

Gender, Migration and intercultural Interaction  
in South-East Europe  
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# National Case Study

Thematic Study on Intercultural Violence (WP 8)

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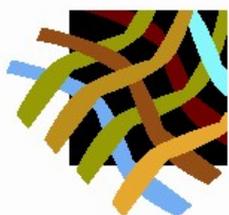
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## 1. The Theoretical Framework and General Hypothesis

All attempts to address the question of violence in relation to gender and migration stumble upon the sheer complexity and diversity of possible acts of violence and subjects that may be considered. Gender violence targeting migrants may range from trafficking, police detention, harassment, rape and domestic violence to structural, economic social inequalities, psychological pressure and racial-sexualized stereotyping. Simultaneously these may potentially include a vast range of female and male subjects, victims and victimizers from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. In the face of this complexity and diversity, defining the issue of violence, gender and migration requires some understanding of the historical, social and political conditions. As Judith Butler argues,

“Violence is surely a touch of the worst order, a way in which the human vulnerability to other humans is exposed in its most terrifying way, a way in which we are given over, without control, to the will of another, the way in which life itself can be expunged by the wilful action of another. To the extent that we commit violence, we are acting upon another, putting others at risk, causing damage to others. In a way, we all live with this particular vulnerability, a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life, but this vulnerability becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions”.<sup>1</sup>

While violence may be a physical act (doing harm) it is also simultaneously embedded into specific social and political practices that make it intelligible. In specific historical, social and political conditions, some physical acts of violence will be considered as more significant, more tragic or more meaningful, while others will remain insignificant, trivial, or impossible to comprehend. This distinction will reflect also diverse representations of some victims of violence as worthy of grief and others as “unrepresentable” and “ungrievable”.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Judith Butler, 2004, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge), p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Butler has developed this theme in relation to September 11<sup>th</sup>, arguing that while the lost lives of American citizens were grieved, there were many other non Western lives lost as a result of the US foreign policy responses that were silenced and deemed to remain impossible to mourn. Judith Butler, 2004, *Precarious Life*,

Acts of violence are not isolated and distinct from the broader context within which they become possible. They are in a continuum with processes of normalization that constitute the bodies of the victims that are marked by the signs of violence. These include strategies of abiding to sexual norms, but also strategies of conforming to racial and ethnic norms “given the racial differential that undergrids the culturally viable notions of the human”<sup>3</sup>. According to Butler, this continuum between acts of violence and processes of normalization of sex and race can be grasped on the level of discourse.

“On the level of discourse, certain lives are not considered lives at all, they cannot be humanized; they fit no dominant frame for the human, and their dehumanization occurs first, at this level. This level then gives rise to a physical violence that in some sense delivers the message of dehumanization which is already at work in the culture. So it is not just that discourse exists in which there is no frame and no story and no name for such a life, or that violence might be said to realize or apply this discourse. Violence against those who are already not quite lives, who are living in a state of suspension between life and death, leaves a mark that is no mark”.<sup>3</sup>

Some migrants fit Butler’s description of those who “are already not quite lives” at a certain point in their lives: for instance when forced by economic and political pressures to flee, when crossing borders illegally, when working in the informal sectors of European economies, when being denied access to public services and protection, or when deprived of legal status. Because they are not (yet) “normalized” in the cultural, political and social life of the state, it is particularly newly arriving migrants that constitute these unrecognizable, impossible to define.

Gender structures such instances of insecurity and uncertainty in migrant lives by making some women vulnerable to violence. The following segment from EMPOWER, a migrant sex workers’ organization based in Thailand, describes how migrant women become vulnerable during the processes of border crossings.

“Border crossings of all kinds have always been about control and power. They have always been particularly dangerous places for women. For us we also add the dangers of crossing the colour borders, black to white; yellow to white; and the class borders poor to rich. Obviously anywhere where men stand armed and

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*The Power of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso)

<sup>3</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*. p, 25

appointed to control and restrict our crossing, the dangers and the chances we will be prevented from crossing increase".<sup>4</sup>

The gendering of border crossings, as described in this fragment, is not limited to state borders but expands to include all kinds of social borderlines of gender, nation, race and class. However, becoming vulnerable to violence in these borderlines is not a permanent trait, naturally attached to women's bodies. Vulnerability to violence may be conceived as form of becoming which constitutes female, transgendered or masculine bodies in different socio-political and cultural conditions.

Gradually through processes of normalization of migrant bodies, which include the medical and administrative "filtering" taking place in border camps and "reception centres", regularization procedures, entering the labour market in positions reserved for migrant labour, language learning and education, adopting local identities and cultural habits or even taking part in integration projects, migrant lives may become recognizable, identifiable, and "grievable". As a result of such processes of normalization, many migrants, including many women, are recognized as lives "worthy of grieving". In many cases violence against migrants is publicly condemned by official international and government bodies as an immoral act and often recognized by international and national law as a violation of human rights.<sup>5</sup>

Migrants, who undergo processes of normalization, cease to constitute those who are "not quite lives" and violence against them acquires different attributes. It becomes recognizable as an unlawful act subject to human rights law. Nonetheless, while there are differences in migrant histories, the processes of normalization of migrant lives are mostly conditioned by their precarious constitution. In other words, processes of migrant normalization are mostly temporary and contingent. Migrants who have been through process of recognition and have become "legal" (acquiring residence permits, asylum, and

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<sup>4</sup> EMPOWER, 2008, "Crossing Invisible Lines" in the special issue of On-line journal Re-public, *Gendering Border Crossings*, edited by Helen Kambouri, <http://www.re-public.gr/en/?p=318>

<sup>5</sup> See, for example the public condemnation of violence against migrant women issued by the Interparliamentary Union (IPU) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, where it was agreed that "violence against women is one of the worst forms of gender-based discrimination and a severe violation of women's human rights". IPU, 2009, "Summary of main points of the debates", Conference Migration and Violence against Women in Europe" 10-11 December, Paris, France at <http://www.ipu.org/splz-e/paris09/conclusions.pdf>

even EU citizenship status) may easily fall back into the uncertainty of illegality, unemployment, and absence of rights. Migrant lives, even when they are recognized and settled, they always entail the potential of becoming once again vulnerable.

The contingent character of vulnerability to violence is lost in universal declarations targeting gendered violence in the processes of migration. In UN documents, for example, this complex question is reduced to a formula that can be summarized under the phrase “violence against women migrants”.<sup>6</sup> As the UN General Assembly’s “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women” states: “some groups of women, such as women belonging to minority groups, indigenous women, refugee women, migrant women, women living in rural or remote communities, destitute women, women in institutions or in detention, female children, women with disabilities, elderly women and women in situations of armed conflict, are especially vulnerable to violence”. In this formula, gender violence is thus anchored to the vulnerability of certain groups of women, who experience double and triple forms of discrimination because of sexual, racial and/or ethnic difference. While gender violence against male or transgendered migrants is silenced, vulnerability to violence is constructed as a universal and timely trait of all migrant women’s lives.

The focus on women is legitimized mainly by historical claims. Women are more likely to become victims because of male domination that positions them in more vulnerable positions than male migrants. As the Beijing Platform for Action states: “violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement.”<sup>7</sup> Since “women migrants” share with all other women this condition of inequality, they are by definition “more vulnerable” to violence because of gendered inequalities in their countries of origin and destination, as well as in the process of migration. In other words, they are “doubly disadvantaged”. Although different categories of acts of violence and subjects are specified in different UN documents, including, physical, psychological, rape,

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<sup>6</sup>United Nations General Assembly, 1993, “Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women”, A/RES/48/104, 85th plenary meeting, 20 December, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

<sup>7</sup>The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, “Beijing, Platform for Action” (1995), paragraph 118.

sexual harassment, this anchoring of the question of violence to the vulnerability of women is always preserved.<sup>8</sup>

In this context, vulnerability to violence is contextualized as an attribute that is attached to migrant women spontaneously and uncritically as if it was a universal, permanent and natural trait. This contextualization usually dictates in all historical, cultural and geographical circumstances a definition of gender violence as a repetition of the same binary opposition between migrant women as victims and men as victimizers. Gender is reduced to an opposition between feminine and masculine orders and migration is deemed to constitute a variable that simply aggravates women's already unequal positioning by "adding more vulnerability". These binaries impose problematic ethical and policy responses to the problem of gender violence that are strictly limited to the protection of migrant women victims and the persecution of male victimizers.

Many female, male and transgender migrants that become victims of gender violence do not fit into the profile of vulnerability that universal declarations and policies sketch. In parallel, many of those who might be considered as perpetrators of gendered acts of violence against migrants may not even be male. Furthermore, what this universal framework fails to grasp is the fundamental precarity of migrant lives, who may experience at different stages of their lives different forms of vulnerability to violence: from the extreme vulnerability to violence in detention centres and camps to a "recognizable" and widely condemned vulnerability to violence by racist groups experienced by legal migrants.

Rather than defining the issue of violence in relation to gender and migration according to the universal standards imposed by the "violence against women" framework, one needs to open up the question and consider to the moments when migrant bodies become vulnerable to gender violence. This will involve a notion of vulnerability as a becoming, rather than as a universal, natural and permanent trait attached to female bodies. Ultimately the possibility of becoming vulnerable may be recognized in all of useven though we have not all lived and

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<sup>8</sup> Examples include the UN General Assembly, 1995, Resolution on "Violence against Migrant Women Workers" A/RES/50/168, 99th plenary meeting and 2002, Resolution on "Violence against women migrant workers" A/RES/56/131, 1 February

experienced acts of violence, even if our lives are not for the moment considered as “ungrievable”.

## 2. The Context (the National and the European)

The European Union has no competence in matters of violence against women, while legislation and policies in this area are made mostly at the state level.<sup>9</sup> On the contrary, the EU has developed an extensive policy making mechanism in the area of migration, which has being criticized for its gender-neutral approach to migration from a gender mainstreaming perspective.<sup>10</sup> What many critics, however, have failed to see is that migrant women have indeed been selectively included in EU migration policies as “victims”. They have been, thus, chosen for their vulnerability as paradigmatic, but also exceptional, subjects to be protected, assisted and aided. This has been mainly done with regards to policies on family reunification, where women are included as “dependent” members and policies on trafficking, where women are included mostly as “victims of sexual exploitation”.<sup>11</sup> In both cases the EU policy framework on migration has adopted a static and narrow conception of gender relations as an opposition between men and women, within which the inclusion of migrant women could only be possible through gender victimization.

EU policies on violence, gender and migration have been mainly focused on trafficking, which constitutes an area of EU competence where harmonization has advanced faster, and even candidate and prospective member states have begun to incorporate the EU acquis into their national legislations.<sup>12</sup> According to

<sup>9</sup> The European Parliament has adopted several recommendations, but according to the Roadmap for Gender Equality, the main activities of the European Commission in matters of gender violence are carried out through the support that the Commission offers “to states and NGOs in their efforts to eradicate gender based violence”. These usually take the form of projects funded by the European Commission, such as STOP or Daphne, and implemented by local authorities and NGOs. European Commission, Directorate for Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, 2006, “A Roadmap for Equality between Women and Men: 2006-2010” (Brussels: European Commission)

<sup>10</sup> European Women’s Lobby, 2004, “Integrating a gender perspective into the EU immigration policy” Position Paper, February, <http://www.womenlobby.org/SiteResources/data/MediaArchive/policies/Immigration/EWL%20position%20paper%20integration%20gender%20perspective%20into%20EU%20immigration%20policy04.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Policy Analysis Synthesis report GeMIC.

