

Auditing the Australian Response to Trafficking

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Abstract

This article was written in response to the April 2009 publication of the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit of the management of the *Australian Government Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons*. It considers both the material presented to the audit office from a range of government agencies and the findings and recommendations arising from the audit. The article seeks to identify significant concerns regarding the operation of the existing policy response. It also identifies key implications of an audit report — a managerialist tool — being the most comprehensive official assessment of the policy response to date. While two other national reports were produced on the Australian response to human trafficking in the months following the tabling of the ANAO Report, it is argued that both reports primarily produced important, but limited, trend and implementation data. Drawing on research nationally and internationally in the area of human trafficking, migration and exploitation, this article argues that assessment of the effectiveness of policy implementation is not naturally or logically connected in any direct way to the eradication of human trafficking. It also argues that the absence of any commitment to evaluating the impact of, and alternatives to, the current response runs the risk of further entrenching the current counter-trafficking framework with limited regard to the broader impacts of this approach.

Introduction

In 2003, the ‘repugnant’ and ‘insidious crime’ of human trafficking was elevated to the national policy agenda (Minister for Justice and Customs 2003). It inspired an unprecedented ‘whole of government response’ in the form of a A\$20 million policy package, the *Australian Government Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons*, to be implemented over four years — a policy response ‘designed to focus on the full cycle of trafficking from recruitment, to reintegration and to give equal weight to the three critical areas of prevention, prosecution and victim support’ (Blackburn in PJC-ACC 2004:14). Reflecting the broader international trend — led, in particular, by the United States (US) (see Wong 2005; Chuang 2006) — the rhetoric around human trafficking was underpinned by a much narrower conceptualisation and understanding of this issue, as a practice that ‘deals with women and children in a sexually exploitative manner’ (Minister for Justice and Customs 2003). Essentially, the primary focus was on sex trafficking and the policy response emphasised criminal justice resourcing and outcomes (Segrave 2004).

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In the six years since the policy was implemented, both the international and national community have broadened the counter-trafficking focus to increasingly recognise human trafficking into industries beyond the sex industry (US Department of State (USDOS) 2010; Anti-People Trafficking Interdepartmental Commission (APTIC) 2009:47). The Australian response has also been the subject of some reform over this period, reflecting problems that arose in the initial implementation of the policy response and criticisms put forward by researchers, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and the media (see Roxon, Maltzahn and Costello 2004; Segrave 2004; Gallagher 2005; Costello 2005; Segrave and Miliivojević 2005; Pearson 2007; Burn and Simmons 2005; O'Brien and Wynhausen 2003; Wynhausen and O'Brien 2003; Wynhausen, McKinnon and O'Brien 2003). While substantial investments, including the development of trafficking-specific legislation (see McSherry 2007 for a discussion) and a victim support program, were introduced (the latter of which has undergone some changes), the visa framework has been the subject of the most substantial amendments during this period, primarily involving the relaxation of some original restrictions (see Attorney-General's Department 2009 for full details; also APTIC 2009). Primarily, there have been efforts to finesse the current framework, but there has been no comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the policy response.

In 2004, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Crime Commission (PJC-ACC) undertook a partial analysis of the policy response at the time, but its impact and conclusions were limited (PJC-ACC 2004, 2005). Concerns raised in the PJC-ACC Report regarding the design and implementation of the policy response failed to impact on the momentum of the Australian counter-trafficking wave. On the back of a Tier One rating in the US Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report of 2004 — the nation's first inclusion in the TIP Report (USDOS 2004)¹ — Australia proceeded to sell its anti-trafficking framework as 'best practice' within the region (Millar 2004). This position has been maintained and affirmed by its ongoing 'Tier One' status in the TIP Report to date (see USDOS 2010:66–7). However, the TIP Report is not an evaluation of the impact of anti-trafficking efforts; rather it focuses on process data in its judgment of whether nations are meeting the US-defined minimum standards for counter-trafficking efforts (USDOS 2010). Despite the absence of any formalised, rigorous analysis of the implementation and impact of the policy response, it was announced in 2007 that a further A\$38.3 million over four years would be invested in the existing policy framework (ANAO 2009:11). There were no major changes to the policy, indeed it was identified that the core components of the response were to remain as they were in order to continue to 'build on the success of the existing initiatives' (Attorney-General's Department 2007). This claim to 'success' was neither supported by any rigorous data, nor was it clear how success was defined.

