard to trust other people. After I got out, everyone was asking me questions. I thought what if they do the same thing to me again?”

In the process, social service organizations which tend to the multiple needs of trafficked persons, see themselves as trustworthy, yet there is no self-evident reason ex-captives would automatically regard them as such. One community-based educator on trafficking who does outreach to ethnic-based community organizations in New York City reports that there are many disincentives for trafficked persons to come forward. They might be reluctant to come forward out of worry that their “work places” might be raided and their friends (some of whom might not be working in slave conditions) would lose their jobs. Often they do not trust the police and believe the police would not trust them nor believe their stories of servitude. Given that traffickers can be well-known and even respected members in their communities of co-ethnics, trafficked persons also might not believe that they would be safe if they came forward – even to the most well-meaning and well-run community-based organizations. Florrie Burke, Senior Director of the Anti-Trafficking Program at Safe Horizon in New York City, describes the “tentacles” of some rings as so far-reaching – including back to trafficked persons’ home countries – that some of her clients are deeply fearful for their and their families’ safety.

There are many pressures on trafficked persons to maintain silences about their status.<sup>15</sup> Although similarities emerge between refugees and trafficked persons, especially on issues related to what Gina Buijs calls the “remaking of self”, the groups often diverge on the issue of community support (1993). Trauma counselors who work with trafficked persons in the United States report that the larger community of immigrants where trafficked persons settle (usually composed



of co-ethnics) often stigmatizes and rejects trafficked persons. Consider the following experience of an ex-captive who chose not to remain quiet about her experience. At a Haitian community-based organization meeting in New York City, a woman spoke about her experiences being trafficked. The crowd was unsympathetic, questioned her judgement, and criticized her ruthlessly. Since then, the organization has not heard from her again. By all accounts, much more outreach and education needs to reach community-based organizations that work with immigrant groups, the staffs of which might hold misconceptions or stereotypes about trafficked persons. Maria José Fletcher, of LUCHA in Miami, describes conducting a workshop in a southern state with a community-based organization where the staff referred to the co-ethnic women in the town's brothels as *putas* (whores) and was unaware that some of these women might be held against their will.

## EX-CAPTIVES' ROLE IN RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

On many occasions throughout this research I have heard social service providers and human rights attorneys liken this "anti-trafficking movement" to that of the domestic violence movement. However, whereas domestic violence victim-advocates took an active leadership role in that fight, trafficked persons were not a significant part of the fight for anti-trafficking legislation, nor are they now – with the exception of members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers<sup>16</sup> – shaping the direction of the anti-trafficking "movement". Unlike the research and advocacy environment in Australia that Veronica Strang describes, where there is a "small but growing number of Aboriginal academics, lawyers and political activists" who speak for themselves (2003: 180), the anti-trafficking movement is still so new in the United States that most often non-ex-captives must "speak for" most ex-captives if their story is to be told at this time.<sup>17</sup> The movement activists, at this early stage of the fight against trafficking, are generally elites, often human rights attorneys. In Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink's now-classic book on transnational advocacy networks, they argue that "in a world where the voices of states have predominated", transnational advocacy networks have opened channels to bring "alternative visions and information into international debate" (1998: x). In the case of trafficked persons to the United States, they have been voiceless for different reasons: because of fear of reprisals from their traffickers, their stage in the recovery process, and concern that their community of co-ethnics will stigmatize them. Given these obstacles, it is possible that few ex-captives will ever step out from the anonymity of their case managers' offices, to give interviews to researchers, let alone public presentations or press conferences as part of "anti-trafficking movement" activities.

