How Nigerian human trafficking networks use motherhood to maintain and introduce their victims into sexual exploitation

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**Abstract:** Nigerian human trafficking, in particular for sexual purposes, in the South of Italy has grown from the beginning of the 90s, consequently to the migration flow hail from Nigeria to the tomatoes’ harvest (Cole, 2006). The lack of implementation of an adequate policy to tackle the phenomenon in the territory, adding to the growth of migration flows from other countries has facilitated the roots of human trafficking. Due to the enhance of legal framework to tackle Human Trafficking, at national and international level, the criminal networks were obliged to adapt their strategies in order to introduce legally their victims in the European territory. Therefore, Nigerian criminal organizations started to use legally considered vulnerable categories, such as non-accompanied minors, as well as pregnant women and women with their children to avoid deportation into the origin countries. Since the majority of the victims is between 15 and 30 years old, the networks also have started to use motherhood in order to proceed with their exploitation on the European territory. Furthermore, considering that traffickers use the victims’ children as a coercive instrument to maintain them in sexual exploitation, the present study has the aim to: a) analyze the mothers’ and their children’s conditions; b) understand how Nigerian human trafficking networks use motherhood as a method to contour migration policies; d) verify the use of the children as a coercive instrument.

**Keywords:** Sexual exploitation; human trafficking; motherhood; coercive instruments; Nigerian criminal networks.

**Introduction**

According to the published data from the European Commission in its recent report “Trafficking in Human Beings EUROSTAT” (2014), a total of 30 146 human trafficking were identified in the 28 European member states, between 2010 and 2012, which 80% are women. The same report indicates that 80% of the victims are between 18 and 25 years old, which is the period of major fertility of the women, with a high probability to become mothers. In Italy, the European country with the highest number of identified victims, three quarters of the victims are women and three quarters of them are used for sexual exploitation purposes, being predominantly Nigerian and Romanian (GRETA’s, 2014).

The Nigerian feminine immigration in Italy, which was mainly originated from Edo State at the end of the 80s, on the contrary of other destination countries, was introduced without any religious, historic or cultural ties, pushed by a demand in the tomatoes harvest. In a second chronological phase, since that the harvesting of tomatoes was only in the summer, some of these women have started to be engaged in these industry. After understanding the profit earned in the activity, Nigerian women began to bring their female relatives and friends for the exploitation of prostitution. In 1989, in the main Italian cities there were around 6000 Nigerian women with the visa granted by the Italian embassy in Lagos, while by the half of the 90s this number has increased into 15 000 women. The emission of these visas by the Italian Embassy in Lagos has allowed Nigerian women to come directly by flight to Milan and Rome. Due to the huge number of visas granted by the Italian Embas-
sy, the District Attorney’s office of Torino has started an investigation that finished on the 28th 1999 with the prosecution of four years for the involved staff from the Embassy in Lagos.

Consequently, the traffickers have started to change their routes, passing majorly by England, Spain and Netherlands by plane and entering on the Italian territory by land. Furthermore, on the Second Millennium, with the enhancing of the International Legal Framework in Human Trafficking, the traffickers, not only started to diversify the routes, but also the strategies to enter in Europe. For instance, many Nigerians, knowing they would have difficulty to have a humanitarian visa, they started to declare of coming from conflict areas, such as Liberia. Recently, with the increased flow of migration coming through the Mediterranean, especially after the Arab Spring in 2011, Nigerian traffickers profit to transfer their victims by boat, mainly by the Sicilian Channel, but also through Spain. According to IOM on recent years, the arrival of Nigerian women coming through the Mediterranean in Italy had a high peak in 2007, followed by another peak in 2014 with the arrival of 1.454 Nigerian women. However, until October 2015 the number has reached 5500 women, with an increase of non-accompanied minors and in 2016 the number has reached a peak of 11.006 women (IOM, 2017). The increase of vulnerable categories such as pregnant women, non-accompanied minors and mothers indicates us the advantage of Nigerian criminal networks of migration policies in the European countries.

