

How Does an Understanding of the Root Causes of the Nigerian Human Trafficking in Italy Allow for Effective Responses?

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Introduction

“The magnitude, forms and impacts of trafficking, both individually and on a societal level are more alarming and devastating than ever before” (Okojie 150). The Palermo Protocol Article 3 UN, 2000 defines human trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution as “ *the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of 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 of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation*” (Rudolph and Schneider 40, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 18,20, Smith 271, Degani 7,30, O'Connor and Healy 8, Rudolph and Schneider 40, Taliani 596, Samarasinghe 41). In other words sex trafficking occurs with the use of either hard or soft power, defined by Joseph Nye as physical violence and threats, making the victims believe the exploiters are omnipotent, or through the use of manipulation, fake promises and illusions, mostly by people close to the victim, such as family and friends, so that exploiters achieve the wanted outcomes, respectively (Taliani 5781,584, Okojie 153, “Global power”, Akor 92). Both Gioia and Precious were manipulated into thinking that they would be going to Italy to work in a farm, but once they got to Italy they were threatened through violence to go out on the streets and make money as prostitutes (“Benin City”). According to the UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons 2016, human trafficking for sexual exploitation and prostitution remains the predominant form of trafficking constituting 54% of human trafficking (UNODC). This is a phenomenon that is extremely important to combat and is at the forefront of various states and non state actors, with the aim of stopping, as it a violation of fundamental human rights to the point in which it is considered a form of modern slavery (Fagnani, Samarasinghe 48, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 20, Smith 272, Okojie 148, Akor 90-1, King 88). It is a human rights violation as it takes away fundamental rights such as the right to live (in 2006, 50% of prostitutes died due to murder (O'Connor and Healy 14-5)), the right to protected liberty, the right to security, the right to health (increases STIs, HIV, STDs), the right to protected work, and the right to gender equality (Degani 5, Fagnani, Rudolph and Schneider 39, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 20-21, Okojie 148, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Taliani 582, Ezeilo). Overall it takes away a person’s dignity, objectifying them and reducing them to a state of helplessness (“United Nations” 6, Ezeilo).

This issue is especially a big problem in Italy with Nigerian victims, as “of the over 70,000 African victims of women trafficking, Nigerian women account for 70 percent of those trafficked in Italy”(Akor 1), 95 percent of which come from the Edo State (Degani 4,33, O'Connor and Healy 4, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Samarasinghe 33, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 20-1, Smith 274,280, Okojie 147, Akor 89,97).

According to the United Nations “it is widespread and growing” (“United Nations” 6, Akor, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu, “Benin City”). In Italy alone there was an augment of 750% of Nigerian

trafficked victims for sexual exploitation in two years, going from 1,500 trafficked Nigerians in 2014 to over 11,000 in 2016 (“Benin City”). According to the United Nations this is due to “social and economic conditions in the countries from which the victims come” (“United Nations”). However this can also be seen as a consequence of failed responses that have been implemented to combat this issue. This is because the given responses, rather than closely examining and analyzing all of the causes that lead to this phenomenon, have only been focused on one specific cause. For this reason the question explored in this essay is: How does an understanding of the root causes of the Nigerian human trafficking in Italy allow for effective responses? The political issue being examined is therefore the root causes of this phenomenon and the solutions, researched using the following methods: case study, analyses of discourse, literature review and evaluation. I chose these various approaches as that allows for a deeper understanding of the political issue and the evaluation of given responses. As this topic is one that regards a clandestine natured trade, most of my sources are of secondary nature, in which the causes are explained through theories and subjects such as international relations, power, development, poverty, human rights, cooperation, Neomarxism, Feminism, Realism, Idealism, Liberalism and violence. I also used primary sources, however, that consisted of experts in different fields that have worked with victims and recount their stories.

By using the previously explained research method, this essay will show how human trafficking for prostitution of Nigerians in Italy is a human rights violation that can only be combatted using an interconnected approach in which an understanding of how criminality, the economy, development, culture and politics are all correlated, in causing this phenomenon to be maintained and grow (Ogwokhademhe 5279). As this is a complex issue in which many interconnected factors are at the root of it, it is important for a multidimensional solution to take place in which the State is at the frontline, cooperating with different global actors, bringing together different capabilities to achieve effective response (Ezeilo).

