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How to cite:

Andrijasevic, Rutvica (2003). The Difference Borders Make: (Il)legality, Migration and Trafficking in Italy among Eastern European Women in Prostitution. In: Ahmed, Sara; Castaneda, Claudia; Fortier, Anne-Marie and Sheller, Mimi eds. *Uprootings/ Regroundings: Questions of Home and Migration*. Berg, pp. 251–272.

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## **The Difference Borders Make: (Il)legality, Migration and Trafficking in Italy among Eastern European Women in Prostitution**

*Rutvica Andrijasevic*

‘Do not ask us why are we here, ask us rather how we got here.’<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

Migratory flows from ‘eastern’<sup>2</sup> to ‘western’<sup>3</sup> Europe have increased in the last twenty years, largely triggered by geopolitical and geoeconomic changes in the former ‘Eastern block’. Commonly referred to as the ‘new’ migration, the involvement of women in this ‘East–West’ migration has increasingly become a subject of alarm in countries of western Europe, namely with respect to the ‘trafficking’<sup>4</sup> of eastern European women for the purpose of prostitution. The governments of the European Union (EU) member states have predominantly associated trafficking with ‘illegal’ migration from ‘third’ countries and organized crime. In this respect, the implementation of the border-protection scheme has been endorsed 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).

Instead of adopting the general term ‘human trafficking’, my work makes use of the term ‘trafficking in women’ not only because the vast majority of trafficked people are women (Wijers and Lap-Chew 1997) but also because, as feminist scholars have shown, the words ‘human’ and ‘woman’ are not interchangeable. In fact, the expression ‘human trafficking’ performs a conceptual collapsing which overlooks the dissymmetry of gender relations and the specificity of migrant women’s experiences. Moreover, the term trafficking, usually intended to signify transportation of persons by means of coercion or deception into exploitative and



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slavery-like conditions,<sup>5</sup> is often used in ways that collapse a large span of operations. These involve, first, the recruitment and transportation of women from their departure to the destination country, and secondly, the living and working conditions upon arrival. As Wijers and Lap-Chew demonstrate (1997), although a woman might find herself in slavery-like conditions (violence and/or threat of violence, confiscation of legal documents, 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.

My analysis makes a distinction between these operations, focusing on the recruitment and transportation phase of trafficking. This choice was prompted not only by the lack of studies that investigate this side of sex trafficking in women, but also by interviews with trafficked women in Italy that brought to the fore the interrelation between trafficking and increased control of geo-political borders. Instead of focusing explicitly on exploitative labour conditions, this approach proposes an analysis of the material and legal immigration apparatus which fosters the legal, economic and physical vulnerability of trafficked women. Italy presents a unique field of study on this topic, since it has become a destination country only relatively recently (late 1970s) and is transitioning from being a country of emigration to a country of immigration. Moreover, Italy has often been considered a locus of permeable borders that allows a reasonably easy flow of undocumented migration into the EU. As far as trafficking is concerned, it is together with Belgium the only EU state to include a specific clause in its immigration laws that allows for social protection and legalization of trafficking victims.

The primary focus of this chapter is on accounts by eastern European migrant women trafficked into Italy. By drawing on these accounts, I critically assess the conceptualization of trafficking in the fields of current political and mass-media discourses and reveal some of the intricate processes that constitute the conditions of possibility for trafficking. My study is based on fieldwork undertaken in Bologna<sup>6</sup> between October 1999 and February 2000, with a group of twenty-five migrant women who, having arrived in Italy through trafficking, have worked as street prostitutes under different degrees of confinement<sup>7</sup> and in conditions of economic exploitation by one or more third parties. The respondents were aged between 18 and 25, and originated from various eastern European non-EU candidate countries (Romania,<sup>8</sup> Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Croatia and FR Yugoslavia). Among the larger group of twenty-five women I selected fifteen to conduct unstructured in-depth interviews. At the time of the interviews, none of the respondents still worked as street



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prostitutes and all were struggling with questions pertaining to their new life arrangements – such as whether to return home or stay in Italy.

