6-2019

Bound by Silence: Psychological Effects of the Traditional Oath Ceremony Used in the Sex Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls

Jennifer Millett-Barrett

Dream On International, Africa and the United States, jen@dreamon.org

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity>

Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Applied Behavior Analysis Commons](#), [Clinical Psychology Commons](#), [Cognition and Perception Commons](#), [Community-Based Research Commons](#), [Community Psychology Commons](#), [Criminology Commons](#), [Criminology and Criminal Justice Commons](#), [Domestic and Intimate Partner Violence Commons](#), [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#), [Gender and Sexuality Commons](#), [Health Psychology Commons](#), [Human Factors Psychology Commons](#), [Human Rights Law Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Multicultural Psychology Commons](#), [Place and Environment Commons](#), [Politics and Social Change Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), [Regional Sociology Commons](#), [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#), [Social Control, Law, Crime, and Deviance Commons](#), [Social Psychology Commons](#), and the [Social Work Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Millett-Barrett, Jennifer (2019) "Bound by Silence: Psychological Effects of the Traditional Oath Ceremony Used in the Sex Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls," *Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence*: Vol. 4: Iss. 3, Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2019.04.03.03>

This Research and Scholarly Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@URI. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dignity: A Journal of Analysis of Exploitation and Violence by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@URI. For more information, please contact digitalcommons-group@uri.edu.

Bound by Silence: Psychological Effects of the Traditional Oath Ceremony Used in the Sex Trafficking of Nigerian Women and Girls

Abstract

Nigerian women and children have been trafficked to Italy over the last 30 years for commercial sexual exploitation with an alarming increase in the past three years. The Central Mediterranean Route that runs from West African countries to Italy is rife with organized crime gangs that have created a highly successful trafficking operation. As part of the recruitment process, the Nigerian mafia and its operatives exploit victims by subjecting them to a traditional religious juju oath ceremony, which is an extremely effective control mechanism to silence victims and trap them in debt bondage. This study explores the psychological effects of taking the oath, the linkages to the definition of torture as outlined by international law in the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the culpability of non-State actors who participate in, and profit from, the trafficking of women and girls. Original quantitative and qualitative research was conducted, which was comprised of 51 surveys and 28 interviews of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking, as well as 15 interviews with key experts who are working on the ground in Italy. In addition, observational research of prostituted women who are currently exploited on the streets of Turin, Italy, was critical to understanding the world in which the women live and the immense psychological control of the oath. The study concludes that the traditional juju oath, as performed in the sex trafficking of Nigerian women to Europe, creates a mechanism for perpetual trauma, coercion, threat, and mental control, thus meets the criteria for torture as defined by the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Keywords

Nigeria, "juju," traditional oath, sex trafficking, women, girls, psychological trauma. African Traditional Religion, debt bondage, torture, prostitution, Central Mediterranean route, survivor, human trafficking

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the contribution of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking. Thank you for breaking your silence to share your experiences and insights for this study. Your stories are critical in understanding the dynamics of sex trafficking from Nigeria to Italy and in developing more effective prevention and protection programs. My gratitude to the professionals who are daily advocates for the rights and wellbeing of sex trafficking victims. Your extensive experience provided invaluable insights to this research. Many thanks to the following contributors: Dr. Esohe Aghatise, Associazione IROKO Onlus & Edo State Task Force Against Trafficking; Dr. Simona Taliani, Il Centro Franz Fanon & University of Turin; Princess Inyang Okokon, PIAM Onlus; Uchenna Uzoije, PIAM Onlus; Sister Margherita De Blasio, Il Mandorlo, Franciscan Sisters of Susa; Reverend Davide Rostan, Waldesian Church of Susa; Paolo Botti, Associazione Amici di Lazzaro; Dr. Aldo Virgili, Department of Public Health; Dr. Maria-Chiara Monti, Associazione Centro Penc; Dr. Filippo Casadei, Associazione Centro Penc; Tatiana Kotlyarenko, Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe. To Domenica Mammì and Ruby Till of Associazione IROKO Onlus for your instrumental assistance in language interpretation, cultural mediation services, and coordination of research participants. To Helen Dike and Joy Bernard for your significant contribution in language interpretation and coordination of research participants. To the YWCA in Turin,

---

Italy for your generosity in sharing your facilities to conduct interviews. To my thesis advisor, Dr. Dorchon Leidholdt, for your invaluable support, guidance, and wisdom. To my husband, Bill, and my children, Godsway, Koku, and Mensah, for your patience, love, and encouragement as I pursued my Master's Degree. Dignity thanks the following people for their time and expertise in reviewing this article: Joan A. Reid, Associate Professor, Criminology and Adjunct Faculty, Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling; Co-Director and Psychotherapist, Restoring Innocence Lost Counseling Collaborative, University of South Florida, USA; Esohe Aghatise, Executive Director, Associazione Iroko Onlus, Italy; and Nora Hashim Msuya, Advocate of the High Court of Tanzania, Legal Lecturer, Mzumbe University, Tanzania, Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Law, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

BOUND BY SILENCE: PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF THE TRADITIONAL OATH CEREMONY USED IN THE SEX TRAFFICKING OF NIGERIAN WOMEN AND GIRLS

Jennifer Millett-Barrett [<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0376-2193>]

Dream On International, Africa and the United States

ABSTRACT

Nigerian women and children have been trafficked to Italy over the last 30 years for commercial sexual exploitation with an alarming increase in the past three years. The Central Mediterranean Route that runs from West African countries to Italy is rife with organized crime gangs that have created a highly successful trafficking operation. As part of the recruitment process, the Nigerian mafia and its operatives exploit victims by subjecting them to a traditional religious juju oath ceremony, which is an extremely effective control mechanism to silence victims and trap them in debt bondage. This study explores the psychological effects of taking the oath, the linkages to the definition of torture as outlined by international law in the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the culpability of non-State actors who participate in, and profit from, the trafficking of women and girls. Original quantitative and qualitative research was conducted, which was comprised of 51 surveys and 28 interviews of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking, as well as 15 interviews with key experts who are working on the ground in Italy. In addition, observational research of prostituted women who are currently exploited on the streets of Turin, Italy, was critical to understanding the world in which the women live and the immense psychological control of the oath. The study concludes that the traditional juju oath, as performed in the sex trafficking of Nigerian women to Europe, creates a mechanism for perpetual trauma, coercion, threat, and mental control, thus meets the criteria for torture as defined by the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

KEYWORDS

Nigeria, “juju,” traditional oath, sex trafficking, women, girls, psychological trauma. African Traditional Religion, debt bondage, torture, prostitution, Central Mediterranean route, survivor, human trafficking

I have stepped into darkness many times, but none so dark as Nigeria. To research slavery is to face the raw and unrestrained bestiary of man. Those beasts are most fiercely unleashed in the dens of sex slavery, and Nigeria is the most unleashed of them all. Other countries may have more victims and other networks may be more sophisticated, but Nigeria took everything I had experienced about sex trafficking and cast it into an inscrutable abyss—Siddharth Kara, Director of the Program on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery, Harvard Kennedy School of Government (2012).

HUMAN TRAFFICKING is the fastest growing, multi-billion-dollar criminal industry worldwide (Spindler and Dobbs, 2018). Though the number of victims of modern-day slavery has been widely cited to be approximately 40 million (International Labor Organization (2017), the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that it would require “significant resources and a long-term perspective” to accurately measure the magnitude of human trafficking (UNODC, 2018). The UNODC states in its *Global Report on Trafficking* that the most common form of human trafficking is for purposes of sexual exploitation (79%) and the victims are predominantly women and girls.

Human trafficking is defined as:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, 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 a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of 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 (The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, 2000).

A highly successful method to control and silence victims is the use a ritual called a juju oath ceremony, which is one practice within a set of customs and beliefs in African Traditional Religion (ATR) (Mbiti, 2015). An oath is a formal pledge that is expressed while invoking a divine witness to the person’s intention with regards to future action or conduct.

Oaths, like promises, are performative utterances. But oaths are generally characterized by their greater moral weight compared with promises, their public character, their validation by transcendent appeal, the involvement of the personhood of the swearer, the prescription of consequences for failure to uphold their contents, the generality of the scope of their contents, the prolonged time frame of the commitment, the fact that their moral force remains binding in spite of failures on the part of those to whom the swearer makes the commitment, and the fact that interpersonal fidelity is the moral hallmark of the commitment of the swearer (Sulmacy, 1999).

Prior to leaving Nigeria, an oath ritual is imposed on women and girls to ensure that they will pay their debt and keep silent about the identity of traffickers. A broken vow comes with the threat of illness or death to the oath taker or her family members. The ritual of swearing an oath to trap women and girls in debt bondage was uniquely developed, and is extensively exercised, by the Edo ethnic group in Nigeria.

The survivors’ powerlessness to speak impedes police investigations, thus justice on behalf of the victims. The inability to identify their abductors to the police also prevents victims from receiving complete protection under Article 18 of Italy’s Consolidated Immigration Act, which grants temporary residence permits if survivors can “provide evidence of violence, abuse, and danger for their safety.” Their obligation to the vow also limits the extent of psychological support women receive to heal from their trauma. The victims live in constant fear of what might happen

to themselves or their family members if they break their oath of silence (Tondo & Kelly, 2017).

This research report establishes the efficacy of the oath as a control mechanism, the psychological trauma experienced by victims who are bound by the oath, and is a call to action to increase protective and preventative policies and programs to end the use of oath ceremonies for the purposes of human trafficking. These recommendations will be examined through the lens of international laws that protect the human rights of self-determination and freedom of speech. The culpability of non-State actors in the use of a religious rite that is designed to inflict terror on women will be explored in connection with the definition of torture as outlined in international law.

METHODS

This field research was conducted in Italy to provide relevant data on the effects of the traditional juju oath ceremony that is commonly used as a control mechanism in the trafficking of Nigerian women and girls to Italy. To assist in meeting the objectives of the project, the following quantitative, qualitative, and observational research initiatives were exercised:

- Interviews of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking;
- Survey of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking;
- Interviews of cultural mediators, doctors, and experts who provide protective care for survivors of sex trafficking; and
- Observation of a mobile unit that provides counseling and other services to potential victims of trafficking in prostitution on the streets of Turin

The specific objectives of the research were:

- To generate data from survivors regarding their participation in the traditional oath ceremony and psychological effects it has had on them;
- To understand from the perspective of cultural mediators and experts who have worked with survivors on how the oath ceremony has impacted the women, the approaches used in rehabilitation, and the efficacy of the methods to reduce trauma and free women from the spiritual and psychological bonds of the oath; and
- To examine the traditional oath ceremony as a control mechanism and establish if the psychological effects equate to torture as defined by international law

Three research instruments were used for collecting the required data for analysis. They are described below.

Quantitative Research: Giving a Voice to Survivors Through an Identity Protected Survey

Surveys and interviews were conducted with women who had arrived in Italy between 1999 and 2017. The participants are in various stages of rehabilitation and reintegration and are under the care of nonprofit organizations. Though many were not free from the constraints of oath, they were off the streets and receiving support, food, and shelter.

Due to the sensitive nature of the information being gathered and the hesitation for survivors to speak about their experiences related to swearing the oath,

careful attention was made to the creation of a survey that aimed to protect the participants' identities and answers. The survey was embedded on a dedicated website that was accessible only by password, and answers were encrypted. No names were recorded and each participant entry was given a number that was automatically generated by the system.

The survey was comprised of fifty-five multiple choice, check box, slider, and open-ended comment box questions. There was the option to pass over any question, which gave the participants complete control over the amount of information they felt comfortable sharing. Results were compiled in the system in the form of graphs and percentages. The survey sought to measure the following:

General demographic information

Current literature speaks to the changing dynamics in trafficking from Nigeria in the last few years. As such, values were measured, such as the participants' age when they left Nigeria, the year of arrival in Italy, the region of Nigeria from which they originated, and so on.

Statistics related to the oath

These questions measured the numbers of victims who swore to the oath, if it was their choice to participate in the oath, if they received pressure by others to take the oath, if they were promised a specific job in Italy, and so on.

Feelings and attitudes

Some of the questions were measured on a scale and sought to identify how participants felt during certain times, such as when the oath ceremony was taking place. These answers provide insight into their emotional state and how these events impacted the women at that time.

Statistics related to psychological care

This section sought to measure who had received psychological assistance, what kind of assistance, the ailment, and if treatment was of benefit.

Open-ended answers

Text boxes were provided in some cases for participants to elaborate their experiences in their own words, with the most pertinent one falling at the end of the survey.

The last question provided a space for the participants to share anything they would like to about living in Nigeria, reasons for migrating, feelings about the oath, experiences along the journey and living in Italy, or advice they would give to girls wanting to make the same journey. Although the survey was designed for the participants to take on their own with only guidance in interpretation of the questions, an unintended result of the last open-ended question was that it broke the barrier of silence and prompted some participants to share details about their experiences verbally beyond the questions listed on the survey. In the end, 28 of the 51 participants opted to provide a detailed statement, or answer additional interview questions verbally.

Qualitative Research: Accounts from Survivors, Cultural Mediators, Doctors, and Experts

To complement the data from the quantitative survey, semi-structured interviews were also conducted to provide further context to survivor experiences.

Though the quantitative data collected revealed important information, it was limited to a set of pre-determined questions. Qualitative interviews, however, allowed for the conversation to be flexible, enabled follow up questions, and provided an opportunity for rich details to surface that were not otherwise revealed in a quantitative survey (Bryman, 2004). Most importantly, semi-structured interviews gave the survivors an opportunity to express ideas that were of importance to them and were not scripted on the survey. Many of the participants took the opportunity to express what was their greatest worry or need at that moment in time.

To understand the scope of the human rights violations that are committed, and the impact of the traditional oath, it was important to interview doctors, cultural mediators, and experts who specialize in protective care of Nigerian women who have been rescued from sex trafficking. The following professionals were interviewed: eight cultural mediators, one psychiatrist, two psychologists and anthropologists, two experts in ethnopsychology, and two anti-human trafficking experts.

Observational Research: Shadowing a Mobile Unit

To have an understanding of the world in which current prostituted women and girls live, observational data was collected by the researcher who shadowed a mobile unit from Associazione Amici di Lazzaro. The mobile unit has traveled two to four nights per week for the last 20 years. Under the direction of Paolo Botti, volunteers provide outreach to women and girls who are exploited in prostitution on the streets of Turin. They build a relationship of trust and provide information about the steps victims need to take to be free from prostitution, receive an education, and obtain documentation according to Italian immigration laws. Once off the streets, the organization provides language schooling, after school programs, and connects survivors with cultural mediators for further services.