The aim of this research is to analyze the complex correlation between motherhood and Nigerians’ sexual exploitation. The author also intends to emerge how Nigerian human trafficking victims can be controlled by a criminal organization that limits their mobility, subjecting them to continuous relocation in different cities or countries in Europe. Furthermore, the victims live in conditions of partial or total deprivation of their rights, principally deprived from access to sanitary services and education facilities for their children. The traffickers seize their victims’ documentation, which leads the victim into a more vulnerable situation, thinking that without the identification documents; she will be taken and deported by the local authorities. The present research has the aim to fill literature’s blank space on the issue, correlating the subject of motherhood in human trafficking for sexual exploitation. An innovative feature of the present study is represented by the proposal to pass the focus to the children of the human trafficking victims, analyzing their vulnerability conditions and human rights violations. This article was based on implemented qualitative methodology through i) literature analysis; ii) press review analysis; iii) interviews iv) participant observation.

Using Vulnerable Categories to Contour Migration Law in European Countries

For several years, African women have declared to suffer major violence during their routes until Europe, especially regarding to sexual abuses. According to a study taken by the Association Women’s Link Worldwide (2009), 63% of the women coming through Morocco have declared to have suffered violence during their route and 17% have suffered from sexual violence (MSF, 2005). Since 2003, that MSF, as well as other organizations have correlated sexual violence with human trafficking and the smuggling networks operating through Morocco. Despite the fact that sexual violence on women during the migration route has been indicated by several international organizations as a method used by the traffickers to introduce these women pregnant in the Spanish territory, it was only recently that OIM (2015) has verified this possibility in the Italian territory. However, it has to be recognized that the Moroccan-Spanish route was one of the main entrance routes in the past for the entrance of Nigerian women used for sexual exploitation. Therefore, it is understandable that a major focus has been given to the women that have arrived pregnant or with newborns into the Spanish territory, rather than the ones arriving in Italy that only recently have registered an arrival increase.

In 2013, the Spanish authorities have investigated a Nigerian criminal network that used to rape their victims in Morocco, before their entrance into the Spanish territory, in order to make them arrive in Spain and avoid deportation by being under the Art 57, clause 6 of the Organic Law 4/2000 11th January (Guardia Civil, 2013). Due to the inducing of pregnancy, through rape and abusive violence, many of the women later are not able to recognize their children or even feel attached to them. For
instance, Ithoan arrived to the association Casa Rut in Italy pregnant, probably as a result of the abusive violence and rape that she suffered during her time in Morocco. Consequently, when her child was born, she has discharged the baby in the hospital and only recognized her child after the nuns have taken the child into the shelter house. (Giaretta, 2007)

According to a report from the NGO Casal Petit in Mallorca (2014), many women have arrived with children in Spain that they have given birth previously in Morocco. Despite that the women were able to arrive with their children in the European territory, the difficulty during the travel is enhanced by the presence of the child, especially regarding to the lack of food or water. Furthermore, some women that have had children during the travel route have had difficulty in getting birth certificates in the transit country, especially in Morocco, since they were considered illegal in the territory. Due to the influence of the criminal networks, some of the minors were able to arrive with a birth certificate that was obtained illegally and with false information. Nevertheless, the power of criminal networks in faking the documents might be used against the women, since they have no control of data indicated on the birth certificate.

Despite pregnancy is current during the travel, not all women give birth to the children, since they are obligated to perform abortions. In fact, the criminal networks are the ones who decide if the women stay a longer term in Morocco in order to give birth or if they have to do an abortion. Moreover, according to the stories in Women’s link worldwide (2014), the networks also propose the women to get pregnant more than once, in order to continuously use the children to arrive in Spain with other women. The decision depends if there is a high number of deportations on the destination country, in this case the networks tend to permit the child to be with the mother in order to avoid deportation (Women’s link worldwide, 2009/2011).

