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**ANDRIJASEVIC, R (2010) *MIGRATION, AGENCY AND CITIZENSHIP IN SEX TRAFFICKING*, PALGRAVE.**

## **CHAPTER 2 THE CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION**

### **Desiring to leave**

‘Do not ask us why we are here, ask us rather how we got here.’

Liudmila

### **Introduction**

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 promise of work, 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>1</sup>

In the style common to media stories of trafficking, the passage above from Bologna’s daily newspaper speaks of unaware victims and preying criminals. This description goes hand in hand with the image of wide-scale deception and dispersal as the journalist infers that women are illegal migrants and compares the experiences of Olga and Natasha to that of many other women from eastern Europe. Whether it is

journalistic, scholarly, governmental or non-governmental sources, reference to the large-scale of 'trafficking' are deployed in order to stress the enormity of the problem and urgency to combat it. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that at least 2.45 million people have been trafficked globally between 1995 and 2004 into forced labour, including sexual exploitation (USDOS, 2009: 8). The US Department of State assesses this number to be between 600,000 and 800,000 each year (USDOS, 2006: 6). As for Europe, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime approximates that each year 250,000 women are trafficked in Europe for the sex sector (UNODC, 2009: 8).

And yet, far from being trustworthy these numbers are arbitrary and unreliable. The accuracy of these estimates came under question when the US Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed the numbers put forward by the US government and brought attention to the methodological weakness, gaps in data, and numerical discrepancies. The GAO report critiqued the US government's statistics for being compiled by a single person without evidence to back up the numbers, the impossibility to replicate the estimates, and a large discrepancy between observed and estimated numbers of victims.<sup>2</sup> This discrepancy is best shown when the estimated numbers are compared to the data held by the International Organisation for Migration's (IOM) database on victims of trafficking. The IOM data indicate that between 1999 and 2005 fewer than 8000 victims of trafficking have been assisted by IOM missions in 26 countries (GAO, 2006: 12).

Whether one works with estimates or with the existing data sets, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is rather difficult to collect numerical data of 'victims of trafficking' due to the precarious and often irregular position of migrants, the situation

of control under which they might be working, fear and distrust they have towards the police, and the divergent definitions of what constitutes 'trafficking'. However, what these numbers do show is that there is a large gap between estimated and real numbers and that much caution is needed when invoking tens of thousand of victims. As references to the magnitude of 'trafficking' are not backed up data and when so, these rely on questionable statistical estimates wherein numbers diverge by hundreds of thousands, there is a need for caution when referring to 'trafficking' being of 'epidemic proportions' (Pickup, 1998: 44) or on 'explosive increase' (Molina and Janssen, 1998: 16). Uncritical deployment of images of wide-scale deception misinterprets the reality of contemporary migratory movements by identifying women's migration for the sex sector with a 'very sad "slave trade" flourishing across Europe' (Orsini-Jones and Gatullo, 2000: 128) and all too easily feeds into moral panic surrounding migration and sex work.

In this chapter I examine what led women to migrate and the ways in which they organised the travel and reached their destination. I am interested in bringing to the fore the plethora of factors and desires that informed women's migration to Italy and which remain obscured by the reference to the magnitude of sex 'trafficking' and the emphasis on use of coercion and deception as its key features. These posit mobility as a consequence of third party's forceful action or an outcome of women's economic desperation. Against the tendency to reduce mobility to an imposition or to an economic logic, I look at the interaction between women and third parties, whether individual or agencies, who facilitated their travel and at non-economic factors such as gender-based violence or a desire for a romantic relationship that, as I show, are of no less importance in understanding women's migration than the financial need. It is

not abject poverty, brute force, or sheer deceit that propelled women to migrate and take up sex work, but rather the desire for economic, affective and geographic mobility. Migrant women's accounts of how, where, with whom, and how long they travelled before they arrived in Italy and their determination to pursue their projects undeterred show how restrictive visa policies and strict borders control produce conditions that exacerbate migrant women's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

What this chapter brings into focus then is the gap between women's accounts of how and why they migrated and the dominant rhetoric of trafficking. This discrepancy is particularly visible in the case of Olga and Natasha who, contrary to what the newspapers reported, were neither naïve nor deceived into prostitution. Rather, they returned to Italy for the second time to work again in street prostitution on a three-month contract but now for a different third party. They were also not illegal but in possession of a passport and travelled on the tourist visa. Women's accounts of their migration to Italy challenge the narrative of victims and organised crime and point to the need to take issues with the accepted notions of deception and coercion as constitutive of eastern European women's migration for sex work. I begin by tackling questions relative to the travel and 'recruitment' process and investigate respondents' cross-border movements. I suggest that the impact of border controls and visa policies on women's lives is a crucial element to be considered in the analysis of the women's migration in Europe. In the final section of the chapter, I discuss how privileging poverty as the primary determinant of migration deflects the possibility of identifying the plethora of motives which inform women's migration and of seeing migrant women as complex subjects pursuing the desire to change their lives.

## **Past and present routes into migration**

In the following sections I look at women's previous migratory experience, examine the type of actors through which women organised and carried out their travel to Italy, and interrogate the notion of deception. These dispute a clear demarcation between voluntary and involuntary processes of migration and the subsequent inclusion of third party controlled sex work migration in the latter category.

