

### Other artificial families

Fraud in family relations is not new. In 1987 two men from Rotterdam were arrested because they adopted foreign people. They 'helped out' illegal aliens without passports with hand-typed false adoption papers, drafted by non-existent solicitors. They arranged for paid adoptive parents. They conducted their business in pubs, but it was never established that this was done for the purposes of prostitution.<sup>2</sup>

Leslie Roberts of the London branch of the International Anti-Slavery Society said, 'In Britain there is the odd example of false adoption. Local authorities don't have the services to vet the adopted children. I am sure people come in on false invitations, but we don't know whether that is a ploy to manipulate women into prostitution.'

It is still theoretically possible to set up fraudulent families by falsely claiming children. A European tourist can easily go to the Dominican Republic and claim to have fathered a girl many years before on holiday, in order to bring her back to Europe and turn her out on the streets.

Leen Pieterse of the Criminal Intelligence Unit said, 'In those cases an alleged father has to go to great lengths to prove himself. We know of these methods, but we haven't heard of any cases. I would have known if it occurred frequently, and by frequently I mean four or five times a year. The embassy personnel are alerted. Besides, it would attract the attention of other authorities.'

## 8 The Greek connection

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Greece has a tradition of trafficking in women. In the 1960s men were leaving the countryside for the cities to find employment. To meet an increasing demand for prostitutes, girls were recruited in rural areas, often with false job promises, and forced onto the game. The number of girls arriving in urban centres was matched by the increase in the number of pimps. Unemployment in Greece then forced many men to look for work in western and northern Europe. A minority of them were criminals.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, they became involved in trafficking women from South America and eastern Europe.

In the Netherlands Greek traffickers were helped by the ease with which an entertainer's visa could be obtained. The Dutch authorities handed out these visas liberally to anyone who wanted to hire artistic performers. For years Greece had been an important distribution centre for go-go dancers, and in the 1980s both Greece and Cyprus played major roles in the international trade in such dancers, who had entertainers' visas. Before 1987 abuse of this system was unknown, but by 1992 the Dutch police were saying, 'We don't know if they are being used for trafficking in women, but there is certainly a massive transfer of prostitutes.' The authorities have become more careful about who they issue the visas to since this method of recruitment received bad publicity.

Ester Rios, a social worker in the Netherlands who helped trafficked as well as non-trafficked South American prostitutes, said in 1991 that among the 150 regular visitors to her centre there were at least ten dancers who had been exploited by traffickers and pimps in Greece. Three of them, Celestina, Hermana and Viola, describe their odyssey through the Greek underworld later in this chapter.<sup>2</sup> Among the first women to come to the authorities' notice as being trafficked by Greeks were Tonia and Natalie.

In 1992 two Greek brothers reported to the Dutch police the theft of two Bulgarian girls by a Dutchman. This strange complaint

was investigated and eventually officers found the women, who were overjoyed. The 'thief' turned out to be a punter who had rescued Tonia and Natalie from window prostitution. The brothers were brought to trial and the women were called as witnesses. They said it had all started when they had gone from Bulgaria to Hungary on holiday. In a Budapest café they met the brothers, who invited them on a short trip to Germany. When they arrived in Düsseldorf, instead of enjoying a holiday, they were kept prisoner in a two-room apartment. The brothers made Tonia sleep with their friends, who then paid the brothers. These friends were a taxi driver, a restaurant owner and a waiter in the restaurant. Natalie was better off: 'One of the brothers was in love with me and reserved me for himself. I was taken out once in a while. I noticed they did something to my friend Tonia. At the time I didn't realize what was happening, but I heard her screaming and crying. She was kept in a separate room. We were not allowed to speak to each other.' Next the two women were taken to the red light district in Amsterdam. They were both afraid because the brothers were well armed.

At the trial the Greeks' friends were called as witnesses for the defence and they all testified that the women were professional prostitutes who had obviously enjoyed sexual relations with several men. The taxi driver said he had met the girls by chance while his car was being repaired at a garage. The restaurant owner bragged that the women had taken him and the waiter to the cellar to have sex with them after dinner. Most of their evidence contained blatant contradictions. 'All these Greeks in Düsseldorf know each other,' the two women commented indignantly. They were right. The stories were obviously inventions and the witnesses were charged with perjury and locked away.

