

Israel Sex Slavery Thrives



Jerusalem-----May 31.....They say that the world's oldest profession is prostitution.

There are two basic instincts in the character of the normal individual; the will to live, and the will to propagate the species - sex. It is from the interplay of these instincts that prostitution took origin, and it is for this reason that this profession is the oldest in human experience, the first offspring, as it were, of savagery and of civilization.

From the gospel accounts, we know that Mary Magdalene or Virgin Mary was possessed by "seven demons" until Jesus drove them out. How was Mary able to travel with Jesus in Israel at a time when such opportunities were a rarity for women? The money had to come from somewhere. There were no Jewish fund raising organizations established back then. Sex for money was always an integral part of history.

The harlot and the pandar were familiar in ancient Rome despite laws related to sex. If, prior to the time of Augustus Caesar, the Romans had laws designed to control the "social evil", we have no knowledge of them, but there is nevertheless no lack of evidence to prove that it was only too well known among them long before that happy age of sex orgies, wine and accepted homosexuality.

Before the advent of Greek and Roman civilizations, there were no orgies: there were just groups of people wantonly having sex willy-nilly in a big pile or some other such unsophisticated clustering. Early and tribal cultures appear to have had some group sex rituals associated with fertility and spring, but these are not especially well-documented. It took right up until the Age of Empires and Alphabets for people to invent a word for it (orgia, in both Latin and Greek) and to twist the childlike fun of random group sex into a constrictive societal institution.

It really is the oldest profession. Ishtar, the famous goddess first of the earliest known civilization Sumer, then of Babylonia, was a prostitute. Her many other names over the centuries included Great Whore of Babylon, Heavenly Prostitute, and Mother of Harlots as well as Har and Hora, from which the words harlot and whore derive. She was said to call herself a "compassionate prostitute". Babylonian sculptures honoring Ishtar depict her as a sacred prostitute in a window, awaiting customers. For thousands of years, high priestesses dutifully performed ritual sexual couplings with Sumerian kings to grant them Ishtar's power.

Over 4,300 years ago, one of these prostitute - priestesses, Enheduana, wrote the oldest words by an author whose name is known today; archeologists have unearthed many clay tablets of her cuneiform poetry. The Babylonians emulated the Sumerian custom on a larger scale: prostitutes called ishtaritu inhabited the temples of Ishtar, offering themselves to any male worshipper who paid the required contribution. In fact, every Babylonian woman was expected to go to a temple and perform the rite with a stranger at least once in her life. There was no shame in such temple prostitution; on the contrary, it was a sacred means of attaining divine union between man and goddess. Indeed, in the epic of Gilgamesh (written around 2,000 BC) a Babylonian temple prostitute civilizes a wild man of the forest by sleeping with him. "The Birth of Venus" (1482?) by Sandro Botticelli

Aphrodite the Courtesan Aphrodite was not only the Greek goddess of love, but also the patron goddess of prostitutes. Dozens of temples were raised in various cities to Aphrodite the Courtesan, Aphrodite of Brothels, Aphrodite of Streetwalkers, etc., and the prostitute-priestesses within conducted worship in much the same way as the ishtaritu of Babylon. In fact, Aphrodite was based on Astarte, who was the Phoenician counterpart of the Babylonian goddess Ishtar. Even the hetairae, the famed high-class courtesans of Ancient Greece, assisted in public ceremonies devoted to the gods. At the conclusion of the Eleusinian Mysteries, Phryne would appear at the gateway of the temple and perform a slow striptease. She was also the piece de resistance at the festival of Poseidon and Aphrodite. According to historian William Sanger, Phryne "slowly disrobed herself in the presence of the crowd. She next advanced to the water-side, plunged into the waves, and offered sacrifice to [Poseidon]. Returning like a sea-nymph, drying her hair from which the water dripped over her exquisite limbs, she paused for a moment before the crowd, which shouted in a phrensy of enthusiasm as the fair priestess vanished into a cell in the temple." This performance, representing the myth of Aphrodite's birth from the sea, inspired a series of depictions by painters beginning with Phryne's own lover Apeles and culminating with Botticelli two millennia later.

