

## Bulgarian Gender Roles and Human Trafficking During and After Communism

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### **Abstract**

This paper will be looking at how gender roles in Bulgaria society during communism and after may have an affect on human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation. It will focus on life under communism and life under capitalism and what women's place in society seemed to be and will then look at how gender roles and inequality are seen in human trafficking at extremes and how gender norms are used to get and keep women into trafficking rings.

### **Introduction**

Human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation has become an increasing problem in the past ten years (Women's Right 2005: 103) and has become the "the third-biggest activity of organized crime in Europe, surpassed only by trafficking in drugs and arms" (Gaon 2005: 6). This is an issue that has been looked at through many different lenses: political, human rights, economical, and many others. I will be focusing on the women in this trade and how their standing in society (gender inequality) has led men (who are the primary traffickers) to put women in the position of forced prostitution. To examine the link between trafficking and gender relations I will be looking at Bulgarian society as a case study. To do this I will look at how perceived gender roles has changed during life under communism and post-communism and how gender norms in this country play out in politics, society, family, and economics and the link that may have to an increase in trafficking in the country. I am picking Bulgaria because, it has a high rate of women being trafficked from there to other European countries, it has had interesting

political changes that have caused changing gender norms, and I have recently studied there giving me a personal connection.

To do this I must first define what is meant when we say human trafficking. The Trafficking In Persons Report (TIP Report) uses the definition from the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA), which I will be using in this paper: “severe forms of trafficking as: sex trafficking in which a commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age. A victim need not be physically transported from one location to another in order for the crime to fall within these definitions” (TIPs Report 2008: 6). In other words, anyone who has been forced into doing some sort of sexual act (including stripping) without their consent, gave their consent under false pretenses, or is considered a child (under the age of 18) and moved to a new location, can be considered a trafficking victim.

Although women may lack the same political and societal power that men have, globalization has created new ways for women to find work and help support their family. Many women answer ads for work, such as waitressing or hairdresser, and end up being trafficked into prostitution instead (Altink 2007: 114). This is one example taken from a story of a young woman trafficked to the Netherlands, where her need and want to get work somewhere was used as a way to bring her in and then any freedom she had was taken away from her as a way to gain control over her. This paper will be looking more into the ways in which gender inequality and power is used in cases of trafficking and how women are exploited using gender norms.

Throughout this paper you will see boxes with stories about women and told by women who were victims of trafficking. These stories are there to add a human voice to the theory and data provided in the rest of the paper. These women deserve to have their stories told, so when people learn about human trafficking they can see it as not only facts but also as many women's lives. There is no way for me to give justice to what happened to these women, so I am giving their stories a chance to do it for them. These stories do not have explanation with them and are separated from the body of the paper, but are in places to prop up what the paper is explaining. They are there to give a voice to the research. They are as important or more to the education and research on human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on human trafficking is extensive and covers a wide variety of topics, including policies on anti-trafficking, globalization and trafficking, prostitution and the link to trafficking, trafficking for uses for sex work, domestic work, child soldiers, and many others (Askola 2007, Penttinen 2008, Tzvetkova 2002, Zimmerman 2006, TIPs Report 2008). Literature on human trafficking has been expanding due to the increasing levels of awareness on the issue, especially as human trafficking of women for sexual exploitation (HTWSE) has been escalating in the past ten years (Women's Right 2005: 103). On the other hand literature on prostitution has always been in circulation and has been a source of debate for many years because of moral implications, the role of women changing, and the fact that it has been around for as long as we know. There is now research and scholarly works being written about the connection between

prostitution and human trafficking (Augustín 2006, Bindel 2006, Women's Right 2005, Dickenson 2006).

For the focus of this paper only the literature on human trafficking for sexual exploitation of women and women's roles in trafficking was looked closely at. The works show that women are seen to be extra vulnerable and thus are taken advantage of more often in the trafficking process (Augustín 2006). There are many reasons for the vulnerability of women in these places, one being economic inequalities and rights. There are two separate issues when looking at economic motivation for trafficking, there is the economy of the country you are in and the economy of sex (Penttinen 2008). Dickenson (2006) discusses how the economy in the origin countries affects the amount of trafficking because it tends to be harder for women to find regular work and thus they run out of other options, and prostitution and migrating to other countries for work (sometimes leading to being trafficked) tends to be their only option, "work or starve" (46). Augustín (2006) also hears from women who tell him that selling sex is their only option for making money (130-131). Many of the women are proud of being in the sex business because they have economic security that many other women do not have (Augustín 2006: 132). The debate on prostitution and whether or not it should all be condemned or not because of the autonomy of women, some women choose to go into prostitution. There is an argument that prostitution should be seen as a business transaction just as any other business transaction (Dickenson 2006: 50). This is now being related to trafficking as well as prostitution because many prostitutes choose to stay with their traffickers or pimps. Also there is a fine line between prostitution and

trafficking; a prostitute can be forced by a pimp but once that pimp moves her she is a victim of trafficking (Bindel 2006).

