



# Maneuvering towards subjectivity

An anthropological analysis of young victims of human trafficking in Italy

**BY TRINE MYGIND KORSBY**

Master's thesis in Anthropology  
Institute of Anthropology  
University of Copenhagen  
Supervisor: Professor Kirsten Hastrup

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The illustration on the title page was drawn by 'Amelia'  
Title: "Il mio passato, il mio presente e le mie speranze per il futuro"  
("My past, my present and my hopes for the future")

For 'Amelia'  
In admiration of your courage, your strength and your sensitivity

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## Chapter 1

# Introduction

*“The last night I was in my country, I said to my mother, ‘See you tomorrow,’ but then the next day, I left for Italy. I didn’t know what was going to happen. I didn’t have any choice. My father and I didn’t have a good relationship and after an argument, he kicked me out of the house. I didn’t know what to do. I met a guy and he said to me that I didn’t have any choice. That I had to go to Italy and earn a lot of money so I could buy a house [...] But when I got here, things were totally different. I had to work on the street, the guy took all the money, he threatened my family, he hit me and I was really scared. After two months, I couldn’t take anymore. I ran away and went to the police. After that, I came here, to the house.” (Ramona)*

This thesis investigates how Ramona and other young women who are victims of human trafficking<sup>1</sup> in Italy experience their lives and personal histories after having fled from their traffickers. Human trafficking is a growing international concern, both within an international forum and in Denmark. A number of governments, NGOs and international organizations create policy plans, information campaigns and make law suggestions, which should contribute to combating human trafficking. Politicians make statements about how human traffickers should be prosecuted and how to best help the victims. Human trafficking has been given a central position on national and global agendas; however, we only rarely hear the victims’ voices or get an insight into their lives – and this is why I have chosen to do fieldwork among young victims of human trafficking and to write this thesis. I hope to offer an ethnographic view into the world and conditions of young trafficking victims; a world that is in the eye of the storm within the debate on human trafficking, but into which outsiders are only very rarely granted an in-depth insight. This thesis is an ethnographic account of the actions, social relations, perceptions and histories of sixteen

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<sup>1</sup> Human trafficking affects women, men, girls and boys of many ages. There is often an assumption that human trafficking refers exclusively to prostitution, which is misleading. Human trafficking is also about exploitation into e.g. theft, domestic servitude, begging and forced labor.

young victims of human trafficking. At the same time, the thesis is also a testimony of trust, freedom and hope.

My ambition in this thesis is to provide an anthropological analysis of these young victims' world and circumstances, including their limitations and possibilities for social navigation. Specifically, I wish to investigate their *actions* in the light of their *thoughts and perceptions of the past, the present and the future*, and to explore the *social relations* that form the backdrop for their maneuvering space.

### **The ethnographic field**

I arrive a little early with the bus, so I go for a walk in the area around the house. It's a nice residential neighborhood with fragrant and colorful flowers, older ladies taking their dogs for a walk, big cars and locked gates in front of big houses. The people who live here surely have money. Clever thinking in terms of keeping the location of the house a secret, I think. I walk around for a while with butterflies in my stomach. I then gather my courage, go back down the street to the house and ring the doorbell. There is a woman's name on the door. The garden is unkempt, I notice. The gate opens with a scraping sound. I go up the steps and am received by Valeria, who works in the house as a volunteer. She smiles and greets me with "*Hi Trine – it's a pleasure to meet you!*" We go inside. One of the girls is vacuuming as I enter the large and somewhat empty living room, where a large television has a prominent position. Eastern European music is blaring from loudspeakers. From the living room, there is a door leading to a large balcony. The girl greets me with a smile, if somewhat puzzled and reserved. We go into the kitchen, which is simply designed and seems dirty. It smells like fried tomatoes and I can see that lunch is being prepared. The girls come in quickly, one after the other, chatting, greeting one another with kisses on the cheek and ask me who I am, how old am I, if I have a boyfriend and how long I'm going to be there. The girls are interested but distanced. I notice their bitten-down nails, nicotine-stained fingers, bad teeth, inquisitive eyes, gold jewelry and colorful make-up. Some of them are unwashed, have greasy hair and dirty clothes on. Others descend upon the kitchen in a cloud of perfume and the smell of shampoo. Valeria tries to keep the girls under control, admonishes them, but her voice is drowned out in the din. The girls yell, argue, laugh, smoke, check their cell phones and embrace each other vigorously. Valeria offers me an espresso, and I take a seat at the kitchen table covered in a greasy vinyl tablecloth. One of the girls approaches me and introduces herself. Her name is Bianca. I

compliment her on her beautiful earrings, which results in a big, warm embrace.

(Excerpt from field notes, February 14, 2007)

Field research took place from February 2007 until July 2007, in a “casa famiglia”<sup>2</sup> in the Italian capital, Rome, where young female victims of human trafficking<sup>3</sup> live, after having escaped their traffickers. The house is called “La Sorgente” (meaning “the Source” or “the Spring”) and is situated in a middle-class neighborhood in Rome<sup>4</sup>. Included in the field research was a three-month follow-up period during the spring of 2008, during which I visited and interviewed my informants, revisited the house and the staff, and presented my research results for the NGO responsible for the house, together with Save the Children Italy and UNICEF.

The house is large; it has three floors and many rooms and balconies. The girls have their own rooms; there is a kitchen, a living room, a dining room, bathrooms, a roof terrace and the staff office. Some of the girls share a room, others do not. Their rooms are cozy and have been decorated individually with posters of idols, pictures of boyfriends and friends, beauty products and teddy bears. There is however, a sense of emptiness in the house; there is not much furniture and things are placed haphazardly. The sofa in the living room is worn and dirty. From the outside, there is nothing about the house that sets it apart from the other houses in the neighborhood, other than the fact that it is not as well cared for as some of the others. According to the staff, there are only a few of the neighbors who know that the girls live here, but the girls themselves say that the whole neighborhood knows.

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<sup>2</sup> The translation of “casa famiglia” from Italian to English is “family house.” Henceforth, I refer to it as “the house.”

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the thesis, I will refer to these young trafficking victims as “the girls.”

<sup>4</sup> The exact location and description of the house have been made anonymous in this thesis. Also, the girls and the staff have been given pseudonyms, and various identifying characteristics have been changed. For a more in-depth discussion about the security aspects of this fieldwork, see Chapter 2.

One could say that the above-described arrival story is reminiscent of classical anthropological descriptions of first arrivals in the field. Perhaps the most well-known of arrival stories is Bronislaw Malinowski's description of his arrival at the Trobiand Islands (Malinowski 1964: 4). The moment of arrival at the fieldwork location is when everything that the anthropologist had imagined about the field, the informants and the research, suddenly becomes materialized and real. One's senses are sharpened, and everything is registered with crystal-clear curiosity and amazement. But it is also at this moment when doubt and insecurity make their entrance. Thoughts enter, such as, "How could I [...] in a few months or a year, hope to overtake and go beyond them?" (Malinowski 1964: 5), as Malinowski reflects upon in the introduction of his classic monograph. During the course of my fieldwork, the house, the daily routines, the girls' loud voices, sharp accents and the staff's admonishing comments all became a part of my everyday life. I slid into the routines, speech patterns, patterns of behavior and the ways of joking, eating and being affectionate. I tried to take my place in the girls' world, tried to understand them and to get underneath the surface of the world within which they sought to navigate. At the same time my puzzlement and curiosity with regards to the field was fed daily by the field's 'strangeness', together with new experiences and comments made by my informants.

The house can accommodate up to ten girls and functions as a home for them for up to two years. During my fieldwork, there were at the most eight girls living there at one time. The house is run by the Italian NGO<sup>5</sup> 'Virtus Ponte Mammolo' in collaboration with Rome's municipality, and my access to the field was granted through this NGO. The house

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<sup>5</sup> The Italian term for NGO (non-governmental organization) is ONLUS, which stands for "organizzazione non lucrativa di utilità sociale" ("non-lucrative organization with a social purpose"). An ONLUS may be run via funding from the local municipality and is thereby not free of political agendas.

is part of the NGO's larger anti-trafficking project<sup>6</sup>, and the purpose of the house is to help young female victims of human trafficking move on to an independent life on a personal level, but also with regards to finding a job. There is a strict framework surrounding the girls' behavior while living in the house, and when they arrive at the house for the first time, they are required to sign a set of rules. This, among other things, specifies that they are required to be home at 7:30 PM everyday, that they must submit a written application for permission to be out of the house in the evenings or on weekends, and that they may not disclose the location of the house to anyone. The house supervisor must meet their boyfriends and ideally, the staff must know at all times where the girls are and with whom. The girls work outside of the house as cleaning or hairdressing assistants, and they go to school<sup>7</sup>. During their free time, the girls go out with their friends and boyfriends, and some of them go to a fitness studio, the movies or to the library.

There are several routines in the house, and especially mealtimes bring the girls and the staff together. The girls are responsible for daily cleaning and cooking, based on a weekly schedule, which is planned with the help of the house staff. The staff members make an effort to create a cozy atmosphere during mealtimes, with relaxed and diverse conversation, laughter and silliness, but mealtimes often end in arguments and animosity amongst the staff and the girls or amongst the girls themselves. Again and again, both the staff and the girls end up raising their voices. Substantial disagreements are discussed at weekly meetings, in which the staff and the girls take part. Sometimes, the girls gather around the television or the DVD player where they listen to music, watch a film or dance to

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<sup>6</sup> The project includes two houses, which function as residences for young women who have been victims of human trafficking: La Sorgente and Il Ponte. I will return to the two houses' purpose in due time. In addition, Virtus Ponte Mammolo is responsible for outreach work among underage prostitutes.

<sup>7</sup> The girls go to the local municipal school, which offers lessons for foreign students. Most of the girls complete a level of education corresponding to a 9<sup>th</sup> grade diploma in Denmark.

Romanian, Italian or American music. But a lot of the time, the girls are in their rooms or on the balconies. They often sit in the kitchen and chain-smoke and drink coffee. The girls also frequently come into the staff office on the ground floor (which for the most part, is locked when the staff is not there), in order to get some attention, use the Internet or to get some form of favor or service, such as pocket money<sup>8</sup> or permission to go out.

### **Informants**

During fieldwork, the informant group altogether consisted of sixteen female victims of trafficking between the ages of sixteen and twenty. Of these sixteen girls, I became close with nine girls who lived at La Sorgente for the duration of my research. Approximately three months into my research, three girls ran away from the house, and I only saw one of these girls again. Shortly after the three girls' disappearance, a new girl arrived. Therefore, not all nine girls were present during my fieldwork for the same amount of time. I did not see the other seven girls as much as the first nine, because they did not live in the house. Four of them were former residents in the house and were therefore occasional guests, while the last three girls lived at Virtus Ponte Mammolo's other house for young trafficking victims, Il Ponte (meaning "the Bridge"), which I had occasion to visit a few times<sup>9</sup>.

There is a common pattern in all of the girls' stories. I have heard the girls tell their stories themselves, have been given renditions thereof by the staff and finally, I was granted access to the girls' files and statements to the police. The stories looked different, depending on to

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<sup>8</sup> The staff is in part responsible for controlling the economy of the girls, who earn their own money. The staff keeps an eye on the girls' bank accounts and plays a role in deciding for which purposes the money may be used. The girls who don't work receive 10 € as their weekly allowance, which is included in the house's budget.

<sup>9</sup> Visiting Il Ponte contributed to my general understanding of how the girls' lives may have been during the periods when they lived there.

whom they were told and within which context. I have tried to take the varying versions of their stories into account and have collated them into a larger, more generic story, which encompasses the different accounts. Therefore, the following narrative is in no way comprehensive, but just a sketch of the girls' past, which should serve as a general impression of the mutual characteristics of their lives.

In this thesis, I refer to the nine girls to whom I became most close as Amelia, Bianca, Sabina, Ramona, Diana, Roxanna, Camelia, Grace and Valmira. The first seven girls come from Romania and the last two from Nigeria and Albania, respectively. They have all been trafficked to Italy. They all come from dysfunctional families, marked by abuse (incest, alcoholism and ludomania<sup>10</sup>) and profound poverty. They have all had only a few years of formal education, and from an early age had to work to contribute to their families' livelihood. As young teenagers (on average, at about 15 years of age), they are persuaded by someone whom they trust (for example a neighbor, girlfriend or boyfriend)<sup>11</sup> to go with them to Italy, with the expectations of landing a regular job there, such as in an office or a bar. The girls see this as an adventure and as an opportunity to get away from the poverty and problems at home, but also as a chance to help their families financially. In some cases, their families are not aware that the girls are leaving the country, and the traffickers forge the obligatory parental consent, which must accompany a minor's passport when crossing national borders. In other cases, it is unclear what role the parents may have played in the

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<sup>10</sup> "Ludomania can be defined as a progressive addiction characterized by frequently repeated episodes of compulsive gambling which dominate a person's life at the expense of family, vocational and social values and commitments" (Cf. [www.betfilter.com/index.php?page=what-is-ludomania](http://www.betfilter.com/index.php?page=what-is-ludomania), accessed May 30, 2010).

<sup>11</sup> Some girls and boys are kidnapped by human traffickers (Lee 2008: 5), but this was not the case with my informants.

trafficking of their children<sup>12</sup>. Most of them are transported to Italy together with other girls. After their arrival in Italy, the girls are locked up and their passports, identity cards and personal items are taken away – and from that moment on, everything changes. The person who they initially trusted changes character radically. The girls are raped and beaten by the traffickers<sup>13</sup>. Some of the girls are abused further. Thereafter, they are informed that they owe the traffickers a large amount of money for the trip and the documents, and that the girls must pay back their debt by working as prostitutes, as thieves or through domestic servitude (or a combination thereof). Six of the nine girls had been exploited exclusively as street prostitutes, while one was forced to prostitute herself in an apartment. Another girl was exploited through domestic servitude and the last one was trafficked into a combination of prostitution, theft and fraud. The traffickers inform the girls that if they resist, contact their families or try to flee, they will be killed and the same fate will befall their families in their home countries. They are kept under surveillance around the clock, both on the street and in the locked apartment. The girls do not get any of the money they earn; all of it is handed over to the traffickers each evening. After a period of time at the hands of the traffickers (anything from a few days to many months), the girls succeed in getting away, either by spontaneously running away or by convincing a client to drive them to the police. There, they press charges against the traffickers, and the police bring the girls to a reception center for unaccompanied minors<sup>14</sup>. Here, it is decided if the girls are victims of human trafficking; if this is the case they are thereafter brought to Il Ponte, as the first step in Virtus Ponte Mammolo's project for young trafficking victims. The girls can stay

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<sup>12</sup> It occurs that parents sell their own children to human traffickers, with more or less full knowledge of what the children will experience in the countries of destination.

<sup>13</sup> According to the girls' stories, I have learned that human traffickers can be men or women, and younger or older people. They work as a part of a larger human trafficking network and have varying responsibilities. Often, the traffickers are very young, even just a few years older than the girls themselves. In addition, the traffickers can sometimes be earlier victims of human trafficking themselves.

<sup>14</sup> I visited the reception center several times, in order to get an impression of what the girls' lives may have been like in this period.



there for a few months and get used to their new circumstances, free from the control of the traffickers. At Il Ponte, security is very strict: the doors are locked, the girls may not go out unaccompanied and their telephone conversations are tapped. After their stay at Il Ponte, the girls are sent to La Sorgente, which functions as the project's second level. Here, the doors are not locked, and after an initial introductory period, the girls are slowly allowed to go out by themselves and to buy their own cell phones. After a period at La Sorgente, it is decided when the girls are ready to move out on their own<sup>15</sup>, and the staff helps them find a suitable place to live (such as a rented room in an apartment). They are told that they are always welcome at La Sorgente if they want to just say hello or if they need help<sup>16</sup>.

The focus of my fieldwork was the trafficked girls, but at the same time, their social surroundings were an important part of the field. There were altogether thirteen staff members and volunteers in the house, including the house supervisor, a social worker and a psychologist. These people were important parts of my fieldwork and became central informants. Most of the staff members were women (ten out of thirteen) and they are all between the ages of 24 and 45 years old. There were also quite a few other actors, who are a part of the girls' lives in different ways, including the girls' lawyers and representatives from the municipality, all of whom visited the house regularly. It must be stressed that the focus of my fieldwork was not the functioning of the house as such or the staff's work. However, the house was the physical point of departure for this ethnographic account of the girls' lives, and La Sorgente and Virtus Ponte Mammolo's project formed the

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<sup>15</sup> As a prerequisite for this step, the girl must have a job so that she can support herself.

<sup>16</sup> There have been discussions about the possibility of creating a residence where the girls could live together after their time at La Sorgente. This would potentially include a weekly visit by a house staff member. These plans have, however, not yet been realized.

institutional framework within which the girls navigated. Therefore, the house, its staff and other relevant actors were a part of the field and played a role in giving me an understanding of the girls' lives. Furthermore, I made an effort to meet and talk to as many of the girls' social acquaintances outside of the house as possible, including their friends, colleagues, classmates and eventual family members. In addition, there were also employees at the local supermarket, neighborhood bars and residents from the area near the house. All of these people had different perspectives on the girls' lives, actions and statements and, therefore, have played a role in forming the backdrop against which I understand the trafficked girls' world.

### **Human trafficking**

The United Nations (UN) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimate that there are approx. 1.2 million children under the age of eighteen<sup>17</sup> who are trafficked in the world every year<sup>18</sup> (Dottridge 2004: 9; Farr 2005: 231). Furthermore, human trafficking is seen as the third world's most lucrative form of organized crime, after weapons and drug trafficking (Farr 2005: 20). According to the UN protocol<sup>19</sup>, human trafficking is defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of a person, 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 [...] for the purpose of exploitation”

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<sup>17</sup> All of the girls were under the age of 18 when they arrived at La Sorgente (and they were even younger when they were initially trafficked); therefore, I see them as part of this category.

<sup>18</sup> It is, however, very difficult to pinpoint the precise number, in part because it is difficult to judge who should be included in these statistics. Should these numbers include, for example, previous victims of human trafficking or people who may be in danger of being trafficked? (Tyldum & Brunovskis 2005: 21; Dottridge 2004: 9; Penttinen 2008: 42)

<sup>19</sup> The UN Protocol on human trafficking is part of the UN Convention from 2000, which deals with the fight against transnational, organized crime (Gade 2005: 247).

(UN 2000: Article 3)<sup>20</sup>. Exploitation includes prostitution, forced labor, slavery or slave-like forms of exploitation of labor (Gade 2005: 245, 249; UN 2000: Article 3)<sup>21</sup>. Almost all European countries have the issue of human trafficking on their agendas and these countries are places of departure, transit and/or destination (or a combination of all three) for human trafficking. Italy and Denmark are both places of transit and destination, but the two countries have vastly different approaches to helping victims of human trafficking. Italy is one of the few European countries that provide trafficking victims with permanent residence permits<sup>22</sup> and the victims are enrolled in a range of social integration programs, which I will describe below. In Denmark – and in most of the other European destination countries – victims of trafficking are repatriated after a maximum of a couple of months<sup>23</sup>.

La Sorgente functions within the framework of the Italian immigration legislation, article 18 from 1998, which provides victims of human trafficking with an exceptional residence permit. At the same time, the victims are required to participate in the national plan of social protection, assistance and integration, the responsibility for which falls on the shoulders of local NGOs throughout the country. Within this framework, there are two kinds of residence permits: either a ‘judicial’ permit (which includes cooperation with the authorities in an effort to apprehend the traffickers) or a ‘humanitarian’ or ‘social’ permit (which does not necessarily entail the cooperation of the victim to press charges against the

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<sup>20</sup> Recruiting, transporting, transferring, hiding or receiving a child (a person under the age of 18) is seen as human trafficking, even if coercion or other forms of force are not employed (UN 2000: Article 3).

<sup>21</sup> Victims are most often trafficked into prostitution, domestic servitude, theft (or other criminal activities), forced labor within the agricultural and construction sectors, as soldiers or camel jockeys (Lee 2008: 3-5). Several countries (including Italy and Denmark) have been criticized, in their assistance to victims, of focusing solely on victims who have been trafficked into prostitution (ibid: 4-5; di Nicola 2008: 66).

<sup>22</sup> E.g. it is also possible for victims of human trafficking to get a permanent residence permit in Belgium, but under different circumstances and via other procedures than in Italy (Ministry of Welfare 2006: 4, 7, 17).

<sup>23</sup> In 2007, a new Action Plan was introduced in Denmark, addressing the fight against human trafficking. This plan secures victims of human trafficking the right to stay in Denmark for up to 100 days, providing they cooperate with local authorities with regards to preparing their repatriation (Ministry of Welfare 2007: 4, 7, 17).

traffickers). The national program for social protection and assistance grants access to work, education and health services. Later, victims of human trafficking have the opportunity to get a permanent residence permit, for the purpose of full integration into Italian society. The idea is that all victims of human trafficking receive protection and that the victims are motivated to collaborate with the police with regards to investigations<sup>24</sup> (ECPAT 2006; On the Road 2003; Save the Children Italia 2006).

