

## Projects of Autonomy as Projects of Migration

‘Non domandarci perché siamo qui.  
Chiedici invece come siamo arrivate.’<sup>15</sup>

### 1. Introduction

In their analysis of media representations of trafficking, scholars have pointed out that trafficking is commonly addressed as a problem of organized crime employing representations organized along a victim–criminal binary. The latter portrays women as innocent, young and unaware victims and traffickers as (male) criminals who coerce and deceive women into illegal migration and prostitution (Andrijasevic 2003, Berman 2003, Doezema 1999, Sharma 2003, Stenvoll 2002, Sutdhibhasilp 2002). In the press, the alarm surrounding trafficking is intensified by allusions to its magnitude:

We will call them Olga and Natasha. Their story equals the stories of many other girls from the East who came to Italy blinded by a work promise, and then forced into prostitution by a pimp, a man of no scruples. As soon as they got off the bus that brought them illegally from Moldova to Italy, they were taken over by Rimi, an Albanian.<sup>16</sup>

Next to portraying these women’s story<sup>17</sup> in terms of being duped into trafficking and coerced into prostitution, this newspaper clip makes use of the *topoi* of collective deception and dispersal as to place these women’s chronicles along numerous other stories of the same kind, and consequently to imply the existence of wide-scale ‘east’

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Do not ask us why are we here, ask us rather how we got here.’ This is the phrase with which the respondents greeted me during one of our first meetings. This chapter, as the two following chapters, are introduced by respondents’ quotes. In this specific case, I kept the quotes in Italian.

<sup>16</sup> “Le chiameremo Olga and Natascia. La loro storia è uguale a quella di tante altre ragazze venute dall’Est con il miraggio di un lavoro e poi costrette a prostituirsi da magnaccia senza scrupoli. Moldave, appena scese dal pullman che le porta clandestine in Italia vengono prese in consegna dall’albanese Rimi” (*Il Resto del Carlino*, 18 July 1999).

<sup>17</sup> In the later sections of this chapter, I will return to this newspaper clip since it concerns two respondents whose accounts of migration I will be analysing.

– ‘west’ Europe trafficking for the sex industry. Such inference to the magnitude of trafficking, and an emphasis on the deceptive and coercive nature of a contract between migrant women and third parties, are not characteristic exclusively of the press. The tropes of ‘waves’ of trafficked women and of trafficked women as ‘victims’ are also deployed by a number of feminist scholars.

While Koser and Lutz (1998: 3) stress the unavailability of reliable data on female migrants trafficked illegally for the purpose of prostitution, other scholars (Caldwell et al. 1999, Lazaridis 2001: 70) rely on questionable statistical data provided by governmental and non-governmental bodies wherein numbers diverge by hundreds of thousands.<sup>18</sup> The vagueness and ambiguity of these figures foster accounts of trafficking from eastern Europe that speak of it in terms of an ‘explosive increase’ (Molina and Janssen 1998:16) that has reached ‘epidemic proportions’ (UN in Pickup 1998:44). Such alarmist portrayals not only inflate the statistics to produce an imagery of invasion but obscure the relationship between trafficking and the juridico-material creation of borders. Furthermore, they conflate trafficking with (organized) crime thus hindering our understanding of how women come to trafficking. These accounts of trafficking become complicit with governments’ agenda in combating ‘illegal’ migration and settlement. The governments of the European Union (EU) member states have predominantly associated trafficking with ‘illegal’ migration from ‘third’ countries and with organized crime. In this respect, the implementation of the border protection scheme has been endorsed by the EU governments as a pivotal measure: ‘Better management of the Union’s external border controls will help in the fight against terrorism, illegal immigration networks and the trafficking in human beings’ (Presidency Conclusions Leaken European Council, No. 42). Next to strengthening of the border controls, the EU governments counter trafficking by tightening of visa policies, and prosecuting the third parties who facilitate migrants’ undocumented entry or stay in the EU (van Doorninck and Wijers 2002).

The term trafficking, usually intended to signify the transportation of persons by means of coercion or deception into exploitative and slavery-like conditions, is often used in ways that collapse a wide range of operations. These involve, firstly, the recruitment and transportation of women from their country of origin to the destination country and, secondly, the living and working conditions upon arrival. As

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<sup>18</sup> The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that 700,000 women and children are trafficked per year across the globe while United Nations (UN) sources oscillate between two (IMADR in McDonald, Moore, Timoshkina 2000: 1) and four million people (Ram 2000: 2). As far as trafficking of women from eastern Europe into EU is concerned, some EU sources report on 500,000 women (Ram 2000: 2) while others estimate between 200,000 and 500,000, a number that rounds up the presence of women from eastern Europe as well as Latin America, Africa and Asia (Molina and Janssen 1998: 16).

Wijers and Lap-Chew demonstrate (1997), a woman might find herself in slavery-like conditions marked by violence and/or threat of violence, confiscation of legal documents, and no freedom of movement. As a consequence of being transported to a foreign country, she might also be recruited without coercion and may or may not find herself in forced-labour conditions.

In this chapter my analysis focuses on the recruitment and transportation phase of trafficking. It is my intention to interrogate through such a focus the criminalization approach to trafficking and illustrate the ways in which the material and juridical immigration apparatus exacerbates the legal, economic and physical vulnerability of trafficked women. By bringing into focus the relationship between migrant women and third party organizers of ‘trafficking’ as well as the complex conditions and desires that impel women to migrate, my analysis sheds light on different – often overlooked – aspects of trafficking and points to a gap between the respondents’ accounts of migration and the dominant rhetoric of trafficking. This discrepancy becomes apparent when scrutinizing, on the one hand, respondents’ rendering of their lives prior to migration and, on the other, the ways in which they entered trafficking networks and reached Italy. Migrant women’s accounts of trafficking –in particular of its initial recruitment and transportation phase—challenge the narratives of victimization and criminality as constitutive of trafficking and point to the need to take issues with the accepted notions of deception, coercion and force commonly perceived as constitutive of the trafficking process.

In this respect, I begin by tackling questions relative to the travel and recruitment process, and investigating ways the respondents attained spatial and labour mobility. Consequently, as I argue in this chapter, the juridico-material formation of borders and its impact on migrants’ lives constitutes a crucial element to be considered in the analysis of the trafficked women’s accounts of migration. In doing so, my work brings to the fore the ways in which borders may have unintended consequences such as the proliferation of trafficking. Finally, I discuss how privileging the narratives of victimhood and criminality as regards to trafficking deflects from the possibility to identify the plethora of motives which inform respondents’ migratory project, and thus seriously limits our understanding of trafficking as a migratory system.

## **2. Trafficking Systems**

The United Nations’ Trafficking Protocol –the main internationally accepted definition of trafficking— identifies deception, coercion and use of force as the key

means of transporting migrants into exploitative and/or slavery-like conditions.<sup>19</sup> In the following sections, I look at respondents' previous migratory experience, examine the channels of recruitment into trafficking, and interrogate the notion of deception. Reviewing the accounts of migrant women, we see a consistent analysis that disputes a clear demarcation between voluntary and involuntary processes of migration, and the subsequent inclusion of trafficking in the latter category.

### *Migratory Histories*

The conceptualization of the trafficking in terms of recruitment by means of deception, coercion and force conveys the impression of women's abrupt and unexpected abduction on the part of a third party. This characterization comes close to the idea, dear to the press, of inexperienced and naïve women being kidnapped by the traffickers. Yet, respondents' narratives, especially in regards to their migratory experiences and the span of time that preceded their departures, convey quite a different picture.

Respondents' accounts show that before entering trafficking systems and arriving in Italy, a number of them had already undertaken other forms of labour migration abroad. Among those women lacking personal migration experience prior to moving to Italy, migration was nevertheless part of the collective landscape since they knew other women who migrated to work in restaurants, to do domestic and/or sex work. Most of the respondents had already migrated at least once prior to their arrival to Italy. Some, like Larisa and Kateryna, experienced an unsuccessful attempt of undocumented migration, followed by detention and deportation. Once deported – Larisa from Hungary and Kateryna from Austria—they were returned home, the place from where they started off and where they did not want to be in the first place. As Larisa puts it: 'After I returned home I didn't know what to do next ... all of those problems where there again'.<sup>20</sup> In the summer of 1999, approximately a year after her first unsuccessful attempt of migration, Larisa departed for Italy and arrived there two months later. The other respondent, Kateryna, who left Romania for the first time in

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<sup>19</sup> The full definition of trafficking is as follows: 'The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs'. [Http://www.odccp.org/crime\\_cicp\\_convention.html#final](http://www.odccp.org/crime_cicp_convention.html#final). From here on I will refer to United Nations' *Protocol to Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* simply as the UN Protocol.

<sup>20</sup> "Tornata a casa non sapevo cosa fare più in avanti ... tutti quelli problemi di nuovo."

the winter of 1997, set on a second journey to Italy in autumn of 1998. The respondents, Oksana, Ester and Marisa went to Italy twice, returning home between the two migratory experiences. These respondents worked in third party controlled street prostitution in Italy before returning to their countries of origin. Eventually, each of women went back to Italy. Another respondent –Tatiana—returned to take care of her terminally ill father and upon his death set off to Italy again.

Among the respondents, some had previously lived and worked in countries other than Italy. Eugenia, for example, migrated from Romania to Serbia where she found work as a waitress in a restaurant. Oksana migrated from Ukraine to Romania for seasonal agriculture work. A number of respondents worked in the entertainment sector or alternated entertainment work with petty trade. Maja, Ana and Oksana worked in a cabaret before migrating to Italy. For some of them cabaret work primarily entailed dancing, while for others it included both dancing and occasional sex work. Maja, for example, in her search for work left Russia and came to Ukraine where her mother lived. Once in Ukraine she departed for Lebanon where she worked as a cabaret dancer on a three-months contract basis. Oksana and Ana both worked in a cabaret in Serbia where employment agents proposed that the women switch to sex work in Italy. While Oksana relocated directly for Italy, Ana arrived a couple of months later having first returned home to Moldova. Another respondent, Snezana, undertook several trips from Moldova to Turkey in order to buy and sell goods at the market. During one of these trips she met a young Turkish man whom she subsequently married. After four years in Turkey, Snezana returned to Moldova. Approximately a year later, she accepted an invitation to Italy for entertainment work in a nightclub.

Studies on trafficking rarely pay attention to the amount of time that passes between the moments when women first contact a third party and the actual moment of departure. When studies take this aspect of the recruitment process into consideration, the results indicate a period of one week or less between initial contact with a third party and when the woman actually leaves. Studies such as Isabella Orfano's use this data as evidence of the organizational capabilities and swift functioning of trafficking networks (2003: 199). My results present only one case that supports such a claim. In example of Ivana, there was less than a week gap between when she was first approached by a third party and her decision to accept the offer. The specificity of Ivana's example is that it constitutes the only account that conforms to the trafficking definition in terms of transportation of persons by means of coercion or deception into slavery-like conditions. In this case, the third party imposed a quick departure in order to manipulate the respondent easier and keep up the deception concerning the nature of the work.