<sup>12</sup>More specifically, in 2002 there was a Council Framework Decision on the harmonization of the penal legislation with regards to trafficking in different

a 2004 report by an expert group commissioned by the EC, however, the aim of existing EU policies against trafficking has been mostly to enforce crime control objectives. These were pursued at the expense of human rights and the protection of migrants. “Up till now, States have concentrated predominantly on measures in the area of crime control and migration policies, rather than on victim assistance and protection. To effectively tackle trafficking, this imbalance needs to be redressed... The neglect of the area of assistance and protection to trafficked persons forms both an obstacle to effectively address trafficking and falls short of the obligations that States have under international human rights law”.<sup>13</sup>

This neglect of “human rights” has been mostly prompted by the fact that protection and assistance to victims in the EU is premised upon “the willingness or capacity to testify against their traffickers”.<sup>14</sup> The report notes that “those trafficked persons who do not wish to make a declaration as witnesses – or are not required as witnesses because they possess no relevant information or because the perpetrators cannot be taken into custody in the destination country – require equally adequate protection measures as trafficked persons who are willing and able to testify”.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the only victims constituted as worthy of protection and assistance by the state are the ones who could be useful in combating crimes linked to illegal migration and trafficking. The criticism of the

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European countries. European [Council, 2002, “Framework Decision of 19 July 2002 on Combating Trafficking in human beings”](#) (2002/629/JHA - OJ 2002/L 203/1, 1.8.2002). In 2004, a Communication was published, which settled issues of residence permits, protection and minimum contemplation periods for the victims who collaborated with the authorities against trafficking networks. EU [Council, 2004, “Directive 2004/81/EC of 29 April 2004 on the residence permit issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or who have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities”](#) (OJ 2004/L 261, 6.8.2004) In 2005, a [Council EU plan was issued](#), whose aim was to establish common standards and procedure across the existing and prospective EU member states. EU [Council, 2005, “EU plan on best practices, standards and procedures for combating and preventing trafficking in human beings”](#) (OJ 2005/C 311/1, 9.12.2005). Funding for specific short-term projects was distributed to member states through programs, such as DAPHNE and “Prevention and Fight against Crime”.

<sup>13</sup> European Commission, Director General of Justice, Freedom and Security, 2004, “Report of Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings”, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 8

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 8

experts' group points out to the problematic nature of the project of criminalizing trafficking, but does so only from a gender neutral perspective. By invoking the abstract notion of human rights, this type of recommendation fails to acknowledge the possibilities of dehumanization of bodies that Butler alerts us to. What if certain categories of victims are already constituted as "non human" in discourse? What if their reality is already denied in the social and political context of the EU?

At once too broad and too narrow, the discourse of "trafficking" condenses the social and political dynamics of violence, gender and migration. Having (re)emerged during the 1990s on the occasion of the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe, the discourse of trafficking became a means of responding to a perceived "security crisis". The securitization of migration came to be interlinked with the efforts to protect the human rights of the victims in a state of generalized uncertainty and risk.<sup>16</sup> As Berman argues, the emblematic figure of the white, young and pure Eastern European prostitute was paradigmatic of the European crisis of borders, identities and citizenship.<sup>17</sup> The representation of Eastern European women as vulnerable to violence served as a means of containing this widespread sense of crisis and risk looming over European societies. Furthermore as Adrijasevic has argued, large scale anti-trafficking campaigns by IOM in Eastern Europe promoted images of migrant women as beautiful, powerless, victimized and static bodies. The public exposition of migrant women's vulnerability to violence responded to voyeuristic desires, but also to anxieties over a perceived collapse of ethnic and gender boundaries.

"The female body is, as IOM campaigns show, the site where control over gender hierarchies and the control of geographical territories meet. Just when EU citizens are encouraged to undertake greater labour mobility, one of the key attributes of the European community, IOM's counter-trafficking campaigns criminalize the

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<sup>16</sup> Claudia Aradau, 2004, "The perverse politics of four letter words: risk and pity in the securitization of four letter words", Vol. 33, No. 2, pp. 251-277.

<sup>17</sup> Jaqueline Berman, 2003, "(Un)popular Strangers and Crises (Un)bounded: Discourses of sex-trafficking, the European Political Community and the Panicked State of the Modern State" *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 1, pp. 37-86

labour mobility of women from eastern European non-EU member states and encourage them to remain at home”.<sup>18</sup>

Although these representations were gradually broadened to include different nationalities, colours, ages and ethnic groups of mainly women – but also increasingly children as well - the overwhelming emphasis on female migrants as victims of violence is a persistent feature of trafficking discourse in the EU. This extends beyond official EU policies and touches upon the micropolitics of government agencies, national, transnational and international NGOs. These micropolitics can be understood best within the context of a growing global tendency to victimize migrants in order to protect them from potential human rights violations. In that sense, the vulnerability to violence normally attached to feminine identities extends nowadays beyond women to include also males, who are feminized and treated as impotent in the face of global violence. As Augustin argues, this victimization “trend, which began as a way of drawing attention to specific forms of violence committed against women, has now become a way of describing everyone on the lower rungs of power”.<sup>19</sup> While the construction of migrants as “trafficked victims” strips them of any autonomy or power to make decisions over their movements, it legitimizes acts of violence on the part of states, such as repatriation or deportation as “benevolent acts” of protection.<sup>20</sup>

Greece is no exception to this tendency: public debate law and policy making on violence in relation to gender and migration has been almost exclusively focused on trafficking too. This is partly linked to the overall development of public perceptions, rhetoric and policies on the issue of gendered violence.<sup>21</sup> As a study

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<sup>18</sup> Rudvica Adrijasevic, 2007, “Beautiful Dead Bodies: Gender, Migration and Representation in Anti-Trafficking Campaigns” *Feminist Review*, No 86, pp. 24-44. p. 42.

<sup>19</sup>Laura M. Augustin, 2003, “Forget Victimization: Granting Agency to Migrants”, *Society for the International Development*. Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 30-36, p. 30

<sup>20</sup> Laura M. Augustin, “Challenging Place: Living home for sex” *Development* Vol. 45, No. 1. p. 113.

<sup>21</sup> In the 1970s, the Greek feminist movement sought to question the prevailing silence by raising demands mainly on domestic violence and rape, which was until then defined by law as “a crime against the property of man”. These demands had a positive effect bringing the issue into the public eye and, as a result, in 1984, rape seized to be a “crime against morals” and was characterized as a “crime against sexual freedom”. Law 1419/1984 on the criminalization of rape. After 1999, there were several systematic attempts to incorporate the UN and European declarations on violence against women in the Greek legislation mainly

published in 2005 concluded, the issue of gender violence remains relatively marginalized in public debates. Even when gender is debated in public, representations of women as powerless victims are dominant.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, whenever the issue is debated in parliament or in the media, it is approached from a moralistic perspective.<sup>23</sup> As a result, with the exception of feminist groups, violence against women in Greece is not considered as a gender issue but rather “as an issue of public responsibility”. This mostly “refers to the organization of citizenship since violence threatens the institutions of democracy”.<sup>24</sup>

This framing of the problem also characterizes public rhetoric and policy making on violence in relation to gender and migration. This is manifest into two antithetical tendencies. On the one hand, there is a public projection of trafficking as a moral question of the utmost importance for national security advanced by both policy making and media rhetoric. It is worth noting that as the Greek borders were increasingly constructed as European in the 1990s, issues of trafficking came to be linked mostly to foreign policy and international security.

The second legislative act after 1985 to address the issue of violence against women in Greece was the 3064/2002 law on trafficking.<sup>25</sup> Following this law trafficking has become the sole area, where issues of gender and migration are dealt with systematically at the policy and legal level.<sup>26</sup> This privileging of

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led by the General Secretariat of Gender Equality, different ministries and NGO projects, which the scope of this study does not allow us to consider in detail. For a more detailed analysis see Maria Stratigaki, 2006, *Το φύλο της κοινωνικής πολιτικής* (The gender of social policy) (Athens: Metechmio), pp. 151-187.

<sup>22</sup> For example, with the exception of certain feminist groups which have raised these issues, there is very little public debate or policy making over the role of clients in relation to prostitution or over the treatment of men involved in domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment.

<sup>23</sup> Andromachi Hadjiyanni, Fray Kamoutsi, 2005, “Dimensions of Public Debate on Sexual Violence against Women: Similarities and Differences between Greece and EU policy Making”, *The Greek Review of Social Research B*: 117, pp. 189-220.

<sup>24</sup> Op.cit., p. 198.

<sup>25</sup> In 2006 legislation was voted on sexual harassment at the workplace (3488/2006) and on domestic violence and rape within the family (3500/2006), “treating domestic violence not as a private issue but as a serious social pathogenesis that violates the personal freedoms, primarily of women, who are the ones targeted by the phenomenon”. The law is 3500/2006 (FEK/232/A/24.11.06). General Secretariat of Gender Equality, 2006, “Τέλος στη Βία. Τώρα Υπάρχουν Λύσεις: Ποιοτική Ανάλυση Στοιχείων για τις Γυναίκες-Θύματα Βίας στην Οικογένεια που Απευθύνθηκαν στα Συμβουλευτικά Κέντρα της Γ.Γ. Ισότητας” (End to Violence. Now there are Solutions. Quantitative Analysis of Women-Victims of Violence in the Family that Addressed the Counseling Centers of the G.S.G.E.), p. 10

<sup>26</sup> Helen Kambouri and Pavlos Hatzopoulos, 2009, “Policy Analysis –Greece”, *Ge.M.IC. Policy Analysis Report (WP3)*, <http://www.gemic.eu/wp->

trafficking has not been prompted, however, by gender mainstreaming or by the need to address violence against women per se, but rather by foreign policy and security objectives. The voting of the law responded mostly to a generalized sense of insecurity over porous borders and anxieties over transnational crime associated with migration flows that prevailed during the 1990s. Furthermore under the pressure caused by the publication of the 2001 and 2002 US State Department “Trafficking in Persons Report” (according to which Greece was ranked at the third tier in the fight against trafficking), the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs took responsibility for the coordination and financing of anti-trafficking initiatives.<sup>27</sup> The decision to transfer the responsibility for trafficking to such a Ministry presupposed an understanding of migration in general as a “threat to security”, and migrant women as victims of criminal transnational networks. The policies that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs introduced in response consisted mainly of activities within the Greek territory, such as the funding of shelters and NGOs dealing with protection of victims, prevention and information, which were outside its formal responsibilities..<sup>28</sup> What followed was a framing of the problem of migration and violence that included the question of gender only as far as it is linked to women victims of transnational criminal networks and in particular networks for sexual exploitation – leaving out the question of migrant sex work.<sup>29</sup>

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content/uploads/2009/04/wp3-greece.pdf

<sup>27</sup> The Report stated that “The Government of Greece does not fully comply with minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking and is not making significant efforts to do so” and urged the Greek government to adopt new laws and intensify security measures to combat trafficking networks and assist the victims. US Department of State, 2001 and 2002, “Trafficking in Persons Report”, <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/index.htm>

<sup>28</sup> YDAS, an agency within the foreign policy ministry that normally specializes in international aid schemes to developing countries, became the main institution coordinating the special “task force” set for the implementation of anti-trafficking policy, although its mandate did not provide for the financing of projects in Greece.

