

### 3 A global brothel in a global village

---

Traffic in women is now a global problem. More and more countries are joining the ranks of sending countries, and increasing numbers are becoming target countries. For example Chinese and Burmese women are trafficked to Thailand, Philippine women to Australia and elsewhere, Mexican and Korean women to the United States and Japan, women from the Ivory Coast to France, Brazilian women to Surinam and Austria. The list is far from complete.<sup>1</sup> No country can claim that traffic does not exist within its borders, although some still try to.

#### Asia

In Asia alone a million people are living in enforced prostitution and slavery.<sup>2</sup> The trafficking of women in Asia is part of a larger picture of development and industrialization. Women destined for western post-industrial countries are usually recruited from regions in developing countries which formerly exported their own produce. Women from the poorest regions, like Bangladesh, are trafficked to developing countries such as India and Pakistan. Within Asia mass migration is going on, especially to the newly industrialized areas. Countries with medium development, such as the Philippines, Taiwan and Korea, are receivers for women from poorer countries like Vietnam, China, Indonesia and Burma. Sending countries are beset by unemployment, chronic poverty, and inability to provide education, medical care or welfare services, as well as by political instability.

When local means of subsistence are swept away by industrialization, the male population moves on to urban areas or abroad, to the Middle East and to countries like Hong Kong and Taiwan,

where the economy is booming. However, migrant workers cannot earn enough to support their families because receiving countries are unwilling to pay them reasonable wages. Women migrant workers follow these male population movements. They fill the demand for domestic workers in wealthy families. Other women end up serving tourists and locals in the prostitution market either abroad or in their own country.

#### *The Philippines*

Sex tourism is now the third top-dollar earner in the Philippines. In the 1970s, however, it was the largest source of foreign currency. Tourists were sent to prostitution houses in the Ermita-Malata area, or the local tourist belt of Pasay City, Paranaque and Mahati. Many of the bars and brothels were owned by Japanese, Australian or German proprietors. This blatant sex tourism became the target of protests by women's groups, whereupon the tourist agencies moved out to other areas.

Before the US military bases in the Philippines were closed in the early 1990s, there were some 50,000 to 55,000 women servicing the armed forces at the Subic Naval Base in Olongapo City and Clark Air Base in Angeles City.

#### *Malaysia*

In Malaysia, a largely Islamic country, sex tourism exists on a modest scale in comparison with Thailand or the Philippines. Currently, there is an influx of women migrants from poorer neighbouring countries. In 1984 more than 200 foreign prostitutes were deported including Filipina and Thai women, who are believed to continue to operate in vice rings across the country. In January 1990 it emerged that an international syndicate had forced several Malaysian girls to work in Japan, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Australia. The women had been promised well-paid jobs, but had ended up in brothels or been stranded in Japan. Many Malaysian children have been reported missing, but they have not been traced to brothels elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Taiwan*

Women are recruited in the mountain villages and abroad for Taiwan, with its fast-moving economy. Aboriginal mountain people, who form only 1 per cent of the population, are partic-

ularly likely to become victims of traffic. In 1986 a Filipino-Chinese man and his Taiwanese wife started to recruit young Filipina women with promises of jobs and marriage to Taiwanese businessmen, who posed as future investors in the Philippines. Filipina women are also trafficked to Hong Kong's sex industry.

### India

As many as 200,000 Nepalese prostitutes may be working in India. Yearly, 5,000 to 7,000 Nepalese girls are supposed to be lured into prostitution, for the sex-tourism industry in Katmandu especially, which caters for tourists on 'active sporting holidays'.

Whenever traffic in India is mentioned, the *devadasis* are discussed. These are young girls who are supposed to serve the goddess Yellama by giving themselves, in return for a pittance, to every man who happens to fancy them. Girls destined for this kind of temple service cannot get married but have to be faithful to the goddess. Although it was officially abolished in the late 1970s, the practice is still common, particularly in parts of southern India.

There has been much controversy in women's groups as to whether these girls lived in permanent slavery or enjoyed relative freedom. The German feminist Maria Mies, who has done intensive research in India, claims that some girls would rather be a *devadasi* than a subjugated married woman. Unlike other women, *devadasis* aren't dependent on fathers, brothers or husbands. They pursue a vocational career, partake in religious ceremonies otherwise reserved for men, and have equal inheritance rights with their brothers. On the other hand, during the feudal period they became the slaves of the village overlords, who had the right to deflower them.

Later this religious tradition was capitalized on by Bombay pimps, who bought the girls to use in their brothels. Some 200 girls still end up in Bombay's whorehouses each year. Ordinary girls are also lured from their villages to work in the cities and may find themselves working in the cages in Calcutta's brothels. These are a remnant of British imperialism, when the girls were supposedly caged to protect them from groping Englishmen.

