

Embodied Perpetration: Transnational Victimhood among Edo Transnational Sex Workers

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ABSTRACT

Narratives of Edo transnational sex work have in most cases constructed the sex worker as victims of a network of transnational traffickers often led by a ‘madam/sponsor’. These narratives portray the ‘trafficked’ as ‘innocent victims’ who ignorantly embark on a trip in which the final destination translates into a place of torture, violence and exploitation at the hands of their sponsors, (potential) clients, and also law enforcement agents. However, this study seeks to explore a different dimension of the sex work discourse in Edo State by undertaking to scrutinize various dimensions of the sex work network. Edo transnational sex workers will be examined through the prism of collaborators and co-perpetrators. Findings from a 6-month long fieldwork in Benin City, the capital of Edo State, revealed that a substantial number of newly recruited sex workers are informed of the nature of work they are to embark on when they cross over to Europe. For some, in order to pay up the incurred debt faster, they elect to take on new ‘recruits’ under their wing, thereby blurring the binary between victim and perpetrator. The question then becomes how much knowledge do the sex workers have of their new ‘job’? And/or how much is understood of the imminent dangers in the transnational voyage they have consented to, traversing the desert, combing the Mediterranean in search of a ‘better life’ at the other side? In critically analyzing the role of sex workers as collaborators in the trafficking network, the paper will also highlight the duties and roles of co-perpetrators in the industry. From the ‘Madam/Sponsor’ who is the head of the operation, funding the entire exercise, to the ‘trolley’, who is saddled with the responsibility of delivering the sex workers across the desert, to the ‘juju’ priest whose duty is to keep the ‘girls’ under ‘control’ and ensure a ‘hitch-free’ journey, to the sex workers themselves who were given prior information but chose to subject themselves to such harrowing experience. Findings show, among others, that the Edo sex workers, contrary to the popular discourse of victimhood around them, embody self perpetration, considering that they mostly elect to undertake the journey into transnational sex work despite prior knowledge of the associated dangers.

Keywords: Edo State (Nigeria, West Africa), Sex Work, Migration, Transnationalism, Victim, Perpetrators.

Introduction

Narratives of Edo transnational sex work have been treated from a variety of aspects, seeking explanation for its root cause and starting up dialogues and conversation to foster understanding of the phenomenon. Strands of the discourse seem to compartmentalise them, just as a broad category of discourses related to the African experience become dichotomised. For the Edo transnational sex work network, this is often not the case.

This paper seeks to read victims of the Edo transnational sex workers, not only as victims but an embodiment of perpetration due to their involvement in the criminal activities perpetrated against them. In doing this, the paper would highlight their roles in the transnational voyage they (some, not all) consent to and the extent of their knowledge. The study shall also examine the ‘hustler’ as an extension of their families, bearing in mind that for families that encourage or initiate negotiations with the network to have their wards/members trafficked, they have also become a part albeit unintentionally of the perpetration.

To understand the players in the network, below are categories in the network and their activities:

The Sex Worker

Plambech (2014) regards the sex worker as the ‘nucleus’ of the whole operation. The sex worker is recruited or initiates her own recruitment into the network. She may be recruited by the madam without adequate knowledge of the nature of the work; at other times, the sex worker may have consciously opted for the trade. She contributes to the smooth running of the system in the period she would be involved in the network. Their innocence/naivety at the point of contact notwithstanding, the oaths taken plays a significant role in binding her to the network and also aids her silence as a member of the network. Other factors are also responsible for her compliance, for example, the ultimate desire to make it in Europe.

To unravel how oath taking aids sex work, examining the sex worker as a concept and a phenomenon therefore becomes necessary. The examination would include the state of mind of different categories of sex workers, their belief system and influence of family members, and relatives on the decision to travel abroad.

Categories of Potential Sex Workers

- **The Naïve**

This study revealed that these categories of sex workers are usually very young, between 12 and 19 years, and are every trafficker's (madam's) delight and dream. They ask no questions and believe everything they are told, hook, line and sinker. Some of the sex workers are recruited from other villages and their knowledge of the outside world is very minimal.

One of the respondents interviewed at New Benin market recounted her experience.

I was barely 15 years old when my guardian brought me to Benin City from my village in Orlu East in Imo State. I could hardly understand a word of Pidgin English not to talk of the Benin dialect; I only did what I was told by my guardian, which was to go with the woman who would henceforth be my new guardian. The woman took me and a couple of other girls to a woman in a faraway village, there some animals were slaughtered and we were asked to eat the heart of the chicken, raw. The woman dressed as a priestess ordered me to recite some words which at that time I could not understand its meaning, I did and after a few days, we took a trip to another city where I and the other girls in the company of my 'new guardian' took a flight to Italy. I had lived and worked for my 'new guardian' for over two years before I found out I was meant to have a 'record' book to take stock of my cash deliveries, the sad truth is that it was only when the police raided and caught up with me and some other girls in my 'crew' that I found out that the city I had been living in was Florence.

