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A Case Study of Sex Trafficking in Romania

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A Case Study on Sex Trafficking in Romania

A Thesis Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
Master's Program in International Studies

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in International Studies

By
Iulia Cristiana Badea Caramello
December 2012

A Case Study on Sex Trafficking in Romania

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF ARTS in INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

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Iulia Cristiana Badea Caramello

December 2012



Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all the members, this thesis project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the abovementioned degree.

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Abstract

Romania is undergoing a severe crisis. The country is confronted with a transnational issue of dramatic proportions. Romania has become what experts in the sex trafficking field call “a global center for human trafficking” (Batstone, Romania a Global Center for Human Trafficking, 2011, February 17th). It is a source, transit, and destination country for women, children, and even men subjected to sex trafficking. Romania is one of the biggest exporters of human flesh to Western European and Middle Eastern societies.

This research paper will analyze the historical context of modern-day slavery in Romania as well as the economic background and the social dimensions of its transition and transformation that has left it increasingly prone to a filthy industry that rots, decays, and dehumanizes. This paper will examine not only the individual attributes but also the environmental factors and will argue that inequality, power, and other social and economic dynamics play a major role in the procurement of sex and continue to leave Romania completely exposed to the cunning web of traffickers.

Furthermore, the paper will draw a parallel showing the links between prostitution and sex trafficking, which many times are interrelated. The data will show that it is seriously naïve to assume that all of these girls are victims, that they are driven by an enhanced perception of opportunities outside the borders of Romania which increase their social status back home, and will attempt to answer the question of whether the traffickers select these girls or if the girls self-select.

Definitions

According to Merriam Webster, these are the accepted definitions of “*traffic*”, “*trafficked*”, “*trafficker*”, “*prostitution*”, and “*prostitute*”:

traffic *verb* (Traffic - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)

traf·fick·ed traf·fick·ing

intransitive verb

1: to carry on traffic

2: to concentrate one's effort or interest; broadly: engage, deal <a writer who often traffics in hyperbole>

transitive verb

1:

a: to travel over <heavily *trafficked* highways>

b: to visit as a customer <a highly *trafficked* bookstore>

2: trade, barter

traf·fick·er noun (Trafficker - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)

a buyer and seller of goods for profit <a *trafficker* who sold pirated DVDs from the back of his car>

pros·ti·tu·tion noun (Prostitution - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)

1: the act or practice of engaging in promiscuous sexual relations especially for money

2: the state of being prostituted: debasement

pros·ti·tute *transitive verb* (Prostitute - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012)

1: to offer indiscriminately for sexual intercourse especially for money

2: to devote to corrupt or unworthy purposes: debase <*prostitute* one's talents>

According to the U.S. Federal Legal Code, Title 22, Chapter 78 (U.S. House of Representatives, 2012), the following definitions are legally accepted:

Sex Trafficking represents the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for the purpose of a commercial sex act.

Commercial Sex Act means any sex act on account of which anything of value is given to or received by any person.

Severe Forms of Trafficking in Persons denotes:

Sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such act has not attained 18 years of age

OR

The recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud or coercion for the purpose of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery.

In terms of the manner they are often defined, the terms: “sex trafficking” and “prostitution” appear to be equivalent and interchangeable. Nevertheless, I will try my best while writing this paper not to transpose them.

Chapter One: Introduction

Background

For more than 300 years, the most powerful nations on Earth grew wealthier and stronger as a result of the slave trade that involved the commerce of 12 million Africans across the thousands of miles to work as slaves on plantations (Kara, 2010). Although today slavery is illegal in all the countries, the truth is that it has not perished in the 19th century. It is more alive and thriving than ever before but this time in the form of modern subjugation of the human body – the global trade in human flesh.

Around the year 2000, Kevin Bales (Bales, 2000) estimated that there were approximately 27 million people enslaved worldwide out of which 6% or 8% globally were sex slaves. In his acclaimed book: “Sex Trafficking – Inside the Business of Modern Slavery” published in 2010, Siddharth Kara estimated that the number increased to 32 million (Kara, 2010).

Sex slaves are the most profitable out of the entire industry, as they do not sell intellectual abilities for capital accumulation but their bodies. They are endowed with a commodity that is not only marketable but which also brings a benefit to the consumer and to the ones that are marketing the service. They can decide on the price, on the volume, the recurrence, the marketplace where to sell it, etc. Eventually, their product

brings them more economic benefit than it ever does to the buyer to whom it mostly offers physical pleasure.

With human trafficking surpassing in revenue drug and arm trafficking annually, sex trafficking will continue to aggravate as it is intertwined with a commodity that people all over the world have ceaselessly sought: money! Thus, capitalism succeeds in transforming once again all aspects of life including sex. The avidity to have more and more money is precisely what has stripped human beings of all individuality throughout the centuries and has led to increased modern day slavery.

Romanian women that had willingly or unwillingly fallen prey in the hands of the traffickers immediately following the 1989 Revolution were regular human beings. They were not models. They were normal girls just like the rest of us. The only thing that set them apart was either desperation and poverty or the ardent desire for material goods, as they love to buy into an image. These were the reasons that stood at the root of their metamorphosis from regular human beings into mere commodities.

As stated previously, from the beginning of times, the traffickers or pimps never sold skilled labor or mental capabilities for monetary gain but instead sex workers who were placed in the labor market to provide impersonal gratification to clients, many times under the oppressive eyes of the trafficker. This relationship is almost correspondent to slave breeding in America during Chattel.

Surprisingly, this burdensome, repressive, and exploited connection co-exists in a free market economy which suppresses individual freedom and reduces the slave to a vulgar, heartless entity that is there solely to create a profit for her master. On one hand, the individual itself along with her soul is reduced to simple merchandise and on the

other hand, the trafficker becomes the exploiter, the omnipotent, and the one holding and abusing the power.

In many circumstances, the exploited slave works for years to escape the vicious and cryptic cycle of the so-called “debt bondage”. Debt bondage takes form when the recruiter or pimp sells the slave to the trafficker for a certain amount of money. The slave is then told that she would regain her freedom only when the return on the investment had been fully recovered. However, that is never the case because as the slave begins the work, the owner subtracts money daily for accommodations, food, clothing, bad behavior, water to shower, or anything deemed incorrect.

Debt bondage keeps the business going until the commodity (the trafficked girl) becomes disposable as she produces no more profit for the capitalist (the trafficker). The sex worker receives no remuneration or wage – she simply serves another individual in the labor market while the traffickers continue to collect all the surplus value.

The victim is neither compensated nor does she collect any other form of payment from the owner. Marx himself would argue that this is how the production starts as a process of creating value for the item you attempt to produce in order to start selling. The raw material in this case assumes the form of the human body itself.

Research data shows that the trafficker recovers his money within the first couple of weeks that the slave has engaged in sexual activities. One hour of sex can range from \$50-\$500, depending on what the client’s desires, fantasies, and needs are. The degradation of the soul that turns the body into a machine takes place at the same time that the human being’s metamorphosis occurs and it transforms it into a “a use-value” which also has “exchange value” (Marx, 1915). These women are forced to engage in

sexual intercourse with 10-20 men per day turning therefore into “a thing”. They lose their value and they become interchangeable amongst the traffickers based on age, tightness, and whether or not they are virgins. The capitalists’ aim (in this case the traffickers’) “is not only to produce a use-value but a commodity and not only a use-value but value per se.” Any service offered beyond this two-week time frame is nothing but “surplus value” - pure profit for the capitalist (Marx, 1915).

Statement of the Problem

Romania, as a country of origin and transit zone tends to favor increased sex trafficking. Along with Moldova, it became one of the hottest trafficking spots - a strategically positioned transit zone in the Balkans and therefore, a country where most of the trafficking occurs. With Sarajevo considered the exchange point for most of the trafficking in Eastern Europe, the so-called “Balkan Trail” emerges as the most notorious of these smuggling routes with Romanian women as protagonists.

Therefore it would be very difficult to write a paper that attempts to answer the question of sex trafficking in Romania without contextualizing the problem in the socio-economic, political, and cultural framework before Stalinism and right after its succumbing. Neither do women lose their ideals and become sex workers overnight nor does a social system disappear instantaneously. It is an assiduous process, which in this particular case began long before 1989 and took full force around the mid-90s when sex trafficking became the fastest growing form of organized crime. Twenty-three years later, a lot of residuals of Stalinism continue to exist in Romania and the large majority of the citizens are still trapped under the ashes of the oppressed Communist mindset where selling your body represents “the livelihood” since it is the easiest job to find. Unless you

have lived it or watched it, comprehending why this “career” has become so popular among Romanian women might be very difficult to accept.

Around 1990, Romanian women’s dreams of a long-awaited democracy and high standard of living started to wither and as desperation settled in, more and more started responding to fraudulent newspaper ads that were offering jobs (predominantly in Germany, Netherlands, and France) for maids, nurses, social workers, hostess, waitresses, and dancers. Once there, their passports were taken away, they were drugged, beaten, and forced to thicken the lines in filthy brothels.

Notwithstanding, statistics from the last decade have shown that despite the illegitimacy of these newspaper ads, more and more Romanian women are still willing to take a risk hoping that “it will not happen to them” or knowing upfront that they will be working in the sex industry but unaware about the conditions under which they will perform the work. For the past decade, Romanian newspapers have been filled with articles that claim that the large majority of the women that are being trafficked brought each other to partake in this very profitable business, as they are all racing to get the quick cash first. Nevertheless, deep down, these women fight a daily battle to become worthy of the world they live in. Starvation and desperation push them to become the perfect wife/girlfriend/mother and thus they accept the job no matter the consequences.

Prior to the December 1989 Revolution, Romania represented nothing but the prototype of a very pathetic and depressing Stalinist republic. People’s freedoms had been suppressed for more than four decades and an indoctrinated nation found itself unable to foresee light in the severely doomed horizons. A mass revolt was inconceivable as the Communist leader, appeared to have spies and informants everywhere. According

to numerous articles written on the topic, prior to the Revolution, “one in three Romanians was an informant for the Securitatea”¹.

But in order to understand what happened to millions of Romanian women that became sex minions right after the eradication of Communism, we must look at their background, which unequivocally contributed to their metamorphosis. There is nothing particular about these women that should attract the pimps or traffickers. Some of them are not even skinny and tall, blond and blue-eyed but short and chubby with dark hair and brown irises. These are regular women; some very educated some perhaps not but they all have a common denominator: according to them, that of having been “cursed” to be born in a “doomed society”.

Romania’s situation preceding the events of December 1989

Before the revolution, Romanians’ daily struggle was a multifaceted and multipronged problem, the most difficult of which was consumer product acquisition such as food or other basic staples of life. Waiting in line for more than 24 hours to buy soy-based products, gizzards, hearts, chicken feet and heads became unbearable under the very strict 1981 food-rationing program. Women and children were significant components of these large queues, often fainting due to standing up for hours in excruciating heat with no water or food available. Rationed oranges (available only during Christmas time), rationed bread, cold and hot water, no freedom of information,

¹ Securitate (the Romanian name for “Security”) is the secret police agency of Communist Romania - the largest secret police force in the Eastern European bloc.

speech and press were only some of the problems Romanians were facing prior to the eradication of Stalinism.

“By the time of the revolution, the official monthly ration for many Romanians had been reduced to a kilo of flour, sugar, and meat, half a kilo of margarine, and five eggs, with there being no guarantee that even these meager supplies would be forthcoming.” (Siani-Davies, 2005).

The toy stores were very limited: a few board games, a couple of dolls and cars, and a little train on rails were the only available toys on display on the almost empty shelves. Due to the communists' drive to save electricity, the power was often shut off unpredictably especially during the evening hours so school children had to write their homework using oil lamps for light. Hot water was available once a week and cold water was rationed to a couple of hours a day. Due to the absence of water, people were filling up their bath tubs and most often than not, the ones on the higher floors were deprived of “the luxury” of having any water whatsoever because of the lack of pressure. The citizens were allowed to drive their cars only on alternating weeks depending on whether the last digit of their license plate was an even or odd number. They were given “numere matricole” (serial numbers) that were sewn onto a square piece of fabric connected to the actual clothing using Velcro, that had to be immediately shown to the authorities of the state, if requested.