<sup>29</sup> In its 2003 report, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs defined trafficking as one of the negative phenomena prompted by large “refugee” influxes that contributed to the “dramatic rise” in transnational criminal activities taking place in Greece. “Many people (mainly migrant women)”, the report explained “in search of better living and employment opportunities are trapped and end up in prostitution”. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Greece, 2003, YDAS Hellenic Aid, 2004, “Ετήσια Έκθεση της Ελληνικής Διμερούς και Πολυμερούς Κρατικής Συνεργασίας και Βοήθειας” (Annual Report of Greek Bilateral and Multilateral Interstate Cooperation and Aid), <http://www.hellenicaid.gr/frontoffice/portal.asp?cpage=NODE&cnode=46>

On the other hand, however, there is also a persistent silencing of the gender aspects of domestic violence, discrimination and harassment at work with regards to migrants. In this context, it is striking how the issue of domestic violence against migrant women has remained altogether outside public debate, law and policy making although according to a quantitative study 16% of the women who resort to the counselling centres and shelters of the General Secretariat of Gender Equality are migrant women.<sup>30</sup> Although there are no accurate statistics, the interviews conducted with social workers conducted in the course of the GeMIC project have shown that the number of migrant women experiencing domestic violence may be very high. In certain shelters, at the time of the interviews all or the majority of women hosted were migrants who have experienced domestic violence either within mixed marriages of same ethnicity marriages or partnerships.<sup>31</sup> Also the cases of violence against migrant domestic workers reported in academic studies and in social movements have failed to reach public debate and remain mostly outside the scope of the existing policy framework on gender and migration in Greece.<sup>32</sup>

It is no accident that a recently formed network of mainly Greek groups and NGOs that assist and support migrant women has adopted the title “ΔΕΣ Με” (Des me), which is an acronym but also literally translates into the phrase “look at me”.<sup>33</sup> What this term implies is that migrant women are invisible in public debate – something which is not entirely accurate since there is abundant reference on migrant women as trafficking victims in Greek discourse. As the Ge.M.IC. policy analysis report argues, “while women have become a privilege

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<sup>30</sup> General Secretariat of Gender Equality, 2006, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> This was the case for example with the EKKA shelter in 2010.

<sup>32</sup> On the topic of domestic work in Greece, see Helen Kambouri, 2007, *Φύλο και μετανάστευση: Η καθημερινή ζωή των μεταναστριών από την Αλβανία και την Ουκρανία* (Gender and migration: the everyday life of migrant women from Albania and Ukraine) (Athens: Gutenberg); Pinelopi Topali, 2008, *Σιωπηρές Σχέσεις και Διαπολιτισμικές Επαφές. Η περίπτωση των Φιλιππινέζων οικιακών βοηθών στην Αθήνα* (Silent relations and intercultural contacts: the case of Philippino domestic helpers in Athens) (Athens: University of the Aegean and Alexandria); Efthimios Papataxiarchis, Pinelopi Topali, Ageliki Athanassopoulou, 2008, *Κόσμοι της οικιακής εργασίας. Φύλο, μετανάστευση και πολιτισμικοί μετασχηματισμοί στην Αθήνα του πρώιμου 21<sup>ου</sup> αιώνα* (The words of domestic work. Gender, migration and cultural transformation in Athens of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) (Athens: University of the Aegean and Alexandria); Dina Vaiou, editor, 2008, *Διαπλεκόμενες Καθημερινότητες και χωροκοινωνικές μεταβολές στην πόλη. Μετανάστριες και ντόπιες στις γειτονιές της Αθήνας*. (Intersecting everyday lives and sociospatial transformations in the city. Migrant and native women in the Athenian neighborhoods) final report (Athens: EMP)

<sup>33</sup> <http://desmeyteite.blogspot.com/>

policy object in matters of security and border control (trafficking), feminized informal sectors (such as domestic or sex work) have been excluded almost entirely from migration policies. There is a gendered dimension therefore to the constant tension between their over-representation as paradigmatic victims of trafficking and the strategic denial to accept their role as workers".<sup>34</sup>

## **2.1 Migration Flows and Legal Framework**

The feminization of migration flows in Greece has been characterized by diverse patterns that vary in different ethnic groups of migrants. According to a 2007 quantitative study, most migrant women in Greece originate from Albania (67,2%) and other Balkan countries, which are now EU member states, i.e. Bulgaria and Romania (11,3%) and the former Soviet Republics (16.5%). Polish and Philippino women constitute also a significant segment of the migrant population (5,1%). While amongst Albanian women, family migration is more common, all the other ethnic groups have a very large percentage of independent migration.<sup>35</sup> Despite this tendency, gender-mainstreaming has remained outside the scope of the Greek law and policy making on migration. All legislative acts have adopted a gender neutral approach and language, ignoring the specific conditions experienced by female and male migrants as well as the ways in which gender, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation intersect to produce gender inequalities within and amongst migrant communities and the Greek society as a whole.<sup>36</sup>

## **2.2 Harmonization of the Laws Regarding Migration with the EU Acquis**

According to the National Ge.M.IC. policy report, Greece has harmonized its legislation in most policy areas, including trafficking and migrant integration. The recent amendment of the citizenship law, which provides for the first time provisions for the granting the Greek citizenship to migrants and in particular to second generation children, born and raised in Greece and accords the right to

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<sup>34</sup> Kambouri and Hatzopoulos, 2009, p. 12

<sup>35</sup> ΚΕΘΙ, 2007, "Η γυναικεία μετανάστευση στην Ελλάδα" (Female migration to Greece), findings of the national research conducted under the scientific coordination of Laura Maratou Alipranti (Athens: KETHI), p. 212

<sup>36</sup> For a more detailed analysis, see Kambouri and Hatzopoulos, 2009.

vote in municipal election to migrants legal resident transforms the general framework of the Greek policy and legislation on migration.<sup>37</sup> Although there are several restrictive measures that may undermine the implementation of the law and effectively restrict its application to a relatively small number of migrants, this development has opened up the possibility to acquire a stable and temporary legal status - which was previously closed for all those who are not of Greek origin leading for the first time towards a meaningful policy of integration.

### 2.3 Trafficking

As mentioned above, trafficking constitutes the single policy area where despite the gender neutral language of the law, migrant women are considered as privileged subjects. Nonetheless, this privileging of women does not escape the silences with regards to the inequalities of gendered power relations in migration. According to the introductory report issued for the trafficking law, the policies pursued by the Greek government are a response to “new forms of slave trade” that turn primarily against three vulnerable groups: women, children and migrants.<sup>38</sup> The identity of the victim attributed to migrant women implies from the onset the marginalization of gender violence against male and transgender migrants which is automatically made invisible, along with gender violence against women migrants who do not fit the criteria of victimhood described by the law. In addition, the overwhelming emphasis and gender stereotyping of violence in relation to sex work that prevail in the general debates on the law, obscure other forms of gender exploitation that involve coercion in different fields of employment and in particular within domestic spaces.

Furthermore, the law reproduces the tight anchorage of trafficking policies to the policing and control of transnational networks, while the protection and care of the victims is considered secondary. Presidential decree 233/2003 specified the conditions for the recognition of the status of the victim and the institutions responsible for the protection and assistance to victims.<sup>39</sup> In accordance with international and EU directives the legal framework functions, as in most

<sup>37</sup> Law 3838/2010, Σύγχρονες διατάξεις για την ιθαγένεια και την πολιτική συμμετοχή των Ομογενών και των Νομίμως διαμενόντων μεταναστών

<sup>38</sup> Law 3064/2002 “Combating trafficking in human beings, crimes against sexual freedoms, child pornography, in general the economic exploitation of sexual life, and aid to victims provided there off”

European states, to “either create or exasperate existing situations that cause or contribute to trafficking in women”.<sup>40</sup> In 2003, Presidential Decree 233 was adopted, implementing a program for the assistance of victims.<sup>41</sup> The decree provides for shelters for victims, imposing a duty on law enforcement institutions to assist victims, and delays deportation of victims so that they are entitled to state assistance. A subsequent amendment of the law on trafficking, occurred with Law 3386/2005, which adopted EU Directive 2004/81/EK, making the collaboration with the police authorities against the perpetrators of the crime a prerequisite for the granting of recognition, state assistance, protection and support to the victims (articles 46-52).<sup>42</sup>

After “a period of contemplation”, during which the victims are allowed to decide whether or not they agree to collaborate with the police (without the privilege of a residence permit however), they have to prove that they are not willing to work again for the criminals who forced them into illegal work and are prepared to testify against them. Even when these conditions are met, the victims are only entitled to a twelve months residence permit, which can be revoked whenever the police authorities judge that the victim no longer collaborates with them. Law 3536/2007 states for the first time that recognized victims of trafficking should not be deported and any judicial or administrative decision for the deportation is annulled.

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<sup>39</sup> Presidential Decree 233/2003 “Protecting and Assisting victims of crimes provided for in article 323A, 349, 351 and 351A, of the penal code in conformity with article 12 of L3064/2002” (A204/28-8-2003)

<sup>40</sup> UN Commission on Human Rights, 2000, “Integration of the human rights of women and the gender perspective”, report of the special Rapporteur of violence against women, Ms Radhika Coomaraswamy on trafficking in women, women’s migration and violence against women, E/CN.4/2000/68, p. 16  
[http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/e29d45a105cd8143802568be0051fcfb/\\$FILE/G0011334.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/0/e29d45a105cd8143802568be0051fcfb/$FILE/G0011334.pdf)

<sup>41</sup> Presidential Decree 233/2003 implements victims’ assistance mechanisms of Law No. 3064 of 2002 under the provisions for protection and assistance to the victims of crimes in articles 323A, 349, 351, and 351A of the Penal Code, in conformity with article 12 of Law 3064 of 2002”.