The case of this young girl is just one amongst many who are taken out of the shores of Nigeria without realizing the implication of the journey. As Kienast et al (2014) posit, the victims are completely deceived about the nature of the job in Italy. Owing to lack of exposure and of course, their naivety, these victims enter into the trafficking situations without actually realising the implication (Long 2002). This category of sex workers do not need to be convinced. They are always willing to obey instructions. Where the prospective sex worker is to go through the land route, she embarks on the journey without questions. This strand of sex workers and their

experiences, interrogates the assertion of Van Dijk (2001), who argues in his work “Voodoo on the Doorstep”, that the efficacy of the oath is only felt when the trafficked girl has arrived the intended destination and tries to defy the oath. This forces the trafficker to resort to violence, threats and the oath taken to make the girl succumb. Findings from this research have revealed otherwise. It was discovered in this study that a good number of girls who are very inexperienced and are recruited from Nigeria to Italy by the land route, experience violence (however subtle) from the onset of the process. Beginning from the lies and deception that the network feeds its victims (Long, 2002) to the traumatic experience at the shrine (Cherti et al 2013, Europol 2011, Pascoal 2012,), here the psychological control is affirmed. Furthermore, the killing and eating of animals as part of the oath taking ritual opens the victim to another form of psychological violence meant to instil fear (US DoS, 2014). Another dimension to the traumatic experience suffered by victims before reaching their destination in Europe is the collection of some specific parts of the body, for example, nails, hair, blood, and so on, which are not returned until the debt is repaid (Nwogu, 2008). In light of this, this study therefore validates the position of Cherti et al (2013) that oath taking occurs when the potential sex worker is already vulnerable. A returnee from Italy had this to say:

I am an orphan and when my mother died, I was put in care of my Aunt, who did not have enough money to send me to school or to learn a trade. She then told me one day that I was to go and live with a friend of hers. When the friend came around, I was taken to a ‘juju’ house where I was asked to swear. I was really scared of the things I saw in the ‘juju’ house, where I was asked to swear, so I did what I was asked to do. It was there I was told I had to always obey whatever my Aunt’s friend said. She told me we were travelling abroad and we were going by aeroplane. I trusted whatever she told me completely. When we embarked on the trip and I realized it was going to be by land, I felt a little unhappy and disappointed; but I could not go back or say anything because I always remembered what I saw at the ‘juju’ house. I spent close to two months on the ‘route’ and on getting to Italy I was exhausted. As soon as I made ‘the call’ to my Aunt’s friend, I was “smuggled” out of camp and taken to her house, she had arranged some new clothes for me and then she told me to rest for the day and I was to begin working the next day. When I realized the nature of job I was to do, I could not even utter a single word of complaint

because I knew I had already tied myself to whatever she asked me to do by swearing that oath.

Another category of the naïve are those prospective sex workers who were not informed of the nature of the job they are to take on before getting to their destination in Europe, but are asked to take oath based on the fact that when they get to Europe, they will stick to their madams. This category of potential sex workers might also have been told that the journey will be by air and consented to the whole process. The difference here is that some of these potential sex workers, on finding out the deception their traffickers subject them to, coupled with the distressing experience along the route, protest and cry out for help. They do so not in expectation of help from law enforcement agents back home, but from family, friends and relatives. As a respondent recollected:

I did not tell anyone of my intention to travel to Italy. I had met the Trolley that was employed to take me, through a friend who was planning to go as well. We spoke to our madam on phone and she arranged with the Trolley who was to take us and two other girls. Our madam had told us that we would get to Europe using flight and that the ‘trolley’ was helping to arrange our travel documents. On the day we were to go, we took a bus to Kano and I began to wonder if we were to travel through Kano International Airport; but when we got to Kano State and still did not head towards the Airport, I began to feel very uncomfortable. On getting to Agadez, I could not hold it any longer as I was very weak and tired from no food and drinking water only once a day. I decided to ask the Trolley what was going on and why we were not using the aero plane as promised. He revealed to us that he was paid to take us to Libya by land route and that we had to manage the little resources that had been made available to him to buy water along the route as water was more important for our sustenance. When I heard what he had to say, I was infuriated and wanted to look for a way to go back but my friend then reminded me of the oaths we took and how we were in the middle of nowhere. We decided to keep moving but I then asked to contact a friend of mine to send in some money into my account so I could access it on getting to Dirkhoul or Libya. My friend sent the money and I was able to collect it

and use for food and buy other supplies such as ‘garri’ from other passengers which helped a lot along the trip...

For this respondent, protesting and crying out for help did not indicate she reneged from the conditions of the oath she had taken; neither did it mean she would not continue the journey. For her, it meant that she would seek alternate arrangement and make plans for her welfare while on the route. On this note, it is pertinent to say that the oath taken was one of the reasons that deterred her from protesting to the relevant authorities, that is, she could have informed her friend of her predicament and asked her to report to the relevant authorities in charge; but instead, she asked for money to sustain her in the wilderness of horror in which she had found herself.

