

2 Traffic old and new

Trafficking in women is not new, but has been practised for thousands of years. In some instances it has been sanctioned by religious custom, in others it has been the result of war or great industrial changes. Traditionally women have been treated as a commodity to be bartered or sold. For example, in the sixth century the Roman Emperor Justinian (527–65) wrote:

We have learnt that many of our subjects, finding that the profits they get from prostitutes are insufficient, are travelling throughout Europe and by taking advantage of poverty and inexperienced young girls, seduce them with promises of fine clothes and other things of a like nature. That they keep them in their houses by means of a contract which they make them sign, stipulating that they shall stay in a brothel as long as the brothelkeeper shall judge fit.¹

Justinian detailed practices by traffickers which are still used: debt bondage, confiscation of earnings and the denial of sleep and food. However, the phenomenon he described was not categorized as traffic in women until the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century heartrending stories circulated in various European countries about young girls who were being abused for prostitution. They were recruited with false promises of jobs abroad, but once they had reached the brothels they could only leave when they had paid the debts they were supposed to have incurred for clothing, food and lodging.

The stories concerned girls from France, Belgium and Germany who were trafficked to licensed state brothels in various European

countries. Balkestein, who investigated the subject in the nineteenth century in both target and receiving countries, looked at these claims.² He came across several cases, for instance that of F  licie Dordoigne, who was born in 1882, and at 18 years of age was a minor under the law of the time. She told him:

I am one of the many daughters of a poor widow. I went to Paris to find a job. While I was looking at advertisements on a newsstand in Paris, two gentlemen approached me. They asked me whether I was looking for employment. I answered I wanted to work as a seamstress. The men suggested they had suitable employment in a large house in the Netherlands.

When she told them she was 18 and could not travel without her parents' permission, they provided her with a forged birth certificate. She was then introduced to a third man, who turned out to be a brothel-owner. He took her to the station, where he handed her a letter for her future employer. She was told to take a horse and carriage when she reached Amsterdam. When she finally arrived at her destination, the truth dawned on her. She was in a brothel. As soon as she could, she escaped with the help of her colleagues, but she had no time to put on her shoes and was found barefoot outside the brothel.

Whereas German and French girls in the Netherlands ended up in closed houses, Belgian women had to sit behind windows 'in drawing-room costumes, behind semi-transparent curtains'.

The trafficker's progress

At the beginning of the twentieth century there was a large traffic of women between Britain and the United States. It was estimated that American brothels employed about 300,000 prostitutes. As each one worked on average in prostitution for five years, some 60,000 had to be replaced annually.³ Some women were recruited in shops by men posing as customers. 'He delivered me from the slavery in the shop. But I was so stupid as to believe him,' one shop assistant stated in court.

A famous American procurer of women was Paul Sinclair, born in 1875 in Ohio, who later repented and became active in the fight against traffic in women. He later confessed, 'I lived a life of lust,

greed and avarice.' He used the classic tricks of the trafficker: debts and threats. At the end of his career he made it up with one of his victims and remained her friend for life. His contemporaries believed that trafficking arose from ignorance, double standards, immoral literature, theatre entertainment and dance halls. Parents who failed to supervise their daughters or who didn't caution their sons to avoid brothels were blamed and fathers who frequented brothels were reminded that prostitutes had fathers too. Pressure groups achieved the closure of brothels. And after the United States introduced strict immigration laws in 1924 it became increasingly difficult to import foreign prostitutes. Traffickers consequently had to resort to bogus marriages to get foreign women into the country. Prostitution did not disappear in the United States but became an illegal activity organized by criminals. Thanks to the illegal liquor trade during Prohibition, the mafia became well organized. It moved on into drugs and prostitution when Prohibition was lifted.