## **Relevance**

As human trafficking is a fast-growing problem today on a global scale (Farr 2008: 5-6), literature on human trafficking has burgeoned. Beyond the publications of NGOs and international organizations, lawyers, criminologists, social workers, psychologists and sociologists have contributed to the debate, most often by focusing on legal aspects, globalization or on adult female prostitution (cf. Farley 2000; Haggren 2003; Rijken 2003; Carchedi 2004; Farr 2005; Kempadoo 2005; Savona & Stefanizzi 2007; Penttinen 2008; Hjort 2008; Cameron & Newman 2008; Samarasinghe 2008; Lee 2008)<sup>25</sup>. But only rarely do these academic contributions focus directly on the individual destinies affected by human trafficking. The general tendency within research dealing with human trafficking is to describe the phenomenon (di Nicola 2008: 57-58). There is a lack of research about the stories, experiences and world of trafficking victims, and it is here that anthropology can play a central role, with its attention to the lived lives that are played out within a collectivity (Hastrup 2004b: 9). In addition, participant observation, as one of anthropology's key research methods, allows new perspectives on the problem to emerge

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. [www.legislationline.org](http://www.legislationline.org) (information downloaded on July 25, 2007).

<sup>25</sup> In addition, the European media has been deeply occupied with this topic within the past couple of years, often in connection with individual cases or in connection with new governmental propositions. Some newspapers have also set special focus on human trafficking by running weekly features on the topic.

(di Nicola 2008: 59-60). Almost no ethnography has been conducted on human trafficking and its consequences; despite an intense search for relevant literature, I have only been able to find few anthropological contributions on the subject (cf. Joshi 2002; Castle & Diarra 2003; Taylor 2005; Brennan 2005; Linqvist & Piper 2008; Dewey 2008). Most of these focus on the situation in the victim's home countries (especially in Asia and Africa) and the familial and economic causes behind human trafficking. Either these contributions do not adopt a 'close' anthropological perspective with regards to the actual victims of human trafficking – occupied with general themes such as health, research methods or efforts to fight human trafficking – or they deal with human trafficking only on the periphery in their analyses. There is a complete void of ethnography dealing with young victims of human trafficking in destination countries and their lives and experiences *after* human trafficking has taken place.

Furthermore, only a few of the above-mentioned social scientists have worked specifically with *youths* who are victims of human trafficking. However, the sociologist Julia O'Connell Davidson must be mentioned, as one chapter of her book, 'Children in the Global Sex Trade' (2005) addresses the topic from the angle of prostitution. In addition, the political scientist Zosa Kropiwnicki's doctoral dissertation from 2007 about young, female prostitutes in South Africa mentions human trafficking in passing. But the fact that over 30% of all human trafficking on a global scale involves children and youths<sup>26</sup> makes an anthropological view on young victims of human trafficking necessary. This thesis, therefore, fills a gap in the international debate on human trafficking and in anthropological research. I have conducted a classic anthropological fieldwork, placing

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<sup>26</sup> Presentation by Helga Konrad, OSCE's (now former) representative for the fight against human trafficking, at the OSCE conference: "Alliance against Trafficking in Persons: Combating Trafficking in Children", held in Vienna on March 18, 2005.

myself in the field as a part of the trafficked girls' everyday life, allowing me to see, hear and experience what is at stake in their lives. In this way, this thesis offers unique *ethnographic* insights into the themes of agency, social relations, experiences and perceptions of these young victims; a vista over how these young women see themselves and their place in the world.

### **Theoretical and analytical premises**

O'Connell Davidson has drawn attention to the fact that human trafficking should be viewed as a form of migration, as it can be difficult to differentiate between illegal migrants and the victims of trafficking<sup>27</sup>. I agree with Davidson's point, in that whether a person is categorized as an illegal migrant or as a victim of human trafficking upon arrival in the country of destination plays a powerful role in their present and future fields of influence and personal agency. However, this thesis does not take its point of departure in a migration framework, although there is a transnational and migratory dimension in the fact that the girls have been trafficked from one country to another<sup>28</sup>. The fact that the girls have been uprooted and trafficked to another country adds important facets to their histories, but the central issue here is the act of trafficking and how this has influenced their personal stories, and not the fact that they have travelled from one country to another. Thus, the focus in this thesis is not that the girls have travelled across national borders; the border that is of interest here is the one between subject and object and how the girls navigate and maneuver across this border towards subjectivity.

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<sup>27</sup> Presentation by Julia O'Connell Davidson at the conference "Human Trafficking Today: Globalization and Human Security," Tokai University Center, Vedbæk, Denmark. February 2, 2008.

<sup>28</sup> It is worth mentioning that in some parts of the world, human trafficking takes place within the borders of a country, where people are trafficked from one area of the country to another. This was however, not the case for my informants.

The central themes of this thesis – social relations, action and time – originate from my empirical material, which in turn feed the various analytical approaches. On the anthropological focus, anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup writes in “Into the World” (2003), “A person is of interest to the anthropologists as a social individual, and in correlation, society is interesting as *practiced by people*” (Hastrup 2003: 9, original italics)<sup>29</sup>. *Action* is a core term for anthropology, and it has been the object of intense theorizing (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 962). Action as a central theme is especially relevant for my empirical material, as the girls, through human trafficking, have been objectified and robbed of their ability to act. Now, they are attempting to rediscover the power to act upon their own lives. My perception is that an individual’s actions are always *temporally and socially internalized*. Action should therefore be seen as a part of the individual’s *social interaction* with others, which includes both possibilities and limitations (Hastrup 2004b: 199, 214). An individual participates in the creation of her world, while simultaneously having to react to others’ actions and other elements that are outside of her control (Jackson 2002: 12-13). As a result, we change ourselves and our surroundings through our actions (Hastrup 2004b: 215). Similarly, action should, as mentioned, be seen within a temporal framework; action is influenced by and oriented towards the past, the present and the future: “[H]uman agency [is] a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past [...] but also oriented towards the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and towards the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects with the contingencies of the moment)” (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 963). Another element is that the girls’ bodies have been exploited through human trafficking, making the corporal

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<sup>29</sup> The original title in Danish is: “Ind i verden”. This particular work by Hastrup (2003) has not been translated into English and this quote has been translated here in connection with the publication of the English translation of this thesis.

aspect an accentuated premise in their lives. Their bodily experiences permeated their lives and social relations (Csordas 1994: 1, 3-4), and since my focus here is on the girls as *total persons*, the bodily element will play a role in my investigation of their social relations and experiences. On the anthropological focus, anthropologist Marcel Mauss writes, “Whether we study special facts or general facts, it is always the *complete man* that we are primarily dealing with” (Mauss 1979: 27, my emphasis). In the girls’ case, creative navigation is necessary to move between the social and temporal spheres of which their lives consist. *Navigation* as a term will, therefore, be a part of an ongoing discussion throughout this thesis (Vigh 2003, 2004, 2006; Ingold 2000). Generally speaking, I will look at the girls’ actions, social relations and perceptions of time and history as a part of their *subjectification process* (Ortner 2005; Das & Kleinman 2000). The three major themes here – social relations, action and time – will therefore be woven into one another throughout the thesis and will be discussed in chapters 3, 4 and 5, especially with regards to Mauss’ theory on reciprocity (Mauss 2000), sociologist Pierre Bourdieu’s praxis theory (Bourdieu 1990, 1996, 2000, 2007) and Hastrup’s theories regarding the individual’s perceptions of the wholeness of the plot (Hastrup 2004a, 2004b, 2005).

### **The structure of this thesis**

After an introduction to my research methodology (Chapter 2), I will explore the girls’ present and absent social relations. Connected to this, a discussion of the girls’ experiences with trust and distrust will follow (Chapter 3). Thereafter, I will focus on the girls’ concrete fields of action and finish this chapter with a discussion of their experiences of the freedom to act (Chapter 4). Setting these perspectives into a temporal frame, I will discuss the girls’ perceptions of their personal histories and what I have introduced as the wholeness of the



plot, including their hopes for the future (Chapter 5). Finally, I will delve into the girls' journey towards subjectivity, and summing up, discuss how trust, freedom and hope function as the directional arrows in their lives, characterizing the lives and worlds of these young women (Chapter 6).

## Chapter 2

# Method

The ‘physical’ point of departure for my fieldwork was the house where the girls lived, but the field’s consistent hub was the trafficked girls and it was their world and activities that guided me throughout my fieldwork. This meant that the context of the field was constantly expanded. In addition, I participated in conferences on human trafficking and followed the debate on human trafficking in the international and Italian media. I followed the girls (and thereby trafficking as a theme) *in* and *out* of the house, defining the field by the various relevant scenes and contexts. Fieldwork was thereby colored by its thematic orientation (Melhuus 2002: 78). While doing my research, I often speculated on the nature of context, where its borders lie and how one creates context. As anthropologist Roy Dillely has noted, there will always be a context and a frame of reference, which by nature excludes and includes; a fact which the anthropologist cannot avoid. This is an unavoidable condition for doing fieldwork (Dillely 1999: 38-39). The girls also created their own contexts with individual hopes for the future, into which I gained more and more insight, as I got closer to the girls: “Indeed, contexts are sets of relations and not self-evident things in themselves. We must therefore be alive to the possibility that there are two parallel processes of construing context: for us within our own bodies of knowledge; and for them within theirs” (Dillely 1999: 38). The anthropologist thus creates the context, just as the character of the field and the informants do.

### **The inclusion and exclusion game**

One of the consistent challenges of my fieldwork was that it was not easy to get close to the girls. They had a harsh past behind them, and their experiences with neglect made it difficult to win their trust. I presented my fieldwork to the girls at a joint meeting just after my arrival at the house, and all of them made a note of the fact that I was there to write about their lives and situation which might play a role in helping other girls who were at potential risk of becoming trafficked. This made sense to the girls, which led to their immediate acceptance of my project and myself. From the very beginning, they thought I was exciting; I was young and a foreign woman just like them, but at the same time I was very different. I looked different and had a different accent. Despite this interest, the girls initially kept their distance – they needed to find out who I was and what I wanted. They were used to and expected strangers to have hidden agendas and questionable intentions. I discovered quickly that the girls liked to dance and I grabbed the opportunity to get to know them better by using dance as a method. They taught me Romanian dances, while I taught them to dance salsa, which gave my first contact with the girls a physical and bodily character.

After about a month in the field, I began to sense the girls' acceptance of me. They said that they could tell that I did not have any bad intentions, and one after another, they welcomed me into their lives. This inclusion, however, was not consistent. Again and again, I was welcomed and then excluded in an eternally fickle continuum. A girl could pull me into her room and share a staggering intimacy with me, by telling me traumatic stories from her experience of being trafficked and in the next moment, she could be moody and answer in monosyllabic words. This was how the girls interacted with each other, and I

became a part of this inclusion and exclusion game, a topic to which I will return in due time.

### **Specific methods**

The classic anthropological method, participant observation, was the cornerstone of my fieldwork (Dewalt & Dewalt 1998: 291), as this method enabled me to gain a perspective on the girls' actions and social relations. From my first day in the field, I 'hung out' with the girls; I observed and participated in their lives. We watched TV together, drank coffee in the kitchen, lounged on the sofa, sat on the balconies and in their rooms<sup>30</sup>, helped make meals and with the cleaning in the house. I also spent time in the office if the girls were there or if there were meetings. When I needed a quiet place to read the girls' files, to which I had full access<sup>31</sup>, I also sat in the office. Generally, I was in the house five days a week, for up to nine hours at a time. I was also there on the weekends, on holidays and in the evenings. I participated in birthdays, parties, the weekly staff meetings and the joint meetings for the girls and the staff.

Participant observation expanded slowly to include the world outside of the house; I went shopping with the girls, to the doctor, to work, to the fitness center and to the Internet café. We went to bars and drank coffee, went to the movies and went out for ice cream. This gave me a fantastic insight into their everyday lives outside of the house and gave me the opportunity to meet the girls' friends, schoolmates and colleagues. It was interesting to

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<sup>30</sup> During my first week in the field, I had the girls give me a tour of their rooms.

<sup>31</sup> Every girl had a personal file, which was kept in the office. It included her health papers, her statement to the police, passport, identity card, documents related to her residence permit and a description of how she was trafficked, as told to and written down by one of the staff. These documents gave me a different insight into the girls' past, as they sometimes provided a different story than the ones told to me by the girls directly (Hammerley & Atkinson 1995).

see how the more familiar I became with their lives *outside* of the house, the more the girls opened up, and metaphorically, let me and my questions *in*. Some of the activities that we shared outside of the house went on without any staff being present, but I also participated in group activities where staff members were present, such as trips to the beach, the museum or for exams at school. As fieldwork progressed, it became clear to me that it would be helpful if I could gain insight into the girls' past on the streets – so on one evening, I participated in Save the Children Italy's outreach work in the streets among underage prostitutes. This gave me an impression of what some of the girls might have gone through<sup>32</sup>.

The girls' inclusion and exclusion games influenced all of my interviews. After about three months into my research, I felt that I had built up enough trust between the girls and myself to be able to conduct recorded interviews, but again and again, they withdrew and suddenly did not want to be interviewed anyway or they abruptly decided that they wanted to be interviewed after having flatly refused before. This provided me with insight into their fickle and volatile nature, which I now see as a consistent analytical theme in my empirical material. From a methodological point of view, it also taught me to always be ready for an interview and to not expect the informant to participate, even though we had made an appointment. The interviews were especially central in being able to shed light on the girls' experiences and perceptions of their personal histories. I conducted altogether sixteen semi-structured, recorded interviews with six of the girls and nine semi-structured interviews with the staff. Most of the interviews took place in the house, mostly with the girls in their rooms. Some of the girls were interviewed up to five times. Beyond these

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<sup>32</sup> I have not directly used any data from my outreach work participation. Instead, it served to provide me with general background knowledge about the girls' lives on the streets. This was particularly helpful because it was difficult for some of the girls to talk about this period of their lives.

concrete interviews, which were based on an interview guide and re-adjusted for each interview, I also used my recorder to capture music, spontaneous conversations on walks, the recitation of a love poem and other things that either the girls or I suggested be recorded. This meant that the girls got used to me using the recorder, and they loved to replay and listen to their own interviews. In addition, I conducted a life-story interview with Amelia (Horsbøl 1999). I chose to use this method only once, as many of the other girls had a hard time speaking directly about their past; their comments about their past were therefore more splinters, instead of whole stories and were often offered over a cup of coffee or inspired by a specific incident<sup>33</sup>. Some of the interviews did have the feel of a life-story interview, in part because I asked the girls in several of the interviews to draw a timeline of their lives, indicating the most important events in their lives, with regards to the person they are today<sup>34</sup>.

Before I started my fieldwork, I had imagined that I would facilitate a focus group with the girls, but this turned out to be impossible, especially because it changed from hour to hour who was at odds with one another and who was on speaking terms (Dawson et al. 1992; Marcun & Posel 1998). The girls' recurring antagonism towards one another meant that they usually were not interested in doing something together as a group. Thus, the only experience that was somewhat reminiscent of a focus group was during one evening when the girls, the staff members and I saw a film together about violence against women. After

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<sup>33</sup> During fieldwork, sadly, the mother of one of the girls died, while the grandmother of another girl also passed away. These events led to many conversations about childhood, family and the past. Also, music functioned as a catalyst for comments about the past.

<sup>34</sup> From a methodological point of view, I suggest that these experiences show that life-story interviews should not be seen as something rigid; these interviews can take place in many different ways, beyond the classic long conversation about the informant's life from birth (or as early as he or she can remember) until the present. This is especially relevant for fieldwork among young people and children, who often do not have the patience for a long interview, but also with regards to busy informants or informants who find it difficult to connect all of the important events in their lives in one long, continuous narration.

the showing, the staff members discussed the movie with the girls, a debate which I was able to record. The whole evening ended in a huge argument; one girl refused to participate and other four girls became very angry at each other and threw their plates, which were full of food, on the floor in pure rage. These ‘problems’ of conducting focus groups in exactly this field leads me to an analytical point as it demonstrates that the girls are brought together due to their *placement* in the house. They do not see themselves as part of a mutual history or as sharing the same problems, making it difficult to establish a common ground as the basis for a focus group (or any other joint activities).

### **Photo diaries**

Precisely because the girls were so eager to emphasize their individuality, other methods ended up working surprisingly well. During fieldwork, I asked the girls to make photo diaries, which was a great success both for them and for me. The idea emerged when I brought a digital camera to the house. The girls were really enthusiastic about having their pictures taken and about taking pictures of one another. They also loved to show me pictures of their families and boyfriends, and I showed them pictures of my own family. This interest in taking and seeing pictures, coupled with my experience of some of the girls’ reticence to express themselves verbally and their initial reluctance to participate in taped interviews gave me an idea; I gave them each a disposable camera and showed them how to take pictures of scenes from their everyday lives and of the things that were important to them<sup>35</sup> (Rasmussen 1999:64; Staunæs 2000: 4-5). Thereafter, I conducted recorded interviews with the girls, with their pictures as our point of departure. Having a concrete focus for the interviews worked really well, as the girls felt a strong sense of ownership,

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<sup>35</sup> I gave them about two weeks to carry out the project.

having taken the photos themselves (Staubas 2000: 2-4). This is again of analytical importance: the girls had a positive attitude towards the photo diaries, as they were individually able to frame their personal realities and to be subjects in their own histories<sup>36</sup>.

Fieldwork was characterized by me giving the girls a lot of influence over which methods I used. For some, it was interesting to write diaries, which were addressed to me<sup>37</sup>, while others chose to make drawings about their lives and dreams, in order to thereafter analyze them for me. These methodological approaches worked well, as long as I paid close attention to which method worked well for which girl. These approaches helped to pinpoint themes which were otherwise difficult or ambiguous to talk about for the girls (such as their past, present and perceptions of the future).

## Positioning

Bianca snuggles close as we stroll down the street. It is early evening and we have decided to go get a slice of pizza at the local pizzeria, where Bianca's friend, Gabriella, who used to live in the house, works. Shortly thereafter we stand with our noses pressed against the window behind which the inviting pizza is displayed. After I announce that I will pay for both of us, Bianca is quick to order two extra slices for herself. *"It's my turn next time"*, she smiles, even though both of us know that she won't follow up on it. We eat and chat and end up with greasy hands and faces from the pizza. Bianca is happy and excited, but gets enraged when a group of young guys tease us and ask for cigarettes. She yells after them about their lack of respect and shakes her head at them demonstratively, so that her heavy earrings bob back and forth on her cheeks. Two families with children are sitting next to us and I note that they look at us with suspicion and repudiation. The mother in one of the families is staring in disgust at Bianca's much too small summer top and short skirt, and she does not return my attempt at a smile. I feel uncomfortable, like there is a

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<sup>36</sup> In order to protect the girls' security, I cannot show the photographs of which the diaries consist as part of this thesis. The pictures, however, functioned as an eminent catalyst for the connected interviews, and are thereby a central part of my empirical material in their own right.

<sup>37</sup> A few months before I concluded my fieldwork, I gave diaries to the girls who were interested (Amelia, Valmira and Grace), where they could write about their everyday experiences, their thoughts, poems and stories.



knot in my stomach and I try to push it out of my mind. Suddenly, Gabriella is standing at our table – she has been busy cleaning up until now. She is tall and pretty with long, coal-black hair and vulnerable eyes. I haven't met her before, so I smile and tell her my name. She looks at me for a long time and asks Bianca some questions in Romanian. *“Gabriella asked if you are a girl like us...If you have had the same experiences as us. If you are a girl who lives in the house with the rest of us and if you've been on the street too”,* Bianca explains and adds: *“But I explained to her who you are.”*

(Excerpt from field notes, June 29, 2007)

As my fieldwork began, I took on a role that was somewhere between a staff member and one of the girls, but this changed as the months passed. I purposefully chose not to behave like the house staff because I wanted to get as close to the girls as possible and did not want to take on an authoritative role towards them. I made it clear in words and in actions that I could not give the girls permission to do anything, that I could not answer the phone in the office and that I did not have the keys to the house. Furthermore, I took on a completely non-judgmental attitude towards the girls and never admonished them if they did something that they were not allowed to do or spoke behind the staff members' backs. I began to identify more and more with the girls. I noted on my own body how I began to develop a sense of irritation with the staff members, how I empathized with the girls and did not like the staff members' reactions when the girls made a scene. Or how I could not help giggling at the table when the girls said something vulgar to provoke the staff members. In addition, my Italian skills were more or less on the same level as the girls', which enabled a closeness in our interaction, as we were in the 'same boat,' linguistically speaking. Just like the girls, my language mistakes were corrected and made fun of by the staff, and I noted that this irritated me and hurt my feelings. When joint house meetings were held for the girls and staff, I sat with the girls. I discovered that this also meant that I began to take on a new body language, such as lounging in the sofa with my arms crossed or eating with bad table manners, elbows on the table and without flatware. As my

fieldwork progressed, I began to embody a position in the field, which gave *me* a bodily sensation of the girls' experiences with their social surroundings. As described in the above field note excerpt (the unpleasant feeling in my stomach), my insight into the girls' behavior and social world became an integrated, embodied experience for myself. As the aforementioned example illustrates, I was often categorized as one of the girls by people outside of the house and this gave me a deeper understanding of the girls' social life. Being in the girls' company outside of the house, I also became the target of disapproving and negative comments, but also the especially obvious (sexual) interest from men of all ages. This 'close' positioning in relation to my informants meant that in some ways it was easier for me to understand their lives and explanations, because I experienced fragments of their social everyday life through my own bodily experience (Jackson 1983: 340-341). This also meant that the girls could relax in my company and did not see me as an 'adult' of whom they had to be wary<sup>38</sup>.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, I was called in more and more often for 'secret talks' on the balcony with some of the girls and laughed along with them when they whistled or called after one of the young male neighbors. Sociologist, Georg Simmel writes that the stranger can experience the most surprising candidness (Simmel 1950: 404), and this candidness was something I experienced regularly, such as when the girls included me in thoughts and concerns that they did not normally share with others. It was an advantage being a young woman, and I was often called in as the somewhat older sister or friend,

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<sup>38</sup> Being positioned as one of the girls was not without complications, as the staff tried to get me to correct the girls or to act as a mediator between them and the girls, a situation which I tried to avoid. I often experienced that the staff expected that I tell them what the girls said in our interviews, or that I would tell them if the girls broke the house rules. I did none of the above and had to explain repeatedly that I was not a member of the house staff.

where questions about make-up, clothes, music and boyfriends became a conduit for what developed into an intimate relationship.

