

## PROBLEMATISING TRAFFICKING FOR THE SEX SECTOR

A case of eastern European women in the EU<sup>1</sup>

*Rutvica Andrijasevic*

We will call them Olga and Natasha. Their story equals the stories of many other girls from the East who came to Italy blinded by a work promise, and then forced into prostitution by a pimp, a man of no scruples. As soon as they got off the bus that brought them illegally from Moldova to Italy, they were taken over by Rimi, an Albanian.<sup>2</sup>

This excerpt, taken from an Italian daily newspaper, is typical of many recent media accounts of trafficking from ‘eastern’ to ‘western’ Europe.<sup>3</sup> In analysing such representations, scholars have pointed out that – as in the above newspaper clip – trafficking is commonly represented along a victim–criminal binary, portraying traffickers as male criminals who coerce and deceive women into engaging in illegal migration and prostitution and the women themselves as innocent young victims (Berman, 2003; Doezema, 1999; Sharma, 2003; Stenvoll, 2002; Sutdhibhasilp, 2002). Taking the victim–criminal binary as its starting point, this chapter critically assesses current representations and understandings of ‘trafficking’ as a matter of organised crime and of the women involved as coerced and deceived victims. Accordingly, my interpretative approach does not focus on violence against women, a privileged topic among many feminist scholars and activists. Rather, by placing ‘trafficking’ in the context of European integration, I propose to shift the terms of analysis from violence and organised crime to those of migration and labour.<sup>4</sup>

In dominant discourse, the term trafficking is often used in ways that collapse a large span of operations.<sup>5</sup> These involve, first, the recruitment and transportation of women from their departure to the destination country, and second, the living and working conditions upon arrival. As various scholars have argued (Anderson and O’Connell Davidson, 2003; Wijers and Lap-Chew, 1997), although a woman might find herself in slavery-like labour conditions (violence and/or threat of violence, confiscation of legal

documents, no freedom of movement) as a consequence of having been 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 various operations, focusing on the recruitment and transportation phase of trafficking. This methodological approach joins recent scholarship on trafficking which questions the assumed correlation between trafficking and organised crime and proposes to investigate the ways in which border and migration regimes foster the legal, economic and physical vulnerability of migrant women (Berman, 2003; Sharma, 2003; Sutdhibhasilp, 2002).

This chapter is based on interviews held in Bologna between October 1999 and February 2000<sup>6</sup> with 25 women, aged 18 to 25 years. These women, all of them originating from eastern European non-EU candidate countries,<sup>7</sup> came to the EU via trafficking networks and subsequently worked there as street prostitutes under various degrees of confinement and under conditions of economic exploitation.<sup>8</sup> At the time of the interviews, all of them had stopped working as street prostitutes and were struggling with questions pertaining to their new living arrangements, such as whether to return home or stay in the EU. Their accounts reveal some of the intricate processes that constitute the conditions for trafficking.

Throughout this chapter, I cast the women's narratives against the backdrop of representations of women's trafficking found in the mass media,<sup>9</sup> as well as in feminist sources. By looking at processes of representation and how meanings are produced and allocated in public discourse, my analysis sheds light on different and often overlooked aspects of trafficking. I question the dominant discourses of trafficking and map out some of the central elements which converge with the EU political agenda, thus helping to legitimate policies geared at tightening border controls.

I shall begin my discussion of how women's narratives challenge accepted notions of victimhood by scrutinising their accounts of border crossings and how they entered trafficking systems. In tackling questions relative to the travel and recruitment process, my work brings to the fore the ways in which strictly controlled borders actually encourage trafficking. Consequently, as I argue in this chapter, visa and border controls form a crucial element that must be included in an analysis of trafficked women's accounts of their migration experiences. Finally, I shall discuss the current trend towards the criminalisation of irregular migration in the light of the respondents' own accounts of their engagement with immigration law. I shall argue that privileging the narrative of victimhood forecloses the possibility of identifying the motives that inform respondents' migratory project, thus seriously limiting scholarly understanding of trafficking as a migratory system.