The Romans and Greeks were obsessed with sex. When they weren't busy writing Illiads, waging war, or inventing architecture and indoor plumbing, they were engaging in sex almost non stop. Given their obsession with sex and sensuality, it's actually kind of amazing they got anything done. Although the Greeks and Romans were sex-crazed, their orgia were not what modern folk imagine when the word "orgy" is used, with a few exceptions. The original orgies were associated with the Greek cults of Orpheus and Dionysus, who was literally the god of sex, drugs and rock-n-roll (or as they were known then, sex, wine and ritual dance). A fertility icon, Dionysus was attended by mythical creatures known as satyrs and nymphs, who later lent their names to the Freudian complexes that house sex-crazed quacks.

Of course, in the final days of the empire, there were a few brave pioneers such as Caligula, whose legendary sexual excesses helped give the orgy its good name (or bad name, depending on your moral stance). Outside of the cradle of the classics, there were mostly inconsistent sexual practices that varied pretty substantially from region to region. Of these, India was another early pioneer in sexual adventurism, and ancient Indian temples contain numerous depictions of almost every conceivable sexual configuration, with participants coming in duets, trios, quartets and more.

The peculiar story of the Bacchanalian cult which was brought to Rome by foreigners about the second century B.C., and the comedies of Plautus and Terence, in which the pandar and the sex harlot are familiar characters. Cicero, Pro Coelio, says: "If there is anyone who holds the opinion that young men should be interdicted from intrigues with the women of the town, he is indeed austere!"

Ludi Florales Flora was thought by Renaissance thinkers to have been a human prostitute turned goddess. The Floralia was a Roman sex festival associated with prostitutes. The Floralia, first introduced about 238 B.C., had a powerful influence in giving impetus to the spread of prostitution. The account of the origin of this festival, given by Lactantius, while no credence is to be placed in it, is very interesting. "When Flora, through the practice of prostitution, had come into great wealth, she made the people her heir, and bequeathed a certain fund, the income of which was to be used to celebrate her birthday by the exhibition of the games they call the Floralia". In the same book, he describes the manner in which they were celebrated: "They were solemnized with every form of licentiousness. For in addition to the freedom of speech that pours forth every obscenity, the prostitutes, at the importunities of the rabble, strip off their clothing and act as mimes in full view of the crowd, and this they continue until full satiety comes to the shameless lookers-on, holding their attention with their wriggling buttocks."

Perhaps not much has changed in Rome. Italian sex porn star and prostitute Chicholina (who performed with live snakes in Israel) moved on to become a respected and elected M.P. But these women, as hundreds of thousands throughout history chose to become prostitutes. They chose money for sex. In many countries throughout the world today, prostitution is legal. Red light districts have been established under government control from Amsterdam to Bangkok. These women were not pushed into prostitution in contrast to many women in Israel who have been forced to become sex slaves in Tel Aviv, Eilat and Haifa.

One person in Israel has taken up the challenge of confronting the sex slave trade in Israel. She does so at great risk. If you want to talk to Nomi Levenkron, be prepared to endanger her life. More than likely she'll be on the road when you call, pressing her cell phone to her ear as she speeds towards a women's lock-up in Haifa, or to a Knesset hearing in Jerusalem, or to the trial of a sex trafficker in Eilat.

She'll tell you she's happy to talk but is in a rush. Could you call again in a few hours? As legal director for the Migrant Worker's Hotline—an organization that battles the scourge of trafficking in women for prostitution—Nomi's workday often starts at 5 A.M.

She carries two cell phones on her at all times. And she talks fast. Her fluent English outpaces most native speakers. When she switches to Hebrew, she seems to forgo drawing breath. Nomi's days are spent crisscrossing the country, encouraging victims to take the stand against their traffickers, lobbying the authorities to take more action, and suing dangerous men for compensation on behalf of the women they brutalized. Once, after she filed suit in the case of a young Moldovan who had passed through the hands of six violent sex traffickers, friends came to Nomi's home to say goodbye, assuming it was the last time they would see her.