<sup>42</sup> These provision were following an EU Council directive, which aimed mainly at combating trafficking and illegal immigration in general through the cooperation of “victims” in exchange for short term residence permits and other short term benefits, such as access to training, vocational courses etc. 2004/81/EC “On the residence permits issued to third-country nationals who are victims of trafficking in human beings or have been the subject of an action to facilitate illegal immigration, who cooperate with the competent authorities”,  
<http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2004:261:0019:0023:EN:PDF>

In practice, the Greek legislation marginalizes the human rights of the principle subjects that it is supposed to protect. The implicit focus is instead on combating criminal trafficking networks.<sup>43</sup> While the minimum possible contemplation period (one year) has been adopted, a very vague procedure for the recognition of victims is enforced. In addition, the law attaches the recognition of victims to cooperation with the police and disengage clients from the procedure -mainly because it is impossible to prove knowledge or intent. Although the Greek government made available \$1.4 million to Greek and foreign NGOs for the protection of victims, the granting of residence permits to victims has no been fully implemented for administrative reasons. In addition the “police authorities played a ‘filtering’ role using its own assessment to refer only the legally resident victims to appropriate agencies and authorities”.<sup>44</sup> A 2007 Amnesty International report stated that most women who may qualify as trafficking victims remain unidentified in Greece and many are being deported without even receiving information on their rights. Furthermore, even women identified as victims are usually found through police security checks for unlawful prostitution or illegal stay in Greece and do not receive adequate protection, assistance and information.<sup>45</sup>

### **3. Analysis of the Discourse in the Legal Documents and Policy Documents of National and International Organizations**

The reports of national and international organizations that refer to gender violence targeting migrants are focused on trafficking almost exclusively. Although there might be sporadic references to migrant men, issues pertaining to

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<sup>43</sup> Greek Human Rights Committee, 2007, “Θέσεις και προτάσεις της Εθνικής Επιτροπής για τα Δικαιώματα του Ανθρώπου στο θέμα της εμπορίας ανθρώπων - η κατάσταση στην Ελλάδα” (Positions and propositions of the Greek Human Rights Committee on the subject of human trafficking - the situation in Greece” June, [http://www.nchr.gr/category.php?category\\_id=162](http://www.nchr.gr/category.php?category_id=162)

<sup>44</sup> Maria Liapi and Theodoros Zeis, 2006 a, “Mapping of policies affecting female migrants and policy analysis: the Greek case”, report prepared by Centre for research in women’s issues, Working Paper No. 10, “FeMIPOL: Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society” specific targeted research project of the FP6, p. 27, [http://www.femipol.uni-frankfurt.de/docs/working\\_papers/wp1/Greece.pdf](http://www.femipol.uni-frankfurt.de/docs/working_papers/wp1/Greece.pdf)

<sup>45</sup>Amnesty International, 2007, “Greece: Uphold the rights of women and girls trafficked for sexual exploitation” report EUR 25/002/2007 at <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/EUR25/002/2007>

transgender and transsexual migrants are silenced. The persistent silencing of masculinities naturalizes instances of violence against male migrants. An example is the violent attacks that took place in 2004 after a football match between Greece and Albania, which resulted in the injury of many Albanians and the murder of one of them. As Golfinopoulos argues, in the Greek press, “the relationship between violence and masculinity is not considered as a problem and this is exactly what is problematic about it. This situation presupposes, and betrays, the gendered-masculine character of the dominant discourse, which is considered so self-evident that it is not even discussed”.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the silencing of transgender and transsexual migrants as potential victims of violence is an indication of the normalizing of sexual roles and attributes that are enforced in the dominant discourse of trafficking.

Violence against migrant women is described in most official documents published by the Greek state as a continuum that takes place during the migration process and makes migrant women vulnerable to violence throughout their lives. As one manual for the counselling of women victims of trafficking stresses, the first thing that social workers need to do when approaching migrant women is to understand their “position of vulnerability”. In order to completely understand this “position”, one has to explore the different stages of their victimization: before departure, during departure, in the place of destination, during detention, voluntary repatriation and deportation and during psycho-social reintegration in the country of destination or origin.<sup>47</sup>

Rather than being constituted through migrant experiences, vulnerability to violence is attached to migrant women as a cultural/ natural characteristic. While administrative and legal restrictions imposed by states to the free movement of migrants are mentioned in most of these texts as factors that contribute to this vulnerability, they are considered only as secondary to the formative experiences of violence in the country of origin. This is because, as the official documents emphasize, most migrant women trafficking victims originate from societies where gender violence is considered to be an everyday reality. The centrality of

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<sup>46</sup> Giannis Golfinopoulos, 2007, “Έλληνας Ποτέ. Αλβανοί και Ελληνικός Τύπος τη Νύχτα της 4<sup>ης</sup> Σεπτεμβρίου 2004” (“Never Greek...” Albanians and the Greek Press on the Night of the 4<sup>th</sup> of September 2004) (Ioanina: Isnafi), p. 38.

<sup>47</sup> M. X. Papagiannopoulou and H. Markousis, 2007, “Οδηγός Συμβουλευτικής για Γυναίκες- Θύματα Διεθνικής Σωματεμπορίας” (Guide for the Counseling of Women Victims of International Trafficking) (Athens: Synpraxis and Centre for Women’s Studies and Research)

gender violence as a cultural trait that is presupposed in the migration process reinforces an already morally charged conception of migrant women as victims lacking agency.

As a booklet published in Greece on counselling trafficking victims explains, the distinction between illegal migration of females and trafficking is almost impossible to identify because they both presuppose coercion and force. “A common element in both “trafficking” and illegal migration and in particular female migration is the lack of consent on the part of the person who moves and her forced prostitution”.<sup>48</sup> The booklet warns against the dismissal of trafficking claims when an assumed prior consent is declared. “Trafficking with the consent of the victim is inconceivable”, the booklet explains.<sup>49</sup> According to this approach, the consent of the victim is always elusive: even if a migrant woman has agreed to be employed in sex work, it is more likely that she will be considered as being forced to do so by direct threats and black mails or by the more general and abstract conditions of living in the country of origin.

On the contrary, while men are also occasionally considered as victims, this is usually done in a way that involves consent. Paradigmatic of this strategy is the articulation of two distinct terms for trafficking by the United Nations Commission for the Prevention of Crime and Penal Justice: “trafficking of migrant women and children” and “smuggling of migrants”. As Augustin argues, “the gender distinction is clear, expressing a greater disposition of women – along with children – to be deceived (above all about sex work), and also expressing an apparently lesser disposition to migrate. Men, on the other hand, are seen as capable of migrating but of sometimes being handled like contraband, thus the word agreed on is not trafficking but smuggling”.<sup>50</sup> Conversely male migrants who are constructed as victims are feminized and stripped of their ability to act autonomously. In this framing of the question of trafficking, the problem of violence is defined in the context of essentialized sexual and cultural difference between male and female migrants.

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<sup>48</sup> Katerina Drouga and Theofania Papadopoulou, 2008, “Οδηγός για συμβούλους – trafficking and the trade in women” (Guide for Counsellors: Trafficking and the trade in women) (Athens: KETHI), p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>50</sup> Laura M. Augustin, 2001, “Sex Workers and Violence against Women: Utopic Visions or Battle of the Sexes?” *Development*, Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 107-110.

This kind of discourse obscures the fact that much more than innate natural or cultural traits, it is migration policies that states impose that constitute migrants as vulnerable to violence. As De Genova argues, migrant illegality functions as a disciplinary mechanism that normalizes unequal power relations between citizens and aliens.<sup>51</sup> In fact, it is through processes of illegalization that migrants become more vulnerable to violence.

“Every “illegalization” implies the possibility of its own rectification. Once we recognize that undocumented migrations are constituted in order not to physically exclude them but instead, to socially include them under imposed conditions of enforced and protracted vulnerability, it is not difficult to fathom how migrants’ endurance of many years of “illegality” can serve as a disciplinary apprenticeship in the subordination of their labour, after which it becomes no longer necessary to prolong the undocumented condition. Furthermore, every “legalization” has an inherently episodic and strictly partial character that never eliminates the field of “illegality” but rather, in concert with the amassing of immense quantities of data for scrutiny by the authorities, simply refines and reconstitutes that field for the ineligible who will remain undocumented along with all subsequent “illegal” arrivals”.<sup>52</sup>

This crucial element of the production of illegality has implication for the understanding of migrant agency and gender. As borders are closed, migrants resort increasingly to illegal border crossings. Instead of halting further migrations, restrictive state policies produce spaces of illegality. This production is gendered. For many migrant women life in those spaces may be precarious as it is also for many male and transgender migrants too. The possibility of illegality and of vulnerability to violence is always omnipresent in migrant lives.

Accepting that migrants have agency or that they have autonomy does not mean that one denies the possibility of them being objected to different forms of violence, neither in fact does it mean that one denies the possibility of their vulnerability to violence. This is a point that has been very much at the centre of the feminist debate on trafficking and sex work. Feminist authors argue that there is no consent in “prostitution” or “sex trade”. Migrant women are treated as objects exploited and exchanged for profit and, therefore, they have no

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<sup>51</sup> Nicholas P. De Genova, 2002, “Migrant illegality and deportability in everyday life” *Annual review of anthropology* , No.31 , pp. 419-47

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, p.429

autonomy even if they themselves believe or rather are under the “illusion” that they are consenting to their objectification.<sup>53</sup> In this context, sex work is not considered as work but rather as a contemporary form of “slavery”. Prostitution should be abolished because it is by definition a form of violence.<sup>54</sup> Migrant sex workers movements, on the contrary, have framed the question of sex work in terms of labour, arguing that they are not forced to work even though they may become victims of violence at different moments in their lives.<sup>55</sup> Their main demands stem from the claim that violence is cultivated in the conditions of illegality and precariousness faced by migrants working in this sector. The crucial difference is that migration is not a natural or culturally inherent state of being. It is rather a position that one occupies, a performance that one performs or an identity that one acquires.

What constitutes people as migrants is a set of power relations that produces them as potentially illegal and precarious. Thus, Augustin is right when she argues that migration is a stage in one’s life.

“I suggest that we re-confirm the idea of *agency* for migrants, with the emphasis on the process they are going through. Although some migrants may experience a (sad) feeling of being *permanently* uprooted, many others do not, and the whole theory of social ‘integration’ of migrants depends on their desires and abilities to adapt, assimilate and lose not their own identities but their identification with migrancy. At best, ‘migrant’ refers to a stage of life”.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. Analysis of the Personal Narratives

In this section, the study will first analyse the narratives of professionals involved in the implementations of policies of trafficking. Then it will focus on the narratives of migrants who have been through traumatic experiences of violence.

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<sup>53</sup> See for example, Sheila Jeffreys, 2009, *The Industrial Vagina: the political economy of the global sex trade* ( London: Routledge) and Paola Monzini, 2007, “Εμπόριο Γυναικών. Πορνεία, Μαστροπεία και Εκμετάλλευση” (The Trade in women: Prostitution, pimping and exploitation) (Athens: Melani)

<sup>54</sup> K. Bales. (2000) *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press and CATW campaign),

<sup>55</sup> Joe Doezema., 1999, “Loose women or lost women? The re-emergence of the myth of ‘white slavery’ in contemporary discourses of trafficking in women” *Gender Issues*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-50. and K. Kempadoo and Joe Doezema, 1998, *Global sex workers: Rights, Resistance and Redefinition* (New York: Routledge).

<sup>56</sup> Laura M. Augstin, 2003, p. 36

In order to analyse the problematic of the temporality of migrant vulnerability to violence and its gender dimensions outlined above, the study will focus on three migrant women who have become victims of different forms of gender violence. Rather than imposing vulnerability as a stable and permanent identity in advance, the respondents are able to narrate moments of vulnerability, formative experiences of violence, as well as moments of escape and possibilities of emancipation. The usage of the method of oral history, which has been employed throughout thematic work package 8, has been considered as appropriate for this particular case study precisely because it gives the respondents an opportunity to describe in his/her own words, changes and trajectories in personal and collective history.<sup>57</sup>

#### **4.1. Analysis of the personal accounts and narratives of Government and NGO activists and professionals**

In the narratives of government and NGO professionals gender violence is defined in terms two fundamental concepts that structure the discourse of trafficking in Greece: *security* and *protection*. Even though the meaning attached to “security” and “protection” may differ according to the institutional affiliation of the subject that narrates, there is a common nexus within which the two terms are conceived as interdependent and complementary.

