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## The Trafficking of Men in Cambodia: How Masculinities Challenge Notions of Victimhood

OONAGH EASTMOND

### Introduction

In the vast spectrum of human trafficking crimes and offences, there is a distinct research focus and reliance on framing women and children as the sole victims of sex trafficking and men as perpetrators (Kelly 2005; Piper 2005). This gendered framing of human trafficking has resulted in a lack of prevention and intervention tactics in trafficking crimes against men, including labour trafficking. This study identifies the characteristics of men as victims using the case study of Cambodian men trafficked onto Thai fishing boats. The paper tackles the following two research questions: how does the construction of masculinity facilitate the exploitation of Cambodian men, and what is the interrelation between a weak institutional framework of labour rights in the fishing sector in Thailand and the construction of masculinity? The overwhelming finding in this research is that there is a perception, that men are not credible victims due to preconceived notions of masculinity and hierarchical power relationships within the trafficking system that lead to an evident lack of incentive to assist male victims or a self-perception of victimhood.

### Theoretical Terrain

Human trafficking is a relatively new field of academic research; the year 2000 marks the start of an explosion of texts. Before 2010, the victim discourse focused on women and girls, typically as victims of sexual exploitation. Smriti Rao and Christina Presenti argue that, in the literature on trafficking, women have been made *hypervisible* while men are made invisible (2012, 231). Nicola Piper highlights this gap in the research stating that the concept of victimhood rarely includes men as potential victims of socio-economic structures and pressures that can lead to trafficking (2005, 217). Men and male immigrants, in particular, were demonised as the perpetrators. As Sarah L. Steele (2010, 35) describes, male perpetrators were viewed as “risky,” “unmanly” and “evil,” which “reinforces divides in masculinities based on regimes of racial domination”. Greater awareness was given to the range of trafficking crimes moving away from the narrow focus on women and children from 2010 (Allais 2013; Shoaps 2013). However, the body of literature remains very limited and many texts focus on the United States (Allais 2013), leaving a noticeable gap of a more global analysis of social constructions of masculinity and vulnerability (Jones 2010; Steele 2010). I therefore focus on the Southeast Asian context and the trafficking of men in order to provide a wider political, economic and social setting for analysis.

The theoretical puzzle I wish to explore is how conceptions of man and masculinity challenge the image of men as victims of trafficking. This investigation provides a framework for responding to the research question of how the construction of masculinity facilitates the exploitation of Cambodian men, resulting in them receiving less legal protection, fewer policies of intervention and lacking a self-perception of victimhood. Masculinity is missing in discussions of human trafficking, while its construction directly limits the capacity for men to be seen as vulnerable or oppressed and therefore as victims. The concept of masculinity has a wide body of literature aimed at understanding the constructed role of a dominant male in opposition to a subordinate female position. Raewyn Connell (1995, 187) propagated the term “hegemonic masculinity” which identifies a socially constructed dominant position of men within society, who uphold a hierarchical and violent nature. She claims that the natural link between nation-building and armed conflict, specifically due to colonialism, created a deeply violent and dominant Westernised masculinity and specific marginalised masculinities.

The comprehension of masculinity and maleness are understood within a framework of recognized ideals of behaviour. Samuel Vincent Jones explains how the modern-day media in the United States highlights the idea of male dominance and invulnerability as the ideal form of masculinity (2010, 1145). This demonstrates how the understanding of masculinity is bound by cultural contexts and that men enact a specific role to establish their manliness. Jackie Turner and Liz Kelly state that there are pre-defined notions of masculine roles, for example, organised crime networks are viewed as the territory of men and not women (2009, 189). The masculine discourse surrounding organised crime networks necessarily implicates men as the perpetrators, reifying their nature as dominant and violent. This is in contrast to the concept of femininity and the idea of the “perfect victim” which has the necessary effect of defining societal gender roles, obscuring men from being seen as victims. There has been long-standing critical feminist literature questioning the attachment of victimhood to the (non-Western) woman and patriarchal codes of protection. Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s ground-breaking article “Under Western Eyes” describes how the singular Third World Woman was arbitrarily constructed and denoted a shared oppression, she continues:

Defining women as archetypal victims freezes them into ‘objects-who-defend-themselves’, men into ‘subjects-who-perpetrate-violence’, and (every) society into a simple opposition between the powerless (read: women) and the powerful (read: men) groups of people. (1988, 67)

Ratna Kapur states that the victim subject is a transnational construct which represents the most victimised subject as the Third World woman. She argues that the international women’s rights movement has strengthened the image of women as victims and reinforces gender essentialism leading to the justification of restrictions on women’s rights (2002, 6). The way that being a victim is constructed as an

undesirable and feminine status has implications for men, increasing the level of shame if they identify as victims. This shame is embedded in the fact that the men have failed to sustain the masculine norms of behaviour as the powerful group, as victimhood fits with the powerless group. Within this dichotomy there is no space for male victims. I argue that feminist discourse must be harnessed, deconstructing the victim status, not only to provide women with agency but also to allow men to be seen as credible victims.