Starting with the obvious: a criminal root

From a liberal-idealist perspective, human trafficking for prostitution has to be dealt through the newly responses put in place by IGOs in which both state and non state actors take a rehabilitative approach for the victims and a criminal, punitive approach for the profiting actors (Akor, Ezeilo, Fagnani, King 89-90). This because, idealism looks at the world using an interconnected and interdependent approach in which human rights drive global actors to cooperate, promoting peace (Sydner). International Law dictates that human trafficking for prostitution is a crime as it is easy to do and the law isn’t effective in punishing the traffickers (Akor, Ezeilo, Fagnani, King 89-90). It is the third third largest kind of illicit international commerce, emphasizing on its large criminal imprint (Rudolph and Schneider 39, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 18, Okojie 149). Human trafficking in general is easily accessible. Anyone can take part in the trade as; 1) there are no specific requirements, 2) there is a high demand for prostitution in Italy, totaling to around 9 million clients (“Benin City”), 3) victims are vulnerable and easily exploited, and, 4) there are low risks as it is a system sustained through the corruption of politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats,

in particular in embassies, and armed forces (Degani 27, Taliani 600, Samarasinghe 34, 42-3, Okojie 162, Ogwokhademhe 5279). For instance, Italian law enforcement directly collects bribes from “madams”, facilitating and incentivizing this growing trade (Smith 279). For this reason one of the solutions proposed by the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, is the punishment of traffickers with rehabilitation and assistance of victims (“United Nations” 41). Human trafficking, however, is hard to punish and persecute as; 1) “trafficking is a crime that transcends borders, and therefore jurisdiction” (King 89), 2) it is costly to implement and police the illicit trade, and 3) “victims of trafficking are hesitant to identify traffickers for fear of repercussion”(King 89). As laws are bound to states and human trafficking is a problematic that involves the crossing of borders from one state to another, laws that are replicable in one country don’t apply to another country, as a country needs to have jurisdiction over a person. Therefore a Nigerian trafficker will not be able to get prosecuted in Italy (King 89, “Benin City”). Exodus, for example, who has been trafficking victims from Libya to Italy, hasn’t been prosecuted and questions why he should be seen as punishable, but the families that are proven to send off their kids knowing their fates are not (“Benin City”). This to show that even if the trafficker is blamed, there are other individuals involved that have equivalent moral responsibility, even though isn’t acknowledged by the law. Prosecutions dealing with international crimes is also costly to states and disincentivizes governments to police it. As victims are scared that themselves will get punished for traffickers’ acts or that traffickers might ‘punish’ them first, there are only few victims that denounce their prosecutors, limiting the law’s capability of prosecuting traffickers. This fear can be seen as a consequence of cultural ideologies that stigmatize victims as part of the problem (King 89). Taking this new approach has lead to many initiatives in which Nigeria has signed both unilateral and bilateral agreements, one being the bilateral agreement designed to combat clandestine immigration with Italy in September 2000, as a way to decrease human trafficking (Okojie 165). Nigeria has also created a government agency, the ‘National Agency for the Prohibition of Traffic in Persons (NAPTIP)’ for the rehabilitation/resettlement of victims, criminalizing clients (Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 23, Okojie 161,165, “Benin City”). In the field of re habilitation and support for trafficked is where major cooperation amongst state and non-state actors should be seen, as other entities that are better equipped to do this, such as medical and psychological clinics, such be heavily involved (O’Connor and Healy 22, Samarasinghe 37, “Benin City”) . Even though the numbers are still augmenting, these new initiatives taken by both countries show a clear understanding of this being “a national and international crime” which “means that no one country or government has the power and the resources to eradicate it all alone” (Akor 100). This acknowledgement allows for a fundamental base in which other factors can be taken into consideration as the leading causes of this phenomenon that therefore have to be addressed in the solutions. One of them, being the motivations that bring both criminals and victims in entering the trade.

So it must be the economy

From a liberal perspective, in which we live in a complex interdependence, connected through trade and technology, the economy can be seen as an interconnecting factor amongst all actors involved in