For other respondents, the process of deciding whether or not to leave lasted considerably longer. In the case of Liudmila, Sasha and Ioanna, the decision to leave involved a process lasting between six months and a year. To offer an example, it took Liudmila six months to decide whether she wanted to do sex work as a condition for migrating to Italy. Sasha took approximately the same amount of time to decide her departure. First, she contacted an agency arranging visas and work abroad. The agency offered her cabaret work in Japan. Shortly before departing for Japan, Sasha consulted with a group of women recently back from working in Italy. While the stories she heard produced doubts about working abroad, one of the women who returned from Italy convinced Sasha that Italy was a good place to work, better, in fact, than a place like Ukraine. Following this episode Sasha decided to migrate to Italy for sex work taking some additional time to arrange her first intercourse, so as to know—as she put it—‘what these things are like’. For Ioanna, the process of deciding took about a year. Initially, when another respondent suggested they leave together to work in a cabaret in Serbia, she refused. A year later, the same friend asked her again whether she would consider leaving to Italy for street sex work. The respondent decided to migrate for sex work and during the months preceding the departure inquired about sex work practices and started learning Italian so as to be able to orientate herself once in Italy.

Trafficking, in contrast to ‘voluntary’ forms of migration, is conceptualised as an involuntary and non-consensual migration. The emphasis on force and deception sets trafficking apart from other forms of migration and conceives of trafficking in terms of the manipulations practiced by third parties. Respondents’ accounts of their migratory histories and the span of time that preceded their decision to migrate contest the distinctiveness of trafficking operations, and posit instead migration to Italy comparable to other forms of labour migration. Respondents’ migration to Italy, like other forms of voluntary migration, was not an abrupt and third party’s orchestrated act. Rather it evolved out of the respondents’ social-economic context and individual needs/desires.

### *Channels of Recruitment into Trafficking*

Recent scholarship on trafficking demonstrated a wide range of opinions about the role of organized crime (Caldwell *at al.* 1999, Salt and Stein 1997, Shannon 1999). Some scholars argue that descriptions of traffickers as part of organized criminal networks contribute to the sensationalism and aliment the anxieties about the Russian Mafia (Finckenauer 2001, Stenvoll 2002). Studies of the methods and channels of recruitment into trafficking for the sex industry --even though still scarce-- illustrate

that the narrative of the kidnapping of women usually privileged by the media is more the exception than the rule (Maluccelli 2001, UNICEF et al. 2002: 7).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, researchers dispute the myth of the existence of a globally organized criminal trafficking network and show that trafficking networks vary in size, aims, organizational capabilities and services offered (Kyle and Dale 2001, Pastore et al. 1999, Payoke et al. 2003)

My research supports the findings that kidnapping is not a common recruitment practice.<sup>22</sup> Among the twenty-five respondents in my study, only one woman, Ivana, was deceived about type of the work and coerced into migration to Italy. A man and a woman approached Ivana while she worked in a neighbourhood bar in the suburbs of Zagreb, the capital of Croatia. The couple offered her a job as a waitress in Switzerland. After Ivana and her husband met with the couple to arrange the travel details, they agreed for the departure to take place the following day. On the day of departure, Ivana arrived at the couple's house and was told she would be going to Italy and not to Switzerland. They also told her that in Italy her job will be to collect money from other women working in street prostitution. When Ivana refused, the male trafficker kicked her in the eye and threatened her with further violence. After being kept in a third party's apartment for some days in order to make the new travel arrangements, Ivana was brought to Italy against her will.

In a pattern that conforms to the internationally accepted UN Protocol's definition of trafficking, the respondent was approached directly by the recruiters at her workplace, deceived about the type of work she would be expected to perform abroad, coerced into leaving for Italy by the use of physical violence and finally worked under highly exploitative conditions in street prostitution for the same third party who recruited her in her country of origin. In conformity with the trafficking definition, the respondent did not consent to migrating to Italy but it was a third party instead who recruited and transported her to Italy with the intent to exploit the respondent's labour in prostitution.

While Ivana's account of her arrival in Italy corresponds to the UN Protocol's classification of trafficking, other respondents' stories do not fit the same definition. Respondents' accounts of how they got in touch with the recruiters and who these were challenge the perspective of those (feminist) scholars who see migrant women as

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<sup>21</sup> By investigating the recruitment practices according to the place of origin of migrant women, these studies have concluded that methods of recruitment vary with respect to nationality of the recruiters, and that some trafficking systems such as the one present in Albania are characterized by a greater use of violence than others as the one in Moldova or Ukraine for example. Some studies confute these conclusions, as for example, the data collected by the Bologna's outreach unit which has recorded that in the last years an increased number of Albanian women asks Albanian men to accompany them to Italy in order to protect them while working in street prostitution (Calderone et al 2000).

<sup>22</sup> With the term recruitment studies on trafficking usually intend the person who 'first proposed or imposed the travel abroad to the victim by means of fraudulent or open offer' (Orfano 2003: 196).

‘deceived and trafficked *by the sex industry*’ (emphasis mine; Phizacklea 1998: 31). Additionally, such account complicate the view of trafficking as the outcome of third parties’ organized and intentional action. My data indicates that often the first contact with those who informed the respondents of the possibility to work abroad or proposed that they migrate for work (whether sex work or not) took place within the respondents’ network of acquaintances, namely their female friends. Moreover, the respondents often initiated the first contact with agents/recruiters by asking their female acquaintances if they knew of people who could organize their trip abroad and find work for them. In fact, my data points to the fact that the first circulation of information occurred between respondents and other young women who had already migrated, or were themselves acquainted with others who were working abroad. Following this initial exchange of information, respondents were usually referred to an individual or an agency which provided the services the women were looking for.

An example of this pattern emerges from the accounts of Larisa and Liudmila from Moldova, both of whom wanted to reach Italy where they had female friends who themselves arrived in Italy through trafficking systems, and had worked for some time in street prostitution. These friends, who were living in Italy for several years already, promised to assist the respondents in looking for a ‘normal’ job<sup>23</sup> in the event they would decide to come to Italy. Liudmila’s friend in Italy sent her money for a visa. However, she found no agency at that moment able to arrange an Italian visa for her.<sup>24</sup> After some time, Liudmila’s friend put her in contact with a person who could help her reach Italy on condition that she agreed to work in prostitution: ‘She called me another time and told me: “I’ll give you the phone number of a man who will help you to come to Italy”. “But, to work on the street”, she said. So, later ... I called, I left and I came here to Italy.’<sup>25</sup> In the same way, Larisa’s friend in Italy put her in contact with a male person who agreed to take her to Italy. Without being charged any transportation fee, the respondent was promised that she would reach Italy in ten days. Prior to departure, she was inserted in a group of four young women who were all about to leave to Italy, among them was a friend of Larisa’s returning to Italy for the third time.

As Liudmila and Larisa’s accounts show, the individuals on whose assistance the respondents relied in order to reach Italy were not the ones who passed them the initial information, and were also not the same individuals who kept them in

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<sup>23</sup> I quote here respondents’ as to refer to work other than sex work. All of the respondents in fact distinguish between prostitution and other forms of work to which they refer as ‘normal’ work. The significance of this differentiation will be discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>24</sup> The reasons for this impossibility will be discussed at the later stage of this chapter in section (II) *legality and trafficking*.

<sup>25</sup> “Lei mi ha chiamato un’altra volta e mi ha detto: ‘Ti do il numero di telefono di un uomo che ti aiuta a venire in Italia.’ Ha detto, ‘però, a lavorare in strada’. Così, poi ... ho chiamato, sono partita, e sono venuta qua in Italia.”

confinement and exploited their labour in street prostitution upon arriving in Italy. Moreover, in order to gain initial information about migrating abroad respondents made use of their circle of acquaintances rather than being approached by a person unknown to them and then coerced into migrating.

The account of Oksana is instructive here. Contrary to Liudmila and Larisa, Oksana was contacted by a ‘recruiter’ previously unknown to her and asked whether she would be interested in leaving Ukraine and going to work in a night club in Serbia. In my interview with her, Oksana described this encounter in terms of a proposition rather than an imposition from the side of the recruiter. The respondent’s description of the methods by means of which she was on several occasions recruited for labour abroad offers an example of the variety of actors involved in the ‘recruitment’ process. Her account also illustrates the ways in which a migrant woman who has acquired knowledge about labour migration passes that information onto others, proposing that a friend of hers join for the next journey to Italy. During a ride home in a taxi, Oksana started a conversation with the driver about the difficult economic situation in Ukraine. Both she and the driver complained about the lack of jobs. After a while, the driver asked if Oksana knew of women who would be interested in working abroad at a nightclub in Serbia. They exchanged phone numbers in case the respondent would think of anyone who might be interested in such an offer. Some months later the taxi driver phoned the respondent to ask her again whether she knew of any women willing to leave and work abroad. The respondent recounts the event in the following words:

[He:] ‘So Oksana, are there any girls who want to go abroad?’

I say ‘No, there are not’.

[He:] ‘And you, what do you think? And did you find a job?’

I say ‘No, nothing. Nothing changed. Everything has worsened.’

Then he told me: ‘If you would like to leave ...’

[She:] ‘I don’t know. I have to think about it.’

[He:] ‘For how long do you need to think?’

[She:] ‘I don’t know. About two weeks’.<sup>26</sup>

When the respondent decided to leave Ukraine some weeks later together with a female friend who also decided to go and work in Serbia, they phoned the taxi driver and he put them in contact with a woman running an agency. The woman explained to them about the nightclub work in Serbia, handled their travelling arrangements and accompanied Oksana, her friend and some other women to Novi Sad in Northern

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<sup>26</sup> [Lui]“Allora, Oksana, non ci sono delle ragazze [per andare all'estero]?”; Dico, “Non ci sono.”; [Lui] “E tu, cosa pensi? E tu, hai trovato lavoro?”; Dico, “No, zero. Non è cambiato niente. E’ tutto peggiorato.” Allora lui mi ha detto “Se tu vuoi andare...?”; [Lei] “Non lo so. Devo pensare”; [Lui] “Quanto devi pensare?”; [Lei] “Non lo so. Due settimane. Così.”