A centralized heating system did exist, but one city plant was responsible for supplying thousands of apartments which made it almost impossible to raise the temperature over 45° Fahrenheit inside the apartments. Most people heated water and filled glass bottles that they would snug to keep warm at night. There were also a lot of those, that fearing hypothermia, had beds set up in their kitchens during the harsh winter months. They “were kept warm by the naked flames of their stoves, risking asphyxiation

if the gas supply was cut while they slumbered and then turned on again unexpectedly” (Siani-Davies, 2005). To prevent that from happening, people were often taking turns to sleep during the night. There were also a lot of citizens that were sharing the same bed with their kids (4 sometimes 5 people) so that they could keep each other warm.

The only two hours of television broadcast were divided as follows: the first half an hour there was Ceaușescu’s speech subsequent to another half an hour of his visits to various factories around the country, then half an hour of Russian cartoons, and another half hour of national anthem and news about Ceaușescu’s whereabouts for the next week. As a treat, there was a Bulgarian movie every Saturday evening.

Nevertheless, the greatest and most rampant source of fear was the one for the informants of the Securitatea. I remember my dad establishing a connection with some guy that was working in a slaughterhouse for exports and who was illegally providing extra meat to the consumers. They were speaking code over the phone as the entire nation suspected that the government officials had wiretapped their phones. The conversation unrolled as follows: “We are going to go to the seaside in a couple of weeks. If you and your wife would like to join us, we can drive together. We can meet at DN² 5 at 11:00 P.M. to avoid the heat.” In reality, that meant: “Bring only 5 kilograms of meat at 11:00 P.M. at our regular place”. Had someone talked, they would both be facing jail time, accused of disobedience towards the regime. Until my dad would return home, my mom, my sister and I would not even breathe for fear something might happen to him.

It is from this territory of constant insufficiency that persistent rumors of critical human right abuses emerged. Those that boldly appeared to defy the system or were

² DN (short for Romanian’s “Drum National” or National Road)

ungrateful to the “golden époque” (as Ceaușescu loved to call it) were thrown in jail, were harassed and threatened by the security forces, were tortured and blackmailed into thinking they would be losing their jobs, risked detention, and most times were thrown in psychiatric hospitals and treated for mental disorders (Siani-Davies, 2005).

Fear that one’s enemies would falsify information that they were participating in illegal activities and there would be no fair trial, shrouded in nebula the entire Romanian society. People feared their neighbors, their friends, their relatives, and even their own shadows. The informants were believed over the accused person with no exception. All these things created a severe disconnect within the society and an indescribable discomfort, as people did not know whom to trust. Neighbors were avoiding and scrutinizing each other, co-workers were keeping their relationships strictly professional and businesslike, and relatives minimized the contact with each other to a point that even a prior, effortless exchange of pleasantries became overly complicated.

In August 1989, Raymond Seitz, the United States Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Canada declared during a conference in Washington:

“I cannot anticipate what will happen in Romania. It is an insensitive country and it has become immune to all the changes that are taking place in Eastern Europe. Romania has its own particularities. The human rights situation is absolutely depressing. For the moment, there is no indication that the events that occurred in such a happy and salutary way in the majority of the Eastern European region will occur in Romania as well. Although we cannot allow ourselves to hope, we will continue to keep our fingers crossed” (Nicolaescu, 1989).

But Raymond Seitz was not the only one that could not foresee Romania’s detachment from communism and intrinsically from the Soviet bloc. The majority of the leaders around the world seemed to share his opinion.

As the former Soviet satellites (Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Bulgaria) were eradicating communism one after another through non-violent action and as the Iron Curtain started to become increasingly dismantled, it became safe to assume that the same would occur in Romania. People had started to hear stories of how the communist states were collapsing like houses of cards and were eager to embrace democracy and a free market economy but because of the media censorship, they did not know where to begin or whom to trust. They believed that if they started with nonviolent protests that would determine Ceaușescu to resign following the model of the other socialist states. However, that could not have been farther from the truth as Ceaușescu, unlike the other communist leaders, was not ready to abjure.

Soon, an entire nation started daydreaming about the day that communism would be eradicated and their kids would lead a better life. They decided there was no better time to take a risk than the present and what had boiled inside of them for so many decades started to surface. They were completely aware they might be heading towards their own death but in a closed world, with non-existent opportunities and severe scarcity of basic staples of life, risk became negligible and death was perceived by many, especially the eldest, as better than the life they were living. Thus, fear slowly disappeared and courage took its place.

Romania after the eradication of Stalinism

In the aftermath of the demise of the former Soviet Union, Romania, as a former satellite, had high hopes of a Western-style democracy that only came about theoretically. The transition from communism to a free market economy, envisioned as ideal, took a

very long time to concretize as a result of the race and fight for power after the 1989 Revolution, which left an entire society captive in the meshes of a very corrupt, newly formed government. The civil society became obsessed with the idea of opportunities outside the national borders as the collapse of state socialism represented the most powerful change in Eastern European political economy in the twentieth century and with the new arrangements in place, time could not have been riper for movement to the West.

One of the main characteristics of communism in Romania was the manufacturing in bulk of citizens that lacked self-esteem since they did not feel in control and experienced a severe inferiority complex compared to the majority of the world outside the national borders: that of being hundreds of years behind in terms of culture, civilization, and technology. Romania was a nation that was bowing to the rich Western, liberal powers and believed all the utopian stories of the people that were looked up to for the simple reason that they had been presented with the opportunity to travel or work abroad. These stories about the good fortunes on foreign territory started perpetuating and the immigration dream was put on the highest pedestal. Due to the desire for social recognition and the incapability to achieve it at a domestic level, Romanians continued to daydream of foreign lands.

The political, social, and cultural changes exacerbated the poverty gap, aggravated the unemployment rate, and built hyperinflation to its climax while completely annihilating the middle class and creating unequal division of labor between men and women. The discrimination in the job market where women were the last to get a job and the first to be fired pushed them towards the unconventional sectors and unofficial channels of the economy such as the black market in order to make a living.

Confused and vulnerable by the crumbling post-communist reality and in search of a better future, these jobless, sometimes uneducated women who were most times abused at home, found themselves wanting to illegally migrate towards the Occident.

Given the absence of conventional channels and eagerness to embrace capitalism at all costs, they resorted to risky but lucrative employment options such as fictitious newspaper ads where their confidence was aggrandized and where they seemed to be easily accepted despite being completely under-qualified. Notwithstanding, this post-communist transition was a much-disrupted process: corruption at the government level, tough border control, insecure socio-economic environment, and equalitarian principles that became obsolete. This is the type of chaotic society that gave birth to frustrated, restrained, and introvert women who started selling their bodies and their lives. The flesh underneath their skin was the only thing they had left to sell after losing all their jewelry, antiques, and all the goods with sentimental value in pawn shops. Everywhere you turned, Romanians were anxious to leave their country.

Why Trafficking?

According to the National Labor Organization, Romania identified a series of factors that determined the vulnerability of Romanian women as an operational concept to fall in the trap of the traffickers (Romanian Ministry of Labor, 2012):

The number one cause was considered to be the low standard of living. Most victims belonged to families where at least one (if not both) of the parents were unemployed and were struggling to make a living, battling financial difficulties daily. In many of the cases, these women themselves led a troublesome existence as most had

been abandoned by their husbands and were left with a few kids in their custody. Desperate and frantic, they resorted to the ads in the newspaper having high hopes that the income earned would feed their kids and pay the bills as the opportunities seemed plenty and extraordinary.

Secondly, the unemployment rates were skyrocketing. The absence of jobs in the labor market and sometimes the lack of educational attainment determined women to fall prey in the hands of the traffickers. The salaries (if present) were very low and they did not cover the bare minimum such as utilities alone. In many situations, these women were underpaid or they were paid under the table. There were circumstances in which they worked for months hanging to false promises of a permanent job contract or a guarantee of an income and months later, they were being fired and given nothing.

The third factor that played a crucial role was education. Most often than not, these women were high-school graduates. Therefore, they were not considered qualified or skilled professionals in the labor market as educational and professional experience had evolved more and more into an important employment criterion. This vulnerability became inversely proportional with their educational level. In the rural areas, they tended to be even more exposed, as most of them were not even high-school graduates. It was right here, at the bottom of the social pyramid where the majority of the minors got recruited (most of them between the ages of 12-16) as these young girls could not possibly meet any employment options and were often abandoned by their parents or pertained to families where both parents were alcoholics and unable to cater to their needs.

In addition, young women in rural areas had been subjected to arranged marriages and had been sold into marriage through practices of dowry and bride-price. They were not being allowed to love; instead, they were told whom to love. That was usually the son of someone of considerable wealth or position reported to the village standards. They could have become bride or sex workers or sometimes both. The linkages between family slavery and international forced prostitution revealed on numerous occasions a highly interdependent system (Barry, 1979).

As the gap between reality and expectations emerged into something wider every day, these women that were only seen as an additional mouth to feed, as inferior solely because of their gender, and as second, if not third bests, became desperate and were willing to believe anything when the so-called employer promised them to get them out of the poverty they were undergoing.

Education, which represented not only the result of the professional and academic development but also that of enlightenment, discipline, and progress of knowledge echoed at the social level and was considered the most important factor that shaped responsibility, understood not necessarily in terms of assuming a specific obligation or adopting a certain behavior to meet the social norms of present times but as lucid and realistic in regards to an array of circumstances prevalent in personal life and which decisively included occupational alternatives.

The structural deficiencies of the personalities of the people involved in trafficking (the moral and behavioral burdens, psychological instability, alienation, and anti-social orientation) led to the fourth cause: the avid will to succeed and become independent. Most Romanian women were financially dependent either on their husbands

or on their parents' pension plans. The promises of substantial income that the traffickers or the recruiters made were by far superior to those that they could ever hope for as the feeling that their future holds nothing intensified. Furthermore, these women were willing to do anything to escape their sad lives and their families where they were neglected and/or physically and verbally abused on a regular basis.

Age as well as the inability and inefficiency to control the uncontrollable were also decisive factors. The community became a cause in itself and so did the institutionalized or urban agglomeration living. Women that had been a part of an institutionalized system were left hopeless at the age of eighteen when they had to pack their bags and find a life somewhere else. The government did not subsidize any of these programs and provided nothing for these people, welfare did not exist, so their only way to survive was to find a job as quickly as possible. However, in an almost "jobless job market" that seemed almost impossible to achieve. In most cases, the traffickers were waiting outside these institutions because they knew these girls had no one else to turn to. They approached them and made them offers that seemed fantastic in the absence of something else.

Shockingly, in terms of the urban agglomeration, statistics showed that girls from larger cities tended to be even more predisposed to these manipulations of the traffickers, as there was very little social control. Within smaller communities there was a set of sanctions associated with traditional community norms and this served as a reason for which women pertaining to these communities were less at risk than those in the urban agglomerations.

A fifth cause of women falling prey to slavery was the exposure to fairytales and migration success stories. Mass media as well as friends, family or merely acquaintances played an important role in shaping the image of a Utopian society outside the borders of this poor country where money could be picked up from trees. As a nation that has the tendency to exaggerate things, these fantasy stories dragged upon themselves hundreds of thousands of women who constantly dreamed of living abroad and who perceived these stories as long-expected rescuing opportunities that will define their social status upon return. Because of the many years of continuous oppression and communist-like values, the large majority of these women were not tech-savvy. The media only passed messages to the public that were imposed and approved by the dictatorship and the Internet was something people were extremely unfamiliar with. The Romanian population had never been exposed to the Western society or its functionality and they were naïve enough to believe the false and empty promises of complete strangers or even the false advertisements that had taken over the pages of the newspapers and where they were being offered unbelievable salaries, room and board if they wanted to sign the imaginary offer letter.