Salvatore 'Lucky' Luciano was the first mafioso to engage in traffic in women. Some 10,000 girls were supposed to have worked in brothels controlled by his mob. About 100 women who refused to co-operate were beaten to death. Finally a woman blew the whistle on him and he was sentenced to 30 years in prison.⁴

Kaftans

The centres of nineteenth-century intercontinental traffic were the Jewish ghettos in eastern Europe.⁵ Jewish trafficking in women was the sad result of anti-semitism, urbanization, secularization and the demand for prostitutes. Eastern Europe was overpopulated and impoverished. In the ghettos several families would share a single room, their spaces only marked out by a chalk line. Around 1910 there was a huge shortage of potential husbands, and unmarried daughters were considered a burden on their impoverished families. However, they could only leave the community with the 'yellow badge of shame', which showed that they were prostitutes. Because there were no brothels in the ghetto, they had to go elsewhere and a number of women gratefully accepted this passport as an opportunity to see the world.

Other 'fallen' women were rejected by their fathers. Many eligible women were married according to the Jewish ritual of *Stillah Chuppah*, a ceremony which didn't have civil status although a

rabbi was present. These women were then completely dependent on their husbands, who could easily blackmail them into prostitution.

The *kaftan* or marriage broker was a familiar institution in Jewish communities. Though *kaftans* were not originally traffickers, the two words later became synonymous. They rounded up girls in Russian Poland and Galicia to send to brothels. Galicia was part of the Austro-Hungarian empire, bordering on Russia. Its centre was Lemberg. Most of the brothels in the region were owned by Jews, who were allowed to run them unhindered by the police. Although brothels were more or less accepted, the Jewish community ostracized the unclean people who were their victims.

As industrial centres, mining areas and construction sites in South America and elsewhere expanded rapidly in the 1880s, there was massive migration from Galicia. The large concentrations of labourers in these areas meant there was a great demand for prostitutes. *Kaftans* soon began trafficking women to South America and Constantinople and even to the Far East. Women who started in brothels in their local neighbourhood ended up in Argentina, for instance, which had a large Jewish community. The pioneer of the traffic, David Auerbach, was invited by the Jesuits, no less, to remedy the shortage of women in Buenos Aires. Pimps had arrived in Argentina before the first influx of eastern Europeans.

In 1898 the Jewish Colonization Association worked on 28 cases of trafficking. Only three of the girls were not Jewish. However, the records are not completely reliable because they don't always distinguish between traffickers, victims and independent prostitutes. Women already on the game were only too glad to get away from bad working conditions in eastern Europe and become high-class prostitutes in Argentina. This ambition was thwarted by the control the traffickers had over them. The girls could not migrate on their own because it was reputed to be very dangerous for women to travel alone. Some villain would see to it that when a woman had to change trains, she would miss the connection.⁶ The recruitment methods were similar to those used today: false promises of jobs, marriage and riches. For example, a man called Hirschfeld sold cheap rings at the doors of poor Jewish families in Pest, claiming he could introduce his victims to rich Turkish businessmen.

Usually trafficking was a family affair. The widow Chave Blum was the head of her family. When she was interrogated by the police at the respectable age of 86 she had established her offspring

comfortably in the trade. One of her sons, a pimp, married a prostitute and was deported to Constantinople. Her other son owned a brothel in Buenos Aires. Her daughter had disappeared to Argentina after marrying a thief. In trafficking families the men were active as well as the women.

In 1892 in Lemberg 27 people were tried for trafficking 29 women, almost as if every woman had been taken care of personally. In those days traffickers could not bundle large groups of women on to planes and check on them long distance by telephone. But traffickers were quick to make use of any new technical developments. In Poland between 1875 and 1880 the railways were being built and shipping routes mapped out, both of which greatly helped traffickers. In one case women were lured on to a boat which sailed suddenly without warning, too late for the women to disembark.

The Zwi Migdal society in Argentina, called after its legendary founder, was the largest and most organized example of Jewish trafficking. Originally founded to run a cemetery for 'unclean persons' who were not allowed room in official burial grounds, it performed other social services for its members and soon became a cover for criminal activities like trafficking. Zwi Migdal was large and well connected and reputedly trafficked scores of women.