Serbia. After two weeks of work in the nightclub, the third party who managed Oksana's work in the nightclub suggested that she goes to Italy for sex work. The respondent accepted and was transported to Italy. After having fulfilled a three-month contract, she returned to Ukraine. Some months later, a female friend of hers with whom Oksana worked together in street prostitution phoned her from Bologna and asked whether she would like to return to Bologna and work together. While deciding if she should leave or not, Oksana asked another friend of hers, Ioanna, to join her. In order to buy the bus tickets, Oksana borrowed the necessary money from the Albanian boyfriend of the woman who originally invited Oksana to Bologna. After an agency arranged the visas and the tickets were purchased, Oksana and Ioanna –named Olga and Natasha in the newspaper clipping mentioned in the introduction to this chapter—departed Ukraine for Italy. Upon arriving to Bologna, both women came to prostitute for the Albanian who lent them the money for the bus fare.

One can see from the complex stories of the respondents, the important role of the agencies in trafficking networks. These agencies, as research has shown, are differently organized, vary in size and in the services offered. Some agencies specialize in facilitating travel, others in employment or both (Anderson and Phizaklea 1997, Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2003, Pastore et al 1999). My results concur with these findings and point to the fact that while some respondents contacted agencies in order to arrange their visa and/or travel to Italy, others turned to agencies so as to assist them in finding work. Contact with the agencies occurred by word of mouth, or by direct contact: namely, the respondents got in touch with an agency after reading an advertisement for work abroad in a local paper. As the following example from Ana's account illustrates, agencies arrange and profit from organizing the movement of migrants as well as acting as intermediaries between migrants and third parties who recruit women specifically for sex work in Italy.

The respondent, living in Moldova, initially contacted an agency because she wanted to leave for Moscow and work as a prostitute there. She was however discouraged by a female friend of hers who told her that the Moscow police would probably arrest her immediately upon her arrival, and that going to Moscow in the middle of the Russian Winter was a bad idea anyway. Lacking an alternative solution, the respondent settled for Moscow and went to an agency to inquire once more about her options:

I went to see her [the woman working at the agency] and there was a person, a man, who brings girls to Italy. But back then I did not know it. I immediately asked her 'How is it going with my leaving for Moscow?' and she told me that a woman should be coming from Moscow to meet me and talk to me. I asked when and she told me that the woman did not arrive yet but that she should be here in two weeks. That man, as soon as he saw me, he told me: 'Why do you

want to leave for Moscow? Why can't you go to Italy? You look good, very good'. You know, I glanced at him and I told him 'I have no documents' and he said 'That's no problem, I'll get them for you'. 'Then, OK', [I said]. You know, I felt happy. I went back to my friend and I told her all, because you know, he said he will take her too.<sup>27</sup>

The episode recounted by the respondent points to the difficulty in separating clearly between informal networks and formal agencies or (individual) private recruiters when investigating the way in which women accessed trafficking systems. At the same time Ana negotiated her departure to Italy, she also arranged for her female friend to make the trip. As in a number of other respondents' accounts, Ana relied on informal network comprised of friends or acquaintances. This network constituted the initial link in the 'chain of facilitation' which at later stages included a number of other actors such as sub-agents, document facilitators, employment agencies and/or travel agents (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2003).<sup>28</sup>

If, on the one hand, trafficking is a 'multi-billion dollar industry' run by organized criminal networks as claimed by Ram (2000: 1), it is also an integral part of the local and informal economies of various eastern European countries. Through such networks, a variety of individuals supplement their income through contacts and clients.<sup>29</sup> The majority of respondents did not portray their initial contact with individual recruiters or agencies as abusive. Rather, the majority of women referred to recruitment agents in a manner similar to Oksana's, namely as those who 'help girls to find a job in a foreign country'. Consequently, respondents' accounts of how they accessed trafficking systems problematize the view of trafficking exclusively as a form of forced migration as maintained by the UN Trafficking Protocol. Informal networks, individual recruiters and agencies among others all intervene at different stages of the trafficking process, often having no interest in controlling and/or exploiting migrants' labour but instead profit from the recruitment and movement of person. This profile assembled from the respondents' accounts calls into question

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<sup>27</sup> "Sono andata da lei e c'era una persona, un uomo, uno che porta le ragazze in Italia. Ma io allora non lo sapevo. Io ho cominciato subito a chiedere a lei "Come va con andata per Mosca?" e lei mi risponde che una donna dovrebbe venire da Mosca a vedermi e a parlarmi. Le ho chiesto quando e lei ha detto che quella donna non ancora è arrivata e che dovrebbe arrivare fra due settimane. Quell'uomo, quando mi ha visto, subito mi ha detto "Ma perché tu vuoi andare a Mosca? Perché tu non puoi andare a Italia? Tu vai bene, benissimo". Sai, l'ho guardato di striscio e gli ho detto "Non ho i documenti", e lui dice "Non ci sono problemi, te li faccio io". Allora, va bene. Sai, così, ero felice. Sono tornata dalla mia amica e l'ho detto anche a lei, perché sai, lui ha detto che prende anche lei."

<sup>28</sup> Usually, people with whom women establish the initial contact are not those who await them upon arrival. At times there is some kind of collaboration between the parties, at times there is none. The former is more likely to occur when a woman has no money on her own but contracts a debt towards those who provide her with a visa (or passport at times) and/or organize the transportation to Italy. The latter is the case when a woman owns a sum of money large enough to pay an agency, which secures her a visa and the transportation to Italy. For a similar categorization see Maluccelli (2001: 52).

<sup>29</sup> Next to the example of the taxi driver, the respondents pointed also to restaurant owners or housewives as those who facilitated their contacts with travel and employment agencies.

characterizations of trafficking as the outcome of third parties' organised and intentional action to profit from migrant women's labour in prostitution.

### *Problematizing the Notion of Deception*

In order for the 'recruitment' process to be considered trafficking, the third party needs to carry out some kind of deceit as regards to the promises made to the migrants. In the debate surrounding trafficking for the sex industry, a debate which has seen the direct involvement of large number of feminists, the discussion has evolved around the actual nature of deceit. In current feminist discourse, the deception is framed either about the nature of the job awaiting the women upon arrival to the destination country, or whether they knew they would be working in prostitution. Framing trafficking from this perspective means reproducing once again the longstanding conflict among feminists on the matter of prostitution.<sup>30</sup> The emphasis on the notion of deceit (into prostitution) allows 'abolitionist' feminists to reclaim their view of prostitution as violence against women grounded in patriarchal domination over the female body and female sexuality (Jeffreys 1997, Kelly 2003, Leidholdt 1999, Raymond 2002).

However, the spectre of deception can also have a countervailing use. For sex workers rights' activists such analysis presents an opportunity to bring sex work back to the international agenda and advance the struggle for recognition of prostitution as a form of labour. Despite the apparent usefulness of a deception analysis, there are significant dangers. By arguing coercion and deceit function as the dominant conditions, activists risk depicting all migrant women as victims of trafficking. How then does the misrepresentation account for the fact that many undertake sex work migration? A discourse based on an analysis of deception, in the end, penalizes women for the choices they have made, or denies them agency entirely. They are seen only as victims to be punished for their status as undocumented labour and/or migration (Adams 2003, Doezema 1998, Murray 1998).

The issue of whether migrant women have or have not been deceived by third parties into the sex industry has been taken up by a number of activist and researchers. A number of studies show that a considerable percentage of women from eastern Europe who came to the EU, Canada or Turkey through trafficking systems agreed to work in sex industry but were unaware of the living and working conditions waiting for them in the destination country (Gülçür and İlkaracan 2002, Maluccelli 2001, McDonald at al. 2000, Orfano 2002, Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997). While my findings

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<sup>30</sup> An overview of the feminist debate on trafficking and prostitution is developed in the Introduction to Chapter 3.

point in the same direction, my data also suggests that when the emphasis is put on deception (or lack of it) as regards to sex work in particular, one's analysis of the trafficking process remains caught in the web of moral arguments surrounding prostitution. Unaccounted for in that analysis are the terms of employment relations migrants have (or have not) themselves negotiated with third parties. Privileging the question of deceit in relation to prostitution tells us little about the agreement reached (or not) between the parties concerning specific living and working arrangements.

It is obvious that respondents in my research like Eugenia, Ester, Tatiana, and Ivana who were promised jobs as waitresses or domestic workers, and were then inserted into the sex industry, had not been informed about the terms of their employment in sex work.<sup>31</sup> However, neither did those respondents who agreed to a sex work contract know the details of the contract itself. We can look at the account of Kateryna for an illustration. Having accepted her lover's offer to migrate from Romania to Italy and work there as a prostitute, Kateryna was not aware of the conditions in which she would be working. Specificities about long hours, the large number of clients and the constant control by a third party or by peers were all kept from her. Reflecting on her decision to go to Italy, Kateryna recalled:

He [the boyfriend] told me what my job will be and I thought that's fine since it won't be written on my forehead what I've done. I decided to go for a year because he promised me half of the amount I would make while working as a prostitute. I thought that after a year I'll have quite some money. Then I could return home, finish my studies and make something better out of my life. But the whole thing turned out more complicated than I thought.

Knowing little about the specificities of the setting of her new job, Kateryna agreed to a one-year contract and a fifty-fifty wage arrangement.

A vagueness concerning the terms of employment also characterizes the accounts of those respondents who related that they knew everything in advance about sex work. Oksana, who was about to return to Italy for the second time, described to her friend Ioanna her previous experience of street prostitution. She asked if Ioanna wished to join her (see the newspaper clip on Olga and Natasha in the introduction which tells the story of the same respondents with emphasis on deception into prostitution). In my interview with her, Ioanna described arriving in Bologna for sex work: 'I came to Italy and I knew all about it – what to tell to the clients, what to do, where to go – I knew it all.' However, a closer analysis of the respondents' narrative shows that by 'I knew it all' Ioanna meant that Oksana described how the monetary

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<sup>31</sup> They were however also not informed about the terms of the work in a restaurant or in private houses, the two sectors which rely to a large extent upon flexible and malleable migrant labour both trafficked and not (cfr. Anderson and O'Connell Davidson 2003).

‘exchange’ between a prostitute and client works. This was explained with an explicit conversation in which Ioanna was told that she would be working in street prostitution.<sup>32</sup> In this way, Oksana equipped Ioanna with information she herself did not have the first time she went to Italy for sex work. Oksana, as a number of other respondents who entered into the sex work contract with third parties thought that they would be working indoors (cabaret or night club) rather than in street prostitution. Even though Oksana shared with Ioanna her previous experience of street sex work, and they negotiated the pay and the length of the stay, none of them knew that they would be required to surrender most of their earnings to the third party and prostitute under the conditions of confinement which made it difficult to step out of the contract:

We came here but we did not think that we would be working for someone. We taught that she [third party’s girlfriend and a friend of Oksana] would look for a place [on the street] for us. [We thought that] she would find us a place. It is OK to work for a month for someone as to return the money he gave us. We would work in order to pay back the expenses, for the help he gave us in coming here. We thought that ... we would be on our own and ... not working for someone else who is always around.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that the respondents consented to sex work represented no guarantee whatsoever that upon their arrival in Italy they would be able to work independently of a third party and retain their earnings. As a consequence of guarantee regarding their pay, as well as the pressing control exercised (often through threats or a use of violence) by the third party, the respondents interrupted their ‘contract’ with the third party and left street prostitution altogether.