A third category of the naïve potential sex worker finds expression in groups who were also deceived and manipulated into the trip but were spared the agony and violence of going through the land route. Instead, the sex workers in this category are given (sometimes forged) documents and flown to the destination in Europe. These individuals are led to believe that the madam had expended a lot of resources on the trip and their primary obligation was to pay back the agreed upon amount by engaging in sex work which they were not told initially.

Ikeora (2016) opines that the term ‘brainwashing’ should not be employed in relation to oath taking and trafficking for sex work. She argues that the sex workers believe in the oath taking practice and its efficacy. This belief in the oath is taken advantage of by the madams and manipulated to suit their cause. This research confirms Ikeora’s claim but reveals that the ‘brainwashing’ of potential sex workers begins when the madams do not disclose the implication of the amount to be paid back by the girls, or the harsh reality of the job on arrival in Europe. The network creates an impression that the debt incurred at the recruitment and trafficking stage is easily achievable within a short period as long as they can obey the instructions given to them.

Another respondent recollected:

I had agreed to pay forty thousand Euros to my Madam; I took the oath and waited for my documents to be issued. My visa was issued and I travelled to Italy few days later. On arrival I was introduced to the work, I reluctantly accepted. I eventually accepted because of the oath I had

taken. I worked for over a year and I realized that the money I agreed to pay was not small money considering the amount I made on a weekly basis and what I had been able to pay back in a year. Based on my calculations and records I had not been able to pay half of the money I agreed with my madam in a year...I was yet to send money home to my family...

The respondent above did not understand the financial debt she plunged herself into when she accepted to involve herself with the madam. She did not put into consideration the exchange rate at the point of acceptance; rather her goal was to make money.

The different categories of sex workers that were introduced to the network and experienced more untold and unspeakable trauma compared to other categories. This may be as a result of their effort to keep to the instructions of the oaths or abide by the rules the madam and other leaders (Trolley and Juju priest) spelled out to them out of their inexperience.

A different group of sex workers also exists. This particular group has some experience of some sort and has been exposed to relatives or friends who had in the past embarked on the trip to Europe (Sanchez, 2001) and returned to tell an interesting story of wealth and affluence. For this category, the desire to become rich against all odds supersedes whatever conditions they have to face: the horrific experience on the desert, the life threatening 'balloon' boat-ride on the Mediterranean Sea coupled with the harsh condition of work in Italy, being always on the run from the police, exposure to strange weather conditions, and so on. Here, the findings of Kienast et al (2014) confirm the notion that some victims elect to embark on such journey to effect a change in their economic status. This is also in line with Atttoh's (2007) research that speaks to the concept of remittances to effect development back home and how this has begun to influence the perceptions of the Edo's towards sex work.

This group of girls understand the significance of the oath and are willing to go ahead without causing any complication for the network. A respondent from Muritala Mohammed way in Benin confirmed that:

My madam did not inform me of the nature of the job I was to do in Italy; rather, she told me I was going to be a nanny for her friend's kids. In fact, she

asked me to try to learn some nursery rhymes in order to keep up with the charade. I had a neighbour who had gone to Italy very wretched and had come back to build a gigantic edifice for her parents in Benin. Another cousin of mine whose mother was heavily in debt was able to set up a very lucrative business for her mum when she went to Europe. So, when I heard of the 'connection', I was determined to go through with the process, so far it did not include loss of my life. However, at some point I really wanted to return, then I remembered that I was not going to come back home to anything, and I had sworn to pay back money to my madam and of course, the condition of living in Benin was not welcoming, I decided to forge ahead and brace all the odds. At some point on the trip towards Libya in the desert, rebels were raiding and we had to hide in the empty tanker of a petrol truck, it was so hot inside and everyone had to maintain silence despite the urge to cough from insufficient air. We all kept still until it was safe to come out. I sweated so much that day and I thought I was going to lose my life but it did not deter me from continuing the journey as I was determined to get to Italy to make it in life....

Another category of sex workers has also been identified. This group is quite different from the rest, its members are known as the 'initiators'. Sex workers in this category believe that they can only change the dystopian condition of living which they are exposed to in Benin by securing a trip to the global North which they believe is a land of plenitude. They seek the attention of the traffickers and commit themselves to the conditions of travel and work, however unfavourable. They are told of the nature of the job, the conditions of travel and the debt they incur from being a part of the network. For such people it is a conscious venture; this venture may have been conceived by parents or relatives of the potential sex worker as a consequence of the extremely impoverished life that is their reality (Blackburn et al, 2010) as captured in the revelation below:

They tell me before I go oh", meaning, I was told before I embarked on the trip. I was in hell in Benin here, I had a son whom I needed to provide for, but the means was not there. To eat was a problem, and then my mother who was a small time farmer had accident while on the farm I was desperate to look for a way out. I told some of my closest friend of my predicament; then one of them told me of the opportunity to go and meet a woman who recruits girls to Italy. The woman who became my

madam took me to a local pub in Benin where sex workers display themselves for prospective clients. There she told me to look at them that that was the kind of work I was going to Italy for. She then asked me to go home and think about it and then give her a reply. I told her immediately that I was interested and didn't need to think about it further....