The reluctance to engage in ongoing analysis of the processes in place are highlighted by the years (and a change of Federal Government) it took for recommendations from the 2004–05 PJC-ACC to be acted upon. This included the ANAO Report responding to the recommendation that an audit be conducted into the management of the policy response (ANAO 2009:13) and the recommendation that a report monitoring and measuring the progress of the anti-trafficking strategy be published annually (APTIC 2009:iv). There remains no commitment to a comprehensive assessment of this policy response. Indeed, it is the suite of reports published in 2009 — by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) (Joudo Larsen, Lindley and Putt 2009), APTIC (APTIC 2009) and the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO 2009) — that comprise the sum total of comprehensive reports. This

¹ A Tier One rating is the highest rating available in the tier system that ranks nations according to the extent to which their counter-trafficking efforts meet the US-defined minimum standards (USDOS 2010).

article will not focus on the AIC or the APTIC Reports, other than to note that both offer implementation and monitoring data rather than any comprehensive assessment of the design and impact of the policy framework itself — although the AIC is moving towards developing a more comprehensive system of review according to the 2009 publication (Joudo Larsen, Lindley and Putt 2009). As accessing comprehensive data on implementation of the whole package of measures was difficult before these publications were produced, they remain valuable sources of information about current processes. Indeed, the APTIC Report was implemented, at least in part, as a direct response to the second recommendation in the ANAO Report (ANAO 2009:25). Yet, these monitoring reports offer limited insight into the challenges and limitations surrounding the implementation of the current response. They offer no basis on which to conclude that the current approach is a ‘success’. The ANAO Report was significant because it critically engaged with the practice of implementing the anti-trafficking strategy; it held each government department to account for its responsibilities and it highlighted significant deficiencies and areas for improvement. It was, however, narrow and limited in its analysis. These issues are the focus of this discussion.

The ANAO tabled its Report — *Management of the Australian Government’s Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons* — in April 2009 (ANAO 2009). Focused on a whole-of-government policy response to people trafficking, the ANAO had two mandated roles. First, assessing the intergovernmental arrangements in relation to monitoring the contributions of the various agencies to the achievement of the outcomes of the policy — specifically: the Attorney-General’s Department (AGD); the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC); the Australian Federal Police (AFP); and the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA), within which the Office for Women (OfW) is currently located. The second task was to assess whether the measures in place effectively manage, monitor and assess performance (ANAO 2009:13). It is recognised from the outset that the ANAO had no mandate for addressing broader issues, such as the extent to which Australia meets its obligations under the *UN Trafficking Protocol* — including issues of rights protections.² This discussion seeks not to criticise the ANAO Report *per se*, but to use the report findings and the limitations of the scope of the report as a platform to highlight the need for a more comprehensive external analysis of the current anti-trafficking strategy.

Specifically, the purpose of this article is twofold. First, it seeks to highlight concerns arising from the data contained within the Report. While the ANAO was focused on implementation from a managerial perspective, the Report has brought to light much data that was previously inaccessible.³ Some key aspects of this data are commented on. Second, the article considers the form and function of the Report itself, including the final recommendations. The ANAO Report embodies key concerns raised elsewhere by the authors of this article, as researchers involved in ongoing research on human trafficking and migrant labour exploitation. Primarily, the authors’ concerns have focused on the disconnect in the design of the policy response and the reality of exploitative practices, including the experiences, needs and perspectives of those who are subject to various forms of exploitation that may be recognised as related to or embodying human trafficking

² *United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*, GA Res 55/25, UN GAOR, 55th sess, 62nd plen mtg, Agenda Item 105, Supp No 49, UN Doc A/RES/55/25 (8 January 2001) annex II (*Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime*).

³ For example, public reporting of AFP spending did not report that a ‘substantial proportion’ of the AFP Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Teams (TSETT) funds were channelled to crime types not classified as trafficking (ANAO 2009:15).

(see Segrave et al 2009; Segrave 2009a, 2009b, 2008; Milivojević 2008). Nationally and globally, sex trafficking — and, more recently, trafficking into industries other than the sex industry (hereinafter labour trafficking) — has captured the attention and imagination of authorities, policymakers, NGOs, the media and the general community. There is a shared commitment to the rescuing of victims and the importance of finding and prosecuting offenders involved in this crime. Yet, it has been argued repeatedly that the criminal justice framework and the framework of transnational crime significantly limit the so-called ‘effectiveness’ of narrowly-focused anti-trafficking efforts (Segrave et al 2009; Agustín 2007; Wong 2005). Research by the authors of this article highlights concerns regarding the reporting of ‘outcomes’ by agencies involved in Australian anti-trafficking efforts and the focus of the ANAO recommendations.