Concurring with another study on trafficking for street work in Italy, my results suggest that migrant women who arrived in Italy through trafficking networks and were prostituting under the control of one or more third party, left third party controlled prostitution. The women made this decision not because of the job content but rather due to the violence and economic exploitation that characterizes third party run migrant street prostitution (cfr. Malucelli 2001: 57). My study also points out

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<sup>32</sup> However, it is not clear to what extent Oksana related to Ioanna the negative aspects of working under third party’s control. In fact, the research has found out that it is quite common that the migrants pretend towards their family and friends back home that they ‘made it’ abroad, namely that they depict their experience only in positive terms and conceal the conditions under which they are employed since this would spoil the image others have of them as successful migrants (cfr. Skrobaneck 1997: 26, Parreñas 2001: 102).

<sup>33</sup> “Siamo venute qui però, abbiamo pensato che se lei [la ragazza del magnaccia] viene qui e trova un posto, non è che lavoriamo per qualcuno. Lei trova un posto e va bene se un mese lavoriamo per qualcuno. Un mese per tornare i soldi che lui ha mandato. Lavoriamo per tornare le spese, per aiuto che ci ha dato per venire qua. Abbiamo pensato così, che l’amica che sta in Italia ci chiama e che stiamo da sole. Nessuno che mi stia sempre dietro: quello che c’è, c’è, quello che non c’è, non c’è.”

that for some respondents the interruption of the sex work contact was not contingent upon the deception as regards to living and working conditions. They were less interested in the earning potential of prostitution, but used the sex work contact instead as a means of reaching Italy. A quote from Ana's interview illustrates this arrangement best:

He said his name was Renzo. He explained everything to me: how we are supposed to work, how much money we get –ten percent of all the money is for us—, how we'll get in trouble if we make a mistake. See, he was trying to scare us. But me, you know, I was thinking 'Just get me to Italy'. To everything he would say I would reply "Yes, yes, yes" and hoped he would choose me for Italy. Once in Italy, I've have taken care of it all by myself.

For Ana, prostitution is imagined as a transitory phase of her migratory project by which to create different resources for herself. Hence, as demonstrated in Ana's account, entering the trafficking system and consenting to prostitute was merely a means to an end.

While some degree of deception about the working conditions in the destination country characterized all of the respondents' accounts of how they entered trafficking networks, a narrow focus typical of the feminist trafficking debate on whether women consent or not to prostitution hinders our understanding of the exploitative labour relations in street sex work. Anderson and O'Connell Davidson (2003) argue that the concept of deception as put forth by the trafficking definition leaves open questions about the extent of deception needed in terms of job content, rates of pay, working practices, work rate, and length of the contract among others in order to qualify as a 'victim of trafficking'. If according to the UN Protocol, a case of trafficking takes place when a person by means of deception has been recruited and transported by a third party into exploitative working conditions so as to profit from his/her labour, then the ambiguity lies with the notion of deception itself.

The vagueness of the notion of deception, in combination with force, coercion and exploitation as core/distinctive components of trafficking establish an oversimplified and ultimately erroneous demarcation between voluntary and involuntary processes of migration. This is particularly important since violence, coercion, deception and exploitation occur also in voluntary and legally regulated systems of migration and employment. Moreover, as my data has suggested, the fact that the definition of trafficking presupposes an interrelation between deception and subsequent exploitation of migrants on the part of traffickers conflates the range of interests third parties might have in supplying vague information concerning the working contract. Contrary to the UN Protocol interpretation of trafficking, third parties might profit from migrants' recruitment or travel rather than from their labour.

Uncritical linking of deception and labour exploitation ultimately criminalizes a wide variety of actors who take part in different stages of the trafficking process.

### **3. The Difference Borders Make**

Feminist scholars of migration, like Anthias and Lazaridis (2000) have accurately challenged mainstream migration theory. At the centre of such theories is the fantasy of the idea migrant family with a male figure upon whom the woman depends economically and in the organization of the migration project. Countering this fantasy, Anthias and Lazaridis emphasize the role of women as ‘active agents’ in international migration (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000: 12). However, they, as a number of other feminist scholars of migration, also undermine the complexity and accuracy of the situation when they associate trafficking with undocumented migration, thus perpetrating the narrative of women’s victimhood (cfr. Phizacklea 1996, Kofman at al. 2000). Phizacklea, for example, writes that ‘trafficked women are often deceived and coerced into illegal migration’ (1998: 31). Orsini-Jones and Gattullo, who have examined the issue of women’s migration and trafficking in Italy and in Bologna in particular, observe that migrant women ‘are part of the very sad “slave trade” flourishing across Europe’ (2000: 128). These feminist scholars characterization of women within the trafficking networks is far from seeing them as ‘active agents’ or examining the degree of agency women exercise in the trafficking process. By recuperating certain aspects of the dominant discourse on trafficking and portraying it uncritically in terms of either ‘illegal’ migration and organized crime, these scholars ignore the multiplicity of modes women enter into trafficking. When we ask specific questions about the experience of migration, a different sort of picture emerges. These questions include: In which way and with whom did women cross the border and reach their destination? Were they undocumented or did they possess passports and visas? If they were in possession of a visa, how did they obtain it and for how long were those visas valid? By failing to ask detailed questions like this, feminist migration scholars fail to interrogate the ways in which the current EU’s border and visa regimes affect ‘trafficked’ women’s lives.

#### *Risk of violence and vulnerability during undocumented migration*

In the respondents’ accounts, having or not having a visa is linked to the ways the women crossed the border and to the duration of time required for the crossing. The difference between documented and undocumented border-crossings is most apparent

in the narratives of those women who were ‘trafficked’ to Italy twice: first on foot without a visa and a second time by bus with tourist visas purchased by a (travel) agency. When the respondents crossed the borders undocumented on foot, in a truck or by boat, descriptions of the journey constitute a central element of the migration narrative and include detailed descriptions of events and actors involved. In her account, Oksana recalls the number and names of travellers, the weather conditions when they crossed the Slovenian-Italian border, the vegetation of the landscape and even the conditions of the ground they walked on. When the same respondents returned to Italy for a second time with a valid visa, they travelled by plane or bus, crossing the international borders quickly and smoothly. In stark contrast to the first crossing narratives, accounts of the ‘legal’ crossing offer few details about the journey. We can attribute the disparity between descriptions of undocumented and documented forms of travel to the degree of danger or risk the respondents underwent during the former experience. The fear of being caught by the border-police, of being sexually abused by traffickers, of contracting a disease or an illness during prolonged travel, of having little or no control over the terms of the travel and therefore being dependent on the traffickers, all of these produce a highly traumatic experience whose details are impressed in respondents’ memory.

Respondents’ accounts suggest that the use of force or violence during the recruitment and travel phase of the trafficking process is an exception rather than a rule. The accounts also point to the fact that the longer the undocumented travel became, the more the respondents were exposed to threats of abuse or sexual violence from agents and more likely they were to contract a disease or/and develop a dependency on alcohol or drugs. Moreover, entering trafficking systems without any initial capital to pay for the cost of the travel meant contracting a debt with the agents. As the journeys got longer and the amount of debt increased, respondents also become increasingly vulnerable to violence and labour exploitation during the journey.

Larisa’s story exemplifies vulnerability induced by debt-migration. After being deported from Hungary, Larisa contacted another agent in Moldova. With the agent’s promise that she would reach Italy in ten days, Larisa set off for a journey that lasted two months, taking her across the Balkans. Reconstructing the respondent’s travel route, it emerges that each undocumented border crossing had a monetary value. Larisa contracted a debt at each border that she could not cross at official border posts because she was not in possession of a visa. To pay back these debts, Larisa took short-term jobs working in cabarets at different points of the journey. Starting her travel in Moldova and needing no visa to enter Romania, Larisa first crossed the Moldavian-Romanian border without being exposed to any type of

abuse.<sup>34</sup> At the border between Romania and the FR of Yugoslavia, the group with which the respondent travelled stopped at the banks of the river Danube. Being transported to the other side of the river and thus crossing into Serbia entailed being passed against payment from one agent to the other, and being able to continue the journey only once the payment had taken place: ‘People would come with a ferry, they would look at us and if they would like us, they would take us ... They would pay money and you went’.<sup>35</sup> The consequence of this transaction was that the respondent contracted a debt towards the person who paid money for her and that that person acquired power over her by means of this monetary transaction. Larisa comments on this power disparity with the following words: ‘One feels like a dog. You cannot say anything because he paid money for you. There’s nothing to be done. It’s ugly.’<sup>36</sup>

In order to pay back the debt, amounting to 750 EUR, the respondent had to work in a cabaret in Serbia in a situation characterized by a total lack of control over her earnings. The vulnerability brought on by the situation of ‘illegality’ and debt bestowed power on the third party and enabled the latter to gain control over and achieve profit from exploiting Larisa’s labour. Moreover, the situation considerably reduced the respondent’s chances to negotiate the amount of time spent in the cabaret and the amount of money to be paid ‘back’. Continuing her travel towards Italy via Albania meant undergoing a similar process once again: this time a 21 years old Albanian man attained power over her by imposing on her unprotected intercourse. In order to go through this period, Larisa made heavy use of liquor and was in a permanent state of drunken stupor. When confiding her desperation to a female friend of hers with whom she travelled, the friend told her to persevere because she heard that their travel to Italy was to be organized within a week. Shortly afterwards the respondent undertook a one week boat journey that took her from Albania to Italy where she was met by the very same third party who had power over her in Albania. Based on the debt the respondent contracted in order to reach Italy, the Albanian man continued to exercise power over the respondent by controlling and profiting from her labour in street prostitution. As the above example show, prolonged periods of travel caused by the respondent’s undocumented status and migration-debt, enforces dependency on third parties in order to continue the travel. This dependency increases the woman’s vulnerability to violence and exploitation.

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<sup>34</sup> However, due to EU’s border and regimes which with the EU enlargement have been expanded further east, Romania is about to change its visa policy and introduce visa requirements for citizens of Moldova.

<sup>35</sup> “Veniva gente con il traghetto ... ci guardavano e se piacevi ti prendevano ... Pagavano dei soldi, e ciao”.