Throughout the chapter, I cast the women's narratives against the backdrop of discourses and representations of women's trafficking found in the mass media,<sup>9</sup> as well as in religious (i.e. *Caritas*) and feminist sources. The Catholic organization *Caritas* is one of the most influential actors in developing projects against sex trafficking in Italy, while Moroli and Sibona, authors of *Schiave d'occidente: sulle rotte dei mercanti di donne*,<sup>10</sup> are leading figures of a feminist association *Differenza Donna* based in Rome. The *Caritas* association runs various shelters where a large number of women have been assisted. It is worth noting that the materials produced by the above-mentioned religious and feminist sources have had extensive influence on public opinion and policy-making in Italy, and have been largely distributed on the national scale. By looking at processes of representation and how meanings are produced and allocated in public discourse, my analysis sheds light on different – often overlooked – aspects of trafficking. I question the official representation of trafficking and map out some of its central elements that re/appear in different sources and converge with the EU political agenda, thus underpinning the view of trafficking in terms of irregular migration and women as victims deceived and coerced into prostitution. I shall discuss the way in which women's narratives challenge accepted notions of victimhood (discussed in the second section) by scrutinizing their accounts of border crossings and how they entered into prostitution in Italy. In the last section, I also discuss the criminalization of illegal immigration in light of the respondents' own accounts of their immigration procedures within the Italian legal apparatus.

But my findings also suggest that when the categories of irregular migration, border and crime are brought into focus, a gap between the interviewee's accounts of migration and the dominant rhetoric of trafficking becomes visible. This discrepancy, as my work points out, is an integral part of a larger landscape within which gendered politics of belonging in the new, enlarged Europe are being sanctioned. In this respect, I begin by tackling the issues of migration in relation to the formation of the 'new' Europe.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, I hope to bring to the fore the political and legal formation of the enlarged EU and of its borders, and to reveal the ways in which borders are created through material and juridical means of controlling the movement of people and, as such, create the conditions for the proliferation of trafficking. In this respect, the juridico-material formation of borders constitutes a crucial element to be considered in the analysis of the women's accounts of migration.

### **Mapping the New Borders of an Enlarged Europe**

In recent years various newspapers throughout western Europe have increasingly featured migration in the following terms: 'Immigration crisis!' and 'Emergency immigration!'<sup>12</sup> As Dal Lago (1999) and Sassen (1999) point out, this approach tends to portray migration as a flood that endangers the stability, security and wealth of the western European states. The 'invasion syndrome' gained particular momentum in the post-1989 period when the Berlin Wall fell, Russia relaxed visa policies to facilitate the travel of its citizens, and countries of eastern Europe got involved in a series of economic and 'political revolutions' (Wolff 1994). In addition to the immigration policies, the invasion discourse is also present on the level of textual and visual representation best discernible in the press. In *La Repubblica*,<sup>13</sup> for example, photographs of arrivals and crossings stir up fears of invasion with images of masses of people, and encourage the idea of migration as a crisis in need of containment.

The narrative of migration as crisis is not limited to the mass media, but is found within leading European political circles as well. As early as the European Summit in Luxembourg in June 1991, John Major addressed the need to control the supposed crisis with the following words: 'We must not be wide open to all-comers just because Rome, Paris and London are more attractive than Bombay or Algiers' (Cohen in King 1993: 184). In addition to its reference to cultural and economic superiority of European capitals, the statement explicitly points to the need for greater control over European external borders. While some scholars refer to migration from eastern Europe as 'the invasion that has never occurred' (Simoncini 2000: 31) and others have indicated that Europe was hardly wide open in the years preceding the 1990s (Dal Lago 1999), the 1990s are nevertheless characterized by the intensification of regulatory agreements. The most incisive is the Schengen Treaty signed in 1985, which reveals the political intention of the signatory member states<sup>14</sup> to construct a culturally homogeneous and economically protected area. The Treaty abolished internal borders between its member states, allowing for the free circulation of goods, capital, services and their citizens, yet it simultaneously reinforced EU external borders and set out to harmonize immigration and asylum policies. Supported by claims that the strict immigration policies are of preventive nature,<sup>15</sup> the Schengen treaty created what has been dubbed as 'fortress Europe' (see Verstraete in Chapter 10 of this volume).

While Simoncini (2000) questions the appropriateness of the phrase 'fortress Europe' and claims that EU does not possess the material means to achieve the level of control which would produce an impenetrable



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border, I use this term to highlight the human costs that accompany strict policing of the borders. The phrase stresses that borders do not simply mark the edges of the supranational body conceptually, but can also take the form of a material barrier, such as a wire or a wall. To survey the borders, there are deployed technological devices such as coastal radar stations used by Italian and Spanish police force to intercept the arrival of the boats, infrared cameras and the x-ray scanners deployed on the English coast<sup>16</sup> or carbon dioxide detectors used by the German border police in order to detect people hidden inside a cargo. These forms of intensified and often violent border enforcement bring with them a large number of migrant fatalities. United for Intercultural Action, a Dutch-based European network against nationalism, racism and fascism, has counted 2,406 deaths of migrants that have resulted from border policing, detention and deportation policies and carrier sanctions.