It becomes obvious at this point that instances where returnees from Italy display their wealth might have been 'staged' to create the desired effect for desperate young girls who will become future sex workers themselves. Therefore, the rich and sophisticated lifestyle of those 'former' sex workers who attained their 'freedom' and begin to 'live the dream' becomes the 'bait' for this category of potential sex workers who intend to make it against all odds. For this group, the oath taking becomes extremely mandatory as there is higher likelihood of defaulting on the promise of the oath arising from the desperation to survive.

The identification of different categories of potential sex workers recruited to different parts of Italy from Edo State highlights the fact that to some groups, the oaths taken before embarking on the journey plays a vital role in keeping them in check throughout their sojourn. For other groups, the oaths taken alongside the lure to 'get rich' are the contributing factors; for some others, the desire for success is the motivating factor, while the oaths taken are conceived as 'occupational hazard'.

Of the 22 returnees interviewed during the course of this project, 73% of them fell into the inexperienced category that had no idea of the nature of the job and were taken to the shrine for oath taking. They went through the desert route and did not protest, especially when they found out the working conditions in Italy.

Another 10% were naive and vulnerable as well and protested the working/travelling conditions to some extent, but also remained as a result of the oaths they had taken. 50% of the respondents had some knowledge of the nature of the job as a result of previous stories heard but went ahead as a result of both the oaths and the desire to leave the 'dystopian' condition in which they find themselves. The study further reveals that 10% of the returnees had established knowledge of the intended 'job', were informed that the trip would be by land route and still opted to carry on, while 2% was not aware the trip was to be by land 'route' but still went on with the plan. For

these ‘hustlers’ the experience however traumatic becomes a part of the ‘suffering they had to undergo to get the ‘prize’, here Iocono (2014) gives a case for the narrative going beyond ordinary binaries to shed more light on the complexities involved in the trafficking system.

This submission strips the system off the idea of merely categorizing a group as victims and labelling another as perpetrator, rather it seeks to understand the phenomenon in its complexity rather than employ a reductionist approach that compartmentalises the conversation. Especially as ‘perpetrators’ in this case sometimes employ a sympathetic approach to their victims in the sense that there are no traces of violence in their dealings with trafficked victims but a sort of relationship that can be described as ‘mother-daughter, mentor-mentee’ as the case may be. And in reality these roles are embodied by the so-called madams as they serve as counsellors, providers and advisers to their ‘hustlers’.

The Madam

According to Europol (2011), there is an increase in the number of traffickers over the years. This means that the traffickers have devised innovative methods of trafficking victims across the borders to Europe. Ikeora (2016) explains that sex work networks in Edo State vary in their mode of operation, but that the structure is in most cases quite constant. These varieties are dependent on a number of factors, for example, the number of women and girls to be recruited. The Madam heads the network; she finances the operation and gives orders on the next line of action.

In this vein, Carling (2005), opines that the madams are usually former victims of the sex trafficking network who have gained freedom from their former madams. They thereafter decide to set up their own network, serving as madams to new sets of victims. These facts underscore their expertise in recruiting new victims into the network. Although the process of recruitment and transportation of women and girls to Italy is regarded as clandestine (see Attoh, 2007), the madam lets word out that ‘she is recruiting’ girls. She beckons on friends, relatives, former colleagues, and former acquaintances made during the course of her own trafficking as well as church members in some cases. One of the respondents, who went to Italy but was recruited via the pastor of her church, recollected that:

I was a chorister in the church everyone usually told me they liked my voice and whenever I sang, the spirit came down. It was one of my singing days that Brother Valentine told me that pastors would like to see me. The pastors told me that I was very talented and that they would help me develop my talent; they convinced me that I would make it in Europe big time as a musician , if I could make good music like I did in the church . I was very excited and was ready to go through with the processes.

The madam's signal here, underscores the chain of communication as it plays out in a transnational network (Vertovec, 1999). Although not physically present in Benin City or Edo State, the madam is able to coordinate the activities of the network through the help of the 'pastors' from another space without any form of restrictions. This is in line with the principle of transnational networks that seek to find a common, 'criminal' ground to operate.

Further findings revealed that the pastor of the church already knew the nature of the job and how the whole recruitment was to be done, having prior knowledge that the girl would be taken to the temple for oath taking. Notwithstanding this understanding, he still chose to conspire with the traffickers using his spiritual position to lure church members into the traffickers' network. The respondent has this to say:

The pastor is a close friend to the madam that recruited me. I was introduced to a man of God who headed a spiritual church he had a sister who lived in France and operates a sex work network. The pastor told me point blank that he would take me to place where I would get 'fortified' for the job ahead, it was during the fortification that I swore to payback fifty thousand Euros to my madam and to always obey her.