However, the trial then took a strange turn. Tonia, who had said she was kept prisoner in Düsseldorf, was also accused of perjury. In Germany a neighbour of the brothers, who had no relationship with them, was positive she had seen Tonia outside. An independent kiosk owner said the same thing. A year after the event these two witnesses had managed to recognize her from a small passport photo. Since it was impossible to prove that the two were not impartial witnesses, Tonia and Natalie were also convicted of perjury. The Greek brothers and their friends were released from jail and even sued the Department of Justice successfully for damages. Tonia and Natalie have appealed against this conviction but the appeal has not yet come to court.

### The traffic in entertainers

A slender girl dances onstage. Slowly she undresses to the sound of reggae music. A busload of tourists wait for her next act: writing 'Greetings from Amsterdam' with her lower body. Nowadays every sex club worthy of the name features a dance act like this. They became popular when old-fashioned night clubs with variety acts became unfashionable and audiences began to demand live sex and not just striptease. Finding able dancers is difficult, so managers of sex clubs make do with their own employees, who are reluctant to comply because they are seldom paid any extra.

Entertainment agencies (and there are several which supply dancers with skills like writing with their private parts) try to fill the gap with cheap, untrained, migrant performers. The dancer who performed the 'Greetings from Amsterdam' act is from former Yugoslavia, according to the doorman at the theatre, which features live sex as well. 'We also employ a Colombian dancer,' he said.

The dancers at this particular theatre are probably working on entertainers' visas. The contracts offered to them by the impresarios are 'informal', so abuse for prostitution is easy. A few 'imported cultural dancers' think they have been hired to perform traditional dances. Instead they have to undress and, once trapped, more often than not are also forced to have sexual intercourse with clients.

Several hundred go-go dancers were recruited in Greece. Josephina, the Colombian hooker who knows a great deal about 'foreigners' prostitution circles, said, 'Since I arrived in Holland some ten years ago, I have heard stories about Greece. At the time, Dutch sex-club owners paid commission to impresarios based in Greece, who sent girls to Holland.' For instance, Maria, a pregnant woman who was raped by her trafficker, was ordered by post for the Netherlands via Greece. Many migrant girls from eastern Europe are prostituting themselves in Greece. According to an Interpol report in 1988, 1,200 Ethiopian girls were working in Greek brothels. Brazilians are also thought to be trafficked by a Greek network.<sup>3</sup>

### 'I wanted to get more out of life'

Celestina, Hermana and her sister Amada came from the Dominican Republic and were all, at different times, victims of a gang run by Papa C. Celestina, who is 22, described herself as

*pequeña*, small, but not too small. For safety reasons she didn't consort with Dominican women who knew many other Dominicans. She was afraid her whereabouts would become known in the tight-knit Dominican community in the Netherlands.

Hermana, on the contrary, was a big muscular woman who didn't care about her safety. She was too angry. 'I'll tell it all because I want something to be done about Papa C.' She spoke for her sister Amada as well, who had gone through similar experiences. 'Papa C. took the money my family needed so badly. And he has never stopped cheating Dominican women.' Taking into consideration the time that elapsed between Celestina and Hermana's experiences (Celestina's in the late 1980s and Hermana and Amada's in 1993), Papa C. must have been trafficking for at least five years. He was one of many agents operating in Greece.

All three women, Celestina, Hermana and Amada, had been job hunting in the Dominican Republic. Hermana had to earn her living because her husband was working in Portugal and didn't send enough money home. She and Amada were contacted by an intermediary, whom they met only once and who promised them jobs in Greece. Celestina was more definite about her agents: 'I told a friend that I wanted to get more out of life. He introduced me to two Dominican men who said they could help me out. I thought they were normal business executives.' The women were given the choice between working as dancers, waitressing in a Greek restaurant or being a receptionist. 'Now I realize that this intermediary knew the intentions of these two men. I never want to see him again,' Celestina said to me. At the time she chose to be a waitress. When Hermana applied it was for a job as a receptionist in a tourist office.