A Romanian called Derderian followed in the footsteps of Zwi Migdal. Working with Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian agents, he recruited his women through advertisements and had a special department which forged the necessary papers. Sometimes he would even send a secretary to the woman's home to make a trustworthy impression on her parents.⁷

In the twentieth century Jewish traffickers were dispersed all over the world. Eastern European traffickers directed their attention to North America, which they had avoided at first. French pimps had been the first to supply this market. Known as *maquereaux*, these pimps even had a costume to show who they were: velvet trousers, a blouse and a little silk cap. They were soon joined by pimps from Greece, Italy and the United States.⁸ In Austria, where anti-semitism was very strong, right-wing groups used the part played by Jews in trafficking women for propagandist purposes. Anti-semites did not mention the large part other Jewish organizations played in combating the trafficking, and their other efforts to make amends for the crimes of the *kaftans*. In some cases their representatives waited at railway stations to catch traffickers in the act.

Abolitionism

In western Europe the fight against traffic in women was more systematic than in eastern Europe. In countries like the United Kingdom trafficking was to become a moral issue, which had a great impact on the later debate. The discussion was initiated by Josephine Butler (1828–1906), one of the first British activists against trafficking. Butler held the state responsible for the exploitation of women in brothels. She was convinced that the state condoned forced prostitution and exploitation of women and opposed the current view that prostitutes were necessary to satisfy the biological needs of men, who would otherwise harass respectable women, an opinion which she believed was the main cause of trafficking.

Many men and women joined Butler's movement. The men, however, tended to ignore the fact that she fought not only trafficking but also the belief that men could not control themselves. They preferred to concentrate on visiting brothels to rescue girls. Butler resented this. She wrote:

Some men who worked with us at the beginning, shocked with the cruelty and illegality of the acts, fall off when they understand the thoroughness of our crusade, and that it is directed not only against the cruel result of vice, but against the tacit permission, the indisputable right as some have learned to regard it, granted to men to be impure at all.⁹

W.T. Stead, who edited the *Pall Mall Gazette*, became involved in the movement after hearing reports of abuse and torture in London brothels. Politicians and the judiciary were unmoved by the evidence, so Stead and Butler decided on a plan which would prove conclusively that virgins, some of them very young, were being trafficked. He would find a procurer, who would buy a child and take her through all the stages of trafficking short of sexual abuse. A reformed procuress, Rebecca Jarrett, who was also a member of the movement, found Eliza Armstrong, who was only 13. Stead gave Jarrett £5 to buy Eliza, and told her to make sure that Eliza's parents knew she was being bought for immoral purposes. Eliza's mother was arrested the same night for being drunk and disorderly on the proceeds of the sale. Without Butler's knowledge, Stead and Jarrett had Eliza's virginity tested by a

midwife who was used by brothels to certify that young girls were virgins. Butler was furious when she heard of the means Stead had used to prove his case, but he had his story. When he published it in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, public rioting ensued and the paper was temporarily banned. Infuriated by this curb on the freedom of the press, George Bernard Shaw went out on the streets himself to sell the paper.

Butler left alone those women who had chosen to become prostitutes and had not been forced on to the game, but many of her followers condemned all prostitution. Well-meaning ladies founded organizations to 'lift the spirits' of prostitutes. Traffic in women was considered a moral issue by these groups, who ignored the social and economic bases of the problem.¹⁰

By the start of the twentieth century the idea that all prostitution, voluntary and involuntary, is slavery, had become dominant in Europe and the United States. The protagonists of this idea did not see prostitution as paid labour, but as the permanent subjection of women. They believed that prostitution should be abolished, as slavery had been, and called themselves abolitionists after those who had striven to abolish slavery. To distinguish traffic in women from the trade in negro slaves, the controversial term 'white slaves' was coined, which was later to be associated with forced prostitution. They wanted to force governments to ban both forced and voluntary prostitution.¹¹

Another group, which wanted to end all state interference in prostitution, confusingly also called itself abolitionist. There were, therefore, three types of abolitionist organization: one which fought black slavery; a second, which wanted to ban all prostitution; and the third, which aimed to end state interference in prostitution. Josephine Butler belonged to the third group, but soon had to give in to dissenting opinions.

In 1902 there was an important conference on the abolition of traffic in women in Paris. Delegates agreed that by definition white slaves must be unmarried. This was to become enshrined in law in Massachusetts in the same year:

the procuring must be fraudulent and deceitful and the woman must be unmarried and of a chaste life. If the procurer married the girl to circumvent the law, he cannot be prosecuted. If the girl makes one mistake in life, she cannot be protected from being procured.