The data collected from observational research was critical to understanding the following: (1) the harsh environment in which the women are prostituted; (2) challenges they face; (3) methods cultural mediators use to engage with, and provide support to, potential victims of human trafficking; and (4) the obstacles cultural mediators face in their efforts to gain the trust of women and girls who are being controlled by their traffickers and madams.

Challenges and Limitations

Participants were informed that their identity and answers would be kept private in an effort to help them feel comfortable and supported while they were contributing to the research. The swearing of the oath involves a pact of silence and is a religious and judicial ritual that is believed to yield a punishment of bodily harm to the victim or her family if broken. As such, the participants who had not fulfilled their obligation of the oath by paying back the debt may have been hesitant to be fully truthful in answering certain questions. In particular, the question as to whether or not a participant had sworn an oath prior to leaving Nigeria may in reality be a higher percentage if participants felt fearful about revealing the truth.

For example, in a survey of fifty-one women and girls conducted by the researcher, 51% of the participants answered “yes” when asked if they had sworn an oath prior to leaving Nigeria. Though the survey was password protected and encrypted to ensure privacy, the fear and shame of answering “yes” may have prevented some women from answering affirmatively on this question. Dr. Aldo

Virgilio, Dr. Simona Taliani, and Dr. Esohe Aghatise spoke about their experiences related to the amount of time that it takes to build trust with survivors, especially with regards to discussing the oath. In their experiences, survivors often will not admit to having taken the oath or discuss the oath ceremony until they feel certain that the person they are talking with understands the cultural norms and they have developed a relationship with the cultural mediator.

Recognizing that the survivors have suffered a number of traumatic experiences and also have a different cultural belief system that makes some topics taboo to discuss, participants were given the option to skip over questions that were deemed to be too sensitive in nature. This option was given to help them feel in control of the process. Consequently, a number of questions yielded a high rate of being passed over by the participants. For example, 20% of the participants declined to answer if they had broken their oath. It is interesting to note, however, although some of the questions were passed over initially on the survey, the same topics surfaced in many of the follow up interviews and contributed to the qualitative research.

The Importance of Survivors' Testimonies

Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking have been silenced for too long. They have been denied justice due to their inability to speak. Therefore, this study relies heavily on the voices of the women who so graciously and bravely shared their stories.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Eloquent arguments have been made to establish that human trafficking as a whole experience falls under the definition of torture in the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OSCE, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, & Helen Bamber Foundation, 2013). The theoretical basis of this research is that one part of the Nigerian victims' experience of sex trafficking — the traditional oath ceremony — has debilitating psychological consequences and equates to torture on its own.

To support this theory, several factors will be explored: (1) the traditional religion that provides the foundation and gives the oath power; (2) deceptive methods used to recruit women and girls and coerce them to swear the oath; (3) the discussion of free will in participating in the oath ceremony; (4) the oath as a control mechanism; (5) continued threats using the influence of the oath; (6) the vow of silence as infringement on freedom of speech and expression in international and domestic laws; (7) the psychological effects of the oath; (8) the role of the priest; (9) the definition of torture under international law; and (10) non-State actors and torture.

Overview of Sex Trafficking from Nigeria to Europe

The trafficking of women and girls for sexual exploitation via the Central Mediterranean Route (See Figure 1) has been occurring for over 30 years (Aghatise, 2002); however, in recent years it has reached epidemic levels. In July of 2017, the International Organization for Migration in Italy released a report announcing a 650% increase of women and girls smuggled to Italy from West Africa who were potential victims of sex trafficking — from 1,454 in 2014 to 11,009 in 2016 (IOM,

2017). While the migration route that funnels through Niger and Libya, and overseas to Europe, begins in all West African countries, 80% of the women and girls arriving in Italy originated from Nigeria (IOM, 2015).

Although this study focuses on survivors of trafficking who reside in Italy, and research was compiled in Italy, it must be noted that many victims are also transported to other countries in Western and Eastern Europe, as indicated in a recent interview with Tatiana Kotlyarenko, Anti-Human Trafficking Advisor for the Organization for Security and Cooperation of Europe (OSCE):

The trafficking situation from West Africa is quite rife. Speaking with other stakeholders on the ground we understand that a lot of women and girls are made to go through the oath ceremony, then go on the land route through Libya where they are heavily abused, and then brought into Italy. From there, they are also taken to Spain, Greece, the Netherlands, and other countries. There are particular countries where this becomes more prevalent, but I've personally seen female Nigerian trafficking victims even in Poland. From other sources, to some degree, there are even victims in other OSCE regions, including Russia (Tatiana Kotlyarenko, Anti-Human Trafficking Advisor for the OSCE, March 2, 2018, personal interview).

Figure 1: The Central Mediterranean Route for Smuggling of Migrants from Western and Eastern Africa

Another concerning factor noted in the IOM report is that in the last three years, increasing numbers of minors have been documented at landing sites, hot spots, or detention centers. Sicily is a gateway for smuggling migrants and victims of human trafficking into Italy. For 15 years, Dr. Aldo Virgilio, a psychiatrist at the Department of Public Health in Catania, Sicily, has specialized in trauma-related

illnesses and dedicated his expertise to migrants who have made the journey to Italy in search of asylum. In the last 10 years, much of his work has been devoted to assisting women and children who have been trafficked from West Africa. He confirms this finding; “We have seen an increase in minors—a lot of minors” (Virgilio, A., March 9, 2018, personal interview).

In Turin, Italy, Dr. Simona Taliani, an ethnopsychologist who has worked with more than 300 Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking at the Centro Frantz Fanon, a support center for refugees and victims of torture, echoes the concern of minors being trafficked to Italy:

I don't have strong data on it, but in the last two or three years it [trafficking] is really different. What's happening now is that we are seeing under-aged girls who are more and more younger making requests for asylum...Even at eleven, twelve years old, they all say they are adults. To be minors means that you are obliged [by Italian law] to go to school, stay in a protected safe place. For these reasons they would be discouraged to say their real ages. Maybe this is what the madam has told the girls to say when they arrive in Italy (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

The rapid increase in both migration and trafficking flows through the Central Mediterranean route, along with the extensive human rights abuses that are taking place along the route, has garnered the attention of the United Nations, the European Union, OSCE, the governments of Italy and Nigeria, and other NGO and INGO stakeholders.

In this research study 23 of the 28 survivors who provided interviews or detailed statements described the appalling and extensive human rights abuses taking place in Libya, which included rape; sexual servitude; physical beatings; and death by starvation, dehydration, murder, or drowning in the ocean on the journey to Italy.

In response to this crisis, there has been an upsurge to investigate the push/pull factors, identify the methods used for recruitment, and increase preventative, protective, and prosecution measures to diminish criminal activities along this route.

Underpinnings of African Traditional Religion

The term “religion” has historically been difficult to define; however, for the purposes of this paper, the following definition is offered: “a regulated pattern of life of a people in which experiences, beliefs, and knowledge are reflected in man's conception of himself in relation to others, his social world, the physical as well as the metaphysical world” (Okwueze, 2008).

In Nigeria, religious beliefs, values, and morals are intricately woven into the fabric of daily life and customs through the use of symbols, traditions, practices, and rituals that have been handed down orally from generation to generation. Although Christianity and Islam are widely embraced, the traditional worldview, customs, laws, and practices remain a strong foundation in Nigerian communities. Psychiatrist, Aldo Virgilio (March 9, 2018, personal interview) states:

Many Nigerian women are Christian, but it is important to understand that the influence of traditional culture is very, very big. If you are

Christian or Muslim, the traditional culture is something that is under everything.

Although an entire study could be devoted to the topic of African Traditional Religion, key principles will be provided to illuminate the impact of these ritualistic practices — such as swearing an oath before the shrine — and the power that spiritual leaders have in the community. The first is the belief in *God*. Every African tribe has a different name for God, but recognizes Him as the Creator or Supreme Being of the universe. God delegates varying degrees of power to the divinities (also referred to as gods or deities), giving them particular domains of influence (Welton, 1964).

The second fundamental conviction of ATR is the existence of *visible and invisible worlds* — heaven and earth. Both worlds are thought to be full of life. Man, as the inhabitant of earth, and God, as the Creator and part of the invisible world, are linked (Welton, 1964). As a system of connecting these worlds “it is man who turns part of the universe into sacred objects, and who uses other things for sacrifices and offerings” (Welton, 1964). These objects contain mystical powers that connect the oath taker with the divinities and represent the contract that has been made.

During the oath rites experienced by victims of trafficking, women and girls are asked to give pieces of themselves to create the object — pubic hair, nail clippings, hair from their head, saliva, panties, and menstrual blood (Okojie, Okojie, Eghafona, Vincent-Osaghae, & Kalu, 2003). The belief in visible and invisible worlds is deeply rooted in the community, orally prescribed over generations, and is a firmly held faith; therefore, “traffickers do not need control the way the victims think of the oath. They merely take advantage of an existing belief and abuse it” (Ikeora, 2016).

Third, is the belief in *order and structure*, which includes the laws of nature, moral order among people, mystical order, and religious taboos. Mystical order is maintained by people who have access to the power in the universe as explained by John S. Mbiti (2015, pp. 41-42):

The belief in this order is shown clearly in the practice of traditional medicine, magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. It is held in all African societies that there is power in the universe, and that it comes from God. The power is available to spirits and to certain human beings. People who have access to it are sometimes able to see the departed, hear certain voices, see certain sights, have visions, communicate at a distance without using physical means, receive premonitions of coming events, foretell certain things before they happen, and perform ‘wonders’ and ‘miracles,’ which other people may not be able to do.

Dr. Taliani describes the principle of mystical order and invisible/visible worlds in her own word as “magification.” She says:

Ritual action may be done for many reasons during the life of a person because of the basis of the society. What I call the ‘magification of the world,’ is the social reality of people that is embedded in this magic world for many aspects of their life — birth, sickness, death, success, job, and so on (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

Intermediaries in both worlds help connect the visible and invisible worlds. In the human world, the leaders include priests, priestesses, kings, medicine men, seers, oracles, and diviners. Prayers, sacrifices, or offerings are made to the invisible world as part of showing respect to the deities and ancestors. It must be noted that the aspect of magic — known also as witchcraft, sorcery, and juju — is only one aspect of African Traditional Religion. ATR is often used synonymously with juju, which is not accurate, as there are other aspects to ATR than the use of juju. (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

The fourth conviction of ATR is that of *life after death* and *ancestral worship*. “Death, although a dreaded event, is perceived as the beginning of a person’s deeper relationship with all of creation, the complementing of life and the beginning of the communication between the visible and the invisible worlds (Ezenweke, ‘n.d.’).” Funerals in many African countries are elaborate celebrations that often take place for days. It is thought that a proper burial must be given not only to honor the deceased, but also to ensure that the deceased does not become a wandering ghost unable to achieve a successful existence in the invisible world. A wandering ghost would potentially be a danger to those living in the visible world. Therefore, proper death rites are as much a form of protection for the living as they are to honor the departed (Ezenweke, “n.d.”).

The fifth principle of ATR is that of *community*. Traditional Africans do not believe in individualism. Beliefs are held and practiced by the community; therefore, inhabitants of a community have an ethical and moral obligation to behave in accordance with the shared values (Sundermeire, 1998).

The sixth principle of ATR is its use as a system of *justice*. Historically, an important function of the priests, tribunal elders, oracles, or other spiritual leaders was to maintain justice. Long before colonialism, spiritual leaders were central to the judicial system and wielded widespread power (Ellis, 2016). Resolutions and sentencing were based not on written laws, but on moral and natural laws. In spite of colonialism, state law, international law, and globalization, traditional justice and political systems remain prevalent (Oraegbunam, 2010).

In African Traditional Religion, “law and religion are inseparable. Both are essential to regulate people’s behavior and conduct in society. Law and religion are laid down for the guidance of an intelligent being by a supreme being who has power over humans. This view implies the existence of a political sovereign whom people in an organized political society are in the habit of obeying: on pain of punishment” (Akeem & Alao, 2017).

Conventionally, in West African Traditional Religion, oaths are used to settle disputes, such as infidelity, land disagreements, defamation, etc. If a person takes an oath and is dishonest, he will be punished by the gods. Swearing the oath prior to leaving Nigeria (and also sometimes in Italy) is viewed within the context of the traditional justice system — a pact with the gods, insurance that the crime of stealing will not occur (Daman, Swails, & Laine, 2017). If a woman breaks her promise, she not only offends the gods, but also breaks a natural law for which there will be consequences. The following are just a few examples of what women were told would happen to them if they did not keep the oath:

I will not be able to have a child in this world and I might die in the process.
I would have excess of bleeding that would never stop (Survey Participant
#43, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

That I would die, my parents would die. My family would be destroyed (Survey Participant #12, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

My family will die (Survey Participant #42, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

I did not participate but know a close friend who did. She believes she will go insane if she breaks the oath (Survey Participant #5, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

Bridging the Cultural Divide: The Role of Cultural Mediators

In the past 30 years, it has been a challenge for police, doctors, judicial courts, and government officials in Italy to investigate criminal cases, arbitrate immigration matters, and provide rehabilitative care on behalf of Nigerian survivors due to the cultural differences, lack of understanding about traditional religion, and the victims' silence. To bridge this gap, cultural mediators of Nigerian descent have been critical in educating professionals on the oath as a control mechanism.

Today, many human rights advocates who operate NGOs, serve as cultural mediators, or assist agencies as interpreters are sex trafficking survivors, such as Princess Inyang Okokon, co-founder of Progetto Integrazione Accoglienza Migranti Onlus (PIAM). Nigerian cultural mediators are able to dispel myths, such as the common belief that the survivors' faith in, and adherence to, the oath is born out of superstition (Mbiti, 2015) or is a form of brainwashing. Several cultural mediators who have extensive experience in bridging the cultural gap in Italy contributed to this research and will be highlighted throughout the paper.

Since 1998, Associazione IROKO Onlus has been providing services to Nigerian victims of trafficking in Turin, Italy and continues to serve 500 women and girls annually. The founder and Executive Director of IROKO, Esohe Aghatise, has raised awareness at international conferences and has executed training courses in Nigeria and Italy for twenty years. In addition to her work at IROKO, Dr. Aghatise is a highly experienced lawyer, expert in International Law and UN Expert on Trafficking and Migrant Workers, Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Hero, ethno-clinical therapist, and President of Associazione Frantz Fanon. She explained that the term "cultural mediator" is not widely known outside of Italy and the role is of great significance in providing services to Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking and migrants seeking asylum:

The Italian system is unique in the sense that cultural mediators are a combination of different roles. They are interpreters, welfare officers, judicial officers, and social workers, all rolled up into one. The main activity is in serving as a bridge to bring together the two sides of these different cultural divides and help them to communicate effectively. They facilitate communication between migrants and local professional bodies and authorities. The cultural mediator has to go further than language translation to decode the cultural content and context of what each side is saying. It's a highly specialized role" (Esohe Aghatise, Founding Executive President of IROKO Associazione, April 16, 2018, personal interview).