The women were given six-month contracts which promised them enormous salaries by Dominican standards. The sum they had to pay the agency was also huge in their eyes: 3,000 pesos. Celestina boarded the plane for Athens with twelve other girls. 'Three men were waiting for us at Athens airport. They said, "Oh, you are here for Papa C., please give us your passports." The other girls and I were frightened out of our wits when we got them back - with different names and ages. Only the photographs were genuine. They kept our genuine passports.' The men at the airport played the same trick on Hermana and her 20 travel companions.

After they reached Athens, Hermana and the others with her travelled to a seaside resort to the so-called tourist office. 'We had

to start that very same day at eight o'clock in the evening. We thought it was strange. What tourist office opens up at that hour?' The moment the women entered the night club they realized their position. There was no escape. Hermana said, 'That first night I was like a piece of furniture. Punters could only look at me, not touch me. I didn't want to do that kind of work. Why would I do my best to attract customers? Surely not to line the pockets of the bosses. Later on I only had intercourse with men if I couldn't avoid it. And those customers smelled. I continually argued about money with this self-styled impresario, the proprietor of the club. Since I couldn't refuse customers, I wanted to be paid for entertaining them.'

After three months Hermana and her sister went to the Greek police. 'We didn't tell them everything because we were afraid for the girls we had left behind. We hoped the police would send us back to the Dominican Republic, but they couldn't do anything without our documents. So we went back to the agent. We threatened to call the police if he didn't give us our passports back within three weeks. Instead of returning them, he said, "Relax, everything will be OK." But he wanted to get rid of us and shoved us off to Papa C., who had apparently already paid commission for us. The recruiter in the Dominican Republic also worked for him and had arranged with our first boss to sell us on to Papa C. That first boss, the night-club owner, was a bastard, but Papa C. was worse.'

### **Papa C.**

When she arrived in Greece Celestina was sent straight to Papa C., whom she described as 'an unpleasant and very bossy man'. She and her colleagues were put up in a hotel, which they could only leave if they asked the porter to accompany them. 'For the first few months we were not allowed out by ourselves. I never dared to complain to the punters, because it meant trouble if Papa C. heard of it. Besides, you didn't know if the customer was one of his spies.'

'In the daytime we received thorough dance training. At night we had to perform in a night club. No matter how often we asked, we were never given our salary. Papa C. took everything from us, really everything. He lived in an enormous house, and one room was packed with luggage he had confiscated from the girls.'

Neither Celestina nor Hermana were beaten up by Papa C., but Hermana said, 'Other girls were. He had relationships with some of the women. When his wife found out, she treated the girls badly, although she knew perfectly well she couldn't stop his womanizing. She was scared to death of him. The others told me that she used to work for him too. She was Greek. We had to call her Mama Maria.' Celestina knew her too. 'I never called her Mama Maria. Others implored her, "Mama or Papa, please help me so and so." Not me. I was too proud for that.'

After a couple of months the regime became less strict because by then the women knew there was nowhere they could go. If they made problems, Papa C. simply moved them to another club. They couldn't leave because their visas had expired. 'I don't know if he had struck a deal with the local police,' Celestina said.

Many women stayed with Papa C. or committed suicide. One girl was said to have thrown herself off the balcony of Papa C.'s hotel, but some said they saw him push her. Papa C. told the police that she had jumped; and they believed him. This particular story was still being told when Hermana and her sister worked for Papa C. He obviously fostered its telling to discourage resistance from the women. However, the story had the opposite effect on Hermana and Amada. 'When we heard that, we thought we had to get away immediately.' Another woman in Hermana's group disappeared in the mountains and was never seen again. At that time they were marooned at Papa C.'s, who didn't bother to lock them up any more. He had learned over the years that fear alone was a cheap and efficient weapon which kept dancers from running away.

Hermana and her sister went to the Greek police for a second time. At the very least they hoped the police would help them to get their luggage back. 'The local police gave us a letter to Papa C. urging him to return our belongings. Of course we never dared to give it to him. We thought it better not to go back to Papa C.'s at all. Afterwards we sat on the stairs of the police station for hours. We met an Argentinian woman there who was in the last days of her pregnancy. She had a large belly and a very big heart. She gave us the money for our train fares to Athens. It was a long journey; on the way we almost starved to death.