##### *Producing trafficking victims*

In the narratives of the Greek police, the question of trafficking is “securitized”. As a higher official of the anti-trafficking unit of the Greek police explains, the policing of trafficking networks in Greece can only be effective if it is disengaged from the task of victim protection.

“At the end of the decade, the police in general understood that we have a new problem that makes its appearance in the countries of Western Europe. This was trafficking, and mainly trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. Because this problem begun to concern the Greek authorities, we created a group for the fight against human trafficking, initially to find out what was going on. The leadership

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<sup>57</sup> On research methods, see Katerina Kolozova and Bobi Badarevski, 2009, “GeMIC Research Design for Intercultural Violence (WP8) at [http://www.gemic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/research\\_design\\_violence.pdf](http://www.gemic.eu/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/research_design_violence.pdf)

of the police, however, staying always close to the problem, and realizing that the victim-centred approach was not bringing any substantial results and was not solving the problem, decided to allocate the responsibility for this particular crime to the organized crime sub-divisions. Because saving 100-150 women per year did not mean anything because they replaced them with others. Besides we should not forget that there is great offer on the part of migrant women. The law gives many more opportunities, such as interrogating techniques, surveillance, and undercover infiltration into terrorist groups. This was the essence, that the target was no longer the victim but the criminal organizations themselves”.

In the passage above, the victims of violence are defined as migrant women, whose numbers may be infinite: they can always be replaced and “there is always great offer”. Exactly like migrant networks “use” migrant women for profit, the police literally instrumentalizes them. It is not only their testimonies that constitute a necessary tool in order to persecute traffickers, but also – perhaps most importantly- the paradigmatic “protection” of certain migrant women as trafficking victims for deterrence purposes.

“We aimed at two things: first to secure the protection of victims and pass the message that those women are protected, because they are our main instruments, they are the witnesses who help our cases. And second to terrorize these criminals because you know the police should some times terrorize, otherwise problems are not solved”.

In this narrative, therefore the protection of victims is strategically used as a means of punishing and terrorizing potential traffickers. While protecting “victims” normally involves secrecy, in this narrative protection can only be effectively achieved if the trauma of violence experienced by victims becomes public in order to deter potential traffickers. Thus, the protection of each victim may involve the arrest and punishment of larger numbers of traffickers. The statistical table bellow shows precisely the economy of this equation since the number of victims is very disproportionate compared to the number of criminals arrested.

Comparative Table of Cases, Criminals and Victims for the years 2003-2008.<sup>58</sup>

<b>Year</b>	<b>Cases</b>	<b>Criminals</b>	<b>Victims</b>
<b>2003</b>	49	284	93
<b>2004</b>	65	288	181
<b>2005</b>	60	202	137
<b>2006</b>	70	206	83
<b>2007</b>	41	121	100
<b>2008</b>	40	162	78

In this context, protection involves ceremonial processes that expose the trauma of violence in public. Whether that is through taking pictures or making medical reports of signs of physical violence on the body, narrating traumatic experiences in court or dealing with psychological trauma in professional counseling, migrant women are expected to perform in public the role of the victim in order to deter future violent acts and assist the police authorities to punish criminals.

As the same police official explained, the Greek anti-trafficking unit has been very successful in the field of deterrence precisely because it has proven its determination to expose direct physical violence against migrant women in public. As a result, he argues, most trafficking networks have turned now to “milder” violent practices, such as persuasion or psychological control. An example would be that of voodoo ceremonies commonly used amongst Nigerian trafficking networks. These mainly psychological methods of violence require the police to adapt and invent new strategies in order to expose migrant womens’ traumas that are hidden and incomprehensible. “It is difficult to explain to the judge that a woman who has been free to come and go as she pleased, was in fact a victim tied up by a voodoo ceremony”, the police officer exclaims.

In most cases, exposing the trauma of violence in public takes place in the police and in the court, where migrant women are called upon to testify against the “traffickers”. As Eleni, a former administrator of a shelter run by an NGO explained:

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<sup>58</sup> Source: Web site of the Greek Police [http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo\\_content&perform=view&id=103&Itemid=95&lang=](http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&perform=view&id=103&Itemid=95&lang=)

“In reality if you do not testify, there is nothing. The whole system of protection was based on the testimony. And if you did not testify, there was nothing. Absolutely nothing”.

In practice, under the present legal system in Greece, protection depends entirely on migrant women's ability to go through this process of public exposure, even though the results may be uncertain. For many migrant women, as Eleni argues, testifying is a painful decision because of the psychological pressure of exposing the trauma but also because it involves having to cope with direct threats on their and their relatives' lives, bribing and alienation from the national community. During the judicial process, there is no formal police protection of victims, nor is the right of feminist and anti-racist organizations to testify recognized.<sup>59</sup>

In the narratives of NGO professionals, it becomes apparent that a migrant woman becomes a “trafficking victim” not by virtue of her trauma or her experience of violence but rather by being subjected to a series of bureaucratic procedures of security and protection. Once a migrant woman agrees to testify against the traffickers, she is entitled to a residence permit, care and protection that expires when the juridical procedure is closed. If a migrant woman does not agree to testify, she cannot get a residence permit or be protected even for that short period of time. As a result, most “trafficking victims” are either referred to the NGOs and shelters through the police or the shelters refer them back to the police. NGO professionals “take cases to court”, assisting and protecting women against potential threats always in collaboration with the police. Recognized victims of trafficking are, in principle, issued migrant residence permits with favorable terms. Becoming a “victim of trafficking” is not possible for those women who refuse or cannot collaborate with the police. These will have to go through processes of “repatriation”.

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<sup>59</sup> Interview of the representative of the feminist organization Feminist Centre, Sisi Vovou, on the occasion of the public scandal over the funding of a specific shelter for trafficking victims. Sisi Vovou, “Σωματεμπορία: Πόλεμος κυκλωμάτων και δίκες ...espresso” (Trafficking: war of networks and trials...espresso” , <http://www.tvxs.gr/v21638>

However, as Eleni insists migrant women “talk” only when they have something significant to gain.

The question is: “what kind system of protection are we talking about?”. The answer is that we should have an effective system of protection and assistance. If you can offer it, after a little bit of work, even women that you think that they would never talk, are able to talk. A woman can benefit from an effective system of protection to take back her life, if this system can provide long term support. This means that she should have access to education and work, and then she would be able to really take back her life in her hands.

During the interviews, several NGO professionals expressed their despair with regards to their ability to assist migrant women, most of which had no formal skills to find employment and housing. Furthermore, during the period of the fieldwork conducted for this report even the functioning of shelters was in question. More specifically, from 2009-2010, the partial termination of funding by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs had put pressure on NGOs active in this area to terminate or stop temporarily their activities until new sources of funding were found. For many professionals in this field it was frustrating to realize that the infrastructures that had been created including shelters and counselling centres, but most importantly the know-how and organizational structures were simply lost or suspended because of this lack of funding.

With the exception of the representative of the Greek anti-trafficking unit, the tight connection between the collaboration of the victims with the police and their protection by NGO professionals is widely criticized. Although NGO professionals express a very positive opinion of the work that the anti-trafficking unit does and many of them argue that “they are not like other policemen”, they emphasize that their ability to work with the “victims” is limited. While exposing the trauma of violence in public may constitute an effective strategy for the police, it is considered as an obstacle for the protection and healing of the trauma by social workers, psychiatrists and the administrative staff of shelters.

It is for this reason that, during the fieldwork, we were denied access to migrant women who resided in the shelters by NGO professionals, mostly on psychological and security grounds. Trafficking victims, we were told, do not want to talk and even if they do this might jeopardize their security since they might be recognized by traffickers. The responses to our requests for interviews by NGO professionals revealed that most of the anti-trafficking work done by lawyers, counselors, administrators and psychiatrists consists in transforming migrant women into trafficking victims able to “talk” about their experiences in public. This fundamental contradiction structures the narratives of security and protection that permeate all aspects of anti-trafficking work. Training in anti-trafficking issues consists effectively in enabling migrant women to expose the trauma of violence in a way that it may become intelligible and normalized. In other words, the trauma of violence can only be revealed, uttered and articulated in discourse through the mediation of specialists. Trafficking victims do not simply exist, but are produced when the trauma of violence can be put into words, when it can become intelligible.

#### *The shelter*

The shelter is the locus where processes of production of “trafficking victims” take place. In the confinement of the shelter it is possible to disclose, hide and heal the trauma of violence in secret. As a social worker from a shelter run by the orthodox church explained:

We give primacy to security. We try to keep the hostel secret. During the first period when the girls enter inside, we always accompany them in their movements. And there is always staff: 24 hours. We never leave the shelter uncovered. There is staff 24 hours per day in case of an emergency.

The security that this passage refers to is personal and intimate. It is imposed through strict rules. On the one hand, there is prohibition to publish the address and in certain cases, there is even a private security guard that protects shelters. On the other hand, each shelter imposes specific rules to the women hosted. These include opening and closing times, obligation to report movement, changes of shelter in cases where the victims are spotted by traffickers. In order

to impose security within, NGO professionals also make sure that the everyday life of migrant women follows specific rules. It is in the shelter that the basic needs of the migrant women-victims (food, clothing, and psychological support) are satisfied. According to a social worker from a women's group that runs one of the shelters, protection requires taking control of all aspects of migrant women's lives.

We take care of all aspects of their lives, from sanitary towels to food and repatriation. We also offer skills training, language learning, if they are not adults, we send them to school in order to be able to find another job and then recover. The shelter is like a family. Although they are from different cultures, they should always feel like home.

Exactly like children in a protective family, migrant women are hosted and at the same time controlled in order to “recover” and become able to communicate and make public their experiences of violence. Social workers often complain that they have to “discipline” migrant women to learn to obey those rules in order to be protected. Some migrant women would turn against social workers, demanding better clothes, independence, employment, or the right to stay out in friends' houses over the night – privileges that most of them enjoyed before. Others, in particular newcomers from Africa, would complain because they cannot eat the Greek food. Whenever violent incidents are reported in the shelters it usually originates from the sheltered women themselves and not from trafficking networks, NGO professionals usually reply in the negative. Many migrant women, as Eleni explained, would simply leave the shelters because they cannot obey these strict rules.

The responses of professionals to trauma reveals the tensions inherent in the tight connection between security and protection in migration policies and legislation. However it also reveals continuities that structure the discourse of trafficking across different fields. Exposing the trauma of violence, first in the secrecy on the shelter and then gradually in public becomes the central purpose of the whole system of “anti-trafficking”. The expert knowledge of professionals in this field mediates this experience of trauma transforming it into a coherent

narrative that may be articulated for a specific objective. The vulnerability attached to trafficking is not a permanent innate of cultural stigma but rather a becoming constituted through the system of security and protection.