The contents: Reports to the ANAO

In 2004, one of the authors of this article wrote an initial response to the introduction of the *Australian Government Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking in Persons* (see Segrave 2004). At that time, it was argued that the assumptions underpinning the domestic law and order parameters of the policy response were inherently problematic — where identifying victims and prosecuting offenders were the primary concerns (reflected in the distribution of funding). The presumption that law enforcement could act as an effective remedy to reduce human trafficking, it was argued, was reflective of a policy response that ignored the complex nexus of migration, globalisation, labour, gender and exploitation (Segrave 2004). This perspective was not a radical one, indeed it reflected the emerging scholarship at the time dedicated to the analysis of the manifestation of these issues globally (cf Sassen 1998, 2002; Burke 2002; Coomaraswamy 2003; Berman 2003; Doezema 1998; Goodey 2003; Andreas 2000; Wonders and Michalowski 2001). Yet the Australian response to human trafficking, mirroring the sentiments and commitments of nations globally, drew instead on a more palatable and simplistic understanding that featured gendered, racialised and sexualised myths of victimisation and criminalisation — where victims were naïve, Third World women ‘tricked’ into migrating and ‘forced’ to provide sexual services, and offenders were men from other developing nations exploiting women for their own profits (Milivojević and Pickering 2008; Agustín 2007; Berman 2003). The moralistic agenda underpinning anti-trafficking efforts led to the ‘formula’ of a criminal justice response alongside the provision of extensive support provisions for victims. In the view of some critics, the inadequacies of the criminal justice framework have the potential, at best, to do little to impact upon human trafficking, and, at worst, to further enable practices of exploitation and to do further harm to women, indeed all potential victims, who are caught up in complex webs of exploitation (Agustín 2007; Wong 2005; Sassen 1998, 2002). Two major concerns relate specifically to the processes involved in the identification of victims and the provisions of victim support. These two aspects of the policy response will be examined in turn, drawing on data revealed in the ANAO Report.

Identifying victims

The process of identifying victims, investigating cases and pursuing prosecutions has been articulated as a straightforward progression of criminal justice proceedings, supported by the parallel trafficking victim visa framework that enables victims of trafficking to access both a special visa status for the entirety of the criminal justice process and victim support

services⁴ (see, for example, Attorney-General's Department 2004). However, the process of identification is far from simple. Victims of trafficking do not self-refer to the AFP, they are brought to the attention of the AFP primarily by a range of external sources (NGOs, local police, DIAC); in the ANAO Report, the majority (61%) had been referred by DIAC through the compliance arm of the organisation (ANAO 2009:58). Clearly DIAC wield a significant amount of power in deciding who may be a potential victim of trafficking and which cases will be referred to the AFP. This process is primarily a predetermined administrative process, in which — according to a set of unpublished criteria (see PJC-ACC 2004) — DIAC compliance officers who suspect an individual may be a victim of trafficking work through a series of questions to determine whether they will refer the case to the AFP. In theory, it is then the AFP's obligation to attend to the cases referred to them and to organise the placing of individual's onto a Bridging Visa F if they have no valid visa.⁵ Simultaneously the referral to the AFP also initiates the system of victim support (which may, in the first instance, involve securing appropriate alternative accommodation).

According to the ANAO Report, there have been considerable failures in the implementation of this system. First, it is noted that there is significant attrition of cases as the AFP determine whether DIAC 'referrals' are in fact 'information reports', 'which are recorded but not subject to an investigation' (ANAO 2009:18). While DIAC have published annual data for the number of referrals they have made to the AFP in their Annual Reports (DIAC 2007, 2008; ANAO 2009:18), AFP reporting of the numbers of potential victims who have been brought to their attention do not correspond. Since 2004, the AFP reported to the ANAO that they had received 131 referrals, while DIAC reported that it had made 256 referrals — almost *half* the cases referred by DIAC have been determined not worthy of further investigation 'generally because of the information provided' (ANAO 2009:19). Since the AFP make these decisions according to criminal justice criteria, this is significant. While it is no longer the case that all of those cases determined not worthy of investigation are ineligible for any provision of support or assistance (Attorney-General's Department 2009), they disappear from any official record without explanation or recognition. It also remains unclear whether all of those identified by DIAC would access the new system of victim support.⁶ The different standards applied by DIAC compliance officers as compared to the AFP require much closer investigation. At first glance it might be suggested that the DIAC standard pertains to a risk-averse identification of any migrant sex worker, particularly Thai women, as a potential victim of trafficking; whereas the AFP standard is a based on a less inclusive legal standard. The impact for women (and men) who are in the

⁴ As of June 2009 there are three visas within this framework: the Bridging F (the 45-day entry visa); the Criminal Justice Stay (may be issued after a Bridging F Visa expires, if law enforcement officers decide to continue an investigation); and the Witness Protection (Trafficking) Visa (see Attorney-General's Department 2009). Until June 2009 there were three phases of victim support, designed to assist victims of people trafficking to meet basic needs such as food, accommodation, health and welfare while they assist with investigation and prosecution (ANAO 2009:72). In June 2009 it was announced that at least the first (45 days), and in some cases the second (45 days), victim support services would be available to 'all victims of people trafficking, irrespective of their willingness and ability to assist with an investigation and prosecution of a people trafficking offence' (Attorney-General's Department 2009:2).

⁵ In June 2009 this process was amended. At the time of the ANAO Report, victim support was *only* accessible to those on a Bridging Visa F, which meant that even those who were in Australia with a valid visa had to cancel their visa in order to be placed on the trafficking-specific visa to enable them to access the support provisions (ANAO 2009:22).

⁶ While the changes made, outlined above in n 5, indicate that effectively anyone who claims to be a victim can access the support services, the implementation of this requires some monitoring.

middle of this assessment process is absent from DIAC and AFP reports on activity (see for example, DIAC 2008; AFP 2008).