### *Migratory Histories*

The concept of 'trafficking' conveys the impression of women's abrupt and unexpected departure caused through third party's intervention. This characterisation comes close to the idea of inexperienced and naïve women kidnapped by the 'traffickers'. That such representation are problematic is best visible when attention is paid to women's previous experiences of migration and to the time it took women to decide whether and how to leave for Italy. Most of the women, as I show in this section, had previous experience of labour migration or were familiar with women who migrated to work in restaurants, do domestic or sex work abroad. Some were unsuccessful in their attempts to migrate, got arrested and deported before reaching Italy. Once they were returned home, they left again as 'home' was where they started off and where they did not want to be in the first place. As Larisa put it: 'After I returned home I didn't know what to do next ... all of those problems were there again'. A number of other women went to Italy twice, working each time in third

party controlled street prostitution and returning home for a couple of months in-between.

Some respondents 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. Others women worked in the entertainment sector where some did cabaret which primary entailed dancing and others combined dancing with occasional sex work. Maja, for example, left Russia and came to the Ukraine where her mother lived. Once in the Ukraine she left for Lebanon where she worked as a cabaret dancer on a three-month contract basis. Oksana and Ana both worked in a cabaret in Serbia where agents proposed that they switch to sex work in Italy. While Oksana relocated directly to Italy, Ana arrived a couple of months later having first returned home to Moldova. Others again alternated entertainment work with petty trade. 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 and approximately a year later, she left for Italy for entertainment work in a nightclub.

That women's migrating to Italy did not occur due to a third party's forceful intervention becomes discernable if attention is paid to the amount of time that passed between when women first contacted a third party and the actual moment of departure. When studies take this aspect of the migratory process into consideration, the results indicate a lapse of a week or less between initial contact with a third party and the actual departure. Scholars use this data as evidence of the organisational

capabilities and swift functioning of ‘trafficking’ networks (Orfano, 2003: 199). My data present only one case that supports such a claim. In the case 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. Third party imposed on Ivana a quick departure in order to manipulate the respondent easier and to keep up the deception about the type of the work she was expected to perform abroad. 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. For all other women, the process of deciding whether or not to leave lasted considerably longer, at times lasting even between six months and a year. To give 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 about 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 spoke with a group of women recently back from working in street prostitution in Italy. While what they told her made her doubt the validity of the decision to migrate, one of the women who just returned from Italy convinced Sasha that Italy was a good place to work. Sasha consequently 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 for Italy for street sex work. Ioanna decided to give it a go and during the months preceding the departure inquired what sex work consists of and how to do it and started learning Italian so as to be able to orientate



herself better once in Italy. Women's migration to Italy was not an abrupt act orchestrated by a third party. It rather evolved out of women's social-economic context and their individual needs and desires. As respondents' migratory histories and the span of time that preceded their decision to migrate dispute the distinctiveness of 'trafficking' operations and signal a close similarity to other forms of labour migration, I turn to examine the interaction between women and third parties that resulted in their leaving for Italy.

#### *Recruitment process or meeting the right people*

In the studies on 'trafficking', the term recruitment is typically used to indicate a person who 'first proposed or imposed the travel abroad to the victim by means of fraudulent or open offer' (Orfano, 2003: 196). Scholars by now agree that the sensational narrative of women being kidnapped and forced into prostitution, still dear to the press, is more the exception than the rule (Maluccelli, 2001, UNICEF et al., 2002: 7). My study of twenty-five women also presents an exception. Only one respondent, Ivana, was deceived the about type of the work and coerced into migration to Italy through use of force. 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. Ivana and her husband met with the couple to arrange the travel details, 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 while he was making the travel arrangements, Ivana was brought to Italy against her will. In this case, the respondent was approached directly by the recruiters, deceived about the type of work, 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.

While Ivana's account of her arrival in Italy corresponds to the UN Protocol's classification of what constitutes trafficking, other women's experiences do not fit the same pattern. Respondents' accounts of how they got in touch with third parties and who these were complicate the view that women's migration is the outcome of third party's organised and intentional action. My data indicate 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 who had already migrated or were themselves acquainted with others who were working abroad.

Women often initiated the first contact by asking their female acquaintances if they knew of people who could organise their trip and find work for them abroad.

Following this initial exchange of information, respondents were usually referred to an individual or an agency which provided the services they 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 female friends of theirs worked in street prostitution. These friends, who had been living in Italy for several years

already, promised to help the respondents in looking for a ‘normal’ job.<sup>3</sup> One of these friends sent Liudmila money in order to apply for a visa. However, at that moment Liudmila found no agency able to arrange an Italian visa. In order to solve the visa issue, the friend put the respondent in contact with a person who could help Liudmila reach Italy on condition that she works 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.’ Similarly, Larisa’s friend in Italy put her in contact with a man 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, Larisa got inserted in a group of four young women who were all about to leave for Italy, among them a friend of hers returning to Italy for the third time.

Contrary to the experiences of Liudmila and Larisa, Oksana was contacted by a ‘recruiter’ previously unknown to her and asked whether she would be interested in leaving the 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 how, on several occasions, she was 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 passed that information onto others and proposed to others to enter a sex work contract too. During a ride home in a taxi, Oksana started a conversation with the driver about the difficult economic situation in the Ukraine. Both she and the driver complained about the lack of work. After a while, the driver asked if Oksana knew of

women who would be interested in working abroad in a nightclub in Serbia. They exchanged phone numbers in case the respondent would come to think of anyone who might be interested in the 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. Oksana recounts the event as follows:

[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? 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’.