However, the trauma is beyond discourse. The traumatic moment cannot be articulated within the limits of discourse.<sup>60</sup> By setting as the main objective of anti-trafficking policies the public exposure of the trauma of violence, migrant women are disciplined into “normal” gender roles. In the shelters, they gradually learn how to acquire normal jobs, normal clothing, normal housing, and normal sexualities. But most importantly, they learn how to articulate their migrant experiences as “trafficking,” how to translate the trauma of violence in actual works that are meaningful and intelligible in discourse. In other words, they learn how from “impossible to comprehend”, “impossible to grieve” lives they may become recognizable victims of violence within a stable social and cultural order of strangers and citizens.

## **4.2 Personal Narratives of Trafficked Women.<sup>61</sup>**

### **Konstantina Kuneva**

The first narrative constitutes an exception to the general tendency of silencing gender violence in public discourse in Greece. On December 22nd 2008, Konstantina Kuneva was attacked with vitriolic acid by two unknown men. Kuneva, was working as a cleaner for one of the large private companies subcontracted by Greek public institutions to provide cleaning services and had become the first foreigner to be elected deputy secretary of labour union of this sector, the [Panattic Union of Cleaners and Domestic Personnel](#) (PEKOP). “She herself, as well as her co-workers and the other members of her union have denounced the attack against her life as a murderous act of revenge and

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<sup>60</sup> Katerina Kolozova and Bobby Badarevsky, op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> Because of the lack of authorization to conduct interviews with women living in shelters, narratives of women who have been subjected to gender violence were collected with the help of the “African Women’s Association”. All the migrants interviewed were during the interview outside the system of protection, although one was in a hospital.

terrorization on behalf of the company OIKOMET. They claimed that it was meant to curtail her union action, as well as terrorize other workers from taking on an active role in demanding their legal rights from the specific company and others like it. The Greek police, in contrast, originally attributed the attack to personal circumstances, possibly a lover's vendetta, and interrogated an Albanian acquaintance of the family. That line of enquiry proving unfounded, they turned their attention to employer's circles, proceeding eventually, six months after the attack to close the file without any results".<sup>62</sup>

As a result, a mass of support by labour, anti-racist and feminist social movements erupted bringing the issue of gender violence at the forefront of public debate. By the time of the interview, Kuneva had become a symbol in these movements although her case had not been resolved and the perpetrators of the crime were not caught. The interview was commissioned by GeMIC to Laretta Macauley, the Head of the [United African Women's Organization](#), while Kuneva was still in hospital with her face disfigured. The interview is well structured and clearly focused on the issue of gendered violence. Kuneva's narrative is not that of a disoriented woman mainly because after the attack she was given the chance to narrate her story in public, give interviews and write letters.

The narrative starts with her departure from Bulgaria. As an "unmarried woman", Kuneva explains that she had to migrate to Greece in order to provide her son with the best medical treatment.

"I am Kuneva Konstantina from Bulgaria. I am forty five years old. I am unmarried with a twelve year old boy. When my son was four years old, we came to Greece because he needed to have a heart operation and then I realized that we had to stay in Greece for his health checks. So I am here since 2001. As my son grows up and the problems increase".

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<sup>62</sup> Helen Kambouri and Alexandra Zavos, 2010, "On the frontiers of citizenship. Considering the case of Konstantina Kuneva and the intersections between gender, migration and labour in Greece" *Feminist Review* , Vol. 94, pp. 148-155

Although from news coverage, it is well known that in Bulgaria she was a well educated woman, she decides to begin her story by exposing her vulnerability. She explains that being a single mother of a child with health problems constituted her as a migrant. Despite this vulnerability, however, her narrative is not lacking agency. Instead, it begins with a decision and a move that is made autonomously.

Kuneva then moves on to describe labour rights violations as a form of gender violence. The experience of being devalued as a woman is described as stressful.

“I discovered, in stress initially, that they undervalue us as a work force. And then along with another girl from Moldova we proved to them that each one of us is worth at least five men, because men are too soft, poor things, and cannot do these jobs alone. Because men do not feel responsibility towards their family. They have learnt to be cool, to be served by us. And we have learnt to do the job of the whole team while they were downstairs in a corner smoking and drinking beer”.

Men are described as “poor things” incapable of working hard or claiming labour rights. In this fragment, the position of vulnerability described above is reversed. Women are proven to be more capable than men in both family and employment. While still in a position of vulnerability, as a single mother, Kuneva is not stripped of her agency. Indeed one might argue that the text here turns towards a feminist direction.

The narrative then goes on to describe labour violations. The particular space of employment is constructed in a semi-official manner. Public organizations subcontract private cleaning companies for public spaces. While working for a private company, cleaners – who are mostly women and their majority is migrant-clean public spaces (such as the underground, hospitals, universities and as in this case, the railway stations).<sup>63</sup> Violence is described by Kuneva as an everyday practice that forces employees to abide to rules that advance their exploitation.

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<sup>63</sup>Giannis Kouzis, 2009, “Οι εργασιακές σχέσεις στον κλάδο του καθαρισμού. Αποτελέσματα εμπειρικής έρευνας.” (Labour relations in the cleaning sector. The results of empirical research) (Athens: INEE/GSEE)

Cleaners are forced to sign blank papers which are later revealed to be contracts, or to accept forced breaks in order to reduce their working hours. Women are particularly targeted since there is a hierarchy of gender roles.

“They were forcing me to sign false reports. We were signing them of course with every caution. But besides the violence against the workers, there was violence also from the company personnel. They had to behave in such a way that it was violence towards us. The supervisor who was supposed to be responsible for a hundred people stayed during the whole time I was at work to survey only me. And this did not happen once. It happened many times. Poor man, outside in the cold. I was forced, since he was the one who signed not only my reports but also the reports for the project manager, to tell him that it was not right, that it is a crime, that he should not do it again. I told him that he does not understand how they use it”.

Surveillance constitutes a technique that demoralizes workers and in particular women. Kuneva's ironic tone reverses the gender hierarchy. As a secretary of her labour union Kuneva was targeted constantly. This role was initially disclosed from her employers.

“I had not revealed myself as a member of the leadership of cleaners’ union. But I was forced to reveal myself and tell them at a certain moment, because they started making fun of us and abusing their right. They had intimidated us psychologically at work. They were surveying us hidden behind a column and in the open. They were threatening us. They were doing different things, whatever they could use against us. They were even pumping as on the bottom. Whatever man can imagine they had used it. They were asking women to give them a little kiss and small envelopes with money. And I am talking in generally about how they behave in cleaning companies towards female employees”.

Kuneva's role as a syndicalist disrupts the gendered order of the cleaning sector. Surveillance and acts of pressure are described as gendered. Soon, however, it becomes apparent that it is not only her identity as a female worker that disrupts existing hierarchies, but also the fact that she is a foreigner.

“The same day at work, the inspectors arrived accompanied by three police cars. Before their arrival, however, two men that looked like cops appeared at work, without the official badge on their shirts. They told me that they were policemen and asked me to show them my papers. They told me that I was illegal and that they will send me back to Bulgaria. I was forced to make a phone call to check if they were policemen and I asked for their papers. They disappeared immediately”.

As an EU citizen, Kuneva is legal in Greece. Her precarious employment and economic and family situation, however, re-constitute her as a de facto migrant.

“During the last years because we were running checks in the company for illegalities, they were more cautious. Our communication was done through official papers, extra-judicial orders. They were sending me extra-judicial orders and I had to answer back with extra-judicial orders. A single one costs a hundred Euros. My salary was five hundred Euros. I am an unmarried mother and they had kicked out my mother from the company in order to force me to submit, to truckle to them. And so my mother, me and my son we were all forced to live with the five hundred Euros they were giving us. I had to pay the rent and the extrajudicial orders from this salary. I do not know if any organization has ever received on any occasion so many extra-judicial orders as I did being employed as a simple worker. These extra-judicial orders were terrifying my family”.

In Kuneva's narrative there is agency but there is also vulnerability to violence. Vulnerability is not defined as a static condition attached to femininity, but as a shifting trait that comes and goes in different phases of her life.

“Because they say that the woman represents the wisdom of nature and guards the traditions. Man is only a movement and an example, keeping the woman at a very high level and accepting truly that the woman is the basis of society. And although this is well known and everyone understands it as well as the fact that the mother is important in life since she is the one who gave us life and takes care of us, the woman is ignored both in her work and in her efforts to bring up her children. They do not make life easier for women”.

The antithetical narratives on male and female roles are indicative of an anxiety over her own positioning in the gendered order of labour relations. The contradictions rather stem from the fact that while she considers herself destined by nature to act the role of the wife and the mother in the private sphere, she is forced to become a worker and then a syndicalist in the public sphere. Because men are “poor” and unable to assume their responsibilities, Kuneva is forced to take over the position of the person who acts – and ultimately ends up in sacrificing herself for the others. But she is not secure in this place.

The narrative ends with a short description of the violent experience that traumatized Kuneva.

“Since I did not agree with that, in the end, I was attacked with vitriol in the head and face. My face and internal organs were burnt. And my health is destroyed. I have been in hospital for nine months. I am doing very well but, according to my doctors, it will take at least two more years to get well”.

This experience has been narrated again and again in newspapers and reports, in concerts of support and demonstrations. As a victim of violence, Kuneva found access to public space. Previously she was excluded from public space although she was an active figure in her labour union. At the end of her account of events, Kuneva pushes quickly the narrative back to explain that what traumatizes her most is her vulnerability as a woman, lacking of male support and state assistance.

“But in general, I hurt all over because a woman must be assisted everywhere. There should be organizations and government bodies to be responsible for women’s and children’s rights. But what happens is exactly the opposite. They are AGAINST women and AGAINST the family and AGAINST the child. There is no help. I was very glad to hear that in Finland women are protected by an organization created by men. And this is correct because this is man’s role in life: to take care of his child and his wife. Not the political parties and the invisible structures. A woman needs SUPPORT”.

## Lia

Unlike the one with Kuneva, the second narrative is that of a woman who has been active in public through a migrant women's community but rarely spoke about her personal experience of violence in public. The interview with Lia was arranged after we have met her and talked to her several times in the African Women's Association.<sup>64</sup> Before the interview, the Centre for Gender Studies invited her to speak in a public event organized by Ge.M.IC. in order to debate strategies to connect research with migrant and anti-racist movements, during which she talked about organizing knitting workshops to enhance migrant women's solidarity and economic independence.<sup>65</sup> Although we have spoken to her in private and heard her talk in several public meetings, we did not know of her personal life story until she mentioned **itin** passing. She was a strong independent activist woman with no (at least visible) signs of a traumatic or psychopathological behavior. Furthermore, she was very outspoken in public about migrant women's rights, although in most cases she chose not to speak about the violent experiences she went through when she first arrived in Greece.

When the interview started, Lia began her narration by telling how she had to leave her country after her husband died in an accident and lost her job as a history teacher in high school. Later at the end of the interview, when asked to give more information on her life in Zimbabwe, she explained that as a young girl of sixteen she was a guerilla fighter in the independence movement and met her husband who was a journalist from a wealthier background and a different ethnic origin, when he interviewed her in order to make a TV documentary about her life. She explained that she was a "national hero" back home, but her guerilla past, ethnic and class origin made her an unsuitable wife in the eyes of her family-in-law. When her husband died in an accident, his family took all her possessions and her children, which she took back only after a year of legal battle which cost her her job and forced her to resort to knitting, an activity that she

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<sup>64</sup>This is a trans-african migrant women's group which is very active in the organization of cultural events, anti-racist protest and it was the one that has initiated the campaign "No to racism from the children's cot", whose aim was to demand birth certificates for second generation children in Greece African women's web-site

<sup>65</sup> Reference to the event

was always very fond of. The fact that in her narration her past as a “national hero” only comes at the end manifests a break with the past, which fragments her life in both geographical and temporal terms.