A related concern to the practice of identification is the ways in which the AFP and DIAC report their activities within the broader context of their contribution towards the eradication of trafficking in persons. The ANAO Report gives voice to two key concerns that the authors share. First is the increasing salience of criminal justice data as *evidence* of effectiveness. Second, the concomitant rise of criminal justice organisations, particularly agencies such as the AFP, as producers of objective ‘fact’ about the ‘reality’ of crime — data that is largely reproduced in ‘monitoring’ reports. As gatekeepers to criminal justice practices and data, these organisations wield considerable power in the management of information. Within the framework of transnational crime and the emerging national security agenda, the ability of the AFP to determine who may access AFP data (and in what manner) and the increasingly opaque reporting of AFP activities has been the subject of concern in many areas (cf Dixon 2008 regarding the AFP and the interrogation of terrorism suspects). The reliance on process data is evident in the production of claims of ‘success’ in the anti-trafficking efforts implemented by both DIAC and the AFP when reporting on activities. For example, DIAC produced reports to the ANAO regarding their activities and their impact stating that the establishment of the Senior Migration Officer Compliance Trafficking position in Thailand had resulted in ‘effective lessening [of] the impact of people trafficking in Australia’ (ANAO 2009:18). As the ANAO noted, there is no basis for such a conclusion as there is no evaluation process, nor is there any empirical evidence upon which such a determination can be made. It appears that *doing something* is presumed to have an impact and to be a substitute for any empirical data upon which to base conclusions about effectiveness and impact.

Critically, these assumptions have remained the unshaken foundation of the policy response. The causal rationale — where simply having a team of investigators focus on an issue will produce the desired effect of effectively policing the crime — informs the reporting of key agencies such as DIAC and the AFP (who are not responsible for considering the issue beyond their jurisdiction or responsibility), as well as the rationale of policymakers more generally. The ANAO noted that while the AFP submission recognised the limitations of quantifying any illicit activity as a measurement tool (particularly practices such as human trafficking), this was at odds with the claim made in the introduction of the *Australian Government Action Plan* that the introduction of the AFP’s Transnational Sexual Exploitation and Trafficking Team ‘would make a substantial impact on combating sexual servitude in Australia’ (ANAO 2009:19). As the ANAO Report details further, the AFP, like DIAC, have systematically failed to develop substantive or meaningful performance indicators and measures, and instead have ‘focused on activity based reporting such as the number of investigations undertaken and number of prosecutions achieved, rather than the impact of the strategies on the objectives’ (ANAO 2009:19). Above and beyond the measurement of performance and accountability, there is no impetus for a broader evaluation of the policy package that includes closely attending to issues of implementation on the ground and the experience of implementation by victims.

Supporting victims

Many of the initial and sustained concerns regarding the policy package have coalesced around the inadequacy of the visa framework introduced as an element of the suite of victim support measures, but which was exclusively tied to the progression of criminal investigations (Burn, Blay and Simmons 2005; Burn and Simmons 2005; Segrave and Milivojević 2005; Burn, Simmons and Costello 2006). Similarly, until June 2009 the victim

support program — which includes accommodation, counselling, legal and migration advice — has also been conditional upon the progression of cases through the criminal justice system (Attorney-General's Department 2009). The concerns raised by the development of a system that operates to effectively offer victims support only when they assist the State in pursuing a criminal case have been made clearly elsewhere for sometime (see Segrave, Milivojević and Pickering 2009; Burn, Simmons and Costello 2006; Burn and Simmons 2005; Maltzahn 2004). These concerns were reiterated by the ANAO and important changes were introduced in June 2009. However, some issues remain pertinent.

Two particular concerns exemplify the extent to which victims of trafficking are repeatedly robbed of their agency and rights in order for the administrative and criminal justice priorities of decisionmakers to progress smoothly. This remains the case even with the recent changes. The authors of this article have argued elsewhere that within a law and order framework, women must be recognised first and foremost as victims and the status of victim does not extend to simultaneously recognising women as migrant economic actors involved in actively pursuing transnational migration and labour opportunities and making strategic decisions based on their circumstances, needs and desires (Segrave et al 2009; Sassen 2002). This perspective informs the concerns raised in this article.

One of the most significant findings of the ANAO Report pertained to the issue of visa provision to victims of trafficking. As cases progress through the criminal justice process, the connected administrative process involves progressing women through both the visa framework and the stages of victim support. The visa framework came about in response to the recognition that many of the victims of trafficking identified by authorities in the early stages of implementation were without legal status in Australia (or this status was rendered invalid due to the circumstances in which these visas were obtained) and, hence, required a visa to remain in the country to assist with investigations, in order to enable Australia to meet its obligations under the *UN Trafficking Protocol*. Critically, however, not *all* victims of trafficking are in this position. Indeed, as the ANAO Report details, in the majority of cases coming to the attention of authorities potential victims do have substantive visas (eg student visa, working holiday visa) that are not invalidated by the circumstances by which they came to Australia or the situations in which they are found (ANAO 2009:51). They are legally in Australia, are not in breach of visa conditions and many have work rights. Despite this, the practice of authorities, as the ANAO Report details, has been to cancel these visas in order to shift women onto the trafficking visa system — not because their migration status needed to be regularised, but to ensure access to the victim support system. For some, this involved moving from a substantive visa to a visa with fewer rights in order to be officially recognised as a trafficking victim. For example, one case study in the Report explained how women have had legal and valid visas revoked to be placed onto the first stage of the trafficking victim visa framework — the Bridging Visa F (a visa that does not entitle holders to work) — only to then find that the AFP's decision was that there was no further case for investigation, resulting in the support for the visa being withdrawn and subsequent deportation.