### Gendering the borders of enlarged Europe

During the past decade, various newspapers throughout western Europe have increasingly featured migration as an urgent threat, a crisis in need of containment (Dal Lago, 1999). In particular, the media portrayal of irregular migration – and specifically of trafficking – emphasises its magnitude. The newspaper clipping about Olga and Natasha quoted at the beginning of this chapter offers a good example. Next to portraying the two women's story in terms of deception into illegal migration and prostitution, it also places it alongside numerous other stories of the same kind. In doing so, it suggests a vast movement of east-west trafficking in Europe.

Such references to the magnitude of trafficking and an emphasis on the deceptive and coercive nature of the contracts between migrant women and third parties are not exclusively characteristic of the press. The tropes of 'waves' of trafficked women and of trafficked women as victims are deployed by a number of feminist scholars too. While Khalid Koser and Helma 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 figures provided by governmental and non-governmental bodies, in which quoted numbers diverge by hundreds of thousands.<sup>10</sup> The vagueness and ambiguity of these figures foster accounts of trafficking from eastern Europe presented 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 argue below, deploy a particularly gendered image of migration which obscures the correlation between irregular migration and the juridico-material creation of borders in response to trafficking.

The governments of the EU member states, associating trafficking with 'illegal' migration from third countries and organised crime, have responded to the alleged magnitude of trafficking by a tightening of immigration laws (Wijers and Doorninck, 2002). 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' (European Council, 2001). The intensification of border controls, in particular at the external borders of the EU, has been seen as a necessary condition for the establishment of a free area of circulation within the EU (Turnbull, 1999).<sup>11</sup> This relocation of control to the EU's external borders has led to the creation of what has been dubbed 'fortress Europe' or, in Étienne Balibar's words, a 'double regime of the circulation of people' (Balibar in Simoncini, 2000: 32). It is designed to facilitate and encourage the labour mobility of EU citizens, while simultaneously restricting the mobility of 'third-country' nationals. The EU enlargement process has moreover transformed

this double regime into multiple regimes of differentiated degrees of mobility between the EU, EU Candidates, and the non-Candidate states. As a condition for integration, the EU Candidate states are required to apply strict border and visa regulations with respect to non-Candidate states. In this way, the responsibility for border protection and for the interception of undocumented migration has been shifted from the EU to the Candidate states, turning the latter into a kind of ‘buffer zone’, the EU’s new migration ‘gatekeepers’ (Andreas, 2000).

While some scholars prefer to downplay the importance of borders, since borders do not constitute an impenetrable barrier, nor can they be controlled comprehensively (Bigo, 2003; Andreas and Snyder, 2000), others talk of a ‘war’ to give expression to the conflict taking place at Europe’s external borders and the human costs<sup>12</sup> it entails (Mezzadra and Rigo, 2003). Notwithstanding the different approaches, scholars concur in regarding the idea of fully policed borders, entertained as such by the sovereign states, as a ‘myth’ (Anderson, 2000: 25) and an ‘illusion of control’ (Bigo, 2003). However, borders and border-control have been described as playing an important psychological function in western European societies, namely providing a feeling of security and fostering citizens’ sense of belonging to the political community (Bigo, 2000; Snyder, 2000). Moreover, borders are not simply static demarcations. The effects of borders extend not only outwards to sanction new partitions, they also extend inwards the form of institutional practices and discourses, defining some people and nations as ‘belonging’ to the EU, and others as not. Borders’ symbolic role is thus intrinsically connected to their role, for example that of filtering ‘unwanted elements’ out of the migratory flow (Andreas, 2000: 4). Within the discourse economy of illegal migration, the border serves as 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 without the required documents.