However, while speaking in public about one's experiences in trafficking is out of the question for some ex-captives, for others it can be therapeutic and empowering. One courageous young woman, Maria, who was in domestic servitude, has chosen to speak publicly both to the mainstream press as well as to audiences at events sponsored by the Philippine Forum in New York City (a non-profit organization that provides services and advocacy for Filipinos, particularly domestic workers). Maria explains that she speaks about her experiences in trafficking since she knows that she is "not the only who was in a bad situation", but, rather, "many others have scary situations". She hopes that by speaking out that she will help other Filipina women either leave an exploitative situation or help prevent them from being trafficked in the future. The demand for "trafficking victims" to speak at events and in the press far outpaces the number of ex-captives who are ready to do so. In some ways, this creates an environment in which the same stories get retold while many go untold, since even when ex-captives do take the podium, they can not possibly give voice to the myriad experiences and viewpoints of all ex-captives. And, Ileana Fohr, the Intensive Case Manager at Safe Horizon's Anti-Trafficking Program in New York City cautions, "For those who are ready to tell their story, it is still draining. It takes so much out of you. Telling the story too many times also can be terrifying and even re-traumatize."

Public speaking which demands a focus on the "trauma story" also can perpetuate the tellers of the stories as victims. Kleinman and Kleinman have written about "victims'" stories as a kind of "currency" and warn that the tellers risk not shaking off their expected role of victimhood (1997: 10). An example is Veronica Strang's description of Aboriginal involvement in the fight for their land claims in Australia. The legal process requires that they "display themselves as victims of colonial violence and subsequent subjugation" which is often "a lengthy account of massacres, murders, poisoning, abductions, rape, the separation of families, dispersal and dispossession" (Strang, 2003: 184). Yet, in other contexts, Beatriz Manz has observed that giving voice to trauma can allow individuals and their larger community "to come to terms with the past, not simply to remain a victim of it" (Manz, 2002: 298). Residents of Santa Maria Tzejá, a Guatemalan village that was a site of a massacre in 1982, have attended human rights workshops in which, writes Manz, they have been "speaking about the past, and engaging with it" (2002: 301). Quite remarkably, residents also have written and performed a play that documents the massacre, *There is Nothing Concealed That Will Not Be Discovered*. However, Manz acknowledges that "the act of remembering, let alone of retelling, is a highly charged, politicized event, fraught with danger" (2002: 299).

Manz also poses thorny questions on what methodology to use when conducting research on grief since she finds that in the aftermath of violence that a

“respondent’s perception of the researcher influences, at times determines what is said” (2002: 300). What is left unsaid is perhaps out of reach for most researchers who, as Manz notes, “face a particular challenge in doing research among populations subjected to fear and terror” (2002: 299). Indeed, I do not ask many questions while ex-captives talk about their experiences in slavery. Rather, I simply listen to what they choose to tell and not to tell. My experience speaking with Carmen, an Ecuadorian young woman who had been in domestic servitude in New York, bears out Manz’s conviction that speaking about the past can be empowering. Even though her case manager at a social service agency and I had explained to her that I was researching life after trafficking and would not ask her about her experiences in trafficking, Carmen spoke up: “Please ask me questions, it’s O.K. It’s not a problem with me to talk about the past.” Carmen elaborated, “It is like therapy for me, I feel comfortable talking about the past; it helps me. You can ask me any questions, I have no problem.” Of course anthropologists are not therapists, a point I not only pressed upon Carmen, but explain to other ex-captives I interview. I have found that having a case manager in the room during an interview not only creates a safe environment, but it is also helpful in drawing clear lines between what case managers (and other counsellors) do, and what researchers do.

Researchers who follow their university Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines, which demand that researchers explain what they do and secure written consent to interviews, may not go far enough in the case of research with trafficked persons.<sup>18</sup> Rather, it is also incumbent upon researchers to explain what we do *not* do. After all, ex-captives are a population that has been asked to tell their stories to two general groups of “authority” figures: those who work in the criminal justice system (attorneys and law enforcement) and those who provide social services. These professionals offer them a variety of “deliverables”: immigration documents, job contacts, medical attention, housing, and, in some cases, financial remuneration (such as back wages and awards from civil law suits). As a kind of third group, researchers must emphasize that there are no similar set of tangible benefits to speaking with us. We also must make clear how we undertake our work as scholars (and possibly as advocates), what kinds of writing we create, how long it takes the different forms of our writing to be published, and what audiences are likely to read our writing.<sup>19</sup> And, of course, we must consider how our writing can be used, particularly since the issue of trafficking has been so politicized.<sup>20</sup>