What Balibar has called a 'double regime of the circulation of people' (Balibar in Simoncini 2000: 32) has transformed into multiple regimes of exclusion produced through the proliferation of border controls throughout the accession countries. The EU enlargement eastward is creating a new external EU border that will separate the future EU member states of central east Europe<sup>17</sup> from the non-members.<sup>18</sup> The EU candidates are required to apply Schengen-type border and visa regulations toward those countries not included in the EU enlargement. This 'domino effect' (Dietrich 2000: 123) is achieved through establishing the 'Safe Third Country' rule. Safe third countries such as Poland, for example, have introduced EU-like asylum regulations which enable Polish authorities to deport undocumented migrants from Polish territory to the detention camps in Ukraine and Belarus (FFM 1998: 6). The domino effect can be further noticed in the introduction of visa requirements for countries further east. For example, the Czech Republic included Ukraine, Russia and Belarus in their proposal for new visa policies (Bort 2000: 6). Additional measures include amendments to the aliens law and the strengthening (or introduction) of laws against human trafficking in accession countries. These operations shift the responsibility for border protection and anti-trafficking measures from the EU to EU candidates and turn the accession countries into a kind of 'buffer zone' or, as Andreas puts it, 'into the EU's new migration gatekeepers' (2000: 8).

The construction of 'new' borders<sup>19</sup> creates a hierarchy between the EU states and third countries, and hints at the new geography of power of the future enlarged Europe (Regulska 2001). By this I mean that EU external borders are relational spaces upon which is inscribed the materialization of power relations not only between the EU and accession countries but

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also as new division between the EU candidates and non-candidates, namely between politically 'stable' and 'unstable' eastern European countries. Borders are not simply static demarcations: the effects of new borders do not merely extend outward to sanction new partitions but also are the effects of a set of institutional practices and discourses that extend inward into 'the EU', defining some people and nations as 'belonging' and others as 'not-belonging'. A communication from the Commission of the European Communities to the European Parliament is quite explicit on the matter: 'The conclusion of the European Council [of Leaken in December 2001] reminds us that coherent, effective common management of the external borders of the member states of the Union will boost security and the citizen's sense of belonging to a shared area and destiny' (COM(2002) 233: 2).

#### **Constructions of Victimhood**

Within the discursive economy of illegal migration, the border becomes a site of crime. It is a locus where the law is broken and where the established order is violated by those trying to cross undocumented. In the press, the visual rendering of border-crossings are highly gendered. The following question springs from these observations: when the border becomes a metaphorical and material reality for marginalization that produces gender-differentiated layers of in/visibility, how are female migrants talked about? The prevalent absence of women from visual depictions of border-crossing comes with a discursive scenario where migrant women are figured not as protagonists but as characters endowed with little or no agency:<sup>20</sup> while male migrants are portrayed as central characters of border-crossings, migrant women tend to fall out of view and gain visibility when portrayed as war refugees and/or as victims of trafficking. Newspapers abound with accounts of young, naïve, innocent victims lured into prostitution by malevolent traffickers:

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.

This newspaper clip from *Il Resto del Carlino* (18 July 1999) portrays these women's story in terms of deception into illegal migration and prostitution. It also places their chronicles alongside numerous other

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stories of the same kind and, by doing so, suggests the presence of a vast volume of East–West Europe trafficking. *Topoi* of a collective deception and dispersal is also brought into play in an educational booklet for high school students, jointly produced by Brescia City municipalities in northern Italy and the local Caritas group: ‘Many young women in precarious living situations and eager to gain freedom get attracted with false promises of social and economic gain, and accept an offer to come and work in the West . . . The numbers suggest hundreds of thousands, maybe a million young women dispersed all over the streets of Europe (2000: 4)’.

Such references to the magnitude of trafficking and emphasis on the deceptive and coercive nature of a contract between migrant women and third parties are not characteristic exclusively of the press and religious sources. The tropes of ‘waves’ of trafficked women and of trafficked women as ‘victims’, are deployed by a number of feminist scholars too. 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 where numbers diverge by hundreds of thousands.<sup>21</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, as I shall argue below, obscure the relationship between illegal migration and the juridico-material creation of borders on the one hand while they deploy a particularly gendered image of migration on the other.