The defective (often non-existent) legislation (insufficiently harmonized with the international norms) did not include sanctions for traffickers nor did they offer solutions for the victims. Women that managed to escape the brothels or the hotels where they were kept were never offered protection and were often tracked down and killed by their pimps in search of revenge.

The current legislation for trafficking in Romania is deficient and the pimps and traffickers take advantage of this. A rapist is punished to 15 years in jail while a trafficker

gets 3-12 years and most often pays his way out sooner and is released “for good behavior”.

In addition, the corruption on the government level had spread tremendously as they themselves realized the profitability behind this business and turned a blind eye to what was happening as they were often working on commission. The more they kept their mouths shut and their eyes closed, the more money they would make. Numerous organizations that had provided shelters recently for these abused women had been accused of picking up the fees to keep the bars open as they were also sharing the profits and taking advantage of the free sex.

Research Questions

- 1) Are there more victims of sex trafficking who are selected or do the majority of trafficked victims self-select?
- 2) If Romanian women self-select in situations of trafficking, is this because of the enhanced perception of opportunities that increases their social status back home?
- 3) If the latter question turns out to be true, is prostitution a profession, an attempt to escape a doomed destiny or all of thereof?

Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted in an ethical manner. The procedures I followed were aligned to the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board’s requirements. The abovementioned institution has approved the application and the informed consent form. In addition, I have obtained permission from the participants who are associated with this research.

For information on how the data was obtained or the steps taken to minimize the potential risk to my participants, please refer to Chapter Three (Methods) for an ample description.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Prostitution has often been referred to as “the oldest profession in the world.” Pimping and procuring, on the other hand, represent the most ruthless displays of male power and sexual dominance (Barry, 1979). Since it would be seriously naïve to assume that all of the girls being trafficked are victims, a clear distinction between prostitution and trafficking must be made to eliminate any confusion.

The discrepancy between prostitution and trafficking is not very easy to ascertain due to both the informal nature of the contracts between the intended “migrant worker” and the trafficker as well as the impossibility to assess the degree to which the victim is or is not aware of the type of job she will be performing (Lazeroiu & Alexandru, 2003). Nevertheless, contrary to the position held by ardent advocates of prostitution that prostitution and trafficking should be separated; the males who buy women and girls in prostitution could not care less about this distinction (Eckberg, 2002). As long as it brings the perpetrators the much-expected profit, they do not care if the girls in prostitution are there willingly or unwillingly. Given these observations, this research will attempt to shed light on a progressing question: are these women selected or self-selecting and if the latter, are they sex slaves or merely sexual deviants? The research also strives to give a different connotation to the word “victim” by offering a different lens for the scholars in the sex trafficking field.

A recent adumbration of sex trafficking in Romania performed by the National Agency against Trafficking in Persons in 2009 revealed that the main means of exploiting the victims have been precisely through sex, which occurs primarily in the streets, clubs

or private residences (41%). Trafficking through forced labor accounted for only 40%. Recently however, this direction itself has fluctuated quite a bit: trafficking for sexual exploitation has significantly increased while trafficking for forced labor has considerably decreased (Garbulet, 2010). This can only point to the fact that from all existing distinctive schemes in which a person can be trafficked, sex trafficking continues to be most profitable thus leading to a new form of sex colonization.

Pertaining to human trafficking, scholars in the field claim that there exist police reports from the villages inhabited by the Jewish from Wales and also from Central and Eastern Europe dated from the end of the 19th century that indicated abductions and sales of children and girls to brothels all over the world but especially South America. In Latin America (predominantly in Argentina and Brazil) and the Caribbean data on such cases was recorded even before 1860 (Mateut, et al., 2005).

Sex trafficking is a multifaceted disease and in one form or another has been one of the few constants throughout the centuries. Myths and historical data assert that older civilizations considered prostitution not only tolerable but something to be encouraged and condoned depending on the task it was attempting to accomplish (Foucault, 2005). People of ancient Greece (8th to 6th centuries BC) referred to prostitutes as: πόρνη (“porne”, a derivative of “*pernemi*”), the Greek word that meant: “to sell” with axiomatic connotations in today’s modern evolution. Greek people believed that refined prostitution was imperiously necessary to satisfy the feeling of pleasure and therefore, they created a hierarchy of prostitution: *hetaera* (luxury prostitutes, sophisticated courtesans who offered not only physical pleasure but also intellectual company), *peripatetica* (street worker), and last but not least, established, renowned prostitutes that

would service the temples and who practiced this job in sacred, prayer enclosures as a sacrifice brought to the Gods for a considerable price (Mihalache, 2005). In the ancient Corinth, for example, the temple was the shelter of no less than 1,000 prostitutes who practiced sex on a daily basis with multiple clients. These established prostitutes represented the first phase of organized prostitution known to history (Garbulet, 2010).

Despite the fact that the analogy between religion and sexuality has been something that emerged naturally throughout the centuries, many contemporary historians still consider this association a blasphemy. (Mihalache, 2005) “Hospitable prostitution” was an important constituent of prostitution as a whole. The male figure of the household was entitled to offer his visitors (pilgrims or plain strangers) the body of his wife or daughter(s) to complete his obligingness. This practice was particularly prevalent to ancient people and later to the Eskimos. (Garbulet, 2010)

Last but not least, one should not forget about the prostitution that had a political character, which was mentioned for the first time in the very well known legend of Samson and Delilah.

In ancient Rome, men reserved the right to commit adultery with the so-called *delicatae* (“kept mistresses” which belonged to the higher category of women prostitutes). Another group consisted of *famosae*³ (daughters or wives, descendents of very rich families who practiced prostitution for personal pleasure. At the bottom of the pyramid, as the lowest class were the *lupae* (those having sex for money) and the *copae* (the girls from inns and taverns who did not mind being paid to have sex) (Mihalache, 2005).

³ The word *famosae* meant *stained doves from respectable families*.

Many times, prostitution was considered a taboo subject and it stayed in practice as a regular job with or without the approval of the authorities of the state. Nevertheless, in spite of these traditional approaches to women, if one was determined to become a prostitute she would risk to be drowned, having her nose cut, or be tied to the “infamy pole”.

Notwithstanding, throughout time, the causes and characteristics of prostitution have changed and are currently directly proportional to the degree of development of the civil society in each nation individually.

Soon, the perpetual abuse of women as sex slaves and their exploitation by the traffickers did not feel much different than what they were experiencing at home. This turned this occupation into the ideal way of making profit for the opportunists from the country of origin. It soon became a transnational issue of dramatic proportions, which gradually succeeded in creating coalitions and expanded in the international human trafficking networks (Mihalache, 2005).

The Romanian legal definition of prostitution is “The act of offering one's self for hire to engage in sexual relations” (Mateut, et al., 2005). Merriam Webster defines prostitution as “the act or practice of engaging in promiscuous sexual relations especially for money”(Prostitution - Definition and More from the Free Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012). Consequently, sex trafficking is often said to occur in a coerced and deceiving manner since the victim is neither aware of the job she will be performing nor the conditions under which she will perform that job. Nevertheless, for the past couple of decades a large majority of these girls knew upfront what their “job description” entailed and thus, became willing participants - therefore, prostitutes. They were there in search of

quick and easy cash. As a result, placing them under the “victim” category would be hypocritical, incorrect, and unjust towards the other group of girls (the ones that are deceived from the very beginning about the job they will perform). Under no circumstances does my last observation imply that these women deserve to be treated differently and suffer although the Romanian society has very little pity and condemns them, often labeling them as “whores”. These are the women who are never offered the benefit of a doubt.

Concomitantly, a lot of policy makers are still debating what “trafficking” really means. According to the United Nations Article 3, paragraph (a) of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2012), the general accepted definition is as follows:

“(…) the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.”

By offering an internationally comprehensive definition of human trafficking, the Palermo Protocol attempted to insert forced and coerced labor as an ulterior motive for trafficking apart that of being sexually exploiting. While the Protocol makes a few clear distinctions between the sex and labor trafficking, the logical presumption is that sexual exploitation does not necessarily imply forced labor. Generally speaking, “trafficking” refers most often to the illegal movement of these people across national boundaries or sometimes within the same boundaries. This phenomenon is treated as a business, people

are treated as commodities, which completes and perfects this vicious circle of exploitation either through sex or through labor (Vidaicu & Doldea, 2009). Through sex trafficking, these girls, who are in their large majority regular girls, not models or mannequins, do not sell skilled services for capital growth but their bodies. Despite that they appear to be self-selecting for prostitution having in mind the enhanced perception of opportunities back home, they are not self-selecting to be trafficked. Nevertheless, the self-selecting ones become what the traffickers call “safe victims”. According to them, “safe victims” are those that are coming from broken households and broken financial situations and who are willing to go the extra mile to make quick money.

Other scholars in the sex trafficking field have also contested this definition questioning whether or not it includes the exploitation itself and claiming that “the wording connotes only the movement portion of the trafficking chain, which explains why so many laws and programs against trafficking focus on movement more than exploitation. However, trafficking is not about movement; it is about slavery” (Kara, 2010). With that in mind, it comes as no surprise that for the past decade, most literature in the field has shifted its focus. Kara therefore suggests two definitions that he finds more valuable:

1. “Slave trading can be defined as the process of acquiring, recruiting, harboring, receiving, or transporting an individual, through any means and for any distance, into a condition of slavery or slave-like exploitation.”
2. “Slavery can be defined as the process of coercing labor or other services from a captive individual, through any means, including exploitation of bodies or body parts.” (Kara, 2010)

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384 B.C. – 322 B.C.) mentioned that all barbarians were slaves by birth, highly unable to rise above or beyond their obedient destinies. Aristotle wrote: “Humanity is divided into two: the masters and the slaves; or,

if one prefers it, the Greeks and the Barbarians, those who have the right to command and those who are born to obey.” He also wrote: “A slave is a property with a soul”. It was thus, that slavery became the “institution to build empires” (King, 2004). In regards to Aristotle’s observation we can argue that while indeed, the slave is a property with a soul, that soul has changed throughout the centuries and is not only bleeding with pain but sometimes is rotten and immoral, corrupt, and unethical as trafficking specifically targets the slave as an object of exploitation and not always unwillingly. Its very own purpose from the very beginning of this process is to exploit the individual in order to gain a profit.

In her acclaimed piece “Loose Women or Lost Women: The re-emergence of the myth of 'white slavery' in contemporary discourses of 'trafficking in women'”, Jo Doezema claims that there is currently some recognition that most of these trafficked women know forthright they will be working in the sex industry but that does not seem to serve as a deterrent. The things they are unaware of are the conditions under which they will perform the work (Doezema, 2000).

This is when they become “victims” – when they realize that what they think it is, it is actually not. The United States State Department argues that:

“It is critical to understand that a person’s initial consent to participate in prostitution is not legally determinative; if an individual is thereafter held in service through psychological manipulation or physical force, that person is a trafficking victim and should receive the benefits outlined in the United Nations’ Palermo Protocol and applicable laws” (U.S. Department of State, 2012).

Other intellectuals forthrightly accuse the media of focusing on the supply factor versus the demand side

“preferring instead to keep their gaze on the woman in prostitution or provide a partisan voice for those who promote the alleged «right to

prostitute» and romanticize prostitution as «sex work» in essence defending the vested interests of the sex industry” (O' Connor & Grainne, 2006).

Without the male demand, sex trafficking would be extremely unprofitable for pimps, recruiters, and traffickers who would cease looking for women to gain a profit. A prostitution market without the male consumers would go broke and traffickers would have to fold (Raymond, 2004).

The men that frequent the clubs, brothels, massage parlors, escort agencies, and strip clubs or street corners are those in search of the new “Natashas” (Malarek, 2010) – the exotic face from a different culture and background that can satisfy their sexual fantasies. They take them for granted and often treat them with disrespect to show their male dominance. They love this abuse of power without which the demand side would not be nearly as populous (Eckberg, 2002).