Recent police investigations in Spain have demonstrated that Nigerian criminal networks have used children, the so-called niños anclas, in order to permit the women to stay legally in Spanish territory. According to the document Memoria, from the Spanish authorities in 2013, from 100 Nigerian women that have entered in the Spanish territory, 25 were not related with the children that they were accompanied. In fact, many of these children were later abandoned in the shelters (Fiscal General del Estado, 2013). The networks are aware that when the women arrive pregnant or accompanied by a child, instead of going to center for illegal migrants (Centro de Internamiento de Extranjeros) or being deported, they are usually hosted by the Red Cross or a social assistance network, in which the women have more mobility. Therefore, it is easy for the networks to go directly to these shelters to pick up the women, pretending to be their relatives and consequently, separate the mother from the son or using the child to obtain the residence permit. Furthermore, as was previously mentioned, the children often arrive without birth certification, which increases the difficulty of institutions or associations to recognize the validity of the biological tie. Nevertheless, in order to overcome the problem, the association DNA Pro Kids performs DNA exams, in order to verify the biological link between the child and the mother.

In 2013, the method niños-anclas came to the surface, when a Nigerian criminal network gave to one of the victims, before her departure in Morocco in a rubber dinghy with direction to Spain one of another woman’s twin. Once they arrived in Spain, the biological mother has started to search for her child that was sent to a shelter with the other victim. As the Police identified the other woman with the child, instead of identifying the woman as a potential human trafficking victim, she was condemned for kidnapping, threats and coercion (Lucas, 2015). Therefore, not identifying the woman as a human trafficking victim, the Spanish government has not applied the Art.177, line 11 of the Law 10/1995 of 23rd November of the Spanish Penal code, in which victims of human trafficking are exempt of penalty if they have committed crimes when subjected to their exploiters.

The increase of Nigerian mothers that have arrived with their children in Europe has not only been verified in Spain, but also in France, in fact, according to the Dispositif Ac.sé (2015), only in 2012, 48 Nigerian women have arrived in France with their children. Furthermore, in Nice from 2002 until 2012 the number of mothers or pregnant women has also increased in 44%. The augmentation of
mothers engaged in prostitution has led that the association Amicale du Nid to emit a communication alert in 2012. The situation of these women, being characterized by absence, has led that these women were identified as the women “sans”, which means “without”. The characterization has derived from their situation of “without papers, without rights, without employment and resources” (Dispositif Ac.Sé, 2015). Contrarily to Spain, the women that have children on the French territory don’t have access to the residence permit, since only the child is considered to be tutored by the State. Therefore, the increase of the phenomenon in France is not related on the legal permanence on the territory as in Spain, but as a consequence, since many of the women who have arrived with their children in Europe through Spain and Italy, have been later moved to France. For instance, according to the association Dispositif Ac.sé (2015), the majority of the Nigerian mothers that live currently in France has passed a precedent period in another country in European Union, especially Spain and Italy, where they were not recognized as victims.

The Nigerian Women’s Conditions, Victims of Sexual Exploitation

For Nigerian women being a mother has a high importance, since the woman acquires a new status in society. Motherhood allows the women to assure a solid role and being respected in society (Dispositif Ac.sé, 2011). However, when the mother is a human trafficking victim, motherhood tends to increase the mother’s vulnerability and submission to the traffickers. For Nigerian victims of sexual exploitation, being a mother does not imply an advantage or a special treatment from their madam. On the contrary, it creates incompatible role situations, since that the woman is in a limited condition and is not able to conduct her mother’s role. Furthermore, according to a study by Ac.Sé Dispositiv (2015), 63% of the professionals that work with mothers engaged in prostitution (the study does not refer in specific if it is in a situation of human trafficking or not), has replied that the women have difficulties to deal with motherhood in prostitution. According to an interview taken in an institution that hosts Nigerian women with their children, in addition to the problems that women have regarding to their motherhood, the fact that the child sometimes is a result of a violence or sometimes unwanted can also lead the mother to accept with difficulty the child and consequently be also aggressive. The consequences of a life with the absence of a father as well as the isolation situation can cause some impacts on the children such as violent behavior with other children or adults, night terrors, more attention demanding to their mothers and difficulty in accept the mothers’ authority (Dispositif Ac.sé, 2015). According to a social worker in Palermo, the majority of the Nigerian human trafficking victims live in a situation of mono-parental families, therefore constituted only by the mother. There are only a few cases that the family is constituted by the mother and the father (Pascoal, 2013). Often they are not the children of their husband, but are born from a story that started in Palermo, and as it starts, it ends quickly. Many children often do not know the father’s figure. At home, depending on the mother’s economic situation, the women share the house with conational. Obviously, many of them have to send money back home, “so the more you save money, the more you have to send it home.”