In the visual media, the presented images of border-crossings are highly gendered. The absence of women in these depictions of border-crossing matches a discursive scenario in which migrant women do not figure as protagonists, but as characters endowed with little or no agency. While male migrants are presented as the characters of border-crossings, migrant women tend to disappear from view, reappearing only as war refugees and/or victims of trafficking (Andrijasevic, 2003).<sup>13</sup>

In their works on gender and migration, feminist migration scholars have accurately challenged mainstream migration theory based on the idea of the migrant family in which the man is perceived of as an economically motivated actor and the woman as his dependant, whether in an economic sense or in relation to the migratory project. In countering this mainstream fantasy, they have emphasised the role women play as ‘active agents’ in international migration (Anthias and Lazaridis, 2000; Kofman, 1999; Morokvašic, 1991). Yet, when it comes to trafficking, many feminist scholars remain

uncritical in associating trafficking with undocumented migration and hence perpetuating a narrative of passive victimhood (Phizacklea, 1996; Kofman *et al.*, 2000). Annie Phizacklea, for example, writes that ‘trafficked women are often deceived and coerced into illegal migration’ (1998: 31), while Marina Orsini-Jones and Francesca 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).

These feminist scholars’ characterisations of women within the trafficking networks are a far cry from portraying them as active agents. By incorporating certain aspects of the dominant discourse and portraying trafficking uncritically in terms of illegal migration and organised crime, these scholars ignore the multiplicity of women’s motives and modes of entry into trafficking networks. But if we take the trouble to ask specific questions about migrant women’s experiences, a different picture emerges. In which way and with whom did women cross the border and reach their destination? Were they undocumented or did they possess passports and visas? If they were in possession of a visa, how did they obtain it and for how long were those visas valid? By neglecting to pose such questions, feminist migration scholars also fail to question the ways in which the EU’s border and visa regimes affect women’s lives.

## **(II)legality, borders and trafficking**

In the respondents’ accounts, having or not having a visa is linked to the ways in which they crossed the border and to the time it took to get across. The difference between documented and undocumented border-crossings is most apparent in the narratives of those women who were ‘trafficked’ to Italy twice: first on foot without a visa and a second time by bus with tourist visas purchased by a (travel) agent. When the respondents crossed the borders undocumented on foot, in a truck or by boat, descriptions of the journey constituted a central element of the migration narrative and included detailed descriptions of the events and actors involved. In her account, Oksana recalled the number and names of travellers, the weather conditions when crossing the Slovenian–Italian border, the vegetation of the landscape and even the state of the ground they walked on. When the same respondents returned to Italy for a second time with a valid visa, they travelled by plane or bus, crossing the international borders quickly and smoothly. In stark contrast to the first crossing narratives, accounts of the ‘legal’ crossing offer few details about the journey. We can attribute the disparity between descriptions of undocumented and documented forms of travel to differences in the degree of risk and danger involved. The fear of being caught by the border police during their undocumented crossings, of being sexually abused by traffickers, of contracting a disease or an illness during prolonged travel, of

having little or no control over the terms of the travel and therefore being dependent on the traffickers, all of these produce a highly traumatic experience whose details are impressed in respondents' memories.<sup>14</sup>

Contrary to the idea that women are always forced or coerced by traffickers into illegal migration, some respondents tell how they were only able to realise their travel plans with the help of traffickers. A striking example comes from Liudmila, who hired an agency to buy her visa and organise her trip to Italy. But due to the instability in the region caused by NATO's bombing of Serbia, the agency in Moldova was unable to carry out this otherwise routine operation.<sup>15</sup> After months of waiting for the situation to improve, Liudmila finally decided to contact a trafficker who brought her to Italy in four days on condition that she worked as a prostitute. Some respondents took longer to reach Italy because the border police intercepted the group they were travelling with. For example, Kateryna, ended up being deported from Austria. For Larisa, also apprehended by the border police, arrest meant permanent denial of admission to Hungary.