The client’s treatment of the prostitute (whether submissive, docile, sweet or violent):

“represents a denial of her subjectivity and humanity, and this process of denial both draws upon and reinforces profoundly misogynistic images of women. As well as paying for the sexual pleasure, physical labor and/or the making available of the body parts, the john is effectively paying the prostituted woman to be a person who is not a person; the essence of the transaction is that she is an object, not a subject within it ” (O' Connel Davidson & Taylor, 1999).

Liv Finstad and Cecilie Hoigard, two Norwegian authors that have extensively written on the topic of prostitution claimed in 1982 that there were four main reasons for prostitution: “money, the sense of belonging, drug use, and an image of women that promotes prostitution” (Finstad & Hoigard, 1992). Ten years later, in the notorious book: “Backstreets: Prostitution, Money and Love” the same authors claim that as they grew

wiser they realized that there is only one reason that stands at the core of prostitution: “money” arguing that “We know of no woman who prostitutes herself for any reason other than money (...) and without the money, prostitution would cease to exist” (Finstad & Hoigard, 1992). But we can easily argue the same thing about trafficking: if women were not desperate for money (for whatever reason they need it), without the money part of it, trafficking would cease to exist.

This seems to hold true even twenty years later after Linstad and Hoigard’s publication. In a current article published in (Adevărul newspaper, 2012) called “Confessions of a Trafficker «I admit! I Exploited 300 Romanian Women All Over Europe»”, Ioana Eugenia Gavrilă, who is currently in the Bacau jail serving a ten-year sentence for sex trafficking, made some startling disclosures. She claims that for the past twenty years she has trafficked more than 300 girls mostly to Greece, Norway, Switzerland, Italy, and Spain and has set up such a high number of brothels that she could barely keep track of. Bluntly, she admits she did it for the money, making as much as €30,000 per night. She talks about the unbelievable conditions under which these girls were kept, gives a lot of details about the recruiting methods, and states that upon completion of her sentence she will do exactly the same thing as highly educated, preeminent, Romanian figures do not earn nearly as much as she did. However, the most alarming among her allegations was how the girls “in need of a job approached her for employment” and how some of these girls recruited other friends that knew about the jobs they will be performing (but not about the conditions under which they will perform these jobs) (Filip, 2012, May 8th).

Gavrilă's statement appears to be perfectly aligned with Jo Doezema's piece: "Loose Women or Lost Women?" which offers a descriptive analysis of "Innocent Victims Versus Guilty Whores" (Doezema, 2000). Doezema claims that

"the mythical nature of the paradigm of the «white slave» has been demonstrated by historians and that recent research indicates that today's stereotypical «trafficking victim» bears as little resemblance to women migrating for work in the sex industry as did her historical counterpart, the «white slave»".

Doezema is intrigued that the policies to eradicate trafficking continue to be grounded on the innocence and the unwillingness of the sex trafficking victims while portraying the prostitutes as bad women who deserve to be punished (Doezema, 2000).

Most of the women being trafficked do not look as if they are slaves. They merely look like prostitutes that seem to enjoy the job they are performing. They put up a front and they smile all the time to satisfy the clients. Toos Heemskerk, an outreach worker from Amsterdam who worked half of her life on De Walletjes in Amsterdam (the largest red-light district) claims that the European Union is to be blamed for accepting Romania as one of its members. She says that the majority of the girls that work the brothels and the streets in Amsterdam are Eastern European (mostly Romanian and Bulgarian) but she questions the fact that these girls came there by themselves and decided to be prostitutes in the Red Light District as the smile that you can see through the window is not the reality of it. She questions how a woman from a forgotten village in Romania that does not even speak the language gets on a plane and comes straight to Amsterdam to rent a window and begins to prostitute herself? She questions how they would know to do that and how they would have the financial means to do that? There is without a doubt an organized network behind it that keeps the 4 million tourists that visit Amsterdam

annually extremely happy. The question is: do these women want to decorate these windows naked or are they coerced into doing it? And at the end of the day, to you or me, the passers-by, what difference does it make?

Chapter Three: Research Methods

Introduction

The United Nations estimates that some 80% of the women trafficked are trafficked for sexual exploitation (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2003). An estimated 120,000 women and children are trafficked into Western Europe each year. Eurostat's ballpark figure between 1990-1998 was that more than 253,000 women and girls were trafficked into the sex industry from the former Soviet Bloc (European Commission, 2012). The same agency estimates that in 2009 that number increased twofold.

The International Organization for Migration, Counter-Trafficking Database, 78 countries, 1999-2006, claims that in 54% of the cases the recruiter was a stranger to the victim while in 46% of the cases the victim knew the recruiter. The same organization affirms that 52% of those recruiting victims on a regular basis are men, 42% are women, and 6% are both men and women. In terms of prosecutions, the 2006 US State Department, Trafficking in Persons Report claims that there were only 5,808 prosecutions and 3,160 convictions throughout the world, which means that for 800 people trafficked, only one person was convicted in 2006.

Romania, one of the main suppliers of human flesh is thus experiencing an unprecedented event. Because of the continuous lack of opportunities within the national borders, more and more women resort to work in Western Europe in search of a better future. These women risk everything they have to be able to become financially independent and put food on the table. If before they were deceived by false promises or

the legality of the work contract, deceived by the opportunities themselves, housing and/or living conditions, these days things have considerably changed. They seem to know exactly where they are heading but they willingly take the risk and give up all their beliefs, ethical values and principles, sell their bodies in search of quick cash in order to stabilize their social status back home and provide for their families. Nevertheless, these highly criticized women do not just wake up and make the decision to become prostitutes over night. This decision is made for them by the very social, political, and economic system in the country in which they were born. What sets them apart from the other women is the ardent desire to succeed at all costs. They are willing to do the job... any job knowing exactly what the job description entails although unaware and unable to predict the circumstances under which it will be performed. It is thus that the prostitute by choice becomes a willing slave.

The following research question is addressed in this study: “Are Romanian women being trafficked selected or self-selecting?”

Methodology and Setting

The study followed a qualitative and reflexive methodology to depict the degradation of the soul that turns the body into a machine and forces the human frame into a material object that can be used, reused, and/or exchanged.

The analysis will have Romania as its central geographical focus, depicting the global implications of these women’s perpetual change of location. Globalization will once more adversely impact Central Eastern European societies and implicitly Romania, deepening the poverty and stagnating its economic growth.

This study was based on a reflexive methodology as it gave more soul to the work performed and was less threatening to the quality of the research. As a native of Romania, I have met and bonded with some of the women that are part of my research and although difficult, I made significant efforts to limit to a minimum my biases and theoretical predispositions in regards to this topic. This has prevented my observations and collected data not to fit my theory but instead to help construct my theory around it. These observations were extended over time and space taking the many years of interest in this particular subject and six months of research to understand what is really happening.

It is worth mentioning that despite the fact that the reflexive methodology lacks scientific data to make it appear more reliable, this was crucial for my research as my “self” delineated the final product rather than the final product being the result of some pre-existing statistical data that has proven to be useless so far in finding a solution or answer per se to this on-going problem.

Sampling Methods

The study used “snowballing” as the sampling method. This proved to be extremely beneficial to the research since the sampling unit (some of the women I already knew) put me in contact with others that experienced a similar or worse situation. Reaching this particular group (trafficked women or family members of trafficked women) was very challenging although I highly anticipated that some of the women that have talked to me openly in the past might not do so once I disclosed that they were going to be part of a research. Despite the promises of maintaining a high confidentiality

level, this continues to remain an awfully sensitive topic although strangely, not so painful to address.

It was particularly the uneasiness of the subject that impinged these women's comfort level given the stigmatization that has perpetually shadowed the Romanian society. These girls are afraid to talk not because they are scared, but for fear people might see them as prostitutes. That is crucial to their image back home for which they have worked so hard. Everything that they do is done because they want to be admired and respected. Nevertheless, most times they are repudiated by the very same system that they so hard try to impress. They must be better than the large majority and they must have a lot of designer clothing and accessories to show they are superior. It is only by doing this that prostitution and slavery become psychologically justified.

Prostitution was not their intention when they initially left the country. Being beaten was not part of how they pictured their job to play out. Not having a voice in front of the traffickers was not their childhood dream. For this, they are ashamed and keep silent to the majority of the people around them mostly to protect their families since a piece of news like that would destroy perhaps forever the reputation that their families have vigorously fought to build for decades. This has nothing to do with escaping a debt bondage or being psychologically traumatized, living in constant fear, etc. Neither do the traffickers threaten their families nor do they threaten them. These are the pimps and traffickers' leading ladies who follow ad literam the instructions they are given and who end up recruiting more girls for them.

Sample Categories/participants

My research sample breaks down into four distinct groups:

a) ***Women that are trafficked willingly***

These are the women that are either completely aware of the consequences of their decision or women that knew about the job they would be performing but were ignorant about the conditions under which they would perform the job. This sample will consist of women between the ages of 18-32. I decided to enlarge my sampling frame as according to the International Office for Migration, Counter Trafficking Database, the majority of trafficking victims are between 18-24 years of age. Since some of these women have escaped the rings of the traffickers or have worked for them for more than a decade, the higher end of the age gap got extended as the majority of these women should be 30+ at the time of the interview.

b) ***Journalists***

This second sample includes the individuals that have interviewed/researched the topic and have published articles on sex trafficking and other related issues within the Romanian borders.

c) ***Traffickers/pimps***

I will also attempt to study the psychology of these traffickers to understand how they select their “victims” and how the majority of them experience no remorse in regards to the crimes they are committing. How do they recruit the next victim or who recruits the next victim for them? In May 2012, there was an article published in (Adevărul newspaper, 2012) about a female trafficker that declared she had more than 300 Romanian girls working in her network. She is currently in the Bacau prison convicted to 10 years in jail. She has released to the media a

significant amount of information and declared she is open to tell it all to whomever is interested. She also mentioned that despite the fact that she has ruined so many lives, she couldn't wait to get out of prison to do the same thing all over again.

d) *Anti-trafficking organizations that provide shelters to sex trafficking victims*

A simple discussion with employees from anti-trafficking organizations in Romania to better understand how these victims ended up there and what their expectations were upon leaving the country. In order to accomplish that, I plan to contact representatives of "Not for Sale Romania" while attending the Global Forum on Human Trafficking that will take place in Sunnyvale, California, November 1st and 2nd, 2012.

The ultimate goal of this study that would help me draw a conclusion to my research questions was to interview at least a few of participants from sample A (women that were trafficked willingly), one from sample D (anti-trafficking organizations that provide shelters to sex trafficking victims), and do secondary research for sample B (journalists) and sample C (pimps/traffickers).

As a Romanian native, I am fluent in Romanian and extremely familiar with the culture. I will therefore, require no help with the translation of the interviews or the raw data.

Confidentiality

I have informed the women participating in my research before the interview started that I would keep the interview notes as well as my recorder locked in my desk at

home and that no one other than myself would have access to the recordings or the interview questions. The non-involvement of a translator also guarantees the confidentiality of the information I will extract from the interviews.

I firmly believed before starting my research that I was not subjecting the participants to any risk whatsoever given that I took all the appropriate measures to ensure that no raw material will ever be seen by anybody other than myself. The participants' identities have been completely protected and did not appear in my notes. No identifying personal questions were asked at all during the interview.

Data Collection

The data collection used for my research analysis involved conducting observations, interviews as well as secondary research.

Conducting Personal Observations: observing how some of the girls targeted act and behave while out in the street was a significant constituent of my research. What prompted these pimps to target certain women? Was there something in their attitude that made them more easily approachable than others? Can promiscuity be read, interpreted, and anticipated on the face of a girl/woman who appears normal under most circumstances? Pimps appear to carefully select their victims. Is there a pattern that they follow? Is there a pattern or a "next victim" prototype or do they just pick random ones, basically anybody that falls in the trap and whose death sentence starts to be written the moment they look back?