Major cities like New Delhi and Bombay are transit posts for the Gulf region and Pakistan. Like Pakistan, India is a receiving country for women and girls from Bangladesh.<sup>4</sup>

Following immigration towards petrol dollars, the price of women has gone up, to the detriment of the women themselves. This is evident in the size of dowries and brideswealth, the money

or goods a groom must pay for his bride. Parents in poorer regions prefer to sell their marriageable daughters to men who have earned something in the boom. On the other hand, in the wealthier Middle East men have been unable to afford the soaring brideswealth of their nationals and have turned to cheaper brides abroad.

### Korea

Nothing is known about North Korea, but South Korea, which is a relatively wealthy country, does have a tradition of traffic in women. Towards the end of the Yi dynasty (1637–1910) wealthy men were entertained by the *kisaeng*, who were high-class courtesans. The *kisaeng* survive in 'entertainment' restaurants, although their status has been diminished. Under the government of Kim Young-Sam these restaurants became meeting places for bribers and bribe takers. The proceeds of economic growth did not flow into manufacturing industry but into the entertainment business. The *nouveau riche* liked to flaunt their wealth in these entertainment restaurants.

Many Korean women who wanted to avoid badly paid factory work tried their luck as waitresses and ended up as *kisaeng*. Their numbers were supplemented by trafficked women from China and the Philippines. In 1988 in Korea 349 official cases of trafficking were recorded, nearly double the figure for 1987. In 1991 a trafficker in custody named 17 large-scale gangs, each procuring an average of 150 women a month, which means that annually 30,000 trafficked women end up in Korea. They are treated badly: women have been burned with cigarette stubs, forcibly tattooed and photographed while being raped. The recruiters, sometimes unlicensed agencies, use universal methods like promises of well-paid jobs. Women have even been kidnapped by people asking directions in the streets, or approached by irresistibly handsome men in parks, 'who want to get to know them better'. The women, who are not as naïve as they may appear, fall for it, because they desperately need the advances they are paid.

Korea is also a sending country. Over 10,000 Korean women work in the Japanese entertainment industry, recruited mostly by fake labour agencies.<sup>5</sup>

### China and Hong Kong

Before the communist revolution prostitution in China was part of a whole system of buying and selling women. Young girls

were kidnapped or stolen; women were misled by false promises or pawned for adoption, marriage, domestic service or prostitution. Pawning women was common and to have a daughter pawned for prostitution was lucrative, since she could send money home and it was more respectable than selling her. Slavery and prostitution were linked since domestic servants could also be forced into prostitution. Slavery was nominally abolished in China in 1906 and effectively in 1930.<sup>6</sup>

Between 1900 and 1945 people migrated *en masse* from the rural areas to the cities, a development accompanied by major political change. The communist regime gained complete power in 1949 and repressed traffic and prostitution, but with the present liberalization a free market in prostitution is booming. Since state control in rural areas is slackening, scores of women have been trafficked inside China for marriage or prostitution. They are sent to farmers who can't find women to live up to the ideal of the glamorous westernized woman they see on television advertisements. In rural areas, where marriageable women are scarce, it is cheaper to purchase a bride than to pay brideswealth. For example, one woman was picked up by a man in a provincial capital who bought her clothes and took her with him on a business trip. Later on he sold her as a bride to a farmer, who raped her on delivery. She was rescued by the police. In 1992 in the space of a few months 300 traffickers were arrested.<sup>7</sup> The police liberated an estimated 40,000 women and children from slavery.<sup>8</sup> The trafficking problem, now recognized as a major national problem, is acute in Szechuan, a densely populated region where there are thousands of victims. A newspaper reported in 1991 that 65,000 members of 900 gangs were arrested.<sup>9</sup>

'Triads', the gangs which organize Chinese crime including trafficking, originated in a patriotic movement which tried to liberate China from a dictator known as the Manchu Master in the Ch'ing dynasty in the seventeenth century. Over succeeding centuries they aligned themselves with those in power. When Mao Zedong took over in 1949, the army and the triads fled to Hong Kong, Taiwan, southern China and Burma.<sup>10</sup> By the 1980s the Hong Kong triads had grown into syndicates of 800,000 people with a hard-core membership of 80,000. Hong Kong has only 6 million inhabitants.<sup>11</sup>

Traffic in girls to Europe occurs against the background of China's one-child policy. Parents prefer boys and don't know what to do with their superfluous daughters. Boys are trafficked to parents who only have girls.<sup>12</sup> One future trend may well be the

large-scale trafficking of Chinese girls to Europe. Because Hong Kong transfers to China in 1997, Hong Kong criminals are moving into Europe. Gangs are trafficking people for various purposes, such as slavery in restaurants<sup>13</sup> and, it is suspected, exploitation in households and private brothels. Reports of young Chinese girls being sold are common. As a rule they have been brought to Europe by elderly men and a few are promised political asylum. Chinese gangs promise the girls they will search for their families abroad.