<sup>36</sup> “Ti senti come un cane. Non puoi dire niente perché lui ha dato i soldi per te. Non c’è niente da fare. E’ brutto.”

In addition to being vulnerable to the abuse of traffickers, undocumented status also puts the migrants at risk of detection by the border police and the abuse that usually accompanies undocumented migrants' apprehensions (FFM 1998, Andreas and Snyder 2000). An example comes from Kateryna who, intercepted by the border police when crossing undocumented into Austria, related the violence of interrogation and incarceration she went through:

We were undergoing an interrogation: "What car brought you here? What was your destination? Who are you? Who brought you here?" We would give the first information that crossed our mind and they would see that we are making it up. I was tired; my eyes were closing constantly. I am a smoker and I ran out of cigarettes. The inspector looked at me and she asked me: "Do you smoke?" I said yes, and she asked me if I would like a cigarette. When I answered yes, she said: "Then, what is the colour of the car that brought you here?" After the whole days of interrogation, the police brought us to a cell at midnight and they even handcuffed my friend.

Following the arrest, the respondent was detained in prison for three weeks until the unit which arrested her obtained funds from the Ministry to cover the costs of her deportation to Romania, namely the costs of the train ticket to the Hungarian-Romanian border.<sup>37</sup> Deportation bars a migrant from utilizing formal migration channels in the future, which in Kateryna's case meant she would not be able to obtain a Schengen visa. Therefore, deportation increased the respondent's dependency on trafficking networks to reach Italy and exposed her once again to the risk of abuse that migrants encounter during undocumented travel and/or arrival at their destination. For all the respondents entering Italy via the trafficking system constituted a means of travel and a mode of migration. My data thus suggests that border controls that aim at suppressing trafficking and hampering the 'illegal' circulation of people increase the involvement of trafficking enterprises and produce situations of greater vulnerability for migrants (cfr. Skrobanek at al. 1997: 20-22)

### *(II) legality and Trafficking*

Contrary to the idea that women are always forced or coerced by traffickers into illegal migration, some respondents tell of how they were only able to realize their plans to leave for Italy with the help of traffickers. A striking example comes from Liudmila, who hired an agency to buy her visa and organize the trip to Italy. Yet, due

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<sup>37</sup> The train ticket for the remaining 300 km that separated the respondent from her town of residence was paid with the money given to the respondent as a present by a Pakistani male (undocumented) migrant detained in the same prison.

to the instability in the region caused by NATO's bombing of Serbia, the agency in Moldova was not able to carry out this otherwise routine operation.<sup>38</sup> After months of waiting for the situation to improve, Liudmila finally decided to contact a trafficker who brought her to Italy in four days under the condition that she works in prostitution. For some respondents it took longer to reach Italy because the border police intercepted the group with which they travelled. Kateryna, whose travel started in Romania, recounts her unsuccessful attempt to cross the Hungarian-Austrian border:

It was 11 pm when they left me in the forest. It was really dark –it was September—it was a crazy darkness and it started to rain. I walked by my guide, the one who knew the path, but forgot it. I walked from 11pm until 8 in the morning and it was a nightmare. When I think back on it, I don't know how I did it. I was tired, and I was covered in mud because I fell down. It is like walking on the ground you do not know, where it is dark, rainy, there are holes filled with mud that you do not see. I felt many times, I was totally dirty, covered in mud, it was humid and I said 'I am giving up'. I was so tired that I was walking on all four. I could not stand straight any longer. It was 3 girls with the guide. I said 'I have to do it, I have to, I have to.' I always thought that I had to do it, that I have to reach the destination, I could not stay here in the middle of the forest. I don't know, at one point, at 8 am, it was becoming light; we were not reaching the point where the car was waiting for us. I could not walk any longer and the guide said 'I'm going and if the car is there, I'll come back to pick you up.' He left and I fell asleep on the ground. After the night of walking, I could not keep my eyes open any longer. And the other girls were pulling me 'No, you cannot sleep here, wake up otherwise you will get a lung infection' and they forced me to get up. The muscles on my legs were not holding me anymore. He was not coming back and we couldn't stay there, we were hungry and thirsty. When we came out of the forest, we started walking the same road he did. Slowly, slowly and we'll get there [we thought]. At 8 am we passed by a small village, there must have been only 4 houses there, and someone who got up early saw us from the window and called the police. They got me.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> The respondents report that an agency charges between 360 and 500 US Dollars, depending on the country of departure, for a visa and a bus ticket to Italy. Just for orientation, those respondents who worked as schoolteachers or secretaries in Moldova or Ukraine, earned between 20 and 30 US Dollars per month.

<sup>39</sup> "Mi hanno scaricata alle undici di notte nella foresta che c'era un buio --era settembre -- un buio pazzesco e ha cominciato a piovere. Ho camminato ma la guida che sa il tragitto se l'ha dimenticato. [...] Ho camminato dalle undici di notte fino alle otto di mattina ed è stato un incubo. A pensarci adesso non so come c'è l'abbia fatta. Ero stanca, ero piena di fango perché ero caduta. E' come camminare su un campo che non conosci, dove è buio, piove, ci sono dei buchi che non vedi. [...] Ero caduta tante di quelle volte, ero sporchissima, piena di fango, un umido e dicevo "non ce la faccio più". Ero così stanca che camminavo a quattro zampe. Non potevo più stare in piedi. Eravamo tre ragazze con la guida. Dico: "Ma lo devo fare, lo devo fare, lo devo fare." Pensavo sempre che lo devo fare, devo arrivare, non posso rimanere qui in mezzo alla foresta. Non so, a un certo punto, alle otto di mattina, si faceva la luce, non arrivavamo più al punto dove ci aspettava la macchina. Noi non ce la facevamo più a camminare e lui [la guida] ha detto: "io vado, e se la macchina è lì, vengo e vi prendo anche voi." Lui è andato e io mi sono addormentata per terra. [...] Non stavo più con gli occhi aperti

Far from describing the situation of coercion into involuntary migration, in the above quote Kateryna positions herself as an active participant in the project of migration. Her account draws attention to a determination to succeed in crossing the border and to the wilful aspect of that action.

For Kateryna, the unsuccessful crossing resulted in deportation from Austria. For Larisa, also apprehended by the border police, the arrest meant prohibition of entry into Hungary. A few weeks later each of the respondents embarked upon another crossing via a different route. Larisa arrived in Italy from Albania by boat, while Kateryna crossed the Slovenian-Italian border on foot. Kateryna comments on her second journey: ‘I was scared of being caught and sent back home. Because if they [the border police] would have caught me I would have had to do it all over again.’ Many narratives are punctuated by remarks that reveal the women’s awareness of the necessity to cross the borders secretly. Kateryna continues: ‘Some girls travel hidden in the back of a truck. They take sleeping pills in order not to do anything and not to eat at all. They take sleeping pills and sleep during the entire journey.’

Not all respondents arrived in Italy undocumented; traffickers provided some women with the necessary travel documents. Realizing that she would have to cross the border on foot because her traffickers were not in the first instance willing to spend money to buy her a visa, Snezana refused to leave until she successfully negotiated a visa and a bus ride to Italy. Another respondent, Tatiana, flew from Moscow to Rome with a fifteen-day tourist visa bought for her by two Russian women working as prostitutes in Italy. Oksana and Ioanna (Olga and Natasha newspaper clipping mentioned in the introduction to this chapter) reached Italy in two days having travelled by bus. However, contrary to the newspaper claims, the two women did not enter Italy undocumented. Working through an agency, they bought short-term visas with money borrowed from a third party. This money covered the costs of the visa, travel from Ukraine to Poland, a night in a hotel in Warsaw and a bus ticket to Bologna. Even though it was quite difficult, if not impossible, to travel undocumented with a regular international bus line across Europe, media coverage of their case described the two women as ‘illegal’. The conflation of trafficking with undocumented migration sustains and strengthens the representation of trafficking as a form of illegal migration. It relies on an over-simplified distinction between ‘illegal’ and ‘legal’ migration. In my research, a number of respondents entered Italy with a

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dopo la notte di cammino. E le ragazze mi tiravano: “No, non puoi dormire qui, svegliati se no prendi la polmonite,” e mi facevano stare in piedi. I muscoli dei piedi non mi tenevano più. Lui non tornava e noi non potevamo stare là, avevamo fame e sete. Quando siamo uscite abbiamo preso anche noi la strada che ha preso lui. Intanto piano, piano, che arriviamo. Alle otto di mattina abbiamo passato un paesino piccolo, che saranno quattro case in croce e uno che era mattutino ci ha viste dalla finestra e ha chiamato la polizia. E mi hanno presa.”

valid visa but became undocumented after having overstayed the length of the granted visa.

As my data indicates, it is extremely problematic to endorse a model which positions trafficking as a form of illegal migration in opposition to legally approved modes of migration. Trafficking may have legal elements such as legally obtained visas. Conversely, legal migratory processes may involve illegal components like requests for high fees advanced by the agencies or even illegal payments asked by Consulates. Moreover, within the Italian legal system that classifies migrants in terms of non-citizens (Dal Lago 1999), a category constructed on social and political removal, being illegal is grounds for detention and deportation. Hence, the fear of being caught by the police and returned to the point of departure enhanced respondents' dependency on the third parties and once in Italy, contributed to their conditions of confinement.

Dependency on the trafficking agents in order to reach Italy was (also) due to the current migration regimes which in the last years considerably reduced the access to formal EU migratory channels for certain groups of people. In fact, none of the respondents qualified for a Schengen visa which would have authorized them to enter to Italy at an official border post and with 'regular' means of transportation. Being granted a tourist Schengen visa requires a considerable number of documents that the respondents were not able to provide. These include: a passport, proof of the purpose of the visit namely an invitation letter (from an Italian citizen), a return ticket, confirmation of accommodation, evidence of sufficient funds, evidence of medical insurance, and a letter from the employer (or school) certifying a labour contract or school enrollment. Most of the respondents could have fulfilled one, maximum two of the above requirements since none of them knew a person who could have guaranteed for them or could provide evidence of sufficient funds to finance their stay in Italy. Moreover, a visa applicant is requested to present him/herself in person, which required additional funding especially when the visa granting Consulate was not where respondents lived but at times as far off as a neighbouring state. Not only is being granted a visa a long, troublesome and expensive process as different NGO sources report, but Consulates often render the process willingly more difficult by establishing a number of rules and/or procedures that make it extremely difficult for some groups of people to obtain visas (Apap 2001).