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

Although such travel arrangements helped these women circumvent border controls, they did expose them to the danger of (sexual) abuse by third parties, or to detention and interrogation by the border police if captured during their border crossing. Having little or no control over the terms of the journey meant that the interests of third parties determined the women's travel routes and the length of travel (Koslowski, 2001). The proliferation of border controls and the introduction of new visa policies also raised the costs of travel.<sup>16</sup> Each border-crossing that a woman had to negotiate while travelling without documents from Moldova or Ukraine, for example, involved new expenses.<sup>17</sup> At times, women had to pay to be transferred from one agent to another, in order to be able to pay back the costs made during the previous segment of the journey and arrange for the next.

In other words, each segment of the journey was ascribed a monetary value which the respondents, having no financial means of their own, were obliged to pay off through sex-work performed at various locations during the journey. Hence, my research suggests that stricter immigration controls adopted to curb trafficking increase the costs of 'doing business' (Salt and Stein, 1997), raise the value of migrants as (labour) 'commodities' (Kyle and

Dale, 2001), and ultimately serve the economic interests of third parties. By extension, they increase the level of control third parties have over migrants, both during the journey and upon the arrival at their destinations (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2003).<sup>18</sup> Quite paradoxically then, increased control over migrants' mobility is not likely to curb transnational crime, but rather to heighten its involvement in migration, due to the increased profits that accrue from trafficking activities (Finckenauer, 2001; Koslowski, 2001: 351).<sup>19</sup>

Not all respondents arrived in Italy undocumented; traffickers provided some women with the necessary travel documents. Realising that she would have to cross the border on foot because the third parties were initially unwilling to buy her a visa, Snežana refused to leave until she had successfully negotiated a visa and a bus ride to Italy. Another respondent, Tatiana, flew from Moscow to Rome on a 15-day tourist visa bought for her by two Russian women working as prostitutes in Italy. Oksana and Ioanna (the Olga and Natasha of the newspaper clipping at the start of this chapter) reached Italy in two days by bus. Contrary to what the newspaper claims, the two women did not enter Italy undocumented. Through an agency, they had bought short-term visas with money borrowed from a third party. This money covered the costs of the visa, the trip from Ukraine to Poland, a night in a hotel in Warsaw and a bus ticket to Bologna. Even though it is difficult, if not impossible, to travel through Europe on a regular bus without documents, the reporting newspaper described these two women as 'illegal'. This conflation of trafficking with undocumented migration sustains and strengthens the representation of trafficking as a form of illegal migration. It relies on an oversimplified distinction between 'illegal' and 'legal' migration. In my research, a number of respondents entered Italy with a valid visa but became undocumented after having overstayed the length of the granted visa.

Hence, trafficking might have legal elements such as legally obtained visas while legal migratory processes might involve illegal components, like requests for high fees advanced by the agencies or even illegal payments asked by Consulates. My data concur with other findings that no clear-cut separation can be made between legal and 'illegal' migration in relation to trafficking (Anderson and O'Connell Davidson, 2003; Malucelli, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2000; Sharma, 2003). Moreover, any attempt to endorse a model based on such a distinction is extremely problematic. Uncritical subsuming of trafficking under the category of 'illegal' migration masks the fact that tightened immigration controls have starkly reduced the number of legal channels available for migration, so that in contemporary times illegality has become a structural characteristic of migratory flows (Mezzadra, 2001: 78).