Since trafficking involves the act of illegally bringing someone across country borders there is a lot of discussion on migration (illegal and legal) of women and how migration is feminized (Augustín 2006: 119). There has been a debate about the differences between migrant sex workers and trafficking and the trouble with distinguishing between the two, which leads to the trouble of whether all trafficking is bad if some women chose the life or to stay in the life (Dickenson 2006: 143). Askol (2007) argues that for many “trafficking in women for sexual exploitation mainly is a sub-category of irregular/illegal migration” (2). Since there is so much talk about the importance of migration within the discourse on trafficking Askola talks about how the European free movement laws are affecting trafficking (73), thus it will be interesting to look at Bulgaria since it has recently become part of the EU.

Another aspect of human trafficking that shows up in the literature is the debate about how prostitution laws affect trafficking. *Women’s Rights* (2005) states that legalization of prostitution will just lead to a greater demand for trafficked women. Binder says, “trafficking increased in countries where prostitution is legal” (145). *Women’s Rights* argues that prostitution of any kind, legal or not, forced or not, has harmful repercussions on the women. Zimmerman (2006) looks at the psychological problems that these women face, including PTSD. Bindel (2006) takes it one step further to say that is a human rights violation with or without consent. *Women’s Right* does bring up the counterargument that legalization will create more control over the industry and

this would include better health care for women in the industry and less stigmatization for women to come forward when they are being forced into the business.

Since this paper will also focus on the lives of women within Bulgarian society and how the gender roles in that country may make Bulgaria more vulnerable to trafficking, looking at the literature on Bulgarian gender roles is also important in conjunction with the literature on human trafficking. Of the literature on Bulgarian gender identity the trends show that women still have traditional gender roles in society. Ådnanes (2000) looks at the backlash that happened after the communist government fell in Bulgaria and how “women are portrayed as the main losers” (25). This is not to say that the fall of Communism has not been seen as an improvement for the Bulgaria society, but with that improvement also came strife for many women; losing jobs and having the gender roles become more traditionalist. The views that women and men have on gender roles differ from what is seen in the society; women have more modern views on gender roles where as the men have more traditional views (Ådnanes 2000). This is also shown in advertisements where women are in very traditional gender roles, taking care of the house, etc, and/or in “sexy” clothing and this adds to gender relations (Ibroscheva 2007). Todorova (2006) also shows that there are very traditional gender roles shown in the survey taken about health, mortality, and general well being between 1990 and 1997.

## **Theory**

One category of theories that will be important in this research is different feminist theories which is defined by Wallace and Wolf (2006) as,

“[F]irst, gender comprises a central focus or subject matter of the theory. Feminist theory seeks ultimately to understand the gendered nature of virtually all social

relations, institutions, and process. Second, gender relations are viewed as a problem. By this I mean that feminist theory seeks to understand how gender is related to social inequalities, strains, and contradictions. Finally, gender relations are not viewed as either natural or immutable. Rather, the gender-related status quo is viewed as the product of socio-economic and historical forces which have been created, and are constantly re-created by humans, and therefore can potentially be changed by human agency” (30-31).

The reason that theories such as these are so important to this project are their focus on “socio-economic and historical forces” that create the gender inequality that we see today. This paper will focus on how these trends that we see in everyday human behavior and societies all across the world, to differing extents, are used to the traffickers advantage and are seen to an extreme in human trafficking of women. One feminist theory that will be important to understanding this is Marxist feminism, which focuses on women’s economic standing and lack of work and also the patriarchal structure of the home as the major contributors to their inequality (Lorber 1998: 33). Another theory that will be used when looking at this issue is that of stratification of gender by Randall Collins, “In all societies one of the most important status groups for determining people’s life chances has been their gender. In almost every case women are markedly inferior to men in their access to wealth, power, autonomy, and other valued resources; in no known case are they actually superior” (Wallace and Wolf 2006: 146). In many of the trafficking cases that I have seen and all the secondary literature on it of “wealth, power, and autonomy” are sources of getting women to be trafficked and also as a way to keep them under their power. Lorber (1994) brings up the theory of social construction of gender; this paper will use this to look at the country case and how that society constructs gender roles and how those may be connected to how men traffick women and the vulnerability of women in that society.

## **Method**

For this research project I will be using two different methods to get a good handle on the topic. First I will be using secondary sources to learn what other scholars have said about the subject of gender in trafficking. I will also be using these sources to see what trends are happening with trafficking in different parts of Europe in more recent years. For this I will use articles and books written by scholars, as well as government documents to get data, such as trafficking rates and policies going into place pertaining to trafficking in different countries. I will also use these documents to get a preferred definition of human trafficking. To find these secondary sources I have searched the Kenyon library system for articles and books relating to women in trafficking, human trafficking, prostitution in link to trafficking, and gender in trafficking. Another aspect of this project is the gender roles in Bulgaria, so I will be using secondary research to find articles and books on that subject also. I have again looked at the Kenyon Library system for articles that relate to Bulgarian gender roles, women in Bulgaria, Bulgarian gender and Bulgarian history.