While this situation has been remedied to some degree by the visa changes noted above (Attorney-General's Department 2009), it highlights practices that had hitherto been largely undocumented and officially unreported. Between 2004 and 2009 this was the accepted practice — a practice that prioritises the administrative function and requirements of the Australian visa regime and reveals a counter-trafficking process that cannot heed the range

of circumstances, needs and desires of potential victims encountered by authorities.⁷ The discourse around human trafficking policy responses, particularly the highly charged discussions around sex trafficking, have failed to attend to the significant harm of State action and inaction in making decisions about women's lives and their livelihood. The ANAO commented that '[i]t is not clear whether alleged victims are being appropriately informed about the impact of the cancellation' (ANAO 2009:52). There has been, to date, no accountability for these practices, and no attention paid to the broader outcomes and impacts such decisions have had. The potential for women to be harmed and for their circumstances to be detrimentally impacted by such processes is not a theoretical possibility. Research by the authors of this article — in countries such as Serbia and Thailand, with women who have been trafficked abroad and returned in similar circumstances — has detailed the significant economic, emotional and other impacts, in addition to recognising that for many, the return to their country of origin is effectively a transit period that involves seeking new options for future labour migration opportunities (Segrave, Milivojević and Pickering 2009).

It is not only the management of the visa and migration system that reveals the limited attention to victim perspectives, and to the challenges and issues raised in the implementation of the policy. There is a failure of the policy response to recognise that the circumstances in which victims of trafficking may be found will not automatically have rendered them unable to work or to be independent social actors. The current response is paternalistic, assuming that women trafficked into the sex industry will have welfare and trauma needs or priorities — but the situations of trafficking are as diverse as the needs of those who have experienced exploitative conditions. Cases that have been prosecuted in Australia have revealed the naïvety of assumptions that a victim of trafficking will be unable to function independently (cf *R v Wei Tang* (2007) 16 VR 454; *R v Tang* (2008) 237 CLR 1). We know that women (and men) who have experienced trauma, sexual violence and various forms of exploitation are, of course, also active contributing members of Australia society — their experiences do not automatically render them unable or unwilling to work. Yet, the current system in Australia does not allow those on a Bridging Visa F to work (Human Trafficking Working Group 2010:3). This visa system is based on assumptions about victims' needs that have consistently been challenged since the strategy was introduced (Burn and Simmons 2005; Costello 2005). Such findings are not exclusive to the Australian context and similar concerns have been raised elsewhere (see Kapur 2005; Agustín 2005, 2007). Arising from this research and scholarship is an argument that the presumptions regarding victim needs, the limitations on work rights and the time limitations on the visas in place (specifically in Australia the Bridging Visa F and the Criminal Justice Stay visas) signals the importance of citizenship in influencing the parameters of support and assistance (Kapur 2005; Agustín 2007; Segrave et al 2009). It also reflects a failure to recognise that, in many cases, the exploitation that occurs has more to do with remuneration and work conditions — whether it be trafficking into the sex industry or any other industry — that are connected to broader labour regulation issues. From this perspective, the importance of providing compensation to exploited workers in addition to other support mechanisms is more likely to be acknowledged (Segrave 2008). Instead, as non-citizens, women who have been identified as victims of trafficking are granted conditional and short-term assistance with limited work and other rights, and no provision at any stage of a clear timeframe

⁷ As one reviewer of this article highlighted, such practices are not unique to the area of human trafficking and similar 'movement' between different visas occurs for a number of groups, including those seeking protection on the basis of refugee status. The broader mechanisms and culture of the management of the administration of Australian visas are also an important factor underpinning the issues raised in this article, though this is a subject for further exploration elsewhere.

regarding the length of time they may be able to remain in Australia. While it appears that nations in the West, in particular, find passive, naïve victims who are tricked or forced into sex work more palatable and with more obvious needs, it is rarely the case that such cases or such victims are found. While not discounting, nor wishing to trivialise, the abuse that some women do experience, research findings by the authors of this article suggest that we must begin with the acknowledgement of the reality of women's lives and their situations and, critically, their priorities. The system provides little for women who come to Australia primarily to seek employment opportunities for financial gain and whose circumstances lead to either no remuneration or further debt. More thorough research is needed on the way in which women and men whom authorities believe may be victims of trafficking are presented with options, and on how they weigh up the prospect of deportation or repatriation or of remaining in the country for another 45 days accessing support services or participation in a criminal justice investigation and prosecution that could take four to five years to be resolved (indeed, the *Wei Tang* case with the ongoing appeals took over five years to move through the Australian judicial processes to finalisation). Research by the authors of this article in Australia, Thailand and Serbia has found that many women will choose to, and do, leave.