Significantly, in this case study the relationship is male perpetrator to male victim making it necessary to analyse the manifestation of masculinity on the fishing boats. Matthew Gutmann (1997, 389) states that manliness is enacted in cultural confrontations, such as the relationship between colonised and coloniser, where men perform their own and others' manhood. He further explains that a similar performance of masculinity is enacted with the perpetrator becoming hyper-masculinised and the victim de-masculinised. The specific factors here lead the male victim to be de-masculinised whilst the male perpetrator is hyper-masculinised.

Human trafficking is not a disappearing trend but is in fact evolving in a globalised environment. Louise Shelley (2013, 116) states that human trafficking is a transnational crime which is thriving as a trade due to factors such as improvements to communication flows, the rise of the internet and tactics used by organised crime groups. Turner and Kelly suggest that flows of people have become more diverse and wide-ranging "creating cosmopolitan or transnational identities" (2009, 192). However, they further state that these diasporic populations are often marginalised within their host community, even if they make significant contributions to the socio-economic and cultural life of a country (ibid. 199). Alison Crosby (2007, 45) argues that more economically advanced countries impose categories on unskilled migrants which define their status and act as a form of population control, denying them rights to citizenship within the destination country. I focus on the relationship between Cambodia and Thailand to demonstrate how the transnational migration dynamic negatively impacts Cambodian migrants who are not seen as integral labourers in society by the public and governing institutions.

I ground this paper in the human rights approach to fight against human trafficking and contemporary slavery. The human rights model, implemented by the Palermo Protocol, combines three measures: law enforcement to hold perpetrators accountable, prevention to preclude instances of the crime and protection recognising trafficked persons as victims and survivors rather than criminals (Choi-Fitzpatrick 2015, 8). I advocate for Austin Choi-Fitzpatrick's expanded version of the approach putting the individual at the centre of consideration and focusing on the empowerment of enslaved persons, particularly in reference to how victims often do not self-identify (2015, 12). As a multifaceted crime, there is no single response which will solve the problem. By analysing the case study in relation to victimhood and masculinity, I demonstrate that men deserve to be viewed as victims and survivors as opposed to criminals, and protected as such.

## Methodology

The research is based on twelve qualitative in-depth interviews carried out to gain insight into the workings of civil society on the trafficking of Cambodian men onto Thai fishing boats. I conducted the interviews in Phnom Penh, Cambodia in January 2015 over two weeks, using a semi-structured format, recording the interviews once the permission of the participants had been received. I spoke to stakeholders who work with male victims of trafficking to gather their perspective on the projects and the governmental policies and policing of human trafficking. The research used an inductive approach, using research questions from observations I made whilst working in Cambodia, to narrow the scope of the study. The themes discussed included the identification of male victims, obstacles to their recovery, projects the organisations have in place to support male victims and their relationships with the police. On completion of all of the interviews, I coded the transcriptions according to the themes identified as the most pertinent to my topic with the aim of detecting patterns and generating new theory from the data.

In my analysis, I support the claims regarding the self-perception of victims with Non-governmental Organization (NGO) reports rather than solely using the interviews, as I did not directly speak with victims. This was due to the difficulty in contacting victims of the crime and the distress that can be caused by discussing their experiences. However, I also wanted to speak to stakeholders to gather their perspective on the projects and the governmental policies and policing of human trafficking. A potential bias is present in the research due to the sensitivity of the subject; the interviewees may not have been willing to reveal some of the limitations of their projects in supporting men, the obstacles they faced in relation to working with the police or government, or the complicated discourse of masculinity and its relationship to trafficking.