human trafficking, that has to be addressed as an internal grassroots issue, as to stop and prevent the phenomenon from growing (Sydner, “Benin City”). The economy brings together criminals and victims involved, as human trafficking for prostitution can be categorized as a business, in which the criminals are motivated by the economic profit, and the push and pull factors that lead the victims into human trafficking is the lack of economic security. The economic motivations that lead people to take part in the illegal trade and profit from it is such that it also pushes powerful lobbies to collaborate with the criminal organizations that manage the trade. It is, according to the Italian National Institute of Statistics, a trade that generates an enormous profit of 90 million euros per month, augmenting to 1.1 billion euros per year (“Benin City”). Criminal motivations can be explained through the greed of people wanting to make big money fast in easy ways. Greed is so powerful that it also pushes lobbies to contribute and profit from this trade, such as the touristic industry, entertainment industry and even the military, facilitating this trade (Degani 5, Samarasinghe 42). The economic profit that pushes both individuals, organizations and institutions to take part in this trade is correlated to the economic motivations, known as the push and pull factors, that encourage victims in entering the trade (Akor 92-3). The push factor is what leads people to leave the country of origin and the pull factor is what attracts victims to a particular destination. The push factor that makes it so that victims want to leave their country of origin, is poverty and underdevelopment. By using the Human Development Index (HDI), in which education, economic growth and health are evaluated, to measure a country’s development; Nigeria was, in 2015, ranked 153 out of 188 countries and territories, categorizing it as having a low human development (*Human Development*). This low ranking of Nigeria’s development, explained by its high poverty rates in which 53.5% of the population is living below the poverty line of \$1.90 per day and bad governance in which the government fails to deliver public services, such as health care, due to elite (political) corruption, makes it so that the Nigerian population is made more vulnerable and therefore susceptible to fake promises and violence, means used by traffickers (Akor 90-1, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 17-21, 27, Okojie 153,157-8, *Human Development*, Degani 4,5,16, Fagnani, Ogwokhademhe 5279 - 5280, Smith 279, “Benin City”). As poverty generates desperation, the stable economy in developed countries generates an attraction or ‘pull factor’ for those living in poverty. This pull towards developed countries is facilitated with globalization, in which the world becomes interdependent and interconnected with trade and technology, allowing for the internet to incentivize immigration, by showing imagery of “greener pastures abroad” (Degani 11, Samarasinghe 39,43, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 24-5, 27, Okojie 156, “Benin City”). In fact immigration is seen from economically poor countries to more economically developed states (Degani 6, O’Connor and Healy 4, Ogwokhademhe 5279 - 5280, Taliani 600, Rudolph and Schneider 40, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 17,22, Smith 272,275-6,279, Okojie 148). As victims look at developed countries thinking they could find economic opportunities and potentially even bring their families out of poverty, some voluntarily look for criminals to leave country of origin (Degani 7, Taliani 600, Akor 92). This was emphasized by “Eki Igbiniedion, chairperson of Idia Renaissance, an NGO involved in the fight against the trafficking” who “argues that the trafficking of women began recently as an economic arrangement, a simple survival strategy adopted by families desperate for a reprieve from

biting economic hardships” (Akor 92, “Benin City”). Often times, however, victims are not aware they will be forced into sex work, emphasizing on their vulnerability and susceptibility to being manipulated (Ezeilo). For this reason, Nigeria should take reformative measures within its economy and working with the support of IGOs, such as the United Nations, in which a large powerful entity, works with the local government, to bring about stable standards of living, to meet good governance and development (Okojie 169).

These push and pull factors are correlated through a neo-Marxist perspective, in which the developed ‘core’ countries are exploiting the underdeveloped ‘periphery’ countries, by implementing neoliberal principles in the local economy (Parenti, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 19, 26-7, Degani 13, Samarasinghe 33, Rudolph and Schneider 42, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 17-19, 26, Smith 275, Okojie 162). Neoliberalism is the current dominant economic policy in which the government’s intervention in the economy is reduced by enforcing free market with the privatization of services and growing influences of multinational corporations (MNCs). Some experts in fact trace the beginning of trafficking in Nigerian women and girls for prostitution in Italy to the second half of the 1980s as a result of economic depression in Nigeria and the adoption of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), leading millions to descend into poverty. SAPs are international economic help given by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to underdeveloped countries in exchange of privatization of public structures and the opening of the underdeveloped countries to the global market (Okojie 153, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21-2, Akor 95). As Nigeria opened its economy to the global market and MNCs, the perfect terrain for exploitation and environmental degradation were established, as these corporations don’t follow environmental laws and use the population’s vulnerability to exploit them through underpaid labor (Okojie 158, Degani 5, Rudolph and Schneider 45, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 17, Fagnani, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 19). Human trafficking therefore contributes to a hyper-capitalist economy in which the push and pull factors incentivizing immigration and trafficking (Taliani 590). By further analyzing the economy that interconnects all of these actors involved in the trade, it is seen to be heavily affected by socio-political aspects, such as gender inequality in Nigeria that attributes to both the economic push and pull factors that have proliferated this trade (Samarasinghe 34, Ezeilo, O’Connor and Healy 4,7,9, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Okojie 156, “World gender”, Taliani 579-580, 582-3603, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21, Okojie 153,160).