Her migration is justified by the fact that she had no means to support her four children (two couples of twins, 10 year old boys and one year old girls). Her decision to migrate was prompted by the prospects of studying knitting in Greece and returning to her home country to earn a better living.

“So I met this family, a Greek family... when I was selling my stuff, so ... they were interested in my stuff so they asked me if they can send me to Greece to come and learn Greek embroidery. So then I will go back to Zimbabwe and then I will ... work for them. So when I came here it was ...our contract, it was for three years”.

Although she had a “contract”, Lia was moved to an island hotel where she was asked to work until the end of the summer when the schools started. In fall, she was moved to a family of relatives in Athens where she became a live-in “maid” with the promise that she would eventually enrol in the knitting school. This promise was soon abandoned as she was told that as a foreigner without papers she would not be allowed to register in a Greek school.

“So, when I was working there ... the people, the lady she was a very wicked woman. She was treating me very bad. I was not allowed to go out. I was working without a day off. Sunday, it was seven days a week! Without salary, it was in 1993. So when they were coming, they would come and open the door. When they left, they locked. Or even when we sometimes go out they would say: “OK, we are going out together”. Me I will be walking, eh, I'll be walking in front and they will be in the back of me, you know watching me as if they were walking a dog. You know when you are walking a dog ... so they have to control me. If I see a black person, they never allow me to talk to anybody, because they knew that the people maybe they can tell me, you know ...”

Lia was confined for two years into this house where she worked as a domestic, without any rights, without any contact with the outside world in Greece or in

Africa. She was told that her family received her salary and her letters; something that she later discovered that it was not true. The letters that she was writing were never posted, while she received only 6.000 drachmas every few months at a time when a normal salary for a live-in would be as high as 100.000 drachmas per month.

The fact that a woman who at the age of 16 was able to cross gender and ethnic boundaries to become a guerilla fighter could have been confined in a Greek domestic space without any use of physical force may appear as a paradox. However, the way in which she describes her captivity is a mixture of legal and social constrains and a determination to follow her life plan. The following dialogue is indicative:

“-But I wanted to ask you something because it's very strange to me because you have been through a war in your country, you had a gun you were... and then you came to Greece and you were captured by these people and you were inclosed and ... it seems to me, how you ... I mean you were ... you managed to survive a war and then you were ...

-It was like a slavery, like a slavery, you know.

-Yes. And you couldn't just hit them and leave?

-And leave them like that. No, no that was it ... because if I wanted to I could do that.

-Yes!

-But, you know I could not do that because it is not in me... the time I went for war it was war, it was war, it was war. So it was over, it was over. If I wanted to deal with them I could deal with them because for me they were just taking me as a fool but I knew what I was doing. So I just say. Ok, let them do whatever they want to do. I am in their country. I was in their country. I didn't know where to go because the problem was language. And the papers at any time. But if we knew also what they were doing it was illegal.

-You didn't know it was illegal?

-We didn't know it was illegal. Just taking girls and using them like that. We didn't know because they were threatening us that the reason why you are not going out it is because you don't have papers. But when I came out, when I was leading

my independent life I saw a LOT of black people without papers and they were walking, they were selling, they were doing this, since the day I left this people until today, I never had a problem with the police. Of course the police they started doing these things for asking papers when they started legalising. Before legalisation the police where just passing people... So I was just thinking, "ok let me work like that". So there is nothing I can do anyway so the time shall come. Because or even if I want to be violent at them and I'll be ended up being in prison again and my children will suffer. Of which I didn't want my children to ...y, to be like that. So I just decided that: Ok, the time shall come when I will, when I will escape. So I managed to escape them and then I left them. I'm still ok (laughing). I'm surviving".

After two years, Lia took the opportunity to escape when she found the keys that the teenage son of the family lost in the house. Although she escaped she could not recover any of her personal possessions, including her passport which was kept by the family of employers, with the exception of her Zimbabwean identity. It was only ten years later that her son managed to issue a new passport for her. Until the time of the interview, she remained illegal in Greece although she had a good standard of living and regularly paid her security stamps.

In this narration, Lia's experience of "captivity" in Greece is not described as a unique or isolated event, but rather as a common practice that functions in continuum with colonial practices in the country of origin. As she explains, migrant women from this country are brought to Greece systematically in order to be interned and used as live-in "maids" without payment or rights in the households of Greeks from Zimbabwe.

In her narration, Lia mentions several cases of Zimbabwean migrant women's confinement and maltreatment in Greece. What these cases have in common is the total lack of contact with people outside the household/family where they work but also lack of access to the geographical and social environment around them, which makes it impossible at least initially to survive outside captivity. For example, Lia remembers that when she first escaped, she had no geographical conception of Athens and no social acquaintances, although she lived there for

two years. In the nearby square, she found few Nigerian street vendors and they put her in contact with another Zimbabwean woman from the same country who had also escaped captivity. On a different occasion, she remembers that once she was called by a woman from Zimbabwe because her employer –a famous Greek singer- left her in the middle of the public highway from Athens to Thessaloniki because she was crying in the car for the loss of her mother. Abandoned by her boss, she had no means to find her direction (“she did not know which way Athens was and which way Thessaloniki was”) but also no means to contact anyone (no language skills, money, means of transport or phone) and ended up in an African student’s dormitory in Thessaloniki after hitch-hiking. She eventually called her boss and was immediately brought back to work as a maid, although this time it was for the singer’s mother.

In Lia’s narrative, there are no acts of physical violence. But there is a constant and widespread control on the part of Greek employers, which materializes not so much in direct physical injuries on the body of Zimbabwean women but on psychological effects that are difficult to describe in words. This difficulty to narrate the effects of violence is inscribed, however, in the disorientation in physical and social space or the inability to identify and recognizable the space around the place of imprisonment. Lia’s personal story, however, becomes entrenched into the narratives of all the women that she later helped to escape. In many stories that she recounts, those women who escape captivity are forced to resort to strangers that they find accidentally on the street, usually because of their color. People of the same color, “Africans”, constitute the only recognizable sign in an unknown space. Being deprived of the ability to communicate or to acquire and use everyday skills that normally one gets after years of residence in a new country is experienced as Lia suggests as a feeling of dependency to the conditions of captivity. Lia’s ability to escape on her own and form a network together with other migrant women becomes a source of emancipation that allows her to recount the trauma of violence from a different perspective.

Since she left her captivity, Lia has become active in tracing other Zimbabwean domestic workers and helping them to escape. The difficulty, as she explains, is to restore to those women a sense of social and physical space. Lia takes

acquires a new role within a network of self help that requires no mediation from the anti-trafficking experts. Once she remembers that she found out about a woman from Zimbabwe who was working in Patras through an acquaintance of her boss. She called her and mobilized the network of Zimbabwean women to help her escape.

“She worked for at least 6 years. Me I didn't manage to go and helped her to escape because I was working that weekend. So the other girls, I told them: “Just go!” So they went and then they grabbed her and she came. When she came in it seemed as if she was not ... you know ... she was very very ... you know very old, very shaggy. I don't know how I can explain to you. “What's wrong with you?” She said “What can I do?”. I said “What about your daughter back home?” She said, “My daughter. I don't know any I don't even communicate with my daughter; I don't know what to do”. And then she came. She managed to get a job anyway, And now she is ok. She even went back home”.

In this context helping the victims through the network that Lia participates in becomes a process of providing them again with as sense of orientation in social and physical space rather than simply physical or psychological comfort. Contrary to the methods employed by the anti-trafficking networks, the network functions in an informal manner, enabling women who are illegal to assist and support each other in a meaningful way. Working with their own past experiences, Zimbabwean women communicate and share their experiences of violence in a common cultural space. The networking of Zimbabwean women is based on providing other migrant women in captivity with the means to begin to recognize again the space that surrounds them including the space that they have left behind. Although many women who escape captivity are hosted for a while in the other's houses, the network gives more emphasis (and is very successful) in life skill techniques and finding the women who escape new jobs, which allow them to support themselves and their families.

### **Maria**

Unlike Lia, Maria had just escaped from a situation of captivity when we interviewed her. She was scared and emotionally stressed trying to avoid to talk

unless it was absolutely necessary. She had found shelter in the house of one of the women from the African Women's Association that she met accidentally and was trying to find ways to survive emotionally, economically and socially. She never left the house where she was sheltered because she was afraid of the police and the people “who have brought her to Greece”. As a result, no attempt was made to ask her to give an interview or talk about her experiences directly. All the information on her life and experiences was taken during two car rides in the centre of Athens and a meeting with a female lawyer who advised her on the possible steps she could take in order to be recognized as trafficking victim in Greece. Mariah fits the description of a trafficking victim perfectly, since she was extremely young (almost twenty), extremely traumatized and disoriented. And yet, as her narrative shows she has also many different agentic characteristics that distinguish her from the stereotypical image of the trafficked sex slave.

In her narratives, which were very fragmented and contradictory, Mariah describes several occasions during which she became the victim of direct acts of physical violence before and throughout the process of migration. Marhia arrived in Greece after a long travel by plane to Izmir in Turkey and then by boat to the island of Lesbos. She remembered that she was very scared of the sea and started crying when she was asked to enter along with a group of other Nigerians, the “balloon” boat. A man pointed a gun at her and told her to get in or else he would shoot her. She was still scared but obeyed. While at sea, the Greek police arrested all of the Nigerians in the boat and took them to a “building, which was not yet built” in Lesbos. They all had medical tests and then they were taken to a camp. After three weeks the police gave her a “paper” and let her leave. She could not tell what was written in this paper but she knew that it had expired.<sup>66</sup>

When she left Lesbos, she traveled by ferry-boat to Athens, where a Nigerian woman, named Linda, was expecting her. Linda was sent by Marianne, who was the one who approached Mariah in Nigeria and agreed to help her move to Greece in order to work. Although initially Mariah told us that she did not know what kind of employment she would do, later during a car ride, she explained

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<sup>66</sup> The paper was a deportation order, which allowed her to “leave the country within a period of six weeks”, but Mariah -not being able to read Greek- thought that it was a permit to stay until she got legal documents.

that she knew that she was going to work as a “prostitute”,<sup>67</sup> but had no other choice because she had to support her daughter (who was three at the time) and was raised by her step mother. She said that her pregnancy was the result of rape. In Nigeria, she emphasized, people are very poor and do not have all the luxuries one enjoys in Greece. Roads are bumpy, cars are old, and most people do not sit for hours in coffee shops, otherwise they will get robbed. Before leaving Nigeria, Mariah went through a voodoo ceremony, where she gave hair and the promise to pay back Marianne, otherwise her family would be harmed. Mariah never saw Marianne in Greece, but she communicated with her on a pre-paid phone that Linda gave her in order to be able to trace her at any time.