### Japan

'Are you no taller than 1 metre, 72 centimetres?' the man on the telephone asked when I called about an advertisement for a waitress in a night club in Japan which appeared in Dutch newspapers in 1994. In Japan they don't like tall girls. When I contacted it, the Japanese embassy expressed great doubt about the advertisement's reliability. For a foreigner it is next to impossible to get a work permit for Japan. STV received many calls from worried mothers whose daughters wanted to go there after seeing the advertisement. After all Japan has a high standard of living and many European girls and women face unemployment. So far there are no reports from women who have come back.

Japan's entertainment market is the territory of Japanese organized crime, the yakuza, and they have controlled it since the 1940s. The American occupying forces after the Second World War westernized the Japanese prostitution scene. Traditional geishas were relegated to the background and the yakuza, which had prospered on the black market, procured prostitutes for the American forces.

Japan became industrialized in the 1960s. The standard of living rose and the yakuza concentrated on luxury, amusement, real estate, drugs and prostitution.<sup>14</sup> In the mid-1970s they became active in south-east Asia and took up sex tourism.<sup>15</sup> Now they have strongholds in Thailand, the Philippines and other Asian countries. The influential yakuza boss, 'oyabun' Kodama, who was a great friend of President Marcos of the Philippines, helped his former cellmate, Ryoichi Sasakawa, to set up in sex tourism. In 1979 Sasakawa tried to buy the island of Lubang and transform it into a sex ghetto. However, he was stopped by the churches and by women's groups. After protests the yakuza abandoned sex tourism and concentrated on large-scale traffic in women. In the 1980s they recruited the first Philippine women for Japan's sex industry.

When Japanese sex tourism to the Philippines declined due to competition, many Philippine women went to Japan to work and quite often ended up in the entertainment industry.<sup>16</sup>

The yakuza boast of their sixteenth-century origin and still retain remnants of their long history in their feudal organization and physical characteristics, such as tattoos and hacked-off little fingers.<sup>17</sup> The yakuza have 100,000 members, divided between 29 clans. Although the younger generation of the yakuza rebel, the organization is still strictly hierarchical. New members have to undergo three years of physical and mental ascetic training.

### **Australasia**

'Nothing ever happens in Australia, apart from the occasional bushfire. So you can't blame people for joking about sheep and kangaroos,' an Australian prostitute said to me. Still, Australia has its own part to play in the international trafficking in women. It is mentioned occasionally as a target country for dancers to work in yakuza-controlled Japanese night clubs, but it is also a receiving country in the marriage introduction racket. Nowadays Australia constitutes the biggest market for brides, who are taken to isolated mining and cattle towns. Marriage agencies are disguised as organized tours and pen-friend organizations and their fees are between A\$300 and A\$1,000. The women are profiled in magazines and on videotape. One agency manager claims he only has to go to the market square to find a bevy of Filipinas ready to be videotaped.

A so-called serial husband, who tastes and discards one bride after another, Kenneth Morgan, sparked off nationwide protest with his book published in the 1980s extolling the meek Filipina dream wife (most mail-order brides in Australia come from the Philippines). Serial husbands are often much older and worse educated than their future wives and 10 per cent of these marriages end in divorce. When asked why she wanted to marry such a husband, one Filipina answered, 'Well, he has definite and concrete plans in life.' Marriage services connecting Filipinas to Australians started up in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Generally the Filipinos figure in the top 20 nationalities emigrating to Australia and since 1974 the majority have been women. At first highly trained Filipinas arrived, then in 1977 there was a large influx of women who were mainly brides, which led the authorities to restrict immigration. In 1983 it was cut back further. The prevalence

of Filipinas marrying Australians is four times higher than in Canada and three times that in the United States.<sup>18</sup>

The Australian Lower House has declared the practice of matching foreign women to Australian men by mail order reprehensible and proposed a six-month penalty on the practice. The bill has not yet come into force.

There is little information on trafficking in New Zealand, but Thai women in particular work in the brothels there on tourists' visas.

### **The United States**

The USA seems to be the country furthest from recognizing the problem of traffic in women. At the beginning of the twentieth century it joined the global outcry against traffic<sup>19</sup> and Congress passed the Mann and Bennet Acts prohibiting interstate and international traffic. After strict immigration laws were passed in 1924 international traffickers were supposed to have lost interest in the country. The USA still basks comfortably in the idea that trafficking doesn't exist within its boundaries.