### **Reconnecting**

A few months after I left the field, I was invited by several Italian and international organizations to come to Italy to present my research to them. In addition, I had to give a presentation to Virtus Ponte Mammolo with my recommendations for the house staff, based on my research there. This made it possible for me to have a follow-up period in the field, when I re-visited my informants. This turned out to be particularly useful (Wulff 2002). I attempted to contact the nine girls I had gotten to know best, all of whom had, in the meantime, moved out of the house. I met and interviewed three of the girls and spoke on the telephone with three others several times. It was not possible to get into contact with the last three girls. These were the ones who ran away during my fieldwork. I also visited La Sorgente and Il Ponte several times and spoke with the staff and the new girls who were now living in the two houses. During my fieldwork, I had spoke a lot with the girls about their perceptions of the future and by reconnecting with them it was possible to ‘jump into the future’ with them and see how things in reality had turned out; had they fulfilled their dreams or did they have other new hopes for the future? I will return to how the girls’ lives had developed in due time.

### **Access, security and ethics**

It was difficult to gain access to my field, as it is enveloped by secrecy and security measures, in an effort to protect the girls from their past traffickers. Several of the girls function as witnesses in court cases against their traffickers, and it is therefore possible that

the traffickers would want to threaten or hurt them. In addition, trafficking victims can be seen as a 'hidden' group in society, which is difficult and risky to identify and contact – and not least to study (di Nicola 2008: 53, 56). Thus, two years passed from my first ideas on the project until I actually started fieldwork; during this time, I worked with the topic, participated in conferences and built up a network among relevant organizations. Furthermore, not having any pre-existing knowledge of Italian, I needed to learn to speak the language, since the girls only spoke their own native languages and Italian. I saw being competent in Italian as a central tool if I was to get to know the girls well<sup>39</sup>. An ethnographic study of human trafficking can also imply risks for the researcher (ibid: 55), and the security measures taken in the house also had an influence on my everyday life in the field. Since the house has a secret address, I had to be careful that no one followed me or found out where my fieldwork took place. My knowledge of the house and the girls could be dangerous for the girls, the staff and for myself. In general, I noted that I was extra attentive to people or situations that seemed suspicious, in connection with my coming and going to and from the house. The staff regularly told me that they felt nervous about being in the house alone with the girls at night, in part because some of the girls were being pursued by the Romanian mafia<sup>40</sup>, but also because the girls were often scared themselves. This fear was intensified during my fieldwork, as two of the girls saw several people who were connected to their traffickers in the area around the house.

I made a confidentiality agreement with the NGO, which entailed keeping the location of the house and the girls' identity a secret. Furthermore, it was recommended that I not disclose my address and last name, my e-mail address and telephone number to the girls

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<sup>39</sup> In addition, only a few of the staff at La Sorgente, Il Ponte and Virtus Ponte Mammolo spoke English.

<sup>40</sup> Stories were also in circulation of previous threats against the staff in the house, such as one story about a decapitated doll, which was placed on one of the staff member's cars.

(the same guidelines were given to the staff). This was difficult because, as I got to know the girls better, they naturally asked about these details of my life. In order to stay in contact with the girls after I finalized my fieldwork, I opened an e-mail account with a neutral name, so that my last name or other identifying characteristics were not disclosed. Since I finished my fieldwork, I have been able to stay in regular contact with Valmira and Amelia through this medium.

When anthropologists work with sensitive topics, there are several ethical questions that emerge, both with regards to the knowledge that is sought after and the way in which this knowledge is generated. As anthropologists Lynn Meskell and Peter Pels argue, ethics is integrated into anthropological praxis, which endows the researcher with different kinds of responsibilities (Meskell & Pels 2005: 1, 3, 6, 21, 22). I have, as an anthropologist, a responsibility to seek knowledge about victims of human trafficking, as I see this knowledge as valuable and necessary. At the same time, it is my responsibility to generate this knowledge in an ethically viable manner. One of the central ethical perspectives is therefore the legitimization of the researcher's topic of investigation. Here, I highlight the anthropological tradition wherein it is essential that the researcher establish her analytical point of departure in her informants' own statements and perspectives. The researcher takes on the 'native' point of view, in order to thereafter re-contextualize and draw attention to these 'native' perspectives in her analysis and the dissemination of her findings. This objective, in my opinion, legitimizes the anthropologist's probing presence in sensitive fields like this one. At the same time, there is an acute need for knowledge about trafficking victims, as the problem is on the rise. Governments, organizations and individuals are more and more confronted often with having to make decisions about how to fight human trafficking and how to help the victims once they have managed to escape from the

traffickers' control (Brennan 2005: 36). This challenge is difficult to address when the *human beings* behind the superficial classification of 'trafficking victim' is unknown.

### Chapter 3

## Social ties

*“When I come home in the evening, I like to eat with the other girls and the staff, to talk with them and have fun, to tell them what I did that day [...] It feels like a big family. I like that time of day in the evening when we eat together. Even though there are some girls that... I don't like them, but I try to accept them.” (Valmira)*

The girls have been placed in a temporary community in the house. They choose themselves if they want to continue living there, but initially, they did not choose to create a collectivity with the other girls who live in the house. Valmira's comment is a good example of the duplicity that permeated the girls' internal social relationships and their relationships to the house staff. In many ways, they were happy for the company they had in the house, such as convening for dinner and lunch, but on the other hand, they did not see these internal friendships as 'real' and they were often at odds with the staff. Their relations with the other girls were perpetually defined by changing alliances. This chapter addresses the *social traces* that were laid out in the girls' lives through their various social ties and the social traces that they laid out themselves. I use *trace* as an analytical term that, in my eyes, encompasses the premise that the individual leaves and lays out her own traces in her life, while at the same time, others (people and circumstances) do the same. These traces are both defined by the past (experience), the present (present maneuvering space) and by the future (possibilities and perceptions of the future).

But how can the collectivity and the social relationships among the girls be understood from a theoretical point of view? Simmel has pointed out that a society is bound together by the dialectic between individuals and the social bonds that she thereby creates with

others. This, in turn, means that individuals influence one another and thus become part of a 'whole' (Simmel 1950: 43; Simmel 1998: 24). In other words, individuals become part of a mutual social sphere. Social relations are characterized by reciprocity amongst the community's members, as suggested by Mauss in his classic work, 'The Gift', from 1923. It is this social sphere and its built-in reciprocity that I will use as a theoretical jetty in this chapter, in an effort to shed light on the girls' interaction and positional alterity.

There are several different kinds of relationships and thereby "relatedness"<sup>41</sup> at stake in the girls' lives (Carsten 2000: 1, 4-5) and I have chosen to call these different relations *present* and *absent*, respectively. The present relations are those that were part of the girls' everyday lives, while the absent relations are those that were not physically palpable but still were able to influence the girls, either through sporadic contact or via thought or imagination.

### **The friendship game**

The present relations in the house can be further broken down into relations that are *external* and *internal*. In this section I will address the internal relations and later, I will return to the external ones. Internal relationships in the house were with the other girls and the staff (and those who visited the house). When I started my fieldwork, I imagined that the girls would have a strong sense of solidarity with one another and see each other as 'fellow victims'. This hypothesis did not hold water. They spoke only very rarely about their 'mutual' past and did not see each other as 'real' friends. The girls' relationships to one another were defined by volatility and uncertainty. Who were friends or enemies was

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<sup>41</sup> Anthropologist Janet Carsten coined the term "relatedness", which serves to provide a different perspective on kinship. The term includes types of kinship that are not necessarily born of biological kinship. The focus is instead on how people themselves define and practice kinship (Carsten 2000).



subject to constant change. The girls continually formed new friendship alliances with one another and they were never sure of their relationships to one another. The girls were connected to one another because they lived together in the house, but their interaction was characterized by a void of any general sense of community. Inspired by Bourdieu's "game theory" (Bourdieu 2007: 110-111), I will call the girls' dialectical interaction a *friendship game*; one could say an eternal 'gambling' with the friendships of the other girls. They could suddenly make a 180°-degree turn and this gave them a sense of power, as a friendship could thereby be given to or taken away from another girl in a heartbeat. Thus, this gave them the opportunity to control the social relation – until it was their turn to be snubbed. But they knew that this was how the game was played and in Bourdieu's words, they had a "feel for the game" (ibid: 110) and expected nothing else. One of the conditions of the game was to have allies and enemies. Some were better than others at playing the game and Diana, for example, was able to dominate several of the other girls over longer, continuous periods of time and was thereby especially successful in the friendship game. The friendship game made the girls particularly sensitive and attentive to one another and they took note of every glance, sigh or smile that indicated which side was being chosen in the game. Only fleetingly was there a sense of group solidarity amongst the girls, such as when there were big arguments with the staff over the house rules. Beyond 'normal' teenage disagreements, there were deeper reasons for the girls' lack of accord:

*"The [other girls] are very confused [...] When I see that they are unhappy or when they fight, I prefer to go into my room or avoid them because I don't like...because it would remind me of my soul, of how I feel, it reminds me of the times when I was sad and I don't like that."* (Amelia)

This statement points out the need for distance to the other girls because they remind each other of their 'mutual' past, including the reason why they were gathered in the house in

the first place. The girls pulled away from the others if they were crying, were inebriated or threw up in connection with bulimia, simply because these actions were seen as negative, palpable mirrors of themselves and (the reactions to) their past. Thus, it was less painful *not* to participate in the collective with the other girls, and in this way, they avoided that the other girls left deep traces in their lives.

Simmel writes that people interact with one another based on different interests or with different goals in mind, "...bring[ing] it about that human beings enter into fellowship – correlating their affairs with one another in activity for one another, with one another, against one another, activity that both affects them and feels the effects of them" (Simmel 2009: 22). Central in the girls' internal relationships to one another is that sympathy or antipathy for one another was unreliable and fickle, thus leaving the girls to juggle these alliances. Over time, relatedness also showed itself to be weak: only Amelia and Grace continued to have sporadic telephone contact with one another after moving away from the house, while the other girls explained that they did not feel a need to stay in contact with the others.

When the girls were on good terms with each other, they were particularly expressive in their positivity. They kissed and hugged with notable force and demonstrated very clearly who was the object of their sympathy by, among other things, insisting on physical contact in a very forward and fierce way. Their hugs and kisses were almost painful, so forceful were they. The fierceness of their physical contact emerged as a combination of the violence and abuse they had experienced against their own bodies and the love, security and attention for which they longed and searched; in the embrace, the physical and the social dimensions collapsed into one. When one of the girls had positive feelings about

another girl, the object of her affection received all of her attention, and the girls adored whispering to and winking secretively at their allies, especially if all the others saw it. But when they felt animosity for each other, they would argue and fight bitterly or demonstratively ignore one another for long periods of time.

Beyond the girls' internal relationships, there were other actors in the house who played a role in their lives, such as the staff, people from the municipality, the girls' lawyers and the staff at Il Ponte, who sometimes visited the house. The girls' approach to the staff was also informed by alterity; which staff member one was fond of changed daily. But the staff members were more stabile than the girls, as their mood and behavior did not change as suddenly and because they were always prepared with a logical explanation as to why they might be irritated or angry. They had an adult and admonishing approach to the girls. They often commented on the girls' internal and external relationships, and applauded the girls for the relationships that they saw as healthy. The girls hated being corrected by the staff, especially because in many cases, they were only a few years older than the girls themselves. One evening the girls were agitated by a specific expression in Italian that the staff members often used and which can be translated as "Now remember that..." or "I would suggest that..."<sup>42</sup>. Grace got more and more irritated and finally yelled:

*"I don't like it when Cristina [staff member] says 'now remember that'...As if I were little. No, see, I know how things work. I left my country and came here, all alone. I know better than you. Think about that! I'm so tired of this!" (Grace)*

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<sup>42</sup> "Mi raccomando..!"

Grace's statement is an example of how the girls pointed out, again and again, that the staff interfered and did not understand their situation or suffering. The girls felt that they were patronized and that they were not being treated as equals.

As a point of departure, the girls had a positive attitude towards visitors to the house until they got in the way of the girls' plans. They knew that municipality staff and the girls' lawyers had the power to make decisions about their future, and for this reason, the girls were careful about how they behaved towards them. These relationships were thus also impacted by the earlier mentioned game-rules, as the girls made prudent calculations about their behavior; they considered what they could get and what they could lose.

### **A change of atmosphere and volatility**

The girls' internal social relationships were characterized by intense *changes of atmosphere*, and arguments, shouting, screaming, noise and loud laughter – in connection with their changing alliances – defined their everyday lives. These changes in atmosphere can be understood with the help of anthropologist Clifford Geertz's terms "moods" and "motivations". In any given situation, the girls' moods colored their world (Geertz 1993: 97). The change of atmosphere was triggered by such mood swings and it was often unclear what it was that brought on a mood change in the first place: "...moods merely recur with greater or lesser frequency, coming and going for what are often quite unfathomable reasons" (Geertz 1993: 97).

Even though the girls did not see themselves as being in the same boat as the other girls, they did live in the same house for a period of time because they had had similar

experiences as trafficking victims and because they had all made the decision to wrest themselves free of the traffickers' grip, press charges against the traffickers and to move on with their lives. In this way, the girls had a common *path* – a common trace – in their lives, which Geertz refers to as “motivation” (Geertz 1993: 97). According to Geertz, motivation is the element that instigates an individual's actions and feelings. The motivation defines the girls' tendencies to carry out particular actions and to feel specific kinds of feelings in specific situations (ibid: 96-97). With Geertz's point of view, we thus understand that the girls' often-changing moods had two sides, with a temporal difference. Moods are without direction; they come and go and suddenly emerge out of a situation, while at the same time intensifying and subsiding: “...they are responsive to no ends” (Geertz 1993: 97). The motivation, however, lasts longer and gives the girls a direction in their lives, defining a more general trajectory. Motivation becomes imbued with meaning via the (more or less temporary) ‘goals’ towards which it navigates, while moods become meaningful via the conditions or ‘sources’, inspiring them (Geertz 1993: 97). Although the girls' lives generally could seem to have a similar motivation and direction, the *goals* corresponding to this direction were different for all of them. These goals, which they more or less actively and consciously navigated towards, changed all the time. The girls were only *temporarily* in the same space and *placed* in this community. And the girls often did things that contradicted their motivation for living in the house, such as breaking house rules. On one day, the girls could smash their motivation into pieces, while on another day they would reinforce it – brought about by, among other things, their mercurial moods.

This ephemeral character was one of the conditions of living in the house and hung like a blanket over the girls' social lives. The girls were potentially on their way to somewhere else, and they could therefore be seen as being in a liminal phase (Turner 2001: 509).

Liminality can be described as being ‘in between’, which implies being (in movement) between two places and/or social stages – to be in a transitional fase, between ‘here’ and ‘there’<sup>43</sup>. For the staff, it was important that the girls were on their way to another place and they did all that they could to help them ‘do the right thing’ and to make the ‘right’ decisions, which, in turn, would enable them to move out of this liminal phase and into a ‘proper’ life. The ‘right’ things and decisions were, for example, holding down a job and behaving properly. As anthropologist Victor Turner has described, an individual who is in a liminal phase is seen as being unclean and potentially dangerous for society, making staying in this phase not a favorable option (Turner 2001: 513). The girls, however, were not as set on moving on, as they saw the house as a safe place to be.

Liminality meant that it was difficult for the girls to feel at home in the house, something which they often told me. Home is the place where one knows oneself best (Rapport & Overing 2000: 158), but the question was, where was this for the girls? They felt distanced from their lives in their home countries, but they did not feel at home in the house either; the girls had been wrenched out of their own history and had a hard time finding and recognizing themselves in their current state of limbo. Anthropologist Michael Jackson offers several suggestions as to where people feel at home and, among other things, he refers to a composer who feels at home when he is occupied with music (Jackson 1995: 120-122). Although the girls did not long for their homeland as a place, they maintained the feeling of home and the familiar by hearing music and watching music videos from their home countries: loud Romanian, Albanian and Nigerian music was a part of daily life in the house. The girls often danced Romanian dances and spent a lot of time translating

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<sup>43</sup> In addition, the girls were also subjected to another kind of liminality, as they were teenagers and, therefore, found themselves in a state between child and adult, which in and of itself is a challenging period.

song lyrics for me. They were proud of their music and dances. But suddenly one day, the girls, with Bianca as their leader, declared that they were tired of Romanian music and that from now on, they would only listen to American songs. Thereafter, Romanian music was not to be heard in the house. This illustrates that the girls' need for a sense of home via music was also mercurial. Their lives were also defined by confusion of and search for a sense of home and belonging<sup>44</sup>.

### **Erraticism and sexuality**

Outside of the house, the girls had very few strong, long-lasting social relationships. They often bragged about having a lot of friends outside of the house and it was seen as prestigious to have an ever-ringing and text message-beeping cell phone. But those who called were often people that the girls had met coincidentally and only once. But these present social relationships played an important role in the girls' daily lives, even though they only knew these people marginally and for short periods of time. In the neighborhood around the house, there were employees at the local supermarket, bartenders at the local coffee shop, the employees at the local pizzeria and the residents in the area. Further away, geographically speaking, there were schoolmates, colleagues and potential acquaintances from the area around their schools or workplaces. Amelia, however, did have a close relationship to a cousin who lived in Rome, and Bianca had regular contact with and often visited a girl who was a previous resident in the house.

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<sup>44</sup> It was, however, important to the girls that they were allowed to make food from their home countries when it was their turn to cook. About once a week Romanian food was made, and Grace was given a weekly allowance to buy ingredients for Nigerian food. It has been suggested that the feeling of home can be connected to food (Hastrup 1991) and a Romanian lunch or dinner often inspired stories about parents and childhood around the table. The girls showed pride in their national culinary traditions.

The girls' present social relationships outside of the house could thereby be characterized as being *erratic*. They sought out these kinds of relationships again and again because these were the kinds of ties that they were used to and with which they felt comfortable. For example, several of the girls continuously sought out short-lived affairs with married men. Flirtatious and sexualized behavior often distinguished their way of relating in the world and of creating relationships outside of the house, and as a result, the majority of their closest relationships outside of the house were with men. For example, several of the girls had had sex with some of the employees at the local supermarket, and one of the girls had a sexual relationship to several of the neighbors. The girls were often whistled and stared at by people who worked at or were patrons at the local bar and in the area around the house. They called out invitingly to male neighbors and young men in passing cars. They dressed provocatively (which staff members continuously tried to correct), and they sought out contact with men in any way possible; via, for example, lingering looks or loud laughter. In one trip to the supermarket, they could obtain the attention of supermarket employees, neighbors doing their grocery shopping and workmen on the street. By behaving in this manner, the girls got attention and an immediate reaction, but this pattern also kept them precisely in the same role that they were trying to shake off. With regards to their surroundings, this behavior stigmatized the girls in their social life outside of the house. Judgmental looks were also directed at me and their sting was felt when I stood in the subway, on a bus or on the street together with the girls in their suggestive clothing and their rough language. As I see it, however, there was much more at stake with regards to the girls' behavior than simply holding on to a social role from the past. On the contrary, I argue that the girls' sexual relations and their way of behaving were steps towards regaining their own subjectivity. They had been objectified in their past, but now they wanted to be subjects in their own histories. The girls were attempting to give form to their new history,



in which they *themselves* chose towards whom they sent sexual ovations and with whom they engaged sexually.

The girls often had boyfriends for shorter or longer periods of time, sometimes several at a time. The boyfriends were Italians or foreigners. Often, they were quite a bit older than the girls, and in some cases a boyfriend could be over fifty years old. Several of the girls had had romantic relationships with the same men. If a girl had a steady boyfriend, the house supervisor would have to meet him in a neutral place and give his ‘approval’. This meant that the girls often did not tell the staff about their new boyfriends, as they felt that seeking this ‘official’ consent was embarrassing and inconvenient. Close relationships with boyfriends, however, only very rarely developed because they could not be privy to where and why the girls lived where they did. This was both because the girls had entered into a confidentiality agreement regarding the location of the house but also because they were ashamed of their background, and this in turn, kept these relationships on a somewhat superficial level. Romantic relationships could satisfy some of the girls’ immediate needs, and they could easily be discontinued by a simple shrug of the shoulders and thereby also controlled:

*“And when you then discover how stupid he is, you just stay stop, stop right now, I don’t like you. And afterwards you find another one, that’s not a problem [laughs]. I also like being alone, just being with a guy today, have fun, kiss him, be together with him for a few days and afterwards no...For now, I’m just trying to do the things I couldn’t do before [...] To discover new places, to have fun with other people.”* (Camelia)

Camelia’s comment draws attention to the freedom she sees in her current romantic relationship as opposed to her past, where sexual relations were forced upon her. Erraticism, superficiality and volatility were, to a great extent, what the girls expected from

their present social relationships, and these relationships did not leave deep or permanent traces in the girls' lives.