An example of the difficulty to obtain official permission to enter into Italy through a Consulate is well illustrated by Svjeta's account. Svjeta arrived in Italy from Ukraine through a trafficking system, exited the third party controlled prostitution, pressed charges against the 'traffickers' and was granted a residence and work permit in Italy on the basis of Art. 18 D.Lgs 286/1998 especially intended for

victims of trafficking.<sup>40</sup> In Winter 1999/00, the respondent went back to the Ukraine to visit her daughter and husband with whom she had had little contact over the past years. Shortly before returning to Italy, the husband confiscated her Italian residence permit in order to make it impossible for her to return to Italy. Having no means of convincing him to give the document back, Svjeta travelled to the Italian Consulate in Budapest<sup>41</sup> with the purpose of obtaining a copy of the permit and consequently a visa to re-enter Italy. However, once she arrived at the Consulate, explained that she has lost her residence permit and asked the Consulate employees to assist her in returning to Italy, she was told that she could not return to Italy and her request for a visa was not granted. Following the refusal the respondent contacted the Women's Shelter in Bologna that has followed –according to Art. 18 D.Lgs 286/1998—Svjeta's process of social integration in Italy and represented the respondent's legal guarantor. The Woman's Shelter intervened by calling the Consulate, an operation that took considerable time since it was extremely difficult to reach the person handling the respondent's case, and upon the Consulate's request sent a letter of guarantee for the respondent and the copy of respondent's residence permit. The Consulate replied that those documents were not sufficient to grant an entry visa for Italy. At this point the Woman's Shelter asked the Head of the Foreigners Police in Bologna to intervene who sent an additional letter of guarantee and confirmed the authenticity of the respondent's residence permit. Once more, the Consulate replied that these documents were insufficient, and requested for the Head of the Foreigners Police to call in person, and only then granted the respondent an entry visa.

Next to illustrating the difficulties women might encounter when attempting to obtain a visa on their own, this episode points to the costs involved in such an operation. The respondent had to cover her travel costs from Ukraine to Hungary as well as the costs of the hotel on several occasions. Moreover, since the whole procedure took more than four weeks, the respondent considerably overstayed the time she had taken off from her job and was consequently fired. Even though third party organizers of trafficking charge more than the official Consulate's visa rates,<sup>42</sup> the respondents knew that they were not likely to obtain a visa without contacts and a large sum of money. If arranging a visa is not cheap and easy, as Anderson and O'Connell Davidson's research on the demand for trafficked migrants' labour shows

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<sup>40</sup> Article 18 of L. n. 40/1998 of the Italian Immigration Law is quite unique in that it allows persons trafficked to Italy, whose lives would be endangered if returned home, to stay in Italy and obtain a residence and a work permit on the condition that they agree to leave prostitution and participate in a social-protection program.

<sup>41</sup> At that time there was no visa granting Italian consulate in Ukraine.

<sup>42</sup> This might not be always true. Many people coming from Serbia to the Netherlands in the period immediately following the NATO bombing and sanctions, reported that the Austrian Consulate in Belgrade, at that time the only Consulate of a Schengen member state to be present in Belgrade, charged 1500 EUR for a three months tourist Schengen visa.

(2003), migrants will not be able to access (even when available) the formal governmental migratory channels. Instead, as my data suggests, migrants will resort to irregular channels that in turn take advantage of migrants' legal vulnerability whether by charging higher costs for travel and documents or profiting from their labour at various points of the trafficking process. Hence, far from preventing trafficking, stricter immigration controls have unintended consequences such as serving the economic interests of third parties by increasing the amount of migrants' debt and raising the level of control third parties exercise over migrants. Quite paradoxically then, restrictive immigration regulations that aim at suppressing trafficking and hampering the illegal movements of people work in favour of third party organizers of trafficking, whether individuals and agencies, because they become a kind of supplementary migration system or even an alternative to the EU regulated migration.

#### **4. Projects of Migration, Projects of Autonomy**

When not being portrayed as victims of traffickers' deceit with intention to channel them –by use of violence—into sexual slavery, women from eastern Europe in the sex industry in industrialized Western States are described as victims of pressing poverty, which impelled them to abandon their countries of origin. In her analysis of how sex-trafficking is constructed and operates as a discourse, Doezema (1999) elicited that the recurrent incidence of the term poverty in relation to trafficking functions as a rhetorical device which locates migrant women in prostitution as innocent victims and secures the victim/villain binary. Moreover, privileging poverty as the factor that drives women into migrating puts forth, on the one hand, the structural processes that determine migratory flows typical of the macro-approach to migration, and on the other hand employs the classic push-pull migration model that, dependent on neoclassical economic theory, sees migration as a rational economic action (Anthias 2000). Instead of understanding poverty merely in terms of economic deprivation, my scrutiny of when and how the respondents' spoke of poverty points to the role the notion of poverty played in respondents' formation as subjects. By shifting the attention away from the push-pull model as regards to trafficking, my approach makes visible the presence of women's migratory projects –usually foreclosed by the concept of victimhood—as well as the plethora of factors and desires that informed these projects.

## *Poverty*

When asked what brought them to Italy, the motivation respondents most frequently put forth is that of poverty. Reference to poverty and economic hardship typically open most of the respondents' life accounts. Poverty, as in Ioanna's narrative is used to describe a situation in which the income of the family barely sufficed for the basic needs such as food and housing: 'You know, back home we are not that well off. Back home me and my mum worked at the market but the money we would earn was hardly enough to buy food.'<sup>43</sup> Poverty is also used to describe the difficult living conditions such as, in Ester's narrative, not having running water in the house or, in Kateryna's story, having to go to school always in the same pair of torn shoes, the only one she had. The description of economic hardship is also used to refer to the situation of not being compensated for the work done. To give an example, Ana recounted how while working in a meat factory she did not get any wage but instead received some meat to take home. This situation went on for a couple of months until the factory went bankrupt and then all the workers lost their jobs.

The recurrence of the theme of poverty put forward as the main reason for deciding to look for job opportunities abroad is too significant to overlook. While the situation of economic lack and/or necessity was a concrete fact that characterized women's lives prior to migration and needs to be acknowledged as such, my study also suggests that due to its recurrent position at the very beginning of respondents' narratives, the topic of poverty is best referred to as an isotropy which plays a crucial role in the respondents' construction of the self and allows us to examine migration – in its overlap with prostitution—as a part of the process of subjectivity.

The scrutiny of the isotropy of poverty in relation to the life stories at large elicits a correlation between theme of poverty and that of prostitution. As I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4, the motif of poverty serves as a way for the respondents to disavow sex work as part of their migratory project and/or reduce the possibility of being identified as a prostitute by others.<sup>44</sup> The fact that this operation of distancing takes place at the very start of respondents' narratives serves a double function. By establishing an objective situation of economic need as a primary factor for migrating and by dismissing the doubt whether to identify the respondent with someone who enters prostitution for pleasure and financial greed, the act of distancing sets the discursive frame centred on economic need. Once established, this allows respondents to recuperate it at different points and thus dis-identify from being prostitutes throughout their narratives.

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<sup>43</sup> "Sai, a casa, non è che stiamo tanto bene. Io a casa ho lavorato al mercato, lavorato con mia mamma però i soldi che guadagnavamo bastavano solo per mangiare"

<sup>44</sup> I examine the complexity of this construction in detail in Chapter 4.

Along these lines, respondents distinguish between the desire to possess money—characteristic of prostitutes—and the need to earn money, namely the situation they relate to their own experience of migration. Moreover, the respondents always underscore that they did not intend to keep the money for themselves but that they were doing it for someone else such as their parents, sisters, or children. At the discursive level, the affirmation of economic necessity often occurs through other characters like police officers or clients. An example comes from the way in which Marisa relates the talk she had with a police officer when he offered to assist her to solve the complicated situation she was in following the murder of a friend of hers: ‘How can you help me? After I have pressed charges and told you everything, you’ll buy me a ticket and send me home. Look, I have a daughter back home!’<sup>45</sup> Throughout the story, financial need reaffirms time and time again that the respondent is not a prostitute. By commenting—as they usually do—that they would not be in Italy now if the situation would have been better in their home countries, the respondents resist the ‘whore stigma’ (Pheterson 1993). However, by doing so they at the same time foster the narrative which sees their migratory projects as determined by poverty rather than as a pursuit of financial independence, an ‘escape route’ from patriarchal structures (Anthias and Lazaridis 2000: 7), a search for (emotional) autonomy from the family and a desire for mobility.

#### *Lack of Employment Opportunities and the Search for Economic Improvement*

Prior to their departure for Italy, some respondents attended high school or university, some had a job, and some worked and studied at the same time. My data indicates that the minority of respondents had only elementary education while most finished high school, some type of professional school (for e.g. for medical nurses) or even attended university. This concurs with results from other studies that point to the relatively high level of education of eastern European women in the sex industry (cfr. Orfano 2003). Moreover, as other researchers observe as well, before migrating women were engaged—whether in formal or informal sector—in a variety of occupations such as factory work, petty trade, office work, nursing or teaching (Gülçür and İlkkaracan 2002, Hopkins and Nijboer 2003, Orfano 2003).

Being without work per se was therefore not a motivation, researchers point out, for migrating. Rather, the impossibility of making ends meet even with a job and the lack of future prospects were among the factors that informed women’s migratory projects. Respondents quite often speak of their feeling of impossibility such as Maja

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<sup>45</sup> “Come mi puoi aiutare? Io faccio la denuncia, ti dico tutto quanto e dopo tu mi compri il biglietto e mi mandi a casa. Guarda che io ho una bambina a casa!”

who said, ‘Looking for jobs at home was useless.’ Alternatively, they refer to the lack of opportunities at home<sup>46</sup> as for example Ana, who talked about the difficulty of achieving anything in Moldova: ‘In our country one doesn’t manage to do things. One never finds money to do anything; One doesn’t manage to do anything at all.’<sup>47</sup> Sasha, who at the time was studying at the university in the capital of Ukraine, speaks of her desire to improve her financial situation: ‘I have wanted to find some kind of work, some money for a long time. I couldn’t stay there any longer: there was no money, no work, and I wanted to conclude my studies too’.<sup>48</sup> While desiring to change her situation, the respondent also had doubts whether she would be able to improve her financial situation sufficiently by migrating to Japan for cabaret work. The confirmation that in any place there are more opportunities than in Ukraine comes to the respondent from a group of women who just returned from Italy and who told the respondent that any place is better than home: ‘Do not worry. No place is worse than here’.<sup>49</sup>

The lack of employment opportunities as well as future prospects brought up for some respondents feelings of frustration and anger. Oksana described this state with the following words: ‘Before coming to Italy I was always filled with anger. I was so nervous! Always ... [I asked myself] why was I born, where’ll I find work, how’ll we survive, how’ll we get by?’<sup>50</sup> The situation of frustration was also due to pressure<sup>51</sup> to look for employment some respondents experienced from their families. Oksana, who at the time was living with her mother, referred to it this way: ‘Back home there was a situation of crisis: ‘I needed to pay for the electricity, the phone ... I was always nervous, like a beast. I did not know what to do, where to go. Additionally, my aunt –the sister of my mother-- would stop by and she kept telling me ‘You are not working! You are doing nothing!’’<sup>52</sup>

Some other respondents do not frame the need for employment in terms of social expectations but, rather, stress their awareness of the difficult economic

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<sup>46</sup> This situation, in Maja’s view, affects in particular women from lower social classes since, she explains, young women from middle or upper classes are more likely to find a job or continue with the education.

