

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

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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

openly integrated into the service sector. In the clubs sex became a recreational indoor activity.

### The normalization of prostitution

In the 1970s the Dutch authorities decided to tolerate prostitution. They adopted the position that if some people are willing to sell sex and others are prepared to pay for it, the law has no reason to intervene. The government still banned the promotion of prostitution and living off a prostitute by a third party. There is a flaw in this liberal attitude, however, in that a third party is necessary to organize a place where clients and prostitutes can meet. If you tolerate prostitutes, you also have to tolerate brothel-owners. The result was that many prostitutes had to rely on illegal entrepreneurs for a place where they could work. To overcome this, it was suggested that the article in the penal code forbidding the organization and promotion of prostitution be abolished. Prostitution would therefore be legalized in all but name. The argument continues. Prostitution in the Netherlands is still not formally legalized, but will be early in 1996.

In the 1980s the demand for legalization was accompanied by a campaign to recognize prostitution as labour. This was initiated by prostitutes, supported by a small group of feminists. At that time there were three main feminist views on prostitution. The first saw it as sexual violence. Feminist hookers, on the other hand, believed that prostitution is a vocation in which women can explore their sexuality, and their feminist supporters stated that the stigma of whore was put on all women who didn't obey male rules ('Good girls go to heaven, bad girls go everywhere,' was one of their sayings). A third group recognized prostitution as labour, but as disagreeable labour undertaken from economic necessity.<sup>1</sup>

Through discussion of these views an official policy was eventually reached, which stated that on grounds of sexual autonomy women from all countries have the right to work as a prostitute and the right to refuse to work as a prostitute. Coercion and exploitation should be prevented. As a result working conditions, which were generally bad, became an issue in the prostitutes' rights movement.

Professional prostitutes resented the large sums, 40 to 60 per cent of their earnings, which they had to pay to brothel-keepers. Window prostitutes were no better off. To rent a window for one

night costs the same as a night in the Hilton Hotel. However, window prostitutes can at least choose their working hours. Whether a prostitute is a high-class call girl or working the windows, she makes on average £15 an hour before tax. Prostitutes have no free health insurance, paid sick leave or holidays.

### The recruitment of foreign prostitutes

Brothel-owners and managers enforce rules which no other employer would dare to. The women have to clean their workplace and do striptease without pay. In some houses women are fined if they are five minutes late. Dutch prostitutes discovered they could make more money working from their own homes. The result was a continual shortage of staff in clubs because of the high turnover of women. Managers no longer wanted to employ emancipated prostitutes in their joints and solved the problem by recruiting women from 'low-wage' countries.<sup>2</sup>

Brothel-keeper Ron W. said to a newspaper, 'It became increasingly difficult to make these Dutch hookers toe the line. Due to emancipation they have become too dominant ... my joint looked more like a feminist shelter than a brothel. In that respect the latinas were a relief. They worked like racehorses, and never nagged because they didn't speak the language.'<sup>3</sup>

Eventually the Third World women proved not to be docile enough, so the managers turned to eastern Europe. In 1992, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the manager of a brothel was reported as saying in a local newspaper, 'Now nine out of ten women working here are from eastern European countries. Dutch and German women are all drug addicts, and those chicks from the Dominican Republic became too cheeky after a while.'<sup>4</sup>

The owners of window brothels also replaced demanding and independent women with submissive women. A Dutch prostitute who took me on a tour around the Amsterdam red light district complained, 'It is an outrage how foreign women are exploited. Sometimes they have to pay more for their windows than Dutch prostitutes, while migrants are allotted the dirtiest rooms.' She pointed out studio spaces no bigger than telephone kiosks, which looked like the crates in which animals are kept. 'The owners of these houses split up these rooms time and again. They only think of pocketing more rent. They have six women sleeping in one room.'