Located in Turin as well, the Centro Frantz Fanon was instrumental in not only bridging the cultural divide, but also in redefining the system of addressing mental health issues in migrant communities, including Nigerian victims of sex trafficking

in Italy. The founding Director, Dr. Roberto Beneduce, is one of the leading experts on ethnopsychiatry (Beneduce & Gibson, 2017) in Italy:

In the early part of the 1990's and beyond 2000, quite a lot of the Nigerian women who were trafficked to Italy and showed signs of trauma were sent to mental health institutions even though they were not mentally unstable. Centro Frantz Fanon identified the fact that if you apply Western standards of analyzing behaviors that you will come to the wrong diagnosis of mental health issues and it could be very dangerous for the patient. For example, Nigerians frequently use song and movement of the body to express sadness or as a coping mechanism. Those behaviors were sometimes wrongly interpreted as a sign of illness in Western medicine (Aghatise, E., April 16, 2018, personal interview).

In their book, *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics: Creolizing the Canon*, Beneduce and Gibson described "ethnopsychiatry" as "psychiatry that intersects history, ethnology, philosophy, and psychoanalysis." The authors argue that Frantz Fanon's work inaugurated a critical ethnopsychiatry based on a new concept of culture (anchored to historical events, particular situations, and lived experience) and on the relationship between the psychological and the cultural. Just as Dr. Beneduce believed that Dr. Fanon's wish was to develop "a new way of thinking, not only for us but for humanity," Dr. Beneduce himself also developed a new way of thinking and innovative methods to understand the behavior of Nigerian women and girls who had been subjected to the oath rites:

Dr. Beneduce made the connection and explained why it was extremely necessary to discontinue the use of Western standards to measure the behavior of these women who came from a completely different culture, didn't speak the language, and found themselves in a foreign context. He realized the importance of understanding how issues, such as the traditional rites, are dealt with in their local communities (Beneduce & Gibson, 2017).

As vital as cultural mediators are to all aspects of rescue, rehabilitation, and legal advocacy, there is a shortage in Italy of skilled professionals who have been trained to meet the needs of people who originate from a vastly different cultural landscape:

It's very difficult to find cultural mediators who are skilled in ethnopsychology or well-trained linguistic interpreters in the hospitals. They are not integrated in the public system. This is a big issue in trying to heal these women affected by the oath. In order to gain their trust and go deeper into the matter, you would really need to speak their language and understand their world in their own language, so cultural mediators are very important in this work. We collaborate with NGOs and IGOs like IOM who assist in providing cultural mediators, but they are not always available to us (Filippo Casadei, anthropologist and expert clinical ethnopsychologist at Centro Penc and Maria-Chiara Monti, group analyst psychologist and expert ethnopsychologist at Centro Penc, March 30, 2018, personal interview).

Tatiana Kotlyarenko reiterates the necessities for cultural sensitivity training:

One of the things I did, even before working for the OSCE, was to look at the control mechanisms, how they are misunderstood in the West, how the rehabilitation programs and even the interaction of law enforcement with trafficking victims from West Africa differs because they don't understand the control mechanisms as well. The understanding is starting. The police officers, border guards, and other officials are being educated on the cultural aspects of trafficking for West African women. The problem is that it [trafficking of West African women and girls] is so pervasive at this point and has gotten out of control completely (Kotlyarenko, T., March 2, 2018, personal interview).

Recruitment: Lured into False Dreams

Survivor Story 1: I was selling water in Nigeria, but I couldn't survive. So, then I tried carrying loads and people would pay me. At that time, I was sleeping on the streets. By God's grace, I had given birth to a baby boy, but the boy who got me pregnant was nowhere to be found. I had to take care of my baby. I met a man who said he would bring me to Europe so that I can be doing housework and earn money to feed my son and family in Nigeria. I followed the man because he told me all my sorrows would be over. I was told I could pay off my debt in less than one year and my life would be good in Europe (Survey Participant #32, Turin, Italy, February 4, 2018).

There is ample literature available regarding the push/pull factors and the vulnerability of women and girls as targets of exploitation and recruitment for sex trafficking. The established push factors include lack of education, discrimination, poverty, political instability, conflict, and displacement (UNODC, 2008). In Nigeria, the strong patriarchal structure marginalizes and oppresses women contributing to the push factors. It is not a priority to educate girls and, as a result, there is a high illiteracy rate. Women have few options for economic stability and are largely domestic workers or petty traders, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation (Okojie et al. 2003). Males exercise authority over their female family members and often create pressure for women to go to Europe to earn money for the family (Aghatise, 2002).

It is only in recent years that traditional religion is being recognized as a coercive technique and push factor in human trafficking of women and children from West Africa. However, the oath ceremony has not yet been formally recognized as a mechanism to systematically create vulnerability, entrapment, and prolonged psychological anguish. International and domestic laws have not been revised to criminalize the use of black magic as a mechanism for human trafficking.

Although details vary, survivor accounts share a similar pattern of "being lured by the false dream of a new life" (Elbagir, Leposo, & John, 2018). There are many duplicitous methods used to persuade victims into believing that the potential rewards are greater than risks along the journey. In fact, risks are rarely discussed, or are minimized.

The notion of finding a better life in Europe has been inculcated for thirty years with the help of madams who returned to Nigeria to recruit girls after living in Europe. Madams are former prostitutes who were trafficked, paid their debts, and have risen in the ranks to operate brothels (Aghatise, 2002). Their apparent wealth and success serve as enticing advertisements for migration to Europe. The image painted of Europe by traffickers is profoundly convincing and creates dreams that

are built on the promise of a job security, freedom, joy, pleasure, financial stability, and a worry-free life:

The story they tell us in Nigeria is that life in Italy is easy. You will be happy. You will have work. I wanted to make money and raise a family (Survey Participant #36, Turin, Italy, February 4, 2018).

In Nigeria, when I saw a plane pass over, I would think of being in Italy. I thought it would be like a paradise. It would be a beautiful place (Survey Participant #11, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

When I was in Nigeria, I was told Europe was heaven. I believed I could take money from the trees (Survey Participant #8, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

I thought it would be better than Nigeria. Be like paradise, a good place. Other people told me what it would be like what I saw on TV (Survey Participant #7, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

Abandoned by Family to Recruiters

Survivor Story 2: In Nigeria, I experienced many difficult things. I was two years old when my father left me. My mother brought me to my grandmother's house. She left me there. My grandmother didn't even take me to school. She bought kerosene for me to sell and I sold kerosene on the streets. That is how I survived until someone saw me in the market and said that if I would go to Europe, I could be a hairdresser. The year was 2015 and I was 14 years old. I said, "no problem." I went to swear the oath around Benin City. There were many girls together in the desert in Libya. There were men who would come buy the girls. I lost my virginity to two Arab men who took me to sleep with them. If you do not obey, they shoot you. The men would sell me from one place to another through Libya. I was on the sea for two days before coming to Sicily. Then they brought me to Torino. I started begging on the streets for food. We need help. Serious help (Survey/Interview Participant #35, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

Madams and "pushermen" (Elbagir, Leposo, & John, 2018) — also referred to as "trolleys" (Okojie et al., 2003) — offer to "help" destitute girls travel to Europe by arranging financial sponsors and coordinating the journey to Italy. Family members also pressure nieces, daughters, and sisters to go work in Europe to increase the overall financial stability and status of the family. They collaborate with pushermen and often attend the juju rites. Of survey participants who had taken the oath, 50% indicated that they were pressured by a family member to take the oath and travel to Europe for work (See Figure 2). In a separate study conducted, Nigerian law enforcement placed the rate of recruitment by family members much higher at 50 – 80% (Okojie et al., 2003).

Figure 2: External Influences in the Decision to Take the Oath

Were others involved in your choice to participate in the oath ceremony?

Survivor Story 3: I was a cook in Nigeria. I had my own traditional restaurant in my country. They told me that I would have the opportunity to work as a chef in Italy. The woman I met turned out to be an ex-trafficker in Italy before she moved back to Nigeria to organize girls to come to Italy. I did not know there was this kind of slavery. They told me they would sponsor my expenses and I would work to pay back the money. When I reached Torino, they took me to one of the trafficker's house — one of the mafia of Nigeria. I met other girls there in the home. It was there they told me that some of the men were coming to buy girls. I said, "Buy girls? How can they buy us?!" So it was in that house that they relayed to me that many women are bought when they come to Italy and I would be one of them (Okokon, P. Co-Founder of PIAM Onlus, January 31, 2018, personal interview).

With promises of an education or jobs as hairdressers, designers, nannies, housekeepers, or restaurant workers, it is an enticing offer to vulnerable women and girls, many of whom dropped out of school and struggled to survive by hawking petty items on the street. Survey results revealed that 60% of the women indicated they were told by their traffickers that a specific job had been arranged for them (See Figure 3), while others were advised they would find work or go to school

in Europe. Of the jobs that had been promised, hairdresser received the highest ranking at 29%.

Figure 3: Employment as a Motivating Factor for Submitting to the Oath

Were you told that a job had been arranged for you in Europe?

Survivor Story 4: I was pressured by my uncle to swear to the oath and go to Europe. I was told I would be a seamstress. If I did not take the oath, I would not be able to go to Europe. During the ceremony, I was told that my family would be killed if I did not repay my debt. I believed this would be true and my family believed it too. I received pressure from my family in Nigeria to keep my promise and pay back the debt. The oath worried me every day. It took me three years to repay my debt (Survey/Interview with Participant #42, Turin, Italy, February 4, 2018).

Another technique used to deceive victims is the evasive language when discussing the cost of the journey. Though women and girls are required to submit to an oath ceremony and vow to pay back their sponsors, they are unaware of currency conversion. According to Uchenna Uzoije, a cultural mediator at PIAM Onlus, the women have no concept of what they are agreeing to during the oath ceremony:

To Nigerians, when you say that you have to pay back a certain amount of money, the girl doesn't even have any idea of what it means. If they say 30,000, she would think about 30,000 naira, which is very little and in euros is much more money. They don't have any idea of how much time and how much work it is going to take to pay back the debt (Uzoije, U., cultural mediator at PIAM Onlus, January 31, 2018, personal interview).

In fact, 30,000 Nigerian naira is equivalent to only \$83US while 30,000€ is equivalent to \$36,900US.¹ The women realize they have been tricked when they arrive in either Libya or Italy and are informed about how much money they will

¹ Currency conversions taken from xe.com on March 10, 2018.

need to pay to regain their freedom. Soon after, they learn about the violence, humiliation, and depravation they will endure as a sexual slave.

Survivor Story 5: I did not borrow money to travel to Europe. They did not tell me it would cost money. It was my friend's father who said he had a sister in France who said she would help me. When I got to Libya, I was told I had to pay 30,000 euros for the journey (Interview with Participant #34, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

Exercising Free Will to Migrate vs. Human Trafficking

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was a landmark document in the history of Human Rights. It was the first document to address the concept of *free will*. Article 1 states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood" (UN General Assembly, UDHR, art. 1, 1948). The human right to self-determination has been carried through on a number of international instruments and were ratified by Nigeria, including the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (UN, ICESCR, 1966), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (UN, 1976), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (UN, ICERD, 1965) and Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (UN, CEDAW, 1979).

The concept of free will in relation to the oath ceremony was discussed with Dr. Taliani. As an anthropologist, Dr. Taliani questions the notion of will from a cultural perspective. In asking about the culpability of the priests in executing this form of spiritual and debt bondage, Dr. Taliani responded:

Whoever has mystical and spiritual powers may use it for the bad or the good. So, this is the ambivalence that we have to state and understand. There is a criminal diaspora, which may develop a system of exploitation and economical accumulation and, of course, native doctors or juju priests may be captured in this desire. However, the shrine is not for the good or for the bad. In the same day you may find in the same shrine a mother who goes to search for the solution for the sickness of her child and also a woman who swears the oath to go to Europe. It depends on the intention or the will of who goes in front of the shrine and asks. What is asked and what is desired in that moment may transform the power of the shrine to good or bad (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

When examining the survivors' participation in the oath ceremony, there are three periods that were considered in relation to free will — (1) the decision to migrate from Nigeria to Italy; (2) the choice to participate in the oath ceremony; and (3) the determination to abide by the oath or break the promise. These decisions were examined in both the survey questions and interviews with survivors to have a better understanding of the dynamics of each person's experience and their freedom of choice or lack thereof.

An autonomous decision is one made without manipulation, coercion, abuse of power, or threats. Consideration, then, must be given to the amount of information that was provided to the survivors and the accuracy of the information to determine if the women had the ability to give informed consent to participate in the

oath ceremony and leave Nigeria. For women to truly exercise free will in making these choices, they would have been given the following information:

- Accurate amount of money to be repaid;
- Dangers associated with the journey, including potential loss of life;
- Expectation that they would be engaged in prostitution when they arrived in Libya and Europe;
- Realities of being prostituted, including daily servicing of numerous men;
- Number of years anticipated that they would be subjected to prostitution
- Lack of freedom of movement;
- Seizure of documentation upon arrival in Europe; and
- Understanding that if they did not comply with what was demanded of them, they would be beaten and threatened.

In a patriarchal society, such as in Nigeria, males exercise authority over females. Fathers, brothers, and uncles heavily influence the direction of a female family member's life and often make decisions on behalf of them, even if it means using a family member as a commodity (Makama, 2013). Mothers will also pressure their daughters to travel abroad to earn money for the family (Andrews, 2018). To evaluate the potential for coercion, survey participants were asked if they had received pressure from family members, friends, or madams and 43% responded "yes." It is not possible then to say that the women who responded "yes" to this question had exercised their free will and informed consent to take the oath and travel to Europe. The respondents who answered affirmatively then indicated who had pressured them to take the oath (See Figure 4).

One of the greatest struggles that Nigerian victims of sex trafficking face is their choice to abide by the oath or break their promise. Indigenous religious institutions and leaders wield a great amount of power in the community as they "are bound up with kinship and ethnicity, which inspires a deep emotional attachment" (Ellis, 2016). Priests have the power to communicate with God and make spiritual agreements with Him. Those who perform the oath ceremony for the purposes of trafficking have chosen to misuse their power, manipulate women and girls, force them into spiritual bondage, and take away their free will to control their lives and leave prostitution.