### Deception and projects of migration

Media accounts offer little information on how women and traffickers get in touch with each other, except through kidnappings. An examination of respondents' life-stories reveals that in reality, trafficking systems are considerably more complex. In these accounts, third parties involved in organising the journey to the EU were many and carried out a variety of tasks. The initial contacts with individual recruiters or agencies are not described as abusive. This does not mean that the respondents were naïve when it came to third parties' economic interests. But neither did they underestimate the importance of third parties' involvement. In this sense, Oksana's account is typical: 'They help girls to find a job in a foreign country'. Some contacts through which women are offered employment and access to the EU, and for whom they subsequently work, seem to form part of larger criminal networks. Other trafficking systems, on the contrary, include a wide variety of people such as taxi drivers, housewives and restaurant owners who supplement their income by 'passing the word'. If, on the one hand, trafficking is a 'multi-billion dollar industry' (Ram, 2000: 1), on the other hand, it also forms an integral part of the local and informal economies of some eastern European countries. Indeed, in these countries, in a context of economic restructuring accompanied by high unemployment rates and the informalisation of labour, trafficking activities have come to form 'alternative . . . circuits for making a living [and] earning a profit' (Sassen, 2000: 523). By identifying the various operations and actors involved at different stages in the trafficking process, respondents' accounts show that recruiting agents often had no interest in profiting from the exploitation of women's labour upon their arrival in the EU, but instead realised economic gain through their recruitment activities or the travel arrangements that they provided. My data problematise the interpretation that sees trafficking exclusively in terms of recruitment and transportation for the sole purpose of exploiting migrant women's labour in prostitution.

Furthermore, the media rarely provide information on the jobs advertised, thus perpetuating the idea that third parties inevitably deceive migrant women into prostitution. A number of studies show that a considerable percentage of women from eastern Europe who came to the EU, Canada or Turkey through trafficking systems agreed to work in the sex industry but were unaware of the living and working conditions awaiting them in their countries of destination (Gülçür and Ilkcaracan, 2002; Maluccelli, 2001; McDonald *et al.*, 2000; Orfano, 2003; Wijers and Lap-Chew, 1997). While my findings point in the same direction, my data also suggest that when the emphasis is put on deception (or lack of it) as regards the type of work involved, then an analysis of the trafficking process remains caught in the web of moral arguments surrounding prostitution. Privileging the question of deceit in relation to prostitution tells us little about the terms of

employment that the migrants have (or have not) themselves negotiated with third parties and deflects attention from women's migratory projects.

Migratory projects, whether inclusive of sex work or not, emerge as a central element in respondents' narratives of trafficking. For Ana, who 'just' wanted to 'get to Italy', entering the trafficking system and consenting to prostitution was merely a means to an end. For Ioanna, coming to Italy was linked to the lack of opportunities at home:

I am 23 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 other work, then going to Italy was the last chance to find a job.

While Ioanna left the Ukraine planning to improve her own and her family's situation, Kateryna left Romania in order to break out of a depression 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 the EU forms 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. For the respondents then, entering the EU via trafficking systems was a means to travel and move on.

It is obvious that those respondents who were promised jobs as waitresses or domestic workers, and were then introduced into the sex industry, had not been informed about the terms of their employment in sex work. However, those respondents who did agree to a sex work contract were equally unknowing as to the details of that contract. We can look at the account of Kateryna for an illustration. Having accepted her boyfriend's offer to migrate from Romania to Italy and work there as a prostitute, Kateryna was not aware of the conditions under which she would be working. None of the specifics concerning working hours, the large number of clients and the constant control by a third party or by peers had been disclosed to her. Another respondent was told more precisely what she would be expected of her. Oksana, who was about to return to Italy for a second time, had asked her friend Ioanna if she would like to join her and had described her previous experiences as a street prostitute (see the newspaper clip on Olga and Natasha at the opening of this chapter, which tells the story of the same respondents with emphasis on deception into prostitution). Ioanna states that she arrived in Italy fully 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, examination of the verbal agreement between her and the third party reveals that she was not aware that she would be required to surrender most of her earnings and prostitute under conditions of confinement which made it difficult to get out of the contract.

My results confirm the conclusion also reached by other researchers that the term ‘victim’ is inadequate in depicting the condition of migrant women within trafficking systems (Maluccelli, 2001; Corso and Trifirò, 2003). This body of scholarship demonstrates that women are rarely kidnapped or coerced into migrating but that they rely on trafficking networks to realise their migration projects *whether geared towards sex work or some other type of work*.