'In Athens we went to the police again. We had heard that Athens had the greatest police force in the world.' Hermana expected too much of them. 'The policemen there asked if we had a job. "Yes," we said, and that was the end of the matter. They could not

deport us because we were tied down by an employment contract. In Greece illegal immigrants have to pay for their return tickets. If they don't have the money, they have to pay for it working in jail.

'We were desperate. Eventually we phoned the Argentinian woman we had met. She sent a friend of hers, a Chilean, who arranged for us to get customers. We did not really want that, but we didn't know how to survive otherwise. We wanted to leave Greece immediately, to get away from Papa C. This Chilean gave us some clothes and let us live in his apartment. He also introduced us to someone who supplied us with false identity papers.'

The streetwise Chilean became their tour operator. He first sent Hermana and her sister to Italy, where a friend of his took care of them. This man sent the two women to another business associate, who in turn introduced them to Italian street life. In Italy nobody forced them to prostitute themselves and the women found their own housing. They managed to save enough money to buy a ticket to the Netherlands, where another 'friend' fed them and gave them the money to pay for a room in a Dutch hotel for a couple of days. This friend turned out to be a pimp who put the sisters back on the game.

### Celestina runs away

Celestina did not go to the Greek police. She arrived in the Netherlands by a different route. After a few months Papa C. packed her off to one of his partners in crime, Dimitri, who was also an 'artists' agent'. She said 'The journey was terrible. I had to make a bus journey which lasted for several hours. I only saw mountains. When I finally arrived it turned out that Papa C. had given me the wrong address. After a lot of telephone calls and even more bus rides I finally arrived at Dimitri's.'

Celestina never had a sexual relationship with Papa C., but she did have an affair with Dimitri. 'He fell in love with me. He was a bit of a softie, but at least he had a heart. As I was involved with Dimitri, Papa C. didn't dare to thwart me any more. Dimitri was married to Carmen, a Dominican woman, who was also a prostitute. By the way, he also trafficked women himself. He recruited girls from the Dominican Republic and Chile for his own sex clubs in Greece. My intimacy with Dimitri gave me enough

courage to quarrel with him. I demanded that we, the girls, should get the money, not Papa C. So he gave it to me and I shared it with the girls. They thought me very brave.'

Because of her behaviour, Celestina was no longer seen as a model of obedience. She had to go. Against his better judgment, Dimitri sent her to Athens, where she was supposed to contact a Rotterdam agent. 'Dimitri advanced me the train fare. I had to report to a hotel of Papa C.'s in Athens. I never went. Instead of following their timetable, I spent the rest of the money on a taxi to the nearest railway station.

'I ended up in Germany. I didn't know where to go and so I called a friend of Dimitri's in Holland. He sent a taxi to collect me. It wasn't very far because I was near to the Dutch border. Dimitri had told me that his friend was an ordinary family man who owned a restaurant, but I soon found out that he expected me to work in his escort service which he operated on the side. I escaped with a so-called client, who got me a job in an Amsterdam striptease joint. Stripping wasn't so hard to do. Nobody bothered me and the managers paid me what they owed me. I shut my eyes to their criminal activities. They were involved in the kidnapping of Heineken, the beer magnate, you know.' Soon Celestina became pregnant. Later she gave up her job to care for her daughter full-time.

'Do you believe my story?' she asked me at the end of our first meeting. She was very surprised when I told her that she was not the only victim of Papa C. to find herself stranded in the Netherlands.

## Cyprus

Papa C. sent some of his women to Cyprus, which had been a transit post for prostitutes for a long time.<sup>4</sup> However, until a few years ago, nobody had examined the role of Cypriot agents in the international trade in women. The connections were played down as coincidental.

In the 1950s and 1960s Cyprus was an important distribution centre for white girls being sent to the Middle East. In the early 1960s the English journalist Sean O'Callaghan met a girl in one of Tripoli's night clubs.<sup>5</sup> She told him the following story. 'A few years ago I left England to go to Cyprus with some other dancers.