The research identified other techniques and strategies devised by the head of the network in the recruitment of potential sex workers. Sometimes this is done by stories she spins about herself or by the agents she employs to recruit these girls (see EASO, 2015). It should be noted that the madam was a one-time sex worker. She also has to be a step ahead of authorities, according to Ikeora (2016), in her bid to make successful moves in ensuring the new recruits get to their European destination As a consequence of anti-trafficking moves, some madams have managed

to stay clear of directly running the affairs of the network (see Mancuso 2014), while some others have maintained their position as the central point of the operation (Siegel & De Blanc 2010; Prina 2003; Carchedi & Tola, 2008). The research was able to reveal among other things the different roles played by the madam in the recruitment process. These are discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Active Involvement in the Recruitment Process

For some Madams, directly handpicking the potential sex worker is a priority, this demands more often than not their presence in Benin City, the help of others might be required in the process; but they make sure to view the girls before the recruitment process is over. This could be done by having a friend or relative introduce her to the potential sex worker as Kienast et al (2014:9) suggests, it becomes quite easy for women to approach these potential victims as they have "easier access to other women...". One of the respondents confirmed that:

I had a customer who usually came to make her hair in my salon. I was always happy to see her because she always tipped me generously and there were sure to be lots of things to talk about whenever she's around. One day she came and offered making me her desired hairstyle, she asked me if I would be interested in going abroad to make hair in her sister's shop. Since I was very good, I was very happy and I told her that it was a welcome idea. After some arrangements, she told me she was going to introduce me to her sister, who I would be working for abroad. This was the first time I met the woman who would later become my madam

The question to ask at this point will be, why would the madam need others to introduce her to the girls or why should there be an introduction in the first instance and why is it that the madam herself did not walk up to the potential sex worker, introduce herself and make her intentions known? These submissions speak to the focus of the EASO report (2015) that engages the idea that the madams contract agents that have either familial relationship or friendship ties to the potential victim. The success of the operation is perhaps hinged on the notion that the society generally perceives that women have been constructed to possess a sensitive nature that characteristically exudes greater innocence than criminality. This perception of society has made

women a trustworthy category, perhaps incapable of involving in criminal activities. Kienast et al, (2014) while drawing from Siegal and de Blanc, notes that the roles women play in the trafficking network are on the increase as pimps, priestesses of temples and matriarchs who sponsor these operations.

Non-Active Involvement of Madams in the Recruitment Process

Other categories of madams do not participate directly in the recruitment process. They make arrangement for the recruitment, transportation and delivery of the sex worker to them at specific destinations in Europe. In this way, the madams employ other agents to run the operations but are able to “influence all phases of the crime by acting as organizers of, and focal points for, the entire trafficking process” (Mancuso, 2014:3). They are central to the sustenance of an active transnational criminal network that resonates beyond spatial enclaves and produces a vibrant community that recreates itself (Carling, 2005). Over the years, the madams have withstood and subverted the demands and pressure posed by anti trafficking groups.

This category of madam is more flexible and have created a ‘successful cliché’ for themselves that paints a picture of affluence and integrity in the minds of the potential sex worker; thus the potential victims are convinced of the credibility of the ‘story’ of an awaiting position or job in Europe. To maintain this cliché, the madams therefore rely on the existing networks in Benin to oversee operations such as visiting the temples for the oath taking ritual, which may otherwise dent the exquisite image of success these categories of madams have tried to portray.

A neighbour of mine introduced me to a man that promised to take us to Italy. He arranged for our document to be processed and convinced us to take an oath. He said we were going to work for his sister, whom he made sure we spoke to at intervals. It was when I got to Italy that I realized that the man’s sister who I had been speaking with on phone was my madam and she had employed her brother to organize the travelling process and oath taking

The Madam and the Oath

Findings revealed that the praxis of oath taking in Edo has peculiar dimensions in comparison to identified oath taking practice by past scholars. Similar to the “Medieval times in Europe, the art of entering into this contract is called doing homage” (Scott, 2009:54 cited in Jegede 2011:148).

In the course of the research, the study identified the similarities and differences in the oath taking practice in Edo and the medieval fealty oath. For the fealty oaths, the vassal pledges allegiance to the feudal lord, and the feudal lord in return pledges allegiance to the vassal. There is a major and minor in this type of oath and the interest of the major is to be served. The major expects certain duties from the minor; so also the minor expects from the major, each party in the oath therefore promises certain things to the other and if the contract is violated, then the fealty can be defied (Jegede, 2011). The oath taking practice in Benin today is quite similar to the fealty oath but has its own peculiarities. The difference in the practice lies in the fact that the minor is the only participant in the process, while the madam is not bound to participate as she is merely an observer. In this practice the interest of the madam is to be served, like in the fealty. None of the respondents stated that their madam swore any oath to abide by the agreement they had reached, neither did they promise to abide to “specified statement of duties” like the potential sex workers did.