During her first six months on the job, Nomi worked full time without salary. She admits it's an addiction. "You don't really choose this kind of work," she says. "It's like heroin." Perhaps only an addict could spend 18 hours a day pursuing brutal criminals through the courts, have government officials call her a traitor for exposing Israel's dark side, and still not be discouraged when thousands more women are sold into sex slavery in her country every year. When she finally pulls up to the Hotline's offices in Downtown Tel Aviv, it's already ten at night. Nomi releases her seatbelt buckle and the belt slides up across her bulging belly. She is five months pregnant.

One of Tel Aviv's red light district is only a short walk from Nomi's office on Rehov Ha Hashmal. In all the Tel Aviv area has three red light areas - the old central bus station, the office skyscraper section of Ramat Gan and the beaches of nearby Tel Baruch.

Most of the brothel-lined streets by the old central bus station are filthy, the buildings run-down. Trails of red arrows painted on the walls lead customers to sex "health clubs" and "massage parlors," all marked out by twinkling strips of colored lights that flash their patterns like cuttlefish enticing their prey. The billboard for "5 Star Peep Show" on Neve Sha'anani street features the silhouette of a naked woman balanced precariously on the end of a dollar sign. She sits astride the bottom curve of the "S," straddling its final phallus-shaped curl.

The Israel sex silhouettes are everywhere. On Rehov Fin—better known as "Rehov Pin" or "Penis"—a reclining nude beckons clients into "Club Viagra." On Rehov Yesod Ha Ma'ale the floating nude in one "Health Club" window tilts her head back as though in the throes of ecstasy, her feet pointed in the direction of a neighboring falafel stand. The real women don't seem quite so eager. Through open doorways one can spot them glumly applying make-up or styling their hair.

Sometimes these Israel sex prostitutes can be seen in brothel windows, chatting to each other and looking out onto the street as they smoke a cigarette. Most of the windows have bars on them. "In the majority of the brothels in Tel Aviv," says Meir Cohen, Head of Investigations for the Israeli National Police, "there is no question that most of the women there are trafficked."

The vast majority of women trafficked to Israel for sex come from Romania and the countries of the former Soviet Union. Seduced by agents of organized crime, they agree to be smuggled into Israel, hoping to make good money. The women are usually young girls, like "Anna" (her real name has been suppressed) a 23-year-old Romanian who testified about her experience to an Israeli court in 2002.

Anna says that in 2001 she was approached in her hometown by an Israel girl named Shula, who promised to get her work caring for the elderly in Tel Aviv. Shula booked Anna on a plane leaving from Bucharest, but Anna had no idea where it would land. When it touched down in Cairo, she thought she was in Israel. Collected by a liaison, she and a group of other women were driven across the desert in an open car, escorted by masked Bedouin armed with

automatic weapons.

At two in the morning, they left the cars and walked for several hours, then crawled on their stomachs under a chain-link fence. Often, it is the Bedouin who are the first to tell victims of sex trafficking they will be working as prostitutes, as justification for sexually assaulting them.

"As early as Egypt I found out that I was going to engage in prostitution in Eilat," one woman told the Hotline. "I tried to run away but a Bedouin got hold of me and beat me. In the evening, four Bedouin raped me, one after the other....I was bleeding and I couldn't walk, it hurt me so much between my legs....I wanted to die." Since Anna was "lucky" enough not to be raped in transit, she still had no idea what awaited her. After crossing the border she was picked up by a man identified in court records as George Ben-Abraham Yosef, who drove her to Tel Aviv.

There, Yosef took Anna to a hotel, and ordered her to strip in front of a roomful of men. The ordeal is known as an "auction." Like traders in a cattle market, the traffickers inspect the "goods" and bid for the women they want to buy. "[The woman] is made to stand naked in the middle of a room," a female trafficker told Maariv. "[The traffickers] touch her breast, her ass....They check her tongue, her teeth, to see if she's healthy. They touch her private parts....They tell her, 'walk forward, backwards, strike poses like a model, wiggle it honey, bend over. Lower. Let's see what you're worth.'" Traffickers are not necessarily picky about the venue of an auction. In one case a woman was stripped, inspected, and sold for \$6,000 in the men's room of a McDonald's.

When the Hotline first contacted Nomi five years ago to ask for her help, trafficking in women was not even a crime under Israeli law. Nomi, then in law school, wasn't interested. She had studied criminology and was more intrigued by criminals than victims. But she had one skill that was crucial to the Hotline—she spoke Romanian. "Although I had a very hard childhood [in Romania], I'm very grateful for it now," says Nomi. Without Romanian, she would never have gotten involved.

