

The Taste of Thirst: A sociological discourse on irregular women’s migration from Sri Lanka to Italy through the ‘Way of Marriage’

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This article explores the sociological dynamics of irregular women’s migration from Sri Lanka to Italy via deceptive, marriage-based strategies. The core research question asks: How do Sri Lankans use marriage as a tool for irregular migration to Italy, and what challenges do they face in settlement and adaptation? The study seeks to understand the motivations behind choosing this high-risk path and examines the role of brokers and informal networks that sustain it. Italy was chosen as the focal site because it has historically been one of the most prominent destinations for Sri Lankan women migrating through marriage pathways, shaped by Catholic networks, pilgrimage connections, and the long-standing presence of Sri Lankan communities in Italy. Using purposive sampling, the research draws on in-depth interviews with 20 undocumented Sri Lankan migrants living in Rome, Milan, and Naples. From this group, three female respondents and one male respondent were selected for detailed case studies. The analysis is informed by Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social capital, especially the concepts of taste, habitus, and symbolic capital; Jean Baudrillard’s notions of simulation and hyperreality; and Julia O’Connell Davidson’s theory of symbolic coercion. These frameworks reveal how fantasies of modernity, emotional scarcity, and symbolic mobility shape migrant decisions and performances. The article challenges simplified narratives of trafficking and irregular migration by showing how marriage operates as both a performative act and a strategic survival tool. It blurs the boundaries between consent and coercion, romance and transaction. The concept of “thirst”—a term used by the migrants themselves—encapsulates the gendered, affective, and symbolic intensity of their pursuit of a better life. By examining the interplay of illusion, survival, and strategy, the study contributes to broader debates on irregular migration, gendered desire, and the moral ambiguities of legality and legitimacy.

Keywords: *Gendered desire, Hyperreality, Marriage migration, Symbolic capital, Symbolic coercion*