Most foreign women are horrified when they see these places for the first time. Those who voluntarily become prostitutes

mistakenly believe that the life of a prostitute in the Netherlands is one of glamour, drinking champagne in a smart dress. A Colombian woman said, 'In Bogotá I thought that in the Netherlands I was going to work in a club with a swimming pool. But I had to work in a small room. There is not even time to talk to the customers. They send you straight to bed.' While women who have legal status in the Netherlands vote with their feet and find another brothel or quit prostitution, brothel-keepers can easily exploit illegal immigrants, trafficked or not, who are under pressure to earn money for their families. 'Dutch women don't have to do this work. They speak the language, are well educated and can choose,' said Conchita, one of the trafficked women.

### The punters

Like any other industry prostitution is subject to the market forces of supply and demand. With this in mind, it has been suggested that the punters should be called on to boycott exploited women. When the first planeloads of foreign women arrived it was thought they would cater for clients with exotic tastes, but this was later disproved when eastern European women arrived who don't look exotic at all. Client Gerrit, one of the few punters who spoke openly to me about his visits to prostitutes, said, 'It is not true there suddenly was a market for black women. There is a demand for cheap prostitutes. For a few quid you can find a nice Latin American woman. I often visit prostitutes and I don't want to pay too much. Only language is a problem. Foreign women don't charge extra for special services, like Dutch women do. They only make me pay for the time I spend with them. They are also less sophisticated. I can tell from the way they ask me whether I want to use a condom that they are willing to go without once in a while.'

Many foreign women are used to a different style of prostitution. In their home countries they can establish relationships with a client for a whole evening. Josephina from Colombia said, 'Not all foreign women work cheaply. I for one charged normal prices and never went without a condom. The punters want everything for nothing, they are part of the cause of exploitation of foreign prostitutes.' Some clients extort money from prostitutes by posing as a policeman, doctor or lawyer, assuming that illegal immigrants won't dare to question their authority.

### Increase in trafficking

The number of prostitutes in the Netherlands, including part-timers, is estimated to be around 30,000. About a third come from countries outside the European Union, and this figure rises to 50 per cent in the major cities.

In a raid in which illegal immigrants are detained, some 20 per cent of them won't have a passport or will hint at financial obligations to a third party. Even if these women are not clear victims of trafficking, they have been helped by profiteers or middlemen, or promised marriage in return for money. Most eastern European women have a 'friend' for whom they work, but whether this is voluntary is unclear. Some women prefer to negotiate for more money themselves rather than contact the police or a social worker. Some want to continue working because their meagre earnings exceed the salary they can earn in a normal job in their home country.

On average 100 new cases of traffic a year are reported to STV. In 1994 this number rose to 170. Each of these women knows on average three other trafficked women. If the number of victims of trafficking already present in the Netherlands is included, then it can be estimated that there are at least 1,000 trafficked women in one small country.

### Cases which altered Dutch law

A striking example of an active, campaigning 'victim' was Lisa from the Philippines, who made her case into a public issue. Her story is as follows. Her situation in the Philippines was difficult. One day she met a local chief prosecutor, who promised her a job as a receptionist in a Dutch hotel owned by a friend of his. She accepted and in October 1981 went to the Netherlands. There she was forced into prostitution in a so-called sex farm. She had to repay an enormous debt, some £10,000. A local farmer met her as a client and rescued her. At first the authorities refused to believe his stories about Lisa's condition. Then Lisa took action. She was brave enough to address a Dutch parliamentary hearing on trafficking in women on 14 September 1987 in a spectacular session. She said among other things, 'What I want to ask you politicians today is this: why does the Dutch government not do anything to stop this terrible thing which is going on everywhere?'

'I think that the Dutch Ministry of Justice does not understand what this does to women who become victims. What happened to me is very clear. What more do you want? I feel more like the accused than a victim, having to defend myself when I have done nothing wrong.'

Lisa did not leave the matter there. In 1988 she joined a rogatory commission, an investigatory committee of the Department of Justice and the police which went to the Philippines, where her Dutch recruiter was hiding. A television company made a documentary of this search, which shocked the nation. The Dutch recruiter was found guilty. In 1990 she took her case to the Philippines to bring the man who recruited her and misled her in the first place to trial. The case against him failed. Before retiring disappointed, in 1990 she received the Marga Klompé Award for her courage and persistence. At the award ceremony she said, 'It is especially nice to be here, when I think that my life was almost ruined. I was deceived and sold by a fellow Filipino and then exploited by a Dutch trafficker. Already for more than seven years I have been struggling, fighting for my rights and to get the guilty ones punished. I am proud to say that my fight has achieved something for myself and other women.'