All the returnees interviewed maintained that they swore to always obey the instructions of their Madam. Does this therefore mean that the sex worker who has taken the oath is bound to the madam as a result of the statements made while swearing? While the madam in turn is free to do as she wishes because she is not bound by anything? Here, the oath taking practice of Benin transnational sex work contrasts with the practice of fealty oaths, as in the fealty, all the parties involved, both lords and vassals are required to adhere strictly to the provisions of the oath, any party who breaks the promise is made to face the consequences.

A returnee respondent confirmed that:

I paid my money judiciously to my madam on return from work every day. I had nearly completed the agreed amount, paying everyday while my madam recorded my payments in a designated notebook. Then she (my madam) set me up with the police, I had

less than one thousand Euros left to pay and I had gone on a trip with a generous client. On getting down from the taxi that brought me home, the police were waiting for me; they handcuffed me and led me to their vehicle that took me straight to the deportation camp. I was not allowed to even carry my own belongings. On getting to Nigeria, I learnt that my madam was responsible for my arrest by tipping off the police of my whereabouts which led to my deportation.

According to the interpretation of this incident among respondents, the madam referred to in the above testimony knew that the sex worker would complete her debt payment and then become a threat to her network operation since the sex worker would not be bound anymore to her after the debt payments. It was revealed that the oath that was taken by the sex worker was to elicit compliance to the directives of the madam. The madam is not obliged to abide by any regulation *vis-a-vis* the oath. This makes it quite easy to manipulate the authorities in her favour thereby truncating the sex worker's stay in Italy. In this case, the madam is the sole beneficiary of her actions. This would enable her recruit a fresh batch of sex workers that would dominate the streets without the interference of the experienced sex worker who will serve as a serious competition for the new 'recruits'.

According to Europol (2011), most madams were in the past victims of the same sex work network, this implies that they were minors in the network before they became majors and at that point of being a madam they emerged as threat to the previous madam by engaging clients from the old madam's client base. Carling (2005) also confirms that the system becomes a self producing organization. The implication of this oath practice is that the contract is one sided and the madam can always terminate such contracts or request a renewal whenever she deems fit.

On arrival in the destination country in Europe, the dependence of the 'hustlers' on the agency and protection the madam and the network provides also brings to light the earlier suggestion of madams who have a 'humanitarian outlook' and have been labelled 'good' by their 'hustlers'. This is quite interesting as most of these 'hustlers' have contacted the madams directly to seek entrance into the network as a strategy for survival.

The ‘Juju’ Priest

The juju priest is an individual (male or female) regarded as a spiritual leader, ‘ohen’ or native doctor, Simoni (2013) observes that the priests serve the purpose of surety to the network to ensure that the promise of the debt is secured. They also perform the functions of ‘fortifying’ the whole operation. The role of the ‘juju’ priest in the sex work industry in Benin cannot be overemphasized. Statistics have it that about 95% of trafficked victims go through a process of oath taking usually done in a shrine and conducted by a ‘juju’ priest, Ikeora (2016). The priest is usually not a direct employee of the leader (madam). His employment is contractual, to oversee the ritual process and handle all spiritual matters concerning the operation. This dual nature of the priest often confuse some victims who generally believe in the efficacy of the protection service offered by the priest but also have to come to terms with the oaths taken. What ensues therefore is a psychological dependence on the juju to serve as protection, which in a sense becomes a chain reaction of dependence. The spiritual affairs are in ranges:

Conducting the Oath Taking Ritual

The research study was able to identify the role of the juju priest in the sex work network. The role of the juju priest is primarily to conduct the oath taking ritual. (UNICRI 2010, Simoni 2014) In most cases the juju priest is aware of the intentions of the madam through the trolley or directly from the madam. The communication link between the juju priest and madam is always intact as he might be needed from time to time to reinforce’ the efficacy of the oaths taken by the victims, especially by uncooperative girls (Simoni, 2013).

This study reveals that the juju priest collects a fee for every girl that is brought in to swear. He prepares the shrine for the ritual and his justification mainly comes from the fact that the leader (madam) spends or intends to spend a lot of money ferrying the ‘potential’ sex worker across to Europe. To him, it is only fair that the sex workers work and pay back the agreed sum. The image about morality of the priest as a messenger of the gods here on earth can be questioned at this point. While most traffickers have employed the use of Ayelala temples and Priests (Simona, 2013), the justice Ayelala serves here is not hinged on whether the action the oath is needed for is good or bad; but rather, it is regarded as a means of demanding and receiving ‘justice’ if there is default. At this point, the attention moves to Madams or traffickers who do not stick to their

end of the promise, do they also bear the consequences of default like the lords in the medieval period? As confirmed by Jegede, (2011), the priest is usually the head of the proceedings in the shrine and has a 'direct' link to the gods. A respondent explained that:

When I got to the shrine in the company of the trolley and several other girls, we met a man who was the juju priest of the shrine. He requested that we remove our footwear and clothes to begin the ritual.