In order to conceal the mother’s role with the exploitative condition, some victims in Palermo see themselves living in extreme situations, giving pills to their children with the scope to put them asleep, while they are on the streets or practicing prostitution at home, in their children’s presence. Another recurrent situation of the victims that are mothers, especially at the beginning of the debit’s payment, in which women have less movement’s possibility and opportunity to live on their own, is that the victims trust their children to their “sisters” that live with them in the same house. In this case, sometimes, the “sisters” are victims that have gained the madam’s trust, thus they control the recent coming victims. This situation leads the children to a roles’ confusion, since they are not aware about their mother’s exploitation and they see the other girls as “aunts”.

The female Nigerian migration in Palermo is very recent, blossoming only on the last decade of the twentieth century. This recent migration, that in the Nigerian case, has begun mainly with sexual exploitation purposes, is reflected in the Nigerian second generation, that is very young. The majori-
ty of the Nigerians in Palermo had only one son in Italy, even if in Nigeria they had a more extended family (Pascoal, 2013). In Italy their children have an age inferior to four years old, which coincided with their mothers’ arrival, since that the majority of the women have arrived in Italy in 2008. In the Nigerian human trafficking, as in the Romanian sexual exploitation, the victims are often moved inside the national territory or at a transnational level. The relocation allows from one hand the traffickers to avoid that the victims establish contact with autochthones and from another hand, they are able to innovate the market’s supply. Furthermore, the relocation often happens in case the victim establishes a particular relationship with an autochthon, for instance, the street unit in Palermo has crossed cases that when the victim is pregnant from a client who is potentially in love with the girl, the network has the tendency to send the girl to another city.

The relationship between motherhood and exploitation in human trafficking generates complex situations, principally when the victims are obligated to move from different cities. This affects the victims’ children, since they suffer from continuous instability with a negative impact on their health conditions, due to the lack of sanitary services’ accompaniment. Furthermore, the victims’ relocation influences directly on their children, since they have two main possibilities: they are displaced along with their mother, not being able to establish connections with other people besides their mother; or they remain with their mother’s exploiters being used as a coercive instrument. On the last case, the traffickers raise the victim’s debit, adding babysitting costs to their mother’s debit that obligates the victim to work more (Pascoal, 2012).

Since motherhood increases the women’s vulnerability, it is not difficult to think that their children are indirect victims of their exploitation. According to the French National report on Human Trafficking (2015), due to the high increase on recent years on situations involving the subject of human trafficking and motherhood, it is advised that the accompaniment should not only be focused on the mother, but also on their children. The fact is that these children have also witnessed their mother’s situations of lack of freedom and violence, which influences them psychologically and physically.

It is proven that in several occasions criminal groups use the victim’s children as a coercive instrument. In November 2013, a press article (Jornal de Notícias, 2013) reported the abduction of two children of two Nigerian victims of a criminal network based in Toledo, Spain. The kidnapping had the scope to oblige the women to prostitute themselves in the North of France. The press article reported a situation of extreme vulnerability for the two minors that were found in a state of undernutrition, subjected to drugs’ assumption. The victims, besides the base debit amount were also obliged to pay monthly 250 euro to the trafficker to take care of their son. Otherwise, the traffickers would menace the victim to throw the children from the balcony. Furthermore, the children were in inhuman conditions, being frequently left alone in the house tied to the bed and gagged in separated rooms (Faro de Vigo, 2015). The children were also exposed to a high level of violence, presenting dystrophy problems and incapacity to control their sphincter, due to the undernourishment and lack of adequate hygiene conditions (La voz de Galicia, 2015). Caring for the victims’ children is normally used by the trafficker as a method to raise the victims’ debit, thus perpetuating the victims’ exploitation. This tactic has emerged publicly in 2013, due to a raise of criminal offences on Nigerian minors that took to the detention of the so-called Madams. One of the cases has resulted on the death of an eight-month child that was under care of her mother’s Madam, who obliged her mother to prostitute herself in Barcelona. Furthermore, she was also accused of giving drugs to her son (La Voz de la Galicia, 2013).

