

TRAFFICKED

In 1904 a young Japanese woman called Minami Haru was persuaded she could earn good money by working in a restaurant in Singapore. To get there she boarded a ship in Kuchinotsu harbour, though she was surprised to be taken to the ship surreptitiously in the middle of the night. Once on board, Haru found herself trapped within the hold, where she spent four weeks living off bread crusts. Reaching Singapore, she was forced to work as a prostitute. This was a typical journey for Japanese peasants tricked into slavery within the richer cities of Southeast Asia. In 1905 a Fukuoka newspaper described how 48 Japanese teenagers were discovered in the coal bunker of a Norwegian vessel heading for Hong Kong.

Chinese merchants also trafficked women and children from Vietnam, again to Hong Kong, Canton and Shanghai. They often used British and German steamers, where the best hiding place was amongst the coal. A 1907 Haiphong newspaper talked of children being knocked out with chloroform, then spirited away on fishing boats. Usually, these children were expected to work in brothels as servants or prostitutes. There was a tradition of childless older prostitutes 'adopting' an infant as their own, teaching them the ways of the brothel so the child might support them in their old age.

In 1932 the League of Nations published its *Commission of Enquiry into Traffic in Women and Children in the East*. This included a personal account of the abduction of a woman from Vietnam, who would then have been described as Annamite:

In Hanoi, the Commission had the opportunity of meeting an Annamite woman who had been kidnapped in Haiphong, taken to China and sold there. In 1922, when she was 18 years old,

another Annamite woman of about 40 approached her in Haiphong and suggested that they should go to Nai-chang to buy areca nuts, which were cheap there. The girl consented and went on board the woman's sampan ... When she awoke the next morning, the woman was not there but there were four Chinese men who bound her arms and feet and threatened her with knives to keep silence. She was taken ashore to a cave in which were five kidnapped Annamite girls. The men put all the girls on a junk which travelled only in the night, the girls being taken ashore and hidden in the daytime. After nine days, they were landed and made to walk for several hours to a little village, where all the girls were put up for sale in a kind of market. The witness was sold for 236 dollars (silver) to a Chinese farmer ... About a year after her arrival she gave birth to a child, but, as it was a girl and the man wanted a son, he killed the new-born baby by strangling it.

Here is a similar story, but more recent:

'It was only four years ago when a young man from Skopje came into my father's shop. He was very polite and well dressed ... his name was Damir and he spoke of the famous cities he often visited ... he said he worked for a modelling agency that looks for pretty girls like I was.' So said Maria, a 17-year-old Albanian who was trafficked into sex slavery in Italy in 1998. Travelling by boat from Durrës to Bari, she thought she was going to work as a model, but gradually she realised her travelling conditions heralded a worse fate. 'It was the first time I saw the sea and my first time in a ship. It seemed very big and beautiful. We followed Damir, who had our tickets and travel documents. He spoke with an official and gave him something before we went into the ship and down many stairs. I thought we were near the engine – the smell of oil was very strong, also rotten food and the smell of

clothes not washed in a long time. He said for our safety he must lock the door but will return in the morning ... we wished to talk about the handsome men we are going to meet and how the girls at home will be jealous, but the bad smells and moving ship made me very sick ... the next morning we arrived in Bari. Damir took us to a house where the streets are dirty and we saw beggars and even rats during the day ... the polite young man from my father's shop grabbed my arm and said something very bad in Albanian. He hit me on the face ... I did not understand what had happened. I heard other girls screaming. And then he raped me. Then the other men came in and did the same ... he said this was modelling that we must do for anyone.'