It all starts with a culture

From a feminist perspective, Nigerian sex trafficking can be seen as a clear consequence of gender inequality, a form of cultural violence, that can only be combatted through a “ bottom-up social, economic and cultural change” (“United Nations” 41, Ezeilo, O’Connor and Healy 4, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Okojie 156, Luiz). Cultural violence, as defined by Johan Galtung, is the use of ideologies and beliefs that justify the discrimination and marginalization of specific groups of people, especially through policies and structures (Madenga 73-7) This can be seen by analyzing Nigeria’s underdevelopment using a feminist

perspective, in which poverty is seen to affect women before men, as they are taken out of education. This phenomenon is called “Increasing Feminization of Poverty” (O'Connor and Healy 4, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Okojie 156). This is because Nigeria is a culturally bound state with a lot of patriarchal views in which women are obliged to subscribe to these ideologies and traditions, even when it comes to education. In one case, Boko Haram kidnapped more than 270 girls in 2014 in Nigeria as a way threaten the population to stop sending girls to school. Gender inequality is further seen through the Gender Gap Index, evaluating health, access to education, economic participation and political engagement for women, which ranked Nigeria which ranked 106th out of 136 countries in the 2013 Gender Gap Index, evaluating health, access to education, economic participation and political engagement for women (“World gender”). This gap is not only due to socio-economic barriers, but also to the ideology that women are more vulnerable and easily manipulated, making them easier subjected to direct violence. A study found that majority of the women and girls that are trafficked for prostitution declare to have been victims of sexual or non sexual violence in their childhood (O'Connor and Healy 7,9, Taliani 579-580, 582-3603, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21, Okojie 153,160, Ogwokhademhe 5279). Here direct violence is underlined by a cycle which women fall into, including also the cutting of genital organs or sacrificing the stomachs of mother. This is backed up by cultural violence, justifying gender inequality with the cultural ideology of women being less valuable (Degani 5, Taliani 600, Samarasinghe 38).

Cultural violence is further seen as victims are psychologically and spiritually coerced through rituals and ideologies that make it hard for victims to escape this (O'Connor and Healy 7,9, Taliani 579-580, 582-3603, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21, Okojie 153,160, Ogwokhademhe 5279). On one hand, trafficking is used as a status symbol, as victims not only pay their debt to their *iyé onisan* (Edo expression for *madam*) , or trafficker, but also have to send money back to their family, of which many parents brag about and incentivize other families to do the ksame (O'Connor and Healy 7,9, Okojie 153, 160, Taliani 598-99, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21, Ogwokhademhe 5279). This idea is further emphasized through religious native doctors that encourage parents to sell their kids as it appeared to them in a dream that it is a sacrifice worth making (Taliani 581, 583, Okojie 160). These doctors then are the ones to sell women or girls to *madams* using ‘juju’ rituals in which women are psychologically terrorized as to have easier control and manipulation over them once in the destination country (O'Connor and Healy 9, Ogwokhademhe 5279, Taliani 579-580, 582-3, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 21, Okojie 153,160, “Benin City”). Florence, a victim, explained how it was a native doctor that manipulated her into migrating as he saw her destiny as being in another place, with a better life (“Benin City”). Another victim said “the obo threw some flames on my chest, by drinking some petrol and spitting it on the fire towards my body” (Taliani 597). This clearly demonstrates not only the psychological devastation, but also physical violence used to terrorize. The madams are also usually older emphasizing the cultural condition of superiority of the senior over the junior (Taliani 598). Using these cultural justifications to marginalize women and push them to leave the country, are however devastating as in Italy there are other cultural violences and policies put in place that further marginalize the victims, forming structural violence (Degani 9, 13, O'Connor and Healy 5). As

gender inequality is gaining attention amongst feminist and politicians, Italy has recently created a partnership with the European Institute of Gender Equality in 2006, in which policies and actions are taken with a focus on a human rights-based approach. This collaboration has allowed for greater cooperation amongst the government, civil society organizations, which have been able to assist an average of 2,000 victims per year (Ezeilo). This can have greater impact with the change of oppressive cultural ideologies, through sensitizing seminars in which the government, associations and religious entities educate in schools, Churches, Mosques, markets, and other public spaces (O'Connor and Healy 5, Okojie 170, Ogwokhademhe 5283, "Benin City"). Families also play an important role in the education process as they are the ones that have the most capability of setting morals that will be recognized and protected by their children and the next generations (Ogwokhademhe 5283). This is extremely important as a study taken place in Edo State, in 2013 showed that there is a lack of knowledge on and how traffickers 'seduce' victims (Ogwokhademhe 5283). Even though support and acknowledgment is rising for victims of trafficking, as long as the policies structurally oppress them, not much progress can be made.