The second part of the research is looking at stories about and from trafficked women for sexual exploitation. I will be watching movies, documentaries, reading books, interviews, and stories from these victims. I will be looking at the ways in which they were coerced or convinced to go with the trafficker. I will also be looking at the ways in which the trafficker, usually a man but sometimes a women, uses the woman's gender or gender norms to keep the victim captive and working for them. This of course may be difficult because it will involve making assumptions about the victims motivations when they were coerced, convinced, or tricked into going with the person and also their

motivations for not running away if they are not being held under direct force. I will also have to make sure to look at the context in which I am reading or watching these women's stories. There is sure to be a difference depending on if it is a documentary, interview, story written about a woman's life, or story written by the woman. In the discussion I will have to take into account these differences and how they might have affected the way I used the stories. A tying thread through the research is the different feminist theories that I have talked about above. These theories will help explain the ways in which gender plays a role in the execution and industry of trafficking.

### **Bulgaria-1944-1989- Life Under Communism**

Bulgaria has gone through many political changes, but the biggest change is the change from being a communist state to a capitalist state. With this there has been many societal and economic changes. These transformations are ones that have not only shaped the way the country is run but has also shaped the way people interact with one another and how they fit into the work force, both of these factors are going to relate to trafficking in the country. To understand the societal and economic changes of Bulgaria one first needs to understand the history and the life of the people under the communist state.

*“ I started living on the streets when I was 11 years old- my father threw my brother and me out of the house. He never worried about us- he was always taking alcohol combined with drugs. On the streets, I met prostitution and crime. One always dreams about being somebody, and that having material things makes you somebody, I never imagined that, wanting to improve my living conditions, I was going to end up losing my dignity” (Maria Fernanda, trafficking victim, interviewed by UNODC Country Office in Colombia)*

Bulgaria fought on the losing side of the Second Balkan War (1913) and World War I during which they lost promised territory, had food and clothing shortages, and

were demoralized by antiwar propaganda which culminated in them leaving the war in October of 1918. This left the country in a state of upheaval in which there were revolts by soldiers that were diminished by Germans still stationed in Sofia. As the unrest continued the current tsar, Ferdinand, was blamed and got kicked out of power for fear of a full-scale revolt. Boris III, Ferdinand's son, then was announced as the new tsar. During the interwar period, Bulgaria was still having political unrest and slow economic growth. "Although social unrest remained at a high level, Boris kept firm control of his government as World War II approached" (Bulgaria: A Country Study 1993: 33).

During World War II Bulgaria sided with Germany and was occupied by Germany for much of the War. Although Germany wanted Bulgaria to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941, Boris did not abide. Even after a declaration of War on Britain and the United States, Bulgaria stayed on good terms with the Soviet Union. Boris kept resisting becoming a bigger part of the War and helping the Nazi party because his people had little interest in the War. Then, in 1943, Boris died suddenly sending Bulgaria into more political unrest and Prime Minister Bogdan Filov became the de facto head of state (the actual tsar being Boris' six-year-old son). During this time there were still German occupants in Bulgaria, but their power in the War was running out. The Red Army was moving in on the retreating Germans and it became clear the Germany could not protect Bulgaria from the Allied power. They became stuck in the middle of the retreating Nazi power and oncoming Soviets without protection from the Allies. Then in early 1944 the Soviets threatened to declare War on Bulgaria if they did not remove the remainder of the Germans occupying the country and declare neutrality. Filov, afraid of

the Germans, wanted to declare peace with the Allies. Before he got the chance the Soviets declared war on Bulgaria in September 1944 (Bulgaria: A Country Study 1993).

Bulgarians welcomed the Soviet occupation because they were seen as the “liberators from German occupation” (43). On September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944 the Fatherland Front coalition installed a temporary government and there became a presence of the Red Army in Bulgaria. These two things helped to strengthen the Communist Party. Then in 1946 there was “abolishment the monarchy and proclaimed Bulgaria a people’s republic” (44). From this point until 1947 there was one anticommunist movement lead by the Bulgarian Agrarian People’s Union (BANU) leader Nikola Petkov. After the Fatherland coalition arrested and killed him, there was not another anticommunist movement until 1989. During the communist rule and the new Prime Minister Georgi Dimitrov (1946-1949), political and economic life became more stable (Bulgaria: A Country Study; 1993).

Gender roles during communism were very different than they are in present day Bulgaria due to a push for equality amongst the sexes in the public sphere. In 1971 the constitution stated, “all citizens of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria are equal before the law, and no privileges or limitations of rights based on national, religious, sex, race, or educational differences are permitted and women and men in the People’s Republic of Bulgaria have the same rights” (Bulgaria: A Country Study 1993: 99). Along with the constitution stating the equality between men and women by the time communism fell there was an equal amount of each gender in the work force. Work put women into the public sphere and helped them earn their own money. Out of women who were surveyed about their professional life, only nine percent said they would rather be a housewife. This did not mean that the men helped out more around the house, which was still

considered “women’s work”, but women still had a fairly equal standing in the public sphere (Bulgaria: A Country Study 1993: 99-100).