In their investigations of trafficking of eastern European women for prostitution, some feminist scholars who have approached the topic from the perspective of migration and globalization (Phizacklea 1996; Anthias and Lazaridis 2000; Kofman et al. 2000) associate trafficking with illegal migration and perpetrate the narrative of victimhood. Phizacklea, for example, writes that ‘trafficked women are often deceived and coerced into illegal migration’ (1998: 31), while Orsini-Jones and Gattullo, who have examined the issue of women’s migration and trafficking in Italy and Bologna in particular, observe that migrant women ‘are part of the very sad “slave trade” flourishing across Europe’ (2000: 128). The work of these feminist scholars has been path-breaking in introducing the important element of gendered relations of power in the study of migration and in theorizing the globalization of labour from a gendered perspective. However, the emphasis on the exploitation of women’s sexual labour in

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the destination countries in studies on trafficking and prostitution fail to investigate the ways in which borders and visa regimes affect trafficked women's lives. Have all trafficked women been coerced into migrating to Italy? In what way and with whom did they cross the border and reach their destination? Were women undocumented or did they possess passports and visas? If they were in possession of a visa, how did they obtain it?<sup>22</sup> How long was the visa valid for?

#### **Coerced across the Borders . . .**

In the respondents' accounts, having or not having a visa is linked to the way in which they crossed the border and to the length of that crossing. The difference between documented and undocumented border-crossing is most apparent in the narratives of respondents who were 'trafficked' to Italy twice: first on foot without a visa and a second time by bus with bought tourist visas. When the respondents crossed the borders undocumented on foot, in a truck or by boat, descriptions of their first journey constitute one of the central elements of their narratives and include detailed descriptions of the events and actors involved. In her account, Oksana recalls the number and names of women and traffickers with whom she travelled, the weather conditions when they crossed the Slovenian-Italian border, the vegetation surrounding them and even the state of the ground they walked on. When those same respondents returned to Italy for the second time with a valid visa, they travelled by plane or bus, crossed the international borders quickly and smoothly, and did not tell much about the practicalities of their travel. The disparity between the descriptions of undocumented and documented forms of travel is grounded in the degree of danger or risk the respondents underwent during the undocumented travel: the fear of being caught by the border police, being sexually abused by the traffickers, contracting a disease or an illness during a prolonged travel, having little or no control over the terms of the travel and therefore being dependent on the traffickers.

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 went to hire an agency to buy her visa and organize the trip to Italy. Yet, due 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>23</sup> After months of waiting for the situation to improve, Liudmila finally decided to contact



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a trafficker who brought her to Italy in four days upon the condition that she work in prostitution. To some respondents it took longer to reach Italy because the group with which they travelled was intercepted by the border police. The unsuccessful crossing resulted in deportation from Austria in Kateryna's case and prohibition of entry into Hungary in Larisa's case. A few weeks later each of the respondents embarked upon another crossing via a different route: Larisa arrived in Italy from Albania by boat and 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 women's awareness of the necessity to cross the borders secretly, as reflected in Kateryna's remark: '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 to Italy undocumented; traffickers provided some with necessary travel documents. Realizing that she will 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 tourist visa valid for 15 days that was bought for her by two Russian women working as prostitutes in Italy. Oksana and Ioanna (Olga and Natasha in the newspaper clipping mentioned above on p.000) reached Italy in two days. As the newspaper reports, they travel to Italy by bus. However, they did not enter Italy undocumented but were in possession of short-term visas which they bought, through an agency, with the 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 is quite difficult, if not impossible, to travel undocumented with a regular international bus line across Europe, the newspaper article reports that two respondents were 'illegal'. This conflation of trafficking with undocumented migration sustains and strengthens the representation of trafficking as necessarily a form of illegal migration. It relies on a distinction between 'illegal' and 'legal' migration which is oversimplified: a number of respondents entered Italy with a valid visa, but became undocumented after having overstayed the length of the granted visa.

As the above examples indicate, 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 might have

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legal elements such as legally obtained visas while legal migratory processes might involve illegal components such as 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 a ground for detention and deportation. Hence, the fear of being caught by the police and returned to the point of departure enhances migrants' dependency on the third parties and contributes to their conditions of confinement.