While some degree of deception about the working conditions in the destination country characterised all of the respondents’ accounts of how they entered trafficking networks, a narrow focus, typical of much feminist writing on trafficking, on the question as to whether or not women consented to prostitution, hinders our understanding of the exploitative labour relations in street sex work. Bridget Anderson and Julia O’Connell Davidson (2003) argue that the concept of deception, as put forth by the dominant definition of trafficking, begs the questions as to how extensive deception should be concerning job content, rates of pay, working practices, work rate, and length of the contract among others in order to qualify the woman as a ‘victim of trafficking’. If, as in the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, the term trafficking refers to those situations in which a person has been recruited and transported, by means of deception, into exploitative working conditions by a third party intending to profit from that person’s labour, then the ambiguity lies within the notion of deception itself.

The vagueness of this notion, and its combination with the terms of force, coercion and exploitation as core components of the concept of trafficking, together establish an oversimplified and ultimately erroneous demarcation between voluntary and involuntary processes of migration. This is particularly important since violence, coercion, deception and exploitation occur also in voluntary and legally regulated systems of migration and employment. Moreover, the fact that the definition of trafficking presupposes an interrelation between deception and the subsequent exploitation of migrants on behalf of traffickers, conflates the range of interests that third parties might have in supplying migrant women with vague information concerning the working contract; it also ultimately criminalises a wide variety of actors who take part in different stages of the trafficking process.

### Setting the crime scene

Both the media and feminist sources offer numerous portrayals of traffickers. For example, Emanuela Moroli and Roberta Sibona, two prominent feminists in Italy, describe traffickers in their book *Schiave d’occidente* as ferocious criminals who affirm their masculinity through physical abuse:

There was no need of a valid reason to unleash Genti’s rage. A mere pretext, invented on the spur of the 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 narrative is best illustrated by the last sentence in the above quote, where the teenage character's perspective filters the authors' view of prostitution as an expression of male sexuality based on the domination of women. This type of the 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, Jo Doezema points out that 'the desire for the protection of injured identities leads to the collusion with, and intensification of disciplinary regimes of power' (Doezema, 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 the exploitation of women, reinforce 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 their effort to combat and suppress trafficking.

Newspapers often highlight that migrant women who wish to press charges against their traffickers may be intimidated with threats of violence: traffickers threaten women's families in their home countries, or the women themselves. Although the dangers of retaliation should certainly not be underestimated, again we must be wary of how, why and when narratives of violence are deployed. A respondent who tells *La Repubblica*<sup>20</sup> that she cannot return home because of the dangerous situation awaiting her there, gives another version of her story when interviewed by me. She explains that mentioning the threat of violence is part of a strategy to allow her to apply for a special residence permit; such permits are intended for those people who have been trafficked against their will and who risk serious violence if returned to their country of origin. This strategy was suggested to Oksana by the police officer responsible for her case. While there is insufficient space here to examine the ambiguous aspect of this police officer's position, I would like to stress that presenting oneself as a victim is indeed indispensable if an undocumented migrant woman wishes to use the legal immigration apparatus to her advantage and obtain the right to remain in Italy.<sup>21</sup>

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

that can 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 contradict them. However, at the same time, the topic of violence highlights the complexity of the victimhood narrative. Its plot lends itself to manipulation because it is 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

The emphasis on the suffering of women involved in what goes by the name of 'trafficking' can be understood in the light of some of the empirical evidence that has been collected by various researchers. This frequently underscores the violence and hardship these women encounter in their quest for access to the European labour market. As such, it is both morally and humanely praiseworthy. My work does not aim either to deny or underplay the suffering and pain experienced by women involved in trafficking. My aim is rather to both broaden and deepen the framework of reference by which these elements of hardship can be understood and analysed. I argue that too strong an emphasis on prostitution per se – with the related attention to the standard repertoire of women's oppression, including the role of men's violence – presents serious political and theoretical limitations. Instead of privileging the issue of violence and/or exploitation exercised by third parties in the sex sector, this chapter proposes examining trafficking from the perspective of migration. From this viewpoint it becomes clear how, through a shared dependence on the categories of 'victim' and 'organised crime', various conceptualisations of trafficking merge to generate a mutually constitutive nexus that masks the complexities of the trafficking process.