Survey participants were asked if it was their choice to participate in the oath ceremony with 19% responding "yes," 56% responding "no," and 25% not answering the question (See Figure 5). A follow up question to further measure the concept of choice was, "If you did not participate in the ceremony, would you still have been able to migrate to Italy for work?" With 48% responding "no," and 27% responding "not sure," this indicates that 75% of respondents who participated in the oath ceremony felt they did not wholly have free choice (See Figure 6). If they wanted to travel to Europe, they had to take the oath.

Figure 4: Individual Who Coerced Victims to Take the Oath

Figure 5: Perception of Free Will in Taking the Oath

Figure 6: Perceived Effect of the Oath on Migration

Survivor Story 6: I had to leave [to Europe] to find work. I was told I could be a hairdresser and make money in Europe. I had to swear the oath and promise to pay the debt and not speak about the people who took me to Europe. My brother pressured me to take the oath and he continued to put pressure on me to keep my promise (Survey/Interview of Participant #11, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

In recent years, an increasing body of literature has surfaced regarding one region of Nigeria called Benin City in Edo State that has become a siphon for trafficking and migration of women and children to Europe. Statistics show that 80% of women and children trafficked from Nigeria to Europe come from Benin City in Edo State (US Department of State Trafficking in Persons Report, 2018). It is proposed by some researchers that women and girls originating from this region are aware that they will be “sex workers” in Europe, thus cannot be considered victims since they exercised their free will to migrate to Italy with the intention of entering prostitution (Lo Lacono, 2014).²

Dr. Taliani said in her interview:

I have talked with cultural mediators coming from Benin City. Many of them tell me, when you say I will leave for Italy, it means prostitution. We see that villages all around Lagos state it's true that there are girls and young women who don't know really what kind of job they will be forced to do. Many women are authentic when they say they don't know what they would be forced to do, but in Benin City it is an 'open secret. (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

In the same way that we consider the principles of free will in the victims' submission to the oath, it is necessary to apply a similar assessment to the phenomenon of women and girls leaving Benin City for Europe. Investigators would need to evaluate if the women have been fully informed of the risks, what prostitution means, the amount of debt they will incur, and the hardship they will suffer. In addition to the previous push factors mentioned, other risk factors that increase vulnerability to manipulation need to be measured:

Some might be aware that there could be elements of sexual exploitation in route. A lot of them have already been sexually abused, which is another issue. They have been sexually violated while at school, by family members, neighbors, and others, so sexual violence is also part and parcel for some of these girls, which makes them even more vulnerable to this kind of exploitation...Even if they are told that maybe they will have to do something like this [have sex], they are not told exactly what it involves. They are not told that they are going to be raped and abused by many men, they will have to succumb to this day in and day out, from morning until night. They are not informed of what their debt will be, that they will have a huge

---

² The term “sex worker” is controversial in human rights advocacy networks. Advocates for the legalization of prostitution use the terminology “sex work” to promote a woman's freedom to choose prostitution as a profession. Abolitionists argue that prostitution is rooted in patriarchy, many women enter into prostitution after having suffered from violent childhood experiences, while others are prostituted by force, manipulation, and coercion. Victims are often not paid and are subjected to slavery and inhumane conditions, violence, and trauma. The term “sex work” implies a personal responsibility and freedom of choice, whereas the word “prostitution” conveys a victim/perpetrator dichotomy.

debt to work off, and will pay it off in prostitution. They are not told about the conditions. The picture that is painted is of a beautiful fairy tale. There is a complete misconception of what they will be facing. Thousands of girls and women end up in Italy and other countries and upon arrival they are informed of what they are expected to do. Because of the oath ceremony, they have no choice but to follow orders. It's a big control mechanism (Kotlyarenko, T., March 2, 2018, personal interview).

Cultural mediator, Uchenna Uzoiye from Piam Onlus in Asti, Italy reiterates,

If somebody comes into your village and you are poor and struggling, and this person tells you that life in Italy will be hard and the journey will be dangerous, maybe you think, 'Okay, but it is still better than the way I am living now.' You believe that it will still be easier than what you are living. Or maybe that you think you will handle it well and can make different choices along the way because of the promises that are made to you. There is hope (Uzoiye, U., January 31, 2018, personal interview).

It is that sliver of hope that gives women the courage to leave Nigeria and what traffickers have been exploiting for thirty years. Hope is what motivates women and girls to resign to a juju ceremony that ultimately seals them in spiritual bondage and silent anguish even if they don't view the vow in this way initially. In fact, though the majority of survey takers responded that they felt fearful and unhappy during the oath ceremony, 22% of the participants said they were happy during the ceremony. One participant explained further:

I was happy. I was hopeful that my life was going to be better in Europe...that it would be like heaven. So to me the oath ceremony was something I just had to do to go to Europe. I believe in God, so I thought I would be okay. I didn't know then what life was going to be like here (Survey Participant #8, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

Survivor Story 7: I was 17 years old. I was selling pure water on the streets in Nigeria and a woman approached me and said she would help give me a better life, so I agreed to travel. She dumped me at Libya to do prostitution. I was in Libya for one year and seven months. I told the woman I was a virgin and I could not do prostitution. She poured hot water on me and beat me. Every day, she would give me food to eat only once. I escaped from that woman...The journey was very, very difficult and scary. Our boat was waving on top of the water very much. Most of the people died inside the water. There were ninety-five people on the boat and only fifteen survived. Many of my friends died. I came this place in 2017 (Survey/Interview with Participant #33, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

Not one survivor who was interviewed or surveyed as part of this research indicated that she was aware she would be expected to engage in sexual activities on the journey or while in Italy. Of those who participated in the survey, 33% arrived between the years 2015 and 2017 (See Figure 8) and 83% originated from the South South region (Edo) of Nigeria (See Figure 7). Though it is a small sampling, these results indicate that not all women from Benin City, including recent arrivals, are aware they would be engaging in prostitution as has been suggested in some news articles.

Figure 7: Regional Origin of Victims

Figure 8: Year the Victims Entered Italy

Survivor Story 8: I am the first of my family and felt responsible... It was my choice to leave Nigeria, but I was not told about the suffering I would face (Interview with Participant #37, Turin, Italy, January 30, 2018).

The Oath as a Control Mechanism

Psychologists treating survivors of sex trafficking contend with the potency of the oath and how to provide relief for survivors. When asked about the use of the oath ritual as a form of control, Dr. Taliani states, "I started to understand what you called before this system of control. I may use the term "dependent relation" or as another anthropologist in central Africa has called 'obedience founded on a magic world.' There is a relation of obedience and control." (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

The following statement was made by a currently prostituted woman who was visibly distraught as she was trying to explain to the cultural mediator why it was impossible for her to walk away from her madam.

Survivor Story 9: Is someone going to go with me to Nigeria? No! You have not been to Nigeria to see. You do not understand our ways in Nigeria. I am trying to tell you. If I go, they will not just let me go. I am not stupid. I am an educated woman. I went to school in Nigeria. I read the laws when I was there, but many go outside the law. And now I am here by the road. But you are not getting me because you do not go there. You do not understand the ways of my people. There is much harm that can be done and so I must be here until I can pay (Bless, Turin Italy, January 31, 2018, observational studies).

For women and girls who don't subscribe to juju, the ceremonial ritual can be equally frightening and compel them to be obedient. The ritual involves insidious rites that are intended to intimidate and is a powerful experience, even to a non-believer. The following are examples of common experiences reported:

- The creation of an object that is comprised of fragments of a girl's body (Aghatise, 2002);
- Being forced to eat organs or blood of a freshly killed sacrificial animal (Interview with Participant #36, February 4, 2018);
- Cutting into the skin and rubbing ceremonial dust into the wounds (Andrews, 2018);
- Blowing dust into the victims' faces;
- Making them drink water that had been used to wash a dead body (Aghatise, 2002);
- Looking into a mirror and being told that her image is now captured in a mirror that is kept at the shrine (OSCE, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights & Helen Bamber Foundation, 2013); and
- Being told that the victim or her family would suffer death if the promise is not kept.

Survivor Story 10: My religion is Islam and I do not believe in the juju. I was told to swear the oath and I participated in the ceremony even though I didn't believe in it. I didn't have a choice. Even though I didn't believe in it, I felt controlled by it. The way they perform it is very scary. The priest asked me to bring my armpit hair, my panties. I was very anxious. (Mary [pseudonym], Asti, Italy, January 31, 2018, personal interview).

The threat of death or harm to family members does not stop with the juju ceremony. Victims are persistently intimidated by madams in Italy or traffickers in both Italy and Nigeria. Frequent phone calls are made to the women and girls, especially if they are not obedient or are not producing enough money. Family members will also make phone calls to complain that they have been receiving threats. They push the women and girls to work harder. Often times, juju ceremonies will be repeated in Italy to reinforce the spiritual bondage. Victims are reminded of the objects at the shrine, and are told if they do not obey, the priest will blow more dust. The pressure is tremendous and unrelenting.

As part of observational research for this study, the researcher traveled at night with a mobile unit from Association Amici di Lazzaro. The mobile unit provides hot tea, biscuits, and counseling to women who are currently enslaved in prostitution. Paolo Botti, director of the mobile unit for 20 years, explained another method of control:

We ask some of the women to church — a safe church. Because part of the problem is that some of the traffickers are in agreement with some pastors. In the good churches, the priests will advise the women to run away and where to get help. But in the bad churches, he will tell the girls, 'No, you promised and you can't break the oath,' because the pastor is working with the madam (Botti, P., Jan. 31, 2018, personal interview).

As women and girls search for guidance in prayer, many are deceived by pastors who have joined hands with the mafia to further manipulate the victims and ensure they remain in prostitution and pay their debt. This form of control was echoed during an interview with Sister Margherita de Blasio Il Mandorlo (Franciscan Sisters of Susa) and Davide Rostan, Minister of the Waldesian Church, Susa, Italy:

There are pastors in Turin who are not real pastors. Some madams use religion as an instrument to create a stronger relationship with the girls. There are these churches that exist that are basically fake churches with pastors who dress in the right way and do all of the religious rituals but are not necessarily real pastors and real churches. Sometimes it's not even in a church, but prayer will be held in a house. I have even heard stories that they pray before they go out for the night to 'work.' They tell the girls it's a good thing to earn money for the madam and they bless the girls to gain a lot of money from prostitution (January 31, 2018, personal interviews).

Survivor Story 11: When Anwuli (pseudonym) arrived [at the church hostel as a woman rescued from trafficking] she was very quiet and shy. She was 17 years old and had a baby. She showed a lot of respect and said she was happy and free. After some time, we heard her talking on the phone really early in the morning. We were trying to determine who she was speaking to, and in the end it seemed she was talking to a pastor. She kept repeating things, like it was a prayer. Every morning and every night, we kept hearing her repeating a prayer. After this repetitive prayer, she suddenly became aggressive. She was insistent on leaving to Turin. I tried to explain if she went to Turin she might be putting herself and her child in danger as there might be someone looking for her [traffickers, madam]. The girl exploded. She changed within a fraction of a second...like a demon. When she was leaving from Susa, the girl thought her phone was switched off, but it was on and we could hear a Nigerian man. Whoever it was, he had convinced her to leave. We believe she was threatened or manipulated (De Blasio, M., January 31, 2018, personal interview).

In addition to being bound by the oath, traffickers render the victims helpless by seizing their documents when they arrive in Italy. Women and girls find themselves in a foreign country lacking a network of friends and family, destitute, without documentation, unable to speak the language, and emotionally and physically traumatized from the violence experienced in Libya (Aghatise, 2002). They are at the mercy of their madams.

All of these control mechanisms are meant to subjugate women and create a power vs. powerless dynamic throughout the recruitment, trafficking, and enslavement process. From the moment the recruiter indicates he has connections to transport the girl to Italy, he has established a position of power. From there, God and the deities are to be feared and obeyed. The priest, as the intermediary between the invisible and visible worlds is entrusted with the authority to deliver messages from the gods, captures the victim's spirit in the symbolic object, and seals the victim's vow in a pact that is entwined with punitive consequences. Identification is taken to prevent them from seeking help from the Italian authorities. The traffickers in Nigeria remind the women and girls that they have the power to hurt their family members. Madams threaten to go to the juju priest if the women and girls are not bringing in money. When victims come to realize the gravity of their situation, they feel that the only way out of sexual servitude and spiritual slavery is to pay off the debt.

The women were asked if they had "broken" their oath. Some of them understood this to mean they had left prostitution without fulfilling their commitment, while others believed the oath had been broken because they had fulfilled their duty by paying off their debt and they were now free from the oath. Therefore, the results on this survey question cannot be used in the quantitative analysis;

however, through qualitative interviews, it was evident that the women believe the sure way of achieving freedom was to pay off the debt. Second to that was to put their faith in God; however, there are uncertainties to this approach as well, which is addressed later on.

For many years, the concept of coercion was viewed largely through the lens of physical or legal means; however, the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children (Palermo Protocol) broadened the definition of coercion:

the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a person by means of the threat or the use of force or other means of coercion, or by abduction, fraud, deception, abuse of power, or of a position of vulnerability, or by the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person, having control over another person, for the purposes of exploitation (UN, Palermo Protocol, 2000)

The Palermo Protocol has received substantial endorsement, laid a foundation for the creation of domestic laws to address the rapidly increasing organized crime of human trafficking, and is the most important tool in the international community to combat human trafficking.

The Victims of Trafficking and Violence and Protection Act of 2000 (TVPA) mirrors the Palermo Protocol and even further expands the definition of coercion with a context that includes psychological coercion. (USDOS, 2000). Since 2001, the TVPA has become the standard with which to measure anti-human trafficking efforts globally in the annual Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report published by the U.S. Department of State (USDOS, 2018).

Living in Silence: Freedom of Speech Denied

Freedom of speech and expression is a fundamental right that is protected in several key international conventions that have been ratified by the country of Nigeria, including the ICCPR, ICSCR, and CEDAW. The right to free speech has been embraced by the government of Nigeria and written into domestic law in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria:

Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference (Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Constitution, art. 39, 1999).

The traditional oath ceremony used in the trafficking of women and girls from Nigeria infringes on the right to freedom of speech, as one of the fundamental reasons for the pact is to force the women to remain silent in an effort to prevent authorities from tracing the identities of the criminals.