Counsellor/ Adviser

The priest also performs other functions apart from spiritual duties. He mediates whenever there is a dispute between the madam and the girl(s), or the girl(s) and the Trolley. The girls/madams also contact him periodically for advice and counsel. One of the respondents confirmed that:

On getting to Italy after the long trip in the desert, I was shocked at the kind of work my madam expected me to engage in. I cried and cried for days and then sought advice from the other girls. They advised me to stay-on and work as I was already there; but I was not convinced and so did not follow them out to work. My madam soon ran out of patience and decided to call the 'juju' priest who conducted the oath-taking ritual back home in Benin. My madam was very angry and told the priest to speak with me and try to convince me. He spoke with me, reminding me of the oaths I had taken and how his 'juju' can make me 'suffer' in life which he didn't want to happen. He asked if I was the only one in such predicament and told me to seek advice from the other girls on how to 'do' the work. He also mentioned that the 'juju' might decide not to affect me if I renege on the agreement of the oath but instead affect my mother.

From the above testimony, it is clear that the priest also serves as a 'surety' and 'counsellor'; as they become a constant reminder of the oaths taken while at the same time serve the purpose of a 'coach'.

This role is likened to the idea depicted by Gifford (2004) in an attempt to capture the changing paradigms of Christianity in Ghana in the wake of political and economic instability. Africans find solace and hope through religion, while the spiritual leaders prey on the inadequacies of the state to become 'life coaches' that members are extremely dependent on. In relation to the

network, this dependency confers agency on the juju priests, who then operates from a position of authority over the madams and the victims. It also seeks to explain their relevance in the network; if any decision is to be taken, the opinion of the priest is highly esteemed. All these services are generally carried out for a fee.

Miscellaneous Duties

Research revealed that the 'juju' priest also performs other functions in the network. For example, they oversee the preparation of materials containing some form of magic, called 'enhancers' which are prepared by special arrangement between the priest and the sex worker, or between the madam and the priest on behalf of the sex worker. The items of juju may get to the sex worker when she has already begun work in Italy.

Cleansing rituals are also conducted by the priests especially on girls who are said to have 'unclean' spirits. The cleansing aims to purify the individual of such unclean spirits and sever the links with them. As a priest confirmed:

I also help them make juju that would help them along the journey and for some of the girls who are going to work as prostitutes, I prepare charms and amulets which if handed over to them at the point of oath taking rituals, their parents or relatives package and send it across to them. Sometimes the girls are not fit to go by land, I call upon the gods to protect them, in that case, they have to go through a cleansing ritual where incisions are made on either their private part or chest or arms which helps to ward off evil spirit along the route and protect them from various forms of harm.

The Administrator as Trolley

Carling (2005) opines that the trolley is very important personnel in the sex work network in Benin. Their duties include but are not limited to recruitment, delivery and organization of the sex workers among others.

They can be male or female and are always available to perform their required duties. Findings revealed that the Trolleys are the brain child of the recruitment process in Benin City. They identify potential sex workers, and also arrange meetings with the potential sex workers already

identified, organize the trip, oversee the oath taking ritual and also accompany the potential sex workers on the trip which involves crossing territorial boundaries. The trolley wields so much power in the network and is responsible for the success or failure of the operation. Domiciled in Benin, the Trolley is mostly handpicked by the madam who must have heard of his reputation. In fact, in some cases the madam does delegate her duties to the Trolley who manages the operation from the recruitment to the delivery of the sex workers all the while reporting to the madam. This underscores the position of UNODC Report (2010) that ‘specialists abound that are saddled with the responsibility of administrative duties’. They may or may not be directly involved in the network but their operations are closely connected to provide supplementary services to the network, for instance, obtaining forged documents from local experts, knowledge of the best routes to take, connections with immigration officers and recruiting new victims. Where the madam is on ground physically the Trolley is also recruited to perform the specific functions that fall into his areas of expertise. The range of the Trolley's responsibilities is discussed below.

Processing of Travelling Documents

The Trolley in his case contacts a network of individuals who have connections with authorities responsible for the procurement of travel document such as international passport, UNODC (2010). Their level of connection cannot be ascertained at the point of this research, but one is left to question the integrity of government officials who prepare such documents without demanding explanation for the recurring demand of travel documents. Instances where the need for ‘fake’ documents arises, the Trolley also has connection with network rings that would provide such documents.

