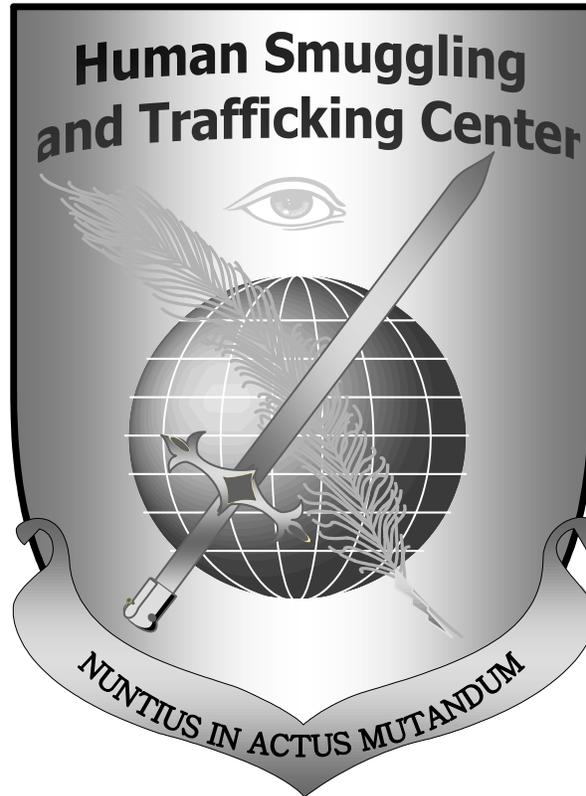


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Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center



HSTC Intelligence Note

**Tenancingo Bulletin #9:
Traffickers' Recruitment Methods
Adapted from Local Customs**

**January 24, 2011
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(CONTEXT STATEMENT: The information in this report was provided by the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Center (HSTC) in collaboration with the participating agencies of the HSTC. The HSTC is an interagency fusion center and information clearinghouse, composed of representatives from various governmental agencies, and focused on matters of human smuggling, human trafficking, and the facilitation of terrorist travel. The HSTC provides the U.S. Government with a mechanism to achieve greater integration and overall effectiveness in its efforts to eliminate these activities. The HSTC is unique among U.S. organizations and centers in that it concentrates on illicit worldwide travel and provides guidance to U.S. Government policymakers.)

Scope Note: *This is the ninth in a series of bulletins at the unclassified level based solely on open source reporting intended to inform federal, state, and local law enforcement about the Tlaxcala, Mexico-based sex trafficking network with ties to the U.S.*

(U) *Traffickers' Recruitment Methods Adapted from Local Customs*

(U) Customs indigenous to peoples of Tlaxcala, Mexico and other central and southern rural Mexican states known collectively as "The South" help to explain Tlaxcala-based sex traffickers' recruitment methods and their sustained effectiveness. Traffickers' successful adaptation of local cultures and customs is just one factor that has allowed the sex trafficking industry to thrive in this region. We will continue to explore aspects of the development of this culture in successive Intelligence Notes.

(U) Two Ways to Marry and Two Ways to Recruit

(U) Tlaxcala-based traffickers are documented in U.S. and Mexican media wooing and seducing young women, according to local custom, and then asking forgiveness and establishing cordial relations with the victim's family.¹ Mexican anthropologist and sociologists' more detailed studies indicate that Tlaxcala-based sex traffickers' use of traditional family codes of conduct in the heavily indigenous Mexican regions has facilitated their recruitment in Veracruz, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, among other poorer, more rural Central and Southern Mexican states known broadly as "The South." Traffickers' two recruitment protocols – "nicely" and "underhandedly" -- resemble the two traditional ways of contracting marriage in this region: "Asking of the hand" and "Theft of the bride." Traffickers have skillfully co-opted local cultures to facilitate their business.

(U) The Traditional Asking of the Hand

(U) Marriage in "The South" is normally a complicated series of customs, including blessings, gift exchanges, meals, dance, a giving away of the bride to her new family, and a nuptial bed. These rituals solidify ties between a man and women and also between their extended families. When an indigenous Mexican man from "The South" asks for the hand of a young woman and her family gives her away willingly, marriage accords her certain rights as a wife, including status in her new extended family and in her community.

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(U) When traffickers recruit *por la buena*, or “nicely,” they woo a potential victim, cohabitate with her, and convince her to prostitute herself using their personal financial woes as a justification. Unlike the women asked traditionally, conferring customs of family mediation and reciprocity between two families, the women *padrotes* recruit for sex trafficking do not enjoy the possibility of recourse. They may be the subject of stigma, having gone out of normal parameters, and considered “a wasted woman,” or a “failure.”