The Hotline convinced her to volunteer for just a few hours, speaking to detained women in prison. What Nomi heard from them—the brutality they suffered from both criminals and police—shocked her into a new consciousness: "I started to say to myself, 'something is really wrong with this country on this issue.'" Two hours of volunteering a week became two hours a day, then 18 hours a day, until finally Nomi was getting only four hours of sleep. When she slept, she dreamt about work. The plight of the Moldovan sold to six different traffickers proved a watershed for Nomi. The woman wanted to testify but the police wouldn't listen. At the time, women who had been trafficked weren't considered victims.

"A prostitute was considered as a partner in crime," says Meir Cohen, the police investigator. Instead of testifying, victims were simply arrested and deported. Police were instructed not to intervene in brothels. The authorities preferred to use pimps as intelligence sources for other underworld investigations. The police in Beersheba told Nomi that her client was lying, that it wasn't important. So she sued the traffickers in civil court. She sued the police for not investigating. She even sued the ministry of interior for not issuing the woman a visa.

Suddenly, the police in Israel began to pay attention. More than 50 men were arrested almost immediately. "It was funny," says Nomi. "There were almost no men left in Beersheba." In May of 2000, Amnesty International had published an embarrassing report that condemned Israel for its cavalier attitude towards sex slavery. The resulting public clamor forced the Knesset to make trafficking in women an explicit crime with a maximum penalty of 16 years in prison.

Enforcing the new law was another matter. "No one wanted to deal with the problem," says Member of Knesset Marina Solodkin, who sits on the Parliamentary Inquiry Committee on Female Trafficking. "It was easier to just pretend that these women were new immigrants from the FSU and were not being trafficked into Israel."

But efforts by Nomi and other activists to publicize the issue finally paid off when, in 2001, the U.S. State Department placed Israel on a "blacklist," among countries that were failing to combat trafficking in women. The State Department's report was not simply a stain on Israel's reputation. United States law forbids the government from providing non-humanitarian aid to countries put

on the blacklist. Washington had jerked back the economic reins. The Israeli government was forced to do a complete about-face. A national police unit was established to investigate the sex trade. And officials insist their entire approach has changed. "Today, one of the central elements of the war against organized crime is trafficking in women," says Cohen.

The challenge is daunting. Demand for prostitution in Israel is enormous, with an estimated one million visits to sex brothels every month. Human rights organizations estimate that 3,000 women are brought into the country as sex slaves every year. The women come primarily from Russia, Moldova, and the Ukraine, where the collapse of social safety nets in post-communist economies has created a ready supply of destitute women. In a Hotline survey of trafficked women conducted at Neve Tirza women's prison, one third said that they, like Anna, had no idea they would be engaging in prostitution when they came to Israel. Others knew they would be prostitutes, but were promised good conditions by the traffickers. They were told they would have to take only a limited number of customers each day and that they would earn a thousand dollars a month (a massive sum in most Eastern European countries).

Eventually, the traffickers said, they would be able to leave the brothels. In the parlor, laughter is forbidden. Girls must always smile and sit straight. "I would sit there wearing thin pantyhose and freezing in the air conditioning," "Natasha," a Russian victim of trafficking told the Hotline. "Laughing was not allowed because the client might think he was being made fun of and leave."

When Anna was first taken to a sex brothel, she didn't know what it was. Yosef had put her in the hands of a man identified in court records as Yuri Ben-Michael Gur. "Yuri told me that he had bought me for a lot of money and I had to do what he said—to do prostitution," Anna testified. "That's how I realized that I had been sold like an animal." Anna was given tight, see-through clothes and told to put them on. Then she was ordered into a room with a man identified in court records as Menasha Ben-Avraham Faraj. Another girl had already told Anna that this was the man who visited the brothel whenever a new girl arrived.

As the other men stood outside and laughed, Faraj raped and performed oral sex on her. The "right" to have sex, including by force and without a condom, with an acquired woman, is taken for granted by most traffickers. After her horrific initiation, Anna was forced to take clients whenever they selected her.