Interviews: the interviews that I conducted aimed to see if there was a pattern that these women followed and if this pattern can be avoided in the future. Is it poverty, social

instability, lawlessness or acute gender discrimination that make these women so prone to leading a life of misery and becoming slaves? The aim of the interviews will also be to clearly underline the links between prostitution and trafficking which is not easy to ascertain because of reasons mentioned earlier such as the informal nature of the contract between the intended “slave” and the trafficker, or of the impossibility to assess the degree to which the victim was aware of the type of job she was undertaking. However, no matter from which angle we look at it, prostitution is a form of extreme violence against women. Open-ended questions served as the perfect tool during the interviews while silence was given special consideration. If my research subjects talked, I would anticipate the retrospective not to be tormenting but something that demands respect and that should not be interrupted.

Secondary Research: desk research proved to be the most challenging as there was very little material related to my research question from where I could collect data. The large majority of scholarly articles and work in the field of sex trafficking dealt mostly with human trafficking in general. Therefore, the summary, collation, and/or synthesis of existing research could be summarized very succinctly and brought very little to this research. Despite the fact that the authors offered a very thorough research and thick descriptions of the human trafficking in general, they gave brief descriptions of some of these girls’ stories and did not focus in particular on finding a viable solution to this on-going problem where life has a price tag.

Chapter Four: Findings

Personal Observations

In October 2010, I went back to Romania to attend my best friend's wedding. At the wedding, I sat next to a very well dressed gentleman. Bored and not knowing the people at my table I started noticing things like how the light in the room was so aesthetically pleasing, one woman smoking although she was pregnant, another girl being way to slim despite that she appeared to be eating everybody's dessert, or an entire crowd making these bizarre movements with their hands while dancing the "penguin dance" (a very popular wedding dance in Romania). But what struck me the most was the phone of the gentlemen right next to me. It was shiny and looked very unusual, not typical for a man since it was really too flashy and ostentatious.

I couldn't help but notice that the phone was a Vertu. The cheapest version of Vertu phones is approximately £3,500. The price of the ones that have real alligator leather, 18k gold, and/or genuine diamonds retail for more than £500,000 so you can imagine my surprise. If there was one thing I learned as a Romanian was that as a repercussion of Stalinism, there is no concept of "too much" - the more, the better, the smarter, and the richer. As a matter of fact, Romanians' tastes and acute interest in luxury commodities and services currently make Romania one of the most attractive markets in the region because its citizens are obsessed with material wealth, they are snobbish, and they love to buy into an image. It is precisely this image that ends up costing them so much.

As he kept texting, I immediately labeled him as a very rich person if he could afford such an extravagant phone. However, as he put the phone down, I found myself doing the rudest and least elegant thing: peeking at the last message that he wrote. It said in capital letters: "CAN'T CALL YOU! RAN OUT OF MINUTES. WILL BEEP WHEN IN FRONT OF YOUR BUILDING SO YOU CAN COME DOWN!" I smiled and remembered reading a recent story in the (*Adevărul* newspaper, 2012) about how Romanians buy some of the most expensive cars in Europe (like the *Lamborghini Aventador* - M.R.S.P. approximately \$380,000), and they make history by going to the dealership to ask if they can convert from regular gas to diesel fuel so that they can save money?

Nevertheless, please be advised that Romanians are neither environmentally conscious nor do they purchase fake items. Most of the designer stuff, all the Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Gucci, Dior, Chanel, and Prada items are real. They might not be bought, they might be stolen or they might have been purchased from someone that stole them while "working" in one of the Western European countries. The general assumption is that Romanians do not work in Western Europe but instead they work the Western European system in a good number of underground, illegal activities. However, the most important observation is they vigorously strive to always look spick and span in their designer items when they come back to light.

A YouTube trend that started a few years back featuring Romanian migrants in Spain and Italy amassed thousands of views. The so-called "căpșunari" (strawberry – pickers) who represent Romania's illiterate, lowest skilled workers and often, lowest class, spoke with disdain to the professionals using a very bad grammar and an avalanche

of slang about their newly found opulence on foreign territories such as designer clothing or luxury cars. Their comments targeted mostly their “friends” back home who would never ever be able to reach that posh threshold nor would they ever be able to buy such deluxe cars (YouTube user "Bulgariu Stefan", 2010). As they slapped the intellectuals in the face, boasting in front of “the losers” that stayed home and who made €250-€300 per month at most as teachers, the câpșunari became the laughingstock of the Internet. The intellectuals mocked them but the ignorant and the unenlightened from Romania, who had very little exposure to anything at all, made these illiterate nouveau riche the role models for their generation.

Soon, entire villages and parts of cities were abandoned as people started packing in search of new fortunes – all based on some delusive YouTube narrative or the disenchant of a neighbor whose stories’ accuracy left a lot to be desired. The deserted villages that now appear to stretch for as long as the eyes can see are solely inhabited by a few of the elders who are awaiting their time to come. They stay outside on the porch or right in front of the house waiting for their kids to come back from God knows where. They are very proud that their children have gone abroad as they claim that things have changed drastically from when they were young. Simply put, there are no opportunities locally. World Bank estimated in 2009 that approximately 3 million Romanian left the country. This represents 13% of the entire population of Romania (World Bank Group, 2012).

Before long, a quarter of a nation started applying for jobs anywhere and some ended up in countries like Cyprus or Greece that were not even close to the economic situation from back home. But the grass was definitely greener as they could increase

their purchasing power and buy more Nike sweat pants with which they could boast at home. Not to mention that the simple fact that they traveled abroad changed their social status, made them feel more confident and superior compared to the “poor suckers” that were still fighting or who gave a chance to the system at home. However, few of them accounted the living expenses in the Western bloc and soon turned to pick pocketing or prostitution.

A Romanian journalist commenting for BBC remarked that

“a summer road trip in rural Romania can show tourists some surprising sights: brand new BMWs with Italian and Spanish license plates, speeding at 140 km an hour down narrow village roads, or three storey, garish, pompous luxury villas built with the uttermost contempt for traditional local architecture standards, and plenty of «villagers» with strong Italian or Spanish accents. «Damn it, the strawberry pickers are back for the summer holidays!» is what any passer-by would say” (Murafa, 2011).

But that holds true not just for the rural area but in large cities as well. Romanians are known to drive some of the most expensive cars in Europe and their cell phones and clothing are always top of the line. Romania is therefore the only country I know of that keeps its illiterate in luxury cars and designer clothing.

The more I scrutinized the wedding crowd the more jealous I became looking at all those gorgeous girls dancing and wondered how they can stay so slim, how they can dress so impressively and tastefully as if they just stepped down from the cover of a magazine. Oana, a former classmate, was wearing this very tight black, knee-length cocktail dress, high heels that appeared to be Louboutin, judging by the unmistakably red sole, elbow length black satin and lace gloves, and an opulent rhinestone choker that was sparkling as much as real diamonds. I do not know what it is about these girls; if it is their overly developed sense of fashion, the way they carry themselves, or the way they

emanate confidence through every pore of their body, but every time I look at them I feel less confident, I feel like the charity case, and I feel that I'm coming from a village where there is no style, no surprises but just routine.

My thoughts were interrupted when Dana (another classmate) asked if I wanted to go to "Krypton" later to just "chill". Krypton is a disco bar that seemed very popular so I gladly accepted. As we were all in the restroom getting ready to take off and go to Krypton, one of my classmates handed me a tube of medicine and said: "Here! Take a couple 'cause you just ate". I looked at it and noticed the big letters that said: "alli". I remembered seeing a commercial while in the U.S.A, which was advertising these diet pills. I thanked her but told her that I did not want any. She immediately snapped: "Are you crazy? Do you want to get fat?" I was thinking to myself that according to their standards I was probably obese as my weight was 119 pounds at the time but considered that not saying anything was the wiser alternative. Under no circumstances should my last observation mean that these girls have eating disorders, as they do not. However, they do have an over developed sense of looking good and they make sure to stay like that.

While in the cab on the way to Krypton, I asked Dana what the deal was with this club and she said: "The richest guys come to this place!" I asked how she knew that and promptly she responded: "Haven't you seen the cars parked in front?" Apparently, this was a race to riches and there I was thinking we were going out to have fun when we were actually going to hunt for rich guys. At least, they were.

Having a boyfriend that drives a nice car, who dresses up nicely, and has the latest cell phone, is the norm among Romanian girls. Whether the boyfriend treats them

horribly or cheats on them is irrelevant, as it does not change anything as long as they make an impression on their friends, co-workers, schoolmates or neighbors. It does not matter how much they suffer. Sufferance becomes the collateral evil as they feel they agonize for a cause (to make their entourage jealous) and after a while, they become immune to it as no matter how the guy offends them, they appear to be inscrutable and there is no expression on their face that could give them away. That is how the very defective Romanian society functions and these are some of the women that end up thickening the sex trafficking lines.

When I asked Dana why she allowed her ex to treat her the way he did she told me that it was worth it as he had a lot of money. I clearly remember her telling me: “A poor man can abuse you just as a rich man can abuse you – but at least from the rich you have more advantages and don’t have to worry about tomorrow”. It was shocking! This was coming from a highly educated woman whose family was not necessarily well off but middle class for sure.

Unfortunately, Dana is not the only girl that is using this method to land a rich guy... sadly, the large majority of the girls in Romania sing the same tune and frequent the same clubs where every night tens of expensive cars are parked outside. They give up everything they care for and everything they believe in and just cater to the guy they are with. Thus, their lifestyles become an affront to decent human behavior and they start orbiting in esoteric and obscure circles as these men have no respect for them and have other things in mind.

While all this might sound completely irrelevant for a paper that discusses sex trafficking in Romania, eventually the fact that low to middle class people in poor

countries dream of a luxurious life with no foundation to support their spending reveries should be an indispensable observation for any paper that deals with trafficking especially in Eastern European societies where material obsession has taken over. Since the eradication of Stalinism, these societies have been built on chimerical a ideal, which digs even deeper holes into the ground where on a daily basis, hundreds of girls and women slip and fall into the sex trafficking world.

Pimps / Traffickers

Unfortunately, things did not go according to plan when it came time to interview Mrs. Gavrilă or Mr. Vlad. It was almost absolutely impossible to obtain the phone number for the Bacau prison and after I did obtain it, I was told I would not be able to talk to any of the inmates.

Therefore, all the information contained below about Ioana Eugenia Gavrilă and farther down about Costel Vlad is a compilation of notes and interviews taken from the (Adevărul newspaper, 2012), (Click.ro newspaper, 2012), and (Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012).⁴

Ioana Eugenia Gavril

Ioana Eugenia Gavrilă (who likes to be called Cristina) is a 36-year old woman born in Slatina, a poor area of the Olt County. She is not the most educated woman as she can only take pride in being a middle school graduate. She did however complete two

⁴ All the quotations from the interview with Ioana E. Gavrilă are from the (Adevărul newspaper, 2012) while the quotations for the interview with Costel Vlad are from the (Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012) - please refer to the bibliography for more information.

other courses that she diligently attended for six months (one of tailoring and the one in the field of construction). Despite her lack of education, she claims “she gained more money than others in 10 lifetimes” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012). According to her statements, for the past 20 years she has been making an average of €20,000 - €30,000 per night from the girls she trafficked. Over 2 million dollars is the sum that she managed to save after she bought herself luxury cars, a mansion at the periphery of Bucharest, kilos of gold and platinum, satisfied all her fads, and traveled extensively. She admits that her fortunes were built from selling other women’s bodies. She has trafficked 300 Romanian women all over Europe mainly to Greece, Norway, and Switzerland. Cristina claims to have remorse and admits that she destroyed lives but nothing to keep her up at night, as “it’s not her fault that those girls love to spread their legs” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012).