One result of Lisa's evidence was that after 1987 all victims of traffic in women who want to lodge a complaint are entitled to a temporary residence permit. They can now stay legally in the Netherlands during the police investigations and the subsequent trial. Formerly it was next to impossible to bring traffickers to trial because the police, after discovering the victims were illegal aliens, deported them immediately.<sup>5</sup>

Lisa was not the only trafficked woman to have an impact on Dutch government policy. Once the threat of immediate expulsion was removed, fear of reprisals came to the fore. This was evident in the case of the Colombians, which is described in chapter 6. These women had been so badly threatened that they did not dare to tell the whole story. 'After I had spoken to the police for the first time, the traffickers let me know I'd better be careful, because if I said any more, something bad would happen to my parents.' Later on they also remembered many events which had seemed irrelevant, but which it became clear afterwards were vital evidence. A year later they came forward with the whole story in an attempt to get the case reopened. This was not granted, but it did persuade the authorities that a period of time should be left between taking evidence and bringing a prosecution. The period was set at three months. Its purpose was to allow time for more complete reports

to be taken from the women and to prevent them from retracting their statements through fear. The women also needed time to consider the consequences of making a statement and the resulting court case.

The next contribution to Dutch law was made by an illegal South American immigrant, who was explicitly not a victim of traffic in women. She went public with her story, calling herself by the name Teresa. 'I came to the Netherlands of my own accord to make some money. I was indebted to nobody and I could work on my own terms. However, my window looked over houses on the other side of the street. There I saw a girl being beaten up and dragged out by the hair. Next I noticed that the other women were not free to leave the building and they were continuously watched by some men. At last I could not stand it any more and discussed it with a friend. She advised me against it, but eventually I went to the police to warn them. That was a mistake, they put me in prison as an illegal immigrant.'<sup>6</sup> She was later released and sued the state successfully for damages.

Through her perseverance illegal immigrants who are not victims but witnesses can also stay legally in the Netherlands while they are needed for a trial.

#### *Attitudes to women who testify*

A now classic argument which defence counsel use is that women go to the police and make statements only to obtain this legal status, and that it is possible for a woman to present a cock and bull story for this purpose. One or two women have tried, but they were soon found out. Their traffickers forced them to make false statements at the police station and made them work again afterwards. However, as a rule it is extremely difficult to sustain a false statement without making mistakes. The police need evidence and any untruths are likely to be found out.

The Rotterdam foreigners' police spokesman said, 'Why should a woman do that? She alienates herself from her associates. Next she notices that those who were not so courageous continue to work to line their own pockets.' The temporary permit of residence is not desirable because it only postpones expulsion. It is easier to get a residence permit by marrying a Dutch national than go through the martyrdom of denunciation. In fact, women with legal status also filed complaints, as did women who wanted to be returned home voluntarily. In 1993, 28 of STV's 88 clients wanted

to go home and in 1992 the figures were 17 out of 70.<sup>7</sup> STV hardly ever hears from women who return to their own countries, presumably because they want to forget the past. In one case a rogatory commission was sent after them, which proved embarrassing. A large delegation of police and public prosecutors arrived in a village in Indonesia, making it public knowledge that a girl was being sought by the police, even if only as a witness. From that day on, she did not dare to leave the house. At least two other women are known to have been pursued by traffickers in their own countries.

#### *Reprisals and after-effects*

One Yugoslavian client of STV was shot in the street in the Netherlands. The police didn't relate her death to the fact that she had denounced traffickers, but a question mark remains. Another trafficked girl was persecuted in Poland by her traffickers. When her brother tried to protect her, his arm was broken.