The use of the children in order to raise the debit has also been well demarked on the women’s stories (Real, M. & Venys, X., 2014) Furthermore, the Madams not only use this method to perpetuate their victims’ exploitation, but also to be able to control them, since the mothers fear for their children’s lives. The traffickers, in order to control their victims, not only threat to endanger their children’s lives, but also to send the children into social services for them to be adopted. This was the case of Eli that has seen her child being taken by the social services in 2004, while on her Madam’s care, due to undernourishment. At the time, Eli was always visiting her child on the hospital, yet the
traffickers have started to exploit her again, so her visits were less frequent. The social services have seen this behavior as a lack of interest from her part and wrote on the process that “she does not follow the visiting period; comes at strange hours when the child is asleep and usually comes accompanied by a man.” Consequently, after being consider a non-appropriate mother for the child, the social services have passed the child from a minors’ shelter into a foster family that has started an adoption process. At the time, being yet under the restriction of the criminal organization, the victim had to sign the adoption papers by force and when she was able to be out of the network, she could not be able to regain her child’s guardianship (Lucas, 2015).

Despite that prostitution is not a cause to take a child from the mother, especially in case of human trafficking, there has been some cases in Spain that the la Dirección General de Atención a la Infancia y a la Adolescencia (DGAIA) has taken the children for their mothers. In 2012, Laura, a Nigerian woman victim of sexual exploitation has arrived in Spain with her child without birth certification. The woman who was obligated by the network to work in prostitution in Morocco has given birth in the transit country not being able, as it was mentioned before to certify her child. The lack of documents as well as the contradiction of the mother regarding to the child's information, has alarmed the Red Cross, where she was hosted in doubting the biological connection with her child. Consequently, the child’s guardianship was taken from her temporarily, passing to definitive in 2016, when the social services have identified a potential relationship of the mother with a criminal network for sexual exploitation. After two months without seeing her child, Laura was able to see her child more often, until the social services have declared to put the child into a foster family, which supposedly would interrupt the mother’s visits to the child. Despite that Laura has finally being able to be with her child, after she had cut relations with the criminal network and proceeding with language courses, she is still illegal in Spain and afraid of not being able to get a job. Furthermore, during three months she and her child will be submitted into a controlled process of adaptation. This was not the only case that women are victims of human trafficking cases have seen their children under control of social services in Spain, since they tend to ignore the mothers situation in benefit of the child. According to the vice president of the social services, the number of cases in social services of children whose mothers are human trafficking victims for sexual exploitation purposes is not relevant, being around eight or nine in a total of 15,000 cases (El País, 2016) However, understanding the hidden nature of the phenomenon a major attention should be given to such cases.

Despite that the court has recognized the family right to this mother, in other cases it has been difficult to the mothers, victims of human trafficking to overcome their submission to the networks and be with their children. In France, the number of women victims of trafficking with children has seen an increase last year. According to the Dispositif Ac.sé (2015), the main organization that offers protection to victims of trafficking, in a total number of 60 women that were accompanied by the association, 18 had children.

It is interesting to see that while in Spain, which is one of the main arrival countries in Europe by sea for Nigerians after Italy, the traffickers induce the women to have children for the residence permit, while in France the criminal networks often regard the child as an obstacle for the exploitation of their mothers. According to the representative of the Association Dispositif Ac.sé, the association has accompanied some cases in which the traffickers that have obligated the victims to give their children to the social services. In one case, a trafficker has obligated the victim after the birth into giving her child to the social services. Moreover, the trafficker has obliged the victim into giving the child with absence of contact, which has developed into a process of being available for adoption, despite the efforts in Court of the association staff. In another case, in which the mother was being hosted by the association, she was obligated to give her child temporarily to the social services, since her Madam did not allowed the victim to be with her child. The woman was able to see her daughter each fifteen days, yet the child is still at the care of social services, since the mother is still in an exploitative situation. According to the same association, a woman who was mother of four has given her four children to the social services, during her exploitation. However, being in a French environment and with the
absence and infrequent visits of the mother, her children started to speak only French. With her situation, the woman consequently has lost the guardianship of her children.