Oath ceremonies are performed for many reasons in Nigeria and have survived as a legitimate judicial method to solve disputes (Oraegbunam, 2010). Customarily, a conditional curse is invoked and guilt or innocence is established depending on whether or not the accused dies or falls sick within a time frame (Oraegbunam, 2010). What is different about the oath ceremony used in the trafficking of girls to Italy is that the gods are not invoked to determine if a person was dishonest about an event that has already taken place, such as adultery, land disputes, or defamation. Rather, the deities are summoned to prevent someone from acting in the

future, thus to frighten the girls from speaking. Where the oath has traditionally been used to detect a crime, its purpose has now been transformed as an instrument to commit crimes, beginning with an infringement on the girls' freedom of speech.

Using Religious Customs to Advance Organized Crime

To kill in the name of God is a grave sacrilege. To discriminate in the name of God is inhuman (Pope Francis, 2015).

Religion is a double-edged sword. It has, and does, serve as a vehicle to promote social harmony and healing in many societies. Paradoxically, however, it has also served as a motivation for violence throughout history. Religion has been used to justify atrocious acts of violence and murder in the name of God, such as the persecution of Christians by the Romans, Aztec sacrifices to please the gods, Witch Hunts by Puritans in Massachusetts, and more currently the persecution of Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar and the Islamic Jihadist "Holy Wars."

While some acts of violence involve discrimination and persecution against people who practice a differing faith, religious rites are also used to target and oppress other groups of people. Women and girls are frequently the victims of religious and cultural institutional exploitation. Examples of customs that promote gender-based violence include:

- Young girls who are offered to shrines in Ghana as trokkosi slaves to atone for the sins of a family member (Gyurácz, 2017). Though the girl has committed no crime, she is sent to the shrine for years, and sometimes a lifetime, where she is a sexual servant and laborer for the priest. She is disconnected from her family and friends, deprived of an education, and sentenced to slavery to atone for a family member's sin.
- A centuries-old Hindu tradition of dedicating young girls called devadasi to the deity in temples in southern India who become child prostitutes (Shingal, 2015). A devadasi (servant of a god or goddess) is barred from marrying a mortal and should bestow her entire life to the service of deity and the temple.
- The sexual "cleansing" of widows through forced sex without a condom in Kenya (Ayikukwei et al., 2007). Widows who are not cleansed are discriminated against and their status is associated with evil spirits that bring misfortunes. Community members are aware of HIV/AIDS but they are insensitive to the fact that the ritual can be a vehicle for the transmission of the HIV virus.
- A punishment, or fatwa, whereby punishment may be stoning, caning, or burning at the stake and is decided by local male Islamic leaders in Bangladesh for extra-marital affairs or defiance by a woman (UNESCAP, 2012),
- Witch hunting and burning in Nepal (UNESCAP, 2012)

The oath in its use for trafficking has been transformed into a successful mechanism to facilitate highly organized transnational crimes between the Nigerian mafia and notorious Italian mafia groups. Nigerian gangs have infiltrated parts of Italy, most notably the Black Axe, "a ruthless organization which dominates its clientele through fear, intimidation, blackmail and juju covenant rituals" (Austrian Red Cross & ACCORD, 2017).

The sex trafficking industry from Nigeria to Italy is a profitable well-run machine and once the woman or girl has agreed to go to Europe, the ignition that

starts the engine is the juju oath. From there, her journey is in the hands of many criminals who benefit along the way: “sponsors” who front the funds; “madams” who groom the girls for prostitution; “controllers” who are senior ex-prostitutes who monitor the new arrivals; “black boys” who monitor the movements of the victims by phone and patrolling the streets; “crossers” who are often corrupt border guards who arrange for border crossings and temporary accommodation; family contacts who collaborate with traffickers to sell wives and daughters; “travel agencies” who arrange for falsified travel documents; and juju priests who administer the traditional oaths (Austrian Red Cross & ACCORD, 2017).

The Psychological Trauma of Swearing the Oath

Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When a force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning (Herman, 1992).

The oath creates a mechanism for perpetual trauma, coercion, threat, and mental control. Human trafficking expert and Director of the Program on Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery at Harvard University, Siddharth Kara, says about the oath, “It [juju] exerts a kind of control that is much more potent than chains or locking someone up. It’s control of the spirit, which is far more powerful and insidious.” (Thomas, 2014) *The Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* defines psychological trauma as a feeling of “intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation,” (Sadock, 2017) which are feelings expressed by women and girls who have submitted to the oath ceremony. The oath presents major hurdles to successful therapeutic treatment.

Psychologists have attempted to address these cultural challenges and find creative solutions to help women and girls cope with the effects of the oath. What perplexed Dr. Taliani early on in her work was understanding why “for this kind of migration, which is of course criminal migration, the oath takes a particular form. It is a ritual action that generates fear, taboo, and moral panic in the life of the girl” (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview). During her research, Dr. Taliani noticed that women and girls from West Africa did not take the oath when migrating to other countries, but to go to Europe it was necessary to “create this painful feeling and the feeling of fear” (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

In a survey conducted of 51 survivors of sex trafficking, 51% admitted to taking the oath (See Figure 9). It is uncertain if this number is accurate or could be higher. Many women will not readily admit that they have taken the oath because they are sworn to silence. Of those women, 70% said they think of the oath every day, 10% said they think of the oath weekly, and 20% said they think of the oath monthly (See Figure 10). For those who think of the oath daily, 29% indicated that they think of it once per day, 6% indicated they think of the oath two to five times per day, 14% indicated they think of the oath five to ten times per day, and 14% said they think of the oath ten or more times per day (See Figure 11).

Survivor Story 12: The oath, it is bad. It gives you pressure. I would think of it many times a day and worry that I might die. My family might die (Survey Participant #32, Turin, Italy, February 4, 2018).

Figure 9: Participation in the Oath Ceremony

The extreme anxiety produced by swearing the oath has a psychological grip on women and girls and can surface at any time in their lives, especially if they have decided to leave prostitution without paying back the debt. Dr. Taliani explained that women and girls are referred to her most often during a point of crisis. The circumstances might involve victims who have been recently rescued and are under the care of an NGO, or could be survivors who have lived in Italy for a number of years. Dr. Taliani says that anything can produce a trigger and create a crisis, even for survivors who appear to be stable and have not required assistance for several years. Often she is called to the hospital to counsel women who were admitted for tests to determine a physical cause for symptoms. If the tests do not yield any concrete answers, this will awaken the fear and anguish from the oath and the women or girls believe their physical discomfort is of a spiritual basis resulting from the juju oath. However, victims of human trafficking often experience *psychosomatic* pain, which is a generalized pain that can stem from psychological distress rather than a physical ailment:

Somatic symptoms such as pain, headache, or other physical complaints, with or without objective findings, are common problems among torture victims. Pain may be the only manifest complaint and may shift in location and vary in intensity. Somatic symptoms can be directly due to physical consequences of torture or be psychological in origin (UN, Istanbul Protocol, 2004)

Figure 10 and 11: Frequency of Thoughts Regarding the Oath

The extreme anxiety produced by swearing the oath has a psychological grip on women and girls and can surface at any time in their lives, especially if they have decided to leave prostitution without paying back the debt. Dr. Taliani explained

Another example given by Dr. Taliani of what produces a crisis is when a family member in Nigeria falls ill or dies. “This will almost always produce panic and the assumption that the illness was caused by her failure to keep the vow. Even simple things, such as an item of clothing that has gone missing after doing laundry will raise an alarm. Nightmares will bring back thoughts of the oath and elicit a range of distressful mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, insomnia, and so on” (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

When these events take place, the survivor will “start to rethink what she has done — the oath that she took, the debt that she did not finish paying” (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview). It brings back the trauma. “Many of them receive a psychotic diagnosis by doctors but they are not psychotic at all. It’s just that they are totally captured by the magical world and their explanation of what’s happened in everyday life that is defined by the ritual action” (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

The undertaking for ethnopsychologists, cultural mediators, and other professionals providing rehabilitative care is to find a way to unravel the emotional trauma and help the survivors find peace. Dr. Taliani has tried several methods over the years.

The thing for me is to figure out how it is possible to weaken this kind of control [from the juju spell]. One of my aims is to transform the powerful object to a simple object. The object that was created at the shrine that was made of the woman’s hair, nails, and blood, this became a magical and powerful object. I help them to see that an object is just an object, a stick is just a stick (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

In Catania, Sicily, Dr. Virgilio contends with similar difficulties in helping Nigerian women understand that physical problems occur naturally and are not a result of the juju.

What we do in therapy is to show the women that it is possible to confront their physical problems. They think these problems are from a magic influence because they broke the oath. We work with medical doctors to explain the physical problems such as headaches, gastric discomfort, anxiousness, etc. It takes a very long time and during this time it is important that they are in a safe, therapeutic setting and are protected from hearing news from family in Nigeria. Very often, the traffickers force the family to say bad and powerful things that creates more trauma (Virgilio, A., March 9, 2018, personal interview).

In Palermo, Sicily, Dr. Filippo Casadei and Dr. Maria-Chiara Monti of Centro Penc express concerns about the challenges they face in bridging the cultural gap and gaining trust:

They [the survivors] don't believe they can be helped because we don't know their world, which is actually the truth. We don't know so deeply their world, and we cannot undo what the magician has done. Our work does not correspond to the same logic. Many of them coming from rural areas have never heard of psychological work so they don't know exactly what our service is for and how we can help them. It's not immediate that we can cure these women. It's very complex, and once they can trust you, and understand that you can share with them their world, then maybe you move ahead a little bit in the therapy and you can start to help them feel in control (Casadei, F. and Monti, M-C, March 30, 2018, personal interview).

The most common way that women seek to break the chains of the juju oath is to become fervent worshippers of God through Christianity or Islam. Survey results revealed that 50% of survivors who had taken the oath believed that through prayer and faith in God they could reverse the oath. One survivor turned activist said, "People ask me, 'The things you do, do you go with a bodyguard?' I say, 'Yes,' and they ask 'Who?' I say, 'Jesus Christ'" (Okokon, P., January 31, 2018, personal interview).

Dr. Taliani says with this approach she can only offer to listen to the survivors and understand their needs. She views this method as the opposite of the aforementioned approach to reduce the power of the juju object.

To become a strong Christian, is to find an entity more powerful than the juju object. In this context, the juju object still has its own power but the women find someone more powerful to trust to protect them from the control of the juju. In psychological terms, I see this path as substitution of one type of control with another control. Even, if I may say, that one is not like the other, but it doesn't break the relation of dependence and control. The women feel under the control of someone else at all times (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

During the surveys and interviews with survivors, many participants made comments such as: "I pray hard to God," "God is stronger than the oath," "I believe in God and practice the gospel," "I fear God." One of several interviewees who

responded “I fear God,” was asked to clarify if she *feared* God or *respected* God, and she remarked, “Oh, you must fear God. He is the Creator and is in control,” which echoes Dr. Taliani’s sentiments about the women and girls not being free from some form of control. Dr. Taliani continued to explain her concerns about this approach of transferring the power from one to the other:

It works, but also there are risks because bad news arrives in everyday life — immigration process, job, sickness, death, and so on. When the bad news arrives, they can be doubtful of the strength of God. They look for explanations for why these bad things have happened. What I have come to understand is that the juju oath makes no event natural. No sickness is natural. You have to find the social reason, and the social reason in Nigeria is spiritual. It’s like after the oath, their lives cannot be turned back to what they were before, as in natural...that things could happen without a reason. This is not possible after the oath. The oath introduces into their lives this kind of psychological mechanism which is not easy to turn back (Taliani, S., February 2, 2018, personal interview).

Women and girls who have taken the oath search for ways to be released from its hold. Half of the survey participants believe that through God they will find freedom; however, some of those same women who attributed their peace of mind to God in the survey answers also expressed later in their interviews that they have found true freedom by being debt free. Paying the debt is the only sure way that women can find freedom from any form of control.

Survivor Story 13: The madam told me I would have to swear the oath if I wanted to go to Europe. The priest told me that if I did not keep my promise I would go mad in Italy and would be returned to Nigeria. The oath was on my mind every day. I was one of the lucky ones because it took me less than one year to pay my debt. I thank God it was quick. I do not believe the oath can be canceled, but I am at peace now because I gave them their money (Survey Participant #36, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

People who endure trauma suffer from a range of serious physical and psychological ailments. The human body is equipped with instinctive defense behaviors to cope with perceived threats, which has been termed the *defense cascade* (Kozłowska et al., 2015). When confronted with imminent danger, the body awakens to the threat through the first phase of arousal, and then enters the *fight or flight* stage whereby all of the body’s energy is focused on the threat, while functions that are less important are temporarily shut down. The emotional and physiological changes during this stage begin with an increased level of adrenalin in the blood, elevated heart rate, stimulation of the sweat glands, opening of the bronchial tubes, and pupil dilation (Cannon, 1915). A *freeze* response, or otherwise known as *attentive mobility*, is a fight or flight stage put on hold (Kozłowska et al., 2015). The person is highly aroused, and primed to respond, but cannot yet act.

The next stage is called *tonic immobility*, which occurs “when the individual is cornered and perceives that neither escape nor fighting is possible; as a response of last resort when there is physical contact with a perpetrator and flight or fight is not possible or has failed; or as the individual’s first-line response to trauma (Kozłowska et al., 2015). With animals that have been captured by a predator, this would be in the form of paralysis. In humans, it would appear as a type of catatonic state where the person is awake, but is numb, often does not talk or react to

anything, and can remain in this state for hours. This type of response has been documented in survivors of sexual violence, veterans returning from war, refugees, and survivors of concentration camps, among other traumas (Kozłowska et al., 2015, p 16). The next reaction is called *collapsed immobility*, which results in fainting. The last state is called *quiescent immobility* and is a response to a stressful event that can become maladaptive. Research is scarce on this phase of the defense cascade.

The diagnosis of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has been applied to people who have been exposed to varying forms of violence, including survivors of sex trafficking who acquiesced to the oath ritual. People who suffer with PTSD

continue to have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to their experience that last long after the traumatic event has ended. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares; they may feel sadness, fear, or anger; and they may feel detached or estranged from other people (APA, 2017)

For PTSD to occur, one does not have to experience physical harm. The threat of physical harm and the intense fear that comes as a result of those threats can cause the disorder. The American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V* includes the following diagnostic criteria for PTSD:

The person was exposed to: death, threatened death, actual or threatened serious injury, or actual or threatened sexual violence (APA, 2014).