While they are in the Netherlands they are entitled to social security, but women who have conditional residence permits are not entitled to work permits. They resent living on social security and want to earn their living: which is, after all, why most of them came in the first place. They know there is one job for which the bosses never ask to see a permit: prostitution. Some women go back on the game, including those who were forced on to it before. With their previous experience they have developed the skills necessary for prostitution, such as the dissociation of emotion and sexuality. Besides, the only people they know live in this subculture.

Some women are afraid they have contracted AIDS; up till now, however, only one client of STV has died of AIDS. One trafficked woman who didn't go to STV for help also became a victim of the disease. Health workers report that the number of cases of AIDS among male and female migrants is increasing slightly. It is unknown whether they were infected by their partner, in prostitution or way back in their homeland. At least five of STV's clients were forced to have abortions. Women who have abortions voluntarily are not counted as victims of sexual violence.

Only a minority of the women go back to prostitution; most want to make a clean break. They are afraid of the traffickers and their associates, which is why they have to stay in shelters whose

addresses are not revealed. But because of these security measures they feel isolated. Occasionally they can stay as guests with a family or in a convent. Three Russian women lived with a Dutch nun. They had the surprise of their lives when they saw the sister driving a car and whistling while doing repairs around the house. 'We'll never forget the emancipated sister,' they said gratefully on leaving. The staff of the shelters do everything to help the women cope with their emotional problems.<sup>8</sup> Women trafficked on a small scale for marriage are often in an especially bad emotional state. Most suffer from psychosomatic disorders. Most trafficked women are homesick and confused; some have lost their homes and jobs. They miss their children, whom they have left in the care of a grandmother or other relatives. Some women become pregnant after rape or 'an accident with a customer'. One of these children, whom I met, is already four years old. He asked, 'Where is my father?' When his mother didn't answer, he grabbed his toy telephone and fantasized a conversation with his unknown father.

Some victims are still children themselves. STV's records seem to show that younger and younger women are applying for help. In 1992 the women were on average 26 years old; in 1993 they were 23. But older women are also being trafficked: the youngest was 13, the oldest 51. Minors are generally sent back to their parents, who have sometimes reported them missing.

#### **The police**

A group of 15 policemen from several divisions were assembled for a briefing on a well-prepared raid. Many translators had spent hours in a laboratory listening to the tapped phone calls of a gang. The timing of the raid had been carefully planned so that the few customers present could be instructed to sneak out secretly. The police chief explained the lie of the land and read out the anonymous letter from a client which had been the starting point of the action. The man had been shocked by the conditions in which the women had to work.

From the outside the brothel looked luxurious and picturesquely situated, but appearances were deceptive. Only the hall where punters were welcomed looked attractive, with its red velvet settee. The working rooms were a mess: the beds were too high and a price list written in felt-tipped pen on cardboard was the only decoration.

In the living room there were cups of half-drunk coffee; newly lit cigarettes had been quickly stubbed out; a piece of bread was going stale: all signs of a hasty departure. A desk drawer had been forced open by one of the women looking for her passport.

Afterwards it turned out that three victims were among the illegal women rounded up. During the raid they were pacing up and down, pretending to be handcuffed. They tried to communicate to the police that they felt like prisoners.<sup>9</sup> News of raids has a way of leaking out, deliberately or by accident, for example by eavesdropping on police scanners. The women reported that they had had to hide shortly before the police arrived because the boss had been warned beforehand.

To achieve more effective policing of traffic in women, in 1988 the Dutch Department of Justice issued policy directives. They state that assumed victims of traffic should not be expelled but referred to support organizations. One directive directs the police to maintain links with prostitution to detect traffic.

The police forces which apply this directive are aware of its inherent dangers. Officers Bennink and De Winter of the Rotterdam police: 'When we visit these houses we cannot ignore the manager. When a girl sees us speaking to him, she may think that we are corrupt. That's how the rumours start that we take bribes and we want a free go. We know the bosses use this argument against us.' It is a classic trick of traffickers to misinform women that they are in league with the police. 'You might stop the gossiping by avoiding sex clubs altogether. But then the managers can do what they please, without us knowing anything.' Women believe their bosses and assume the police are corrupt, because they often are in their home countries. Research has pointed out there are some incidents of police corruption, but it is not widespread in the Netherlands.<sup>10</sup>

Women don't always understand police tactics: they are surprised when prostitutes are not arrested, which reinforces their belief that the police turn a blind eye. Often they don't know that prostitution is not illegal in the Netherlands. It takes time for them to understand that they haven't been arrested for prostitution but because they are illegal immigrants. Most of these women go to great lengths to avoid the police, but others can't wait for the police to raid the clubs or brothels. 'At last, it was about time,' one woman said during a raid.