### **Reciprocity and objectification**

These observations about the girls' lives have inspired me to view their social relations through the prism of exchange and reciprocity. Simmel writes that all interaction must be seen as a kind of exchange (Simmel 1978: 82) and Mauss adds that exchange consists of reciprocal gift-giving. In gift-giving, a social tie is created because gift exchange requires reciprocity between the giver and the receiver (Mauss 2000: 15, 26, 32-33; Godbout 2000: 7). Gift-giving maintains and creates ties between people and the social actors involved have a responsibility to give, receive and to reciprocate (Mauss 2000: 26-27, 58-62). Reciprocity is thereby the central building block in social ties.

In the process of doing fieldwork, it became clear to me that the reciprocal aspect in the girls' lives was thrown off course. A large part of the girls' lives has been characterized by abuse, coercion and neglect, both on social and economic levels. They have been subjected to extreme poverty in their home countries and all of them grew up in dysfunctional families defined by abuse and neglect. Thereafter, they were cheated by a person who they trusted, who, in turn, sold them to human traffickers. They gave something (their bodies and sexuality), but did not receive anything in return – and as victims of human trafficking, they were treated and sold as commodities, as objects. They were abused on a daily basis for money that they never received, but which the traffickers took for themselves. There was no reciprocal relationship between the girls and the traffickers or the people who exploited them in various ways while they were under the control of the traffickers. These

were all one-way relations, void of exchange, which means, according to anthropologist Jacques Godbout, that these 'relations' should actually not even be regarded as such (Godbout 2000: 7). In this way, the girls have experienced being extracted from the system of social exchange and to be commodities which are traded among other actors. They embodied the exchanged 'gift' and were thereby subjected to commoditization and thus objectification (Marx 1961: 67, 69, 76; Kopytoff 2004: 274; Kopytoff 1986). The girls have been seen and treated as commodities/objects/things instead of as individuals/subjects/people. In anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's words, "...anything that can be bought for money is at that point a commodity [...] to be saleable or widely exchangeable is to be 'common' – the opposite of being uncommon, incomparable, unique, singular and therefore not exchangeable for anything else" (Kopytoff 1986: 69). This objectification of the girls resulted in what I will call *social exclusion*, simply because they were plucked out of the system of social relations and used in others' social exchanges (such as between traffickers and prostitution clients). The girls were placed in a strange in-between role; a no-man's land *between* the social actors who controlled the game rules. The girls' *social crisis* originated in this social no-man's land. This lack of reciprocity thus affected the girls' present lives and social relations.

Anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes, in her research dealing with organ trafficking has described a similar example of commoditization of the body, where poor people in Brazil see a way out of poverty by selling their organs. In other cases, some are put under narcosis and their organs are removed without their consent (Scheper-Hughes 1996). Just as the girls in the house, these people experience that their bodies are being degraded to the status of commodity, a thing. The social scientist, Karl Marx, writes about the commoditization and objectification of the worker, which leads, among other things, to an "...activity of

alienation, of estrangement” for the individual (Marx 1961: 83). The girls also experienced this kind of estrangement as a consequence of their commoditization. Marx’s theory deals with capitalism and the estrangement of work, but his theoretical terminology may be used to illuminate the correlation between commoditization and the estrangement that the girls experienced. The problem, in relation to the girls’ commoditization and estrangement, is the existence of, in the words of anthropologist Annette Weiner, “inalienable possessions” – or in other words, elements, which *cannot* and *should not* be commoditized, objectified or estranged (Weiner 1992: 26, 33, 37). Weiner uses this term in relation to things, which over time become unique and imbued with symbolic meaning, while I argue that her term may be stretched to include people, the human body and its organs. A human can therefore be seen as the ultimate “unalienable possession” – having a value, which places her *beyond* the exchange of one thing for another (ibid: 33, 42). But, as Weiner notes, the paradox is that “...such possessions, from time to time, are exchanged” (Weiner 1992: 37). It is, among other things, this paradox that characterizes the girls’ lives and circumstances.

### **Moving towards subject status**

In the creation of new relations to men in the girls’ present lives, they used and carried forward their bodies and sexuality, which in the past, they were forced to give. They had not gotten much out of these kinds of ties in their pasts (as these relationships had not been reciprocal), but now they experienced their sexuality as something that gave them power over the men who whistled and called after them on the streets. The girls were acutely aware of and explicit about having their ‘gifts’ reciprocated – their ‘gamble’ in these social relationships:

*"I want a man who is older than me...Someone who knows life. Someone who is at least 35 years old...Love knows no age!"* I'm sitting on the kitchen balcony together with Ramona and Valmira, and we're eating ice cream. We're talking about guys and love, which is a very popular topic of conversation among the girls. The girls agree to remove blackheads from each other's backs, so Ramona sits on a chair backwards so that Valmira can get to her back. It's a burning hot summer day and lethargy seems to be draped over the house and the neighborhood like a thick blanket. Valmira is staring into space and doesn't really register Ramona's comments, but Ramona chatters away continuously, while gesticulating energetically with her thin arms. *"All the guys I know where I work...So many of them ask me out. The guy who works as the porter just asked me out to dinner."* She adopts a knowing look. *"But I said, 'If you want to go out with me, it's going to cost you! I want a house, a car, vacations...the works!'"* Valmira laughs: *"Mamma mia, Ramona!"* Ramona's eyes shift back and forth triumphantly between me and Valmira, who in the meantime has gotten up and lit a cigarette. *"And he said he would take my beautiful eyes... but you know what I yelled after him?! 'You can have something else, but not my eyes!'"* Ramona laughs, while she expertly snatches up her ringing telephone and goes into the kitchen.

(Excerpt from field notes, May 29, 2007)

The girls often told stories like Ramona's, and they made a point of illustrating how they were in power in situations with men. It was they who had the power to choose. They gave nothing if it was not reciprocated, and they decided themselves what they wanted to have and what they felt like giving. I see these types of social ties as part of how the girls went about regaining their status as subjects and this was carried out via their bodies and sexuality. The paradox here is that the girls used their bodies, through which they earlier had been objectified, to reclaim their subjectivity. They used a familiar way of acting and getting in contact in a new way. It was a reciprocal relationship, in which they were in charge and in this way, the girls *re-conquered and personified* their own bodies.

Telling a story – e.g. to the other girls and to me – about men and how these men wanted them, also gave the girls an extra nudge towards a status as subjects. In the above-described story Ramona *proved* and *made probable* that she was desired and that she had power. She acted based on the experience of being desired and she made her own decisions regarding

how the situation would progress. The narration emphasized Ramona's new position in the world.

But the girls also experienced that their way of being in the world sometimes backfired and that they were not always in control: people with whom the girls were not interested in engaging in a flirtatious and sexual relationship made their wishes clear in a more or less aggressive way. Several of the girls experienced that their bosses and colleagues showed their sexual interest in them or tried to touch them, which shocked and upset the girls. Camelia, for example, chose not to return to her workplace after such an episode. Even though the girls tried to escape this feeling of objectification, this was not always possible in their social relationships either, and at times they felt trapped in this cycle in their relations to men. Diana explains:

*“Sometimes my boyfriend makes me feel like a thing.”* (Diana)

### **The emerging body**

It is stiflingly hot and I force my way through the river of sweaty passengers in the overloaded bus. I hop off the bus, relieved, and look up, as I recognize Camelia and Ramona's voices: *“Hey, Tri – come here! Come with us in our car. We have made teams!”* Their voices sound happy and excited. It's the 1<sup>st</sup> of May<sup>45</sup> and we're going on an outing to one of the nearby lakes. We plan on swimming and having a picnic and the girls have been looking forward to it all week. Sabina, Grace, and Bianca are hauling plastic bags filled to the rim with soda bottles, chips and panini and they call to me cheerily. Further back, and in her own tempo, Amelia saunters over to us. She smiles when she sees me and waves. We all exchange kisses on the cheek, chat and sit down together on the wall at the end of the road to have a smoke while we wait for the two staff members who will drive us. *“Trine, you have to see something”*, says Amelia and tosses her head as an invitation for me to come closer. She pulls out her cell phone and starts a video, which, she proudly explains, she recorded in her

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<sup>45</sup> The first of May is a national holiday in many European countries and is similar to Labor Day in the United States.

room just before she left the house. 'Like a Virgin' with Madonna plays scratchily from the phone's loudspeakers and I see Amelia on the screen, dancing sexily and provocatively in very little clothing. She writhes on a chair and tosses her full curly hair in front on the camera, while she touches her body. "*Cool, eh?!*" she laughs.

(Excerpt from field notes, May 1, 2007)

The girls had different ways of drawing attention to their bodies. Some of them showed their bodies often, both to strangers by being lightly clad on the street, or to each other, the staff and me. The way in which the girls initiated the first contact to another person was often physical, regardless of whether they sought contact to men or women. One example of this was the first times Bianca wanted to speak to me, which she signaled by kicking my foot and pinching my thigh while we were sitting together on the sofa.

All of the times I participated in parties or birthdays in the house, the girls danced with each other ardently, their bodies close, often becoming more and more unclothed. During trips to the beach, the girls wanted to sunbathe topless, even though this is not standard or acceptable behavior in Italy, and they laughed while they rubbed sun cream on each other's bellies and breasts. At the same time, some of the girls often complained about their bodies. Sabina had chronic leg pains and she went through phases when she limped and had a look of discomfort on her face. Doctors could not find a physiological reason for her pain, which Sabina refused to accept. Amelia often had strong stomach pains, which worsened in emotionally demanding situations. Ramona was anorexic and was an alcoholic, while a fourth girl told me that during the past few years she had cut herself on the arms regularly in order to feel the physical pain, rather than the emotional pain. Many of the girls had attempted suicide. But at the same time as experiencing this attention to their bodies, several of the girls expressed a lack of contact to their bodies:

*“Life on the street has left a big wound inside of me. And now in my mind and my body, even these two parts are in conflict, because sometimes – no, always – I can’t feel, I remain, I am like a machine, I do things like a machine [...] because my body can’t feel anymore because of all the men who touched me and all the things I suffered... It is a big wound.”*  
(Amelia)

Amelia’s statement is an example of how the girls did not feel that they were in contact with their bodies because of their past as victims of trafficking. The body was experienced as if it were cut off from the self (Leder 1990: 70, 77, 87, 90). Even though this ‘absent’ body is, according to philosopher Drew Leder, most often experienced by people who are in great physical pain or who suffer illness (ibid: 70-83, 90), this was also a situation in which my informants found themselves. For Camelia, her body was so absent that she did not wash herself and for this reason she always smelled badly. While a girl could experience her body as divorced from herself, she also experienced that her body ‘emerged’ or ‘appeared’, and for this reason, became especially prominent and ‘present’. As Leder shows, the body can emerge due to pain, which leads to a heightened attention to the body (ibid: 4, 82-86, 89-90), but for the girls, the body also ‘appeared’ as a method of provocation, making contact and getting attention. The body had been the hub of the girls’ past abuse and this story and implicit ‘bodily marking’ was perpetuated in their bodies and into their present lives. In addition, all of the girls had some form of sexual abuse behind them. All of the girls had been raped and/or sexually abused, some by family members, and almost all of the girls had had several abortions or had given birth to children in their home countries<sup>46</sup>. One could be tempted to believe that this bodily attention only pertained to the girls who had been forced into prostitution, but this was not the case. Sabina and Bianca, who had been exploited through domestic servitude in a home in Italy as well as theft and fraud, experienced the same bodily focus. Regardless of which kind of trafficking the girls

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<sup>46</sup> The girls did not have any contact to their children.



had experienced, they all shared a sense of being separated from their bodies while at the same time, feeling that the body surfaced and made itself present, in a more or less conscious way.

At the same time, the girls' relationship to their bodies may be understood as the body reflecting the self by expressing what is felt but cannot be verbalized. Their bodies were symptoms of their lives as trafficking victims; their bodies had a history (Csordas 1994: 4). As Bourdieu writes, "[the body] *enacts* the past, bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is" (Bourdieu 1990: 73, original italics). Human trafficking had thus marked the girls' bodies.

The girls continued the bodily markings in their present lives, by piercing one another in the nose, lips and ears and many of them got tattoos. Here, *they* chose to mark their own bodies. The body was a tool, which had been abused earlier, but also the tool through which they won attention and created and sustained social ties. It was an embodied way to meet the world that they knew, but were in the process of changing. The choice to mark their bodies in the way that *they* chose was a step towards reclaiming their subjectivity. The girls thus emphasized that their bodies were *their own*, and no one else's. When I asked Amelia what she would say to the staff, when she told them that she had gotten a tattoo without their permission, she answered:

*"I will tell them that this is my body and that I can do with it what I want."* (Amelia)

It was the experienced separation between body and self that the girls wished to get over and a step in this direction was made through their sexual relations and boyfriends. The

girls wished to re-establish and re-discover the connection between body and self and with the collusion of the two, to create (and be subjects in) their own new histories. This process came about *with* their bodies in a completely new kind of reciprocal exchange than they were used to, and sexuality and the use of their bodies became the first steps on their way to re-claiming control over their own histories. The girls put themselves at risk in these bodily relations and allowed themselves, in Leder's words, to become absorbed by sanctioning the overstepping of their bodies' borders (Leder 1990: 166-167).

### **Missing the mutual**

*"The most important people in my life now are my mother, Ariana; my sister, Shpresa; my grandmother, Rovena."*

(Excerpt from Valmira's diary)

The girls' absent social relationships, such as to friends and family in their home countries, played a large role in their present lives. All of them had some kind of contact to either a family member or a girlfriend in their home country, in another country or somewhere in Italy. Contact was sustained via the telephone, text messaging or the Internet. Amelia spoke and 'chatted' with her mother every Monday over the Internet, Grace received telephone calls from cousins in Nigeria while Sabina only seldom spoke with a cousin who lived further away in Italy. The comments and actions made by the absent social relations were often the cause of great sadness or celebration for the girls. A good or bad telephone conversation could make or break their day or week. When I asked the girls who was the most important people in their lives, they usually answered by naming one or several family members. The relatedness to these absent social relations was thus very important from the girls' point of view. When staff members punished the girls or admonished them, the girls often argued that the staff members were not their family and that they therefore did not

have the right to discipline them. In this way, the girls clearly preferred the absent social relations to the present ones in their lives. I argue therefore, that the girls needed to hold on to these absent social relations (and at times to romanticize them) in an effort to tackle the more temporary and volatile present relationships in their lives. These absent relationships were, despite their absence, permanent points of orientation for the girls.

These absent relations, however, regularly disappointed the girls. The girls tried in different ways to reach out towards these distant actors in their lives, but their overtures were often not welcomed. The girls longed for attention and recognition from the absent social ties, but were disappointed again and again:

*“They [the family] don’t think of you, but you think of them. For my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, no one called to wish me happy birthday. Afterwards, I thought that I don’t have a sister anymore.”*  
(Bianca)

My empirical data does however vary, in that there were two of the girls who experienced reciprocity with at least one of their absent relations. They were contacted regularly and their communication was of an interested and loving character. The other girls tried to sustain contact with their absent social relations by sending money and packages home regularly, but often this did not result in reciprocity, such as thanks or other forms of recognition. Grace sent a monthly monetary contribution to her home country (apparently to her family), which caused the staff members to suspect that she might still be paying off her ‘debt’ to the traffickers. She avoided questions as to whether there was any coercion from the traffickers connected to her payments or whether she just wanted to help her family.

In understanding this situation, it is helpful to recall anthropologist Marshall Sahlins' description of different forms of reciprocity. The girls felt that they had what Sahlins calls "generalized reciprocity" with their absent social relations (Sahlins 1978: 193). Generalized reciprocity is defined by altruistic transactions among individuals who help each other and generously share the resources available to them. Generalized reciprocity is typical among family members, who are not exact in getting anything in return within a certain time frame; those who can, give to the others (ibid: 194). The girls tried to practice this – if they had money, they sent some home – but the problem was that they almost never were on the receiving end of this generalized reciprocity, which created terrible frustration and disappointment in the girls. They were engaged in a form of reciprocity, which the partner did not return – and when a gift is not reciprocated, social disorder between the involved parties ensues (Mauss 2000: 60-61). What the girls did experience was a kind of negative reciprocity from the absent actors' side, which is the most impersonal form of exchange that exists, in that the actor in this form of exchange tries to get something without having to contribute or to risk anything herself (Sahlins 1978: 195). According to Sahlins, negative reciprocity is only experienced amongst strangers and does therefore not happen within families (ibid: 198-199), but this was nevertheless the case for the girls. Many of the girls were contacted if a member of their family was sick and therefore needed for money, but when the girls were sick, no one called. Both in their past as trafficking victims and in their present ties to their absent social relations, the girls thus only rarely experienced reciprocity. But in the hope that things would change, they continued to 'invest' in these relationships. This points out that, for the girls, despite the unfairness and inequality, a 'bad exchange' was better than no exchange at all. This bad and unequal exchange was still a way for the girls to perpetuate and maintain sociality. This suggests, in opposition to Mauss' theory, that sociality is maintained and creates meaning as long as just one party attempts to sustain

the exchange. The party who gives does not need the reciprocity in order to continue to maintain the social relation, even if the consequence is social disorder. As long as there is *hope* for reciprocity, the exchange makes sense and creates meaning.

Other than the above-mentioned absent social relations, the girls dreamed and often spoke of other social actors with whom they did not have contact or of people who were dead. These were actors who were present in the girls' *thoughts and perceptions*. As an example, Bianca often spoke and dreamt of her mother, who died when she was 11 years old, and the girls often spoke of their female friends and boyfriends who they had known in their home country. These remembered and imagined relationships were even more absent than the ones described above, but still, they were significant. Here, there is another kind of relatedness and sociality at play, rather than the kind of relations that are direct and clearly connect people to one another; an *imagined* relatedness, through time and space. Another group of absent social actors were the girls' previous traffickers. The traffickers were dangerous for the girls who lived with a recurring fear of reprisals (violence, threats and attacks) should the traffickers get their hands on them again:

Trine: *"Are you sometimes afraid of running into people from your previous life on the street?"*

Amelia: *"Yes, of course I am afraid. One time I was at Termini [the central train station in Rome] with my cousin and my ex-boyfriend, and I saw the wife and mother of one of the men I pressed charges against. They walked directly towards us and we hid [...] But they saw us. My ex-boyfriend didn't know anything about my past on the street [...] They stood there and were talking on the phone and looking at us [...] And the two women came and my cousin and I ran away. We ran to the police at Termini. Afterwards my boyfriend said, 'Did you know that those two women were running after you? They asked me where you went.'"*

The girls' world in the house was thereby also embedded in a world of absent others: their absent family and friends in their home country, and the *perception* and thoughts of traffickers, family members who had passed away and other social ties from their past.