Mariah was brought to Linda's house where other Nigerian girls who also did street prostitution stayed. According to Mariah, Linda was also working as street prostitute, but she had temporarily taken the role of the “Madame”, because her own “Madame” was in prison. She also said that Marianne continued to do prostitution in secret, although she was married to a Greek man. At first, Mariah was afraid to “do it”, so Linda bit her up several times. This aspect of Mariah's narrative challenges the binary conception of trafficking as a form of male violence against migrant women. Instead in one encounters here a sex work network in which different migrant women are involved. The roles that each one woman takes are shifting: a single migrant woman can take different roles, not necessarily in an order of progression according to the circumstances. She can be a girl who is being moved illegally, a prostitute that has no control of her life or right to take advantage of the earnings of her work, a “sex worker” who is independent and earns her own living, or a “Madame” who takes advantage of newcomers and imposes an order in the whole system. Migrant women may in any specific instance occupy multiple positions at the same time, while also partially crossing the boundaries the network (like Marianne did with her marriage to a Greek man). This network may be hierarchical, but this hierarchy is versatile, shifting and porous. In this context, the violent acts (bitings, control, enclosure) that sustain the network are not simply based on male domination

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<sup>67</sup> The term “prostitution” is used here because it is the one that Mariah used. Although “sex work” may be more appropriate in other occasions, in this case it is the one that best describes Maria's conception of a demoralizing and psychologically overburdened sexual activity in exchange for a very low payment.

-although men may enter in different roles- but rather on shifting gender relations that aim at the control of migrant women's bodies and sexuality.

When Mariah finally gave in, she was accompanied twice by another girl to the specific locations where street work is most usually done and showed her what to do. Then she was left to go and do the work alone. Her obligation was to bring back a sufficient amount of money to pay back those who brought her in Greece. She was told that she owed 50.000 Euros. "I think that it is too much", Mariah exclaimed once in the car, "they only paid for the plane ticket and the men with 'balloon' boat". Each time she was coming back home to Linda's house, she would give her a certain amount of money, which was written in a blue notebook. During the three months that she was working she had brought 200 Euros back. Mariah was bitten again by Linda when she could not bring enough money back.

Although Mariah did not talk a lot about being a prostitute, she described her experience as impossible. She told us once in tears that while she was doing it she repeatedly thought of committing suicide. She could not live in those conditions, but she felt trapped, afraid of both the police and these "women". She explained that none of the other girls supported her. Instead they were often offending her and swearing at her in the street because she "destroyed the business".

Although she was not enclosed into a house like Click, Mariah described the same experience of lack of access to the geographical and social environment around her, which made it impossible for her to survive outside captivity. Although she could move back and forth from work alone, her itinerary was limited to certain roots, i.e. from Kypseli where she resided to Omonoia Square or Plateia Theatrou in the Centre of Athens. Her movement was controlled by mobile phone calls only, but she never left this itinerary and had no knowledge of the social and physical space around her. When we went for a car drive, it was the first time during the four months of her residence in Greece that she saw central points like Syntactic square or Exarcheia, which are located only ten to fifteen minutes walk from the places where she did street prostitution. She did not know either the

address of the house where she lived, although she knew how to get there by bus from the place of work.

An additional factor that prevented her access to the Greek public space was the lack of knowledge of the language. She could only speak those words in Greek that were necessary for street prostitution: “Come here”, “Blow job”, “20 Euros”, “Bed”.

As in the case of Zimbabwean women in the domestic sector, Mariah's captivity was conditioned upon her status as an illegal migrant. Linda's boyfriend had taken her several times to the central police office in Petrou Rali, where asylum petitions are filled but she never managed to apply for asylum because of the long waiting lists.<sup>68</sup> The fact that she was illegal created a kind of dependency on her condition of captivity. Exactly like in Lla's case, she was afraid that if she escaped, she would be captured by the police and be deported. Furthermore, there was the fear of the prostitution networks. Anecdotal stories that circulated amongst Nigerians reinforced her sense of insecurity. “One girl that left her Madame in June, was found and her breast was cut”. Furthermore her family back home would be in danger if she decided to escape.

Mariah finally decided to escape by telling her “Madame” that she was arrested by the police and detained in the police station. She went into a house and was locked there for several weeks afraid of both the police and her Madame. The only time she left the house was during the car drives, during which she was holding a notebook writing down words and locations and directions. Her Madame instructed her to disconnect her phone and mention nothing to the authorities. Locked inside a house, the first weeks after her captivity she insisted that she had to go back to Linda's place to collect her personal stuff. Her soap, her cream, her clothes and a CD player with the hymns she was singing in her local church in Nigeria. She did not wish to go to the police, however, because she was afraid of the harm that “these women” could do to hurt her and her family. She asked the lawyer if she could accompany her. After a while, she decided to move to an NGO shelter for the protection of trafficking victims in Thessalonica.

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Mariah's case describes best how the vulnerability of migrants to gender violence may take different forms and may vary in different periods. Illegality is the condition that makes possible the development of networks of exploitation of migrants by migrants. In Maria's narrative, migrant women feature as both victims and victimizers, taking different roles according to the circumstances and, thus, challenging the essentialist assumptions about migrant women as being paradigmatic victims. Psychological and physical violence emanates from the exigencies of illegality, and functions as a means to escape the lack of papers, legal status and employment prospects.

Most importantly, however, the violence that Mariah alludes –because she never clearly refers to it- to is not that of anti-trafficking policies, but a violence impossible to speak about. The trauma is never in fact spoken by Mariah. It remains outside discourse and outside the intelligible categories of victim and victimizer.

## **5. Conclusions and Policy Recommendations**

The life stories of the migrant women that we have tried to reconstruct and analyze above may be contrasted with the narratives of the NGO and government officials. In the narratives of government and NGO officials, vulnerability to violence is attached to migrant women like a stigma that determines their lives from beginning to end. Only through the mediation of experts (police or NGOs), can this stigma be removed. In migrant women's narratives, on the contrary, vulnerability to violence is not a trait attached to their femininity, but rather a form of becoming. The movement of Lia from a guerrilla fighter into a domestic imprisoned in a Greek household is paradigmatic of the paradoxes of violence and femininity in different social and political settings, in war and peace, in Greece and Zimbabwe. The shifts in Kuneva's discourse too demonstrate ambivalent positions of vulnerability to violence, which is sometimes attached to femininity and sometimes attached to masculinity.

Furthermore, in migrant women's narratives vulnerability is clearly a becoming. All three women, but Lia in particular, reject any notion of gender violence as

natural. There is no evidence in their narratives that they have learnt in their societies of origin to accept violence as part of their everyday life. From their perspective vulnerability to violence is not a result of cultural factors in the country of origin, but a result of migration. Becoming vulnerable is a direct product of the lack of legal status, and the precarious of labour relations that exist in the cleaning, the domestic and the sex work sectors of the Greek society. Crossing borders are described only in Mariah's story as a "violent" experience, but the lack of legal papers constitutes, as Lia, explains, the constitutive element of her victimization as well. All three women describe instances of violence through real and imaginary confrontations with the police. The threat of illegality and deportation condition vulnerability in gender terms in particular in the last two narratives, since it is through such processes that migrant women accept their "voluntary" submission. In that respect, it is interesting to note that, while Kuneva (as an EU citizen) is no longer a migrant in legal terms, she experiences forms of violence that constitute her as a migrant precisely because of her precarious labour status.

Although in both Kuneva's and in Mariah's narrative, there are descriptions of extreme physical violence, these are only mentioned in few words and in passing. The difficulty or inability to describe the trauma of these experiences in a public encounter, such as an interview, is also evident in Lia's emotional description of her imprisonment. Psychological pressure is easier to articulate, but even this is done in a laconic and straightforward manner. This is in contrast with the overarching framework that dictates the narratives of government and NGO professionals. "Making women talk" in this context involves much more than simply providing comfort or helping them cope with the trauma. As many professionals note, the continuum between practices of protecting migrant women and "healing" the trauma and the public exposure of the trauma for purposes of crime control is very problematic. It is particularly striking that in Mariah's case, the narrative of violence is mostly uttered during a meeting with a lawyer - a fact that should alert us to the performative engagements with violence that migrant women adopt in the context of "anti-trafficking" institutions. Clearly Mariah is aware and informed of the fact that she has to narrate her experience of violence in a specific way to the lawyer. This is not to

say, of course, that Mariah's narrative is false, but rather that what is exposed in public is not so much personal trauma, but a manifestation of the fact that the migrant woman in question must now speak her experience in an intelligible manner within the discourse of violence.

In other words, putting the trauma of violence in words requires a process of "apprenticeship" of the norms of trafficking or labour rights violations. Shelters, counselling centres and hospitals function to a great extent not only as spaces of protection and healing, but also as spaces of normalization of migrant lives. In this context we argue that anti-trafficking policies constitute procedures of normalization to sexual, cultural and social norms that position migrant women in roles of victimhood and need, denying them their ability to act autonomously as agents.

In the narratives collected, there exist several examples where migrant women successfully manage to deal with the problem of violence outside the framework of security and protection. Lia's ability to escape from the conditions of imprisonment and form with other migrant women an informal network of support constitutes an escape from these practices of normalization. Empowerment derives from the fact that this is a self- help network that develops informally, penetrating into the informal sectors, such a domestic work. Similar informal practices have been adopted by NGO professionals in their efforts to assist migrant women residing in the shelters. Some social workers from example, mentioned cases of violations of labour rights and sexual violence, which were reported and dealt with through pressure phone calls and direct assistance to migrant women by other migrant women of the same nationality. Similarly groups, such as Nea Zoi, who have focused their efforts on street work and providing empowerment and basic skills learning classes for migrant women sex workers have used such migrant self-help networks to provide support for vulnerable migrant women.

## 6. Policy recommendations

### 1. Policies on violence against women

-Development strategies and mechanisms to prevent gender violence in the deregulated spaces of migrant employment, including the cleaning, domestic and sex work. Recognizing these sectors as employment sectors and providing basic guarantees and respect of labour rights would be a positive step towards reducing migrant women's vulnerability to violence.

-Disengaging the process of recognition of migrant women as victims of violence from the police. This process should include efforts to disassociate the public exposure of the trauma of violence with protection of victims. In particular in the case of trafficking, this needs to be done explicitly in order to prevent the treatment of migrant women as "tools" in crime control and prevention.

-Dealing with gender violence from an intercultural perspective will enhance and improve the mechanisms for the protection of vulnerable migrants. This will have to involve the support and funding of self-help networks of migrant women who already engage into the protection and emancipation of migrant women in need, such as the one formed by Zimbabwean women in Greece. Working with migrants and training the personnel working in anti-trafficking institutions will be also a positive step towards resolving the existing problems with the system of victims' protection.

-Open up the process of dealing with the trauma outside the enclosed space of the "shelter". This may include street work and establishment of information and counselling centres in areas where there is a large concentration of migrants.

-The focus on both men and women migrants who become victims of violence (rather than women only) and a more specific engagement with unequal power relations in society as a whole that make possible specific forms of violence against migrants is necessary. Particularly important is to finance and run

projects that would address gender violence in relation to migrant masculinities and transgender identities.

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