The average length of the interviews was 46 minutes and exactly half of the participants were native Cambodian, with the remainder being foreigners who have spent most of their working lives in the region. All but one of the interviews were conducted in English, in which case a translator was provided by the interviewee (a colleague from the same company). This translation may affect the depth and quality of the data from this specific interview, however, as the translator works in the field of human trafficking she was knowledgeable about the subject. Additionally, one interview was held over Skype with the web-cam enabled. Although Skype allows the participant and the interviewer to see each other, the distance can still have an impact on the information gathered. As a female, Western researcher I consider the impact of my own cultural background and gender on the research project. Geert Hofstede (2007, 16) states that when researching in another continent such as Asia, culture has a significant impact on the results and may result in ethnocentric bias. Aware of the cultural differences between Southeast Asia and Europe, I pay particular attention my female, Western interpretation of the data and the potential for bias.

## Political, Economic and Labour Conditions

Southeast Asia is an area which is recognised for having sustained levels of human trafficking. Globalisation has had a significant impact on the labour practices and migratory movements in the area, resulting in many people leaving their homes and traditional agricultural lifestyles in search of low-skilled work. In particular, Thailand has experienced a very rapid industrialisation, with an extremely low unemployment rate of 0.7%, therefore depending on Myanmar and Cambodia for cheap labour (The World Bank 2013). In Cambodia there is a lack of employment opportunities and, when jobs are available, the income is often not sufficient to meet daily needs, meaning that many choose to travel to Thailand in search of work.

The legal process to migrate to Thailand is very long, expensive and confusing, as the requirements to obtain the documentation are regularly changed. The majority of migrating Cambodians do so illegally; as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) states, "10% of migration out of Cambodia is regular and 90% is irregular" putting individuals at higher risk of being trafficked (Interview, Program Specialist, ILO, Phnom Penh, 23 January 2015). Thailand has a huge fishing fleet, providing the US with an estimated one in five pounds of its mackerel and sardines, and a large amount of anchovies. However, the fishing industry has a shortfall of about 60.000 fishermen for the production of this demand, resulting in Cambodian men being sourced and trafficked onto the boats for years at a time, with little or no financial compensation (Palmstrom/Service 2012). It is thus evident that many Cambodians are vulnerable to precarious circumstances with the risk of being trafficked in their search for a living wage.

Cambodia is in a post-conflict state following the Khmer Rouge regime. The Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, took control on April 17, 1975. The hard-line communist regime strove to create an agrarian utopia but was ultimately responsible for the deaths of up to two million people from overwork, starvation and execution between 1975 and 1979. Estimates range over the number of people who died during the regime from around 800,000 to 3 million deaths. The U.S. State Department funded a project through the Cambodian Genocide Program at Yale University and estimated that the number of deaths was approximately 1.7 million (Yale University 2013).

Emerging from a turbulent history, the process of rehabilitation was marked by substantial international assistance and influence with many noting that the United Nations (UN) peacekeeping force that arrived in 1992 led to a sharp increase in the levels of prostitution in Cambodia (Alvarez/Alessi 2012; Keo 2014; Sylwester 2014). Reducing the levels of prostitution became a priority for many NGOs in Cambodia, which were established primarily to promote the rights of women and girls. As Maria Beatriz Alvarez and Edward Alessi note, this focus affected the identification and assistance for other victims of prostitution and trafficking, in particular men and boys who also suffered (2012, 143). The Cambodian anti-trafficking law was hastily

ratified in 1996. Chenda Keo claims that a moral panic was generated in Cambodia by the implementation of this repressive legislation (Keo 2014, 6). The law was limited to criminalising human trafficking but made no attempt to tackle factors leading people into situations of vulnerability.

Thailand has been recently demoted to Tier 3 on the Trafficking in Persons Report, meaning that it is among “countries whose governments do not fully comply with the minimum standards and are not making significant efforts to do so” (U.S. Department of State 2014). Factors influencing this include high levels of corruption in government and the police, alongside low levels of enforcing anti-trafficking legislation (Sylwester 2014). After the military coup in 2014, the new leadership in Thailand decided to clamp down on illegal migrants and ordered them to leave or face deportation. This led to a mass exodus of migrants returning to Cambodia. The Mekong Migration Network (MMN) estimates that 220.000 migrants returned to Cambodia within two weeks in June 2014, leaving a significant mark on Thailand’s unskilled labour sector (2014, 7). Therefore, it can be seen that, as Turner and Kelly (2009) state, the diasporic group is heavily marginalised and their situation is highly precarious.