#### **. . . and Deceived into Trafficking?**

Besides kidnapping, the Italian press offers meagre information regarding the various ways by which women and traffickers get into contact. One of the few examples I came across concerned two women who responded to a newspaper ad in Moldova placed by an agency promising earnings up to US\$800 per week (*Il Resto del Carlino*, 17 October 1999). An examination of the respondents' life-stories disclose a more complex reality of trafficking systems. In the respondents' accounts, third parties involved in organizing the journey to Italy were many and carried out a number of different tasks. The respondents do not portray the initial contact with individual recruitment people or agencies as abusive. This does not mean that the respondents are naïve when it comes to the third parties' economic interests. Nevertheless, the respondents do not underestimate the importance of the third parties' involvement and often refer to them in a manner similar to that of Oksana's account: 'They help girls to find a job in a foreign country.' Some parts of the network through which women are offered employment and access to Italy, and for which they subsequently work, seem to be part of a larger criminal network. Other trafficking systems, on the contrary, cover a wide variety of people such as taxi drivers, housewives and restaurant owners who seem to supplement their income through 'passing the word'. If on the one hand trafficking is a 'multi-billion dollar industry' (Ram 2000: 1), on the other it also seems to be an integral part of the local and informal economies of some eastern European countries.

Interestingly enough, the newspaper clipping on p.000 does not report on the nature of the advertised job, thereby perpetuating the idea that third parties inevitably deceive foreign women into prostitution. In contrast, Wijers and Lap-Chew (1997: 99) point out that the majority of women who migrated through trafficking know about the nature of the work but



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are often unaware of the conditions they will work under. My findings point in the same direction as the work of Wijers and Lap-Chew. Within the larger group of respondents, disparities of the modes of entry into trafficking surfaced between those women who were deceived about the type of labour they were expected to perform and those who were informed that they were expected to work as prostitutes. For the respondents from the former group, prostitution was not an option. In her story, Ivana recounts how, instead of working as a waitress in Switzerland as agreed with third parties, she was forced through the use of physical violence into leaving Croatia and then prostituting in Italy.

As for the latter group, the fact that the respondents were told that they are to work in prostitution did not imply that they were informed about the working and living situation upon arrival. A respondent who accepted her lover's offer to work in Italy as a prostitute, for instance, was not aware of the conditions she would be working in, such as long hours, a large number of clients and the constant control by the third party or the peers. Another respondent was told more precisely what she was expected to do. Oksana, who was about to return to Italy for the second time, asked her friend Ioanna if she would like to join her and described her previous experience of street prostitution. (See again the newspaper clipping on Olga and Natasha mentioned on p.000 which tells the story of the same respondents with emphasis on deception.) Ioanna states that she arrived to Italy prepared: '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, from the examination of the 'contract' between a third party and the respondent emerges that the respondent did not know that she would be required to surrender most of her earnings and prostitute under the conditions of confinement which made it difficult to retract from the contract.

Even so, for this group entering into a prostitution contact emerged as part of a bigger migratory project. At this point, I would like to reiterate that at the time of the interviews, all of the respondents have already left prostitution. Given the fact that my evidence is limited to this specific category of migrant women, it is impossible for me to know whether interpreting prostitution – in its intersection with trafficking – as a migratory project is representative of the larger population of trafficked women or if it is specific for a group of subjects who have already left prostitution and construe their experience of trafficking in terms of a migratory project. Notwithstanding its interpretative limits, an investigation of entry into trafficking systems and prostitution from the perspective of the respondent's lives generates new insights into the complexity of trafficking.

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Hence, entering the trafficking system and consenting to prostitute was merely a means to an end, as for Ana, who ‘just’ wanted to ‘get to Italy’, unconcerned about the details of her work in prostitution. For Ioanna, coming to Italy was linked to the lack of opportunities at home: ‘I am twenty-three years old and now I am able to take care of the things on my own. I came to Italy because there was no job for me back home. Initially I said no, but if there was no work then going to Italy was the last chance to find a job.’ While Ioanna left the Ukraine planning to improve her and her family’s situation, Kateryna left Romania in order to break away from her depressive state caused by 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.’ For these women, migration to Italy for work in prostitution is part of a project designed to lead them out of poverty, lack of employment, lost self-esteem, family abuse, interrupted education and a general sense of life stagnation. Paradoxically, my data suggests that the EU borders, visa-regimes and restrictive immigration regulations that aim at suppressing trafficking and hampering the illegal movements of people work in favour of the third parties who organize trafficking, whether individuals and agencies, because they become a kind of supplementary migration system or even an alternative to the EU regulated migration. In fact, for a number of interviewees, entering Italy via trafficking systems was a means of travel and migration.