Under the communist regime, there were many measures that the state took to create equality other than just have it written in the constitution. There were childcare facilities so that both parents could work, there was paid maternity leave, a monthly childcare allowance until the child reached the age of sixteen years old. On top of this mothers also got benefits for each child and single mothers got greater benefits, so there was no economic push for women to marry. The state also took care of, but to receive this you must work for three years at a job of the state’s choosing to pay the state back for your education, this applied to everyone. So although equality was great there was a lack of freedom under this system; “like an overbearing father, the Bulgaria state was responsible for meeting the needs of its ‘children’, and in return, it demanded absolute obedience” (Ghodsee 2001: 31). Although all the basic needs were met the need for more freedom was one thing that eventually lead to the fall of communism. People wanted to choose their own jobs and be able to travel outside of Bulgaria, but both these things were limited under communism.

Even though Bulgarians do not want to return to communism, many women do “admit that things were easier for women under the old system” (Ghodsee 2001: 31). This was due to a greater amount of institutionalized equality and a better economy that could support women in the work force. Also as Ådnanes found in her study, men in Bulgaria have a more traditional view of women’s role in society (that is to be in the home) and without a large job market for women, men are taking this opportunity to express their views that women should stay at home (Ådnanes

2000). Heidi Hartmann argues that this is due to the patriarchal system, which is “a set of social relations which has a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enables them in turn to dominate women” and the biggest material control they have is over women’s labor-power (Jackson 1993: 14). The control over women’s work force comes from men’s control over the access to economic resources. The ways it is seen most are by having women economically dependent on their husbands due to the state laws, marriage, and work. These are all systems that are needed for society to keep running like it has (Jackson 1993). These are things that changed in the Bulgarian society due to the fall of communism.

### **Bulgaria- 1989-Present- Post-Communist Life**

Life for the Bulgarian people changed after the fall of communism, which happened in 1989. At this point Todor Zhivkov had gone from being the head of the police force in Sofia to being the leader of the People’s Republic of Bulgaria. This time, known as the Zhivkov era, was one of great stability and country pride (Bulgaria: A Country Study 1993). In 1987 the Zhivkov era and the communist state started to lose its power and many people started to rebel against the lack of freedom they had under communism. After two years of conflict, including losing 344,000 ethnic Turks to a capitalist Turkey in May 1987, the Berlin wall was breached and on November 10, 1989 Zhivkov resigned. Only four days after Zhivkov resigned fourteen non-communist political groups joined together to create the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). After the change in power there were great economic problems, food shortages, lack of employment and political unrest. Then in 1990 Bulgaria had its first free elections

(Crampton 1997). For many years after the fall of communism in 1989 Bulgaria had to work to become a capitalist country and many things for the people changed.

One of the main things to change was that gender equality is no longer forced upon the Bulgarian people by the state. Although one can say that gender equality has gone down since the fall of communism general human rights have gone up. During communism the society was extremely oppressive and many basic human rights were gone. So after the fall of communism freedom was greater and oppressive equality no longer mandated. Other big change that happened were due to economic problems that occurred when the state changed. These economic difficulties affect women the most making them much more vulnerable in society. The biggest problem for women is unemployment, this is an issue for all people in Bulgarian society, but women have been hit the hardest (Ghodsee 2001: 154). Going along with the problem of unemployment there is also no more job training under the new system to help women who need more training or different training to get jobs under the new system (Ghodsee 2001: 156). Women are losing out on gaining the job training and social capital that they need to succeed in the new free market economy. A job force favoring men is making women the main losers in this society. The longer they stay out of the job market and become less and less invested in the work force the more society sees them as incapable of being able to compete in the new system, even if this is untrue. As new generations come about under the new system fewer and fewer of these women have high managerial jobs making it harder to “resist the resurgence of local patriarchal discourse convincing younger women that they should not work” (Ghodsee 2001: 157).

The idea of traditional gender roles is reinforced throughout Bulgarian society. Ibroscheva looks at advertisements on television and how gender roles are projected to society, “in the cases of portrayals of gender roles, which are often presented, validated through frequent exposure, and ultimately, adopted by the general population as acceptable norms of behavior” (Goffman 1979; as cited by Ibroscheva 2007: 409).

Through her research she shows that women are shown as domestic workers and rarely in positions of power. They were also seen as sex objects, being much more physical than the males, and more often than not wearing sexually suggestive clothes. Overall gender roles were projected as being in line with other very traditional cultures (Ibroscheva 2007: 416).