Although this study attempts to isolate the psychological effects of oath as a control mechanism, it is a challenging endeavor due to the fact that victims of human trafficking have endured a range of human rights violations that trigger trauma responses. Therefore, it is not only necessary to investigate the psychological effects of the oath ceremony itself, but also view the oath as a profoundly influential catalyst to overarching human rights violations, thus trauma, that takes place in the trafficking and exploitation of women and girls from Nigeria. The oath also dictates the duration of time that the abuse takes place due to the fact that victims are trapped in prostitution until their debt is paid. The juju curse as a control mechanism is responsible for ensnaring women in this world of criminal exploitation, and is the reason why many women will not walk away from prostitution even if offered assistance from NGOs, or other cultural mediators such as mobile units.

The Helen Bamber Foundation has collected extensive data on psychological trauma symptoms observed by clinicians during their work with survivors of human trafficking (OSCE, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, and Helen Bamber Foundation, 2013). The following is an abbreviated list of common disorders discussed in a report titled *Trafficking in Human Beings Amounting to Torture and Other Forms of Ill Treatment*.

- Disassociation: "People in captivity become adept professionals of the art of altered consciousness. Through the practice of dissociation, voluntary thought suppression, minimization and sometimes outright denial, they learn to alter an unbearable reality" (Herman, 1992).
- Intrusive thoughts, memories, flashbacks, and panic attacks

- Hyper-vigilance and altered arousal perception: This is a state of persistently being “on guard” and can last for years after survivors are no longer confined.
- Feelings of low self-esteem, shame, self-blame
- Depression
- Difficulty trusting others: Many victims were manipulated by family members, “boyfriends,” or close family friends to travel to Italy based upon idealized dreams of a beautiful life in Europe only to find out that they had been sold into slavery. This kind of betrayal makes it difficult for women to trust again. Victims of sexual violence also develop a deep distrust or fear of men.
- Self-harm: This can be an expression of low self-esteem, distress, a need for help and/or an actual wish to die.
- Suicidal ideation
- Sleep disorders: Insomnia and nightmares are very common among victims of human trafficking.

Survivor Story 14: I am facing a problem on the inside. On the outside — my makeup, my hair looks good — but on the inside I am facing a problem...I have many problems — anxiety, flashbacks — and the psychologist is helping me. A big girl like me, I pee on the bed. You see how it affects me? I am 18 years old. I am very sad (Interview with Participant #31, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

In more recent years, a revised concept of PTSD was introduced by Dr. Judith Herman who recognized that the current model did not take into consideration extreme, prolonged, or repeated trauma. She introduced the theory of Complex Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (“Complex Trauma”). This theory takes into account the concept of re-traumatization whereby a recent trauma is compounded by earlier childhood traumas. The collective traumas create complex psychological symptoms.

Lenore Terr, a clinician who worked with survivors of child abuse, searched for a similar model that would further define the difference between a singular trauma and a repeated trauma. She delineated the differences by naming them Type I and Type II traumas. She classified Type II syndromes as having more severe symptoms such as denial, psychic numbing, disassociation, and alternations between extreme passivity and outburst of rage (Terr, 1991).

During interviews with survivors, many revealed that their pursuit of a better life in Italy was motivated by earlier trauma that made them feel hopeless. The hardships they suffered laid a foundation of vulnerability, psychological distress, and made them easy prey for traffickers: loss of parents, displacement from homes, sexual violence, poverty, dropping out of school, food insecurity, health problems and lack of medical care, physical abuse, abandonment, and so on. The juju oath added another layer of trauma, and being sold into slavery yet another layer. Several survivors shared details of the exact heartbreaking moment when they realized that they had been sold into slavery—a memory and a feeling forever etched in their minds.

The second aspect of Dr. Herman’s Complex Trauma theory and Herr’s Type II classification is that of prolonged trauma. This concept of persistent trauma will be underscored in the next section regarding torture.

Survivor Story 15: When I was living in Nigeria, I preferred to be with women. It is taboo in Nigeria. My family members are Christian and they felt I brought shame on the family. It even caused my parents to divorce. I only went to primary school because when my father found out I was a lesbian, he beat me and left me on the street. The pastor prayed on my head a lot and put pressure on me. They told me judgment day will come. I had to leave Nigeria (Interview with Participant #23, Turin, Italy, February 4, 2018).

Applying the Definition of Torture to Oath Ritual

According to the UN Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT), torture is defined as the following:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity, it does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent or incidental to lawful sanctions (UN, Convention Against Torture, part 1, art. 1, 1984).

Nigeria is a state party to the Convention Against Torture as well as the Optional Protocol for the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT). The country is also a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography (OPCR).

In discussing the definition of torture, and recalling Dr. Herman's explanation of Complex Trauma, it is necessary to reiterate some of the extreme physical and psychological torment girls are subjected to as a result of taking the oath ceremony, thus trafficked into prostitution:

- Manipulation to believe there will be a dream life in Europe;
- Invasive and often violent oath ceremony;
- Threat of death to oath taker and her family during ceremony;
- Entrapment through excessive debt bondage;
- Shock of the deception, realization that the dream is really a nightmare, and awareness of being sold into slavery;
- Witnessing horrific violence such as murder, rape, beatings, and other forms of death;
- Repeated rape, physical abuse, and starvation;
- Threats from traffickers, madams, and family members to prevent escape or reports to authorities;
- Intense feelings of humiliation, shame, and guilt;
- Isolation in a foreign country, unable to speak the language, confiscated documents, and no way to earn a legitimate income;

- Physical restriction of movement;
- Degradation to the level of passivity; and
- Begging on the streets for survival.

All of the above are as a result of “intentionally inflicted” force, threat, and coercive tactics that have occurred due to an abuse of power. These abuses have resulted in severe psychological and physical anguish, which often fall under the classification of Complex Trauma.

The Duty of States When Non-State Actors Commit Torture

“Since its adoption, the Convention [Against Torture] has engendered substantial criticism for its perceived focus on the actions of public officials or persons acting in an official capacity, to the exclusion of the commission of similar acts by non-State actors, such as armed groups, corporations, and other private individuals” (McGregor, 2014). To delineate that the crime of torture has taken place only if it is executed by State actors denies an adequate legal framework for victims who have suffered under the control, force, and threat of non-State actors. Due to this qualifying factor, millions of people who have suffered from torture are not acknowledged or protected by CAT.

In the *Pinochet* case, Lord Millett argued this aspect of the definition of torture under the CAT when he said:

The Convention against Torture (1984) did not create a new international crime. But it redefined it. Whereas the international community had condemned the widespread and systematic use of torture as an instrument of state policy, the Convention extended the offence to cover isolated and individual instances of torture provided that they were committed by a public official (McCorquodale & LaForgia, 2001).

Human trafficking is a criminal enterprise that is largely carried out by a network of non-State actors. The CAT would only offer legal protection in the event of direct involvement by a State official in a human trafficking incident. It is necessary then to focus on the State’s due diligence in protecting victims from torture to determine if the State has failed to protect citizens, and is thus complicit in allowing torture to occur (McGregor, 2014).

This analysis focuses on the effects of the oath ceremony itself and the psychological and physical torture suffered by victims as a result of being bound by the oath, thus subjected to further torture as sexual slaves. As such, the non-State actors responsible for misusing his or her power and administering the oath on behalf of a criminal network are the priests or priestesses:

The juju priests are paid to make this kind of oath. We cannot separate this from the political economy or trafficking as a job market. I know it is controversial but that is how it is: they earn a lot of money on making these oaths and the churches do as well (European Support Asylum Office, June 2017).

In examining the State’s due diligence in protecting potential victims from being forced to submit to the juju ceremony, we look to the record of anti-human trafficking operations. As a result of the Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition)

Enforcement and Administration Act 2003, Nigeria created the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) on July 14, 2003. In partnership with NAPTIP, the Nigeria Police, Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS), the Ministry of Justice, and other law enforcement agencies are actively involved in anti-human trafficking efforts in Nigeria. In spite of the creation of anti-human trafficking laws, policies, and agencies, there has been a steady rise in sex trafficking of Nigerian women and children with a 650% increase of potential victims over the last three years.

It is common knowledge by law enforcement agencies that the oath ceremony is widely used in the trafficking of Nigerian women and children to Europe. However, historically, little has been done to hold the priests accountable for their part in collaborating with the trafficking network and subjecting the victims to spiritual slavery.

In the 2017 Trafficking in Persons report published by the U.S. Department of State, Nigeria was downgraded to a Tier 2 Watchlist for its overall anti-human trafficking efforts. The Tier 2 Watchlist category is given to

countries whose governments do not fully comply with the TVPA's minimum standards, but are making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with those standards AND: a) The absolute number of victims of severe forms of trafficking is very significant or is significantly increasing; or b) There is a failure to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat severe forms of trafficking in persons from the previous year; or c) The determination that a country is making significant efforts to bring themselves into compliance with minimum standards was based on commitments by the country to take additional future steps over the next year.

Several concerns were highlighted in the report, including a lack of prosecutions for human trafficking offenses, with only 23 convictions; a \$2.66 million reduction in funds to NAPTIP; and serious concerns about corruption by government officials. (USDOS, 2017 & UNODC, 2017). Though the oath ceremony was mentioned in the report, no specific reference was made to any attempts to eliminate the practice of the oath ceremony or hold priests culpable for trafficking.

In reviewing the NAPTIP analysis reports from 2014 to 2017, the data does not specify if any of the arrested and convicted "traffickers" were priests. On the "Categories of Offenses" chart, classifications such as "Exportation of Persons for Prostitution" and "Recruitment of Persons Under 18 years for Prostitution" were delineated. The focus has been on recruiters and transporters; however, there was no category for arrests or convictions of priests who performed oath ceremonies (NAPTIP, 2017). Statistics for arrests of priests are not easily located, which begs the question of why the involvement of priests is being handled delicately and quietly and prosecution is not used to deter the practice.

The relationship between religious rights and universal human rights has always been very problematic. Religious leaders and practitioners are concerned with defending divine rights and the freedom to choose, practice, and proliferate their religion while States have a duty to serve and protect all citizens to ensure universal human rights. Both universal human rights and religious and cultural rights are protected in a number of international law instruments. Religious rights are most notably safeguarded in Article 18 of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights (UN, ICCPR, art. 18):

- Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. This right shall include freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice, and freedom, either individually or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in worship, observance, practice, and teaching;
- No one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice;
- Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; and
- The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

Article 18 (3) makes it clear that the fundamental rights, safety, and freedoms of individuals surpass the freedom of religion. Nigeria is also a State party to the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC), which asserts in Article 21, “State parties to the present Charter shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate harmful social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth, and development of the child and in particular: (a) those customs and practices prejudicial to the health or life of the child; and (b) those customs and practices discriminatory to the child on the grounds of sex or other status” (Organization of African Unity, ACRWC, art. 21, part 1).

The above principles are also reflected in Nigerian domestic law. The Nigerian Constitution “provides for individuals’ freedom to choose, practice, propagate, or change their religion and prohibits religious discrimination. The rights defined in the constitution cannot supersede the interests of defense, public safety, order, morality, or health, or protecting the rights of others” (USDS, International Religious Freedom Report for 2015: Nigeria).

Nigeria has a legal system based on customary laws, Islamic law, and English common law. Indigenous and State systems operate side-by-side within the same jurisdiction (Aiyedun and Ordor, 2016). Traditional leaders are not extended executive, legislative, or judicial roles in the Nigerian Constitution; however, they continue to exercise immense power and influence in the daily lives, well-being, and moral fabric of Nigerian life through traditional customs:

traditional rulers control substantial economic and financial resources including land and forestry. In many rural areas of the country, the indigenous political institutions are virtually the only institutions of governance. In such places, there is a total absence of the paraphernalia of the modern Nigerian state. Law and order are maintained through traditional political structures... Even as the federal and state governments try to diminish the political significance of traditional leaders, they nevertheless continue to rely on them as the link to the people in the rural areas. Thus, ironically, the traditional institutions are still the most effective channel by which the federal and state governments reach the people in the rural areas (Agbese, 2004).

In this way, there is collaboration between the State and the traditional leaders. The State also holds a reverence for traditional leaders and invites them to sit on councils, appoints them to prominent roles such as chancellors of State

universities, and leans on them in times of national crisis as mediators and peace-keepers (Agbese, 2004).

It is through this lens that we understand the complexities that the Nigerian government experiences in holding priests accountable for criminal actions, but also return once again to the definition of torture as outlined in the CAT. Police, social welfare officers, and other public officials engage the assistance of traditional political and spiritual leaders to conduct investigations and seek assistance in fostering peace, facilitating deliberations, and educating members of the community. Traditional and spiritual leaders provide an important role in bridging the complex differences between State law and customary law. They are respected by both community members who subscribe to African Traditional Religion and State officials. With the understanding of the authority and respect traditional leaders have to both govern through customary law and serve as advocates for the State, we look more closely at the words “other person acting in an official capacity.” Traditional priests have authority in the community and are revered as powerful healers, problem solvers, and conduits for sanctioning justice. In this way, they are acting in an official capacity in the eyes of those who subscribe to customary laws.

Nigeria’s commitment to prohibit torture is also reflected in domestic law and is not limited to State actors. Chapter IV of the Nigerian Constitution, titled Fundamental Rights, Article 34(1) states that: “Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly, (a) no person shall be subjected to torture, or to inhuman or degrading treatment, (b) no person shall be held in slavery or servitude” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, Nigerian Constitution, chapter VI, art. 34(1), 1999). In understanding the level of physical and psychological complex trauma that is experienced by Nigerian women and girls who undergo the oath ceremony, the laws must be applied to priests who use their position of power for financial gain and violate the human rights of women and girls.

Survivor Story 16: What I want to say is that we all know that it is not easy but you people should help us. Our girls are suffering in Nigeria and that is why we come here. Some take the oath and remain in it forever. If I don’t pay my madam, I will die. To stay in camp is a problem. To go out is a problem. One leg in, one leg out. We sit and do nothing and have no way to earn money...If I were to advise a girl from Nigeria, I would not allow her to come to Italy. We have suffered too much (Interview with Participant #31, Asti, Italy, February 3, 2018).

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

Human rights activists, doctors, scholars, public officials, civil service organizations, and other stakeholders have worked tirelessly for more than twenty years to shed light on the plight of Nigerian women and girls who are trafficked to European countries for prostitution. After years of small incremental steps forward in prevention and protection efforts, and the disheartening rise in trafficking in recent years, a significant positive shift has taken place with respect to the use of the juju oath ceremony in the trafficking of Nigerian women and girls. This event has generated hope that this may be the beginning of the end of sex trafficking from Nigeria.

The change took place after data compilation for this study and while the researcher was near completion of this report. These new developments are important to the context of the discussion and underscore the power of the juju oath.