When, some weeks later, the respondent decided to leave the Ukraine together with a female friend for Serbia, she phoned the taxi driver who then put them in contact with a woman running an agency. The woman explained about the type of work in the nightclub, handled their travelling arrangements and accompanied Oksana, her friend and a couple of other women to Novi Sad in Northern Serbia. After two weeks of work in the nightclub, the third party who managed Oksana’s work in the club suggested that she leaves Serbia for sex work in Italy. The respondent agreed, left for Italy and having fulfilled her three-month contract, returned to the Ukraine. Some months later, a female friend with whom Oksana worked in prostitution phoned her from Italy and asked whether she would like to return to Bologna and work together

again. 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, they borrowed the money from the Albanian boyfriend of the woman who originally invited Oksana to Bologna. After an agency arranged for the visas, Oksana and Ioanna purchased the tickets and left the Ukraine for Italy. In Bologna, both women came to prostitute for the Albanian who lent them the money for the visa fee and the bus fare. Contrary to the newspaper clippings at the beginning of this chapter that describe them as unaware, deceived and 'illegal', Olga and Natasha, the pseudonyms for Oksana and Ioanna, carefully planned their migratory project, entered into a sex work contract with a third party, and arrived in Italy with valid travel documents.

As these accounts illustrate, agencies play an important role in the migratory process. While some women 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, women got in touch with an agency after reading an advertisement for work abroad in a local paper. The agencies are differently organised, vary in size and in the services offered. Some agencies specialise in facilitating travel, others in employment or both (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2003, Pastore et al., 1999). As the following example illustrates, agencies arrange and profit from organising the movement of migrants or from acting as intermediaries between migrants and third parties recruiting women for sex work in Italy. Living in Moldova, Ana initially contacted an agency because she wanted to leave for Moscow and do sex work there. She was however discouraged by a female friend of hers who told her that in Moscow, the police are likely to arrest her immediately upon 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 nevertheless and went to an agency to inquire again about her leaving:

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.

As in the case of Oksana and Iaonna, this episode also points to the difficulty in separating clearly between informal networks and formal agencies or (individual) private recruiters when investigating the way in which women arranged the travel logistics. At the same time Ana negotiated her departure to Italy, she also arranged for a female friend of hers to leave too. Ana relied on informal network comprised of friends or acquaintances to gain initial information about migrating abroad rather than being approached by a person unknown to her and then coerced into migrating. The majority of respondents did not portray their initial contact with individual recruiters or agencies as abusive. Rather, in Oksana's words, they are those who 'help girls to find a job in a foreign country'. Taxi drivers, restaurant owners and housewives all

facilitated respondents' contacts with the agencies. These networks 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 Ruhs, 2008). All of these appear to be an integral part of the local and informal economies in respondents' countries of origin. Through such networks, a variety of individuals supplement their income through contacts and clients. The individuals and agencies on whose assistance women 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 confinement and exploited their labour in street prostitution upon arriving in Italy. Informal networks, individual recruiters and agencies among others all intervene at different stages of the process, often having no interest in controlling and/or exploiting migrants' labour but instead profit from the recruitment and movement of persons. Similar profile of small-scale informal networks have been found to operate also in case of independent migrant sex workers, such as undocumented Latin American women working in indoor establishments in the Spanish-Portuguese frontier region (Ribeiro and Sacramento, 2005). These widely recurrent patterns of recruitment and travelling call into question the notion that exploitative or abusive labour situation in the sex sector is the outcome of coerced migration or third party's organised and intentional action to profit from migrant women's labour in prostitution.

### *Reconsidering 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 numbers of feminists, the discussion has evolved around the question whether women did or did not know that they will be working in prostitution. The available research has shown that a considerable percentage of migrant women agreed to work in the sex industry but were unaware of the living and working conditions in the countries of destination (Gülçür and İlkaracan, 2002, Maluccelli, 2001, McDonald et al., 2000, Orfano, 2003). While this is an important aspect to highlight, in particular as situations of exploitation in the sex sector are often viewed as a consequence of deception about the nature of the work, it is also necessary to consider that when the emphasis is placed on deception (or lack of it), the analysis of 'trafficking' remains caught in the web of moral arguments surrounding prostitution. Unaccounted for remain the terms of agreement reached (or not) between the parties concerning specific living and working arrangements.

It is obvious that those women 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 sex-work contract. However, neither have they negotiated the terms of the contract for work in a restaurant or a private home. This situation is not much different to the one in which women agreed to sex work but knew very little about the concrete working conditions. As an illustration, we can look at the account of Kateryna. Having accepted her lover's offer to migrate from Romania to Italy and work as a prostitute, Kateryna was not aware of the conditions in which she would be



working such as the long hours, the high number of clients and the constant control by a third party or peers. Reflecting on her decision to go to Italy, Kateryna commented:

He [the boyfriend] told me what my job would 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 pay share.

The vagueness concerning the terms of work is typical also of the accounts of those respondents who said 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 and asked her if she would consider coming along next time. Ioanna described arriving in Bologna for sex work with the following words: '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.' Yet, a closer analysis of the respondent's narrative shows that by 'I knew it all' Ioanna meant that Oksana described how the monetary 'exchange' between a prostitute and client works. This was explained with an explicit conversation in which Ioanna was told that she would be working specifically in street prostitution. 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 party's thought that they would be working indoors (cabaret or night club) rather than on the street. So, even though Oksana shared with Ioanna her previous experience of street sex work and they negotiated the pay and the length of the stay, they expected to work independently and reimburse the third party the money he lent them to pay for the visa fee and travel fare. The respondents did not expect that they will have 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 thought 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.

The fact that women consented to sex work was no guarantee that upon their arrival in Italy they would have been able to work independently of the third party and keep their earnings or that agreeing to work in the sex sector meant that they were in control of their working conditions and free of exploitation and abuse.

Contrary to what might be expected, for some respondents the terms of the contract did not play a key role in their migratory project. 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 situation 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'd have taken care of it all by myself.