## COLLABORATIONS

If ex-captives take the podium and tell their stories, the next step might be their participation in an anti-trafficking movement as advocates. In Guatemalan refu-

gee camps in Mexico, anthropologist Patricia Pessar found indigenous women who moved beyond the initial stage of giving testimony in their struggle for women's rights, to participating in the more "'objective' phases of analysis and policy formulation" (Pessar, 2001: 476).<sup>21</sup> I am interested in how ex-captives can move beyond their "victim" status where they are called upon to provide "testimony" about trafficking, to participating – much like the members of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers – in the decision making of the direction of an anti-trafficking movement.

Modern-day slavery exists because a range of other exploitative labour conditions exist. The current legislation that protects trafficked persons and offers them the possibility of staying in the United States with a new visa, is based on a binary conceptualization of labour. One is either trafficked or not; suffered under "severe forms of exploitation" or not; and thus, eligible for benefits or not. The current system of identifying trafficking victims sorts exploited workers into trafficked and non-trafficked categories. It does not allow for a more nuanced understanding of the kinds of work sites where there is a spectrum of abuse and where slavery can flourish. Often, in these sites, those held in servitude labour side by side with contract employees who have a marginal ability to leave. Indeed, in many of the cases that have been prosecuted in the United States, T Visas have been issued to tomato pickers and women working in brothels who worked alongside friends who might make a different wage – though not a liveable one – and therefore do not qualify as "trafficked". I am interested in this liminal space, a kind of grey zone that is not written about in the media's anti-trafficking frenzy. Critical to more ex-captives' participation in the anti-trafficking movement is the inclusion of these individuals who do not qualify for T visas. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' membership, for example, draws from this liminal group. Since CIW's members who are ex-captives speak publicly about labour exploitation, they are a model organization for how to incorporate exploited workers and ex-captives in the decision making and leadership of an anti-trafficking organization. Their efforts aim to illuminate how the conditions of work create a potential for a spectrum of abuse.

Collaborative research with indigenous intellectuals, such as anthropologist Joanne Rappaport's collaborative research with Nasa intellectuals in Columbia, offers a model for collaborative research projects between ex-captives, labour activists, service providers, and researchers (2005). Rappaport, for example, taught history workshops in Nasa communities to indigenous university students, as well as collaborated on an oral history of the education programme itself. She also participated in a collaborative research team with Columbian academic scholars based in the Columbian Institute of Anthropology in Bogotá. One starting point for ex-captives who already participate in group "empowerment"-

oriented meetings at their service providers, is to create workshops led by ex-captives, possibly in collaboration with researchers and activists. In such settings, much like Rappaport's collaborative workshops in Columbia, ex-captives and their collaborators can identify "pressing issues" to be "reflected upon by groups" which generate "not only data but interpretation" (2005: 125). Setting research agendas according to what marginalized groups identify harkens back to Sandra Harding's feminist call to arms that feminist scholars must "provide for women explanations of social phenomena that they want and need" (1987: 8). Although anthropologists have long been involved in research to promote social justice, a shift toward what Rappaport terms "ethnography as politically motivated dialogue", this kind of collaboration also raises many questions (2005: 125). For example, how compatible are the agendas and methodologies between "internal researchers" and academics? And, we must consider the difference in "consequences" of a research commitment for an academic and an internal researcher (2005: 127). A starting point for research (collaborative or otherwise) with ex-captives would be well-served by following a premise that undergirds the World Health Organization's (WHO) recommendations on interviewing trafficked women: "The degree and duration of the physical danger and psychological trauma to an individual is not always evident. In some cases risks may not be obvious to the interviewer. In other cases, the dangers may not be apparent to the woman" (Zimmerman and Watts, 2003: 5).