Customers paid 150 shekels (40 USD), which Anna had to give to Gur's underlings. For each client they would give her back only 20 shekels, with which she had to pay for food and contraceptives. In the end she was always left with nothing. According to other women interviewed by the Hotline, brothel owners made them work seven days a week and an average of 13 hours a day. They had to work during their periods, using diaphragms to prevent blood from leaking.

"The meetings with the clients were short—just 15 minutes," according to Natasha. After the client finished, she would rush to the tepid showers, then back down to the freezing lobby. The customers who frequent these brothels are regular Israelis. Soldiers in uniform get discounts. Orthodox Jews stuff their skullcaps into their pockets when they enter, then replace them when they leave.

If a customer is dissatisfied, the girl is beaten. But as one 18-year-old victim told Hotline volunteers, "they beat you so as not to leave any marks, because clients don't like to see a woman with bruises."

If a woman gets ill or pregnant, she is taken to a veterinarian or a back-alley abortionist. About half the women interviewed by Hotline volunteers said they had been incarcerated in locked brothels. "Try and escape," one of Gur's employees told Anna, "and I'll crush your head in the door."

In one notorious case, two women were tied up in a cage on Tel Aviv's Rehov Pin and forced to provide sexual services. But even if the doors aren't locked, the women are always prisoners. Their traffickers confiscate their passports and threaten their loved ones. "The Russian mob knows exactly how to get to their families," says Nomi. "It is enough for them to say to the prostitutes, 'if you don't want to see your grandmother's house burned down or your 12-year old

sister taken as a prostitute, you better do what we tell you."

At a conference on prostitution in August 2002, Israel Police Major General Moshe Mizrahi stepped to the podium and stated the obvious: "Trafficking in women here is run by organized crime." Though his announcement was no revelation, Mizrahi's willingness to make it was unusual. For years, Israeli officials have consistently denied or downplayed the existence of organized crime groups within Israel's borders. But faced with a multi-billion-dollar sex-slaving trade and its serious political implications, the elephant in the room has become too dangerous to ignore.

According to a report by Nomi and her staff, trafficking in Israel is made possible by "an international network of criminal organizations, most of whose members are from the countries of the former Soviet Union." Almost 80 percent of the women Nomi interviewed said their traffickers were Israelis whose origins are in Russia or other FSU countries. Their language skills and local connections give such traffickers a professional advantage.

"The Russians do quality work in crime....That's Russian education for you," says Police Superintendent and Spokesperson Gil Kleiman. Kleiman believes the trafficking networks are so successful because they are made up of individuals who grew up and served in prison together. Their connections and experience allow them to coordinate the complex arrangement of recruiters, bribes, intermediaries, and buyers that an international smuggling operation requires.

"It's always a 'Sasha,'" says Nomi. "One 'Sasha' recruits them in Moldova, another 'Sasha' is waiting for them in Egypt, another meets them when they arrive in Israel....it's organized perfectly." Once the women get to the brothels, traffickers use intimidation and violence to keep them enslaved, and to ensure that those who escape do not testify.

One former prostitute in Israel recounted how her trafficker drove her to a beach and threatened to drown her if she caused any trouble. When Anna refused to work and stayed in her room to pray, her pimp beat her with her own bible, screaming "this is not a church."

Traffickers prefer not to murder their prostitutes, since killing them would mean a loss of "merchandise." But sometimes examples are made of woman who break "house rules." In June 2002, police found the body of a woman dressed in revealing clothes, who had been strangled and dumped in the street of Eilat's red light district. In October of that year, 42-year-old prostitute Svetlana Lukatzky was bound, beaten, and stabbed to death. Trafficked woman also find themselves the victims of turf battles between organized crime groups. To assert dominance, traffickers will abduct women from their competitors, as in the case of one call girl who was ordered to a customer's hotel room only to be thrown in the trunk of a car and driven to her new owner.

In other cases, brothels have been firebombed as part of gangland feuds, leaving women burned and maimed. Fear and corruption outside the brothel combine to keep victims of trafficking enslaved. "People are scared," says Nomi. "When we try to convince them to go to the police to complain about the brothels operating in their neighborhood, they say, 'What are you joking? The traffickers will kill me.' There is a lot of fear in Israel of the Russian mob." If citizens do screw up the courage to complain to the police, they are quite likely to be met with indifference. "In Tel Aviv [the police] understand what is going on," says Nomi. But in most places "it's a different story. They couldn't care less and they don't see [trafficking] as a serious crime....they think these women really enjoy what they're doing."