Although women have little opportunity for job training they are over represented in higher education, which does not necessarily lead to work as job training. They have been shown to have very liberal views on gender roles and very high ambitions for their lives, but the “economic and social situation of the country” seems to be holding them back from what they want to succeed (Ådnanes 2000: 37). This line of fault between what the women in Bulgaria want to do and what they are able to do in the society is what leads many women to look abroad for hope. A 21 year-old from Sofia described what she would like for her future, “I would like to be married by that time (year 2005), have a foreign husband and child. A foreign husband because Bulgarian men’s attitudes towards women are abominable (despicable)...” (Ådnanes 2000: 35). Ghodsee found that many people felt their only option was to leave Bulgaria for the West because the situation in the country was not going to improve, “in June 2000, 85.5 percent of Bulgarians surveyed believed that the

situation in their country would continue to deteriorate, and 86 percent felt that it was either difficult to live or their situation had become unbearable” (Ghodsee 2001: 38). You can only imagine how many women must feel this way when they are the ones with the highest unemployment rate and have the feeling of discrimination with little opportunity to reach their own ambitions.

### **Overview of Human Trafficking Trends in Europe**

Understanding not only the definition of trafficking but also how it is implemented in countries and their laws is important for looking at the problem. First to restate the definition,

“The recruitment , transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the *threat* or use of *force* or other forms of *coercion*, of *abduction*, of *fraud*, of *deception*, of the *abuse of power* or of *position of vulnerability* or of the giving or receiving of payment or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of *exploitation*. Exploitation includes, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs” (emphasis added by author) (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 50).

What needs to be focused on in this definition is the use of the word exploitation. This is important to understand because trafficking in persons is not defined by the human rights violation or the severity of the conditions of the person being trafficked. This is important

to see because of the difference between the trafficking and smuggling, which can be very hard to see in certain situations.

Smuggling in persons can be

“At that moment, my nightmare began. I was terrified when they showed me what I was supposed to do- I felt I just couldn't do it. I've been through many things, but never something like that, so I told them that I wasn't going to and that I was going back home. I was shocked when they told me that wasn't possible- they said they had invested a lot of money in me, and I had to work to pay them back, because I now belonged to the network. I thought about escaping, but I was afraid of being physically hurt or killed. I worked hard for six months, but they have no mercy on you... they're just demeaning. During this time, I was sold many times, and this happened every 10 days-sometimes I just didn't know where I was. You're like a commodity to them” (Maria Fernanda, trafficking victim, interviewed by UNODC Country Office in Colombia)

just as horrific as the trafficking of persons but they are different in law and in practice. In this paper I am just looking at the trafficking of persons so I must be able to distinguish between the two. The definition of smuggling is, “the procurement, in order to obtain, directly or indirectly, a financial or other material benefits, of the illegal entry of a person into a country of which the person is not national or a permanent resident” (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 50). The biggest difference between the two is the use of exploitation in trafficking. To be a traffick victim you must be exploited upon arrival to your destination. A smuggled person may have a very inhumane transportation to their destination and may have had many human rights violations, but it ends when the person arrives in their destination. If someone else, apart from the smuggling, then exploits the smuggled person this does not make it trafficking. Another difference is that of consent; a trafficked person has not given consent or has given consent to something different than what is happening through coercion or deceit. A smuggled person has given permission to be taken into another country. The last difference between trafficking and smuggling is border crossing, with smuggling you must cross international borders but trafficking can occur even when someone is moved within their own country. (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 52).

Along with what trafficking entails and how to distinguish it from smuggling it is also important to understand where this happens. To look at this we must first understand origin, transit, and destination countries and where they are located. There are four stages of trafficking, the recruitment, then transportation, then exploitation, and finally gaining profits from the trafficked person. An origin country is where a trafficker finds and recruits its victims using the ways defined earlier in the definition. The “TIPs: Global

Patterns” report lists countries as very high, high, medium, low, and very low depending on the number of trafficking cases there have been. There are a reported 127 origin countries, but only eleven of those countries have been cited as very high, including, Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Albania, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Romania, China, Thailand, and Nigeria. As can be seen “countries in Central and South Easter Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States, and Asia, are the most frequently mentioned” (TIPS: Global Patterns 2006: 58).

A transit country is a country which traffickers use on their route to their final destination. Of course there may be many countries that fall as transit countries for only one trafficker. Many women are transported across many countries before reaching their destination and many are exploited in those countries along the way. This is why many countries are both origin and transit countries, or in some case both transit and destination countries. Only six countries are cited as very high transit countries, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and Thailand (TIPS: Global Patterns 2006: 60). These countries are transit countries mainly due to their relative geography, but also because of laws and reinforcement that they have regarding border crossing. These are countries where the traffickers know that they have little to no chance of being caught or where it is easy to bribe their ways out.

A destination country is the place where the trafficked victim will stay and get exploited, which can be in many ways as seen above. There are 137 countries that have been reported as destination countries with Western Europe, Asia, and North America being the most cited. There are ten countries that have been cited as being very high

*“They said that we each owed DM 2,500 (around \$1,700) for our travel expenses, and that when we had paid this back we could leave. But later on that night two of the Moldovan girls who had come to Kosovo with us were sold to local Kosovo men” (Olga as interviewed by Waugh 2006: 15)*

destination countries, including Belgium, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Israel, Turkey, Japan, Thailand, and the United States (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 63).