### **Maneuvering between fields**

A field, in the Bourdieuan sense, is a network or a social arena, within which the field's participants play the field's game and struggle over the resources that are significant in the field. The field's participants define the field according to which type of capital is at stake for them, and they navigate towards a mutual goal (Bourdieu 2007: 111-113; Bourdieu 2000: 11; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996: 84; Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989: 39). The girls' lives consisted of several fields between which they jockeyed: their life in the house, their home country, their workplace, school and their social lives with friends and boyfriends outside of the house. In this way, I see the fields of the girls' lives as a composite of the social ties in which they were involved. As Bourdieu writes, every field has its own logic and 'taken for granted-ness', which sustains the field (Bourdieu 2000: 11). The girls invested themselves in the various kinds of fields, in an effort to understand how they worked and how they should behave in each of them (Bourdieu 2007: 111-112). But they did not combine the fields; they never told their acquaintances outside of the house (such as boyfriends or employers) about their lives as trafficking victims, and as a result, they did not tell these people about their life in the house, either. Their families in their home countries often did not know what the girls had been through after they arrived in Italy or where the girls were and lived in Rome. This was due, in part, to the obligatory confidentiality agreement, which entailed keeping the location of the house a secret, but also because the girls were afraid that their absent social relations would be sad,

disappointed or worried. Some of the girls were also worried that these individuals would distance themselves from the girls, if they knew to what kind of ordeal they had been subjected. I went along with Amelia a few times when she spoke with her mother over the Internet at an Internet café. Afterwards she told me:

*“I see my family, we speak for a few hours [...] I prefer to pretend that I am happy. Then I don’t have to think about bad things [...] Because my mother is the kind of person...if I said something bad to her, she would get nervous and I don’t like that. I want her to be calm and happy with regards to me. She doesn’t know what I’ve been through [...] because otherwise she would be really worried.”* (Amelia)

The girls played the game and participated in the logic that the various fields ‘demanded’ (Bourdieu 2000: 11; Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996: 85). There were different forms of capital at stake in these fields and the value of the different forms varied (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1996: 85). In the house, it was central to gain the other girls’ respect and to give the staff the feeling that the house rules were followed. At the workplace, the girls made an effort to be serious, hard-working and trustworthy. Towards their boyfriends and friends outside of the house, it was important to be cool, flippant, sharp-witted and to demonstrate that they didn’t care what other people thought and that they were in control of their lives. With regards to their families in their home countries, the girls were sweet and understanding. This illustrates how variegated the arenas in which the girls acted were in the course of their everyday lives<sup>47</sup>. The girls who had attempted to combine the fields, for example by sharing with a boyfriend the reason why they lived in the house, did not experience this as a success. A previous resident of the house, Gabriella, had decided to tell her boyfriend about her past, which resulted in his calling her a “whore” when they argued. The girls who had been trafficked into prostitution agreed that it was a bad idea to tell their social

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, it is relevant to note that many people experience having to navigate between various arenas in their lives, but the point here is that this aspect was particularly accentuated in the girls’ lives.

relations outside of the house about their past. As Ramona expressed it, that kind of information *“could be used against them in the future.”*

The girls could not unite the fields of which their lives were comprised, and in this way, their lives were fragmented. Their method of dealing with this can be understood with the term “social navigation”, which, among others, the anthropologist Henrik Vigh has interpreted as a way for individuals to maneuver across an instable terrain – a terrain, which, like the individual, moves (Vigh 2003: 133, 135; Vigh 2004: 119; Vigh 2006: 54-55). As opposed to the anchoring character of the term “field,” “terrain” encompasses the movement that the girls were required to make in order for their lives to have coherence and the perception that the fields, of which their lives were comprised, were ever-changing and ‘mobile’ entities. Anthropologist Tim Ingold makes an argument for the term “wayfinding” instead of navigation, as the latter indicates that the individual has an overview and a sense of how the world looks, as if on a map, and knowledge of where the individual is going (Ingold 2000: 236-237). It is not Ingold’s opinion that this is what an individual does in her everyday life. But I would suggest that the girls do more than ‘find their way’ in their lives. Precisely because of the many amputated fields within which they operated, overview and plasticity were necessary. Ingold writes in his argument against the term “navigation”: “For when we move about, we do not normally think of ourselves as piloting our bodies across the surface of the earth, as the navigator pilots his ship across the ocean” (Ingold 2000: 237). But this was precisely what the girls did; the maneuvering and border-crossing between the fields were conscious acts which required, in fact, exactly this overview and ‘steering’. For this reason, navigation is a term that is applicable in relation to my empirical data. Others had laid out some of the traces that marked the girls’ lives, but the girls also laid out traces of their own. They tried to jockey between and in and



out of the fields, but without letting them overlap. This limited their maneuvering space and forced them into lies and secrets in order to stay the course. For how would you answer, when your new boyfriend asks where you live or why you came to Italy? Or when you reconnect with a schoolmate over the Internet, who wants to know if the office job in Italy has turned out as well as promised? The fields between which the girls maneuvered were not just ever-changing and in movement (Vigh 2004: 131), but they were also completely separated and irreconcilable frames of reference in the girls' lives. This demanded an extreme flexibility and capacity for maneuvering of the girls. The disconnect between the fields in the girls' lives led them to often claim that they felt they were two or more different people, depending on within which fields they were currently operating. They were chameleons; they tailored their behavior according to with which social actors they were interacting. This fragmentation necessitated a high level of resilience with regards to the volatile circumstances of their lives and an ability to *navigate creatively* through these unsteady waters.

### **Trusting in distrust**

I'm sitting in the office with Roxanna, Sabina and one of the house staff members. We're alone in the house – the other girls are at work or in school. All of us are in a silly mood, and we're goofing around and laughing. There is a happy and light atmosphere. The girls find Romanian pop songs on the Internet that we dance to and try and sing along with. Suddenly, the expression on Sabina's face changes, she gets up and leaves the room. I follow her with my eyes, and when she reaches the hallway, her one leg gives out under her and she has to lean against the wall to regain her balance. She grasps her head and limps out of the door and into the sunshine of the garden. No one in the office reacts, so I get up and follow her. She is sitting hunched over on the stone steps with her hands covering her face, crying. I hold her.

Sabina: *"I just want to die [sobs]. I don't trust anyone; not the other girls and not the staff."*

Trine: *"I thought you were friends with Bianca?"*

Sabina: *"Yes, but I can't talk to her. I can't talk to anyone [...] If I say anything to anybody, they just laugh. Nobody understands me."*

(Excerpt from field notes, April 9, 2007)

Psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott writes that the individual is born into a trusting relationship to the world, which first and foremost is fulfilled via interaction with the individual's mother (Winnicott 1962; Winnicott 1985; Giddens 1994: 86). This is the perfect exchange relationship between mother and child and: "...from this develops a belief that the world can contain what is wanted and needed, with the result that the baby has hope that there is a live relationship between inner reality and external reality, between inner primary creativity and the world at large which is shared by all" (Winnicott 1962: 139). Thus, the individual is inculcated with a built-in assumption that she can safely involve herself in trusting relationships with the people that she meets. The mother's job is later on to teach the child that the world does not automatically offer what is wished for or needed, which in turn, gives the individual a vital essence with which she can meet the world without being disappointed (Winnicott 1962: 140). But for the girls, their experiences with the world and their social relations in it showed themselves as anything but trustworthy. And for most of them, interaction with their mothers had only rarely been defined by trust and safety; they had not been imbued with this basic sense of trust in life and people. The girls said that it was hard to trust other people, be it the other girls, the house staff or others outside of the house. They were always looking for some kind of hidden agenda behind other people's actions and did not expect that others would inspire anything but distrust in them:

*"Trust is very, very, very, very difficult for me...I only trust four people – I know that they won't hurt me. My mother, my brother, my boss and you [Trine]." (Amelia)*

As sociologist Niklas Luhmann writes, trust is a risk that an individual runs which includes a realistic possibility of being disappointed (Luhmann 1999: 31, 88, 125). The girls had run that risk too many times in their lives where disappointment and hurt feelings were the

result. For this reason, they had 'chosen' distrust. They blamed themselves for being trustful of the people who had tricked them into coming to Italy, and the boyfriends and friends in whom they had trusted and who had abused their faith. The girls said that they would not make that mistake again. Trust was not something with which the girls had had good experiences. According to Luhmann, trust is something basic for human beings, and he insists that if people did not have trust they would be too fearful to even get out of bed in the morning (Luhmann 1999: 31). The girls did have basic faith that the house would not collapse on them when they woke up in the morning, but their experience had taught them that having been disappointed as many times as they had, they could not meet other people with trust. They had faith in general structures in their lives, but they did not have personal trust in others (ibid: 81, 87; Giddens 1994: 36, 79). In many ways, they found themselves in a situation that sociologist Anthony Giddens describes, "Trust in abstract systems provides for the security of day-to-day reliability, but by its very nature cannot supply either the mutuality or intimacy which personal trust relations offer" (Giddens 1990: 114). In many ways, the girls had lost trust in the world (Winnicott 1985). They were on their guard and their point of departure was distrust. They did not have "...confidence in the reliability of a person [...] regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another" (Giddens 1990: 34). Giddens refers to this condition as "existential anxiety" (Giddens 1990: 98). The girls' entire history was connected in the experience that it did not pay off to show trust in their social relations. In Luhmann's perspective, there is an interesting temporal difference between trust and distrust; as he writes, trust can only be won and sustained in the present, as neither the past nor the future can inspire trust (Luhmann 1999: 43). I see this however to be the other way round with regards to distrust. For my informants, distrust was rooted in the disappointments of the past and neglect, which led to an incorporated expectation of

distrust in the future. Luhmann continues and explains that trust is "...confidence in one's expectations" (Luhmann 1979: 4) and, in relation to my informants, this was also the case with regards to distrust. The girls expected distrust both from others and from themselves; they had trust in distrust.

Trust was also at stake among the girls – if one had one of the others' trust, one could loan money, clothes and make-up. Trust among the girls was however fragile, mercurial and delicate. Trust could be built up carefully, over a long period of time, but at the same time, trust could be destroyed in a heartbeat and not so easily re-established:

*"I have a friend, Denisa, who also used to live in the house [...] Denisa and I used to tell each other everything, but now I've heard something [that she has said about me] and now I don't tell her everything anymore. Now I say a little less, because when you hear something about a person, you lose trust, there is no more trust [...] We are still friends but not like before, not so close." (Bianca)*

Trust and relatedness are connected in my informants' social ties. Both are factors that, according to their level of intensity, characterize the girls' social ties. Relatedness grows or is diminished proportionately with trust – and the other way around. Trust can be described as relatedness' point of departure or 'backdrop', particularly with regards to the girls' non-sanguine social ties. In order to feel connected to another person, there had to be at least a hint of trust. In the girls' case, experiences with (dis)trust were characterized by negativity, volatility and constant change – for which reason the relatedness between the girls and their present social relations was similarly characterized. The relatedness to their families in their home countries led, however, to a kind of 'blind trust' from the girls' side. As a rule, the girls believed that their families were truthful when they told them about illnesses and asked for more money, even though the girls' experiences pointed towards the opposite. Here, relatedness won over experience and resulted in blind trust.

## Summary

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the girls' social ties were draped in a cloak of volatility and inconstancy, and that the girls were part of a friendship game with one another that was defined by changes of atmosphere and erraticism which were characteristics of life in the house. I have argued that the girls' way of being in the world and their sexual relationships were avenues for re-conquering their bodies and regaining their subjectivity. The paradox is that the girls used their bodies, with which they earlier were objectified, to regain their status as subjects. I have analyzed the girls' social ties from the perspective of reciprocity, through which I have shown that, through their objectification as trafficking victims, the girls were commoditized and thereby excluded socially. With regards to their absent social ties, reciprocity was also de-railed, but even though the girls experienced negative reciprocity here, they fought to maintain the connection. I have thereby argued that, with their absent social relations, a 'bad exchange' is better than none at all. Furthermore, I have described the girls' social ties as irreconcilable fields, between which they navigated consciously and creatively. Finally, I have focused on trust and distrust and shed light on the girls' experiences with and expectations of distrust in their social ties. Thus, this chapter has explored the – short-term and long-term as well as the superficial and deeper – social traces that the girls' social ties left in their lives, and the social traces that the girls laid out for themselves.

In the following chapter, I will further explore the girls' path towards subjectivity by shedding light on the possibilities and limitations of their maneuvering space.

## Chapter 4

# Maneuvering space

My point of departure for understanding the girls' lives and world is to look at praxis. In particular, I am interested in how praxis is played out in relation to the limiting and, at the same time, opportunity-creating framework of the maneuvering space afforded to the girls. The relationship between praxis and framework can be summarized through Bourdieu's term, *habitus*: "[...H]*abitus* [are] systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations" (Bourdieu 1990: 53 italics in original). This perspective has led me to the term *maneuvering space*, which I will use in this chapter to shed light on the girls' undertakings and which potentials and conditions were connected to these actions. The term maneuvering space encompasses both the girls' everyday activities, but also more generally speaking, addresses their possibilities of moving on in their lives. As we saw in the last chapter, within their social relations, the girls fought to move out of objectification and to become subjects in their own histories; they were in, what I would call, a *subjectification process*. In order to see how this is expressed in their concrete actions, it is important to take a closer look at what it means to be an acting subject.

### **The experience of acting**

Philosopher Michel de Certeau describes in 'The Practices of Everyday Life' (1984) how individuals can act in different ways: either tactically or strategically. Strategies are carried out by powerful actors. A subject who acts strategically has (power in) a space that is her own, and this is the space wherefrom she acts (de Certeau 1984: 30, 36, 38). A tactic is, in

de Certeau's words, "an art of the weak" (de Certeau 1984: 37). A tactical act is a maneuver within the powerful subject's terrain – an act within someone else's space – and here, the tactician uses the possibilities available at a given time (de Certeau 1984: 30, 37, 39). Strategies are expressions of power, while tactics represent a lack thereof (ibid: 38). In many ways, one could say that the girls acted tactically in their present lives, because they did not act from within their own terrain; they acted tactically in relation to a framework that was determined by others. They had also done this, to an extreme extent, in their lives as trafficking victims, where they had experienced total objectification, and only limited self-determination. Here, their actions were defined to a great extent by tactics. The girls had a history that was formed by the fact that they had been acted upon and seen as items that could be bought and sold; they had been *treated as* objects in the past and therefore they had *become* objects in the past. This had happened within the context of the girls' relationships to other people, which illustrates the fact that subjectivity (and objectification) is *also* about how individuals are a part of a collectivity. However, in their present lives, they were in the process of becoming actors, who were active and whose actions had an effect – and this acquisition of subjectivity was played out in, among other things, the girls' praxis. Their stay in the house was an intermediary in-between place in their lives and is therefore an interesting period, as it embraces the transitional phase from the girls' objectification to their subjectification.

With regards to their past, the girls at times stressed that they *themselves* had chosen their path in life – that they had acted and made choices. They knew and accepted that there were people who had abused them, but they sometimes made a point of explaining that they had chosen to travel to Italy to try their luck, and that it was their own decision every time they sent money, gifts and mobile phones to their families and others in their

respective native countries. In other situations, they focused on their helplessness and lack of action. Depending on the situation, they chose to emphasize their role as victims or their role as acting subjects. This kind of *subject-object collision* is characteristic of the girls' lives.

Although the girls were not in a position to change the framework within which they acted in their present lives, I nevertheless see their actions as being particularly powerful, as the girls succeeded in restructuring situations and making them more advantageous for themselves. At the same time, the girls sensed that they were in the process of leaving objectification behind; they acted and chose actively and were moving on in their lives. In relation to my empirical data, I would thus go a step further than Certeau's definitions of tactics and strategies and lean on anthropologist Michael Jackson and philosopher Hannah Arendt's interpretations of action. Jackson emphasizes that the central issue is the individual's *perception, experience or feeling* of being an acting subject (Jackson 2002: 14). Similarly, we have all had the experience of being objectified and acted upon in our lives – in Arendt's words, we have both been “a who” and “a what” (ibid: 12-13; Arendt 1958: 176-179, 181). These two experiences may be seen as the outermost points on a continuum, between which all people move, instead of being two definitive possibilities. But in the case of the girls, the subject-object relationship was especially accentuated, as the girls had experienced being at the one extreme of the continuum in their past. The girls' actions were a part of their subjectification process, and I argue that an extra layer should be added to de Certeau's tactician category since the girls' actions were powerful within the maneuvering space accessible to them. In the following section, I will thus demonstrate how the girls can be seen as especially able and cunning tacticians, who utilized their maneuvering space to its fullest extent.



### **Maneuvering space: inside and outside**

The purpose of the girls' actions was often to gain attention. They sought out attention from people outside of the house by speaking loudly and dressing provocatively. They sought out the staff's and the other girls' attention by applying varying 'methods', such as goofing off, speaking loudly on the telephone at the dinner table or by pouting. There was, however, a difference between their maneuvering space inside and outside of the house. Within the walls of the house, the girls were bound by the rules that abide there and the staff's assessment of their actions. Here they were held responsible for their behavior, and the girls struggled against this framework in different ways. When I spoke with them about the rules of the house, they agreed that the rules were good, reasonable and necessary, but when they experienced the rules in practice, they despised them and those who enforced them (the staff). This feeling of not being able to administrate everything in their lives was something the girls distanced themselves from; they felt that they were adults and could take care of themselves, a position that they often voiced. If the rules were broken, the staff admonished them loudly and a thorough discussion would ensue as to why the rule had been broken. If they did not come home at the agreed time, a fax was sent to the municipality and the police with the message that one of the residents of the house had run away. Thereafter, the consequence was stern talks with their contact person at the municipality and even a possible dismissal from the house. The staff's reactions varied from girl to girl, depending upon how her behavior was otherwise. Diana had, for example, broken house rules a number of times and was, according to the staff, a bad influence on the other girls. She was rebellious, did her own thing and was in the house as little as possible. As a result, she experienced more strict rules, and the staff was generally less willing to be flexible with her, such as with requests to go out in the evenings. Sabina, on the other hand, followed the rules, spent much of her time in the house and did not create

conflicts, and as a result, she did not experience the same restrictions. The most important element in being on good terms with the staff was to talk with them and to share daily experiences and choices with them, a point of which the girls were very aware and used to their benefit. The girls who did not do this were given less ‘rope’ than those who did. As an example, Bianca’s telephone rang incessantly and she always adopted an amiable and personal tone with whoever called. But she refused to answer the staff’s questions as to who had called; she shrugged her shoulders and answered “*a friend.*”

Also outside of the house, the girls’ maneuvering space was in many ways limited, as there were other rules to which they had to relate, such as at their workplaces or in school. And the house rules stretched into the girls’ lives outside of the house, as they had to request permission to be away from the house, and the staff always had to know where they were. Furthermore, the girls experienced being discriminated against on the job market because they were foreigners, which meant that they could not get the jobs they had set their sights on; the available jobs were either as cleaning or hairdressing assistants. On a more general level, the girls were also limited because not all of them could return to their home countries – either because there was a risk that the traffickers would track them down there, their economic situation was not strong enough, or the relationship to their families was bad. Their status as trafficking victims thus limited them in different ways in the present and also with regards to the future. At the same time, this status gave them the opportunity to live in the house, to get help in connection with getting an education or in finding a job, etc.

The girls could be very condemning of one another’s behavior and actions outside of the house, even though they were guilty of exactly the same things, such as being together with

guys they did not know very well, getting drunk or cutting class. In the conversations they had in the house, they were against this kind of behavior, but outside of the house they carried out these actions all the time. The girls told on each other regularly with regards to illicit behavior outside of the house, and they spoke behind each other's backs to the other girls. Through speech, they manipulated events and explanations to serve their own needs.

### Speech acts

It has been a long day and we sit down late at the dinner table for our evening meal. The girls are irritated with the staff and do not want to talk to them. They have huddled together at one end of the table and they scowl at the staff and look angry. They don't answer when the staff speaks to them. Amelia and Grace begin to talk amongst themselves about two of the staff members, Enrico and Carlotta, who are not there. They quietly make fun of them and suddenly the two girls switch to English, which both of them are good at. They almost shout, "*I think Enrico has taught Carlotta a lot of things!*", Grace laughs with a knowing look and food in her mouth. "*Yeah, to fuck!*", Amelia giggles back in English, and she and Grace crack up laughing. They laugh even louder because the staff members don't understand the English words and therefore do not react.

(Excerpt from field notes, July 10, 2007)

One of the ways the girls showed agency was via language. First of all, language was an accentuated theme, as all communication in the house took place in Italian, which was not the girls' mother tongue. This placed the girls in a 'lower' position than the staff because they had trouble finding the right words or pronounced them incorrectly (Hastrup 2004a: 101). One of the house rules was that the girls had to speak Italian to each other so that the staff could understand what was going on, but this was not always honored. The girls had other languages to fall back on: either Romanian, Albanian or English, and they made eager use of them as a way of controlling a situation. Amelia and Grace spoke English, which they often used to talk behind the staff's backs, or to their faces, as described above. The Romanian girls quickly switched to Romanian if they needed to agree on what they would

or would not say to the staff. The display of power was evident when the girls used a foreign language, employing the rudest of terms, right in front of the staff members, who were not able to understand what was happening. Native languages were also used when the girls offered emotional support to each other. At the same time, there was prestige in being able to speak Italian well and Sabina was often teased, as she was still struggling with the language.

These observations have motivated me to augment the term agency to include the girls' *speech acts*. Speech acts are actions that, via language, intervene in the world and have an influence on it (Hastrup 2004b: 208). By speaking, the individual does something. My point of inspiration in using this term comes from the theories of philosophers John Austin and John Searle. One of Austin's (and later Searle's) points is that language has several functions which work as actions; speech is thereby not just declarative, but also performative (Austin 1997: 35-38, 43; Searle 1974:22). Speech moves others to act and is, in and of itself, an action. Hastrup thus writes, "Speech is an action, a form of position-taking vis á vis a situation" (Hastrup 2004a: 164)<sup>48</sup>. For the girls, speech acts were one of the most powerful instruments they had at their disposal, allowing them to control, steer and influence situations. Through speech acts, they expressed their subjectivity. Through conversations with the staff, they were able to convince them that they were eager to change or that their bad behavior was not coupled with bad intentions, such as when they fought over violated house rules. In such situations, the 'gift of the gab', was central. The girls struggled for their window of speech opportunity – and thereby for attention in time

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<sup>48</sup> This particular work by Hastrup (Hastrup 2004a), 'Kultur. Det fleksible fællesskab', or 'Culture. The flexible collectivity', has not yet been translated into English and the quote here has been translated in connection with the publication of the English translation of this thesis.

and space – and there was either loud vocal articulation during mealtimes and at house meetings, or total silence and sulking. Silence was also powerful (Barnes 1994: 17). This *tactical silence* or ignoring which the girls utilized as a way of drawing attention to themselves, was different from another form of silence of which the girls also made use. This other kind of silence sometimes functioned as an ‘answer’ to questions regarding their pasts, a pattern of behavior that characterizes people with a history of oppressive traumas (Jackson 2002: 20). The purpose of the tactical silence, on the other hand, was to provoke a reaction from others or to mute events or intentions behind actions.

Lies were another form of speech act. The girls lied in order to avoid getting into trouble, to blame one of the other girls or to get attention. Anthropologist John Barnes writes that a lie is a statement made for the purpose of intentionally seeking to mislead others about the nature of the world, including the liar’s situation and attitude. In addition, the lie can serve to protect against incisive questions and other disturbances (Barnes 1994: 11, 13, 17). Supplementing Barnes’ definition, I would add that another purpose of the lies was to allow the girls to wriggle their way in and around the rules and frameworks of the house and other frameworks laid down by others. Their lies were extensive and emerged both with regards to their own and the others’ comings and goings, and in connection with their changing histories. They often lied about insignificant things, such as whether they had done the laundry or whether they had taken the bus with one of the other girls. But they also distorted and censored aspects of their past if it could bring them into a more advantageous position. As a case in point, much suggested that Roxanna had been a prostitute for a long time – among other things, several girls from the scene recognized her – but she claimed that she had been forced into prostitution by her traffickers for the

duration of only one day<sup>49</sup>. It often seemed as if a lie became the girls' reality, and they held tightly to their versions of daily events, even when they clashed with other's perceptions of the same events. As Barnes writes, "Lies, of course, are not static; making a lie has consequences, not only for the dupe but also for the liar, and after a while a statement that began as a lie may no longer fit easily under its initial rubric" (Barnes 1994: 11). The lie, as a speech act, was thus a powerful and effective instrument for controlling the girls' personal histories and could, furthermore, recast daily situations with the other girls in a different light. Through their speech acts, the girls simply snatched up the maneuvering space available to them within the fields in which they operated (Bourdieu 2000, 2007) – speech acts were effective tactics.