(U) The Culturally Acceptable Theft of the Bride

(U) The alternative to the “Asking of the hand” is the “Theft of the bride.” This highly ritualized marriage protocol makes a woman the transactional material of a family alliance and uses control of the woman’s body to create community cohesion.² It is culturally acceptable in many rural, indigenous areas, including Chiapas, Quintana Roo, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tabasco, Puebla, Estado de Mexico, Tlaxcala. *Padrotes* have transformed and adapted “Theft of the bride” to their sex trafficking recruitment needs.^{3,4}

(U) While not as accepted as the “Asking of the hand,” the theft is a concerted kidnapping with a full cultural screenplay and ritual recognition by complicit parents and community. Sometimes it includes a calculated rape that makes a woman “unreturnable” to her family. Often the parents of the groom facilitate his bride’s detainment and help ask forgiveness of her parents after she has been absent too long not to belong to her future husband.⁵ In some indigenous communities, obtaining a woman by force shows manhood and confers prestige.⁶

(U) The Trafficker Steals a Victim to Compel Her into Prostitution

(U) Like any young man looking to marry in this region, a Tlaxcala-based trafficker will aim first to recruit a woman by wooing her – a traditional asking her hand. But if he is unable, he will take her underhandedly, through the trafficker’s version of theft. When the trafficker steals the future victim, he may keep her for some time, sexually mistreating, impregnating, and then abandoning her to a job of indentured prostitution, going well beyond the limits of any regional custom. *Padrotes*, as the pimps are widely known, take advantage of an existing social logic, systems of family ties, and attitudes toward ownership of the female body to recruit indigenous women. The theft of the bride becomes a way to abuse women.⁷

(U) When *padrotes* steal the bride, they follow similar patterns to the socially legitimate theft of the bride, going to girl’s home to ask her parents’ forgiveness, bringing her to live in his home, letting her have contact with her family and even permitting her to send money initially; however, Tlaxcala-groomed traffickers later force their victims into prostitution in faraway locations and abuse them physically – again, activities completely outside the bounds of local custom. They do not allow family contact as victims’ testimony indicates, “We couldn’t talk to anybody, not even my own mother... if [we] would say anything to [our] families... he would beat us.”⁸

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(U) *Sorting the Criminals from the Customs They Exploit*

(U) In these ways, sex traffickers distort the traditional “Asking of the hand” and “Theft of the bride” into successful recruitment methods, one apparently kinder than the next, but both devolving into the same inhumane sexual exploitation. U.S. and Mexican authorities working to counter Tlaxcala-based trafficking must understand how these recruitment methods’ traditional underpinnings have fueled and sustained the lucrative sex trafficking in this region. These authorities will need to carefully extricate the criminals from the cultural practices that they have adapted to the benefit of their illicit activity – and note that they have rendered them distinct from those culturally acceptable.

¹(U) *New York Times Magazine*, “The Girls Next Door,” 25 January 2004, <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/01/25/magazine/the-girls-next-door.html?scp=1&sq=%22the%20girls%20next%20door%22%20peter%20landesman&st=cse>, accessed 17 December 2010.

²(U) Segato, Rita Laura, *Las estructuras elementales de la violencia. Ensayos sobre género entre la antropología, el psicoanálisis y los derechos humanos*, Universidad Nacional de Quilmes, Buenos Aires, Argentina, 2003.

³(U) D’Aubeterre, María Eugenia, *El pago de la novia. Matrimonio, vida conyugal y prácticas transnacionales en San Miguel Acuexcomac, Puebla*, El Colegio de Michoacán/Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la BUAP, Michoacán, 2000.

⁴(U) Robichaux, David, “La formación de la pareja en la Tlaxcala rural y el origen de las uniones consuetudinarias en la Mesoamérica contemporánea: un análisis etnográfico y etnohistórico”, in David Robichaux, *El matrimonio en Mesoamérica ayer y hoy. Unas miradas antropológicas*, Universidad Iberoamericana, México, 2003.

⁵(U) D’Aubeterre, María Eugenia, *El pago de la novia. Matrimonio, vida conyugal y prácticas transnacionales en San Miguel Acuexcomac, Puebla*, El Colegio de Michoacán/Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades de la BUAP, Michoacán, 2000.

⁶(U) López Moya, Martín de la Cruz, *Hacerse hombres cabales. Prácticas y representaciones de la masculinidad entre indígenas tojolabales de Chiapas*, tesis de maestría, CIESAS Occidente- Sureste, 1999.

⁷(U) Romero Melgarejo, Osvaldo, *Crisis de la comunidad indígena tlaxcalteca. Surgimiento de los proxenetes y la prostitución*, 2006.

⁸(U) United States District Court, Northern District of Georgia, Atlanta Division, “USA v. Francisco Cortes-Meza, Defendant,” Docket no. 1:08-CR-55-RWS-3, 1 April 2010.