She is currently imprisoned in the Bacau jail serving a 10-year sentence but hopes that for good behavior and bribing everybody around her, she will be able to complete it in less than 3 years, only to go out and do exactly what she has done so far: “I am going to be the woman I’ve always been: Cristina, the one with the money and the power. I will marry another trafficker, obviously not a sucker. I will never do grunt work” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012). Given the level of corruption in Romania, that is very probable indeed.

The story of Cristina started in 1994 when she traveled to Greece. She claims that at that time, she did not even think of getting involved in this business as she used to be a very honest person with high moral standards. Her first job was in Athens where she was picking oranges for export and then a porter/janitor for an apartment building. Three years later, however, she met Doru who was also a Romanian immigrant in Greece. Doru

was a guide for those who wanted to illegally cross the border. At the time, there were still tough border control regulations. Cristina claims that she used Doru initially so that he can help her cross the border in order to visit her parents. She could not afford the trip so he did not charge her. Soon after, she noticed that Doru was bringing back to Greece only very young and beautiful girls who were sent to work in clubs or massage parlors. They broke up as she was really offended that he would use and abuse women in such a way.

Two years later, Cristina met Eduard.

“He was a pickpocket. I told him not to dare steal before my very eyes because neither did I like it nor did I approve. One day he noticed money sticking out of this old lady’s purse. I went to her, grabbed her arm and shook it to make her understand there was something going on. He got really mad and beat me pretty badly. There was a huge scandal and I promised I would leave him. He then swore he won’t steal and told me he’ll find another way to make money.”
(Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

After this incident both Cristina and Eduard started working 20-hour days in order to survive. Cristina even worked as a janitor for the Romanian Embassy in Greece. She was earning at that time 3,000 Deutschmarks⁵. Nevertheless, she soon realized that was not enough, as she had to pay taxes.

Eduard tried hard to explain to her that they could not make a decent living out of their honest jobs.

“A large part of the money I was earning he was spending gambling. He was not bringing any money home. One day, I found out that out of his desire to earn some money he started a new job: he became a pimp. Actually, I think he was doing that for a while but he never told me. Little by little, I started playing the game myself. I was really good at it! I had

⁵ The Deutschmark was the currency of Germany at the time and most immigrants were paid in Deutschmarks. It was quite strong as currency. Such, as of January 1st 1999 the change was 1.96 DM for 1 €.

previous experience with my ex and that helped a lot. I knew whom to trust and who the corrupted ones were.”
(Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

Within a few months, things started looking up and Cristina and Eduard started working side by side.

“I was bringing the girls from Romania and I was placing them in all sorts of bars. I was making sure they were not beaten or sequestered. I was helping them get by as they did not speak the language and I was fluent in Greek. I had 10 girls. My commission was 10%. I was making between 10,000-15,000 Deutschmarks per month. At the time that was the equivalent of a 2-bedroom apartment in Romania. At the same time, I continued to work as a porter and janitor in the houses of the rich. I felt as rich as they were but I was trying to be covered in case someone would question where I have so much money from. My biggest fear was that one day the girls will learn the language and they will make a living without my help. And that is exactly what happened.”
(Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

Before long, Cristina and Eduard managed to set up an entire network of prostitutes in multiple European countries. The main pawn was Eduard, who in the meantime became her husband.

“The majority of the girls were Romanian, but then there were quite a few from Moldova and Russia. I was sending them «la produs»⁶ all over Europe. Basically, they were bringing each other. I rented them houses (in their name so that I do not appear in any of the paperwork) and had other men from our network watch them closely to make sure they don't do stupid things. In Switzerland we had six houses, five in Italy, and in Greece...in Greece we had so many that we lost track.”
(Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

In her interview, Cristina also revealed the method through which the girls were recruited:

“A lot of them were recruited by the boys in our network who promised them the world. The classical story that you must have heard about: they make them fall in love with them, they get them out of the country, and

⁶ La produs is Romanian for “to produce”. This is common slang in Romania meaning girls that go and prostitute to “produce” money.

then send them «la produs». There were some that we were buying from other traffickers. The price ranged between €500-€5,000.” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012).

Gavrila claims that all the girls that were in her prostitution network knew exactly what they were going to do when recruited from Romania – except for the ones for which they were using the “lover boy” method on as those were mostly virgins and if they had to buy them they would have been very expensive.

“Of course they knew the truth. Almost all of them did. Their parents were kept in the dark though. I sometimes went to their houses and asked for permission from their parents to let them go with me. The parents knew that I was a recruiter for hotels and bars and that their daughters were going to be maids or waitresses. They served, alright. They didn’t care. They were very proud that they were going to leave the country and make money. I was lying to the parents all the time. I was telling them that my contract were on cruise ships so they won’t be able to call home. But the girls knew exactly where they were going.” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

Between 2005-2008, Ioana Eugenia Gavrilă made more money than she ever thought possible. She concedes that the ones that had the most difficult life were the ones they were buying. The “*worst*” had to make between €1,000-€1,500 per night.

“They had a lot of clients but they were very picky. They were unhappy if the clients didn’t look good. I never beat them but my husband did. He was getting mad. Sometimes he was breaking their nose...some he even mutilated. I sometimes saved them from my husband’s hands as he was getting really upset as we were losing clients. He was locking them in rooms and we were not allowed to go in to give them food or anything for weeks at a time. Just a glass of water and a slice of bread that’s gone bad twice per week. I even lied for them. I told my husband that the police chased them all night long and that’s why they couldn’t make any money.” (Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

Cristina claims that this was the period in which they made €20,000-€30,000 per night. Part of this money she was allocating to chauffeurs, bodyguards, newspaper ads, and telephone.

At the lowest of Mrs. Gavrilă's prostitution pyramid there were the ones that she calls "macumbe"⁷. According to her, the macumbe were the uneducated girls picked up from villages. These were the ones clients were not willing to pay a lot for. Therefore, since they did not bring a lot of profit, they did not deserve much.

Gavrilă admits that she and her significant other could not have managed the 300-women network had they not had help.

"There was a lot of help. Of course there was. Especially from the authorities but I do not want to talk about it! I've always known I'll be arrested. Whomever enters this «hora» must dance...you can't break free. You are almost as much of a prisoner as the girls you own. It's very complicated. There's a lot of money involved, true, but the fear and the stress are out of this world. My heart was pounding for every knock on the door or every time I saw a policeman. Although there was a time in my life (I had cancer and I was going back and forth to Romania to get treatment and always coming back with more girls) when I wanted to give up this job, now I can't even conceive this. I am praying to not live the day of my release, as I know I will do the exact same thing. I want to make money more than ever!"⁸
(Adevărul newspaper, 2012)

All throughout her interview, Cristina did nothing but intrigued as the most unscrupulous scrupulous person. While she was paying taxes as an illegal immigrant to the Greek government she was working very hard to establish a network of girls that would augment her income, which she never stopped exploiting but for which she felt sorry for.

Costel Vlad

⁷ Macumba according to the DEX (the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language) was an Afro-American religion from Brazil brought here from Angola and Mozambique following slave commerce from these regions. It was later enriched with Christian and Amerindian elements.

⁸ While in detention, Gavrilă and her husband divorced.

Costel Vlad is a 42 years old man from Călărași⁹. Also nicknamed: “Țaganu”¹⁰ or “The King of Prostitution in Eastern Spain”, he was detained by the Romanian authorities and sentenced to six and a half years in prison in May 2012. Appallingly, not long ago (after not even half a year), rumors started surfacing that he will be let go.

Between 2006 and 2010, the members of this trafficking ring abducted, transported, and sexually exploited hundreds of Romanian girls to Spain, Greece, France, and Italy. The majority of the girls they were targeting came from disrupted families and had an unstable financial situation. Țaganu’s profit during these years was close to €1 million. He claims that the girls prostituted themselves “out of love for him” (Stoica, 2012).

Despite that, the confessions of some of his victims are absolutely shocking: “I was abducted by two members of the Țaganu clan while hitchhiking right outside Predeal¹¹. They sequestered me in this house in Călărași and I was raped continuously for two weeks” (Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012). In order to install fear in her, the traffickers forced her to take part in a ritual meant to punish another girl that attempted to escape.

“They made her go down on her knees, hands tied behind her back. There was a circle formed by 10-12 people, all members of the clan. They all (with no exception) forced themselves on her and then one of them said: «If you’re fed up of this job, then this is the last time you you’ll get to taste it!» When they were done, one of the men grabbed her lips and held

⁹ Călărași is the capital of the Călărași County and Sud-Muntenia Region in the Wallachia region, which is situated in South-East Romania, on the bank of Danube's Borcea branch, at about 12 kilometers from the Bulgarian border and 125 kilometers from Bucharest.

¹⁰ Țaganu is the mispronounced word of “Țiganu” which means “Gypsy” in Romanian. Țaganu is often used as a substitute just to appear more “cool”.

¹¹ Predeal is a town in Brașov County, Romania. It is the highest town and one of the most important mountain resorts in Romania. It is located on the Prahova Valley.

them tight together with a pair of pliers while another was sewing them with a metal wire”
(Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012).

Contrary to that, Țaganu claimed

“they wanted to be there. They brought each other. Why would they recruit their friends, classmates and cousins if they didn’t like it? Of course we had to do the same. If they like it and wanted it so badly then we have to give it to them!”
(Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012).

If any of the girls rebelled, they were burnt with the cigarettes, asked to take ice-cold showers, beaten or cut with a knife. They would then place salt would be placed on the wound to maximize the pain. This was all done in front of all the other girls so that “they know better next time” (Evenimentul Zilei newspaper, 2012).

“Do all of the girls have tattoos?” – this was one of the questions that Țaganu was ceaselessly asking. He was marking all of his girls to make sure he will always find them. At any rate, the shady trafficker knew exactly how to sell his merchandise. He was forcing them to wear high heels and heavy make-up and was insistent on them leaving very little to the imagination. His wife was the one in charge of all these details. Work started at 5 P.M and ended at 4 A.M. The rates were flat: 60 Euros for half an hour and 90 Euros for an hour.

Unfortunately, Țaganu did not seem as willing as Mrs. Gavrilă to give a lot of information to the Romanian journalists.

Anti Trafficking Organizations

Not for Sale - Romania

After trying for some time to reach an anti-trafficking organization in Romania, I decided that my best option would be to attend the Global Forum on Human Trafficking, which took place November 1st and 2nd, 2012 in Sunnyvale, CA.

While attending the forum, I introduced myself to Mrs. Maria Stana Rădoi, the Deputy Director that helps run Not for Sale Romania and Mr. Mano Kamaleson, who manages Not For Sale's social enterprises for Eastern Europe. Both Mrs. Rădoi and Mr. Kamaleson have greatly contributed to fighting sex trafficking in Romania and have struggled to find innovating approaches and techniques to make the girls see that there are other options than prostitution, which often leads to trafficking.

Annually, Not for Sale Romania supports and gives hope to more than 200 survivors of human trafficking.

Mrs. Rădoi assists in providing shelter, rehabilitation, program-reforms, and job training for a good reintegration of the victims in the society once the program comes to an end.

The victims arrive at the shelter by following different paths both nationally and internationally. Nationally, Not for Sale has created a rapport with the police and local NGOs. Internationally, they work with embassies and international social services, which refer the girls and help with repatriation.

Once the victim enters the shelter, she becomes part of the reintegration program. However, the biggest challenge that the girls need to overcome is that of stigmatization. Mrs. Rădoi mentioned that the girls seem comfortable to be in the shelter for the first couple of days. They do not even dare look up as they feel guilty, ashamed, dirty, and

used. The majority of them carry serious sexually transmitted diseases. They do not trust anybody anymore, but who is to blame them?

Nevertheless, immediately after their acceptance in the shelter, they start looking for a way out. It is actually pretty typical in Romania to be judged versus helped in a situation like that. People would never see them as victims, but filthy whores or prostitutes. Numerous times I have heard people say that: “they got exactly what they were looking for as they were insatiable”. They never think of them as human beings. They never try to understand what pushed them to choose this profession. And the sad part is that in Romania, there is this preconceived idea that all of these women (with no exception) know where they are going and since they willingly put themselves up for prostitution, then they do not deserve respect.