The return home

A final point of discussion in this section relates to a significant absence from the ANAO Report. This pertains to the process of repatriation. In the design of the *Australian Government Action Plan* in 2004 it was announced that all Thai women who were identified as potential victims of trafficking would be assisted in the return home via a repatriation process to be managed by AusAID (who contracted the repatriation process out to the International Organisation for Migration (IOM)). There has been no assessment of this process made available. Research by the authors of this article has found that this process is highly restrictive in terms of who it is available to, and that the practice is effectively an extension of national criminal justice priorities as it is designed to increase the likelihood of victims coming forward once they are returned to their country of origin (see Segrave 2009b; Segrave, Milivojević and Pickering 2009). The failure to address this aspect of the policy response in the audit process is unexplained and warrants further investigation. It reveals the need for a thorough evidence base and demonstrates, yet again, the necessity for a comprehensive analysis of the implementation and impacts of the current policy strategy, beyond the limits of an audit report seeking to evaluate the management of the response.

The audit

Human trafficking: Setting the parameters

While human trafficking is broadly defined (ANAO 2009:11), the ANAO Report focuses on sex trafficking throughout, reflecting the prioritisation of this form of human trafficking by the Australian Government and government agencies since 2004. Labour trafficking is absent from the Report and remains relatively absent from the human trafficking efforts in Australia, despite increased rhetoric and efforts in relation to this form of trafficking in the past two years (USDOS 2010:66–7). The Report acknowledges that this focus reflects the fact that, based on AFP data, the majority of victims identified in Australia to date have been women trafficked into the sex industry (ANAO 2009:29). While the Report later asserts repeatedly that the existing AFP and DIAC data reflect *activity*, rather than the 'reality' of human trafficking in Australia, this focus on sex trafficking is not considered

problematic even though the ‘fact’ of the number of victims found cannot be presumed to be a reflection of victimisation, but of the focus of authorities in seeking and identifying victims. There is little comment regarding the focus exclusively on sex trafficking, including the lack of recognition of the limits of the ANAO’s data-gathering efforts that involved ANAO auditors accompanying DIAC compliance teams on raids *only* in relation to the sex industry. This information is included in the Appendices of the Report, where a table of suggestions (rather than the more weighty ‘recommendations’ contained within the Report) includes the possibility that the AFP and DIAC need to look more broadly in terms of targeting their resources towards regional locations and beyond the focus on sex trafficking (ANAO 2009:86). While the Report acknowledges the recent shift to attend to all forms of trafficking, it is a concern that the Report cannot and does not identify that the current system has been based upon and implemented as a process designed to attend to women as victims of trafficking processes that primarily involve sexual exploitation. That the policy response is simply being expanded to apply to all victims and situations of trafficking raises many concerns, and requires further and more detailed analysis.

The audit recommendations

Numbers, numbers, numbers

The ANAO Report operates within a regulatory framework defined within a policy-oriented economic model. As such, its findings must be examined within the parameters of the ANAO’s role and task, which was to undertake a ‘performance audit of the management of the Australian Government’s Action Plan to Eradicate Trafficking In Persons’ (ANAO 2009:13). For criminologists in particular, the focus on the *management* of the response, without considering the framework and its broader context, raises concerns. Particularly when this audit exists as the sole published review related to the policy since the first year of implementation.⁸ It also absolves the ANAO from asking broader questions that are deemed beyond its remit. The role of a report such as this is effectively to reinforce the logic of the current response, to identify weaknesses of management and to suggest strategies for reinforcing and maintaining what is in place. The ANAO Report is demonstrative of the limits of evaluations that do not look beyond the immediacy of policy implementation to the broader research and scholarship in an area, including the reality of the weakness of the national and international evidence base. The lack of data regarding trafficking patterns and the impacts of counter-trafficking efforts is recognised at once as a global reality and as a reflection of the complex nature of this issue (ANAO 2009:29, 30), *yet* all six ANAO recommendations relate to the production of baseline data and performance indicators that should be reported annually to achieve transparency and accountability (ANAO 2009:24–6). There are also important issues and significant suggestions made in the detail of the Report that are absent from the summarised list of recommendations (as they are beyond the scope of the ANAO focus), which means they are not required to be responded to directly and can conveniently be ignored. The second of the six recommendations was the development of arrangements for an appropriate performance framework, ‘including a method to establish reasonable estimates of the approximate numbers of victims’, and to have performance indicators that are reported annually by all agencies involved (ANAO 2009:45–6). Of concern at the time the Report was released was that such language has the potential to enable agencies to maintain the status quo and simply gather and collect more process data

⁸ As opposed to monitoring reports such as the APTIC Report (2009).

that can then be used to produce descriptive trend data. In many ways the APTIC Report, produced a few months later, was the realisation of that concern.