However, in the mid 1980s a marriage racket came to light, involving American soldiers who had married Korean women, run by an organization of mafia-like proportions with tentacles in New York, Philadelphia and Houston. The men were paid \$10,000 for their inconvenience. Army sources reveal that annually 20,000 Americans return from Korea. In 1985 2,777 Americans married Korean women; 90 per cent of the Korean prostitutes in the United States are wives or ex-wives of American soldiers. In the first half of 1986 there were 1,044 American-Korean marriages. The Immigration and Naturalization Service vetted some 300 soldiers who had married and divorced Korean women in the preceding three years. Only three American soldiers were convicted of arranging bogus marriages and black market activities. After these cases American GIs have had to sign a document stating that they are aware they can be punished if they engage in the marriage racket.<sup>20</sup>

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a new, highly organized market has burgeoned: the commercial pairing of Russian and other eastern European women with American suitors. An agency called American Russian Matchmaking produces a catalogue advertising 20,000 candidate wives. The women have to pay up to US\$80 to join the agency, twice as much as their future American

partners. The men, however, have to pay a considerable sum for a Russian tour on which they meet a selection of three Russian women. As a bonus, if a decision is reached within 48 hours the agency provides the woman with a two-year conditional visa. If she decides to leave her husband before that time, she will be deported.<sup>21</sup>

On 9 March 1993, the American cable company CNN broadcast a rare item on traffic in women in the USA. It was not specified where the women came from, but it stands to reason that Mexican women are smuggled into the country for prostitution purposes. In 1993 it was also established that many Latin American women have been introduced to unmarried American men. Agencies catered for men who had divorced their liberated wives.

'Besides a large number of mail-order brides from Thailand and other women from Third World countries there are many migrants working here as sex workers,' says Priscilla Alexander of the National Task Force on Prostitution. 'They are trafficked to the extent that they can't get visas. In New York there are also many women from the Dominican Republic. I don't know how they migrate but they are known as women who make many phone calls, presumably to people they have to pay, possibly their families. They have to find the money to get here. Many have forged documents in some way or another because they can't get visas. They pay ridiculously high sums for their airfares, from US\$5,000 to US\$6,000, which is too much. It really costs far less. They travel around. Many South American women work in Mexican brothels. In Chiapas you have legal and illegal brothels. Only Mexican women work in legal brothels, but in the illegal brothels you have women from other Latin American countries. I know a woman who has been there, and she seemed to think they worked voluntarily.'

'There must be trafficked women in Chinatowns. Recently after two raids Chinese women were taken out of a New York brothel where they were held captive. They were not released until they had handed over the proceeds of 200-300 customers, as their contracts stated. And these contracts could be sold to other brothels.'

'There are many Thai women working in massage parlours. I imagine some of them have gone through the same thing, but I don't think they are willing to talk about it. They traffic themselves.'

To European eyes these sex workers are migrants who will do anything to get into the United States. They know what they want and they have to pay to get it.

## Africa

Little is known about traffic inside Africa, but there is evidence that many African women are brought into Europe on false papers. They are afraid of the authorities because most of them have bought their false documents on the streets, for example in Ghana. The first incident of smuggled Ghanaians in the Netherlands, for example, was reported in 1982; but the Criminal Intelligence Unit has no reported cases of trafficked Ghanaian women. Leen Pieterse of the Unit and of Interpol said, 'We can't tell if they work voluntarily or not. Ghanaian women commute between Düsseldorf and Aachen. In Italy and Belgium there are quite a few women from Ghana and other African countries.'

A Dutch madam who employs them said, 'Of course you can't meet African women. They fear outsiders because they are illegal. Some of them are forced to peddle drugs at the airport. One Ghanaian woman applied to my call-girl company, but she told me she had to telephone home every hour. Besides, she had to account to a godmother who lived in Germany.'

'There are many girls from Ghana working in the same joint as me,' a Dutch prostitute told me. 'I know they all come via Belgium. They all claim to have a brother as a business partner. As far as I can see, these so-called brothers are ordinary pimps.' These men also pass themselves off as future husbands.

It is striking how many African women apply to Payoke, the Belgian organization for prostitutes' rights and support for trafficked women, for help.<sup>22</sup> Formerly they were recruited for the marriage racket: in 1985 there was a sharp increase in marriages between Belgians and Ghanaian or Nigerian women; even residents of old people's homes were marrying to provide trafficked women with Belgian nationality. Now African women are entering Belgium on false applications for political asylum. Between February 1988 and November 1992, 2,859 Nigerians were registered, among whom were many women who later surfaced in prostitution.<sup>23</sup>

In November 1993 a network of 43 traffickers and victims from Nigeria, Liberia and the Ivory Coast was exposed. In exchange for false documents the women had handed in their own passports, which were then used for other people. The traffickers were charged with procuring false documents, profiting from prostitution, embezzlement and organizing criminal activities. The victims were also rounded up for using false papers, being complicit

in fraud and working as prostitutes. The African women were too afraid to talk at the trial; those who did were considered traitors. One woman asked to be brought into court handcuffed to give the impression that she was one of the accused. The case was complicated by the women's fear of a kind of voodoo: they were convinced they could be harmed from a great distance.