A migration perspective extends the discussion of organised crime and victimisation so as to include an analysis of the role that the EU's migration policies play in creating and maintaining the conditions that lead to trafficking. My work shows that when formal avenues of migration become inaccessible, migrant women turn to irregular channels. Stricter border controls and more restrictive immigration regulations aimed at preventing trafficking do not protect women from abuse but, on the contrary, foster migrant women's vulnerability to violence and exploitation during the travel and paradoxically leave ample space for profiteering and abuse. My data suggest that current EU mechanisms of migration control actually help to produce 'irregular' migration, channelling women into trafficking networks and consequently into prostitution. These considerations call for further analysis of how states increase migrants' vulnerability and dependence through a combination

of restrictive residency and labour regulations, thus providing scope for relationships of enslavement and domination.

As discussed above, a number of feminist scholars who have investigated trafficking from the perspective of migration and/or globalisation, fall short of addressing the convergence, posited in dominant discourse, between trafficking, illegal migration and crime. A politically and theoretically informed feminist scholarship should, in my view, bring to the fore the material terrain of EU immigration regulations, and address the role that these regulations play in creating the conditions for the proliferation of trafficking. This reasoning would allow scholars to reallocate the responsibility for the persistence of trafficking from eastern Europe, now perceived of as the main producer of crime and trafficking, to the EU member states.

Shifting the terms of analysis of trafficking from violence and organised crime to migration creates another crucial theoretical opening. This opening allows for stories of women's migration to emerge. When trafficking is defined in terms of involuntary migration and organised crime, the implication is that 'trafficked' women are the victims of a non-consensual process of migration and that 'traffickers' are criminals who recruit and move their victims in order to profit from their labour in prostitution. This definition of trafficking relies on a vague notion of deception in order to indicate that the victim has been misled regarding the nature and terms of her 'contract' prior to migration. My analysis of respondents' narratives demonstrates that there is a direct relationship between women's entering into trafficking systems and their search for ways in which to realise their migratory projects. Women's migratory projects are best understood, I suggest, as an expression of their desire and demand for mobility. Informed by both economic and non-economic factors, women's migratory projects include trafficking as a means of achieving economic improvement and creating new life opportunities. Respondents' narratives of the recruitment and travel phase of trafficking reveal an urgent need to examine how trafficking is experienced and negotiated on the one hand, and represented and institutionalised on the other.

My data urge feminist (migration) scholars to take issue with the notions of coercion, deception and victimhood and to investigate the complexity of desires and projects that migrant women articulate in their attempt to achieve social and material mobility via trafficking systems. To consign the complexity of women's desires and projects to the category of the 'victim' amounts to denying their resistance to structural inequalities and their struggle to transform their lives. Finally, migrant women's life stories suggest that the category of 'trafficking' is inadequate as well as misleading when trying to grasp the complexity of current political subjectivities. These migrant women's narratives press scholars to come up with figurations other than 'organised crime' and 'victims' in order to account for socio-political transformations in today's Europe.