A significant issue raised by the ANAO recommendations is that the most tangible recommendation is the identification of the need to produce more quantitative data. According to the Report, the ‘key baseline measure of the effectiveness’ of the *Australian Government Action Plan* is the documentation of the trend in numbers of victims trafficked into Australia a ‘challenging ... but achievable’ task (ANAO 2009:14). ‘Indicators’, ‘targets’, ‘benchmarks’, and ‘estimates’, as indicated in the Report, are ‘important for assessing the success of the anti-trafficking measures’ (ANAO 2009:17). Attempts to quantify trafficking have been the significant focus of various agencies and organisations, locally and internationally, for decades and this has been the subject of much debate (Kelly 2005; Goodey 2008). These efforts focus on a range of data, from overall number of victims according to geography (country/region), to the number of identified victims, the number who come forward to authorities, the number willing to participate in the criminal justice system, and the number repatriated. It could be argued that such efforts are a legitimate way of trying to portray something as intangible and complex as human trafficking in a tangible way, that makes sense to global audiences and that can mobilise the international community to act. However, the production and reproduction of such data has consequences. First, it diverts our attention from issues that need to be addressed, for example the challenges faced by women from developing countries trying to seek legitimate passage to more developed nations to work and the multiple points in those journeys that may put them at risk of various forms of exploitation. Further, as argued elsewhere (Milivojević and Pickering 2008), the endless production of ‘guesstimates’ with no substantive evidence have the potential to create harm for those we ought to protect. Thus, the ANAO sets a challenging and potentially dangerous task in encouraging the ‘[development of] a method to produce reasonable estimates of the approximate number of victims trafficked into Australia’ (ANAO 2009:15), especially if such a task is part of a process that involves measuring the success of the anti-trafficking framework by reporting the percentage of victims willing to assist police, the number of prosecutions and convictions, the number of applications for Bridging Visa F, the number of people who make complaints about trafficking, the number of AFP referrals, the percentage of victims receiving services and number of victims assisted per year (ANAO 2009:44, 62–3, 80) and so on. The need for better data gathering is clear, but the emphasis on pursuing purely or predominantly quantitative accounts of the current process is a concern.⁹ More importantly, its usefulness in terms of assessing whether the framework is working or not is highly questionable. The preoccupation with ‘internally deliverable “outputs”’ and inability to escape the ‘new political rationality of “managerialism”’ are embodied within this Report (Loader and Sparks 2002:87; Garland 2001; Clarke and Newman 1997).

Indeed, it is within this context that the logic of the law and order framework and the focus on prosecutions are further consolidated. Criminal justice outcomes present an opportunity to fulfil both the symbolic desire for the performance of justice together with the instrumentalist desire for measurable outputs (Segrave et al 2009). The ANAO Report concludes that working towards the production of more accurate trend data in relation to the number of victims ‘would provide Parliament with some assurance that the Action Plan is achieving its intended results and provide an indication of progress towards eradicating the

⁹ The 2009 AIC Trafficking Monitoring Report has promised the inclusion of qualitative and quantitative data in future reports that may present a broader picture of what is happening, however this remains to be seen (Joudo Larsen, Lindley and Putt 2009).

trafficking in persons' (ANAO 2009:15). This conclusion is steeped in the language of managerialism. The assessment of the effectiveness of policy implementation is neither naturally nor logically connected in any direct way to the eradication of human trafficking.

The ANAO calls for greater transparency and accountability, a call echoed by the authors of this article. The main concern, however, is that these recommendations will result in the continued production of descriptive process and activity data — information that may continue to obscure the complex links between exploitation, migration and economic issues under conditions of globalisation. It is of note that in a close reading of the detailed suggestions from the ANAO regarding the reporting and collating of information, the overwhelming focus is on the production of quantitative data. There is one paragraph that suggests there would be 'merit' in collecting qualitative data from victims (ANAO 2009:44). Reflecting the ANAO's focus and role, the suggested qualitative component is driven by the desire to assess what is being done. It does not suggest that through better understanding women's experiences that we may better understand vulnerabilities to exploitation and the circumstances under which exploitation may occur. In this way, the absence of critique can be seen to ultimately reaffirm the current approach.

A final concern pertains to recommendations regarding the focus of future efforts. The Audit notes that the policy framework has, thus far, mismanaged cases involving particularly vulnerable victims, including those who are mentally impaired and children. The authors of this article recognise the legitimacy and the importance of having specific measures that allow for groups within the victim cohort whose needs (and experiences) differ considerably. However, insisting on the development of better responses to these cases should not be the primary focus or measure of government efforts to improve the response to trafficking. This enables attention to be displaced from the fundamental deficits of the current response. It also reinforces the merging of trafficking of women and the trafficking of children as equivalent issues under the human trafficking banner. Trafficking-related practices that involve women and that involve children are fundamentally different, and must not and cannot be treated in the same manner in terms of the support for victims and the response of government agencies.