Nomi acknowledges that the police today do listen much more. "In the beginning we had to sue for every victim. It was hard. But after two or three cases, they learned—don't mess with them." Nomi says enforcement has been improving since the state department's report. But she blames the police for creating the crisis by ignoring trafficking in the nineties. For her, the new efforts are far too little and much too late.

Even in Tel Aviv, Meir Cohen admits, most brothels operate freely. He says the law does not allow police to shut them down without proof that the women have been trafficked and kept there against their will. Since most women are too terrified to complain, the system favors the traffickers. But fear of reprisals is not the only reason prostitutes do not go to the police.

According to a Hotline survey, 40 percent of the ex-prostitutes interviewed said policemen were clients at their brothels. And some reported seeing money change hands between pimps and police officers. In one case, a woman said the police tipped her pimp off about an impending raid. And in another a woman claimed the police dragged an escaped prostitute back to their brothel. Police officials angrily dismiss such claims. "These allegations are bullshit!" fumes Police Superintendent Gil Kleiman.

But they are not without proven precedent. In one noted case, a police officer named Oskar Siss was not only a customer but cooperated with traffickers to buy and sell women and coerce them into prostitution. "Without a doubt, there exists collaboration between the police and the pimps," says MK Solodkin. Though seeking the help of the police might seem risky to many women trapped in prostitution, their only other hope for freedom— buying it back—is a chimera. When a woman is trafficked to Israel, she is charged both for the cost of being smuggled and, paradoxically, for the price of being acquired. But while the traffickers make back the purchase price on a woman they buy in a matter of weeks through the money clients pay for her services, the woman herself is paid almost nothing. And her debt is compounded both by exponential rates of interest and numerous fines for invented "infractions," from refusing a client to chewing gum. The debt, of course, is never meant to end.

Being sold to another trafficker generates a new debt, and if a woman ever comes close to repaying it she is sold once again. "They are traded and sold from one trafficker to another like a piece of merchandise," says Cohen. And so the victim remains in bondage.

Anna was lucky. Shortly after Yosef picked her up, when she still thought she was being taken to her job as an elder-care worker, they stopped at Ben-Gurion airport on the way to Tel Aviv. Yosef briefly left her alone in the car to run an errand. As she sat in the passenger seat smoking a cigarette, a security guard approached her and asked her to move the car. "She spoke no Hebrew at all," says Nomi. "So she said to him in Romanian, 'Leave me alone.' And he replied in Romanian so they started talking. He made her take his cell phone number because he thought something was wrong. She said that everything was okay." After three weeks in the brothel, Anna happened to get a Romanian client. She asked him where exactly she was, then sneaked a call to the security guard on one of the employees' unattended cell phones. The security guard received the message and went to see her, posing as a customer. He then went straight to Tel Aviv's main police station and insisted on seeing the head of the vice unit.

Within 48 hours, the police stormed the brothel and arrested Yosef and Gur. Most victims of sex slave trafficking don't get the chance to orchestrate a police raid from within a brothel. A few pluck up the courage to flee (Nomi notes that most of those who do come to the Hotline, not the police). Others are arrested in chance raids. Either way, the women are detained as illegal immigrants and scheduled for deportation. Nomi is a regular at the detention centers, informing the women of their rights and urging them to testify against the men who trafficked them.

Convincing a former prostitute to take the stand after all she's experienced is a tough sell. But "big court cases" aren't always so crucial. "If you told her a joke and made her smile, that's enough for me," says Nomi. "Just make those women laugh. It's just as important." Those who do decide to testify are put up by the police in unguarded hostels. Galit Saporta, who works with the Hotline, regularly takes a team of volunteers to one such hostel in Tel Aviv (to ensure the women's safety, Nomi and Galit insisted its location not be published). "There are approximately 40 women staying in the hotel waiting to testify," says Galit, who despite being eight months pregnant still visits the hostel each week. She makes sure the women are aware of their rights and are receiving the medical care and 150 shekels a week in pocket money (spent entirely on cigarettes) they are entitled to.