While some degree of deception about the working conditions in sex work can be found in all respondents' accounts, a narrow focus on whether women consented or not to prostitution hinders a comprehensive analysis of labour arrangements in third party controlled street prostitution and in considering that some women might not be concerned about the working conditions at all, as they saw the contract with the third party merely as a means to an end. 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, by means of deception, a person has been recruited and transported by a third party into exploitative working conditions so as to profit from her labour, then the ambiguity lies with the notion of deception itself. 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. Third parties might profit from migrants' recruitment or travel rather than from their labour. The vagueness of the notion of deception, together with force, coercion and exploitation as distinctive components of trafficking establish then an oversimplified and ultimately erroneous demarcation between voluntary and involuntary processes of migration. This is particularly important since violence, coercion, deception and exploitation may also occur in voluntary and legally regulated systems of migration and employment.

### **The Difference Borders Make**

In tackling issues relative to women's travel and work arrangements, there is a need to ask specific and rather detailed questions about the travel itself. Some of the questions I ask in the following sections are: 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? In posing these questions, this section aims to make visible the ways in which immigration and visa regulations and border controls contributed to creating conditions that exposed migrant women to heightened levels of vulnerability and labour exploitation.

*Dealing with visa and border controls*

Dependency on a third party or an agency to arrange travel to Italy is due to the tightening of formal EU migratory channels for certain groups of people. In fact, none of the women would have qualified for an EU tourist visa which would have allowed them to enter at an official border post and travel with 'regular' means of transportation. Being granted a tourist 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 in case of work or study, also a letter from the employer (or school) certifying a labour contract or school enrolment. Most of the women could have fulfilled one, maximum two of the above requirements since none of them knew a person who could have acted as a guarantor for them or could provide evidence of sufficient funds to finance their stay in Italy. Moreover, a visa applicant is requested to present herself in person, which requires additional funding especially when the visa granting Consulate is not where women 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 make the process deliberately more difficult by establishing a number of rules and procedures that make it extremely difficult for certain groups of people to obtain visas (Apap, 2001).

An example of the difficulty to obtain official permission to enter to Italy through a Consulate is illustrated by Svjeta's account. Svjeta was in possession of the residence and work permit granted in Italy specifically to victims of trafficking under the Art. 18 of the Italian Immigration Law. She left Italy for a short visit to the Ukraine in

order to visit her daughter and husband with whom she had had little contact over the past few years. Shortly before returning to Italy, the husband confiscated her Italian residence permit so that she could not leave for Italy. Being unable to convince him to give her back the document, as at that time there was no visa granting Italian consulate in the Ukraine, Svjeta travelled to the Italian Consulate in Budapest, with the intention of obtaining a copy of the permit and returning to 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 rejection, Svjeta contacted the Women's Shelter in Bologna that according to Art. 18 was respondent's legal guarantor and assisted her in fulfilling the obligations linked to the residence permit. 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 Woman's Shelter asked the Head of the Foreigners Police in Bologna to intervene who then 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 that the Head of the Foreigners Police call in person, only then granting the respondent an entry visa.

Next to illustrating the difficulties migrant 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 expenses from the Ukraine to

Hungary as well as the costs of several hotel stays. Since the whole procedure took more than four weeks, Svjeta considerably overstayed the time she had taken off from her job and was consequently fired. Even though a third party might charge more than the official Consulate's visa rates,<sup>4</sup> women knew that they were not likely to obtain a visa without contacts and a large sum of money. Yet, in certain situations even agencies who specialised in visa procedures found it impossible to arrange a visa. A striking example comes from Liudmila who hired an agency to arrange her visa and organise the travel 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>5</sup> After months of waiting for the situation to change, Liudmila finally decided to contact a third party who arranged for undocumented travel and brought the respondent to Italy in four days under the condition that she works in prostitution.

Respondents' accounts point to women's awareness of needing to cross the borders secretly. Kateryna puts it like this: '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.' She herself was unsuccessful in crossing the border into Austria:

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 fell 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 fours. 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.

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.' The above quote underlines the determination and the wilful intent of the women to succeed in crossing the border which challenges descriptions of coerced and involuntary migration put forward by the notion of 'trafficking'.

Not all respondents arrived in Italy undocumented; agents provided some women with the necessary travel documents. Realising that she would have to cross the border on foot because the third party was initially not 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 arranged for her by two Russian women working as prostitutes in Italy. Oskana and Ionna, alias Olga and Natasha from the newspaper clipping mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, reached Italy in two days having travelled by bus. Contrary to what the paper reports, they did not enter Italy undocumented but with short-term visas arranged through an agency with money borrowed from a third party. This money covered the costs of the visa, travel from the Ukraine to Poland, a night in a hotel in Warsaw and a bus ticket to Bologna. Women's accounts suggest first, then that not all migrants who are irregular have entered into the EU via irregular channels. The women who travelled with a visa became undocumented after having overstayed the length of the granted visa. These considerations need to be read in the light of EU governments' position that trafficking equals illegal migration to be deterred via stricter border policing. The existing research for Italy offers a different picture of migratory flows. The data by the Italian Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that the majority of third country nationals residing illegally in the country

have not crossed its borders undocumented but have entered the country with valid entry clearance becoming undocumented either once their visas expired or after they overstayed their residence permits (Caritas/Migrantes, 2005). Secondly, 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 such as requests for high fees advanced by the agencies or even illegal payments asked by Consulates. If arranging a visa is not cheap and easy, migrants will not be able to access, even when available, formal governmental migratory channels (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2003). Instead, they will resort to irregular channels that, as I discuss in the following section, in turn take advantage of migrants' legal vulnerability whether by charging higher costs for travel and documents or by profiting from their labour.