A Trolley respondent had this to say:

Our work involves so many things; you can't call it a job. It's like using the connections we have to get what we want, I have ‘eyes’ in all government agencies that help to provide travel documents that the girls would need, sometimes if we can't get the one from the legal authority, we go for the fake travel documents that are very similar to the original. In fact,

if you don't take a good look at it you won't differentiate it from the original document.

Identification and Organization of New Recruits

In charge of the most sensitive part of the operation the trolley looks out for young, naïve girls who will fit into their purpose. In doing this, they require the input of agents who feed them information about the girl or introduce him to different girls (Carling 2005; Cherti et al; 2013, Landinfo 2006) these agents are familiar persons that are perceived to be trustworthy, in form of peers, neighbours and relatives. Cherti et al's research corroborates this finding. They revealed that 29 out of 40 women interviewed had been recruited by someone they or their family members were familiar with while 6 women out of 40 were introduced to the network by their family members or a colleague. About 7 women were recruited by guardian or employer, 9 of the interviewed women were introduced to the network by family friends or neighbours, while only 11 women in the study were recruited by total strangers. The role of the trolley in the operation of the network goes beyond recruitment alone. They also perform the duty of a travel guide and companion, tasked with delivering the potential sex worker through Niger and Libya, (or by air) across to Europe and makes sure they arrange with the Madam in Italy while ensuring that the potential sex workers cross the Mediterranean at a time when the tides are low, so as to make for easy crossing and safe delivery of the travellers. In cases like this, one can deduce that the trolley takes on additional duties to ensure the safety of his passengers. This is good for his reputation and also furthers the cause of the network. (Women's link Worldwide, 2015). One of the respondents affirmed that:

A friend of mine introduced me to the man who was in charge of the processing of the trip. It was the trolley that helped me secure my international passport at a fee, he also was the one who took 'us' to the juju priest that conducted the oath. On the day we embarked on the trip, I learnt he was also the one that would take us through the desert. I later found out that he was a returnee from Libya who was very conversant with the 'route' we took.

For the kind of trolley above, his task was not only organizing and recruiting the girls for the trip. It also entailed delivering them across the desert for a fee. The view resonates with the research

conducted by Women's link Worldwide which depicts the trolley as 'guidemen' who use their previous travel experience to their advantage and make a living out of the booming trafficking industry (Plambech 2014). This study identified how the trolley secures his or her recruits, how he evades the authorities such as NAPTIP in his or her illegal operations. One of the respondents had this to say:

I got wind of the operation through a friend we did our Ordinary National Diploma together; she and the 'trolley' were related. When my friend asked of my interest and I signified interest, she took me to him and then he began planning for me to join the 'trip'.

As revealed in the respondent's testimony, the use of informal networks to 'spread the word' is quite advantageous to the trolley, they exploit it and makes sure family members, friends, etc., are aware of his trade. The trolley is also saddled with the responsibility of locating a 'powerful' priest to conduct the oath ritual. In identifying such priest, he/she has to 'test' their powers for the suitability of his demands. Kienast et al (2014) observes that these administrators could represent any gender and women who act as trolleys are very knowledgeable of the operations as they may have at a point been former sex workers themselves (Carling 2005).

A trolley respondent revealed that:

In our work, we have to carefully select the 'juju' priest to use. Some priests are better when it comes to preparing 'protection' charms which is also needed as not all the people we deliver across the desert are girls; some men who want to go to Europe for 'greener pastures' also seek our services. For this kind of job, we require a priest that has protection spell expertise; if I am to deliver girls to their madam who wants them to stay under 'control', I will get a priest who is renowned for his 'oath-taking' powers. In short, the make-up of my 'passengers' determine the kind of priest to use.

The study identified that the Trolley keeps contacts with different 'juju' priest as part of his job description to ensure the compliance of his passengers and for a smooth journey. Trolleys are

basically of different types. There is that one who is regarded as the “ king of the desert” because he has crossed successfully, guiding a lot of people, while the other has a string of contacts with forgers who help to secure documents for madams who are willing to pay more for the passage of their ‘wards’.

Their jobs have become threatened with the presence of more and more returnees from Libya who claim to also have contacts along the route who can successfully take people across. The whole operation is a money-making venture and achieving success in any operation adds ‘feathers’ to his reputation thereby building a clientele base.

From the above submission, it becomes apparent that although the Trolley is an employee of the leader of the operation, he is more central to the success of the operation in most cases and only requires a ‘financier’ which the madam fills suitably. The Trolley is more often than not, the ‘face’ of the operation and madams who love to protect their anonymity prefer to employ their ‘services’ from the beginning of the operation. For a madam therefore who is still renegotiating her feeling of ‘inbetweenness’ in Vertovec’s (1999) words, the ties she has maintained so far with the network back home in Nigeria becomes reliable enough to produce a trolley whenever the need arises, no matter how long she has been away from home.

Finally, it is important to recalibrate our understanding of different narratives especially in the African space that tends to simplify notions of our existence, rather an approach to embracing our complexities as a group and redefining stereotypes.