As we were quite successful as dancers we wanted to move on to Athens. So we went, but our manager left us in the lurch. Without his help we couldn't find a suitable place to work. I flew back to Cyprus with two other girls, but the situation had changed overnight in the old club. We were told we would be sacked if we refused to sleep with the clients. We met a man there who invited us to go and work in Beirut. We accepted, but that was even worse. It was a private night club where they beat us up and made us go without food.' She could not escape. Instead she had to help a Frenchman to recruit other girls in various European cities. He told the girls that they were wasting their talents and that he could offer them better opportunities.

The English girl, in the meantime, had found out she had become part of a notorious 'syndicate', which had at least 19 members and worked with procurers in European and Arab countries, recruiting through artists' agencies. The head of the syndicate, who was brought to trial in the Lebanon in 1964, was one Hassan Ali Karim. O'Callaghan checked out the English girl's story by posing as an undercover trafficker. He heard reports of women who had been drugged and detained in luxurious harems. Other girls, who had started off in dance groups, ended up in night clubs and brothels. John Keet, the manager of an agency, described his methods to O'Callaghan: 'A girl is hired as a dancer for a realistic fee, and is reported missing afterwards.'

English ballet dancers were supposed to be in particular danger because they were favourites with men in northern Africa and the Middle East. English girls could be found working in most of Beirut's 500 night clubs. A classic example of trafficking at that time was the Champagne Ballet in Cyprus, which was run by an English woman who recruited schoolgirls through an agency in Sheffield. The girls were offered a contract with a no-play no-pay stipulation. At first they were employed in the wardrobe department, where they invariably became extremely bored. By this time, they were ready to drink with the customers. The next step was for the night-club manager to promise them a better job in the Middle East.

Modern agents adapted this existing infrastructure for trafficking women, but the women weren't being sent east any more but to western Europe instead. They also catered for the local market, for the many soldiers who were based in Cyprus.<sup>6</sup>

A notorious Cypriot called Ernesto B. operated in the late 1980s. A Frenchman called Vladimir A. had supplied the clubs in

Rotterdam with Thai girls trained in Cyprus.<sup>7</sup> Vladimir had started this trade in Cyprus. Later he supplied the Belgians, who were known as the Billionaire gang, with so-called dancers. Ernesto B., himself of Lebanese origin, was well connected in the Lebanon. One of the women who was sold by Ernesto to the Billionaire gang was sent to the Lebanon, an old Middle East destination for trafficked women.

Unhampered by the civil war, traffic to the Lebanon continued during the 1980s. Despite the presence of the so-called Terry Waite watchers, who were monitoring the captivity of the archbishop of Canterbury's envoy, many agents brought Filipinas into the Lebanon with the help of corrupt immigration officers.

Flora from the Philippines, the domestic helper whose story is told in chapter 13, was employed in the Lebanon at the time. 'I would never work as a stripper, but I befriended a dancer who had run away from her employer. That's why I offered her a place to sleep in my house. The bosses of the dancers came after her. They formed a mafia-like organization which also traded drugs.' According to Flora, Philippine President Aquino repatriated many dancers when the bombing intensified. They were given priority over domestic helpers, who were housed with their employers. Three hundred domestic workers were abandoned and had to become prostitutes in order to survive.<sup>8</sup> Other 'entertainers' were sent back to the Philippines via Syria. Flora learned that many of them were exported to work in Belgium and Luxemburg. Domestic workers who successfully fled from the Lebanon were offered jobs by middlemen as 'cultural dancers' in Cyprus.

Viola, aged 26, from Colombia, was sent to Cyprus by Ernesto B.'s organization. She told her story reluctantly. 'Cyprus was teeming with agencies. Impresarios worked with cabaret proprietors. We never found out exactly who was involved. Personally I didn't have much to do with Ernesto, I only saw him once or twice. The bosses distanced themselves from the cabaret girls. I only knew that Ernesto was married to a Spanish woman and consequently spoke Spanish perfectly. Our agency alone had some 20 staff members.' During our conversation she referred to the agency staff vaguely as 'them'. 'My dancing group consisted of twelve girls.' The dancing groups were organized by nationality. Viola said, 'There were ballets from Argentina, Colombia and Thailand. I also met girls from El Salvador.'