On Friday, March 9, 2018, the King of Benin, Oba Ewuare II, joined forces with newly appointed Governor Godwin Obaseki and took a bold stance against the trafficking of women and girls from Edo State. In a large formal gathering at the Royal Palace of Benin City, the Oba brought together hundreds of native doctors and religious leaders. With his superior powers, the Oba performed a ritual to neutralize the oath curses. The Oba declared that women and girls were now free from their oaths (Freeman, 2018).

In addition, the Oba himself then invoked a curse on any native doctors who continue to coerce victims into taking the oath in the future. This was an important moment in time when the king publicly acknowledged the link between trafficking and the oath ceremonies (Associazione IROKO, blog entry, accessed on March 21, 2018).

This ritual was unprecedented because the Oba used ritualistic charms that had not seen the light of day in 800 years. This ritual has a huge impact on the women, much greater than the oath they had taken (Aghatise, E., April 16, 2018, personal interview).

In support of Governor Obaseki and the Edo State Attorney General Yinka Omorogbe's agenda to eradicate human trafficking in the region, the Edo State Task Force Against Trafficking was established and has been an instrumental part of increasing awareness about human trafficking and providing support services for 5,000 returnees from Libya. These efforts, along with the ascension of Oba Ewuare II to the throne, created the unity to make events on March 9th a success and set anti-human trafficking efforts in motion at a fast pace:

We have been shouting about prevention and protection programs for years, and now with the new government, everything is moving forward quickly. It is because now there is the political will to do something about the human trafficking crisis and it is backed up by action (Aghatise, E., April 16, 2018, personal interview).

The new government of Edo State and the Oba of Benin have publicly recognized the damage that has been inflicted on women and girls who have been subjected to the oath ritual as well as the culpability of some priests in the trafficking operation. Edo State officials and the highest traditional leader of Benin are working together to exercise due diligence in ending human trafficking of women and girls in Nigeria.

When asked for her thoughts about the influence of the ritual to revoke the juju curses, Dr. Aghatise said that news has already spread quickly over the Internet and by word of mouth, and the impact has been massive in the last couple of weeks. Feeling free for the first time in a long time, women are announcing on YouTube that they have left their madams and are seeking help in relocating to new homes. There has been an outpouring of telephone calls to NGOs for assistance as increasing numbers of women are abandoning their madams to search for homes and employment. The next challenge in this rapidly changing environment will be finding shelter and creating stability through educational and work opportunities for

survivors of human trafficking. It will be especially challenging to find homes for women and girls who would like to return to Nigeria but cannot return to family members who coerced them into trafficking (Aghatise, E., April 16, 2018, personal interview).

The day before the Oba's announcement, the Edo State House Assembly passed the Edo State Trafficking in Persons Prohibition, Enforcement, and Administration Law. (Aghatise, E., April 16, 2018, personal interview). This is an Edo State law and not a national law. The final copy has not yet been shared with the public as of the writing of this report.

The initial response from women and girls who have been released from spiritual and debt bondage emphasizes the power that the oath had over them. The immense relief that has begun to sweep over the survivors as news has traveled throughout Europe, and their ability to walk away from their madams demonstrates the validity of this study. A follow up long-term study will be necessary to understand the efficacy of the measures taken by the Oba of Benin in both freeing women and girls from the curse and in preventing traditional priests from invoking the gods in oath ceremonies for the purposes of trafficking in the future. It remains to be seen if the women and girls who are no longer bound by their silence will step forward to share their stories and turn in the criminals who profited from their anguish.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The juju oath ceremony used in the trafficking of women and children to Italy for prostitution has been an immensely effective control mechanism that renders victims powerless and voiceless, and has left deep and long lasting psychological wounds. Linkages have been made to demonstrate that the severe psychological trauma experienced through means of force, coercion, and threats equates to torture as outlined in international and domestic laws. The priests' responsibility as a powerful authority figure creates a genuine nexus to additional protective measures under the Convention Against Torture. To underscore the pervasiveness of the oath ceremony and the damage that it creates, it is essential to acknowledge that, where free will may be implied, it has been proven to not be the case. Manipulation, coercion, and threats have been exercised during every step of the human trafficking process on women and girls who are disadvantaged and vulnerable.

With the new developments that have surfaced in the last few months, a focus will be on resettling survivors and providing them with critical rehabilitative care, educational and vocational training, and work opportunities. As the dust settles from the excitement of newfound freedom, survivors will still be coping from Complex Trauma and will require support services. Though the Nigerian and Italian governments might feel optimistic that the trafficking flows will slow down due to recent events, they will need to remain vigilant in anti-trafficking prevention, protection, and prosecution measures. Together, with NGOs, INGOs, and other civil society organizations, it is recommended that the following be implemented:

- **Establish laws and policies to criminalize the use of the juju oath ceremony for purposes of trafficking:** The measures that the Oba of Benin has taken are very powerful and may be enough to dissuade traditional priests from

colluding with criminals in the future. However, the long-term effects from the March 9 ritual conducted by the Oba is unknown. Now that the Oba himself has made the link between trafficking and the oath ceremony, it would be beneficial to go one step further by adding an article to the Edo State Trafficking in Persons Prohibition, Enforcement, and Administration Law that forbids the use of traditional oath ceremonies for purposes of debt bondage and trafficking. This measure would add one more layer of protection.

To echo Dr. Taliani's sentiments, it is advisable to refrain from using broad judgment when seeking to hold priests culpable for crimes and in discussing the use of oath ceremonies in general. Oath ceremonies are traditional rituals that are used for multiple purposes, many of which hold significant value in the community and do not infringe on universal human rights. Thus, it is essential to ensure that laws and policies focus on the distorted use of the oath ceremony for criminal purposes and root out priests who are accomplices to the criminal network.

- **Create community sensitization programs for girls, women, and families.** The myth of a dream life in Europe must be dispelled. Through mass media and community-based programs, it is critical that families are on the realities of human trafficking, dangers of traveling to Europe, and the truth about prostitution and the severe human rights violations that are committed. The focus would be on deterring family members from pushing girls into human trafficking and preventing girls from succumbing to manipulation. A central part of this program would be addressing the root causes of girls and women as targets — societal attitudes, gender-discrimination in access to education, etc. Awareness campaigns that include testimony and compelling documentaries from survivors must saturate communities, especially Benin City where madams and trafficking operatives have a stronghold.
- **Address root causes of the outflow of migrants and potential human trafficking victims.** Poverty, lack of job opportunities, and school dropout rates are some of the underlying systemic problems that contribute to large numbers of people leaving the country in search of a better life. Investing in education and job creation for women and girls is critical not only to ending human trafficking but also in strengthening Nigerian society.
- **Increase funding for National Agency for the Prohibitions of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).** To operate effective prevention, protection, and prosecution programs, NAPTIP must be adequately funded.
- **Consider increasing funding for the Edo State Task Force Against Trafficking.** To date, the Task Force has achieved remarkable results; however, with the projected increase in victims who will seek assistance in returning to Nigeria, it is likely the Task Force will require more financial support to maintain the level of care it has been providing to survivors.
- **Demonstrate a zero tolerance for government corruption.** Though human trafficking is carried out in large part by non-State actors, the involvement of State actors has been reported by NGOs and the United Nations. It is recommended that the government investigate and prosecute to the fullest extent of the law any State actor who is found directly involved or aiding and abetting perpetrators of human trafficking.
- **Establish comprehensive training programs for clinicians and increase the number of cultural mediators available to NGOs and the public sector in Italy.** Nigerian women and girls are currently not receiving adequate psycho-social support. The limited number of skilled ethnopsychologists are struggling to provide services for the increasing numbers of migrants and trafficking victims. It is essential that the Italian government invest in cultural

sensitivity training for all professionals who come into contact with victims, provide linguists to assist cultural mediators, and increase the number of clinicians available in public hospitals and refugee camps.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the contribution of Nigerian survivors of sex trafficking. Thank you for breaking your silence to share your experiences and insights for this study. Your stories are critical in understanding the dynamics of sex trafficking from Nigeria to Italy and in developing more effective prevention and protection programs. My gratitude to the professionals who are daily advocates for the rights and wellbeing of sex trafficking victims. Your extensive experience provided invaluable insights to this research. Many thanks to the following contributors: Dr. Esohe Aghatise, Associazione IROKO Onlus & Edo State Task Force Against Trafficking; Dr. Simona Taliani, Il Centro Franz Fanon & University of Turin; Princess Inyang Okokon, PIAM Onlus; Uchenna Uzoije, PIAM Onlus; Sister Margherita De Blasio, Il Mandorlo, Franciscan Sisters of Susa; Reverend Davide Rostan, Waldesian Church of Susa; Paolo Botti, Associazione Amici di Lazzaro; Dr. Aldo Virgili, Department of Public Health; Dr. Maria-Chiara Monti, Associazione Centro Penc; Dr. Filippo Casadei, Associazione Centro Penc; Tatiana Kotlyarenko, Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe. To Domenica Mammi and Ruby Till of Associazione IROKO Onlus for your instrumental assistance in language interpretation, cultural mediation services, and coordination of research participants. To Helen Dike and Joy Bernard for your significant contribution in language interpretation and coordination of research participants. To the YWCA in Turin, Italy for your generosity in sharing your facilities to conduct interviews. To my thesis advisor, Dr. Dorchon Leidholdt, for your invaluable support, guidance, and wisdom. To my husband, Bill, and my children, Godsway, Koku, and Mensah, for your patience, love, and encouragement as I pursued my Master's Degree. *Dignity* thanks the following people for their time and expertise in reviewing this article: Joan A. Reid, Associate Professor, Criminology and Adjunct Faculty, Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling; Co-Director and Psychotherapist, Restoring Innocence Lost Counseling Collaborative, University of South Florida, USA; Esohe Aghatise, Executive Director, Associazione Iroko Onlus, Italy; and Nora Hashim Msuya, Advocate of the High Court of Tanzania, Legal Lecturer, Mzumbe University, Tanzania, Postdoctoral Researcher, School of Law, University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Jennifer Millett-Barrett, M.A. Human Rights Studies, Columbia University, USA. Millett Barrett is the founding president of Dream On International. Her nonprofit work has taken her to several African countries, with a particular dedication to West Africa, where she has facilitated projects for more than ten years. Dream On has established a number of community-based programs aimed at the prevention of human trafficking, sexual violence, and other human rights violations afflicting children and women. Dream On initiated and maintains various protection programs, including witness protection for children involved in legal cases, safe houses for girls who were victims of sexual violence, and a long-term residential home for children and teenagers. Millett Barrett has collaborated with officials in government institutions and agencies, tribal elders, and private NGOs to advance the wellbeing of women and children. She has been conferred with the title of Development Queen of Hohoe, Ghana by Paramount Chief Togbe Gabusu VI and a received a humanitarian award from the National Council of Ghanaian

Associations and the Ghana Consulate of New York. She is currently serving as an expert on country conditions in Ghana for asylum cases that will soon go before the US Department of Homeland Security and US Citizen and Immigration Services.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Millett-Barret, Jennifer. (2019). Bound by Silence: Psychological effects of the traditional oath ceremony used in the sex trafficking of Nigerian women and girls. *Dignity: A Journal of Sexual Exploitation and Violence*. Vol. 4, Issue 3, Article 3.
<https://doi.org/10.23860/dignity.2019.04.03.03> Available at
<http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/dignity/vol4/iss3/3>.

REFERENCES

- Aghatise, Esohe. (November 18-22, 2002). Trafficking for prostitution in Italy. Concept paper presented at the *Expert Group Meeting on Trafficking in Women and Girls*, Glen Cove, New York. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204268608>
- Agbese, Pita Ogaba. (2004). Chiefs, constitutions, and policies in Nigeria. *West Africa Review*. ISSN 1525-4488. Issue 6. Retrieved from <https://www.africaknowledgeproject.org/index.php/war/article/view/300>
- Aiyedun, Adenike and Ada Ordor. (2016). Integrating the traditional with the contemporary in dispute resolution in Africa. *Law Democracy and Development*. Vol. 20. <http://www.doi.org/10.4314/idd.v20i1.8>
- Akeem, Oladiti Abiodun and Akin Alao. (2017). The interaction of law and religion in central Nigerian societies. *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 10 (5). Retrieved from <https://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol10no5/10.5-5-Akeem.pdf>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2014). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-IV*. 4th edition, CBS Publishers & Distribution.
- American Psychiatric Association. (January 17, 2017). What is posttraumatic stress disorder? Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>. Accessed on March 15, 2018.
- Andrews, Frank. (October 5, 2018). The Paris park where Nigerian women are forced into prostitution. CNN. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/04/africa/paris-nigerian-women-trafficking/index.html>
- Associazione IROKO Onlus website and blog: <http://www.associazioneiroko.org/en/>
- Austrian Red Cross and Austrian Centre for Country of Origin & Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD). (December 2017). Nigeria: COI compilation on human trafficking. Retrieved from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5a79c7114.html>
- Ayikukwei, Rose Mmboga, Duncan Ngare, John E. Sidle, David O. Ayuku, Joyce Baliddawa, James Y. Greene. (August 22, 2007). Social and cultural significance of the sexual cleansing ritual and its impact on HIV prevention strategies in western Kenya. *Springer Science+Business Media, LLC*.
<http://www.doi.org/10.1007/s12119-007-9010-x>
- Baarda, C.S. (2016). Human trafficking for sexual exploitation from Nigeria into Western Europe: The role of voodoo rituals in the functioning of a criminal network. *European Journal of Criminology*. 13(2). 257-273.
<http://www.doi.org/10.1177/1477370815617188>