I am doing the dishes with Grace and Sabina when Bianca comes running into the kitchen and asks if I can come up to her room afterwards. She waits impatiently for me and afterwards we go up to her room, which is always nice and neat. The bed is perfectly made and her teddy bears are aligned with precision. The door from the room to the balcony is open, where Amelia sits and smokes. We sit down with her on the plastic chairs outside, our legs resting on the railing. It's a warm summer evening and everything is quiet except for the neighbor's dogs. Suddenly Bianca jumps up, turns her back to me, lifts up her blouse and pulls down her pants, revealing a large tattoo of an Asian-style snake along the length of her torso. The skin is swollen and red; clearly, the tattoo has been made recently. "*Look, Tri!*" she says gleefully, looking over her shoulder at me. I am surprised and admire and compliment the beautiful tattoo. Bianca giggles and explains that it didn't hurt at all. "*I haven't told the staff yet... so you can't say anything*", she whispers to me. "*I'll tell them at some point, but I couldn't care less what they think. I'm of age now!*" Bianca gives me a big hug and says she's looking forward to seeing me again tomorrow.

(Excerpt from field notes, July 4, 2007)

The telling of secrets could also function as speech acts, and the girls' internal interaction was characterized by secrecy and gossip. They shared alliances and secrets with some,

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<sup>49</sup> It is difficult to know why this possible lie was important to Roxanna. But as she later ran away from the house in order to cooperate with her earlier traffickers (which I will return to later in this chapter), it is possible that she wished to blur the details surrounding her time on the street and the degree of force/voluntariness involved.

which at the same time defined the borders to others. Sharing a secret was a clear way of communicating that you stuck together, often against the others, which the above situation with Bianca illustrates; in this case, she positioned me on the girls' team, against the staff. At the same time, the example illustrates Bianca's resistance to and struggle against the house rules, as it was in no way permissible to get a tattoo without the staff's knowledge. Secrets were thereby one of the 'weapons' the girls had in the house. The staff could not force the girls to reveal their secrets (about boyfriends, their past and their movements outside of the house) and in this way, secrets became particularly potent tactics. Different elements could be tactically kept secret. Another aspect was that secrets among the girls were extremely powerful and knowledge of another girl's secret could be used against her in the future, if necessary. The emphasis on initiation, if one told another something, meant that it took a long time before the girls told me about their lives. There was thereby great meaning and power in these narratives.

### **Narrating oneself**

Telling one's personal story is a central 'method' in maintaining a feeling of agency (Jackson 2002: 15). The girls' speech acts also included narrations of their own subjective histories, wherein they defined what should be excluded or included, depending on who was being told and under which circumstances. Through this personal narration as a speech act, the girls were able to form what their reality looked like and how they experienced themselves within that reality (ibid: 30). In Jackson's words, "Storytelling is a coping strategy that involves making words stand for the world, and then, by manipulating them, changing one's experience of the world" (Jackson 2002: 18). Jackson goes on to say that the individual, by telling her story, recreates reality in an effort to make it bearable

(Jackson 2002: 16). As a result, the girls' speech acts, in their various forms, awarded them agency in relation to different events that otherwise made them feel helpless (ibid: 17, 36). Here, I would add that these could be events that took place in the past, the present or the future, as all three 'times' could be part of the narrative. In this way, a narration could play a role in changing the subject-object ratio in the girls' lives (ibid: 16).

Through their speech acts (narrations, mother tongue, silences, secrets and lies), the girls exercised agency and gained a feeling of control. In Jackson's words, "...in telling a story with others one reclaims some sense of agency, recovers some sense of purpose, and comes to feel that the events that overwhelmed one from without may be brought within one's grasp" (Jackson 2002: 36). The girls' distortions and exclusions of their past as trafficking victims can also be seen as a conscious attempt at taking charge of their personal histories. As trafficking victims, the girls became inculcated by their traffickers as to which story they should tell if the police should find them: they should say that they were in the country and on the street by their own free will, and that they should never mention any of the traffickers. They were told that if they did not keep to this story, there would be consequences for themselves and for their families<sup>50</sup>. Thus, there was great symbolic power and value in now being in a position where they could decide how their stories should sound and to what extent they chose to lie or not. At the same time, stories of their past could make them appear as either victims with no possibility to exercise their agency or acting individuals, depending on which aspects they intentionally chose to emphasize. It is also possible that the girls felt it was necessary to tell their story to the police and to the house staff as a 'correct' trafficking story, wherein they were portrayed as

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<sup>50</sup> After the girls had fled from the traffickers, several of their family members experienced being contacted by the traffickers who wanted to know where the girls were. This worried the girls greatly.



innocent victims of the traffickers' malice. This is also a way of taking charge of their own histories. The girls thus captured what I will call the *potentiality* of the fields within which they moved – and they acted from this 'standpoint', while at the same time, they saw and acted upon the potentiality of their whole history.

### **Hungry for control**

It is Wednesday afternoon, a few days before my departure from Rome and the girls have been hanging around me all day and spoken about when I would come back and visit them. I have planned a party for the girls and the staff for Saturday, with good food, chips, ice cream, presents, soda, music, balloons and karaoke, which I know the girls love. We've spoken about the party and Valmira has proudly showed me which outfit she will be wearing and how she is going to do her hair. Afterwards, I go down to the office, where Bianca is lounging on a chair with one of the staff members. When I enter, Bianca suggests that we find some music videos of the singer Nelly Furtado on the Internet and we sit close to each other in front of the computer. We laugh, goof off and sing, talk about guys and music and Bianca holds my hand and squeezes my arm. Her eyes are warm and happy and she says, "*Tri, what am I going to do without you?*" and hugs me much too tightly. Suddenly Bianca's face changes abruptly; she drops my hand and ignores me completely. "*I want to fill out an application form so I can go out on Saturday. I don't know who I am going out with, but I am just going out*", she says to the staff member, while she focuses on the computer screen. The staff member says that that would be a bad idea, since Trine is throwing a goodbye party on Saturday and Bianca answers coldly, "*That doesn't interest me*", and clicks further with the mouse without gracing us with so much as a glance. I sense hurt feelings, disappointment and anger welling up in me, but I stay seated quietly. Finally, I get up and say that it would make me happy if she would come on Saturday, but that this is, of course, her own decision. She shrugs her shoulders and I'm just about to cry in rage. In the following days, I'm anxious about whether she'll come to the party on Saturday, but she ends up coming for the whole evening. She cries most of the evening, hugs and kisses me and has a hard time letting go of me when I finally have to leave. Her face, tears and dark eyes are the last that I see, as I run down the steps in order to catch the last bus late Saturday evening.

(Excerpt from field notes, July 25 & 28, 2007)

The above excerpt is an example of how the girls intentionally tried to control a situation based on the framework to which they had to relate. First of all, Bianca tried to protect

herself from being hurt because she knew that it would be difficult for her to say goodbye to me, and so her way of tackling the situation was to be cold and distanced. In addition, she used her sudden change of mood to provoke a reaction from me and to place herself in the center. For Bianca, one play available to her was to demonstratively refuse to participate in anything that I wished and expected of her and in this way she grasped control. Her participation *meant* something to me and she knew this. By using this knowledge, she wished to indicate her position of subject in our relationship. Bianca also indicated her freedom to act by emphasizing that she would only do things by her own free will. In the example above, I experienced in my own body how powerful and strong her act was, and this suggests how effective the girls' (speech) acts were on their surroundings. Finally, this event leads me to a methodological point; in many situations, I experienced myself as a part of the girls' social game and was neither seen as, nor did I perceive myself as, one of the staff, who most likely would have had a more 'professional' approach to the above-described situation.

Another related way of acting within the given framework was the girls' use of 'retreats'. When a situation became too much or too demanding, the girls withdrew and did not participate. Sabina, for example, always complained of headaches, pain in her legs and that she generally did not feel well if a party or birthday festivities were to be held in the house; in other words, if someone other than herself was in focus and if the forecast suggested a positive and fun atmosphere for everyone. For this reason, she never participated, but stayed in her room, cried and moaned. The staff members and the other girls tried to convince her to participate, but if she finally did come down to the living room to the rest of us, she limped on her bad leg with a pained look on her face and tears in her eyes and was incapable of eating anything or having fun. This was a powerful act, the purpose of

which was to draw attention to herself and thereby demonstrate that she did not feel well. The purpose of 'retreat' acts was thus to provoke a reaction from others.

### **A feel for the game**

The girls constantly changed their descriptions of themselves and how they chose to present themselves. Sometimes they emphasized their victim status, while at other times they focused on their own choices and agency; they either underlined their object or subject status. This duality is also described in Kropiwnicki's conclusions about young female prostitutes in South Africa. She writes about her informants: "They attested to the victimization that they endured in their homes and on the streets, but they also described themselves as powerful agents in relation to other actors" (Kropiwnicki 2007: 320). In the girls' case, I suggest viewing their oscillation between subject and object as a step towards re-claiming their subjectivity, as this oscillation was something that they seemed to control. They knew that there were different roles available in their lives and they met this challenge as best as they could, in an effort to get as much out of the situation as possible. The girls navigated in a complicated and limited terrain, which moved and influenced them (Vigh 2003: 133; Vigh 2004: 124, 131). But they understood that they were where they were today because they had been objectified in their past, and they used this mentally and physically embedded knowledge as a point of departure for their actions in the present. At the same time, they kept an eye on future possibilities, according to which they also positioned themselves (Vigh 2003: 136; Vigh 2004: 130). The girls were placed and positioned in their present lives because of their status as trafficking victims, and they did not seem to take on powerful positions within the fields in which they moved (Bourdieu in Wacquant 1989: 39). But they used and navigated within the maneuvering spaces accessible to them, imagining

for themselves even more possibilities for the future, which made their positioning seem not rigid.

In anthropologist Robert Desjarlais' research on mentally ill homeless people in a shelter in the United States, he tries to capture how the homeless act and experience the world. He describes how the homeless encounter the world differently from other people; they "struggle along", meaning that they live one day at a time and experience life as a series of episodic events without any temporal coherence (Desjarlais 1996b: 70, 85, 87, 88). The homeless in Desjarlais' research are in many ways reminiscent of the girls in the house, as both groups are living in temporary quarters without their families and have a tough history behind them. In addition, the homeless' homelessness may be seen as a metaphor for the limbo stage within which the girls find themselves and their sense of homelessness which is bound up in their struggle to discover where they belong. Despite the structural similarities between the homeless and the girls' situation, the two empirical studies are different in important ways. First and foremost, I do not see the girls' lives as defined by 'struggling along', as they related to their past, present and future. They saw a temporal connection in their lives, as opposed to the homeless. The future maneuvering space, which the girls imagined, opened up to completely new horizons, wherein they saw themselves as strong, acting individuals, which in turn, influenced their lives and actions in the present. Amelia, for example, dreamed about writing a book and becoming a great author, and she acted towards this vision in her everyday life by writing drafts of short stories and by informing herself about the publishing business in Italy. It was thus not just the objectification of the past that defined the girls' present maneuvering space, but also the girls' perceptions of and hopes for the future. The girls lived and acted in relation to both their past and future, and can therefore not be said to live one day at a time, without a sense of temporal coherence,

in the same way as the homeless. The girls linked events together over time, but in an elastic and selective way, depending on what was most beneficial for them. I will discuss this point further in Chapter 5.

Although the girls' actions may also primarily be understood as tactics, just as Desjarlais understands the homeless' actions, I argue that the girls' (speech) acts had consequences, were powerful and potent. The girls did not practice strategies, in de Certeau's terminology, as they were not able to change the structures imposed upon them, but they were aware of being tacticians and utilized this consciousness to its fullest. This, from my point of view, makes them capable and clever tacticians. The girls' actions therefore do not seem vulnerable or weak, as Desjarlais' description of the homeless suggests (Desjarlais 1996a: 894) and the girls showed great creativity in their maneuvering space, as opposed to how Desjarlais' homeless appear. Desjarlais' attention to de Certeau's different forms of action (ibid: 893, 894) is of essence in my empirical material, and it is important to acknowledge that power and context play a role in defining action. But the homeless in Desjarlais' research are not assigned much influence within their maneuvering space. In contrast, the girls bent the rules and exploited the opportunities they had to act to the maximum, which in my perspective, shows that they knew the game rules and how to use them. As opposed to the life of the homeless, which in Desjarlais' words, "...could entail months of living on the margins of language, communication, and sociability" (Desjarlais 1996a: 880), the girls used language in exercising agency very effectively. The framework around the girls' actions limited them, but also invited *new* ways of acting. The staff tried to influence the girls' way of speaking by stressing that they should speak calmly and not shout (which is also the case in Desjarlais' study) (Desjarlais 1996a: 884), but the girls continued to shout and speak as they wished, anyway. As opposed to the homeless, who abide by the rules because they feel

that too much would be at risk by breaking them (ibid: 888), the girls often broke the rules, such as by getting tattoos or lying. The girls thus demonstrated that the frames around their maneuvering space could be elastic.

This situation may be understood with the help of Bourdieu and what he describes as having a “feel for the game” within the field in which an individual operates. A feel for the game is a practiced sense, which is developed through experience with the game. This is what “...gives the game a subjective sense – a meaning and a *raison d’être*, but also a direction, an orientation, an impending outcome, for those who take part and therefore acknowledge what is at stake” (Bourdieu 1990: 66, original italics). The girls had an especially good feel for the game in the house, and they sneakily manipulated the rules, the staff and one another in order to influence situations and decisions so that they were as close to their personal agendas as possible. There is no doubt that the girls acted in relation to a framework and some social structures, but their actions were directed towards particular consequences; their actions had an influence on the girls’ lives, their social relations and their undertakings. In this way, the girls can be said to stretch the field and their habitus to their *outermost* limits (and perhaps even beyond). At the same time, the girls had to move between different non-contiguous and separate fields, requiring of the girls a particularly developed and intuitive feel for the game. Their refined feel for the game is an example of their extraordinary *creative agency*. This creativity did not mean that the girls knew or played equally well in all the fields in which they operated, but their creative agency meant that they utilized the maneuvering space available to them to its fullest.

### **Maneuvering towards subjectivity**

The girls' time and life in the house was meant to help them move on in their lives; to help them to go from being objects to subjects – to maneuver towards subjectivity. Life in the house should inspire them to become subjects. In this limbo, the girls tested the borders of their subjectivity and they fought against anything that could make them feel objectified, which included the house rules. These rules clearly did not result in the kind of objectification that the girls were subjected to as trafficking victims, but still, the girls had to obey the rules, which were enforced and determined by others than themselves. But the girls, via their actions, tried to shape the framework presented to them. And with this new frame, which was no longer defined by the traffickers, the girls changed character. They moved from being objectified to building up their subject status.

This threshold may be further understood with the help of Bourdieu's term *habitus*, which was introduced at the beginning of this chapter. *Habitus* is a product of the structures surrounding an individual and at the same time, *habitus* is the internalized history, which is deeply manifested in the body. All of this is expressed through the way in which an individual acts and thinks (Bourdieu 2007: 92, 94). The *habitus* with which the girls were familiar originated from their childhood in their home countries and from their lives as trafficking victims. As this *habitus* was familiar, they at times also longed for it. Some of the girls held on to elements from their time as trafficking victims in their present lives; Grace, for example, had a large sign on the door to her room that said "La Bella Baby Grace", the name she was given as a prostitute. This illustrates how difficult it was for the girls to let go of the past – and some of the girls did not succeed: Camelia, Roxanna and Diana, who ran away from the house during my fieldwork, were suspected of frequenting their old crowd (and presumably prostituting themselves) while they still lived in the house.

When Diana and Roxanna ran away, they re-established contact to their former traffickers and went back with them to Romania to help them find new girls to be trafficked into prostitution. The two girls thus took on new roles as traffickers. In addition, they contacted the rest of the girls living in the house in an effort to convince them to run away as well, but the house staff stopped this from happening.

The girls' habitus had to be re-created, externalized and transformed in order for the girls to be able to enter into a new phase in their lives and to become incorporated into society as people, as subjects. And it was this threshold that the girls were trying to cross; they were attempting to create a new space for experience in their lives, with which they could see their own new histories. It was a struggle, a challenge for the girls who did what they could to *bend* their habitus into the right shape. Part of this process meant recognizing that it *is* possible to re-create one's own history – it follows one, but is not necessarily deterministic.

*Having the freedom to act and the freedom to abstain from acting* are major parameters for the girls' present lives and situation. As accurately described by Bourdieu's term habitus, an individual never has the complete freedom to act, as she always behaves in relation to historically created dispositions within a given field (Bourdieu 2007: 92, 94, 98). Thus, there will always be a frame around the girls' actions. An individual's subjectivity is therefore both creative and limited (Hastrup 2004b: 216). But as the girls moved away from the extremely limiting framework set up by the traffickers, they experienced more and more of their own freedom to act and left objectification further behind them. They *experienced* themselves as having the freedom to act and at the same time, they had the time and space to refrain from acting. Their stay in the house offered them this opportunity for a period of



time, and the process they were going through could not be forced. Freedom consisted of being able to *re-position themselves* in the fields in which they navigated, by slowly establishing social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu 2007: 177-191), including new opportunities for acting within the structures that were now theirs. In this way, the girls experienced moving closer and closer to the center of the fields available to them, which in turn gave them a greater level of freedom to act (ibid: 113-114).

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have analyzed the girls' maneuvering space and investigated how, through their actions, they gained subjectivity. I have shown how the girls' lives were defined by subject-object collisions, and that they intentionally emphasized themselves as either victims or as powerful actors, depending on the situation. I have shed light on the girl's speech acts and placed these in the framework of narration. This led me to argue that through narration, the girls reformed – and obtained agency and a sense of control of – the events in their lives. In addition, I have argued that the girls saw the potentiality of the fields in which they navigated and in their personal histories, and that they were thus clever and cunning tacticians who utilized their maneuvering space to the greatest possible extent. In this way, the girls had a refined feel for the game in the house, which was illustrated by the creativity they showed in their actions. Their actions left and made traces in their lives, while, at the same time, they were confronted with the traces that were left by others. In their present lives, the girls were going through a process in which they tried to transform their habitus, and thus move from being objects towards becoming subjects; their maneuvering along a path towards subjectivity. Their stay in the house supported this

process. Generally speaking, I have thus argued that the freedom to act and the freedom to re-position oneself in a field were central to the girls' lives.

Some of the elements which can contribute with a deeper level of understanding of an individual's world, while also influencing and forming her actions, are that individuals' perceptions of and expectations for the future (Hastrup 2004b: 212). This will be one of the central focus points for the following chapter. Here, I will delve into which extent the girls see their past, present and future as a whole, contiguous history, and which role perceptions and hopes for the future play in their lives.

## Chapter 5

# Time, plot and history

The point of departure for living in the house was the girls' shared past as trafficking victims, from which they wished to distance themselves. This past was the incentive behind their paths into the future, away from trafficking. In an effort to understand an individual's social worlds, actions and perceptions, it is imperative to include the aspect of time in the analysis (Hastrup 2005: 5-6). In any anthropological analysis, it is relevant to take a closer look at the perceptions of time and the temporal fusion into human praxis (James & Mills 2005: 1, 13-14). With regards to the girls, time is of special essence, due to their turbulent past in their home countries, their mutual past as trafficking victims, their temporary present in the house and their uncertain future.

In the last chapter, we saw how the girls' maneuvering space has limits and possibilities and how the girls navigate within this space. The starting point for this chapter is to look at the girls' social relations and maneuvering spaces from a temporal perspective; to investigate which thoughts about time, plot and history are a part of their lives and influence their actions and social ties. In this chapter, I will offer a vista over and analysis of the girls' perceptions of their past, present and future; their on-going and contiguous history, and their perceptions of a *whole plot*. In sociologists Mustafa Emirbayer and Anne Mische's words, "Since actors are embedded within many [...] temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented towards the past, the future, and the present at any given moment" (Emirbayer & Mische 1998: 964). I will look at how the girls see themselves temporally and how their actions are oriented towards past, present and future movement.

Time is an element in all human life and while it is difficult to define, it is something that we all relate to in our praxis (James 2004: 68). As anthropologist Edmund Leach writes, “The oddest thing about time is surely that we have such a concept at all. We experience time, but not with our senses. We don’t see it, or touch it, or smell it, or taste it, or hear it” (Leach 1961: 132). Time is part of how human beings understand themselves, as we think of ourselves within a temporal frame. We think of ourselves in relation to before, now and after. Time is part of human language, social relations, actions and our way of being in the world. Time is not something that an individual ‘has’, but something that an individual acts according to – time cannot be contained, because time is not *anything* in and of itself (Bjønnæss & Ostefeld-Rosenthal 2004: 7). Bourdieu describes how the individual’s actions are temporal; praxis is ‘temporalized’, meaning that praxis is located in time, because praxis creates time (Bourdieu 2000: 206-207, 213). As we discuss time in this chapter, my point of departure will be in what anthropologist Alfred Gell calls “A-series time”, which means that an individual experiences and categorizes events as being either in the past, present or the future, lending her a consciousness of the present which moves towards the future (Gell 1996: 151, 154). It is the interplay between and the experience of the individual’s time dimensions that are central in this chapter.