## CONCLUSION

Researchers on human trafficking face multiple methodological challenges and ethical concerns. With a current media environment of sensationalistic stories about trafficking, carefully conducted research projects can make significant contributions to trafficking discussions among service providers, attorneys, and policy makers. Given the extreme vulnerability of this population, and how they are geographically dispersed throughout the United States, collaboration among researchers could yield research that both involves a wide range of trafficked persons as well as ethnographic richness. And, as a corrective to the absence of voices from trafficked persons, we await more writing by ex-captives such as Jean-Robert Cadet's (1998). In the meanwhile, collaborations between researchers and ex-captives is one way to incorporate trafficked persons' insights into both research design and analysis. These kinds of collaborations, at the nexus of research and advocacy, not only could play a meaningful role in an "anti-trafficking movement", but also contribute to an engaged anthropology.

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## NOTES

1. I also have interviewed Dominican women in the Dominican Republic who were designated by the IOM as “trafficked” to Argentina and returned by the IOM to the Dominican Republic. The book, *Life After Trafficking: Creating Home/Returning Home*, will be based on field research with trafficked persons both in the United States and in the Dominican Republic.
2. I use the term ex-captive since it emphasizes that life in trafficking is slavery. Those who have been trafficked usually do not use the terms “trafficking” or “slavery” when they enter into dialogues with law enforcement or social service providers. Nor, do they necessarily use them once they learn about the concept of trafficking and that they have been trafficked. For example, Maria, whom I write about in this article, often refers to “what happened to me” and “her situation” when referring back to her time in domestic servitude.
3. Peter Landesman’s article “Sex slaves on Main Street”, in the *New York Times Magazine* has been criticized for making unfounded claims (2004). For example, see Jack Schafer’s series of critical articles on Landesman’s writing on [www.slate.msn.com](http://www.slate.msn.com) (Schafer, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d, 2004e).
4. Elsewhere I write about the clear differences between voluntary and forced prostitution, along with the debates over how to conceive of women’s sexual labour, see Brennan (2004).
5. The latest State Department Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report puts the number of people annually trafficked into the United States within a range of 14,500 to 17,500 (2004: 23). This revised estimate is down from the 2003 TIP Report’s figure of 18,000 to 20,000 (2003: 7). And, prior to these revised estimates, the figure circulating in many government documents was 50,000 (O’Neill Richard, 2000).
6. For legal scholarship see Hyland, 2001 and Young, 1998; for research by organizations see Anti-Slavery International, 2003; and for articles in the media see Bowe, 2003 and Browning, 2003 on agricultural servitude, and see Yeung, 2004 on domestic servitude. Also see Joy Zarembka’s chapter on trafficking into domestic servitude in the United States in *Global Women* (2002). One notable recent report about trafficking in Florida was produced by a collaborative research team comprised of social service providers and academics, see Florida State University (2003). And, the latest collaborative effort is a report “Hidden