## Notes

- 1 This is a revised version of an article that has appeared in French, under the title: 'La traite des femmes d'Europe de l'Est en Italie', *REMI* (2005) 21 (1). The author would like to thank Sarah van Walsum for the time and effort she put into editing this chapter.
- 2 *Il Resto del Carlino*, 18 July 1999. Author's translation.
- 3 I use the terms 'eastern' and 'western' Europe to indicate distinct geopolitical areas. I put them in inverted commas and do not capitalise the terms in order not to perpetuate images of two static blocs. In the post-1989 era, and especially at the moment of the European Union enlargement, this conceptualisation would be erroneous. From here on, west and east Europe will be used without inverted commas.
- 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. From this point onwards, trafficking for prostitution will appear simply as trafficking and without inverted commas.
- 5 See, for example, the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, adopted in November 2000, which defines trafficking in terms of forced transportation of deceived persons into exploitative and slavery-like conditions.
- 6 Together with Belgium, Italy is the only EU state to include a specific clause in its immigration laws that allows for social protection and legalisation of trafficking victims. As a result, women can be more easily contacted in Italy than in most other EU countries. For over a decade, the city of Bologna 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. *Casa delle donne per non subire violenza di Bologna* – part of the latter project – is where I have conducted my fieldwork and a large number of interviews.
- 7 Namely, Romania, Ukraine, Moldova, Russia, Croatia and Serbia-Montenegro. Even though Romania is currently an EU candidate, at the time of the fieldwork it was considered to be lagging behind the other candidates and hence until recently (January 2002) its citizens needed a visa to enter Schengen territory.
- 8 I borrow the term 'conditions of confinement' from O'Connell Davidson. With this term she signifies '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).
- 9 The newspapers clippings have been collected between 1998 and 2000 from *La Repubblica*, a national daily, and *Il Resto del Carlino*, a Bologna local daily newspaper. These clippings are relevant not only for their portrayal of trafficking in general, but especially because they concern the very same women I interviewed.
- 10 The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that 700,000 women and children are trafficked per year across the globe, while United Nations (UN) sources oscillate between 2 million (IMADR in McDonald *et al.*, 2000: 1) and 4 million people (Ram, 2000: 2). As far as trafficking of women from eastern Europe into the EU is concerned, some EU sources report 500,000 women (Ram, 2000: 2) while others estimate between 200,000 and 500,000, a number that rounds up the presence of women from eastern Europe as well as Latin America, Africa and Asia (Molina and Janssen, 1998: 16).
- 11 The Schengen Treaty, for example, 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 harmonise immigration and asylum policies. Today the Schengen area comprises Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and Sweden.
- 12 United for Intercultural Action, a Dutch-based European network against nationalism, racism and fascism, has counted 5,017 deaths of migrants that have resulted from border policing, detention and deportation policies, and carrier sanctions (UNITED, 2004). These numbers concern only those migrants who have been identified. Hence, the 'real' numbers are unknown.
  - 13 Ursula Biemann has made similar observations concerning the Mexico–USA border (2000).
  - 14 A study on the modes of entry of Filipina domestic workers into Italy presents quite similar results concerning the episodes of border crossing (Parreñas, 2001).
  - 15 The respondents report that an agency charges between US\$ 360 and 500, depending on the country of departure, for a visa and a bus ticket to Italy. Just for comparison, those respondents who worked as schoolteachers or secretaries in Moldova or Ukraine, earned between US\$ 20 and 30 per month.
  - 16 Rhacel Salazar Parreñas (2001) shows that the fee that agencies charged for assisting migrants with undocumented migration from the Philippines into Italy doubled to US\$ 8000 in the 1990s when Italy joined Schengen and strengthened the control at its external borders.
  - 17 In the trafficking literature this operation is commonly referred to as being 'sold' (Global Survival Network, 1997; Kelly, 2002: 31–2).
  - 18 A discussion on the conditions of confinement the respondents experienced in third-party controlled street prostitution is beyond the scope of this chapter. I have, however, addressed this issue in my PhD, especially in Chapter 3 (Andrijasevic, 2004).
  - 19 Data indicate that organised criminal organisations were initially not involved with trafficking but that trafficking took place instead via the migrant network type of structure (IOM in Turnbull, 1999: 192).
  - 20 The exact date of the article is withheld for the safety of the informant.
  - 21 For details on the specific regulations in Italy, see Isabel Crowhurst's contribution to this book, Chapter 13.

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