The issue of the victims' virtue was to have long-term consequences. Until the 1980s only women of unblemished reputation could be labelled victims of traffic. Further, the delegates to the conference established that only international transport of women could be regarded as traffic in women, a view which still informs current discussion.

By the 1900s the feminist zeal had gone out of the movement as it became associated with moral reform. Contemporary feminists like Christabel Pankhurst and Emma Goldman considered the moral stand on prostitution fruitless. They wanted to improve women's economic position, so eradicating prostitution, and gave priority to the fight for the vote for women. Teresa Billington-Grieg from the Pankhursts' Women's Social and Political Union was even more cynical: 'There is no organised trapping, there is only sensationalism.'¹²

Trafficking in women had increased greatly with the first wave of industrialization in the nineteenth century. Large groups of people were dislocated as men moved into towns and cities to find employment, leaving women behind in the countryside. Middle-class indignation about prostitution and trafficking was increased by fears about urbanization. Cities like London were transformed and class divisions were challenged by workers demonstrating for their rights in rich neighbourhoods. Jack the Ripper then appeared on the scene, murdering women who went out to work.¹³ The cities seemed to be breeding grounds for traffic in women, and the trend grew in the twentieth century. Traffickers made use of technological advances like the ocean steamer and the telegraph, which facilitated intercontinental contacts. They sent cables in code, 'offering young lions or brandy', which referred to certain types of girl.¹⁴

The twentieth century

Soon after the Paris conference the abolitionists achieved their aims in Europe and the United States: in most European countries brothels were closed and state interference with prostitution ended. However, the demand for women's sexual services was not diminished, nor did women stop making a living from prostitution. The two world wars were later to relegate the prostitution problem to the background as sexual virtue was made pointless under the constant pressure of impending death.

After the Second World War, European traffickers sold women to night clubs, brothels and harems in Arabian and African countries. Zanzibar, Mozambique and Angola were the centres of this traffic, which was mainly controlled by Portuguese criminals who had been deported to the African colonies. Their brothels attracted customers from South Africa, where white men were barred from sleeping with black women. After decolonization the market for traffic in Africa dwindled, to be replaced by local networks which supplied women for native men.

Only the traffic in Europe was relatively well documented. In 1965 in Spain Professor Honojosa warned of an agency that was employing girls for jobs abroad but sending them to British and French prostitution rings instead. In Britain, the famous case of Red Max (Max Kassel) hit the headlines. He took girls to Paris only to put them to work on the streets and then left it to his agents to sell them on to brothels in various countries.¹⁵

The second great case of trafficking in the United Kingdom came to light in 1947. The Messina brothers arrived in Britain after the French had closed down their brothels. They fought the Maltese, who had been trafficking women from Malta. This was small-scale traffic: one man married one woman and put her to work as a prostitute.¹⁶ After the brothers had won their fight with the Maltese, they bought flats throughout London and rented them out to individual girls. Rooms with only one girl were not considered to be brothels, which left the police powerless.

The British authorities did everything they could to prevent the entrance of foreign prostitutes into the country. As they had done in the United States, traffickers resorted to the trick of bogus marriages. An extreme example of this was Etienne Verraud, who managed to contract 27 marriages in only two months. He remained in business for years.¹⁷

We don't know whether the traffic in women at this time occurred on a large or a small scale. The trade gradually diminished, probably because increasing postwar wealth made women indifferent to false promises of jobs in countries far away. However, an Interpol report in 1965 still listed five main routes:

- 1 South American women were exported to Puerto Rico, the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Between 1965 and 1974 few cases were recorded of trafficking from Argentina. Some women were recruited from the countryside to be put on the game in Chile, Italy, Turkey and the Middle East.

- 2 There was a regional market in Europe; for example, French women were sent to German eros centres.¹⁸ As in the 1950s, 1960s and early 1970s there was occasional trafficking between western European countries. A remnant still exists today, usually made up of runaways or addicts who can easily be black-mailed into entering prostitution.
- 3 European women were sent to developed African countries.
- 4 There was a regional market in south-east Asia.
- 5 There were large numbers of foreign prostitutes in Kuwait and Lebanon. Girls from Britain, Germany and France were being held in Beirut.