With a vast shortage of labour and an unregulated system of control, the Thai fishing sector is a key receptor for trafficked men. Joanna Sylwester states that the environmental conditions of over-fishing have pushed boats further out for longer durations at sea (2014, 440). The United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking (UNIAP) completed a study of the industry noting that “these boats, out to sea for up to two years or more, become virtual prisons on which the trafficking victims endure inhumane working conditions, and physical abuse” (UNIAP 2009, 1). The fishermen are often forced to take drugs to ensure that they work long hours, leading to withdrawal problems in the post-trafficking period. The UNIAP stated that 59% of their interviewees had witnessed a murder at the hands of their boat captain (*ibid.*, 5). This was reinforced by two interviewees who stated that the male survivors they work with had witnessed killings. The labour conditions within this industry are undoubtedly dangerous and exploitative.

### **Men are seen as Economic Agents and Not Victims**

There are many components of masculinity and cultural expressions of manhood that play a significant role in men being less likely to be viewed as victims. As discussed in the theoretical terrain, feminist scholars and activists have argued against framing the victim subject as female, urging that women need to move away from this positioning in order for them to exhibit agency (Kapur 2002; Mohanty 1988). When considering male victims, it is necessary to show that victimhood can provide agency rather than the more negative associations of femininity and shame.

The more traditional understanding of masculinity in Cambodia is the man’s role as provider and protector within a family unit in a community environment. However,

women have an important impact on the construction and performance of manhood, and specifically the Cambodian code of behaviour for women, known as Chbap Srei. Mona Lilja (2012, 45) explains how Chbap Srei dictates the ideal gender-appropriate behaviour for women as obedient and submissive towards men and encourages virtuosity. However, from the interviews with stakeholders in Cambodia, the relationship can be seen as more complex, according to the Community Legal Education Centre (CLEC):

I think the role of men here is a little bit different and not what you would perceive, because the woman is really the financial head of the household but the man is still the symbolical head in some ways (...) men don't want to 'lose face' which is a big deal in Cambodia. (Interview, Consultant, CLEC, Phnom Penh, 16 January 2015)

In this way, the household dynamic can be seen as communitarian in an economic sense, where women can also play a significant role in providing for the family. This demonstrates that although men are required to provide money for their families, it is not their sole responsibility, which places weight on their role as the symbolic head of the family. Therefore, if men are viewed solely as economic agents in terms of their experience, then the totality of their suffering is obscured.

There is also a more complex negotiation of masculinities at play, for globalisation means that a new dynamic of cultural expectation has formed, and that the Cambodian men are exposed to diverse cultural parameters of manhood. Lilja discusses how Cambodian men negotiate between the local "particular" and "universal" norms of masculinity. She states that it can be difficult for the men to identify with the "universal" subject positioning in comparison to a more local "particular" masculinity (Lilja 2012, 53). Trude Jacobsen explains how, in this case, traditional paradigms of Cambodian masculinity have been replaced by more individualist notions of survival, creating a tension between modernity and tradition (Jacobsen 2012, 86). Attempting to bridge the gap between local and global masculinities becomes a difficult course and has significant implications for Cambodian men both when they migrate to Thailand and when they return home.

There are cases where men are reluctant to go home even though they are being exploited on the fishing boats, and that even when freed, men were quick to migrate back to Thailand. The International Office for Migration (IOM) stated that, "when we do manage to catch up with the families we find out they've gone back to Thailand. Despite what happened, some of them just see it as bad luck being forced onto a boat, but migration is still an option" (Interview, Program Manager, IOM, Phnom Penh, 26 January 2015). Most Cambodians are Buddhist and believe in karma, which has noteworthy implications with regards to human trafficking. First, for many in Cambodia karma explains why people are not born equally, with actions in a previous life affecting gender, wealth and health at birth. Second, as Jacobsen and Stuart-Fox highlight, Cambodians believe that everyone will eventually suffer for their wrongdoings (Jacobsen/Stuart-Fox 2013, 11). This belief seems to lower the

incentive for a victim to bring a perpetrator to justice through the law courts, feeling that the punishment will be served in other ways.

### Identification and Rescue Procedures

Many obstacles prevent men from seeking comparable help to female victims of human trafficking, particularly victims of sex trafficking. This is most apparent in terms of the range of services available to men; for example, a representative from ILO stated that: “in Cambodia there is tenfold the services for women than men” (Interview, Program Specialist, ILO, Phnom Penh, 23 January 2015). At the time of this article, there is no active search for victims of trafficking in Thailand’s fishing industry, with the majority of identifications dependent on victims self-identifying and contacting an NGO, usually through a third party. A limited number of victims are detected at the border crossing entering Thailand by immigration officials or NGOs searching for victims. In most cases, this means that the victim will have already had to escape the boat and the captain, usually by jumping off ship and attempting to swim for freedom. If successful, they regularly end up in remote areas, facing difficulties in being rescued and may fall prey to further trafficking or exploitation.