### **Setting the Crime Scene**

Next to the exposé on victims, texts from the press, religious and feminist sources also put forward numerous portrayals of traffickers. For example, the authors of the joint City of Brescia and *Caritas* educational booklet present traffickers as follows: ‘Smuggling in people and trafficking in arms, drugs, and cheap labour are all closely connected to the traffic of foreign girls. Due to an excellent and very close communication network, the criminal web spreads across all countries of eastern Europe. Its terminals are fashion, employments and travel agencies’ (City of Brescia et al. 2000: 6). Using the image of an overarching criminal web, this booklet represents trafficking as all-encompassing and even perhaps unavoidable for women found at its ‘terminals’. Another example comes from *Schiave d’occidente* mentioned earlier, where traffickers are portrayed as ferocious criminals who affirm their masculinity through physical abuse: ‘There was no need of a valid reason to unleash Genti’s rage.



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A mere pretext, invented in that very moment, would do. Each time I returned from working [on the street], he greeted me with a good beating . . . Of course, he also raped me in order to affirm his rights of ownership' (Moroli and Sibona 1999: 39). Throughout the book, the authors intervene in the text by combining their own views on trafficking with the direct quotes from women. This type of operating is best visible in the last sentence of the above quote where the point of view of the teenage character filters the authors' viewpoint of prostitution in terms of expression of male sexuality based on women's domination. This type of authorial manipulation of characters' perspectives produces a narrative which inscribes 'other' women as victims of violent men (usually from their own patriarchal culture).

In her reading of 'western feminism and third world prostitute' through the work of Wendy Brown, Doezema points out that 'the desire for the protection of injured identities leads to the collusion with, and intensification of disciplinary regimes of power' (2001: 33). Western feminist strategies, such as those in *Schiave d'occidente*, that aim at illustrating the horrendous 'reality' of trafficking by focusing exclusively on male violence and exploitation of women, re-enforce the idea of foreign women as powerless victims, and of foreign men as violent. Moreover, the authors do not question the role of the Italian state or immigration regulations as pivotal factors in sustaining migrants' social and political exclusion and their vulnerability to violence. Instead, they look to the authorities in the effort to combat and suppress trafficking.<sup>24</sup> In a similar manner, the authors of the *Migration Dossier 1999*, published by *Caritas*, assume the illegal and criminal nature of trafficking and put forth the measures to combat it through 'the creation of the special border-police, . . . and financial and technical support for the poorer countries in order to achieve better border control' (1999: 31).

The *topos* of violence is popular with the press too. Newspapers often highlight that migrant women who press charges against their traffickers are intimidated with threats of violence: traffickers threaten women's families in their home countries, or the women themselves. These women therefore face an enormous risk in returning home or reporting the crimes of which they have been victims. 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 programme. While I recognize the importance of legal measures that protect victims, I am wary of the ways in which Article 18 institutionalizes and essentializes



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the rhetoric of victimization. It requires that applicants leave prostitution, disqualifying in this way the possibility that for some women prostitution might be part of their migratory projects, and establishes a normative narrative of victimhood grounded in very particular forms and patterns of violence. For example, when the threat of violence upon returning home or the danger of traffickers' retaliation is not clearly discernible from a woman's story, immigration officials do not accept her claim to stay in Italy. In Natalya's case, for example, her request for a residence permit on the basis of Article 18 was rejected by the authorities, which rejection was justified as follows: 'Currently, there are no concrete dangers for the safety of the claimant, which would be caused by the claimant's attempt to escape organizations that exploit prostitution.'<sup>25</sup> In this way, the current legal conceptualization of trafficking not only disqualifies women's agency by establishing a normative narrative grounded in forced migration, coercion into prostitution and economic exploitation, but also penalizes those women who fall out of the established norm. By being refused access to Article 18, they are unable to legalize their status, and might be deported.