Of the people trafficked in the world

77% of them are women and 48% of them girls (under the age of 18), which is a overwhelming majority and 87% of those women were trafficked for sexual exploitation where as only 28% for forced labor (TIPS: Global Patterns 2006: 33) <sup>1</sup>. As we have seen before of these people trafficked a large majority of them come from Eastern Europe; 175,000 women are trafficked from the former Eastern block countries, which includes Bulgaria (Stateva 2004:110). Of these women most are between the ages of 18 and 30 and most are poor due to low-income jobs or unemployment (La Strada 2009). Of the traffickers themselves 43% come from Central Eastern Europe (CEE), while 41% come from Western Europe; by far the largest majority of traffickers come from Europe (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 34). Many of these traffickers are part of the organized crime unites in these countries, which became an increased issue after the fall of communism (Ghodsee 2001: 39).

*“Tatyana, a 19 year old Ukrainian, responded to an advertisement in Kiev newspaper for a job in a beauty salon in Germany. With a fake passport she traveled to Frankfurt where she was told that the job had already been given to someone else, and that she would have to go to Belgium to work in the same chain of beauty salons. When she finally arrived in Belgium, she was told that she now owed her trafficker [\$15,000] and would have to pay it back by working as a prostitute. She managed to escape and went to the police, but they arrested her because she had no legal documents” (Gaon 2005: 11)*

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<sup>1</sup> The totals do not add up to 100 because victims may fall under more than one profile or form of exploitation

Although trafficking is a horrible violation of human rights, there is a reason that people have been doing it and the numbers have just been increasing: human trafficking is a highly lucrative business. The people who do it are types of business men that are meeting the demands of an increasing market for trafficked people, especially for sexual exploitation; “sex trafficking would not exist without the demand for commercial sex flourishing around the world” (TIPs 2008: 23). Most people ignore the business side of trafficking to focus on the victims, but there is a very real business out there and it is making billions of dollars. When you take into account both the “sale of individuals and the value of their exploited labor or

services” the estimate is as high as \$32 billion per year. Sex trafficking alone

*“I was almost blind. If I had stayed any longer, I would have completely lost my sight... They beat me in my head and in my eyes” (Olga as interviewed by Waugh 2006: 25)*

has been cited as being a \$7 billion industry or as high as \$19 billion (TIPs: Global Patterns 2006: 34). It is hard to get an accurate account of the money involved since it is an underground trade and trafficking, because of the nature of the problem, is very hard to learn correct details about. We do know that the high demand for sex services, the low risk of getting caught, and the incredible economic payoff makes it worth it for some people to use other people for their own gain.

There are many ways that traffickers get their victims. One of the most common ways is a woman answers an ad or gets an offer from someone to work abroad. The person placing the ad or the offer will gain the person’s trust by telling them where they will be working and that they will provide all the necessary money and paperwork to go abroad and the woman can pay them back with the money she will make from the job. Instead of assisting with the migration they are usually “funneled in the system of

trafficking”. This can also happen with a contact the women already has abroad, such as a friends, family member, but the contact gives the person to traffickers instead of helping. Some women are plainly kidnapped. Some women already work in the sex industry and get trafficked by their pimp. Many women are trafficked through arranged marriages made by the family or think they are going abroad with a boyfriend and end up in the hands of traffickers (Gaon 2005: 12). There are other ways that trafficking happens but these are the most commonly used. Once they are trafficked, to keep the women under the control of the traffickers their passports and documents are taken from them, they are usually beaten and raped, their families at home are threatened, and they usually do not speak the language (Waugh 2006). These tactics make sure that the women feel helpless, have no legal rights, is under complete control of the trafficker, and are scared.

The difficulties that these women go through does not end when they return, if they get that opportunity. A large number of women have health problems when they return home. This includes, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sexually transmitted diseases, and physical trauma from being raped and beaten (Zimmerman 2006). Physical and psychological problems are not the only thing that these women go through; many women have the problem of being looked down upon by family members and people in their own community; “the reaction of the family can vary. Some try to keep the facts about the trafficking hidden because they are afraid of the reaction from the community...the local community may blame the victim for having been trafficked and consider her a person of low morality” (Gaon 2005: 47). Not only are the women afraid of what the community might think but they themselves feel shame for what has happened to them. “Natalia (an NGO worker) has already told me that at least half the

women that she meets do not want to go back home or say they cannot return for fear reprisals or shame” (Waugh 2006: 38-39). Another reason that many women do not want to go home is for fear of being “retrafficked” by having their traffickers find them again (Gaon 2005:46). For some women this is not an issue and the need and desire to go abroad overshadow any fear that they have and even after being trafficked they say that they will try again and it was just “bad luck” (Waugh 2006: 39). For these women the effects of the trafficking will never go away and will be part of their lives forever.