While being in a shelter, the victims fear their parents, co-workers, relatives, or friends might find out about what happened. So, they prefer to suffer, lick their wounds, go back home and keep what happened to themselves without anybody suspecting the truth.

Mrs. Rădoi claims that unless the girls are treated with the utmost respect, they tend to leave the shelter. However, their biggest fear is that they will have nothing to do once they are back in the streets. The majority lack education and the relationship with the schools is precarious as the majority of them refuse to take them back. The school system in Romania is still under the spell of communism where extreme discipline rules and there are no exceptions. Mrs. Rădoi was mentioning that despite the law that was passed in 2001 by the Romanian government which stated that “schools must reintegrate the victims of trafficking immediately”, most of the schools do not comply and the most

common question is: “What is a victim of trafficking and why do we have to help her rehabilitate after so many of years of being truant?”

My final questions at the Human Trafficking Global Forum was that from my experience the majority of these girls appear to know exactly what they will be doing ergo, they self-select. Therefore, I asked Mrs. Rădoi and Mr. Kamaleson to give me their opinion since this is what they have been doing for almost a decade: deal with sex trafficking victims in Romania. Their answers were as follows:

Mrs. Rădoi:

“Being in a situation where you don’t have any food, you do not have any clothes, you do not have anything...I cannot say that they do it because they like it or they enjoy... Yes! They know where they are going, but they are doing it because this is the only solution and opportunity for them. We have these kinds of cases. But when you offer them an opportunity to have a job and a stable environment, things are different. I often wonder: I have a kid and a family. Luckily, I have a stable job and I don’t have to worry about tomorrow, but if I had to, what would I do?”

Mr. Kamaleson:

“I don’t know if you’re looking for a number or a percentage, but the individuals I have spoken to...they know, they know what they are getting into, but they end up being forced into it! (...) the fact that we sit here in Southern¹² California and there is a lot of working safety net, there are a lot of networks and it’s really a lack of opulence there. You’re in a different environment where the safety nets do not function and the reality is that if you are pushed to the side, no one’s gonna come pick you up. You’re going to wither away and you have to find a way to make value so it’s a different environment, it’s a completely different environment!”

Consequently, I have one more question: forget about the corruption in Romania, forget about cultural perspectives on how to treat women with respect, forget about home-made soup(Not For Sale Organization, 2012)¹³ that might help put an end to human

¹² I believe Mr. Kamaleson made a mistake and was actually referring to Northern California.

¹³ From the Not For Sale Organization website: “The Not For Sale HOME soup project, located in the heart of Amsterdam’s Red Light District, will offer both job skill training in culinary arts and catering and employment to survivors of exploitation as chefs to prepare meals that will be

trafficking, and forget about the viability or non-viability of the Romanian economy – What do we use as a prevention element so that we can get to them before the traffickers get them? Lamentably, from my research almost nothing except for the great pride we take in the campaigns that help us create awareness.

Women Trafficked Willingly

Dana (I. Caramello, Personal Communication, November 10th, 2012)

Dana left Romania in 1998 for Italy. She got a job as a secretary in a big company – or at least that is what everybody knew for almost a decade. Her mom was a pastry chef and her dad was a machinery foreman for the national train station who died electrocuted in a work related accident when Dana was only 14 years old. She was an only-child.

The family never had a lot of money and they were very strict about her upbringing. More than once Dana got in big trouble at school because of her entourage so her dad rarely allowed her to leave the house. She was known as the black sheep of the neighborhood as she had a problem conforming to the social norms imposed by the very society she was a part of. She cursed and made sure everybody knew what she was thinking. Discretion was not her strongest suit.

delivered to individual women working in the brothels.

The catering program becomes visible through the HOME kitchen and community space where meals are made for the women by the women and thus displaying the possible employment alternatives to prostitution.

Longer-term, we will scale our operations to pilot a commercial sales distribution of our soups and breads which tell the story of how new futures, opportunities, and jobs are being created for survivors of exploitation. Our ultimate aim is to assist women to return to their country of origin with job skills that empower, prevent, and protect them and their families from further exploitation.” This idea was extensively discussed in the beginning of the Global Forum on Human Trafficking.

After her dad's passing, her mom started working longer hours. She brought home a lot of leftover pastries that she sometimes traded with the farmers at the market for meat and dairy products. Dana sometimes sold the pastries to the kids that lived in the same apartment building and with the cash she bought clothing or make-up. Unfortunately, ever since she was little she had a predisposition for the vulgar, which she claimed to love.

As she became more and more neglected, she started smoking and bringing home a lot of strange individuals. They were in their mid-30s and she was not 16. I was two years older but I vividly remember a shiver going down my spine every time I had to climb the stairs with them. I never thought I was going to make it upstairs. They were creepy, scary, and ominous. They would look at you one time and it felt as if they were going to grab you and throw you in a bag. However, they kept very quiet; never did or said anything. Dana was like a sister to me as we grew up together and were inseparable.

Soon, she was picked up in the nicest cars and had the nicest clothing and accessories. That was huge in Romania at that time and she became everybody's envy. She kept telling me how one day she would be rich and glamorous, as she will leave Romania, which is too corrupt and where there is nothing to do. She refused to continue her education past high school as "it doesn't make a difference; educated or uneducated, you still cannot find a job." And she was right – there was no hope or opportunity for new graduates.

For a year we plotted together on how to leave and one day, Dana came and told me that I had to make up my mind fast as she got in contact with someone that found her a job as a secretary in Italy and the same person "can hook me up" as well. For the first

time I felt a little envious and really considered it, but was too scared to mention it to my parents. I had just taken the admission exam at the university and had been accepted.

A week later, Dana left and nobody knew of her whereabouts except that she was somewhere in Italy. She never called her mom or me and for four years we just assumed she is working hard to build her way up. Sometimes we worried that something happened to her but strangely, it was never enough to send any of us to the police to file a missing person report. We had no idea where she was and Italy only looks small on the map so it was impossible to assume.

Four years later, I was accepted at a college in the U.S. and two days before my departure, Dana stopped by. She looked so different. She had cleaned up so much. Although still very heavy, her make up did not look as vulgar anymore. She was dressed from head to toe in Versace and wore really expensive Bvlgari jewelry. The first thought that crossed my mind was that her hard work had paid off and that I should have gone with her. She invited me over to her house where two other friends joined. She showed us her suitcases filled with designer clothing, and accessories and we were all fascinated. Apparently, she had contacted one of the other girls from Italy and she was scheduled to go with her the week after as she had found her a job as a secretary at the same company where she worked. For years, I asked myself why she did not ask me first. I thought she had a heart of gold, as not only did she succeed but she was helping other girls succeed as well.

It was not until nine years later when she moved to New York and contacted me that I found out that Dana had been a prostitute in Italy since the first day she left Romania. She is HIV positive but thinks "prostitution was the best thing that happened to

her as it offered her more than any job in Romania could have given her. And plus, sex is just sex.”

Unmistakably, Dana was the first person I interviewed. She was absolutely wonderful and helped me understand a lot of things by inserting history into experience.

She started the interview laughing, saying that she really wants to help me with the research for my thesis and that “she swears she will tell me the truth.” She admitted that sometimes she is embarrassed to admit what she has done to make money but she said she is only ashamed of me, my parents, and her mom since she knows that we are all very disappointed in her. I told her that I am nobody to judge and that as long as she is happy, we are all happy, which was very true.

Dana confessed that she did not “quite know” what she was going to do when she left Romania. She was told by the traffickers (who recruited her right outside of her high school) that she will have to sleep with one or two clients a day and that she will make a lot of money. Obviously, once she arrived in Italy, the story changed.

With one of the traffickers she slept before she left Romania and had a very close relationship with him. She hated her life for a long time as they used to beat her for not cooperating but soon she realized that she could not be the same person she was before and somehow she started enjoying what she was doing. The moment the transformation occurred, the traffickers started letting her leash loose and allowed her to travel to Romania where she was recruiting more girls. She was the ones that “trained the girls on how to satisfy the clients”. She looked at me and laughed again: “Remember? Good thing you didn’t come with me. This type of work isn’t for you! I would have not been happy if you were to do what I’m doing.” “But it is for you?” I promptly asked. She said that she

would not do anything else and that prostitution has offered her the luxurious life she has always pictured for herself. She makes money by prostituting herself and then she is paid 50% commission for all the girls she brings in the network or 70% if the girl is a virgin. She laughs again: “But where can you find virgins these day, anyway? Unless she looks like a bookworm with thick glasses and nobody would want to do a goofy looking girl.”

She said that her mom never knew what she was doing until last year. Since then, she has learned to accept it. I asked her if she feels guilty knowing that she is ruining so many lives and her answer was surprising.

“See? You think I ruin it, I think I improve it. I don’t lie to them anymore. I just show them what I have and they want it. They have nothing. I only lie when I tell them about the number of clients they’ll sleep with ‘cause they’re stupid and they get scared easily. I was lied to about the clients when I started. And look at me now! I love it! They will love it, too. They just need to get used to it. But look at me now. They can have the same things. But they are stupid. How can you be o.k. to have sex with 2 men/night but not 10? It’s the same thing; there’s no difference! And they know that’s what they’ll be doing. I take them out of poverty and give them a luxurious life. They stay at home burning the gas for nothing, so doing something is better than doing nothing.”

All throughout her interview, Dana seemed absolutely fascinated by her job, which allowed her to wear the most expensive clothing and travel extensively. One week she is in Rome, and the next in New York or Barcelona. She loves her job, as nobody knows what she does and is always treated with respect, which is very important to her. She did not mention a lot her HIV problem and I thought it would be cruel of me to insist on the topic so I dropped the subject.

Despite the fact that I sometimes think that she betrayed me by not telling me where she is going, by wanting me to go with her, and by not knowing anything about her for so many years, I could never get upset with her. While a lot of people might think of

Dana as the devil himself, I still believe that there is a lot of good in her and that she has the same heart of gold. However, that heart has been so corrupted and her mind has been so brainwashed that there is no going back for her. If there were a way back, I would do anything to save her from this life of misery, which she so much loves.

Carmen (I. Caramello, Personal Communication, November 11th, 2012)

Carmen is currently 33 years old and not interested in a relationship. She is very beautiful; probably, one of the most beautiful girls I have seen working in the sex trafficking industry.

She escaped her debt bondage in May 2010 but she is still unsure if running away was the best thing she did. She does not talk about the traffickers much. She knew who they were before she went away with them but what they have told her initially did not quite match what she found while on location. She fought them for more than a year but finally gave up as “they are really good people”.

Carmen kept telling me all throughout the interview that “they are not as bad once you get to know them and once they get to trust you”. The sex that she had continuously with one of the traffickers was the best sex she has ever had. She said that they treated her badly in the beginning (she did not go into details) but she blamed herself for it.

“It’s not that they were mean to me, I was mean to them as I was stubborn and did not want to do my job, I did not have my act together around the clients and that cost them money. I was costing them money”.

I asked Carmen if she ever realized that she was not supposed to be there in the first place, that they deceived her and did not tell her upfront that she was going to have sex with 10, 15, maybe 20 men per night but instead, they promised her she had the right to refuse clients, take days off, and be paid a commission on the money they were

making. I also suggested she should not beat herself up as they forced her into doing what she was doing. Her answer was pretty shocking. Very defensively, she told me that I was nobody to judge and that I did not know how difficult it was for the traffickers to do what there are doing as they live in constant fear that they are going to get caught and they try to do their best to keep the girls dressed and in better houses than other traffickers because “they care.”

Carmen fell in love with the trafficker that raped her regularly when she first started. However, she would never call that “rape” but instead “love making”. She has struggled with her feelings since and it has been a continuous battle. It seemed to me during the interview that this trafficker has completely brainwashed her as she is not doing much but hangs around the house all day hoping that he calls. And sometimes he does, but sometimes he does not call for weeks. Despite all these, Carmen always finds an explanation for his behavior:

“he lives a dangerous life, his business keeps him busy, one of the girls must be acting up so he has to show her who the boss is. He always tells me: The greatest trick the devil ever pulled is to convince the world he never existed. And he is the devil.”