Viola was recruited by the Colombian branch of Ernesto B.'s organization. 'In Colombia a friend took me to a hotel, where a Spanish businessman and his associates were holding a reception. They were ordinary men – actually they were quite nice. The Spanish man said he was looking for a professional dancer, which I wasn't, but he offered to get me training and promised me an artistic career. I even had to pass an audition of sorts.

'I found out later they needed no fewer than ten girls. The impresario employed everyone. I thought to myself, "Something is wrong. Don't do it," so I told him I had only contacted him out of curiosity and I had decided not to take up his offer. He went to a lot of trouble to persuade me. "We operate on a completely legal basis and we will give you a contract." I was promised £350 a month, money I could really do with. That sounded better, so I decided to give it a go after all.'

Viola flew to Athens with eight other girls. 'A man was waiting for us at the airport and he asked us if we were the Colombians he was expecting. When we said yes, he immediately confiscated our papers and passports. Then he took us to a hotel. We were supposed to start dancing the very next evening. "Regular dancing", they had told us,' Viola added ironically, 'but with an unusual type of costume.'

Viola's first stop was in Piraeus, the port of Athens. There she stripped in clubs called the Crazy Horse and the Copacabana. 'We were never trained as dancers, we only had to learn to move sexily. I also had to wear make-up, which I hated. You know me, have you ever seen me wearing make-up? We were also told that as "artists" we had to entertain the customers. "Why?" we asked. "That's not why we came here." But they claimed we each had to earn £1,500 to pay back what we owed them.

'The first weeks we received no salary at all, just some food. We cooked our own meals, but they did the shopping, so we could dance full time. In between, when we were hungry and cold, we didn't get anything at all. We were often shivering because we were not allowed to wear trousers. We never had any time off, not even on official holidays. We couldn't talk among ourselves because the *chef de ballet* was always around. If we tried to he would separate us at once. We were all in the same situation and none of us spoke Greek. By the way, the *chef de ballet* was gay and didn't harass us. He took us to work and picked us up afterwards.

'After a month they gave us a few dollars to buy our own food. We spent it on the lottery in a desperate attempt to make some

money. One of us had become involved with a Greek guy and wanted to leave. She asked for her passport but they wouldn't give it to her. We realized then that none of us would ever get our papers back. Another girl became so angry that she punched the *chef de ballet*. "You've deceived us," she said.

'Our bosses sent us to Cyprus next with the *chef de ballet*. We lived in a filthy old house owned by the organization, which we had to clean ourselves. There was only one bath for all those girls. Again they locked us up in our rooms. Since we had to repay the fare for our boat trip, we weren't paid a penny for months. In Cyprus we were forced to sleep with clients. We could not refuse a customer who wanted us for the whole night. Officially we could say no, but then we would never get any money.

'The bosses didn't give us condoms and we had no idea where or how to get them ourselves. No matter how much we were crying, the customers made us sit with them. I couldn't speak to them because they were mostly Greeks and Arabs. We had to drink with them before we slept with them. It wasn't long before we started to ask for alcohol ourselves. Soon I became an alcoholic. Once a drunken girl hit a customer. He hit her back so hard that she was badly hurt and I pleaded with the boss to let her go to the hospital. He refused and beat me up instead.'

Viola spent 18 months in Cyprus. 'One day we heard that a new group of Filipinas had arrived. They were young and beautiful, and some were still virgins. They didn't need us any more. The manager returned our passports and said, "Get out." At last we got some money. In all those months we had only earned £1,000.' Viola burst out crying and we had to stop our conversation for a while.

Though Viola was free, her misery wasn't over. 'Just before I heard I could go, Maria, a former girlfriend of Ernesto's, talked to me. I told her about my problems and she said she would help me to find a job in Holland.' According to social worker Ester Rios, such chance meetings happen frequently. 'In Greece or Cyprus these girls always meet someone in a night club who advises them to go to the Netherlands and offers to pay for her ticket.'