- slaves: forced labor in the United States” by the non-profit Free The Slaves and The Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley (2004).
7. An example is the Department of Justice’s press conferences where prosecutions of traffickers are announced, thus situating attorneys and law enforcement at the centre of fighting trafficking.
  8. Farmer describes structural violence as a “broad rubric that includes a host of offensives against human dignity: extreme and relative poverty, social inequalities ranging from racism to gender inequalities, and the more spectacular forms of violence that are uncontestedly human rights abuses” (2003: 8).
  9. Farmer writes: “I could never serve as a dispassionate reporter or chronicler of misery. I am openly on the side of the destitute sick and have never sought to represent myself as some sort of neutral party” (2003: 26).
  10. The importance of safety cannot be emphasized enough. Psychiatrist Judith Herman situates safety as the first stage in her three “stages of recovery” from psychological trauma, with “remembrance and mourning” and “reconnection” as the next two stages (Herman, 1992: 155-156). And, a WHO report of recommendations for interviewing trafficked women suggests that interviews should not be conducted “if there is a risk that making a request for an interview or the interview itself will cause harm or compromise a woman’s safety or her mental health” (Zimmerman and Watts, 2003: 5).
  11. For example, see WHO (2001) and Schwartz (1997).
  12. The “American Samoa” case involves Kil Soo Lee (a Korean national) who was sentenced on 29 January 2004 for involuntary servitude in a factory he owned in the territory of American Samoa. From 1999 through November 2000, Lee “used threats, arrest, deportations, starvation, confinement, and beatings to hold over 200 Vietnamese and Chinese garment workers in servitude” (Department of Justice, 2004). The conviction of Lee and his co-conspirators is the largest human trafficking case prosecuted by the Department of Justice.
  13. To date, researchers have been put in touch with trafficked persons through social service providers. For example, in a European study on health risks associated with trafficking researchers “sought to interview participants through relevant support organizations both in EU partner countries and in three countries of origin” (Zimmerman et al., 2003: 16). The same kind of collaboration between researchers and social service providers also occurred in the Florida State University Study (2003) and in the report by Free the Slaves and the Human Rights Center at Berkeley (2004).
  14. Hirsch notes the benefits for migration research from “cross-fertilization and collaboration between migration researchers and anthropologists” who conduct long-term fieldwork (2003: 252). In fact, there are a number of large migration studies in which scholars have joined forces. For example see two studies on the second-generation (Kasinitz et al., 2004; Levitt and Waters, 2002).
  15. Because of a kind of “learned” silence as a survival strategy during civil war or genocide, refugees also are known to not speak about their past experiences. Aiwha Ong writes about Cambodian refugees who, while living under the terror of the Pol Pot regime “in the midst of life-and-death choices and the extremity of daily survival”, depended on “subterfuge, disguise, lying, and silence” (Ong,

- 2003: 47). Once resettled in Oakland and San Francisco, they tried “to disappear into the local old people among who they were settled” (2003: 47).
16. While, the absence of “victim”-advocates is a striking dimension of this stage of fighting trafficking, the Coalition of Immokalee Workers is one exception. The CIW, located in Immokalee, Florida, has members who had been held in agricultural slavery and now are worker-advocates.
  17. The problems of anthropologists “speaking for” marginalized individuals have been well documented, including anthropologist Pat Caplan’s discussion of “exactly for whom one is speaking” and the pressures for minority groups to speak with one voice (2003: 17).
  18. For more on ethical guidelines for conducting anthropological field research see the American Anthropological Association’s website (at [www.aaanet.org](http://www.aaanet.org)) for the following documents: “Statements on ethics: principles of professional responsibility” (adopted by the Council of the American Anthropological Association, May 1971) and “American Anthropological Association Statement on Ethnography and Institutional Review Board” (adopted by AAA Executive Board, 4 June 2004). And, see recommendations on conducting interviews specifically with trafficked persons in a WHO report (Zimmerman and Watts, 2003: 5). The report includes sample standard informed-consent questions “to help the researcher assess security”, such as: “Do you have any concerns about carrying out this interview with me?” and “Do you feel this is a good time and place to discuss your experience? If not, is there a better time and place?” (2003: 5). It also includes questions that are based on the premise to “Treat each woman and the situation as if the potential for harm is extreme until there is evidence to the contrary” (2003: 5). An example is: “Do you think that talking to me could pose any problems for you, for example, with those who trafficked you, your family, friends, or anyone who is assisting you?” (2003: 5).
  19. The WHO report I write about in the previous endnote also suggests asking: “Have you ever spoken with someone in (interviewer’s profession) before? How was that experience?” which underscores the work process of researchers and journalists (Zimmerman and Watts, 2003: 5).
  20. See recent news articles on how organizations – both on the right and the left – have claimed human trafficking as one of their major issues (Shapiro, 2004; Jones, 2003; Bumiller, 2003).
  21. For example, Pessar recounts the story of an indigenous woman who was part of a delegation visiting New York but was told that she would not accompany the larger group because “this time it was not about giving testimony”. A 23-year-old Ixil woman, Elena, commented on this delegate’s exclusion: “Presenting women as ‘victims’ goes hand-in-hand with discrimination....We can continue to give testimony, but we can also provide analysis and even write a book. We must become the protagonists in our own struggle” (Pessar, 2001: 476).



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