Recently the Dutch policy directives have been re-evaluated.<sup>11</sup> The results were shocking. Not all police forces put the directives into practice, nor did they tackle the problems in a uniform

manner. Though the law condemns all trafficking of prostitutes, some policemen are concerned only with women who definitely didn't know they were entering prostitution. The directive that supposed victims of traffic must not be deported immediately is not always heeded. Some police forces are not prepared to spend time and money on combating traffic, which is why the Rotterdam police, who were pioneers in tackling traffic in women, have backed out of prostitution control and stopped investigating traffic altogether.

### Reporting by people other than the police

'Look, right now I have many Thai girls in the waiting room here at the STD [sexually transmitted diseases] clinic waiting for a health check-up,' a doctor said when I called him at a busy time. Angrily he continued, 'From their bodies I can tell these girls are only 13. But they have papers, probably false, stating that they are over 18. What can I do? I have my professional code of secrecy and besides, I have been threatened with a knife before.' He is one of the few doctors in close contact with these women.

Although it is the role of the police to investigate and uncover trafficking in women, other professionals are also involved. Once or twice doctors have warned STV when they suspect a woman has been trafficked. In quite a few cases women stop a passer-by, who takes them to a social worker or to the police. Lawyers, fellow prostitutes and social workers also find victims. In 1993 ten clients were brought to STV by private individuals, whereas in 1992 that happened only once.<sup>12</sup> In 1992, 26 of the 70 women who contacted STV had been sent by the police, and in 1993 the number had risen to 57 out of a total of 88.<sup>13</sup> Sometimes brothel-keepers or punters put the women in contact with support organizations. Punters can play an important role, but it is not easy to mobilize them.

Men who use prostitutes can't easily find out whether they have been trafficked or not: the women don't always confide in them. Besides, the women know they have to keep smiling to attract the punters. Gerrit, who visits prostitutes regularly, said, 'In The Hague I once had a newcomer to the job. When I was inside people were shouting instructions to the girl through the window, so I understood, though I don't speak Spanish. I left straight away, because I didn't want any trouble. On another occasion I was with

a naïve girl who clearly hated the job. I paid her and left without touching her. By the way, you shouldn't overdo it. Most women work voluntarily. In Amsterdam I have never come across a window prostitute who was trafficked.' Like Gerrit, most punters don't want a woman who has been forced on to the game. Sometimes they pluck up their courage and help a girl who has been trafficked to get away.

Frequenters of night clubs have less trouble in coming out than clients of window prostitutes because they can say they were 'just having a beer in a club'. Sometimes these knights in shining armour press the women to go to the police. So one Thai woman arrived with her client at the police station. This man noisily demanded that the police raid the club, if necessary with violence. He would not allow her to speak to the police in private. An elderly detective put him in his place: 'You are angered by the infringement of her human dignity, but now you should respect her too. She can very well speak for herself.' Another woman left her rescuer, fearing that he would take the law in his own hands. He said to her, 'I am no good myself. I have been convicted for violent assault. I know I can handle these people more effectively than the police.'

Quite a few women start a relationship with their clients because they are the only outsiders they know. Besides, it offers an alternative to the temporary residence permit. In some cases marriage results. Some of these marriages work, others don't. Most of the romances come to an untimely end. Couples usually clash over the issue of sending money to the woman's family in her home country. One relationship broke up when the groom was convicted before the marriage could take place. At least two of STV's clients were 'saved' by Dutch punters who then employed them in their own brothels.

Unfortunately STV can only help women who are considering pressing charges or are in the process of doing so, and so have temporary legal status. Those who don't dare press charges have to remain hidden. Social services are not available for them.