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

Having or not having a visa is linked to the ways in which the women crossed the borders 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 respondents who travelled to Italy twice: first time on foot without a visa and a second time by bus with a tourist visa. When women crossed the borders undocumented on foot, in a truck or by boat, descriptions of the journey constituted a central element of their migration narrative and included detailed descriptions of events and actors involved. For example, Oksana recalled the number and names of

other travellers, weather conditions when they crossed the Slovenian-Italian border, the vegetation and even the conditions of the ground they walked on. When respondents returned to Italy for the second time with a valid visa and travelled by plane or bus they crossed the borders quickly and smoothly. In stark contrast to the narratives of their first borders crossing, in their accounts of the 'legal' crossing, women remember very 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 'illegal' experience. The fear of being caught by the border-police, being sexually abused, contracting a disease during the prolonged travel, or having little or no control over the terms of the travel and therefore being dependent on the third party, all produce a highly traumatic experience that women remember in quite some detail.

The longer the journey became, the more the respondents were exposed to threats of abuse or sexual violence from agents, contracting a disease or developing a dependency on alcohol to deal with the conditions of travel. Moreover, arranging for transportation without any initial capital to pay for the cost of the travel meant incurring a debt with the agents. As the journeys got longer, the amount of debt increased and respondents become increasingly vulnerable to violence and labour exploitation during the journey. Larisa's story exemplifies well the vulnerability induced by debt-migration. After being deported from Hungary, Larisa contacted another agent in Moldova who promised her that she would reach Italy in ten days; Larisa set off for a journey that lasted two months and which took 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 because she could not cross at official border posts as she was not in possession of a visa. To pay back these debts, Larisa took short-term jobs working in cabarets at different points in 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>6</sup> At the border between Romania and Serbia, 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 transaction has 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'. The consequence of this transaction was that the respondent contracted a debt towards the third party 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.'

In order to pay off the debt of 750 EUR so she could continue to travel to Italy, the respondent had to work in a cabaret in Serbia in a situation where she had no control over her earnings. This situation considerably reduced Larisa chances to negotiate the amount of time to be spent in the cabaret and the amount of money to be paid 'back'. Continuing her travels towards Italy via Albania meant undergoing a similar process once again. The continuation of travel was now in the hands of a 21 year-old Albanian man who abused Larisa sexually 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 overheard that their travel to Italy was to be organised 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 abused her in Albania. Based on the debt Larisa 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. The respondent's undocumented status resulted in her contracting debt and making her dependent on third parties in order to continue her travel. This situation increased Larisa's vulnerability to violence and exploitation and allowed third parties to gain control and achieve profit from exploiting her labour.

In addition to being vulnerable to the abuse by third parties, undocumented status exposes migrants to ill-treatment that often accompanies undocumented migrants' apprehensions by border police. An example comes from Kateryna who got intercepted by the border police when crossing undocumented into Austria:

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 day 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. 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 migrant detained in the same prison. Having being deported meant that Kateryna was barred from utilising formal migration channels in the future, which in her case meant she would not have been able to obtain an EU visa for the next five years. Deportation then increased the respondent's dependency on individual recruiters or agencies to reach Italy and exposed her to additional risk of abuse that migrants encounter during undocumented travel.

My data show that in their aim to channel migrants into legally sanctioned migration schemes and prevent labour exploitation in countries of destination, visa regulation and border controls produce situations that, in fact, increase migrants' vulnerability to abuse and exploitation and the involvement of third parties in facilitating travel and employment arrangements. Consideration of the link between border controls and conditions of vulnerability need therefore to be taken into account by scholars of trafficking because the border is a significant element of anti-trafficking policies (Segrave, 2009) and laws regulating the conditions of entry into the EU contribute to rendering migrant women vulnerable to abuse and labour exploitation during their

travel and, as I discuss in the next chapter, at their destination. Hence, far from preventing trafficking, stricter immigration controls have unintentional consequences such as serving the economic interests of third parties by increasing the amount of migrants' debt and raising the level of control these third parties exercise over migrants. Quite paradoxically, immigration regulations that aim at suppressing 'trafficking' and hampering the illegal movements of people work in favour of third parties as these become an alternative to the formally sanctioned EU migratory channels.

### **Projects of Autonomy**

In her analysis of how 'sex trafficking' is constructed and operates as a discourse, Jo Doezema elicited that the recurrent incidence of the term 'poverty' in relation to 'sex trafficking' functions as a rhetorical device which locates migrant women in prostitution as innocent victims and secures the victim/villain binary (Doezema, 1999). Taking, as an example, migrant women from Eastern Europe, employed in the sex industry in the EU, when not portrayed as victims of deceit or coercion, they are described as victims of pressing poverty which is given as the reason which impelled them to abandon their countries of origin. Emphasis on poverty leads to a rather problematic reading of migration in terms of a rational economic action.

Understanding poverty merely in terms of economic deprivation, as I show in the following sections, fails to consider the role poverty plays in relation to women's subjectivities and obscures a plethora of factors and desires that informed women's migratory projects.

## *Poverty*

When asked what brought them to Italy, the motivation women most frequently put forth is that of poverty. Reference to poverty and economic hardship typically opened most of the respondents' accounts. Poverty, as in case of Ioanna, is used to describe a situation in which the income of the family barely sufficed to cover the basic needs such as food and housing: 'You know, back home we are not that well off. Back home my mum and I worked at the market but the money we would earn was hardly enough to buy food.' Poverty is also used to describe the difficult living conditions of 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 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 all the workers lost their jobs.