The lessons from an empirical evidence base

The ANAO Report was released at a time when there was a shift towards the expansion of the anti-trafficking framework within Australia — and, indeed, this shift continues. Thus, the findings contained within the Report and the recommendations it made are especially deserving of attention. Research in the area by the authors of this article and colleagues continues to demonstrate that the current framework is problematic (see Pearson 2007; McSherry and Kneebone 2008; Burn, Simmons and Costello 2006). The importance of attending to the limits of this framework cannot be underestimated. As some initial work in the area of labour exploitation is demonstrating, the impacts of misplaced and simplistic efforts can result in expanding the opportunities for exploitative practices (Segrave 2008, 2009). In Thailand, Australia and Serbia there was evidence that narrowly-focused criminal justice efforts created further opportunities for more profit to be gained by those seeking to exploit marginalised migrant groups, and this was enhanced by the limited options for assistance for those who experienced exploitation (Segrave et al 2009). Repeatedly exploited workers have told the authors that it remains a more realistic option to hope that one day soon you may be paid, rather than relying on authorities to provide any relevant or useful assistance. The ANAO Report was not designed to, and nor did it, actively assess the

adequacy of the response to trafficking and the authors of this article understand this. However, the concern is that while some important points were raised in the Report, its findings imply that the current framework is effectively sound, but requires some adjustments. Thus, it serves to reinforce the logic that underpins the current framework. Based on empirical data arising from rigorous research in three countries, three final points need to be made before concluding.

First, research by the authors of this article leads to the conclusion that simply expanding the focus to become more inclusive of 'all victims of trafficking' is going to result in the further entrenchment of the assumption that a domestic criminal justice response is impacting upon practices of exploitation within the nation and in people's movement across national borders. This is unfounded.

Second, the focus remains on management and oversight of the implementation of this policy response in terms of quantifying every process, with some possibility of additional qualitative material. There needs to be a shift away from numbers to contexts and to the complexities of a range of issues that give rise to exploitation. For nations and for communities this requires a more complex and comprehensive response that cannot be easily quantified. It requires rethinking the exclusive location of anti-trafficking efforts within the criminal justice framework and identifying that this system is not able to deal adequately with the range of issues that require attention. The authors of this article recognise the challenge in such a call, as nations such as Australia remain steadfast in their reliance on the 'seeming practicality' of criminal justice efforts and on the 'tangible results' of criminal justice data (Goodey 2003:423).

A final concern is that the ANAO Report continues the expanded reach of official policy and 'research' discourse that rewrites women as 'victims', effectively condensing myriad narratives — of migration, labour, survival, hardship, opportunity, exploitation, desire and incentive — into an assumed identity of victimisation. There are no questions about women's needs or responses to what was available — the Report draws upon the 2005 AFP estimate of 100 persons trafficked annually, then notes that from the introduction of the victim support service in 2004 to August 2008 107 victims had been 'assisted under the various phases of support', observing that this is a 'substantial shortfall in catered demand of up to victims per year' (ANAO 2009:15). At no point is it suggested in the Report that this shortfall may be, in part, due to the failure of the existing response to attend to the immediate concerns and needs of those who experience exploitation in Australia. This is further evidence of the ways in which women's experiences of exploitation have revolved around neoliberal agendas of control (Segrave, Milivojević and Pickering 2009; Kapur 2005; Bumiller 2008). As argued elsewhere, women's negligible opportunities for legitimate transnational migration options — particularly women from developing nations seeking short-term low-skilled employment — produce harms that are attributable not only to the 'traffickers', but also to the myriad nations, including Australia, that enforce highly restrictive border enforcement regimes (Segrave, Milivojević and Pickering 2009).

It is nevertheless fitting to conclude by signalling opportunity. Australia, as a developed nation that plays a key role within the region, has an ability to forge an alternative approach to this issue. Currently the US maintains a tightly-held grip on the anti-trafficking agenda that is echoed by the *UN Trafficking Protocol* framework. While the change of Administration has enabled some of the more explicitly moralised (and gendered) components of the US anti-trafficking framework to be abandoned, it remains a model that is highly symptomatic of the global insistence upon human trafficking as a discrete transnational criminal justice issue that can effectively be dealt with via immigration and

criminal justice measures. This is not the *only* framework available. Nor is it a framework that cannot be amended and moulded to fit the realities of practices and situations on the ground. An approach is needed that seeks *not* to prioritise prevention, prosecution and protection as they are currently conceived. Though this is possible, recent developments such as the Victorian Parliament Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee Inquiry into People Trafficking for Sex Work (Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 2010) demonstrate the tight grip of the narrow assumptions and approaches of policymakers (see Pickering and Segrave 2010). In place of this approach, Australia could consider enabling migration, supporting and recognising the contribution of low-paid and low-skilled labourers to its economy, and begin asking those who are actively engaged in transnational labour migration circuits how it may be possible to support their needs, whilst also serving the nation's desire to criminalise and prosecute those engaged in exploitative practices. The ANAO Report, operating as it does to offer key insights into current practice, but with no mandate to comment on the appropriateness of the anti-trafficking framework, reminds us that while an alternative is possible, it may not come easily.

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