### **The current legal situation**

Following discussions the laws against trafficking in women have been amended. Sex-club owners or traffickers can be taken to court if they use force or violence. There are now several grounds on which a woman can be defined as having been trafficked, including women brought into prostitution under false pretences. The

majority of STV's clients didn't know they were going to become prostitutes.<sup>14</sup> Other women who knew they were going to work as prostitutes became victims of traffic when they were misled about their working conditions. They never agreed to hand over their earnings or their documents. They were not bound in their contracts to endure being locked up, violence or threats. The law states that it is illegal for women to be made dependent on the services of traffickers; the official wording is bringing a person into prostitution by 'force or violence or by abusing one's ascendancy derived from actual relations'. Moreover it is forbidden to take women across national borders for the sole purpose of prostituting them. Last but not least, the new law is not gender specific, but also recognizes the traffic in boys and men.<sup>15</sup>

### **Managers of sex houses**

'Like me, many women were forced into prostitution. I get very angry when I hear that they only fuss about foreign women,' a Dutch ex-prostitute said. She had been terrorized and kept prisoner for a considerable length of time by a pimp. She was right to consider herself a victim, but she was a victim of pimping not trafficking. Under the new Dutch law, transporting women across national borders is a vital characteristic of traffic.

Trafficking doesn't only occur in major cities with red light districts. Trafficked women can also be found in small villages in the Netherlands and elsewhere. Nowadays traffickers prefer rural areas where the police are less alert. Until recently in the Netherlands most trafficked women worked in clubs, where 80 per cent of the prostitution takes place, and behind the windows. Nowadays they are working as escorts and even on the streets. Street-corner workers report that eastern European women come in pairs and some are known to have been sent by criminal organizations. Formerly only small-time criminals, mostly drug addicts, forced their girlfriends to work in kerb-crawling areas. A minority of trafficked women, especially Moroccan and Chinese, work in private houses.

Not all traffickers are brothel-keepers and not all brothel-keepers are traffickers. Nowadays brothel-owners who knowingly hire trafficked girls are considered accomplices. In 1992 Klein Beekman of Verenjin Exploitanten Relaxhuizen (VER), the Dutch Association of Relaxhouses (a euphemism for sex clubs) stated that one-third of the owners of the 3,000 houses of prostitution in the

Netherlands were involved in criminal activities. By 1994 he was not so sure of the figure. He said, 'We want to outnumber the bad operators. We have already refused a company which was known to deal in arms, minors and drugs.' He agreed that traffic is a serious problem which damages the respectable image the association needs to support its claim to be legalized. 'Only the genuine sex-club owners join us, if only to safeguard their investments.'

## 5 Thailand to Europe: a one-way ticket

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In the district of Korat in Thailand there is a small village where most of the young women have left for Germany. The teacher's sister recruited them to be prostitutes in Berlin. To pay for their travel several incurred enormous debts. The teacher's sister had to stop trafficking because she was under suspicion, but another sibling carried on the family business. Twenty women went to Berlin, encouraged by their families to take jobs abroad. Some parents went so far as to persuade them to divorce their Thai husbands in order to marry a German; one woman had paid 5,000 marks for this. The women who returned home had found there was no way they could make a living. One of them had contracted AIDS.<sup>1</sup>

These women emigrated according to the one-step pattern, that is directly from the rural areas to their foreign destination. Women who do this usually have no experience of being on the game and have very high expectations of life abroad.<sup>2</sup> Women who move from the country to the big cities and then go abroad through agencies or as tourists are following what is called the two-step pattern.

Not until 1985 did the Thai government take measures to repress trafficking. The authorities stated that women who applied for a passport who were under 36, had little money and were travelling alone, had to be thoroughly screened. However, this only criminalized women who wanted to travel independently. To avoid being caught travelling alone, they had to use dubious middlemen.

More effective action has been taken by non-governmental organizations such as the Women's Information Centre and EMPOWER (Education Means Protection of Women Engaged in Recreation). EMPOWER wants to improve working conditions for Thai prostitutes, which are generally bad because the bosses have