It is unquestionable that the lives of women and their families have been affected by economic hardship. In the literature, poverty is considered for the consequences it has on women's and girls employment and education and is often quoted as a trigger to women's migration. While regional differences should be taken into account when considering the impact on women of the economic restructuring, as a general trend scholars agree that women's socio-economic situation has worsened across eastern Europe and that economic restructuring has affected women more severely than men



(Becker-Schmidt, 2002: 8). Economic restructuring entailed a transition from a planned to market economy and the subsequent liberalisation of trade which overlapped with the process of European integration. The pressure to be competitive resulted in the reduction of spending on welfare, food, and agriculture subsidies as well as in cuts in healthcare and education (Adam, 2002: 12). The primacy EU gives to its economic agenda and to reconciliation of family and work in its gender related policies in eastern Europe, led to the deterioration of social and economic benefits for specific segments of population such as young women (Koncz, 2002, Regulska, 2001: , Roman, 2001, Siemeienska, 2002). The cuts in public education resulted in the reduction of educational benefits, which had negative repercussions for women and girls.

The research project on women in transition economies completed by International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights examined the status of women in twenty-nine countries in eastern Europe and fSU. The report signalled that due to a high level of economic crisis and increased poverty, women present a high level of dropouts from school, especially in fSU where the state abandoned control over compulsory education. In Moldova, girls' education has been affected both at primary as well as university levels, and the number of female students has greatly decreased. In Romania, for example, the difficulties created in the transition process resulted in high dropout rates in secondary schools. In Serbia, women have been moving out of education and into the 'informal' economy (IHF, 2000). When it comes to the labour issues, the report highlights increased levels of women's poverty and unemployment. For example, since 1997 in Romania, while both women and men are affected by high levels of unemployment (18-20 per cent), women are more exposed to unemployment

due to their labour positions in sectors subject to economic restructuring (IHF, 2000: 350). In Moldova where 80 per cent of the population lives in poverty, the economic crisis caused by restructuring and privatisation disproportionately affected women and unemployment increased due to reduction of personnel in low-income light industries employing mostly women (80-85 per cent). In comparison to 1994, when the rate of women's unemployment was 8.9 per cent, at the end of the 1990s the rate had increased to 17.8 per cent for women and 10.2 per cent for men (IHF 2000: 314). In the Ukraine, a high level of underemployment is typical for women's labour. Women are highly educated but the level of education rarely corresponds to employment requirements. Due to the socio-economic crisis, women's employment rate has been declining since 1995, and some 3 million people lost jobs in 1997-8 due to the closing of production lines and received no money for wages. Consequently, one-third of the population profits from unofficial work and so-called 'shadow economies'. Women form the majority of the population forced onto the streets and into selling and buying goods in the marketplace. Young women under the age of 30 are the most vulnerable in this situation and they amount to 44.3 per cent of the total number of unemployed women in the Ukraine (IHF, 2000: 476).

Looking at education and labour is crucial in order to comprehend women's lives within the context of socio-economic restructuring. The respondents, aged between twenty and thirty, belong to the first generation of young women who have been raised and educated in eastern European and fSU countries during the 'transition' period from socialism/communism to a neo-liberal market economy. Poverty certainly played an important role in the development of women's desire to leave. However, the recurrence of the poverty theme put forward in women's narratives as the main

reason for migrating is too significant to overlook. While the situation of economic necessity was a concrete fact that impacted the lives of women prior to migration and needs to be acknowledged as such, I suggest that due to its recurrent position at the very opening of the narratives, the topic of poverty is best referred to as an isotropy which plays a crucial role in the construction of respondents' subjectivities. The scrutiny of the isotropy of poverty in relation to the life stories at large elicits a correlation between the theme of poverty and that of prostitution.

As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 4, the motif of poverty operates as a mechanism through which women disavowed sex-work. In establishing an objective situation of poverty as the main factor behind their migration, women distanced themselves from the doubts that they might have that worked working in prostitution is associated with looking for sexual pleasure or out of financial greed. The emphasis on poverty at the very start of women's narratives sets up a discursive frame centred on economic need. Once this is established, women can return to it at different points of their narratives and reassert that they are not really prostitutes. For example, women distinguished between the desire to possess money i.e. characteristic of prostitutes— and the need to earn money, namely the circumstance they relate to their own experience of migration. They were also always careful to emphasise 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. Throughout the narratives then, poverty reaffirms time and time again that the respondent is not a prostitute. The reference to poverty needs to be examined beyond its immediate relation to economic need and in relation to its function in resisting the 'whore stigma' (Pheterson, 1996). The prominence of the motif of poverty is also likely to conceal the fact that women's

migratory projects developed out of a more complex set of factors and desires such as a pursuit of financial independence, 'escape route' from patriarchal social relations (Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000: 7), search for (emotional) autonomy from the family, and ultimately a desire for mobility.

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

Prior to their departure for Italy, a number of the women attended high school or university, some had a job, and some worked and studied at the same time. Only a few of the women had just primary school education while the majority completed secondary school, some type of professional school (e.g. medical nurses) or 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. It also points out that before migrating, women were not unemployed but usually held a job in a variety of occupations such as factory work, petty trade, office work, nursing or teaching (Hopkins and Nijboer, 2004, Orfano, 2003, Della Giusta et al., 2008: 65). Being without work therefore was not per se a motivation for migrating. Rather, the impossibility of making ends meet even with a job and the lack of future prospects were factors that informed women's migratory projects. Respondents quite often spoke about the lack of prospects in words similar to Maja's who said: 'Looking for jobs at home was useless.' Alternatively, like Ana did, they spoke in a disillusioned tone about the difficulty of achieving things 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.' Sasha, who at the time was studying at the university in the capital

of Ukraine, puts it in terms of the desire to change 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'.

The lack of employment opportunities and future prospects provoked in women feelings of frustration and anger. Oksana described this situation as follows: '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?'

The feeling of frustration was also due to pressure put on the respondent by other family members to look for employment. Oksana, who at the time was living with her mother, referred to it in 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!'

Some other women did not frame the need for employment in terms of social expectations but, rather, stressed their awareness of the difficult economic situation of their families coupled with an understanding of the need to earn money 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'.