Ghanaian women also enter Europe by way of Italy. Nigerians move about, whereas Ghanaian women stay in their clans.<sup>24</sup> In Italy they pay their debts via African middlemen and avoid the police because they feel more secure paying off their debts.<sup>25</sup> In 1989 and 1990 5,000 Nigerian women were working in Italy as prostitutes, most of whom were trafficked, according to Interpol. The police tried to close down the brothels where they worked, but the women bricked up the windows because they were afraid they would be repatriated.<sup>26</sup>

## Western Europe

### *Belgium*

Antwerp, early in the morning. The red light district, where window prostitution has long been housed, looks bleak. Bars are up for sale, hotels look dilapidated. It is cold. Only one black woman is at work. In the centre of the district Payoke has its office. There they told me that one of the many problems in the neighbourhood is monopoly formation by the Dutch and German underworld. Dutch owners divide the studio spaces into smaller units, as they do in the Netherlands. Gangs from former Yugoslavia join by using nominal owners and Albanian criminals are now making nuisances of themselves.

'The district is a hotbed of criminality; that is to say, trade in drugs, arms and women,' one of the workers at Payoke told me. Another staff member took me on a tour. On our way we met Tanya, who was recruited by the Georgian mafia. A member of the mafia, who owned a store in Antwerp, was still free and using his many contacts in the area. In 1993 Payoke helped 88 trafficked women, among whom were many from the Philippines, Africa and Hungary.

Belgium has a policy for victims of traffic similar to that operating in the Netherlands and Germany. They are allowed to remain in the country for 45 days without having to press charges. They are entitled to a permit to stay for three months, which can be renewed every four months, when charges are brought. They get a permanent

residence permit when their case has been heard in court. Belgium is unique, however, because victims of traffic other than for prostitution purposes are recognized. The late King Baudouin devoted a lot of his energies to combating trafficking. In recognition of his concern with the problem, a victim spoke about trafficking in front of the assembled heads of state at his funeral.

### *Germany*

'At first we didn't want to recognize the problem of traffic in women. If prostitution is labour, why shouldn't labour agencies be legal? But when we heard stories about women being beaten up and dying from asphyxiation in the containers they were smuggled in, we changed our point of view,' Helga from Hydra, one of Germany's prostitutes' rights movement, said at a conference on traffic in women.

Germany has a history of tolerating prostitution in certain exclusive areas, such as the eros centres. In the 1960s these attracted Austrian criminals who had become unemployed when Austria closed its brothels. At first traffic seemed two-way between Germany and Austria, but rivalry ensued and the Austrians left to set up organizations in other countries.<sup>27</sup> Later on, when the centre of traffic in women collapsed in the Lebanon because of the civil war, a new generation of traffickers turned their attention to Germany.<sup>28</sup> In Germany there are now several organizations which help trafficked women and discuss the problem theoretically, one of which is AGISRA (Arbeitsgemeinschaft Gegen Internationale Sexuelle und Rassistische Ausbeutung).

Some 75 per cent of Germany's prostitutes are foreigners. In Frankfurt they are mostly Latin American. Women from Uruguay and Argentina were taken through Germany to be married in Italy. It is difficult to explain why so many women from Paraguay work in Germany when hardly any do in the Netherlands. Josephina from Colombia said, 'When I was working in German prostitution, many prostitutes from Brazil and Uruguay were controlled by Italian pimps. In Germany Italians, Uruguayans and Argentinians worked together with German pimps. Many women from Paraguay working in Germany are married to Italian pimps. I don't know why these particular groups worked together but I guess they already did that in South America.'

In Germany traffic for arranged marriages is rife. In one notorious case a member of a bowling club married an Asian woman to share

her with his club mates. In the late 1980s the authorities imposed a crackdown on bogus marriages, which were the way most Thai girls entered prostitution. In some German states women who report trafficking can remain in the country for a variable period of time.

Before 1993, 517 incidences of traffic in women were recorded in Germany, but that number should be treated with caution. Not all the cases were properly documented; for example, German victims of pimps were also included. As in other European countries, there is a striking increase in the number of cases involving Russian and other eastern European women.