A respondent who told to *La Repubblica*<sup>26</sup> that she cannot return home because of a dangerous situation awaiting her there gives another version of the story in the interview. She explains that mentioning the threat of violence was a strategy to be allowed to apply for a special residence permit for those people who were trafficked against their will and who are at risk of serious violence if returned to their country of origin. This strategy was suggested to Oksana by the foreign police officer responsible for her case. While there is no adequate space here to get into the ambiguous aspect of this police officer's position, I would like to stress that presenting one's self as a victim is indeed indispensable if an undocumented migrant woman is to use the legal immigration apparatus to her advantage and obtain the right to remain in Italy. I am not suggesting that episodes of violence do not occur. However, I am interested here in the rhetorical use of violence that creates a discursive space able to accommodate various narratives of violence. Although I have focused on women's experiences of migration as a way of countering dominant discourses and representations of trafficking, I am not arguing that women's narratives are not informed by established discourses, nor that they are necessarily in an oppositional relationship with them. However, at the same time, the topic of violence points to the complexity of the production of the victimhood narrative: its plot lends itself for manipulation because of its being already available within the mainstream discursive scenario on trafficking but, simultaneously, its appropriation feeds into and further sustains the dominant rendering of trafficking in terms of crime and violence.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have mapped threads of the current official Italian discourse on trafficking of women from eastern Europe for the work in prostitution. From the perspective of the actors partaking in this debate – press, religious and feminist organizations – trafficking in women for prostitution is regarded as a form of coerced migration. Migrant women are portrayed as victims deceived into trafficking, and forced into illegality by the traffickers. Traffickers are represented mainly as ‘foreign men’ joined in organized criminal networks that stretch across the whole of eastern Europe. Tighter control over the external EU borders and stricter immigration laws are called upon as indispensable measures to rescue migrant women, apprehend the traffickers and combat trafficking.

In contrast, I suggest that the official re/presentation of trafficking is highly gendered and re/produces stereotypical narratives of femininity and masculinity. The narratives of victimization and criminality are a form of contemporary fiction that discloses the dissymmetry of power relations in the new Europe. I argue that in order to investigate trafficking in its contemporary European dimension, one needs to tackle the issues of migration in relation to the formation of the EU and its enlargement eastward. Viewed within this framework trafficking emerges as intrinsically linked to the interception of undocumented migration, the enforcement of border-regimes, and the tightening of immigration regulations. Rather than inviting stricter border control to prevent trafficking, the migrant women’s narratives suggest that for them, making use of the trafficking networks became one of the few available means of informal labour migration. Given the gap between official discourses on sex trafficking, policies and respondents’ narratives, I argue 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. Trafficking as such is an inadequate category to account for the complexity of current social-political transformations in Europe and women’s experiences of international migration.

As discussed in the third section (see pp.00–000), a number of feminist scholars who have investigated trafficking from the perspective of migration and/or globalization fall short of addressing critically the convergence that some anti-trafficking campaigns and governments establish between trafficking, illegal migration and crime. Instead of remarking casually, as Lazaridis does, that the ‘lightly protected borders’ (2001: 92) facilitate trafficking of eastern European women into Greece, a politically and theoretically informed feminist scholarship should, in my view, bring to



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the fore the material terrain of the EU immigration regulations, and address the implications of strict Schengen border regime and visa policies on trafficking in women. Interrogating the effects of the border-regimes of the new Europe and its material and legal apparatus, in particular the processes of recruitment into trafficking and cross-border travel, and theorizing trafficking within the context of the EU enlargement, might help us to challenge our current understandings of trafficking, and of migrant women as duped into trafficking. Not to take issue with the notions of coercion and deception means to bolster trafficking as a criminal activity rather than a phenomenon predicated upon legal, political and economic inequalities. This reasoning would allow a move away from that perspective which sees the countries of eastern Europe as the main producers of crime and trafficking, and would reallocate the responsibility for persistence of trafficking onto the EU member states.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Open Society Institute for its support of my doctoral research during the academic year 2001/2. I also wish to thank Anne-Marie Fortier and Claudia Castañeda for their extensive comments and incredibly laborious editorial work, Bridget Anderson, Sarah Bracke, Rosi Braidotti, Bettina Knaup and Joanna Regulaska for their insightful suggestions on previous versions of this text, and finally, Elsa Antonioni, Elspeth Guild and Sandro Mezzadra for encouraging my work. A very special and warm thanks to Diana Anders, whose friendship and support made this result possible.