<sup>47</sup> “[...] da noi non riesci, non riesci; non trovi mai i soldi per fare una cosa, non riesci a fare niente.”

<sup>48</sup> “E’ da tanto tempo che volevo trovare qualche lavoro, qualche soldo, perché non potevo stare lì [in Ucraina]: non ci sono soldi, non c’è lavoro e volevo anche finire di studiare.”

<sup>49</sup> “Stai tranquilla. Peggio di qua, là non trovi.”

<sup>50</sup> “Prima di venire in Italia ero sempre con la rabbia addosso. Quanto stavo nervosa! Sempre ... perché mi fanno fatto nascere, cosa faccio io, dove vado, dove trovo lavoro, come facciamo a vivere, cosa faremo in avanti?”

<sup>51</sup> Those respondents who come from economically quite stable families, such as Liudmila, were not pressured by their relatives or parents to find a job in the same measures as respondents from working class families.

<sup>52</sup> “A casa mia c’era proprio la crisi: devo pagare la luce, telefono ... Io ero sempre nervosa, come una bestia. Non sapevo cosa fare, dove andare. In più veniva la sorella di mia madre e mi diceva sempre ‘Tu non lavori! Tu non fai niente!’”

situation of their families coupled with an understanding of the need to earn some money somehow and be economically self-sufficient. Ana, who had been a guest at her grandmother's house after the fight with her mother, spoke of this awareness: '[In my grandmother's household] everyone has children, everyone has little money, they do not work, those who work earn nothing. I am a grown up person, I cannot allow myself [to be maintained by them]. I myself do not approve of it either. It is better for me if I leave'.<sup>53</sup> Ioanna speaks of that desire to leave and of the willingness to take the risk in realizing it: 'I thought, "I'm leaving no matter what might happen. There's nothing to do here!"'<sup>54</sup> Hence, far from being pushed by pressing poverty, respondents' narratives suggest that the lack of employment opportunities and/or future prospects, the desire for economic improvement and/or independence from the family, and search for alternative resources all informed respondents' migration projects (cfr. Corso and Trifirò 2003: 28).

### *Intra-family Violence*

Respondents' decision to migrate was at times also influenced by non-economic factors such as intra-family violence including wife beating, sexual harassment, rape and/or incest. While some respondents spoke of sexual molesting at the workplace and their dismissal from work subsequent to having turned down the employer, a large number of respondents recount intra-family violence that most often took the form of wife-beating and at times that of (attempted) incest. An example is offered in Kateryna's narrative who described her family situation in terms of constant intra-family abuse. Her mother divorced the abusive father when Kateryna was six years old, and remarried another violent man who also –as the mother's previous husband—molested the respondent sexually. Another respondent, Ester, was caught in a family situation full of physical violence and abuse: the father physically abused the mother and occasionally beat up the respondent as well. The father made all major decisions about the household and disobeying him resulted in violence. The violence reached its peak when the father threatened the mother and two sisters with a firearm in order to impose absolute obedience. While Ester identified strongly with her mother, she was also frustrated by her mother's lack of initiative and her inability to leave her husband. In an emotionally loaded description of her parents, Ester told of how back then she hated them both and expressed the need to separate herself from the mother: 'I think

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<sup>53</sup> "[a casa di mia nonna] tutti hanno dei bambini, hanno pochi soldi, non lavorano, chi lavora ma lo stesso non ha i soldi. Io sono grande, questa cosa [essere mantenuta da loro] non posso, non mi permetto neanche io. Per me è meglio che vado via."

<sup>54</sup> "Ho pensato, 'Vado.' Succede quello che succede, qui non c'è niente da fare!"

of my mother who is alone now [after the father has died], but there are also some neighbours and other people to keep her company. I had to leave sooner or later to live a life of my own. I could not always stay with her. There have been periods when I ran away [because] I wanted to leave the house'.<sup>55</sup>

While mentioning the episodes of violence here and there, the respondents always quickly glossed over them and never connected them explicitly –as they did in case of poverty—to their migratory projects. Or, as in Ester's account of violence above, the respondents were more likely to speak in their life narratives of how the father was abusing the mother, than of the abuse they themselves had experienced.<sup>56</sup> My scrutiny of respondents' narratives suggests that this absence was due not only to the difficulty of talking about acts of abuse or the indifference towards them because considered so common and therefore a side issue (IHF 2000), but also to the fact that bringing up the family abuse (when relevant) in a more consistent manner would have disrupted the respondents' perception of themselves as active agents. Not bringing to the fore the episodes of violence that informed their migration project, and that often – as feminist scholars have pointed out—influence women's decision to migrate in general (Kofman at all 2000) means resisting the dominant public perception of 'trafficked' women as victims. The category of the 'victim' effaces women's desires for mobility, their determination to undertake a 'solo migration project' (Anthias 2000: 20), and their being an essential source of family support (cfr. Corso and Trifirò 2003, Malucelli 2001).

### *Projects of Autonomy from the Family*

The disappointment felt towards and/or disagreement with parents, lack of respect, humiliation or a feeling of not being wanted all contributed to respondents' wish of separation from the family, their desire for autonomy and their search for ways of realizing it. An illustration comes from Ivana's account. Ivana accepted the offer to work abroad, hoping to earn enough money to support her two children and husband. That money would allow them to move out of his parents' flat where they had no space of their own and were fully dependent on his parents' moods. There they were constantly belittled: she for not being a good mother and he for not having a steady job. Ivana interpreted this unfriendliness as a sign of both families' disapproval of

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<sup>55</sup> "Io penso a mia mamma che è rimasta da sola, però lì ci sono anche altre persone e i vicini che stanno con lei. Alla fine prima o poi dovevo andare a farmi la mia vita. Non potevo stare sempre con lei. Ci sono stati dei periodi quando sono scappata via, volevo andare via da casa."

<sup>56</sup> This specificity of caught my attention because through the period of extended fieldwork I got to know the respondents quite well, and was acquainted with episodes of violence they experienced but did not introduced during the 'official' situation of taped interview.

their marriage due to the fact that she comes from a Catholic Croatian family and her husband from a Muslim Bosnian background. Ivana and her husband looked at the short-term labour migration abroad as a way of improving their financial situation, which would also have allowed them to move out of his family's apartment and rent a flat on their own. In this way, they hoped to escape the family pressure of being in a mixed marriage and live a more independent, and less humiliating life.

Other respondents also expressed a desire for autonomy from the family, usually communicated through episodes of disappointment towards one or both of their parents. In Oksana, Kateryna, Ivana and Snezana's narratives the father is portrayed as a drunkard and/or as an absent and abusive figure. Oksana is deeply disappointed that her father was drinking and was not able to provide for her or the family. Snezana recounted the story of being abandoned, together with her four siblings, by the mother who left since she could not stand any longer her husband's abuse. Snezana's own relationship with her father is nothing else but a series of abuses of various kinds. Another respondent, Kateryna, has no relationship with her father, and is disappointed with him because he is a drunkard. Next to being ashamed of the father, not wanting to be associated with him and avoiding him, the respondent wished—at the same time—for a caring relationship with the father. Her need of being taken care of was not compensated by the mother who did not give her much attention or time:

She married and remarried, and took me with her but I was there like a baggage would be. She never came to school, she never asked if I had eaten or not, never ever. Even when I went to the high school all the kids would come with their mothers who would ask the secretary how to do things. ... she was not interested in my life, what I was or was not doing. If I would be absent for two days my mother would not even notice my absence. This was not because she did not love me but because she was like that.<sup>57</sup>

As Kateryna perceives herself as a burden for her mother, another respondent, Ana, describes her relationship with her mother in a similar manner. The respondent's parents accused her of stealing money from the house where they lived together and threw her out of the house. She spent some time with the grandmother and then returned home. When recounting, the respondent's narrative lingers on the description of the event that occurred upon her return home:

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<sup>57</sup> “Lei si è sposata e risposata e mi prendeva con lei però ero lì come un bagaglio. Non veniva mai a scuola, non mi chiedeva se hai mangiato o non hai mangiato, mai, mai. E anche quando sono entrata al liceo, cioè tutti i bambini andavano con le madri che si interessavano in segretaria, come si fa, come non si fa. [...] non si interessava lei di mia vita, che faccio, che non faccio. Se mancavo due giorni mia madre non sentiva neanche la mia mancanza. Non è perché non mi amava, ma perché lei era così.”

I came back home and I thought that maybe they have realized what they did to me. Then mother and father told me ‘Why did you come back? Why did you not stay where you were?’ You know, when it is winter and you don’t have a dress except the one you are wearing ... I also had a bladder infection back then, I was bleeding. When they told me those things, I felt a pain in my heart. My grandmother is the person I loved most in my life and I know that she loves me too. But do you know what is the ugliest thing? I understood that they didn’t need me. The mother, do you believe me, told me straight in my face, told me this ‘I do not care for you. You earn your money where you want and the way you want!’<sup>58</sup>

In the respondent’s narrative, this episode --recounted by means of direct speech and comparison-- is invested with the connotation of the breaking point from the family. A staccato effect is achieved using the direct speech to report on her mother’s words and its effect makes the respondent’s claim of veracity of her words (and position) stronger. The comparison contrasts love of the mother and that of the grandmother, and concludes that the latter is the only one who ever truly loved her. As to identify parents’ rejection with a painful wound, the respondent compares sickness, blood and hurt on the one hand, and pain caused by parent’s refusal on the other.

As the above examples illustrate, respondents’ migratory projects are not only invested by the pursuit of economic improvement for themselves and/or their families, but also by the desire for transformation of familiar ties. To these young women migration offered the opportunity to resist some of the constraints that impacted their lives. Influenced by situation of familiar indifference or conflict, respondents’ migratory projects aimed at achieving autonomy from the family and aspired at gaining the latter’s recognition and respect. Hence, respondents’ willingness to take the risk and migrate needs to be seen also as a desire for transformation of affective bonds and simultaneously as a search for (social) inclusion.