Between January 1992 and December 1993, 911 victims of traffic were reported, one of them male; 286 of the women had never worked in prostitution and did not realize they would end up on the game; 192 women knew what it all was about. What the other 433 expected is unknown. Many of the suspected traffickers, 32.8 per cent, were from former Yugoslavia and the eastern European countries. Turkish traffickers were also well represented at 17.7 per cent; and 329 out of the 777 were German nationals. Fourteen Italians and seven Greeks also plied their trade in Germany. They used the familiar methods of recruitment: promises of jobs as cooks, domestic workers, nannies, dancers, waitresses or models. Many of the victims were addressed personally or contacted via advertisements. Most women travel overland, the easiest and cheapest route to Germany. In some parts of the country trafficked women can legally await the trial of their traffickers.

#### Switzerland

Women working in Switzerland come from Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Ghana, Kenya and eastern European countries.<sup>29</sup> Switzerland has a tradition of exploiting entertainers. In 1981 the first complaints were lodged against traffickers. The Swiss Association of Erotic Companies claimed that these women, who were often recruited at beauty contests, were free to go where they liked and were in fact better off than Swiss prostitutes.<sup>30</sup> In 1987 the Swiss authorities issued only seven entertainers' visas, whereas in 1991 the number had risen to 269. These go-go dancers are employed with a variety of dubious contracts. A stripper has to pay her own way home, usually with earnings from prostitution. Most women arriving from abroad don't know that dancing means *strip intégral*, or completely naked. The Swiss police often

don't bother to check on the person who is standing guarantor for a woman entering the country. Only when they arrive does the agency decide whether or not the women are fit for the job; if they are accepted, they can dance for eight months. If their contracts are extended, the women have to leave the country for four months before they can return. As a rule they don't go home but turn to prostitution in neighbouring countries because no other employment is open to them. Their contracts have to be ratified by the foreigners' police, but even so they can be fired within the first three days. They have no insurance cover.<sup>31</sup>

#### The United Kingdom

'Philippine models, Spanish beauties, call 0171-' reads a typical card on the walls of a London phone booth. However, the UK is conspicuously absent from all reports of traffic in women for the prostitution market. Because of the UK's geographical situation it is not easy to smuggle people into the country. The people brought in illegally are usually males. However, many methods of recruitment for traffic could still work in the United Kingdom. Jean Gould, a London solicitor, said, 'Rich families offer to take a girl of a poor family to Europe and to pay for her education, as some Nigerians do. Sometimes these girls are brought in under a false name. I have handled two cases. The second girl travelled on the papers of the first girl. Some Latin Americans pull the trick of artificial family connections [see chapter 7]. It is also possible to issue a phoney invitation to work with a British firm as a translator or "public relations manager". An employer in one of the cases was prosecuted for faking evidence. We don't know if these girls are exploited in prostitution.'

Small-scale traffic certainly exists in Britain. But how about large-scale trade in women? John Deal of New Scotland Yard answered my query, 'To my knowledge it does not happen.' He referred me to Chief Inspector Spencer of the Crime Committee, who said, 'I am not qualified to comment upon that. Illegal immigrants are the concern of the Home Office. Suppose large-scale traffic in women occurred in the United Kingdom, the women would be rounded up as prostitutes in the first place. If it were organized or serious crime, it would be investigated in a different way. We are conscious of developments on the continent with eastern European crime, but that is all I can say.'

Under UK law it is unlikely that anyone will come forward to denounce traffickers. The Sexual Offences Act makes it a crime

to work as a prostitute or to use an office to bring women into prostitution, as in call-girl agencies, for example. According to the Street Offences Act it is illegal to loiter and to solicit. A law dating from 1985 criminalizes punters, because 'it was not considered fair and emancipated just to arrest the women'. The result is that customers are wary, but are hardly ever arrested. Because of these laws the English Collective of Prostitutes (ECP) will never invoke the help of the police to prevent traffic in women. 'All prostitution laws work against prostitutes. A strengthening of the police powers only worsens the position of migrant women. We don't want any licensing of brothels. You can't equate licensing with decriminalization. State brothels did nothing to better the position of women in the past. Licensing brothels could give traffickers a chance; they can invest big money and put their own people in. We see little evidence of trafficking in women. It might occur with women who work in massage parlours. We do know women who work for individual pimps. Black and migrant women are working on the streets where they suffer the most violence. The premises are controlled by people who don't want black people working there. Any legalization affects migrant women.'

'The police don't use the law to arrest violent pimps, but to break up the relations of prostitutes, to criminalize men. They don't arrest the real pimps. It might be a good thing to have a crackdown on procuring when violence or force is involved, but in England a prostitute's mother can be accused if she accepts a drink from her daughter in a pub.'

'In England organized crime is just an excuse to arrest prostitutes. The police consider hookers' flats hotbeds of organized crime. The police organize crime themselves. When we were occupying a church to protest against indiscriminate arrests of women, they sided with the pimps who were waiting outside.'