Ioanna speaks of that desire to leave and of the willingness to take the risk in realising it: 'I thought, "I'm leaving no matter what might happen. There's nothing to do here!"' As we can see, pressing poverty does not come up in women's narratives as a

key determinant to migration. Rather, the accounts suggest that the lack of employment opportunities and/or future prospects, the desire for economic improvement and independence from the family, and search for alternative resources all feature prominently in women's migration projects (Corso and Trifiro', 2003: 28).

### *Intra-family Violence*

Respondents' decision to migrate was at times also influenced by factors such as intra-family violence including physical and sexual abuse. While some women complained about sexual harassment at the workplace and being laid off when turning down their male superior, the majority of respondents were exposed to intra-family violence that most often took the form of physical abuse and in one occasion that of (attempted) incest. In Kateryna's case family violence was frequent. Her mother divorced the abusive father when Kateryna was six years old and remarried another violent man who as the mother's previous husband also sexually harassed the respondent. Another respondent, Ester, was caught in a family situation of physical violence and abuse: the father physically abused the mother and occasionally beat up the respondent as well. The father made all of the major decisions about the household and disobeying him would result in a beating. The violence reached its peak when, trying to impose absolute obedience, the father threatened the mother and two sisters with a firearm. While Ester identified strongly with her mother, she was also frustrated by her mother's lack of initiative and inability to leave the husband. In an emotionally loaded description of her parents, Ester told of how back then she had hated them both and expressed the need to separate herself from the mother: 'I think

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’.

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 the case of poverty—to their migratory projects. Or, as in Ester’s account of violence above, the respondents were more likely to speak of how the father was abusing the mother than of the abuse they themselves had experienced. This absence was due not only to the difficulty of talking about acts of abuse, or the indifference towards abuse perhaps considered so common/ordinary and therefore a side issue, but also to the fact that bringing up the family abuse would have disrupted respondents’ narrative of themselves as active agents. Intra-family violence has been found to constitute one of the factors that plays an important role in women’s decision to migrate (Kofman et al., 2000). By not linking the violence suffered explicitly to the desire to leave, respondents distanced themselves from the position of a ‘victim’ and positioned themselves as protagonists of their migratory projects. As for other types of women’s migration, the respondents stressed their determination to undertake a solo migration project and to support their families financially.

*Projects of Autonomy from the Family*

The disappointment and disagreement with parents, lack of respect, humiliation or a feeling of not being wanted all contributed to women's wish for separation from the family, desire for autonomy and search for ways of realising it. An illustration comes from the account of Ivana who accepted the offer to work abroad hoping to earn enough money to support her husband and two children. That money would allow them to move out of her husband parents' flat where they had no space of their own and were at the mercy of 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 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 her short-term labour migration abroad as a way of improving their financial situation which would have allowed them to rent a flat on their own and live a more independent and less humiliating life.

Other respondents expressed a similar desire for autonomy from the family, usually communicated through episodes of disappointment towards one or both of their parents. Often, they would portray their father as a drunkard or as an absent and abusive figure. Oksana was deeply disappointed that her father was drinking and unable to provide financially for her or the family. Snezana spoke of how she and her four siblings were abandoned by the mother who left when she could no longer stand her husband's abuse. Snezana describes her own relationship with her father as nothing but a series of abuses of various kinds. Another respondent, Kateryna, had no relationship with her father and was disappointed with him because of being a drunk. Yet, while avoiding him, she also wished 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 was 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.

In the same way that Kateryna perceives herself as a burden to her mother, so does another respondent, Ana. Ana's parents accused her of stealing money from them and threw her out of the house. She spent some time with her grandmother and then returned home. Ana describes with the following words the event that occurred upon her return home:

I came back home and I thought that maybe they have realised 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!’

Recounted by means of direct speech and comparison, this episode is invested with the meaning of a breaking point from the family. A *staccato* effect, achieved using the direct speech to relay her mother’s words, works to stress the veracity of mother’s words. The comparison on the other hand contrasts the love of the mother to that of the grandmother allowing the respondent to conclude that the grandmother is the only one who ever truly loved her. Finally, relating sickness, blood and hurt to pain caused by parent’s refusal works to identify parents’ rejection as a painful wound.

Hence, women’s migratory projects also need to be read in relation to the desire to transform family relations rather than simply in terms of a pursuit of economic improvement to which references to poverty or economic hardship often reduce the impetus for migrating. For these young women, migration offered the opportunity to exit situations of family indifference or conflict and work towards achieving autonomy from the family. Respondents’ willingness to take the risk and migrate needs then to be seen in terms of the desire to transform affective familiar ties and gain parents’ recognition and respect.

#### *Ruptures and the search for alternative life projects*

Relationship or marriage break-ups and a desire for a new male partner played a role in respondents’ migratory projects too. While a number of respondents were at some

point engaged or married, none of these arrangements was still in place at the time they departed for Italy.<sup>7</sup> Several respondents got married at the age of eighteen and then divorced a year or two later. Oksana, on the other hand, got engaged and expected to marry not long before leaving for Italy. Yet, the marriage was suddenly cancelled and her fiancé married another woman. Oksana saw a direct connection between the break-up and her leaving the 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.

Oksana suggests that the 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 her first trip to Italy, she stayed for a while in the Ukraine and then, unsuccessful in her attempt to find a husband, she left again. For those respondents who were divorced, as for example Liudmila and Marisa, the desire to find a partner also played an important role in their migratory projects. Liudmila told of a female friend of hers who left for Italy and found a man with whom she was happy and spoke of her own desire to meet someone: 'I also wanted to meet the right person; the right person to be together with'.