Galit's visits have another, unspoken purpose. Women in line to testify against traffickers have a habit of "disappearing" from the hostels. If Galit can account for all the girls she knows are among the hostel's guests, she can ensure they're safe. Still, women can wait up to a year to testify, giving the traffickers plenty of time to find out where they're staying. One day in the hostel, Anna's roommate handed her a cell phone. On the other end was a man who spoke Romanian. He said Gur and Yosef had paid him to hurt her family. If she didn't withdraw the complaint, he'd set her parents on fire.

In April 2002, Anna took the stand and testified against Gur, Yosef, and Faraj. Gur and Yosef were both found guilty of trafficking in women and were each sentenced to eight years in prison. Faraj received a two-and-a-half year term for rape.

The convictions are one more sign that Nomi's hard work is paying off. Since the beginning of 2002, Tel Aviv police have busted five major prostitution networks, culminating in the arrest and conviction of Mark Gaman, who police believe is the country's leading sex racketeer. Gaman - the owner of several massage parlors and gambling clubs - survived a car bombing in 1996 that left numerous shrapnel scars on his body.

Those distinctive mob markings allowed many of his victims to identify him to the police. Gaman was convicted and sentenced to ten years hard labor. Whenever they lecture, the prosecutors say 'look at Mark Gaman,'" says Nomi. She is standing by the bulletin board in her little office on the Hotline's floor, staring at a picture of the victim with whom she grew closest. She was forty years old with a child waiting back home and the main witness against Gaman. Six months after the trial she committed suicide. "Very few people know about it," says Nomi.

Other stories have happier endings. Nomi often gets invited to weddings of former sex workers who married Israelis. She points to a picture of another woman on the bulletin board. "The one in white is already a mother," says Nomi. "She was told by a gynecologist that she would never be able to have a child. But now she has a son." Further along is a small wedding photo, a happy couple. The woman is Anna, smiling in her wedding gown. After testifying, she and the security guard who rescued her fell in love. "It was worth everything just to meet him," she told Nomi. "Divine intervention, of course," Nomi comments dryly. Nomi and her boyfriend recently got married themselves. But when people say "Mazel Tov" on hearing the news, she waves off their congratulations. "Ach," says Nomi. "We only did it so that my parents wouldn't say they had a prostitute in the family."

Some women, who are not forced into slavery, enjoy being in the sex trade. Many are young students who work at "Peep Shows" in Israel.

They do not want nor do they perform sexual intercourse, rather they perform a strip tease followed by hand jobs.

One girl stated: "I have nothing to fear, no diseases, good money and sometimes I actually get as excited as the client does."

And the Israel government, as many others for thousands of years, encourages the use of sex for national security.

Mossad Agent Cindy, the Mata Hari who seduced Mordechai Vanunu and was drugged, kidnapped, smuggled back to Israel and jailed for espionage. The Mossad, Israel's feared secret service, whose mission was to bring him back to Israel from Europe. Their honeytrap was Cheryl Hanin, codenamed Cindy, who then was an attractive, apparently open and, to Vanunu at least, very friendly 26-year-old. Gordon Thomas, author of *Gideon's Spies, the Secret History of Mossad*, wrote: "She was sent on practice missions, breaking into an occupied hotel room, stealing documents from an office. "She was roused from her bed in the dead of night and dispatched on more exercises: picking up a tourist in a nightclub, then disengaging herself outside his hotel.

Every move she made was observed by her tutors." After her training, Hanin joined the Mossad unit that worked with Israeli embassies, where she apparently posed as the wife or girlfriend of other agents. Her final mission began when she engineered a meeting with Vanunu in Leicester Square and suggested a coffee, saying she was a beautician on holiday. The next day they met in the Tate Gallery and began to see more of each other. Peter Hounam, the Sunday Times journalist who had debriefed Vanunu, warned him that she could be a Mossad agent, but Vanunu insisted: "She is just a tourist who is critical of Israel. I think you would like her." There were plans for Vanunu to bring his new girlfriend to Hounam's house but he cancelled because he "going out of the city". "Going out of the city" meant Vanunu had fallen for the Mossad trap - Cindy had lured him into going to Rome, where it would be easier to stage a kidnapping. Vanunu was then tried secretly on an espionage charge and began his 18-year sentence, much of which was spent in solitary confinement. Hanin went to Israel in triumph but when the Sunday Times discovered her living quietly in the northern Israeli town of Netanya in 1988, she left for her native

United States.