Carmen’s voice was changing every time she was uttering his name. The so-called “boyfriend” (whose name Carmen revealed but specifically asked not to be mentioned anywhere) is living between Italy and Albania, trafficking girls. He told Carmen that he does have other relationships “*of course, because he is a man*” but that she is the one he loves. This prompts Carmen to turn on her computer and sex video chat every time he calls. And that is all Carmen is doing; she sits around all day waiting for him to call, she cries as she misses him, and refuses to go out or look for a job. She still lives off her parents’ pensions (€425 per month combined), cries when he does not call

for weeks, and just waits. Lamentably, when I offered to pay to have her see a professional and discuss how she feels and what her experience was, she told me that she wanted to end the interview as that is the problem – people do not understand their love story. They just think she needs help... but she is not the crazy one.

Erica (I. Caramello, Personal Communication, November 11th, 2012)

Unfortunately, every single time I called Erica it was not a good time to talk. She initially accepted to do the interview as a favor to Dana whom she calls: “mommy”.

Dana recruited Erica for her first job in Syria. From Syria, she was trafficked to Dubai. She told me that Dubai must be filthiest place on the face of the Earth, despite its reputation.

A startling admission that Erica made was that the hotels of the sheikhs were filled with Eastern European prostitutes, who kept them full. She said that the majority of the so-called “Romanian stars” go to Dubai and prostitute themselves. However, they are considered “high class prostitutes and make ten times more what we make” as they do that following a fashion show, an ad, or a commercial.

“Whom do you think pays for their breast implants and plastic surgeries? They come back to Romania from Dubai with their fancy purses and jewelry but they never tell anybody how they had the money to pay for them. I saw them with my own eyes!”

Although Erica appeared to have a lot of information, she did not seem very willing to share it and kept changing the subject often. After a few unsuccessful attempts, I decided to give up.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

More and more Romanian women continue to be forlorn due to the lack of opportunities and social reconnaissance on their national territory. Right after the eradication of Stalinism, they were drawn away like a magnet from what appeared to be a very dysfunctional society with no room for improvement towards the Western European nations. These women were searching for any type of income, which could improve their status back home and would make them feel worthwhile to their families, neighbors, and friends.

While in the years immediately following the 1989 Revolution this trend started out of desperation, in recent years there was a shift noted, which was due mostly to the fact that they were trying to preserve an image and aim for a higher social status versus putting food on the table.

Convinced that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence and starved for social recognition, they started to respond to newspaper ads that were offering work abroad and thus they embarked on the journey of their lives aware of the job description and sometimes even of the conditions under which they will perform the work. Lamentably, these women considered themselves lucky to be the chosen ones to thicken the lines of prostitutes in Western Europe and the Middle East. They rarely saw the person at the other end of the line that contacted them unless they were watched for a long time. All they saw was what ridiculous Romanian social norms forced them to see: the big picture where they would prostitute themselves for a little while, make some

quick cash without anybody ever finding out, and then they would return back home where a life of luxury awaited.

Unfortunately, many times, these lucrative employment options eventually led to sex trafficking, which left them empty, mere puppets in the hands of the traffickers, and destroyed their lives and their ideals.

Currently however, these women learned to accept what happened to them and more than that, started to perceive the whole experience as something positive. Thus, they start recruiting other women for the traffickers, with whom they claim to have a perfect relationship.

Discussion

Regrettably, poverty does not only create, but sustains sex trafficking. NGOs in Romania work with survivors in assisting them to enter the main stream of the economy but the margin of impact is connected to the surrounding environment and the challenge in these locales is that the economy is so depressed that no matter how well they are trained, there is nothing for them at home upon return.

Romanian citizens go through 4-year universities, masters, and PhDs, and upon graduation they cannot find jobs. Skilled or unskilled, it does not make a difference unless you have connections. In a society where there is nothing to do, hope is reduced to a zero and nepotism thrives. In the event that they manage to pull some strings and obtain a job, there is no future or hope in these careers because of the perpetual economic fluctuations, which makes the average population more and more susceptible to trafficking.

Due to the fact that the political system is so corrupt, Romania has become a lawless sovereignty. It is precisely the Romanian government that has transformed these girls in what an entire nation now calls: “whores”.

Money is the only religion government officials adhere to and there is no difference between the situation today and Romania under communism from 23 years ago except that people are free to travel and that is precisely what they do every single time an opportunity arises.

The women I interviewed were no different than my friends or me and it is my personal belief that their nonchalant attitude is a simple front to stoically accepting their destinies. They are regular women, not models, nothing out the extraordinary but tremendously stigmatized. They are lacking control and balance in their lives and that is exactly what they feel the perpetrators offer them. A guy that is tough, who plays cool, who dresses up nicely and who makes a lot of money is exactly what these women would perceive as: “in control”.

These women become desensitized and if in the beginning the pain and shock quakes them to the core, little by little, they learn to accept the abuse and many even accept this exploitation as a form of discipline for transgression. Some even go as far as to consider these actions to be a positive force in their lives. Nevertheless, they are not mere dolls; they are hesitant and reluctant to talk (even with people they feel comfortable with) for fear they might be identified as prostitutes.

This must be very difficult to comprehend for regular human being surrounded by love which often is taken for granted and who screams: “violence” and “abuse” every time someone raises the hand or even the tone of voice, but for these women, abuse

means care; it means someone cares about them enough to do something about it; good or bad, it becomes irrelevant. It makes no difference if the traffickers slap them and/or break their nose or bring them flowers. They have been trained to put them on the highest pedestals and they would always blame themselves over the perpetrators. This also might come as a result of the fact that they are perhaps the only male figures in these women's lives.

Moreover, the large majority of people assume that these women, because they are sex robots (sometimes they have sex with 10-20+ customers per night), they can detach themselves emotionally when having sex but that could not be farther from the truth when it comes to their pimps. The pimps are the ones they see on a daily basis and whom they have sex with on a daily basis. With the clientele is different because the constant change of location. Very few (if any at all) of these men are regular clients so they do not feel any type of attachment. Again, a woman can detach herself emotionally while having sex but when they think they are in love (which they often do in case of the traffickers) that is rarely the case.

Furthermore, in the majority of cases, these women are taken from home when they are still teenagers and the trafficker or the pimp becomes their first. It is usually one of the perpetrators who ends up having sex with them or who rapes them to "teach her" what to expect, how to perform the work, and also to initiate the cycle of abuse and degradation.

However, while I was talking to these women they seemed as if they have joined the dark side and only because they did not have any other option. They have to be tough. Before starting to write this paper I was under the impression that if they were offered a

decent life, they would take it without blinking. Notwithstanding, after serious thinking I realized that too much time has passed by and no matter what they would be offered, they would not do anything else as this is their life now. When I asked them if they would take a real job if offered, they told me that this is a real job and that “*n-ar da niciodata vrabia din mâna pe cioara de pe gard*” (they would never let go of the sparrow in their hand to grab the crow that is sitting on the fence). Who could blame them? None of the Romanians have the luxury to feel secure in their jobs – so then why would they? Even if they are placed somewhere by an intermediary (e.g.: an NGO), they never know for how long and they are not willing to take the risk.

In addition, these women are perfectly aware that while maintaining a job in Romania is a laborious thing to do, trafficking on the other hand, works all the time. Former slaves become recruiters, they receive a huge commission, and thus manage to lead a decent life. These women have become immune to anything that symbolizes pity for the women around them. They have suffered too much and they had nobody but the traffickers to cling to. It was their survival mechanism for so many years that they refuse to give it up. They are seriously attached to their pimps and that is not about to stop either. In a world in which decency has started to be replaced by shamelessness and where more and more girls are having sex before they turn 18, at least they are getting paid for it and thus they feel superior compared to the large crowd.

Limitations

My research was limited in its scope to properly identifying an exact number of women that were trafficked and which became recruiters.

I firmly believe that in Romania, becoming a recruiter for the traffickers is one of the very few employment options available for trafficked women. This may be partially as result of the importance of confidence between the victim and the perpetrator and/or because of the bond that is created between the trafficker and the victim. However, the reoccurrence seems so frequent that while it would be intriguing to find out a close enough percentage of former slaves that recruit other women that would be almost impossible to determine.

The second limitation to my study and I believe the most important was the lack of empirical research and biases in the sex trafficking field. Given the nature of the research, personal experiences would have been perceived as biases towards my research. Although I tried to incorporate a fraction of my personal experience in my study, I left a significant portion out as I did not want to compromise the validity of the study. However, I think that incorporating empirical evidence is critical and it represents the key to getting to the root of the problem and determining why these girls are so desperate to sell their bodies. Nobody knows better than a native that has lived amongst these girls the exact situation, but if every native's opinion is interpreted as biased, then we might never get to the bottom of it.

The third limitation of my study is that it does not attempt to offer a solution to this on-going problem. I am a very optimistic and positive person but I do not believe in chimerical solutions so I did not attempt to provide one. The literature that has been written on the topic has been filled with ephemeral answers. The truth is that unless we analyze the historical background of these societies and try to understand their current

economic and sociopolitical situation, we will never be able to get to the root of the problem.

The fourth limitation of the study was my inability to interview women that have been trafficked against their will and therefore, I could not draw a parallel between the sex slaves and what I would call: “sexual deviants” to underline the differences and similarities.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are six things I did not have time to research while working on this paper:

1. The first was to look into the very defective and backwards political system of Romania, which is sending away its citizens while employing foreigners. A New York Times article from 2007 reads: “Romania, a Poor Land, Imports Poorer Workers” (The New York Times newspaper, 2007). Thus, Romania is losing its most important resource: the people whom the government offers up for prostitution while welcoming with open arms foreigners.
2. The current legislation for sex trafficking in Romania is deficient and the pimps and traffickers take advantage of this loop in the system. A rapist is punished to 15 years in jail while a trafficker gets 3-12 years and most often pays his way out sooner or is released “for good behavior”.
3. The third thing I was not able to look into what the mirage of the Western European societies that represent just that: a mirage! The Romanian society right after the eradication of Stalinism was left captive in the meshes of a very corrupt government. This type of social disorder, economic, and financial pandemonium gave birth to frustrated, restrained citizens who refused to settle for stagnation

despite their severely embedded communist values. An entire nation dreamed of brighter horizons and felt compelled to adapt rapidly to the new transition, consciously or subconsciously driven and unhesitating to catch up with the developed world. They anticipated with optimism that their children's destinies would be woven into a much more uncomplicated pattern than their own since they were allowed to travel freely and make a living somewhere else. What were their expectations when they left Romania and how were they met as a lot of those women turned to prostitution and they were soon trafficked all over Europe?

4. On the same note, I would have liked to be able to determine whether the people that abandoned their home succeeded indeed to accentuate the class differences upon their return.
5. The fifth and most important question that was left unanswered was: What do we use as a prevention element so that we can get to these women before the traffickers get them?
6. How can we help these women to emotionally detach themselves from the traffickers? Is there still hope for them?

Conclusion

I realized right after my interviews that it is indeed irrelevant whether these women are selected or self-selecting. No matter which one, the degree of pain appears to be the same with one exception: the self-selected women appear to be more financially stable and have more purchasing power because of the commission they receive from bringing other girls into the network. These little material things that they can purchase

represent their safety net. They cannot fall because everybody envies their life style and the material goods that they take so much pride in. This is what keeps them going and gives them the false impression that they are happy.

Lamentably, until we will start dimming the very bright lights in the red districts of the very hypocritical Middle East which turns a blind eye to trafficking to keep their hotels full while imposing on their conationals the burqas and niqabs or the all-so-blatant Western Europe who appears careless and until we find a way to fight the corruption in all these Eastern European societies, the fate and success of these women will continue to be based on who “renders” more or who “renders” better.

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