The English Collective of Prostitutes is housed in Camden Town, near King's Cross, a well-known area for kerb-crawling. Niki Adams and Nina Lopez of the ECP freely hand out information in a room lined with old books on feminism, Marxism and household work. They are also associated with the campaign to recognize housework as official labour.

Walking through Gerrard Street in London's Chinatown, it is hard to believe that this friendly area is a hotbed of forced prostitution, but a few years ago the BBC broadcast a disquieting documentary on the role of the triads in this crime. The area attracts many Londoners and tourists to its well-supplied supermarkets and restaurants and caters for some 300,000 Chinese people

scattered throughout the capital. Amidst the bustle the Chinese Community Centre is a haven for Chinese people who want to read a paper or a book. 'That documentary was a bit overdone,' one of the Centre's workers said, 'but prostitution is taboo in the Chinese community. Here the triads are not as big as in Hong Kong. People are scared. The police could not protect the victims. I was hurt when I heard triads do in fact exist in London, but, touch wood, they have not come to the Community Centre. In London they are busy loan-sharking. Recently they threatened an old lady and took away her passport. Now they are recruiting youngsters.'

'We have not come across traffic in women, but there are many domestic workers from mainland China. They are really exploited, they live in laundries and get tuberculosis. The Chinese people in England are originally from Hong Kong. Most Chinese people work in catering and that doesn't take place in secrecy. We are the fifth generation: the first Chinese came to England less than a century ago as sailors. They gathered in Tower Hamlets and started a laundry. In the 1960s, 98 per cent of the Chinese community in England worked in catering. They needed wives to help them run their takeaways. They had no days off. Families joined them. The children were not well educated and could not catch up with English children because of language problems. The parents just worked hard. Wives came over and were promised a better life. They worked long hours and lived isolated lives. They were not exactly cheated, but England was not what they had expected. Women in arranged marriages were not happy. Gambling was the only way out for these migrants. It still is. Drinking is also a problem. Families suffer from these problems. They ask old friends to borrow money. Old people are reluctant to accept benefit, because they are afraid of losing face.'

'Chinese women may now seek better employment and come here on tourist visas. They also come here for political reasons. They come as a student or to seek asylum. They may find employment on the black market.'

## Eastern Europe

### *Czech Republic*

Hana Malinová is the expert on prostitution in the Czech Republic. She is a street-corner worker for the country's only organization



for prostitutes. She described the situation there at a conference in Prague. 'Before the Velvet Revolution in 1989 a free market existed for commercial sex. Many hookers served tourists in the big hotels. They made good money. High-class prostitutes also took up positions at the airport. At the time middle-class prostitutes tried to make a fortune in places where local men gathered. Cheap hookers, usually runaways or mentally retarded women, were to be found at the large railway stations.

'Under communism everybody, including whores, had to register their livelihood on their identity papers. People without a job invariably were saddled with a criminal record, and when a woman couldn't prove she had an acceptable profession, she was sent straight to jail. There she mixed with women who had committed serious crimes like murder. That's why at the time most prostitutes paid to have themselves registered as cleaners in hotels. These regulations to combat "parasitism" were abolished after the Velvet Revolution.

'There were pimps under communism. They were mostly black-market money changers who worked as taxi drivers and porters at the big hotels. They had regular contact with both tourists and prostitutes and exchanged foreign currency for the hookers. Quite a few of them joined the mafia.

'After the Velvet Revolution prostitution became a booming business. The fall of the Berlin Wall stimulated a type of sex tourism, especially to the border regions, but not in Prague. In the capital sex tourists only have a limited choice. Brothels aren't easy to find because the women working there are keen to protect their territory from competition from outsiders. Most tourists in the border regions are truckers and men who travel on their own, many of them Germans who live near the border. They tell their wives they cross the border just to have a cheap meal, but instead of eating they pick up a girl. Once I took a woman to see where her husband was going to eat. She took it badly.

'There is enough room for streetwalkers along the thoroughfares in the border regions. But it is next to impossible to secure a place without help. The girls are supposed to hand over a part of their earnings to the person who has paid for their place in the line.

'There are many female pimps, who focus especially on young girls. In the border regions many gypsy families are actively involved in the trade in women. These families welcome the girls, who appreciate it because they are very isolated. They are

usually runaways from broken homes who can't go back. Since they avoid outsiders, it is very difficult to get a hold on these trafficking gypsy communities.

'Women are sold on into Germany. Their papers are arranged in a few days by the Yugoslavian criminals operating there. The Czech mafia is dominated by German and Bulgarian criminal organizations. Abductions constitute a major problem, but the women don't or won't talk about it. Some girls are so afraid of kidnapping that they hardly dare to go to the lavatory. It is not uncommon for the women to be filled with alcohol before they are pushed into cars to go to Germany. Rumour has it that in the last couple of years 8,000 girls have disappeared in this way. However, we have been unable to confirm that figure.