### **Notes**

1. This is the phrase with which the respondents greeted me during one of our first meetings. All the quotes from the conversations and the interviews with respondents as well as the excerpts from newspaper, religious and feminist sources have been translated from Italian into English. The translations are my own.
2. I use the terms eastern and western Europe to indicate distinct geopolitical areas. I put them in inverted commas and do not capitalize the

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- terms in order not to perpetuate images of two static blocks. In the post-1989 era, and especially at the moment of the European Union (EU) enlargement, this conceptualization would be erroneous. From here on, west and east Europe will be used without inverted commas.
3. By 'western Europe' I mean the EU member states.
  4. While people might be trafficked for purposes of domestic work, prostitution, entertainment industry, agriculture and construction work, this chapter is concerned exclusively with trafficking for prostitution. The inverted commas are used to indicate my criticism of the term 'trafficking', which I develop in the chapter. In order not to burden the chapter with too many inverted commas and repetitions, from this point onward trafficking for prostitution will appear simply as trafficking and without inverted commas.
  5. I am paraphrasing the United Nations' *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons* that constitutes an internationally agreed-upon definition of trafficking. The Protocol was adopted in November 2000 at the UN Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.
  6. For more than a decade, the city has housed several innovative projects on trafficking, such as *Moonlight* working as an outreach street project, and *Progetto Delta* aiming at social protection and/or voluntary repatriation of trafficking victims.
  7. I borrow the term 'conditions of confinement' from O'Connell Davidson. With this term she intends 'conditions that prevent exit from prostitution through the use of physical restraint, physical violence or the threat thereof, or through the threat of other non-economic sanctions, such as imprisonment or deportation' (1998: 29).
  8. Even though Romania is an EU candidate it is considered to be lagging behind the other candidates and until recently (January 2002) its citizens needed a visa to enter Schengen territory.
  9. The newspaper clippings have been collected between 1998 and 2000 from *La Repubblica*, a national daily, and *Il Resto del Carlino*, a Bologna local daily newspaper. The clippings are relevant not only for their portrayal of trafficking in general, but also because they concern the very same women I had interviewed.
  10. *Slaves to the West: Tracing the Routes of Traffickers of Women*.
  11. By 'New Europe' I mean the post-1989 Europe influenced by the end of the Cold War, which entailed the restructuring of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and the integration of the EU and its enlargement eastward.

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12. See among others *la Repubblica* (Italy), *El País* (Spain), *de Volkskrant* (The Netherlands), and *Der Spiegel* (Germany).
13. I examined *La Repubblica* during the years 1999 and 2000.
14. Today the Schengen area is comprised of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.
15. In his work King (1993) criticizes these claims and shows that in 1990, according to Eurostat Demographic Statistics, the total amount of third-country aliens in 12 countries of the EU did not exceed 2.5 per cent. A similar argument is found in Bort (2000) concerning the link between cross-border crime and undocumented migration. Bort shows that the initiatives to prevent cross-border crime in the border regions between Schengen and accession countries have little to do with a 'real' amount of crime perpetrated by the citizens of the accession countries.
16. Europeans became acquainted with those technologies in 2000 when 58 Chinese people were found dead in a Dutch truck after it had reached England at Dover.
17. Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania are considered pre-accession countries, and their entry into the EU should take place in 2007.
18. Albania, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.
19. 'New' indicates that the character and function of these borders are new, whereas their geographical locations are not.
20. Biemann has made similar observations concerning the Mexican-US border (2000).
21. 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 million (IMADR in McDonald et al. 2000: 1) and four million people (Ram 2000: 2). As far as trafficking on women from eastern Europe into the EU is concerned, some EU sources report on 500,000 women (ibid.) 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).
22. In some countries one cannot find an Italian embassy. For example, citizens of Ukraine needed to go to Budapest (Hungary) to present a visa request.

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23. The respondents report that an agency charges between US\$360 and US\$500, depending on the country of departure, for a visa and a bus ticket to Italy. By way of comparison, those informants who worked as school teachers or secretaries in Moldova or Ukraine earned between US\$20 and US\$30 per month.
24. It is no coincidence, perhaps, that Arlacchi, the Director General of the UN Programme of Drug Control and Crime Prevention, provides the preface to *Schiave d'occidente*.
25. P.p. n. 3349/96–21 R.G. P.M. dated 26 November 1998. The Italian Immigration Law has recently been revised since the Government found it to be too permissive. A new clause, which considers illegal entry into Italy a criminal offence, was introduced. Accordingly, if an illegal person re-enters Italy after deportation, he or she could be punished with six months to one year of prison. If the same person enters illegally for the third time, imprisonment will vary between one and four years.
26. The exact date of the article is withheld for the safety of the informant.

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