### **Gender in Human Trafficking and its Connection to Bulgaria**

As discussed before the gender roles in Bulgaria have changed post communism and many would say that women have been the main losers in the new capitalist society. Many of the women under the new system have lost their jobs, have been forced back into the home to do more traditionally feminized jobs, domestic labor, this is partly because the state no longer guarantees jobs and provides childcare and partly because of the patriarchal view that men have of women’s role in society. Marxist feminism argues that inequality amongst the genders is because women are exploited in the work place and in the home. In the work place they are seen as a cheap back up labor and are used only when they are needed by the state. They are paid less because their real job is to take care of the home and the family (Lorber 1998: 33). This is also known as the “feminization of poverty”, which is from the social, economic, and political discrimination of women (Gaon 2005: 51). In a capitalist society it is impossible not to work and have some source of income and because of this Marx says that since women are expected to stay home with the children it is a necessity for them to get married (Lorber 1998: “Gender Inequality”: 33). As was shown in Bulgaria during communism

there was little incentive to get married because you would get greater child allowances if you were single, this changed when capitalism came. Since the state was no longer taking the responsibility of taking care of the family the women stepped in as was seen fit in a patriarchal family (Ghodsee 2001). Marx says that women feel the need to take care of their families and this includes taking care of their husbands and children and providing for them, but since they cannot do both they rely on marrying a man who can provide economically for them (Lorber 1998: "Gender Inequality": 33). Women are then taken out of the decision making process because they are not adding economically to the family, "[I]n Southeast Europe...women often have a difficult position within the family- on one hand, they may be responsible for the well-being of the family, especially economically, but on the other hand they are often excluded from decision-making processes within the family" (Gaon 2005: 52). Women in Bulgaria are being excluded from the work place and being pushed to do the domestic work, as those are traditionally feminine jobs, and thus are looking to go else where (abroad) for work to support their family and become an equal member of society (as is the stereotype for Western Europe) and thus making them vulnerable to trafficking.

*"I met him at the end of June 2000, and by the middle of July I had been sold to a bar in Kosovo," she says quietly. "And I really thought I was going to Italy" (Olga as interviewed by Waugh 2006: 15)*

Since women in Bulgarian society have a harder time finding a job (Ghodsee 2001), they are lower on the social totem pole. Men who traffick women for sexual exploitation know this and

know what creates the inequalities in society and use that knowledge to traffick these women. Their lack of work but need to provide for their family leads many women to look for jobs outside Bulgarian society, "this means that leaving the country to find work

becomes an attractive option for many women, or may seem like the only option, especially if there are dependent family members to support” (Gaon 2005: 51). Leaving women with no options for economic success makes them more desperate to find jobs in anyway they can leaving them vulnerable to men exploiting them. As was seen above one of the main ways that women get trafficked is by looking for jobs abroad.

*“My father was a drinker and he was violent when he drank. He would beat both of us then, my mother and I” (Olga as interviewed by Waugh 2006: 15)*

Looking for a job is not the only reason women want to leave their country. Many women see Western Europe as a place of greater gender equality and a place that they will be able to live up to their ambitions (Ådnanes 2000: 37). Many also see it as being a safer place for them to live, since “there has been an increase in the level of violence against women in Southeastern Europe, especially domestic violence” (Gaon 2005: 51-52). Animus Associations works with women from Bulgaria that have been trafficked. Of their victims 44% of them had been subject to domestic abuse before being trafficked and 26% of them had been subject to incest or childhood abuse. This shows that domestic abuse is becoming a “social phenomena” and not a totally private issue (Stateva 2004: 112). In Zimmerman’s study she found that 60% of women had been sexually abused before they were trafficked. This is the highest prevalence in any gender-based violence in the world. (Zimmerman 2006: 9). This could be for many reasons, that women want to get away from their abusive environment and are then sucked into trafficking by other men looking to exploit them or it could be that women who have been abused are more vulnerable to further abuse. There is no way to know for sure, but the connection is still there and the levels of domestic abuse in Bulgaria are high.

One of the reasons why violence in Bulgaria has been an issue is Bulgarians’ lack of identity and the search for it after many upheavals in the country. Bulgaria is situated between continents and has been the subject of

ruthless invasions, violence, and slavery. The country has had a hard time keeping their culture; “to survive and to keep their culture, the Bulgarian people had to mobilize a patriarchal spirit, and as a consequence the celebration of physical power and almost aggressive assertiveness are entrenched as values. Nowadays, this is dysfunctional, leading to an acceptance, fear of and respect for aggression, and the corollary whereby physical weakness and the lack of assertiveness are looked down upon” (Stateva 2009: 111). The Bulgarian people feel the need to be on the defensive all the time because in the past this small country has been taken advantage of and has gone through many different foreign rules and political unrest. The things that they devalue are things that are seen traditionally as feminine. This does not put women in strong standing in society. During communism there was this idea that the man should work and the woman should also work while taking care of the family. These ideals were possible under communism because the state took care of the childcare and guaranteed women jobs. Under capitalism these patriarchal ideals are no longer as easy to fulfill and women end up being the losers in society.