'It is easy for traffickers to convince the women to work abroad. Some agree to work as prostitutes, provided the working conditions are reasonable. They see it as a temporary solution to their problems. Specialized travel agencies distribute them to Italy and Greece,' Hana concluded.

#### *Slovakia*

I also spoke to a Slovakian expert, Gabriel Bianchi, who gave a lecture on the situation in his country. 'In Slovakia's border region there is a lot of prostitution. The Russian mafia have infiltrated. Their only problem is that the women have few clients. There is not a big market for prostitution in Slovakia.

'Professional prostitutes are soliciting in hotels. Bars are the domain of less professional women. Besides street prostitutes, there are "guestworkers", women who live close to the border and go to Austria to work for the weekend. Bratislava is only 100 kilometres from Budapest and 60 from Vienna. Street prostitution in Austria is almost entirely an eastern European affair.'

#### *Poland*

'I was fired under communism because I insisted that prostitution did in fact exist in Poland,' said the Polish lawyer Sylvia Igra. Sylvia and 14 Polish women from the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association) and the Polish Feminist Association participated in a seminar about prostitution and traffic in women in the Netherlands in 1994. Sylvia said, 'Up to now prostitution in Poland has not been forbidden and hookers are not registered

with the police. Communists have always denied the existence of commercial sex in a workers' paradise. What doesn't exist, cannot be forbidden.'

Barbara Limanowska of the Polish Feminist Association said, 'Until 1991 the Polish prostitution market was stable. But then peepshows and massage parlours appeared on the scene. Now most women work in sex clubs and escort services. There are over 100 escort agencies in Warsaw alone. There is also prostitution in fast-food restaurants, and part-time prostitution and juvenile prostitution in the border region.' Prostitution is not just for tourists any more. The Russian mafia have taken over and Poland is a target country for traffic in women. However, many Russian prostitutes come voluntarily to Poland. They can enter Poland when they have enough zlotys to last their stay. They befriend Polish hookers, who put them up. The police don't intervene because it happens in private homes. Only when the neighbours complain about the public nuisance do the police come to deport the women. The press interprets this as Russian women liking the job better than Polish girls. In fact 12 per cent of the women working in Poland are foreigners.

Beata Fiszer, also from the Association, pointed out that the Polish media suggest that women become victims of traffic voluntarily. 'Polish women are beautiful, and that's why they are being sold,' is what reporters want to hear.

Tina Wieruszewska founded an organization for missing children after her daughter and her friend went missing without trace in 1992. Only the girls' passports were recovered. Tina asked Interpol and no fewer than 20 embassies for help. She questioned whether the police took the case seriously.

Wieslawa Stzyrkowska, who co-ordinates all investigations of traffic in women in Poland at Warsaw police headquarters, was also at the 1994 conference: 'Unlike the government, the Polish police have done much to prevent and fight traffic in women. We work together with Interpol.'<sup>32</sup> In 1993, 44 cases of trafficking in women were brought to court. 'There is a direct line of trafficking from Poland to Germany and hence to the Netherlands and Belgium. Traffickers are assisted by Turkish bar owners in Germany. Polish men sell women to German club owners for 2,000-3,000 marks. The women are covered with blankets to hide them from custom officers. There is much traffic for marriage as well as for prostitution.'

## 4 Traffic and prostitution in the Netherlands

---

Crocodiles of tourists move through the famous red light district in Amsterdam, the women with their handbags safely tucked under their arms. A sightseeing boat passes by on the canal. Angrily the window prostitutes close their curtains.

'Nowhere is prostitution practised as openly as here.' Conchita from the Dominican Republic told me that this was her first impression when she saw her future workplace. Amidst the bustle she is silent and subdued. The people who accompanied her to the Netherlands have just told her she can only work as a prostitute. Up till now Conchita had believed she would be working in a beauty parlour.

The easiest way to save Conchita and her fellow victims might seem to be to close down all brothels. This policy was tried throughout Europe, including the Netherlands, at the turn of the century, but to no avail. Prostitution was driven underground, only to resurface conspicuously in the following decades. When the licensed brothels were shut, the sex trade in the Netherlands was carried on behind the façades of boarding houses, the future window brothels. Prostitution became a thriving business and the authorities saw no alternative to tolerating it.

In the 1960s the sex business had to operate in a situation in which prostitution was not the only source of extramarital sex. With widespread use of the contraceptive pill promiscuity became less risky, and sexually transmitted diseases were easily treatable with antibiotics. The controllers of prostitution reacted by creating sex clubs, where men could relax with girls. The numbers of these clubs, featuring new gadgets such as whirlpools and private porno cabins, mushroomed in the 1970s. By the end of the 1980s prostitution was no longer a surreptitious marginal trade, but was