The Interpol report was based on only a few cases of traffic recorded in each country. Unfortunately the figures are hardly reliable because each government applied its own definition of traffic. Some countries recorded minor concentrations of prostitutes as cases of traffic, others merely reported court cases in which pimps were involved. Most countries didn't mention what Interpol called 'disguised traffic in women, the act of hiring women in one country with a view to making them engage in certain types of employment in another country, and in conditions in which they are subjected, incited or exposed to prostitution'. Most people would consider this to be full-blown trafficking. Until the 1970s press coverage of incidents of traffic in European women was very limited.

In 1979 the feminist writer Kathleen Barry brought the issue back into the public eye in her book *Female Sexual Slavery*. She later developed her argument further in *The Prostitution of Sexuality* in 1995. There are some weaknesses in her analysis: for example, she distinguished between voluntary and involuntary slavery, and voluntary slavery is of course a contradiction in terms. She did not differentiate between voluntary and involuntary prostitution. Despite this, Barry's achievement was to get traffic in women a modest place on the United Nations agenda and to have it recognized as an infringement of human rights. At a conference to found an international network against traffic in women Barry said to a journalist that a prostitute:

may plead for recognition of her work, but it also concerns us. She evokes the image of woman who can be taken. And if you don't take her, you buy her. It is the very basis of rape. Maltreating in marriages, threatening with sexual

violence, prostitution is the red thread of slavery and of taking women hostage.

Barry failed to mention the economic motives for entering prostitution.¹⁹ Her book aroused indignation among prostitutes who considered themselves 'ordinary working girls', but not victims. They pointed out that prostitution could not be ignored in today's society.

The *jungshindae*

Traffic in women has not only been run by organized crime or greedy individuals: governments have also been party to it. Korea was ruled by Japan from 1910 to 1945 and during this time 200,000 Korean women were forced into prostitution to service the Japanese military. The women were known as the *jungshindae* – the 'volunteer comforters'. The traffic reached its peak in 1944 when Emperor Hirohito passed the Women's Voluntary Labour Law, which allowed for the systematic procurement of large numbers of Korean women for military brothels.

Often the women were young – the youngest were only eleven and twelve. They were the daughters of farmers ruined by Japanese exploitation, who were promised plenty of good food and money and were often told that they would be working as cooks, domestic helpers or nursing assistants. About a quarter of them died. Those who tried to escape or who caught venereal disease were killed. Many more were massacred as the Japanese army retreated. After the war others were abandoned or offered to the occupying forces. Of those who went back to Korea, many were shunned by their families and forced to change their names. Some committed suicide by jumping off the boat rather than return home.²⁰

Some European women who were detained in Japanese concentration camps in south-east Asia during the Second World War were also forced into prostitution for the Japanese army. In the 1990s some of them joined with Korean women to sue the Japanese government for compensation.

Sun, sand and sex

Demonstrators against the Vietnam War in the 1960s and early 1970s could hardly have realized that sex tourism would be one

of the side effects of peace in south-east Asia. American GIs in the war were often sent to Thailand for R & R (rest and recreation), which added to the existing local market for prostitution in Thailand. After the American soldiers had left, the amusement centres which hosted them lay waste. But not for long. Tour operators found new ways to squeeze money out of the existing infrastructure of bars, discos and massage parlours. Where other strategies of development failed, tourism was a means for Thailand to earn foreign currency. The World Bank and the United Nations both encouraged tourism. In 1991 the proceeds of sex tourism in Thailand amounted to US\$3 billion, only 40 per cent of which remained in Thailand. The Thai government had allowed for a limited percentage of non-Thai ownership, but this rule was flouted by the use of puppet heads of companies. The other 60 per cent flowed back into the pockets of European investors. Tourism lured Thai women from the countryside, where they had few prospects, to the tourist centres where they took up prostitution.²¹

The first to explore this market were Japanese men, tired of the professional attitude of Japanese hookers. It was also cheaper to visit prostitutes in Thailand.²² European travel agencies soon followed suit. Sex tours were organized by both straight tour operators and companies advertising in porno magazines.²³