This aggressive attitude and the mind-set that women are dependent on men affects the way that men treat women, but also what women learn to expect from men. In trafficking it happens a lot that men will make women believe that they need the man, and even if they do not trust them, and make it so the women who have been trafficked do depend on them. When Waugh interviewed women who had been trafficked she found that many of the women told the same story about

their pimp or trafficker making them believe that they cared for them and were the only ones that would look out for them. This makes the women depend on the men that have put them in this situation because they are looking for some hope and want to believe someone cares about them. “The bar owner teaches them they can only trust him, and so they gradually become completely dependent on him and

easy to control” (Waugh 2006: 24). Once they have control over them the women feel helpless and like they have no option but to stay and work as hard as they can

*“They were kind to me, I didn’t know what to do next. I couldn’t stay in that village because I knew that the men from the bar would be looking for me. I had nowhere to go, so I asked to use their telephone, and I called Uri [the pimp who bought her] and asked him to come and pick me up” (Anna as interviewed by Waugh 2006: 35).*

so they will be treated as best as they can hope for. In many cases it is not just a case of dependence but also a case where the pimp is seen as a boyfriend figure, even though he is selling her to other men.

It is a very “complex relationship...he is her tormentor and her provider. He is a brute who may rape her and probably beat her but is often the only friend that she has left in the world. He feeds her and starves her. He may show her physical affection and then rent her out to half a dozen men for the night afterwards. He is her only guarantee of personal safety but might threaten her everyday. He will remind her that she is his property but may pay her a salary if she works hard enough and endures enough sex with the men that he selects for her” (Waugh 2006: 36).

With this relationship these women start to see themselves as his property and start to see him as the only thing that they have left in the world. He treats them with respect just enough of the time for them to still have trust in him and he makes sure they are dependent on him for everything: food, shelter, money, affection, friendship. This is a sort of power control that is seen in many situations outside of

trafficking. These are tactics used by the stronger gender to control the weaker, but it is shown in an extreme in trafficking. This is a way that traffickers use already seen gender norms to a much greater degree to keep women in their power.

It is not all about keeping women in their power; it is also a question of the way that men see women and women see themselves. This is related to the way gender is constructed in society. Lorber talks about how gender is something that people do not think about on a day-to-day basis because it is so engrained in our lives that we do not notice it. Gender is constructed and re-constructed in society through interactions with each other, and interactions with society (Lorber 1994: “Social Construction”). The way that people see gender is different in different cultures because society and people construct gender differently. One of the ways that gender is constructed is through media. In Ibroscheva’s study of gender portrayals in Bulgarian television ads she found that women were mostly depicted as sex symbols or in a domestic role and never as authoritative figures (Ibroscheva 2007). Showing women in this way makes men see them as sex symbols or caregivers and they are more likely to treat them as such. In trafficking the problem is not just the supply but also the demand for these women and many men see these women as property and something to trade for what they want, not as people but as objects.

### **Discussion**

Gender role and power in Bulgarian society have been a strong force in the vulnerability of women in that community to be trafficked. The numbers in trafficking

have been steadily raising since the 1990s and a large number of these women are from Bulgaria, “Bulgarian authorities estimate that international sex trade operatives traffick approximately 10,000 people from Bulgaria a year... According to police in Sofia approximately 770 pimps are working both at home and abroad” (Gaon 2005: 145). Although it a large issue in Bulgaria, this country is not alone. One of the weakness of this paper is that it is only talking about one small country and trafficking is an international problem in nature. This makes it hard to use Bulgaria as a case study and to make assumptions about other Eastern European countries. There is definitely a connection to gender roles and gender inequality that leads to vulnerability for women to be trafficked; it is always the most vulnerable in society to be mistreated and women are not equal in society. I wanted to show that women’s roles in society translated directly to the way that women were sucked into trafficking, kept in the trafficking circles, and the reason they were easy to be picked out in the beginning. Women are already starting to fight back from this discrimination and the problems in trafficking in Bulgaria. They have become more vocal about the problem, started to work with authorities and testify against the traffickers and “because of their efforts, the number of Bulgarian women trafficked abroad is decreasing” (Gaon 2005: 142). This shows that women can make a difference in this problem and they do not have to just be victims. People should keep reading about this issue and come away with at least some understanding of the problem and the more people who know about it the less underground it becomes and the better prepared we are to deal with the issue, especially women.

## **Future**

There is a lot of future research that should be done about trafficking in Bulgaria, especially because we have seen that Bulgarian women are already starting to take a stand against trafficking and already helping with the problem. Another thing to look at will be the effect of Bulgaria's accession to the European Union. Joining the EU will make the Bulgarian economy more stable, but will also make it easier to travel amongst other countries of the EU, along with their expected accession to the Schengen agreement in 2009. Of course joining the EU will not change the gender roles in their country and without changing gender power and norms it will be hard to stop trafficking because that is a large part of the problem. Another part of trafficking that should be looked at through a gendered lens is that of "happy trafficking", which is women trafficking other women. It would be interesting to see how gender norms and power play into this practice.

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