Since then, Israel's largest circulating newspaper, Yediot Arhronot, says she and her family have been living a prosperous life. The newspaper reported that she had "a red Cutlass convertible" and estimated that her house in Florida is worth more than R3-million. She and her husband refuse to talk about her past. "For me this is a black story and I just want to erase it and forget it," Yediot quotes Hanin telling a friend in Israel.

But unlike "Cindy", many prostitutes are forced to perform sexual acts in Israel. Between 3,000 and 5,000 women have been smuggled into Israel over the past four years in this burgeoning, illegal sex industry, according to an Israel parliamentary committee report issued last March.

Zehava Galon, who heads the Committee Against Trade in Women, said the four-year inquiry showed how women are smuggled across the Egyptian border into Israel and "along the way, raped, beaten and then sold in public auctions."

Most of the women are from the former Soviet Union, she said. Galon, from the opposition Yahad Party, presented the report on Wednesday to the speaker of the parliament, Reuven Rivlin. The panel faulted judges for light sentences, sometimes only community service, for men running the prostitution rings. The report called for minimum jail terms of 16 years instead. The report said women are sold to pimps for as much as \$10,000 each, work 14-18 hours a day, charge about \$30 a client but receive only a small fraction of the money for themselves.

Galon said the biggest challenge in addressing the plight of foreign sex slavery in Israel was to change the attitudes of the public, and especially the police. When the committee met with the law enforcement agencies, she said, "the prevailing attitude was to treat the women as illegal residents." Since then the police have slowly begun to see the women as victims of crime, she said.

Israel is not unique in its apparent inability to protect women who have been trafficked for the purpose of prostitution. The AI report mirrors situations in many countries worldwide. As the sex trade grows at an alarming rate, governments are finding that they are unable to address the situation.

According to the UN Development Fund for Women, trafficking in women for prostitution is one of the fastest-growing organised criminal activities in the world, and follows, in frequency, only the trade in narcotics and weapons. The sex trade brings in \$7-12 billion annually.

The United States State Department has estimated that over one million women are trafficked every year, primarily from economically unstable nations. Many women are abducted, but others are lured by offers of good working conditions and high salaries in the sex industry, or by false offers of employment entirely unrelated to prostitution. Travel documents are confiscated so as to ensure they are unable to escape. The women frequently endure torture and imprisonment. Psychological trauma, disease and denial of health services are commonplace.

The UN has suggested that there is police complicity with traffickers in many nations, so women who report crimes are often returned to their abusers. Modern technology allows for captors to trace victims who flee, as some organised crime rings scan and electronically distribute photos of women who 'belong' to their syndicates.

Other countries have begun to take innovative steps in efforts to eliminate sex trafficking of women, and to implement protective programmes for those who have become victims of the sex trade. Italy has recently established a witness protection programme to help trafficked women denounce their exploiters, and has increased accessibility of work permits which would allow women to legally stay in the country. India has begun to repatriate individuals from Bangladesh who have been trafficked from the country. In Nepal, a programme assisted by the International Labour Organisation has former victims of the sex trade monitoring border crossings, watching for signs of trafficking.

The United States Senate has recently passed a bill which proposes to increase penalties to traffickers, and give immigration relief for up to three years to allow sex victims to stay in the country and bring charges against their abusers. A conference in Istanbul last year on trafficking

of women concluded that international actions are needed to protect and repatriate or resettle victims. The recommendations made by AI to Israel include the need to review government procedures concerning trafficking, and to enhance existing legislation to punish traffickers and abusers.

Perhaps most importantly, the country is advised to take action to protect women who have been sex victims of these human rights violations, and to avoid exacerbation of trauma through detention and ill protection. If all nations were to review and ensure compliance with such recommendations, women everywhere could begin to hope for an end to the horror of the sex trade.

With Hasdai Westbrook and Victoria Blint

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