### *Ruptures and a Search for Alternative Life Projects*

Relationship or marriage break-ups and a desire for a new male partner also played a role in respondents’ migratory projects. While a number of respondents –Liudmila, Marisa, Lia, and Oksana—were at one point engaged or married, none of these

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<sup>58</sup> “Sono arrivata a casa e ho pensato che forse loro si sono resi conto di che cosa mi avevano fatto. Allora la madre e il padre hanno detto “Ma perché sei tornata? Perché non stai là dove sei stata prima?” Sai, quando è l’inverno e non hai un vestito tranne quello che porti addosso; in quel tempo ho preso la cistite, con sangue. E quando mi hanno detto così mi ha fatto male il cuore. Mia nonna è la persona a cui ho voluto più bene in questa vita, anche lei so che mi vuole bene. ... Ma sai qual è la cosa più brutta? Io ho capito che loro davvero non hanno bisogno di me. La madre, tu mi credi, mi ha detto in faccia, mi ha detto così “Non mi frega per niente. Fai i soldi come vuoi e dove vuoi”.

arrangements was still in place at the moment of respondents' departure for Italy.<sup>59</sup> Marisa, Lia and Liudmila got married when 18 years old and got divorced a year or two later. Not long before leaving to work abroad, Oksana was engaged and expected to marry. Yet, the marriage was suddenly cancelled and her fiancé married another woman. In her description of why she left for Italy, Oksana established a causal relation between the break-up and her leaving Ukraine for sex work:

Six months after my boyfriend left me ... but me ... you know what I think? For example ... yes ... before I was always angry, I started really to hate him ... it is his fault that ... if he wouldn't have left me I could've been his wife. I could've been together with him; I could've not left to work on the street.

The respondent suggests that a break-up and being without a man affected her decision to leave for work in a nightclub in Yugoslavia first and for sex work in Italy later. This also seems to be confirmed by the fact that once the respondent returned from Italy, she stayed for a while and then, because unsuccessful in her attempt to find a husband, left again. Next to a break-up, a desire for a new and/or better relationship—as for Liudmila and Marisa, both divorced—played a role in respondents' migratory projects. Liudmila told of a female friend of hers who left for Italy and found a man with whom she is happy. Liudmila spoke of her own desire to meet the right person: 'I also wanted to meet the right person; the right person to be together with'.<sup>60</sup>

Next to affective ruptures, interrupted (university) education influenced respondents' migratory projects as well. Sasha, who was studying economics, studied and worked at the same time. Yet, at one point she could not get a job any longer and faced a financially difficult situation. At the same time, the respondent was assessing her future as an economist in Ukraine and decided that in order to make a career she needed to learn English. Similarly, Liudmila also started a university education but at one point, the family's financial situation worsened and her father did not have the money to finance her education further. Faced with financial difficulty, both Liudmila and Sasha interrupted their education and looked for a job in Ukraine and Moldova respectively. As the money they earned—25 US Dollars per month approximately—was insufficient to cover their living and studying costs both of the respondents opted for labour migration abroad as a way of earning money and hence continuing their university studies.

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<sup>59</sup> This is not valid for Ivana who was married at the time she reached Italy. However, her account differs greatly from other respondents' accounts since she was trafficked to Italy in the sense intended by the UN trafficking Protocol, namely by use of force and deception and thus it is impossible to view the respondent as active agent and her departure for Italy as her migratory project. This however, does not exclude the fact that the respondent did look at migration with a favourable eye as a way of improving her economic situation and opening up new opportunities.

<sup>60</sup> "Pure io volevo conoscere una persona, una persona giusta per stare insieme."

Affective ruptures not linked strictly to a boyfriend or husband but to another referential figure, such as a teacher, and in combination with interrupted education also affected some respondents' lives prior to migration. Kateryna, who had nearly no relationship to her mother or father was encouraged in her education and by extension in her life, by her high school teacher. The respondent was one of the most brilliant students in the school and won the Romanian national championship in a chemistry contest. Yet, due to problems in her family she could not at one point concentrate on school any longer, and often entered into direct conflict situations with other students or teachers. Once the respondent lost the support of her favourite teacher and dropped drastically in her school performance from excellent to poor, she decided to interrupt her education. Her self-esteem vanished and she sunk into apathy:

I was really stuck in Romania. Mentally I felt like being in a hole from which I couldn't come out any more. Because if you think of another girl with the same problems as I had, she could've made it even there but me, I was feeling down, no, I did not want anything any longer, I was depressed, depressed, depressed, and all the things I'd see --even school and friends-- made me feel more down, and I didn't want to see them any more at all. And I was thinking only of running away; I was dreaming of running away. I didn't know precisely if I wanted to leave but I said to myself 'This life cannot continue like this, one cannot live like this.' Slowly the depression inside me was growing and I said 'A moment will arrive when I'll give up'.<sup>61</sup>

For Kateryna, migration becomes a way of breaking away from the hopeless situation she had sunk into. She departs from Romania in order to break away from her depressive state caused by her humiliation in school and past violence at home: 'I wanted to start my life all over again in a place where no one knew me or things about me. I wanted to create a new image of myself.' Another respondent, Larisa, echoed the statement of the respondent above when she framed her leaving Moldova in terms of a hope for a different future --'I ... came to Italy in order to change my life'<sup>62</sup>-- and said that one has to take her life into her own hands because if one waits for things to change, one ends up being fifty years old and achieving nothing: 'Who are you? You are no one. A zero.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> "In Romania ero proprio bloccata. Mi sentivo in un buco che non ce la facevo più a uscire fuori, ma proprio mentalmente, non so. Perché se pensi, un'altra ragazza che aveva gli stessi problemi miei alla fine poteva riuscire anche lì, però io ero, cioè ero giù, no, non volevo più niente, ero depressa, depressa, depressa, e ogni cosa che vedevo, anche la scuola, gli amici, mi mandavano più, più in giù, non volevo più vederli, niente, niente. E pensavo solo a scappare, a scappare, cioè sognavo di andare via. Non sapevo proprio se voglio andar via però ho detto "Questa vita avanti non può andare così, non si può vivere così." Piano, piano quella depressione cresceva e ho detto "Ci sarà un punto che non so se c'è la farò".

<sup>62</sup> "Io ... sono venuta qua [in Italia] per ... cambiare la mia vita."

<sup>63</sup> "Chi sei tu? Tu sei niente. Zero."

As my data points out, respondents' migratory projects were informed by an overlap of economic and non-economic factors such as the search for economic improvement, the search for labour opportunities abroad, an escape from intra-family violence, a desire for a transformation of affective bonds, the pursuit of recognition and respect, and finally the demand for (social) inclusion. Throughout the autobiographical narratives migration emerges as a project meant to lead one out of the situation characterized by lack of employment, lost self-esteem, family abuse, interrupted education and a general sense of life stagnation. Entering trafficking systems in order to realize one's migratory project is therefore related to women's desire to (re)conquer their material/financial and affective mobility. These results confirm the findings, based also on biographical narratives, which elicit the inappropriateness of the term 'victims' to depict the condition of migrant women in trafficking and demonstrate that women are rarely kidnapped or coerced into migrating but that instead women rely on trafficking networks in order to be able to realize their migration projects (Corso and Trifirò 2003, Malucelli 2001, Sutdhibhasilp 2002). To consign the complexity of women's desires and projects to the narrative of victimhood means effacing women's immediate struggles against the ways in which structural inequalities shape their lives, and precluding our understanding of trafficking as an alternative migratory system for those who have no access to formal cross-border migratory channels.

## **5. Conclusion**

When trafficking is defined in terms of involuntary migration and organized crime, the implications are that 'trafficked' women are perceived as victims of a non-consensual process of migration and 'traffickers' as criminals who recruit and move the victims in order to profit from their labour. This definition of trafficking relies moreover on a quite vague notion of deception as to indicate that the victim has been misled as regards to the nature and terms of the employment 'contract' prior to migration. Characterization of trafficking in terms of coercion and deception establishes an oversimplified differentiation between consensual and non-consensual processes of migration and criminalizes a variety of operations and actors involved in trafficking systems.

My investigation of the recruitment practices and travel operations constitutive of the initial phase of trafficking suggested, on the one hand, that the use of force to persuade women to migrate is an exception rather than a rule, and on the other, that rather than being approached by unfamiliar 'traffickers', the respondents learned first about the possibility of work abroad through informal networks and most commonly through female friends of theirs who have worked abroad themselves. Following the

first exchange of information, respondents referred to individual recruiters or agencies in order to contract travel and employment abroad. By eliciting the variety of operations and actors who intervened at different stages of the trafficking process, respondents' accounts show that recruiting agents often had no interest in profiting from the exploitation of women's labour upon their arrival to destination but instead realized economic gain through the recruitment or/and movement of migrants. My data problematizes the interpretation that sees trafficking necessarily as the result of third parties' intentional and organized operation of recruitment and transportation geared towards profiting from the exploitation of migrant women's labour in prostitution.

The criminalization approach to trafficking adopted by the governments in order to combat organized crime and the 'illegal' movement of people prioritizes the enforcement of border and visa regimes and the tightening of immigration regulations. Instead of preventing trafficking, this approach has come unintended consequences such as enhancing 'trafficked' women's vulnerability to violence and exploitation. When formal avenues of migration are inaccessible to them, women turn to irregular channels. In fact, for a number of interviewees, entering Italy via trafficking systems was a means of travel and migration. Irregular migratory channel in turn take advantage of migrants' vulnerability caused by their undocumented status and by the debt they contract in order to be able to undertake the travel. Stricter border controls and more restrictive immigration regulations thus do not protect migrants from abuse but rather make them dependent upon third parties as to facilitate their migration and travel across international borders. Border and visa regimes foster migrants' vulnerability to violence and exploitation during the travel. Thus, restrictive immigration regulations that aim at suppressing trafficking criminalize the mobility of certain groups of people and paradoxically leave ample space for profiteering and the abuse of migrants.

Finally, respondents' narratives of the recruitment and travel phase of trafficking make evident that there is an urgent need of attention to the nuances of how trafficking is lived and negotiated on the one hand, and represented and institutionalized on the other. The frame of organized crime within which trafficking is usually positioned and examined, consigns migrant women to the position of victims and forecloses the possibility for stories of women's migration to emerge (Berman 2003). My investigation of respondents' narratives demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between women's entering into trafficking systems and their search for ways in which to realize their migratory projects. Informed by both economic and non-economic factors, women's migratory projects looked at trafficking as a means of achieving economic improvement and creating new life opportunities. As an escape route from an environment with scarce opportunities and

a pursuit of social inclusion, migration-via-trafficking systems resembles other forms of women's transnational migration. It therefore urges feminist (migration) scholars to take issue with the notions of coercion and deception and of migrant women as victims of organized crime. This shift of perspective would allow us to move away from the conceptualisation of migrant women as duped into trafficking and bring to the fore the complexity of desires and projects migrant women articulate in their demand of social and material mobility via trafficking systems.