

## Sex-slave trade in United Kingdom

LANDRY HAARMANN | STAFF WRITER

Two hundred years ago, the British Parliament decided to abolish slavery and the trade.

Despite the illegal status of slavery, a recent investigation by British police has shown that it is still present in 21st-century England, albeit in a form different from forced physical labor.

The present victims are often women from overseas, who are sexually exploited and forced into prostitution.

Sophomore Kat Siladi, who recently participated in "The Vagina Monologues" and played a "comfort woman," women who were forced to work as sex slaves for Japanese soldiers during World War II, was very struck by the reports of forced prostitution.

"It's a microcosm of the treatment of women in Western society," Siladi said. "There are many overlying problems and, to stop human trafficking, we must also address the issue of verbal abuse at home, because they are both ways to dominate women."

The young women, nearly half of whom are between the ages 18 and 25, are tricked into

coming to England, often by a boyfriend under the guise of finding work. The women may also be kidnapped or forced to go to England.

According to BBC News, in 2003, as many as 4,000 women were trafficked into the U.K. for sexual exploitation.

Sophomore Jen Banich was most surprised by the fact that human trafficking, or sexual slavery, was happening in Britain.

"I've only ever heard of sexual slavery in Asian countries, so I'm shocked that this is going on in England. But, no one deserves that kind of life," she said.

According to BBC News, most of the girls come to England from Eastern Europe, West Africa and South Asia under the belief that they will find better lives. Others arrive in England thinking they are on a vacation.

That is what happened in the case of Jiera, a 19-year-old from Lithuania.

Jiera said to BBC News that she and a friend thought they were headed to England for a vacation only to discover when they arrived that they were being sold into sexual slavery.

"When I was with clients I

tried to pretend I was doing something else, but I couldn't. It made me so angry that I was often violent towards the clients." Jiera's "owner" beat her and eventually had to sell her because she caused trouble.

Auctions to purchase sex slaves often occur at the airports, especially Gatwick Airport in Sussex, according to BBC News,

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and reports show that many prosecuted cases of sexual exploitation began at Gatwick.

One woman, a Romanian named Nicoleta, was tricked into going to England by a friend of her stepfather.

"When I was 18, I was trafficked into prostitution in the

U.K. where I worked 11 hours a day, seven days a week, for over three years," Nicoleta said to BBC News. "I was made to work during my period, was often not fed so I did not become 'fat', and had to have sex without a condom."

Many of the stories mirror other reports of forced prostitution, which come from all over the world. Women are raped and beaten, denied food and condoms. Many contract STDs and are left both physically and psychologically scarred.

Nicoleta's story left an impression on Kat Siladi. Siladi was most appalled by how desensitized the men at the brothels must have been.

"The men who were having sex with these women must have known they were not enjoying it," Siladi said. "And the men who sell these women and force them into slavery, they must have had mothers, grown up in homes with women, and yet they so willingly sexually oppress women."

Both the police and private agencies have been working to help women who find themselves the victims of sexual exploitation.

One group is the Poppy Project, a London-based program, which offers support and accommodations for victims of human trafficking. Since its inception in 2003, 581 victims have been referred to the group.

Another agency is Citylight, which offers service in Brighton and Hove. Citylight was set up by Naomi Cohen and other church volunteers in the city.

Cohen got involved because of her desire to help and support these victims.

"It horrifies me that this is happening in this day and age when most of us have our freedom," Cohen said to BBC News. "I just wanted to be a part of something that changes that and can help women to rebuild their lives."

While the efforts of such projects have helped remove women from their situations and are attempting to help them through what they've experienced, many are still haunted by the abuse they endured while forced to work as sex workers.

Nicoleta said to BBC News, "I can't eat, I can't concentrate and I can't sleep, although I am very tired. I have nightmares in the day as well as in the night."

## Mexico City grants gay couples civil unions

SIMON KELLY | STAFF WRITER

*With the passing of a civil union law in Mexico City, Mexico may be liberated from a history rich in Catholic conservatism and homophobia.*

On March 16, after nearly seven years of litigation, legislators in Mexico City passed a new law permitting same sex couples the right to civil union. This law, which grants gay couples pension and inheritance rights, is generally believed to mark the beginning of a new age of plurality in Mexico, despite mounting opposition from both President Calderon's conservative party and the Roman Catholic Church.

However, because most cities in Mexico, the capital included, are governed by left-wing parties

more than the national government, Calderon and the church may have difficulty suppressing the impact of this case as it ripples outward from Mexico City.

"With this law, a history of exclusion comes to an end. Today, the love that before did not speak its name has now entered into the public spotlight," said journalist Antonio Medina to BBC News. Medina and his partner, Jorge Cerpa, were one of the first couples to take advantage of the new law.

To the relief of conservatives, however, the law distinguishes civil union from marriage by not granting gay couples the right to adopt. Claiming that traditional family values will now be jeopardized, numerous conservative Catholic objectors are flooding the streets of Mexico's major cities to voice their complaints.

"It is simply not the will of God to have acts of homosexuality," said Armando Martinez Gomez,

president of the Association of Catholic Lawyers, to BBC News. "We are not against gay people, but we believe a union between a man and a woman is for the creation of children."

Meanwhile, other states across Mexico are starting to follow the capital's example. The deeply religious state of Puebla, whose capital is known for its 365 Catholic churches, is even beginning to mull over gay rights legislation. The northern border state of Coahuila has already passed its own civil union law, which was modeled after the one framed in the capital but put into effect nearly two weeks before it.

Also, couples who have registered under Coahuila's law enjoy the state's protection of their rights wherever they choose to live in Mexico — a stipulation that the capital's law does not include.

"There is going to be a domino effect across the country," said

David Sanchez, a federal congressman with the Democratic Revolution Party, who is openly gay, to The San Diego Union-Tribune. "This movement cannot be stopped."

However, members of the conservative National Action Party, or PAN, an organization keen on preserving family values, are among the many who still believe otherwise.

"We are dealing with a death blow to the family," said PAN President Esther Quintana to The San Diego Tribune. "What comes next? Permitting homosexuals to adopt children?"

Of course, gay adoption rights are among what many activists and legislators hope will ultimately succeed the passing of the civil union law. What is frustrating to many civil union advocates is the tendency of conservatives to attack the law on moral, rather than legal premises. When dealing

with legislative matters, this often makes for a tenuous argument.

"I think the only argument that one could legitimately make (against gay adoption rights)," said Theatre Studies Chair Jack Zerbe, "is that given the nature of what it means to develop from an infant to an adult, children should have a close relationship with both sexes."

With this said, opponents of gay civil liberties might demonstrate more prudence if they approached the subject from more of a psychological than biblical standpoint. Given Mexico's deep Roman Catholic roots, however, such a shift in perspective could prove to be a challenge.

"If they're going to say that children shouldn't be allowed to grow up in a single-sex family, then are they going to take children away from single-parent dwellings too?" said Zerbe. "It's the same logic."

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