The more regular travel agencies didn't flaunt their amenities. They used phrases like 'very suitable for bachelors', or 'sauna and massage available'.²⁴ Feminists in Europe but particularly in Asia exposed them, demanding that sex tourism be recognized as the racist exploitation of economically weak women. The racism involved in the trade was illustrated by a leaflet advertising Thai women as if they were anthropological specimens: 'When Thai girls are mature, they ask to see the tribal chief: he arranges a sexual rendezvous with their fathers, with compliance of the wives.' This is not true: prostitution is not part of Thai culture. On the contrary, prostitutes are not really accepted. It has to be said, however, that although prostitution is illegal in Thailand, it is tacitly accepted by the government because of the revenue it generates. In most cases Thai prostitutes get to keep only a small part of their earnings; most of the money goes to the sex-tour agencies, the hotels, brothels and bars.²⁵

In 1973 the Japanese Women's Christian Temperance Unions described sex tourism as sexual imperialism and succeeded in putting a stop to prostitution in Japan by law.²⁶ In 1991 sailors

from the Gulf arriving at Pattaya in Thailand were welcomed by their wives and families instead of by a bunch of prostitutes. In Europe women demonstrated at airports and forced travel agencies to stop advertising sex tours. A major victory was won in the legal battle with the Norwegian tour operator Ivar Larsen in 1988. This was the first court case ever in the history of sex tourism. His advertising of Thai women in his brochure for his company, Scan Thai Travellers Club, was blatant:

Thai women don't bother about sexual intimidation as Norwegian women do. Western women consider prostitution as a form of repression whereas Thai women see prostitution as a cultural asset. These dark women are attractive because they are not aware of human rights.

Getting sick of women's rights fanatics – join Scan Thai. Thai women don't strive to be equal to men. On the contrary, it is innate in their culture to serve their husbands.

The Women's Front in Norway learned of Scan Thai and obtained a brochure. They criticized the club for trafficking in women, racism and sexism. Larsen sued Women's Front members in Tonsberg and Oslo for libel. In August 1988 the victory went to the Women's Front and the judge said, 'Generally one must see prostitution as a form of exploitation and oppression of women.'²⁷

In the second half of the 1980s other voices were heard, not least those of the Third World prostitutes themselves. They claimed to be dependent on this line of work as their only chance of earning a living. They said their families needed the money because sometimes they were the sole providers.²⁸

Traffic to Europe

'I don't have to go all the way to Thailand. Thai girls come here, to the Amsterdam red light district. Besides, I can choose any nationality,' a Dutch punter told me. He's right. The then popularity of underpaid Thai women with sex tourists inspired European brothel-owners to fill their houses with girls from south-east Asia. In 1976 the first oriental 'relax princesses', as they were called, were brought to western Europe; they were often prostitutes who were superfluous to the local and tourist markets.

Similar developments were taking place in Latin America. Tourism to the Dominican Republic, for instance, increased because the currency was devalued against the American dollar. On top of that the Dominican authorities created a favourable tax climate for foreign investors in real estate. In 1990, 3,000 prostitutes were active in the Dominican Republic, catering for both the tourist and local markets.²⁹ However, there is not always a relationship between sex tourism and traffic. Colombia is a sending country but does not have a fully fledged entertainment industry.

At the start of the 1980s South American women joined their colleagues from south-east Asia; at first it was Colombian and Dominican women in particular who came to Europe. In 1981 the first South American woman with a bought passport arrived at Amsterdam airport.³⁰ The second group consisted of migrant South American prostitutes recruited by sex bosses: sex-club owners paid commission to procurers.

Now many nationalities, including African and eastern European prostitutes, have entered the scene. Reports have surfaced of women who have been exploited, beaten up, threatened and sometimes raped by traffickers. They have also had to sign contracts for debt bondage. For example: 'You work eleven hours a day. You'll agree to marry for the duration of the contract and you'll end up as a divorcee. Your debt is 15,000 guilders.'³¹ Pressure groups who at first opposed sex tourism shifted their attention to the activities of criminal recruiters and were the first to warn of the revival of the trade in women. In 1987 Dutch groups achieved official status for STV, the foundation against traffic in women, when the government agreed to fund it.