When I returned to Rome about half a year after I had finished my fieldwork, it was interesting to see how life had developed for all the girls. Had they been able to realize the plans they had set their sights on? Where they in the process of fulfilling their dreams? I thus had the opportunity to take a peak into, what during my fieldwork, was the girls’ future, but had in the meantime become their present. Amelia, Valmira and Ramona had moved out of the house and were living on their own in apartments in Rome. They all continued to work as hairdresser or cleaning assistants and Amelia was getting an education

in tourism at a night school. She liked her job and her colleagues and she lived in a rented room with her cousin. Ramona had moved in with a female colleague and had been given a raise at the hair salon. Valmira changed cleaning jobs regularly and lived with her boyfriend. She said, however, that they weren't doing well together because he ordered her around. Grace had moved to a different house, which was monitored by a social worker twice a week and she was still working as a cleaning assistant. Sabina had moved to northern Italy and was working full time as a caretaker for an elderly woman and Camelia had moved back to Romania and had become a single mother. Apparently, Roxanna had also moved to northern Italy but I was not able to get in touch with her. No one had heard from Diana. Bianca had lived in the house until my arrival, but there had been some tension with the house staff in the period before my first visit because she regularly broke the house rules. In the meantime, she had a new (somewhat older) boyfriend, of whom the house staff did not approve. After a series of conversations between her and the staff, it was finally decided that she should be excluded from the house. After a few months, the staff and I, however, got in touch with Bianca again; she was pregnant and happy about her new life with her boyfriend, who had a full-time job as a bus driver.

### **The near and distant past**

When the girls spoke about their past, they distinguished between their past in their home countries and their past as trafficking victims, which in the following I will refer to as their *distant* and *near* past. When they spoke of their near past as trafficking victims it was in terms of pain, anger and disempowerment. This had clearly been a tough period of time in their lives. The stories they told from this phase of their lives were characterized by violence, rape, cynicism and cruelty. These experiences had left the girls with emotional

scarring and it was hard for the girls to speak about and relate to them (Jackson 2002: 20). When the girls spoke about their distant past (in their home countries), they switched between two different kinds of narratives; they either romanticized the lives that they had lived or they told stories of abuse, neglect, hunger, violence and abortions.

Although one could say that the girls had a 'mutual' past (a past with mutual characteristics) because of their shared experiences of having been trafficked, this was something that they spoke about very rarely amongst themselves. There was a dialectical relationship between seeing oneself as part of a near and joint past and seeing oneself as an individual, who was completely different from the others – maybe because the idea of this 'shared past' was constructed by others, who had placed the girls together in the house, an idea against which the girls rebelled. At times, they stressed that they understood one another because they had lived through similar experiences, but at other times, they were not interested in being placed in the same category, on the background of their past experiences. As many teenagers do, they were sometimes eager to emphasize their individuality, while at other times they sought out the collective and uniform. But at the same time, they experienced that it was the shared past as trafficking victims (and thereby the 'frame' within which they operated in their present lives in Italy) that also played a role in defining the possibilities they had in the future.

### **Regret and longing**

The girls' thoughts about the distant past were, momentarily, defined by regret and longing for the life they *could* have had:

It is late in the afternoon and I am waiting for Amelia in the living room of the house. She is going to the Internet café in order to talk to her mother, which she does every Monday and today, she has invited me to come along. Amelia walks down the steps – she is dressed up and is wearing a red, festive dress with ruffles and she is wearing beautiful silver jewelry and make-up. She smiles shyly when I tell her that she looks nice and she explains to me in a serious voice, that it is important to her that she looks elegant – she does not want to appear cheap. We call out our good-byes to the others and walk down to the end of the quiet street, where we take the bus to the Internet café. Amelia is excited and we chat and laugh in the bus. At the Internet café we make ourselves comfortable and shortly thereafter her mother's face appears on the screen. She looks like Amelia. They chat and the mother shows Amelia her new glasses and the necklace she is wearing, which has been bought with the money that Amelia sent to her for her birthday. The mother is enthusiastic, energetic and happy. She gets Amelia's favorite cat and Amelia smiles and 'pets' the cat through the screen. Her mother is sitting in the master bedroom, Amelia explains to me, and I can see a light blue wall with a religious painting behind the mother. The mother asks Amelia what clothes she is wearing and Amelia gets up and spins around so her mother can see her dress. The mother looks proud and happy and writes a quick chat note to her daughter, "*You are a princess*". Suddenly, more chat messages pop up on the screen and one of them is from one of Amelia's earlier schoolmates, Alexandra, and Amelia is happy to hear from her. Her face is aglow as she tells me about their friendship. Alexandra sends some photos from their recent graduation party, and all of the sudden Amelia's eyes flood with tears. She begins to cry. "*It is too late to cry now*", she says, as if to stop herself and she explains to me who is who in the photo. But her voice cracks and she sobs, "*I must invent a time machine, so I can go back. I have to do that!*". She stares at the festively clad girls smiling back at her from the photo and mumbles, "*It could have been me in those clothes*". She points to the picture and explains in a timid voice, "*There is a gate at my school which is only for the students who graduate. I always looked at that gate and thought that someday it would be me who walked through it.*"

(Excerpt from field notes, July 23, 2007)

Amelia's words show regret that life had not taken on the form that she had hoped for and that her dream of walking through the school gate with her diploma in hand was not fulfilled. Although almost all of the girls said that they did not want to return to their home countries in order to live there, they momentarily longed for their homeland and the past. They longed for the lost opportunities that their past, despite everything, stood for; the opportunity to live a different life without trafficking and all the experiences and problems that followed:

*“I was happy in my country, time passed easily and I did things happily. And I really regret a lot that I lost school, it was the best school in my town. Also my family...”* (Sabina)

In Sabina’s comments, a longing for the absent social ties coalesces with a longing for the distant past and a feeling of remorse of having lost the opportunity to live a different life.

In his analysis of Lebanese migrants in Australia, anthropologist Ghassan Hage notes that migrants’ daily connection to and longing for their homeland functions as a coping strategy, as their lives did not turn out as they had hoped (Hage 2002: 205). The girls’ momentary longing and romanticizing of their distant pasts may also partly be seen in this light. Their lives in Italy had not in any way ended up as they had planned or hoped, which is why they sometimes clung to memories of ‘another place’ (their homeland – since this was what they were familiar with). Their families, childhood memories, siblings, first boyfriends, traditions, food and dance from their home countries, seemed to be pleasant places to visit in their thoughts, when the brutal reality of their present lives confronted them. The home country gave the girls a possibility of a feeling of belonging and was a part of how they saw themselves, for better or for worse.

### **The social imaginary**

The girls were driven by a powerful force, which propelled them towards the future. They wanted to leave their past and all of its pain behind them. They did not want to stay stuck in the past, which was exemplified in such statements as, “You have to move forward in life”<sup>51</sup> and “You must leave the past behind”<sup>52</sup>, which were heard often in the house. In

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<sup>51</sup> “Devi andare avanti nella vita”.



order to adopt a theoretical understanding of the girls' perceptions and expectations of their future, I have drawn inspiration from philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis' term "the social imaginary" from his book, "The Imaginary Institution of Society" from 1987. Philosopher Charles Taylor builds on this term, which is defined as the way in which the individual *imagines* her collective social existence and surroundings (Taylor 2002: 106). It is the social imaginary that creates and enables praxis in society, as the social imaginary contains a sense of what we as individuals expect of one another (ibid: 91). And vice versa, the social imaginary is created and transformed when people adopt new praxis (ibid: 107, 111). This means, according to theoretician Dilip Gaonkar, that the imagined and the practiced control one another in a reciprocal fashion (Gaonkar 2002: 8). Gaonkar, in his use of the term, points out that an individual acts in relation to a temporal horizon and a sense of her history: "Within the folds of a social imaginary, we see ourselves as agents who traverse a social space and inhabit a temporal horizon [...] engage in and make sense of our practices in terms of purpose, timing, and appropriateness and exist among other agents" (Gaonkar 2002: 10).

In relation to my empirical data, Castoriadis', Taylor's and Gaonkar's perspectives on the connection between perceptions of the future and present praxis are relevant. However, in order to dig deeper into the meaning of the imaginary's temporality, I turn to Vigh's use of the term: "The social imaginary, I suggest, can best be defined and analyzed as the sum of our social horizons. It is, as such, constructed by four different perspectives: the retrospective, introspective, extrospective and prospective, each constituting a sphere of orientation informing agents of where they come from; what they have become; how they

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<sup>52</sup> "Devi lasciare il passato".

stand in relation to others; and, not least, how they can move and what they can move towards” (Vigh 2006: 483). By looking at the social imaginary in this manner, the term helps to offer insight into how an individual actually acts in relation to her past, present and future maneuvering space and potentiality. In other words, the social imaginary suggests that an individual acts on the background of a perception of a contiguous and whole history. The term can thus unfold an understanding of how my informants acted in relation to the abuse, violence and humiliation in their past, their present positioning and the possibilities that they imagined for their future.

### **Temporal immediacy and distance**

The house has been shaking from all the yelling and admonishing that has taken place all morning. One has heard Bianca’s shrill voice and the staff members’ loud shouting in a clamorous discussion about broken house rules. Now, the storm has more or less passed. Bianca has, with tears in her eyes and hissing and seething comments, chain-smoked a few cigarettes in the kitchen. Lunch has been made and we gather around the table. Everyone digs into the pasta, salad and meatballs and the atmosphere quickly changes. Bianca is sitting at the end of the table, laughing and speaking loudly. We talk about some of the girls who have moved out of the house. *“You need to start thinking about that too, Bianca”*, the house supervisor says in passing, while he concentrates on getting a portion of spaghetti all’amatriciana on his plate. *“You’ve lived here for a long time, you also need to move on soon. You can’t live in the house forever”*. Bianca’s face suddenly stiffens, and her eyes dart about nervously. *“Lots of girls have lived here longer”* she says, while she, unsuccessfully, tries to catch his eye, *“...much longer than me!”* Bianca looks desperate and frightened, while she names several of the previous residents. It is loud around the table and Valmira knocks over the green pitcher, spilling water all over the table. Bianca tries a few times with a little crooked smile, *“Hey, I could just rent a room here in the house... Then I’ll stay here! How much would it cost?”*. But after a few attempts and some scattered chuckles from the staff, Bianca becomes quiet and just sits and stares at the salad on her plate.

(Excerpt from field notes, July 4, 2007)

Several of the girls were afraid of and worried about what the future would bring. Just as Bianca in the above example, the girls were afraid of what would happen when they left the

house and had to stand on their own two feet. The unknown was uncomfortable and frightening. The staff laid the future into the girls' own hands; they needed to understand that when they left the house, they would have to take care of themselves and make their own decisions. And in the house, discussions and actions were always approached with the idea that the girls would have to move on; they were on their way to a new place. The temporariness of their life in the house was overwhelming for the girls – alone the fact that the girls lived in the house implied that that they had to move on; the house was a temporary stop on their timeline. The house and the staff supplied the girls with a stable framework, to which they could relate in the present and against which they could also rebel. It was difficult for them to imagine their lives outside of this framework. Their present life in the house – that temporary space in which the girls found themselves – was something they could manage, while the choices that lie ahead of them in the near future, such as finding their own place to live, were confusing and daunting for the girls.

The girls' ideas about the future tells us something about why they acted as they did and which direction they expected and hoped their lives would take; towards which horizon they were steering. The girls regularly told me about their ideas about and expectations for the future – and these were often quite humble. Most of them said that they wished for a normal life, a nice boyfriend and a car. At other times, their wishes were more extravagant, such as wishing to be famous. The shift was dependent upon when they were asked and in which forum and mood they were. In general, the girls' statements about their perceptions of the future were mercurial. It turned out to be easier for them to talk about their perceptions and hopes for the *distant* future, such as dreaming of writing a book or of bringing their entire family to Italy, than to talk about their hopes for the *immediate* future. Most often, they avoided questions about their immediate future or expressed fear (as in

Bianca's example above). Questions about what would happen within the next six months were difficult to answer and seemed nebulous, whereas questions about how life would be in ten years led to long descriptions of their hopes and dreams. Camelia and Roxanna explain:

Trine: "I often think about what I'll be doing in the future – a long time from now. It's nice to think about what will happen."

Camelia: "Me too! I love to think about that. I always think about that! [smiles broadly] I think about the house I'll get, my car [laughs] And then I think about my future husband and my kids [...] I often think about the future [...] Sometimes I'm afraid of moving away, to leave this house. On the one hand I'm afraid, and on the other hand..."

Trine: "I understand. But do you know what is going to happen when you leave the house?"

Camelia: "Uh, I don't know... [looks away]."

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Trine: "But what do you think – what will it be like when you leave the house?"

Roxanna: "I don't know, I think that the day I leave this house... I don't know what it will be like. There really aren't words for it. There are no words."

Similarly, the *immediate* past (their life as trafficking victims) was more difficult to talk about than the *distant* past (their childhood in their home countries). On the background of the important theoretical inclusion of temporality in an anthropological analysis of the individual's personal history and identity (Hastrup 2005: 5), I therefore, find it relevant to add another layer to the discussion. Based on my empirical data, the parameters of *temporal immediacy and distance*, contribute to a deeper understanding of this important theoretical exegesis. For my informants, *temporal immediacy* was frightening – both with regards to the immediate past and the immediate future. The temporal fact that much time had passed since their childhood, made it possible to drape this period of time in their lives in a more acceptable and romantic cloak which was not possible with regards to the immediate past, the horror of which the girls remembered all too clearly. Similarly, the immediate future was more concrete, and talking about this time period in some ways required a tangible

‘plan of action’ regarding what the girls wanted, where they would live, etc. which appeared to them as terrifying and unmanageable. In contrast, it was possible to romanticize the distant future, with vague ideas of what it would be like. The fact that the distant future did not require concrete plans and actions meant that the girls had what seemed to be unrealizable expectations and perceptions of their distant future. When I asked Grace, for example, what she wished for in the future, she answered,

*“To get my father here. He is sick, he has... what’s it called again...epilepsy [...] He could work here too and I could take care of all his paperwork [smiles]. Because now I know how it works!”* (Grace)

That the girls imagined events that were not necessarily realizable did not mean that these perceptions did not influence their choices and actions. The dreams and perceptions were elements that they thought of, spoke about and that caused them to act accordingly (such as gathering information about how Nigerians could immigrate to Italy) – even though Grace may have understood that she would probably never be able to bring her father to Italy or manage his illness and find work for him. The ‘elasticity’ and vagueness of the temporal distance meant that the girls could easily imagine scenarios, which seemed unrealistic in their present lives, both for themselves and to those in their surroundings.

Bourdieu writes that the practiced world “...is a world of already realized ends – procedures to follow, paths to take” (Bourdieu 1990: 53). According to Bourdieu, a kind of ‘plan’ for how the future will unfold thus exists in the individual’s world. This appears to be a bit rigid in relation to my empirical data, where the girls’ future horizons are defined by volatility, insecurity and inconstancy. Following Bourdieu’s lead, Vigh supplements that the imaginary, towards which the individual navigates, is a sphere of orientation directed toward the possible, the expected and the likely. At the same time, he writes that the

imaginary may not be fantasy (Vigh 2006: 483, 495 note 7). I find it, however, fitting to doubt this point of view – for is it really true that an individual only acts according to what is possible, expected and likely? My informants act with a forward moving perspective towards what seems to be unrealizable and ever-changing horizons. Despite this fact, these horizons are very present in their lives. The term *illusion* embraces the concepts of horizons and imagined targets. Hastrup writes that illusions are basic conditions for all human actions and perceptions and in their way create a trail defining where these actions lead (Hastrup 2004a: 160, 172). Illusion is inspired by Bourdieu's term 'illusio', which is the perception of the frame which is shared with others within a field and which is formed by the field and by the individual herself. Illusio is the investment and interest in the game that is being played in a field; the individual believes in the game and accepts its rules (Bourdieu 2007: 110, 133). In this case, both Bourdieu and Hastrup are interested in the function of a general and shared illusion of society or in a field. However, in relation to my empirical data, I suggest that the term may also be relevant on a more individual level. The term illusion is applicable in relation to the girls' individual and personal perceptions. It does not specify whether the girls' goals are realizable or not (and thereby, does not classify perceptions as fantasies or not) but describes a 'whole' perception of something in the future, of which the individual might have an idea, but does not yet know how will develop. The illusion is that which does not yet exist, but it has an effect and creates a connection. I see the illusion as the individual's *vision* for the future; the illusion is the imagined, future goal, regardless of whether it seems as if the goal may be realized or not. Hastrup writes that without an illusion of the plot, in which we imagine to participate, no action would be meaningful (Hastrup 2004b: 209, 212) and in the same way, I also argue that illusion may be seen on an individual level. In relation to my empirical data, the illusion of the future imbues the girls' present praxis with meaning and creates consistency in their

lives and world. And among other things, it was through the narrating of their own ever-changing histories, that the girls, in Jackson's words, created "...the 'necessary illusions' without which life becomes insupportable" (Jackson 2002: 26).

### **A changeable plot**

Just as the social fields in the girls' present lives were irreconcilable, as described in Chapter 3, the girls also spoke of the temporal dimension of their lives as separate, both with regards to the future and to the past. The girls saw their near and distant past, their present and their near and distant future as disconnected and different sequences, which they struggled to unite and which were experienced as completely separate lives. There were palpable ruptures and radically different directions on their personal timelines. Ramona speaks about her past, present and future:

*"I get very sad when I think about my other life in my country...Now it feels like I'm struggling with two lives – the life I had and the life I'm trying to create...And it is a big conflict inside of me [...] It is sad to lose a life and to be reborn, to create a new life. It is a conflict inside of me that I'm now trying to resolve."* (Ramona)

For Ramona it is a struggle to fit her earlier history into her present and future histories. The rifts are so pronounced that they do not fit together; they can only be combined with difficulty, leaving Ramona with the feeling of having two lives.

Although the girls saw their lives' temporal dimensions as difficult to combine, I still experienced the girls as having a sense of a whole plot and a bigger picture, and it was with this plot structure as 'point of departure', that they acted in their present lives (Hastrup 2004a: 172; Hastrup 2004b: 212; Hastrup 2005: 7, 9-11). As Hastrup expresses it, "The unique event of the act and the 'long story' of the plot belong together" (Hastrup 2005:

11). In relation to the plot's function, philosopher Paul Ricoeur writes, "...the plot serves to make *one* story out of the multiple incidents, or if you prefer, transforms the many incidents *into one* story" (Ricoeur 1991: 21, original italics). The plot's oneness (thoughts about the past, the present and the future) became visible in the girls' actions and comments (Hastrup 2005: 10-11). Valmira says:

*"Everything is connected, because every part of my life, both the good parts and the bad parts, they are all parts of my life, they are together, they cannot be separated."* (Valmira)

The point, thereby, is that in the present, the girls think about the past and the future and they see these temporal elements in relation to one another. They were conscious of the fact that previous events and choices had carried them to where they were now and that they were continuing on in their lives with the baggage they had accumulated along the way. Bourdieu describes this experience of the past and the future in the present: "[The present] encompasses the practical anticipations and retrospections that are inscribed as objective potentials or traces in the immediate given" (Bourdieu 2000: 210). The girls acted with a 'movement' that was simultaneously directed towards the future and towards the past: "The future is crammed into present action, just as the past is" (Hastrup 2005: 11). As discussed in Chapter 3, the girls had a motivation – a direction – in their lives, towards which they navigated, with a goal that they sought to realize (Geertz 1993: 97). Through the parameter of motivation, they could see a future for themselves and tell me and others around them about it. The plot however, was extremely *fluid*, just as, to a great extent, all other elements in the girls' lives. The plot did not always hold water. The girls often said that they had a plan for their lives (such as becoming a social worker or bringing a brother to Italy), but these plans could change in a heartbeat. Major ideas about their future could suddenly change. In response to my question about whether the girls saw themselves in



their home countries or in Italy in the future, the girls could answer one way and an instant later, answer the opposite. In the same way, the events of the past were also often modified in the girls' comments; events were 'erased' and new ones were added. The girls' perceptions of their whole plot and their whole personal history, consisted, in this way, of several different and ever-changing narratives and configurations.

The *fluid time frame* and the *changing plot* illustrate extreme confusion, volatility and insecurity for the girls, but at the same time it emphasizes that the girls could form, choose and describe their own histories *themselves* – both with regards to the past and to the future. Grasping their own histories and forming them in a constantly changing flow, was a way of ascertaining and cementing their status as subjects. They defined themselves how they wished to present that their lives had been, how it looked now and how it would be. They chose themselves, if today they wanted to return to their home country and if they wanted to stay in Italy tomorrow. It was a different issue as to which extent these plans could actually be realized in terms of economy, legal aspects and security. Thus, the girls had intentions for how their future should unfold, but these intentions could be shattered both by themselves and others.