- Beneduce, Dr. Roberto and Nigel C. Gibson. (2017). *Frantz Fanon, Psychiatry and Politics: Creolizing the Canon*. Roman and Littlefield International, Ltd. London.
- Bryman, Alan. (2004). Interviewing in Qualitative Research. *Social Research Methods*. 2nd Ed. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Chapter 20.
- Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. (August 10, 2016). 2015 Report on International Religious Freedoms: Nigeria. U.S. Department of State. <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/256269.pdf>
- Cannon WB. (1915). *Bodily changes in pain, hunger, fear and rage*. Appleton & Company New York, NY.
- Cole, Jeffrey. (2006). Reducing the damage: dilemmas of anti-trafficking efforts among Nigerian prostitutes in Palermo. *Anthropologica*, 48(2). 217-228. <https://www.doi.org/10.2307/25605312>
- Crowhurst, Isabel. (August 22, 2012). Approaches to the regulation and governance of prostitution in contemporary Italy. *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*. 9:223–232. <https://www.doi.org/10.1007/s13178-012-0094-1>
- Daman, Arwa, Brent Swails, and Bruce Laine. (December 5, 2017). The sex trafficking trail from Nigeria to Europe. CNN. Updated March 21, 2018. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/12/04/africa/nigeria-benin-city-sex-trafficking/index.html>
- Ekeke, Rev. Emeka C. and Dr. Chike A. Ekeopara. (December 2010). God, divinities, and spirits in African Traditional Religious ontology. *American Journal of Social and Management Sciences*. 1(2), 209-218. <https://doi.org/10.5251/ajsms.2010.1.2.209.218>
- Elbagir, Niama with Lillian Leposo and Hassan John. (February 27, 2018). Smuggled by Nigeria's pushermen, *CNN Freedom Project*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2018/02/26/nigeria-migrant-smugglers-lon-orig-ejk.cnn>.
- Ellis, Stephen. (2016). *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York.
- Ezenweke, Elizabeth Onyedinma. (2008). The cult of ancestors: A focal point for prayers in African Traditional communities. *Journal of Religion and Human Relations*. 1(1). ISSN: 2006-5442. Retrieved from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/jrhr/article/view/87321>
- European Support Asylum Office (ESAO). (June 12-13, 2017). EASO COI Meeting Report: Nigeria. Practical Cooperation Meeting. Rome, June. Retrieved from <https://www.easo.europa.eu/sites/default/files/publications/nigeria-pc-meeting-report-august2017.pdf>
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (March 26, 2015). Trafficking in Persons (Prohibition) Law Enforcement and Administration Act 2015. <http://www.placng.org/new/upload/TraffickingInPersonsEnforcementAndAdministrationAct2015.pdf>
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (May 29, 1999). Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ng/ng014en.pdf>
- Freeman, Colin. (April 2, 2018). 'They will face the wrath of our ancestors:' Nigerian king places curse on sex trafficking rings," *The Telegraph*. Retrieved from <http://subscriber.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/02/will-face-wrath-ancestors-nigerian-king-places-curse-sex-trafficking/>

- The Global Initiative Against Transnational Crime. (May 7, 2014). Smuggled Features: The Dangerous Path of a Migrant from Africa to Europe. *A Research Report*. Retrieved from <https://globalinitiative.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/2014-crime-1.pdf>
- Gyurácz, Veronika (2017). Domestic servitude and ritual slavery in West Africa from a human rights perspective. *African Human Rights Law Journal*. 17(1). <https://doi.org/10.17159/1996-2096/2017/v17n1a5>
- Herman, Judith. (1992). *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence from Domestic Abuse to Politic Terror*. Basic Books, New York.
- Ikeora, May. (January 2016). The role of African Traditional Religion and ‘juju’ in human trafficking: Implications for anti-human trafficking, *Journal of International Women’s Studies*. 17(1). 1-18. Retrieved from <https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1835&context=jiws>
- Independent Advisory Group on Country Information (IAGGI). (August 2016). Nigeria: trafficking of women. Country Information and Guidance. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/file/887031/download>
- International Labour Organization (ILO) and Walk Free. (September 19, 2017). Global estimates of modern slavery: Forced labour and forced marriage. Geneva. Retrieved from https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/publication/wcms_575479.pdf
- International Organization for Migration (IOM). (July 2017). The trafficking of human beings through the central Mediterranean route: Data, stories and information. Retrieved from https://italy.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/IOM_report_trafficking_2017.pdf
- International Organization for Migration and IOM Rome. (2015) Report on Victims of Trafficking in Mixed Migration Flows Arriving in Italy by Sea: April 2014 – October 2015. Retrieved from https://italy.iom.int/sites/default/files/documents/IOM_Report_on_victims_of_trafficking_2015_ENG.pdf
- International Organization for Migration. (July 21, 2017). UN migration agency issues report on arrivals of sexually exploited migrants, chiefly from Nigeria. The UN Migration Agency. <https://www.iom.int/news/un-migration-agency-issues-report-arrivals-sexually-exploited-migrants-chiefly-nigeria>
- Kara, Siddharth. (2009) *Sex Trafficking: Inside the Business of Modern Slavery*. Columbia University Press. New York NY.
- Kara, Siddharth. (2012). *Modern Slavery: A Global Perspective*. Columbia University Press. New York, NY.
- Kozłowska, Kasia MBBS, FRANZCP, PhD; Walker, Peter BSc Psych, MPsychol; McLean, Loyola MBBS, FRANZCP, PhD; Carrive, Pascal PhD. (2015). Fear and the defense cascade: Clinical implications and management. *Harvard Review of Psychiatry*. (4). 263–287. July/August 2015. <http://www.doi.org/10.1097/HRP.0000000000000065>
- Lo Lacono, Eva. (February 11, 2014). Victims, sex workers and perpetrators: Gray areas in the trafficking of Nigerian women. *Trends in Organized Crime*. 17(1-2). 110-120. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12117-014-9212-1>
- Makama, Godiya Allana. (June 2013). Patriarchy and gender inequality in Nigeria: The way forward. *European Scientific Journal*. 9(17). Retrieved from <https://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/1161/1177>

- McCorquodale, Robert and Rebecca La Forgia. (2001). Taking off the blindfolds: Torture by non-state actors. *Human Rights Law Review*. 1(2). 189 – 218.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/hrlr/1.2.189>
- Merriam Webster. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/> Accessed on February 3, 2018.
- McGregor, Lorna, (2014). Applying the definition of torture to the acts of non-state actors: The case of trafficking in human beings. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 36. 210-241. The Johns Hopkins University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2014.0000>
- Mbiti, John S. (2015). *Introduction to African Religion*. Second Edition, Waveland Press, Long Grove, IL.
- National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). (2014). Data Analysis Report. <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2014-Data-Analysis-Final-1.pdf>
- National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). (2015). Data Analysis Report. <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2015-Data-Analysis-1.pdf>
- National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). (2016). Data Analysis Report <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2016-Data-Analysis1-1.pdf>
- National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP). (2017). Data Analysis Report. <https://www.naptip.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/2017-DATA-ANALYSIS-FINAL.pdf>
- Okojie, Christina E.E. (2009). International trafficking of women for the purpose of sexual exploitation and prostitution: The Nigerian case. *Pakistan Journal of Women's Studies*. 16(1-2).147-178. ISSN: 1024-1256.
- Okojie, Christina, E.E. & Dr. Obehi Okojie, Dr. Kokunre Eghafona, Dr. Gloria Vincent-Osaghae, Mrs. Victoria Kalu (2003). Trafficking of Nigerian girls to Italy: Report of field study in Edo State, Nigeria.
- Okojie, Christiana, (2003). Trafficking of Nigerian Girls to Italy: Report of Field Study in Edo State, Nigeria. University of Benin. Retrieved from http://www.unicri.it/topics/trafficking_exploitation/archive/women/nigeria_1/research/rr_okojie_eng.pdf
- Oknokfua, F.E. & S.M. Ogbomwan, A.N. Alutu, Okop Kufre, and Aghahowa Egosha. (September 2004). "Knowledge, attitudes, and experiences of sex trafficking by young women in Benin City, South-South, Nigeria." *Social Science & Medicine*. 59: 1315 – 1327. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2004.01.010>
- Okwueze. M.J. (2003). Ethics, religion and society: **Biblical traditional and contemporary perspectives**. Prize Publication. Nsukka, Nigeria. p. 3.
- Olagbefi, Besi et. al. (2006). Human trafficking in Nigeria: Root causes and recommendations. UNESCO Policy Paper Policy Series No. 14.2 (E). Paris. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001478/147844e.pdf>
- Oraegbunam, Ikenga, K.E. (March 2010). The principles and practice of justice in traditional Igbo jurisprudence. *OGIRISI: A New Journal of African Studies*.
<https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9508/CGP/v06i02/42362>
- Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and Co-coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. (2013). *Trafficking in Human Beings Amounting to Torture and Other Forms of Ill-Treatment*. Part I: Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights. Part II: Helen Bamber Foundation.
<https://www.osce.org/cthb/103085?download=true>

- Organization of African Unity. (1999). African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Adopted on July 1 1990. Entered into Force on November 29, 1999. African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights.
<http://www.achpr.org/instruments/child/>
- Oxford American College Dictionary. en.oxforddictionaries.com. Accessed on March 2, 2018.
- Pope Francis. (September 6-8, 2015). Peace is Always Possible: Religions and Cultures in Dialogue. The Holy See. *Message of His Holiness Pope Francis to Participants in the 28th Edition of the International Meeting for Peace*.
https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150829_messaggio-s-egidio-albania.pdf
- Republic of Italy. (August 11, 2003). Law n. 228: Measures Against Trafficking in Persons. Retrieved from <https://www.warnathgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/italy-tip-law-2003.pdf>
- Republic of Italy. (July 25, 1998). Legislative decree n.286. Consolidated Immigration Act. Entry into force on June 26, 2014.
<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/54a2c23a4.pdf>
- Republic of Italy. (December 1947). The Constitution of the Republic of Italy.
http://www.prefettura.it/FILES/AllegatiPag/1187/Costituzione_ENG.pdf
- Sadock, Benjamin J., Virginia J. Sadock, and Pedro Ruiz MD. (May 24, 2017). *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry*. Wolters Kluwer, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins, Philadelphia, PA.
- Shingal, Ankur. (January 1, 2015). The devadasi system: Temple prostitution in India. *UCLA Women's Law Journal*. 22(1). Retrieved from
<https://escholarship.org/content/qt37z853br/qt37z853br.pdf>
- Spindler, William and Leo Dobbs. (October 11, 2010). Conference puts focus on human trafficking: Fastest growing criminal industry. UNHCR. The UN Refugee Agency. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/latest/2010/10/4cb315c96/conference-puts-focus-human-trafficking-fastest-growing-criminal-industry.html>
- Sundermeire, Theo. (1998). *The Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions*. Lit Verlag. Humburg, Germany.
- Terr, L.C., (1991) Childhood Traumas: An Outline and Overview. *American Journal of Psychology*. 148: 10-20. <https://doi.org/10.1176/ajp.148.1.10>
- Thomas, Gavin. (October 14, 2014). Juju's control is powerful. *BBC News*. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-wales-29598027/juju-s-control-is-powerful-expert-siddharth-kara>
- Tondo, Lorenzo and Annie Kelly. (September 2, 2017). The juju curse that binds Nigerian women into sex slavery: Traditional West African 'healers' and Sicilian psychiatrists are struggling to help free Nigerian Women forced into prostitution. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2017/sep/02/juju-curse-binds-trafficked-nigerian-women-sex-slavery>
- United Nations. (1984) Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 39/46 of December 10 1984, Entry into force June 26, 1987. Retrieved from
https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&lang=en

- United Nations. (1979). Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 34/180 of 18 December 1979, entry into force 3 September 1981. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- United Nations. (1981). Convention on the Elimination on all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *UN Treaty Collection*. Entry into force September 3, 1981. List of State parties retrieved from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en
- United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989. Entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>
- United Nations. (1989). Convention on the Rights of the Child. *UN Treaty Collection*. Entry into Force on September 2, 1990. List of State parties. Retrieved from https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en
- United Nations. (1984). Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. Entry into Force June 26, 1987. List of State parties retrieved from https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-9&chapter=4&lang=en
- United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification, and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI) on December 16, 1966. Entry into force on March 23, 1976. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- United Nations. (1966). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 2200 A (XXI) of December 16, 1966. Entry into force on January 3, 1976. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- United Nations. (1965). International Covenant on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Adopted and open for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) on December 21, 1965. Entry into force on January 4, 1969. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cerd.aspx>
- United Nations. (2002). "Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment," Adopted by General Assembly resolution A/RES/57/199 on December 18, 2002. Entry into force on June 22, 2006. <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPCAT.aspx>
- United Nations. (2000). Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution A/RES/54/263 of 25 May 2000. Entered into force on 18 January 2002. Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OPSCCRC.aspx>

- United Nations. (2000). Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol). *UN Treaty Collection*. Entry into force on December 25, 2003. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ProtocolTraffickingInPersons.aspx>
- United Nations, Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, Supplementing the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol). *UN Treaty Collection*. Entry into force December 25, 2003. List of state parties retrieved from https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mt_dsg_no=XVIII-12-a&chapter=18&lang=en
- United Nations. (July 21, 2017). UN report reveals shocking abuse migrant women face on their journey to Europe. *UN News center: Refugees and Migrants*. Retrieved from <https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/un-report-reveals-shocking-abuse-african-migrant-women-face-their-journey-europe>
- United Nations. (December 10, 1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Adopted by General Assembly resolution 217A on December 10, 1948. Paris, France. Retrieved from https://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). (November 19, 2012). Harmful traditional practices in three countries of South Asia: Culture, human rights, and violence against women. *Gender and Development Discussion Paper Series No. 21*. Retrieved from <https://www.unescap.org/resources/harmful-traditional-practices-three-countries-south-asia-culture-human-rights-and-violence>
- United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and Intersectoral Poverty Education Programme. (2006). "Policy Paper No. 14.2 (E), Human trafficking in Nigeria: Root causes and recommendations." Paris. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000147844>
- United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. (2004). Istanbul Protocol. Professional Training Series 8(1). *Manual on the Effective Investigation and Documentation of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment*, New York and Geneva. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/training8Rev1en.pdf>
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2008). An Introduction to Human Trafficking: Vulnerability, Impact, and Action. *Background Paper of the U.N. Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking*. 71-75. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/human-trafficking/An_Introduction_to_Human_Trafficking_-_Background_Paper.pdf
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (July 2017). Corruption in Nigeria: Bribery, Public Experience, and Response. Vienna. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Crime-statistics/Nigeria/Corruption_Nigeria_2017_07_31_web.pdf
- United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). (February 2009). Global report on human trafficking: Human trafficking, a crime that shames us all. UN.GIFT (Global Initiative to Fight Human Trafficking). Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/documents/Global_Report_on_TIP.pdf

- U.S. Department of State. (2015). International Religious Freedom Report for 2015: Nigeria.” Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. Retrieved from <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm?year=2015&dliid=256057>
- U.S. Department of State. (June 2018). Trafficking in Persons Report 2018. Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, 304-306. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/282798.pdf>
- U.S. Department of State. (2000). Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act 2000. HR 3244. 106th Congress of the USA. October 28, 2000. Retrieved from <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/laws/61124.htm>
- Welton, Michael Robert. (1964). *Belief and Ritual in the Edo Traditional Religion*. University of British Columbia. Anthropology and Sociology. <https://open.library.ubc.ca/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0104377>