The identification process relies on the men’s self-perception of victimhood, which can be problematic since many men are not aware that their situation is in fact human trafficking. Keo focuses on the traffickers themselves and points to the limited understanding that Cambodians have of the law and the definition of trafficking (2014, 113). The IOM explains:

It’s hard because conceptually they wouldn’t say that they have been trafficked, because they don’t quite understand the word trafficking and what that means. But they know that they have been exploited, abused and beaten. (Interview, Program Manager, IOM, Phnom Penh, 26 January 2015)

Another issue concerning the men’s self-perception of victimhood is that they do not find that they fit the model of the ‘ideal victim’, which, as described earlier, is a vulnerable woman experiencing sexual exploitation. Lauren McCarthy (2014, 228) states that many people who have been trafficked were in fact active in the decision-making process and cannot be defined as victims with no control over their experience, but as agents retaining some control. The men trafficked onto fishing boats do not see themselves as entirely helpless and lacking in agency, as they chose to work in the fishing industry and therefore feel that they can escape their situation in time or without external assistance.

There are also many reasons why the men do not go directly to the authorities to report a crime. Officials are known to be corrupt; rather than protecting a male victim they may force them to be deported, detained or exposed to further trafficking in another sector. Additionally, the victims fear retribution from their boat captain or

broker who may have withheld their identity documents. Kritaya Archavanitkul and Andy Hall argue that:

Fear of arrest and deportation is a major threat often used by employers to control and ensure the continual exploitation of irregular migrants. Being arrested is often a greater concern for irregular migrants than working and living in inhuman conditions. (2011, 63)

If the men are deported, they will return home with nothing and to a situation where they are unable to earn any money. Significantly, they often perceive the situation at home, where they cannot earn any money, to be worse.

The exploitative conditions on fishing boats have serious implications on the mental health of survivors. A spokesperson for Chab Dai stated in relation to trauma counselling and healthcare provision that the men “say they don’t need this help but they actually do need this help; they don’t want to show their weakness to other people” (Interview, Chab Dai, Phnom Penh, 16 January 2015). Ligia Kiss et al. conducted the largest survey to date on the health of trafficking survivors, interviewing people entering post-trafficking services in Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. The report states that “excessive working hours, poor living conditions, and being cheated of wages increased the risk of symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression” (Kiss et. al 2015, 159). This demonstrates the need to develop mental health services for male victims, an area which is currently being overlooked.

### **Government Policy and Intervention, Police and Prosecution<sup>1</sup>**

The current Cambodian Law on the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation was implemented in 2008 and uses the Palermo Protocol definition of human trafficking recognising men, women and children as victims (United Nations 2000). Trafficking in persons is criminalised and victims have the provision of protection of their privacy and identity under article 49 alongside the right to claim compensation under articles 46 and 47 (UNIAP 2010, 28). The majority of stakeholders interviewed stated that, although the anti-trafficking policy in Cambodia was found to be appropriate and suitable, there were serious problems with the implementation of the policy and a lack of incentive to support male victims. According to the interviewees, the police did not “respect male victims or value them as victims” and that “even with training, it would be hard for them to really take it seriously” (Interviews D and J, Phnom Penh, 2015). It was a common theme in the interviews to hear that police enforcement was a problem specifically concerning late responses to cases with a view that the police do not view men as potential victims of exploitation.

Over the course of the interviews, the most significant obstacles to the protection of male victims of human trafficking were the Cambodian consulates and embassies abroad. They were depicted as follows: “(the consulates and embassies) consistently fail to do their jobs” and “they lack responsiveness and collaboration with them is really difficult” (Interviews C and G, Phnom Penh, 2015). The interviewees were es-

pecially dissatisfied by the attitude of consulates towards male victims, often turning away victims to return to an exploitative situation. An interviewee stated that “the consulates are more ready to assist women” (Interview F, Phnom Penh, 2015). When consulates do take on cases it can be a very slow and difficult process, during which the male victims are often put into detention centres. An organisation stated that in one case in Malaysia “the guys came back in a really bad state because they’d been in a detention centre for over a year, they had scabies all over their skin” (Interview L, Phnom Penh, 2015). It is evident that the conditions in the detention centres are abysmal and violate human rights.