The changing plot, with regards to the future and the past, was underlined when Amelia in the summer of 2007, decided to go on a vacation to Romania for a few weeks. She had not been to her home country since she had left for Italy two years earlier. I stayed in e-mail contact with Amelia during her entire vacation in Romania and read her accounts about her trip:

August 12, 2007: *"You have no idea how happy I am [...] When I arrived in my town, I started to cry. Everything was the same. Nothing had changed. My brother was in town*

*and he came to the train station to pick me up. I gave him a hug and began to cry. Afterwards we went home to surprise my parents [...] When my mother saw me, she started to cry like a crazy person, even my dad, too. But I couldn't cry. I don't know why. I was just in a trance, and I couldn't understand that I was really home."*

August 17, 2007: *"Next Wednesday I'm returning to Rome and I'm kind of sad. Oh, Trine, I'm so confused. Once I said to myself, that going back to Romania would give me an idea of what to do with my life. But the truth is that I'm very confused. I feel like I don't belong anywhere. I've started thinking that only love can save me, but I've become so selfish, so cold, that I don't trust anyone anymore [...] I think that if I come back to Rome, I'll go crazy again. Oooooooooo! My life is such a mess! What should I do! This is the question I ask myself every night, every day."*

August 24, 2007: *"I have come back to Rome with so many dreams. As I sat in the train and looked back at my town that was getting smaller and smaller in the sunset, I understood that this is where I want to spend the rest of my life. I said to myself, I'll study in Italy, save some money and will return to my home country [...] These days I am lost in my thoughts, thinking about my future and what I will do. But I'm happy, because I have so many dreams inside me now."*

September 14, 2007: *"I'm feeling better now. Everything is like it was before. I don't want to leave Rome anymore ☺ I miss my family and my boyfriend in Romania, but it is a feeling that loses its intensity every day [...] I even found a new boyfriend. His name is Marco and he is from Croatia."*

(Excerpts from e-mail correspondence with Amelia)

This excerpt of my e-mail correspondence with Amelia shows how mercurial her perceptions are of the future. Before her trip, she had always said that she would never return to Romania. But she re-visited her home country and suddenly felt that she would stay there forever – but this feeling faded as soon as she was back in Rome. Her e-mails also point to the fact that Amelia does not feel at home anywhere – or that she feels at home in many places.

### **Narrativity and arbitrariness**

The girls had a picture of time – a fluid time frame – which was defined by temporariness and mercuriality. This influenced their lives and their way of seeing themselves because they thought with this perception of time when they thought of themselves. Our

perceptions and expectations of the future are part of the way in which we participate in and understand the 'game' that is played within the respective fields of which we are a part. And perceptions of the future are, according to Bourdieu, integrated parts of our present actions, where the individual "...places himself not where the ball is, but where it is about to land" (Bourdieu 2000: 208). The individual thus acts according to an approximation of where the metaphorical ball will land in the future. But I suggest that it is relevant here to take Bourdieu's perspectives a step further, since the girls lived under circumstances which made it impossible to know where the 'ball' would land. They had some ideas about where the 'ball' would land, but these ideas were fickle, making this uncertainty relating to the future especially accentuated. In addition to this volatility, there were many actors involved who also had an influence on the positioning of the 'ball', making the landing place of the 'ball' even more arbitrary. Bourdieu's focus on the individual's actions and projections into the future according to clear ideas of where the 'ball' should land and based on the individual's understanding of and participation in a particular field, therefore seems to be too rigid in relation to the girls' reality. Bourdieu's perspective on how an individual projects into the future does not take the arbitrary and ever-changing elements of the girls' lives into account when he writes that the 'good player' has a sense that "... the forthcoming in relation to which he positions himself is not a possible which may happen or not happen, but something which is already there in the configuration of the game and in the present positions and postures of team-mates and opponents" (Bourdieu 2000: 208). The good player knows the game so well that she knows how to handle the present, in order to 'ingratiate' the future. The individual acts, according to Bourdieu, not according to a potential future, but towards a future that the individual can see clearly on the horizon and which is 'present' in the present of the game's current structure (Bourdieu 2000: 208, 211, 213). This was however, not the case for the girls. Their points of orientation were not

static, in part because of the dissimilarity of the fields of their lives and the alterity and volatility that characterized their entire lives and social relations. The girls reached out for the (future) opportunities that seemed to be available to them, but these options did not always materialize, defining their lives (and the future placement of the 'ball') by *arbitrariness* and *eventuality*.

Having a plot is connected to being able to tell one's story – to being able to narrate oneself. A narrative offers a method for ordering one's world in a temporal manner (or ordering experience in time) and expresses continuity over time (Rapport & Overing 2000: 283). The narrative is a way for the individual to temporally understand, tell, structure and experience the world and her personal history (Ricoeur 1991: 21). The contiguous history, through which the individual tells herself, is not a 'well-rounded' and homogenous story, but a conglomerate of heterogeneous, unconnected and unintended elements, which despite its inconsistency and uncontrollability, comprise a totality (ibid). Ricoeur calls this process 'emplotment', meaning that by seeing one's story as a whole plot "...we learn to become the *narrator* and the hero *of our own story*" (Ricoeur 1991: 32, original italics). Having been objectified to such an extent in their lives, not being able to define the agenda in their lives over long periods of time and seeing their lives as dissected into different temporal dimensions, made this process a difficult challenge for the girls. Sometimes, their narration fell apart and at other times they were simply not up to 'telling themselves'. Despite all this, they continued to take on the challenge and even if their narration fell apart one day, they resumed the project the next day, just in another form. They had a plot, but it was fragile and volatile. Through their changing narrations, they slowly regained their subjectivity; it was here that their dreams for the future were solidified and 'came to life' as real points of orientation, and it was through narratives that they were able to order their past in different

ways. Through narratives the girls' whole plot became coherent and structured and their actions gained meaning (Hastrup 2005: 11).

### **The wholeness of the plot**

The girls had a powerful drive towards the future, pushed forward by their turbulent past, from which they were trying to distance themselves. But although the girls tried to put their past behind them on their path towards subjectivity, they experienced that their *entire* history was part of defining who they were. For this reason, it is important to emphasize that it is the perceptions of the *whole* history that are central in understanding the girls' lives and world. It is therefore, not always the future that holds the key to understanding the individual's history, as Hastrup argues (Hastrup 2005: 8). This certainly does not mean that the future is not central to understanding the girls' situation, but the point is that, despite the girls' longing for the future and their wish to put their tough past behind them – their *future-oriented glance* – the past influenced their lives in a number of ways. The past, as experience, is embedded in the body, a fact that holds true for everyone, and this was expressed through the girls' momentarily heightened bodily 'appearance'. The past reappeared as leg, stomach or head pains or via overwhelming nightmares or insomnia, of which many of the girls suffered – their bodies reminded them again and again of their lives. This suggests that *the body does not forget*, even though the mind may wish to do so. Permanent traces were therefore left in the girls' bodies. Regardless of how focused the girls were on their future, their bodies held onto and reminded them of the whole plot of which their past was a part.

The girls realized the influence of the *whole* plot on their lives; in her interpretation of an illustration of a young woman with a rose in her hand, which she had drawn for me, Amelia explains:

*Amelia: "This is a prostitute. And she is thinking about her past and she is asking herself, why have I had this life? And now she has found a rose, that...The rose means happiness, she has found some light in her life. But her past is returning, and she is sad because [...] She knows that she cannot hold the rose for very long because of her other life [...] She is too tired and sad to begin another life. She knows that she has done something wrong in her other life and now she is crying because she doesn't know what to do."*

*Trine: "So she is thinking that it will still be a part of her in the future?"*

*Amelia: "Yes, of course, because that part will never disappear. You cannot forget [...] That part of me will never vanish. It will remain inside me and I will remember it every single day for the rest of my life."*

In Hastrup's words, the individual is always in the process of reconciling one's past (Hastrup 2005: 7), just as was the case with the girls. In their case, perhaps 'reconciliation' is not quite accurate, but they were conscious of the fact that their past continued to extend itself into their lives and future. An interesting element of Amelia's analysis of her drawing is the grammatical change that she makes between the first and third person (Hastrup 2004a: 169-171). This illustrates her tentative acceptance that the drawing is of herself; it is her own story she is telling and it is herself and her body which is depicted. In this way, Amelia's explanations above demonstrate the process of relating to her own whole history.

## **Dreaming of love**

### LOVE

Let us pray for love  
For only love can save us!  
Let us sing about love  
For only love can bring us sunlight!  
I had love  
And once love destroyed me  
But here I am again  
Begging for love

I am a stranger to this feeling  
And still I always beg for it  
Like a beggar, begging for food, I beg for love  
(Excerpt from Amelia's diary)

A large part of the girls' perceptions and dreams for the future were about love for and from a nice boyfriend. They all longed for and dreamt about the prince in shining armor. They loved to speak about this topic, if possible daily, and to hear about one another's experiences with the opposite sex. In order to understand how this influenced their present lives, it is useful to turn to anthropologist Dorothy Holland's perspectives on American romance and cultural systems. In her analysis of young female college students' love lives, Holland describes the motivating power of love, which is reminiscent of Geertz's perspectives on motivation (Holland 1992: 61; Geertz 1993). Just as the girls in the house, the college girls used a lot of their time thinking and talking about romantic relationships, break-ups and guys; these were central parts of their everyday lives (Holland 1992: 61-62, 64-65, 67, 68). Love was a goal that motivated my informants and this motivation was strengthened by love narrations, wherein the dream of love took form and became real. The elements that my informants listed as central for a successful future romantic relationship were respect, abstinence from alcohol, and for many of the girls it was important that their future partner was not from their home country, because they felt that men from their home country could not be trusted. It is thought-provoking that in her poem, Amelia emphasizes that she has not been lucky in love or that she has not experienced much love in her life ("I am a stranger to this feeling") and for this reason, she longs and hungers even more for love in the future.

Throughout the course of this thesis I have continuously reiterated the volatile and ever-changing character of the girls' social relations, perceptions and actions. But their dreams

and expectations of love in the future were, however, stable and consistently present and in addition to this, they resembled one another's. They sought after a beautiful and generous love and they looked forward to experiencing this. Holland's point is that a cultural model for love exists and that "...a cultural system guides action. At the very highest level, it instigates action" (Holland 1992: 68). Although my empirical data does not point to a general model for love in a society, I do find that the girls' model for love influenced their actions. The girls' dreams of love were part of their motivation and the coordinates towards which they navigated. They *hoped* that 'the ball would land' in a good romantic relationship in the future. One difference between Holland's research and my empirical data is that the college girls acted in the present vis á vis their present love lives, while the girls in the house acted in the present in relation to their *perceptions of love in the future*. The girls' present relationships with men were in a completely different category than that of their illusions of future romantic relationships. In their present lives, the girls often obstructed the realization of these dreams, by, for example, getting into brief relationships with married men. Despite having love as their goal, there was therefore often a discrepancy between what the girls wished for and what they actually did, precisely because they were *in the process* of transforming their habitus. Because of this transition, their actions and social relations did not always correspond with their hopes and dreams. The *direction* was clear, though not always consistent.

## **Hope**

Anthropologist Wendy James writes, that we understand ourselves and present events in relation to "...the patterns by which we have come to understand what went before, and what *should, or could* happen next" (James 2004: 72, my italics). With regards to my empirical



data, it is interesting that James writes that we understand ourselves in relation to perceptions of what *should* happen and what *could* happen. In a similar way, Taylor writes that the social imaginary implies that the individual has an idea of what is *possible* in the future (Taylor 2002: 110). But, as has been illustrated throughout this chapter, the girls had perceptions that, in many ways, seemed to be impossible to realize. I argue that the girls acted in relation to an the idea of a whole, contiguous history with an imagined future, which could not or should not necessarily be realized – for the most part, there was no indication that what the girls dreamed about and imagined would actually materialize in the future.

In this way, one could say that the girls told me about what they *hoped* would happen in the future. I see hope as a broader term, which includes the dreams, expectations and perceptions, as described in this chapter. Hope is ‘more’ than expectations for the future and can embrace both the slim likelihood of realization and the mercurial character that was paradigmatic for the girls’ histories. Anthropologist Vincent Crapanzano writes, “[Hope] penetrates further into the future than expectation (*attente*)” (Crapanzano 2003: 9). Crapanzano writes about the difference between hope and desire that people act on desire (it demands action), while hope asks for a different kind of action (a chance, fate, God’s hand) in order to be fulfilled (Crapanzano 2003: 6). My point however, is that the girls’ hopes for the future influenced their maneuvering space and thereby also their way of being in the world in the present. Experiencing the future’s realm of possibility forms the realm of possibility of the present; regardless of how likely it is that these perceptions may be realized, they influence the girls’ present world. Crapanzano describes the danger of hope: the individual sits apathetically, waiting for her unrealistic dreams to come true, *without* acting (*ibid*: 18). He writes, “Hope bucks the activism (call it “agency”) that founds

our understanding of social action” (Crapanzano 2003: 19). But this was not the case with the girls: Ramona, for example, acted consciously with regards to her hopes of moving to Sardinia in the future. She often spoke about how the move would be or asked her colleagues about potential living quarters on the island. There had been a number of imagined scenarios like this one before but she continued to hope and act towards this goal, despite the fact that this seemed like an unattainable goal to her surroundings and even though she may have had an idea that the chances of this plan working out were slim. She persisted *as long as this perception for the future continued to exist*. I would argue, therefore, that hope carried the girls and their actions forward in their lives and shed a better and more acceptable light on their present lives because they imagined and hoped for something better in the future. Although these hopes did not materialize, they played a big part in the girls’ present lives:

*“I just want to live my life with the hope that something will come. It’s better to have the dream, than to have the things you dream about.” (Roxanna)*

Hope made present and past pain, injustice and struggles easier to bear. It is central, however, that the girls’ hopes changed quickly and that the girls did not assess or place emphasis on whether their hopes could be realized.

The girls needed hope in their lives. Their present situations were formed by their thoughts of the past, but also of their hopes for the future. In order to exist and to be able to act, the girls needed to have illusions and dreams, which gradually became more and more consistent. They dreamt of a different life, with more subjectivity and other parameters; and via their hopes for the future, they in different ways began to regain the status of subjects in their present lives.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have investigated the girls' perceptions and experiences of the past, present and future and I have argued that temporal immediacy and distance must be incorporated in the analysis of the individual's past and future. In addition, I have illustrated that temporal immediacy was frightening for the girls and contended that the girls' perceptions of the future influenced their actions, even though their ideas could seem difficult to realize. I have shown that it was difficult for the girls to unite their past, present and future, but despite this, they had a conception of and acted according to a whole plot, which, however, was characterized by plasticity. In this way, the future placement of the girls' 'ball' was random. I have analyzed the girls' perceptions of a whole plot through the lens of narratives, through which the plot became consistent and I have argued that the girls related to their *entire* history, in addition to their drive towards the future. Thus, I have shed light on the traces that the girls carried with them from their past, including the traces that they laid out for themselves into the future. Finally, I have discussed the girls' dreams about love and have shown that hope played a central role in the girls' regaining their status as subjects.

In the final chapter, I will gather the various traces that I have laid out in this thesis on the girls' subjectification process, while pointing to the role that anthropology can play in the understanding of and fight against human trafficking.

## Chapter 6

# Conclusion

This thesis has offered a unique ethnographic insight into the lives and world of young victims of human trafficking. There is a close connection between the analytical themes of the thesis and I have analyzed the girls' social relations, actions and perceptions of time in relation to one another. I have investigated the social traces that the girls leave and the traces left by others, including the experiences that have left temporal traces in their lives and on their bodies. I have explored which traces the girls lay out for themselves and which traces they imagine for the future, which traces and structures are laid out by others, and how the girls, in their present lives, navigate in relation to these traces. The thesis has shown how the girls' volatile bonds to their present social relations are part of regaining their status as subjects. However, the girls' point of departure for social relations is *distrust*, making the relatedness to their present social relations weak. The girls do not experience reciprocity in their absent social relations, but still show 'blind trust' in these individuals. Thus, superficial and deep – short-term and long-lasting – social traces are left in the girls' lives. We have seen how the girls grasp the potentiality in the fields in which they operate and how they, through (speech) acts, utilize the maneuvering space available to them to the greatest possible extent. At the same time, they navigate with power and creativity between the various social fields in their lives. And their actions – including the structures to which they have to relate – lay out and leave new traces in their lives. The *freedom* to act and to choose not to act, are thus central markers in the girls' lives. Furthermore, we have seen how difficult it is for the girls to combine their lives' temporally separate fields, but still they see their life as a whole, yet plastic, plot with a past, present and future. We have seen that the past has laid out clear traces in the girls' lives, but that *hope* for the future impels

them to move on. *Trust, freedom and hope* are thus three elements that the girls navigate towards and strive for. Trust in long-lasting relations, freedom to act and hope for a better future.

During my fieldwork, I have followed the girls during a period of their lives in which they are in the process of regaining their subjectivity through actions, perceptions and social ties; they are in the middle of a *subjectification process*. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner writes that subjectivity is “...at the basis of ‘agency’, a necessary part of understanding how people (try to) act on the world even as they are acted upon. Agency is not some natural or originary will; it takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings” (Ortner 2005: 34). The subjectification process that the girls are going through is the ‘fundamental’/‘underlying’ process which their *actions* are part of. At the same time, subjectivity does not just relate to the individual, but is also *social* in character; subjectivity is also defined by social relations and by both the individual and by her position in the collectivity (Das & Kleinman 2000: 1). Furthermore, this thesis has shown that the girls’ subjectification process takes *time* and is formed over time. The subjectification process is oriented towards and produced through the past and the future, which means that the girls’ perceptions and experiences – including the physical and psychological violence that they have experienced through human trafficking – are a part of their subjectivity (ibid: 8, 10, 14-15). It is this interplay between the three intimately connected thematic perspectives on the girls’ world – social ties, action and time – that this thesis has shed light upon.

While investigating the girls’ journey towards subjectivity and their hopes, this thesis has also mirrored my own journey into the field. This thesis is therefore also a testimony of my

path of discovery, a development through which I came closer and closer to the girls and that ran parallel to the analytical progression. Thus, the analysis started with the girls' social ties, as this was where I took part and could assume a position in the field. The anthropological process takes time, just as the girls need time in order to see how their hopes can become anchored in their lives. This process is precisely the strength of anthropology: to take the time to take part in our informants' social world. Through this process it becomes clear what is at stake in our informants' lives.

This thesis has demonstrated that the girls need time and space to rediscover and re-experience themselves as subjects in their own histories, something that the house facilitates. The liminality in their lives, therefore, is meaningful beyond the protection the girls receive by living in the house, as it provides them with the necessary time it takes to formulate their hopes for the future. The girls who (after having left the house) have been able to create the lives they wished for and thereby have fulfilled some of the goals they had set for themselves, were the same girls who, while living in the house, were most concrete in their hopes for the future. Here, I am thinking primarily of Bianca, Ramona and Amelia. Bianca wished to get married and have children with an Italian man, Ramona's wish was to get a promotion at her work at the hair salon and to live in an apartment with a respected colleague and Amelia's great dream was to start an education and to try to write a draft to a book. The three girls realized all of these dreams. Their hopes had become gradually more and more consistent. They had gained a concrete sense of their options, and as a part of their subjectification process, they saw themselves more clearly. At the same time, all three girls had entered into more permanent social relationships to a husband, a colleague and a boyfriend, respectively. These relationships seemed more well-anchored which gave the girls a different sense of security than they were familiar with

from the more volatile social ties. This also prodded the girls further down the road to subjectivity and made the traces they had laid out for themselves more sustainable. Hope and its mooring in their lives was the element that assisted the girls in maneuvering towards subjectivity.

As an anthropological contribution to the ongoing political debate on human trafficking, this thesis has shed light on the fact that time is particularly necessary for young victims of human trafficking, who have escaped from their traffickers, if we are to help them rediscover their subjectivity. How this time is used and defined may vary, but it is imperative that trafficking victims are given time and space in their countries of destination to re-experience themselves as subjects and to formulate their hopes for the future. On a political level, this means that the time that trafficking victims spend in the destination country, after their escape from the traffickers, should not be limited to just a few months which is the tendency in most European countries, including Denmark. Hopefully, the ethnographically founded knowledge on young victims of trafficking presented in this thesis may constructively support new initiatives in this area, both in Denmark and in other countries.

The debate on human trafficking is complex and should be discussed within different disciplines and in varying fora, as human trafficking is *also* about human rights, globalization, security, poverty, law and politics. However, the victims of trafficking and their world and stories must not be excluded from this debate. Anthropology's keen focus on the *individual* and her social fields coupled with the ethnographic intimacy with that field, thus makes an anthropological contribution to this debate particularly salient, precisely because, "[t]he anthropologist must enter *into* the world she seeks to investigate"

(Hastrup 2003: 10, italics in original Danish)<sup>53</sup>. The anthropological approach to the issue of human trafficking emphasizes the importance of an analysis that can shed light on general ideals and directions *in praxis*. We will always need international and national standards that address human trafficking but they must be shaped and assessed in accordance with *the lived lives of trafficking victims*. And this thesis has emphasized the victims' need for time, opportunity and space to formulate their hopes, reestablish their mental, bodily and social 'borders' and thereby regain their subjectivity. This thesis has offered a unique insight into a world that is inhabited by the people who *should be* at the center of the debate on human trafficking and my hope is that this work has given the reader a greater understanding of the world and lived lives of young victims of human trafficking.

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<sup>53</sup> This particular work by Hastrup has not been translated into English, and this quote has been translated here in connection with the publication of the English translation of this thesis.





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