Next to affective ruptures, interrupted further education influenced respondents' migratory projects as well. Sasha, who was studying economics, studied and worked

at the same time. At a certain point she was no longer able to find a job and faced a financially difficult situation. She realised that if she was to find a job as an economist and make a career, she needed to learn English. Similarly, Liudmila began her university studies but at one point, her family's financial situation worsened and they could not finance her education any more. As the 25 US Dollars they earned per month in the Ukraine and Moldova respectively was insufficient to cover their living and studying costs, both of the respondents opted for labour migration abroad as a way of earning money with the idea of continuing their university studies. A very powerful effect on respondents was exercised by the situation which combined affective ruptures with that of interrupted education. Kateryna, who had virtually no relationship with her mother or father, saw in her secondary school teacher a key figure of reference and support. The respondent was one of the most brilliant students in the school and won the Romanian national school chemistry contest. When, due to problems in her family, Kateryna could no longer concentrate on studying and she encountered again and again conflict with other students and teachers, she lost the support of her favourite teacher. After her grades dropped drastically from excellent to poor Taking, as an example, migrant women from Eastern Europe, employed in the sex industry in the EU, when not portrayed as victims of deceit or coercion, they are described as victims of pressing poverty which is given as the reason which impelled them to abandon their countries of origin, 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'.

Consequently, for Kateryna migration becomes a way of breaking away from the desperate situation into which she had sunk. She departs from Romania wanting to break away from humiliation at school and 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 this statement when she spoke of her leaving Moldova in terms of a hope for a different future: 'I ... came to Italy in order to change my life'. One needs to take her life into her own hands, otherwise 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.' For these young women, then, migration emerges of as project offering an exit from situations characterised by lack of employment, loss of self-esteem, family abuse, interrupted education and a general sense of life stagnation.<sup>8</sup> For that reason, migration to Italy is prompted by women's desire to (re)conquer financial and affective mobility. To dilute the complexity of women's desires and projects to the narrative of victims would mean glossing over women's struggles against the structural inequalities that shape their lives and failing to understand third party facilitated migration as an alternative migratory system for those who have no access to formal migratory channels.

## **Conclusion**

Measures to counter ‘trafficking’ in women for the sex sector have been driven by the assumption that ‘trafficking’ is orchestrated by organised criminal networks and ‘evildoers’ who manipulate women into migrating and mislead them into sex work. The implication is that when facilitated by third parties, women’s migration for sex work gets construed as non-consensual and illegal and women primarily in terms of victims. This perspective leads to policy measures geared towards deterring ‘trafficking’ via strengthening of international cooperation between law enforcement agencies and tightening the control over cross-border movements. Yet, these legal interventions heighten, as Nicholas de Genova put it, the visibility of ‘illegal immigrants’ and the invisibility of the law (De Genova, 2002). The emphasis on illegality locates the responsibility for the persistence of ‘trafficking’ with actors outside the EU and positions EU governments as not being implicated in proliferation of irregular migration or situations of migrants’ labour exploitation and vulnerability. Next to the observation that not all third party facilitated migration is clandestine, this perspective fails to acknowledge that migrants are moving via irregular channels precisely due to restrictions and controls imposed through EU legal interventions (Kapur, 2005). Stricter border controls and more restrictive immigration regulations do not protect migrants from abuse but rather make them dependent upon third parties to facilitate their migration and travel across international borders. Restrictive immigration regulations that aim to suppress ‘trafficking’, in fact criminalise the mobility of certain groups of people and paradoxically leave ample space for

profiteering and the abuse of migrants. There is therefore a need to examine in greater detail the link between EU immigration regimes and migrant women's vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.

When the focus is on deterring irregular migration or combating the prevalence of organised crime, the perspective of the migrant subject is overlooked. And yet, when not identified *a priori* with victims, migrant women's perspectives disclose a complexity of cross-border movements that cannot be adequately addressed through binaries such as illegal versus legal and involuntary versus voluntary migration. Quite the contrary, migrant women's accounts of how they came to migrate disclose a complexity of desires and projects and such a level of determination to pursue those desires that to consign migrant women to the position of the victims would constitute an act of epistemic violence. This is even more so as women's accounts of why and how they migrated are not exceptional, in the sense that they resemble other forms of women's transnational migration which see women as primary migrants. It is only by taking issue with the notions of coercion and deception and acknowledging migrant women's desire and pursuit of mobility that we can begin to address the uneasy question of how trafficking rhetoric and anti-trafficking legal interventions, legitimate and contribute to setting up hierarchically organised access to EU's labour markets and citizenship.

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<sup>1</sup> From Bologna's daily newspaper *Il Resto del Carlino*, 18 July 1999.

<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the report commissioned by the Home Office in the UK concluded that there is no quantitative evidence available for the UK either for adult or child trafficking DOWLING, S., MORETON, K. & WRIGHT, L. (2007) Trafficking for the purposes of labour exploitation: a literature review. London, UK Home Office..

<sup>3</sup> 'Normal' work stand for work other than sex work. All respondents distinguish between prostitution and other forms of work to which they refer as 'normal' work. I discuss the significance of this differentiation in chapter 4.

<sup>4</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.

<sup>5</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>6</sup> However, due to Romania's becoming an EU member state, Romania recently changed its visa policies and introduced visa requirements for citizens of Moldova.

<sup>7</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>8</sup> A study of migrants sex work in the UK comes to the similar conclusions in relations to reasons for migrating. The reasons are interrelated and include among other: job opportunity, improving of one's family living conditions, completing of education, escaping war, homophobia or patriarchy, and living more rewarding lifestyles MAI, N. (2009) Migrant Workers in the UK Sex Industry. Final policy-relevant report. London, London Metropolitan University..