Corruption by officials was found to be prevalent across all areas of the trafficking experience. Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index ranks Cambodia at 156 out of 175 countries (Transparency International 2014). The study conducted by Human Rights Watch in Thailand found that every migrant interviewed had money, gold chains or mobile phones stolen from them by the police in routine stops and checks (2010, 60). An interviewee stated that “there is corruption in the immigration police; we have accounts of migrants crossing the border from the Cambodian side to Thailand illegally through the forest and we know that some police were involved” (Interview H, Phnom Penh, 2015). There is a clear and systemic corrupt system of police officers and border control whereby bribes can be paid for them to “look the other way.”

Cambodian embassies and consulates were also found to be corrupt, repatriating victims with travel costs being charged directly to the families of the victims, rather than the government or an NGO, with an additional fee paid directly to the consulate staff. “Our staff went out on this one occasion to the airport and all the families were there to greet the victims. It turns out [the families] didn’t want to talk to us because they’d all paid \$200 per victim for an AirAsia flight” (Interview L, Phnom Penh, 2015). Another interviewee highlighted how government officials are sometimes affiliated with the recruitment companies who recruit men under false pretences into the fishing industry: “I think there’s quite a lot of overlap in government positions and ownership and management of recruitment agencies, which means they are less likely to be regulated properly” (Interview F, Phnom Penh, 2015). In this way, the crimes that some recruitment agencies commit may be overlooked by the authorities. Many obstacles arise in the various processes of submitting a trafficking case to court, particularly affecting men and victims of labour trafficking. The nature of the anti-trafficking policy in Cambodia means that there is a focus on the sex trafficking and the exploitation of women. One organisation highlighted the following: “there is no labour court; labour exploitation and forced labour are not criminalised, therefore it is incredibly hard to take cases to court” (Interview K, Phnom Penh, 2015). This has serious implications for men who are trafficked, as the judges do not have specific knowledge and are less likely to make convictions. McCarthy demonstrates how judges can stereotype victims, whose case can be thrown out of court and if they do not show a suitable level of remorse, shame or traumatised (2014, 234). The study

by Keo et al. of incarcerated traffickers in Cambodia highlights that about half of the convicted participants stated that the police or the judiciary had requested a bribe in return for a more lenient sentence (2014, 218). These factors seriously weaken the judicial system and lead many victims to lose trust in the courts, who therefore do not to file complaints.

## Conclusion

The framing of men as perpetrators and women as victims of trafficking leaves no space for men who have been exploited to locate their experience, preventing them from self-identifying as victims. The root of the problem lies in the discourse and theoretical understanding of male victimhood, significantly in respect to masculinity. I have demonstrated how the construction of masculinity facilitates the exploitation of Cambodian men by viewing them in opposition to the female victim subject. Men are seen as economic migrants in control of their destiny and during the process of trafficking are de-masculinised using violence, fear and threats. In this way, I argue, through the critical feminist literature on victimisation, for the destruction of the victim status being attributed to the (Third World) woman (Kapur 2002; Mohanty 1988). This would enable men to be legitimised as credible victims, both in the larger social context and in terms of perceiving themselves to be victims.

The trafficking of men onto Thai fishing boats is a critical issue that needs to be immediately addressed, highlighted by the fact that Thailand has been demoted to Tier 3 on the Trafficking in Persons Report, due to exploitation in the fishing industry. Measures need to be taken to protect migrant men, and to hold those involved in the trafficking process accountable. Currently, there is no incentive for the boat captains to alter their practices, as they are able to act with impunity from a labour rights perspective. There is also insufficient legislation regarding human and labour rights in international trade agreements in the fishery sector. The weak institutional framework of labour rights in Thailand, together with the particular construction of masculinity, with acute hierarchies of power negatively affecting victims, creates a system capable of disregarding the trafficked men. It is crucial that we follow the human rights approach developed by Choi-Fitzpatrick (2015) and focus on the survivors' empowerment and the mobilisation of communities. The Thai state should be obligated to rescue victims and to assist them, so that they are not forced to return to exploitative conditions.

## Note

- 1 Discussing the government, police and consulates in Cambodia is very sensitive; I therefore made the quotes in this section anonymous to protect the identities of the interviewees.

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