Maria took Viola to 'Uncle Henkie's' hotel in Rotterdam. 'Almost all the girls who worked there came from Colombia.' They had to have intercourse with their clients without condoms. If the punters complained, they got to have another go for free. 'Uncle Henkie' was a well-known criminal. At his hotel Maria

introduced Viola to an Argentinian who would take care of her. Viola had to prostitute herself for him. She was rigidly controlled by a female drug-runner who was a friend of his. Viola's only confidante was a woman who worked in the same hotel, who later died, to Viola's distress.

After her friend's death, Viola had to cope with the Argentinian criminal on her own. After a while she was 'saved' by a man from the Antilles, who offered her armed protection in exchange for prostitution money. When she refused to co-operate, he pointed meaningfully at his gun. Viola realized that his armed protection might well be turned against her and eventually reported him to the police.

### In the Netherlands

It is not unusual that all three women – Viola, Celestina and Hermana – were contacted in the Netherlands by profiteers who offered to deal with their difficulties as illegal immigrants in return for money. 'Those pimps know we need help,' Viola said cynically. 'They know where to pick up a girl.' Hermana said about the helpful 'friend' she met. 'He only kept me for his own relaxation. He had other girls. Problems, problems, and on top of it I got pregnant.'

Like other women in her position, Hermana abandoned her 'friend' when she discovered she could get a professional social worker for free. She wanted to go to Portugal to join her husband. But she had to take care of another problem. 'I called my husband to tell him I was pregnant. Of course he wanted to know what that was all about. I said, "All the time you were in Portugal I hardly ever heard from you. That's why I went abroad. I could only get a job in prostitution. I had an accident with a client. The condom burst." He said, "Get some help and come to Portugal as soon as you can."' Hermana was glad that he didn't react too fiercely. They are now reunited in Portugal.

The Amsterdam police wrote a report on Hermana, Celestina and Viola's experiences. 'They are interesting,' they commented, 'but we can't do anything because the traffickers are outside Holland.' However, they were able to track down their pimps. Unfortunately Viola's friend from the Antilles wasn't listed in the police files. When she was shown the photographs of well-known criminals she recognized many of her regular clients.

Celestina's pimp was known to the police, but she became frightened and withdrew her statement. He was imprisoned only to be released soon afterwards. Hermana left the Netherlands without making a statement.

## 9 The Belgian Billionaire gang

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There were only a few customers in the night club next door to the Billionaire Club in Rotterdam the evening I went to visit it in March 1992. The majority of the girls were non-European. 'They all work here voluntarily,' the manager, who was also a dancers' agent, explained proudly. 'At my agency the women can be trained as professional dancers. I also see to their health insurance, and I never force them to do a striptease if they don't want to.' Pointing at a sturdy, shy girl sitting at the bar, he said, 'It is no good trying to make her perform a striptease. By the way, it is wellnigh impossible to employ a whole contingent of foreign strippers and prostitutes legally. Next door, at the Billionaire's, there are at least 20 foreign girls.' One of the customers interrupted us to say that a new group of Philippine women had recently arrived at the Billionaire.

In 1987 the Billionaire gang owned half of the 38 sex clubs in Rotterdam. They also ran an entertainers' agency, which they had taken over from a French couple, who had gone out of business after it became known that they had recruited 20 Thai women as 'folk dancers' and then forced them into prostitution. The Thai women had entered the Netherlands through Belgium, France and Luxemburg.

The gang had vested interests in clubs and night clubs in the Netherlands and other European countries including Denmark, Switzerland and Italy. In its heyday the gang also received the revenues from clubs in Ankara (Turkey) and the Christian part of the Lebanon,<sup>1</sup> and was reputed to have a branch in the United Kingdom,<sup>2</sup> possibly for taxation reasons. Many Dutch sex-club owners have registered their businesses as British limited companies and have an office somewhere in the United Kingdom. Taxation on such limited companies is lower than for a b.v., the Dutch equivalent.

Abroad the Billionaire gang, who were Belgian in origin, focused on various side activities. They organized drugs transportation to