Politics as a facilitator: what gives legitimacy to cultural and structural violence

By looking at human trafficking through a nationalist perspective, taking into account national security as a state's priority, negative impacts can be seen on trafficking victims, such as a rise in racism, discrimination and fear, as politicians are taking a stronger stance in which irregular migration is criminalized and migration is limited (Ezeilo). In the 70s and 80s, various geopolitical changes took place in Europe, facilitating the growth of the human trafficking industry as border controls were amplified and there was an increase in restrictive immigration laws. This has led traditional migration to turn to illegal smuggling and human trafficking. In fact human trafficking and exploitation was first analyzed at the beginning of the 1980s (Degani 6, O'Connor and Healy 6, Taliani 586, Samarasinghe 40, Okojie 155, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu 18). Migration policies have not only made it hard for people to migrate, but it has also made it hard for a migrant to stay there. This is because governments are criminalizing irregular migration, punishing anyone who doesn't have the correct documents. Under article 11 of the Italian Bossi-Fini Law irregular migration is prohibited and a migrant without the right documents can get both arrested and deported. This has, on one hand, created distrust amongst victims and migrants, who don't collaborate with Italian law enforcement to denounce traffickers or abuses. It has on the other hand also created confusion on how to deal with migrants, trafficked victims and refugees. There was a case in which a "Nigerian girl, trafficked for sexual exploitation, was misidentified and arrested as an irregular migrant on three separate occasions in Lampedusa and Turin" (Ezeilo). This confusion has also generated stereotypes that all Nigerian migrants are criminals and that since Nigerian victims of trafficking illegally crossed the border, the state shouldn't help them. This gives legitimacy to their abuse and further perpetuates stereotypes that are difficult to get rid of and marginalize Nigerians in Italy (Degani 9, 13, O'Connor and Healy 5). It is through policies that marginalize and create structural disadvantages for women that Nigerian sex trafficking can be seen as an unbreakable cycle in which victims for trafficking take on roles

of authority, managing the trade (Ezeilo). In fact, women make up the majority of the sex trafficking trade as often times, after being victims of this trade, they take on a higher position, becoming a madam and running the trade (Taliani 600, Ezeilo). As more people start to acknowledge the State's responsibility through structural violence there have been strong initiatives that show a country's commitment, however it is important to note that a political/state solution can only be effective in cooperation with other actors as "governments have incentives to underreport incidences of sex trafficking, limited resources to collect data and strong motivations to exaggerate their efforts to curb it" (Smith 279). For this reason other actors are however fundamental in this battle. Civil society, by justice organs, humanitarian NGOs, journalists, researchers, feminist associations, should all be in support of the government's changes and pressuring governments to take these actions when initiative is lacking or when it is encountering internal problems (Degani 28,32, Samarasinghe 34).

Conclusion and global significance

In conclusion, human trafficking for prostitution of Nigerians in Italy has been rising and can only be combatted when all of the causes leading to this phenomenon have been analyzed, not only taking into consideration criminality, but also the many other aspects that lead to it, such as the economy, cultural and structural violence ("United Nations" 6, Akor, Iyanda and Nwogwugwu). As these causes are all correlated, human trafficking for prostitution can be defined as a multifaceted issue in which a multidimensional solution has to be taken (Ogwokhademhe 5279, Degani 28,32, Samarasinghe 34). Everyone should be doing something because this economic system with neoliberal policies, this culture with discrimination and prejudices, this political world in which policies are passed supporting the cultural prejudices, are all supported by the world's population. As the first lady of Edo State, Mrs. Eki Igbinedion, said in October 2000 to "The Punch" Newspaper is that the entire society should be blamed for prostitution (Ogwokhademhe 5279). This however shouldn't dismiss the more important roles that do have more responsibility and more blame. The actor that should be on the frontline of this battle should be the State (O'Connor and Healy 22, Samarasinghe 37). Governments should change their policies, which structurally and indirectly oppress the more vulnerable, and implement economic solutions to decrease poverty rates and allow for realistic economic alternatives (O'Connor and Healy 22). The proposed solutions of the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime in which; 1) prevention through internal, grassroots approach that involves different actors working on a bottom-up social, economic and cultural change and 2) the punishment of traffickers with rehabilitation and assistance of victims, are presented, is fundamental and summarizes a deeper understanding of the interdependent and interconnected causes proposing effective change ("United Nations" 41).

Understanding this allows for a global significance; in which depending on how a person perceives an issue, the way of dealing with it and potentially resolving it changes. It is important that when analyzing any issue, from the most basic one (such as a medical outbreak or defining poverty), to a more

complex issue (such as immigration and human trafficking), all of the different aspects are being taken into consideration, looking at the issue through a multifaceted approach with multidimensional solutions. For this reason, this issue should be discussed amongst different actors that through cooperation can achieve a solution.

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