Generally, on human trafficking cases, the authorities have the tendency to analyze the mother’s situation and the child situation in a separate way, rather than analyzing the complex situation itself. In this case, when social services verify a lack of adequate conditions for the child, there is a major preoccupation with the child, putting aside the abuse situation of the mother. The governmental institutions tend to separate both situations and not undergo into a process where the victim can overcome the complex situation. Moreover, when a victim decides to exit from her abusive situation, the authorities tend to concentrate on the victim, limiting her protection geographically, hic est., not including her family in the origin country. However, good examples have been taken in case of transnational mothers exposed to retaliations. For instance, in 2015 after the prosecution of the trafficker, the judge along with the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs has decided to support the transferring of a Nigerian child in France. The urgent family reunification was possible due to the subsidiary protection of the mother. Another solution has also been applied for Nigeria, in which associations that protect the victims in France provide a sum of 300 euro in order to pay a year of accommodation to the victim’s family on another state of Nigeria.

Many of the victims before they departed they have left their children in their origin country with their families. However, these children are not only being used as an extortion instrument by the trafficker, but also from their families in their origin country; the scope is to take as much money as possible from the victims. In the book Le Ragazze di Benin City (2007), the author mentions the history of a Nigerian girl, which the family continuously asked to send money to her son. The family used the child’s health as an emotional manipulation, even being aware about her exploitative condition.

**Women’s Vulnerability Factors and their Partners’ Exploitation**

In the first millennium’s decade, the majority of the Nigerian victims arrived in Europe by plane, with scale on northern European countries, yet in recent years, many Nigerian have arrived in Europe through the Mediterranean. In fact, according to IOM, the number of Nigerian women arriving in Italy by boat has increased 300% (Redattore Sociale, 2013). The arrival of these women mainly going through the different Mediterranean routes into the European territory often tend to be a synonym of previous rapes and abuse. The violence suffered by these women through the travel that are often used by the smugglers as an exchange payment for the sexual services to the border militaries, push the women into finding a male travel companion. Despite that women may also be a victim of her male partner, it is still considered to be safer than travelling alone (Freedman & Jamal, 2008).

However, in Morocco the situation is different, since according to the women’s stories we find the figure of the “journey husband”, which is the so-called guide man. These guides are Nigerian men that have started their migration project to Europe, yet since they were blocked in Morocco without economic resources, they have started to work with the human trafficking networks. The madams contact these men and propose them to travel to Nigeria in order to recruit women or girls. Moreover, these men are often the fathers of the victims’ children that arrive in Spain (Women’sLink worldwide, 2009). For instance, on the study taken by the association Casal Petit (2014) one of the women admits that the man that has brought her to Europe was her husband, whose work was to take people from Nigeria to Morocco, while other three women have recognized that the guide man was their boyfriend. According to the testimonies, the guide man can be with several women and also be related to the Madam (Real & Venys, 2014). Despite that the same figure exists on the route from Nigeria to Libya, there has not been testimonies of the overlap between the figure of guide man and husband or boyfriend. However, women that have arrived in Italy have also been accompanied by false husbands or boyfriends (IOM, 2015).

According to IOM’s report on Human Trafficking (2015), the girls start to realize the level of exploitation, especially when the trolleys and smugglers offer the girls’ services to the military in Libya in exchange to pass the borders. Furthermore, the researcher Lo Iacono defends that to have
an immediate and major profit from the victims; the trolleys put the women in African Houses or Connection houses to exploit them sexually. Brothels’ existence in Libya that managed by Nigerian criminal cells, also documented in Be-Free’s report, where Nigerian women work up to a year, without contraception. Furthermore, in order to protect themselves, women inserted wool from their mattresses inside their genitals (Aljazeera, 2015).

The victims’ immediate exploitation leads often to unwanted pregnancies from the traffickers or the clients. Based on some interviews in Palermo and in Italy, the vulnerability of the Nigerian human trafficking victims increases during their pregnancy and after the birth of their child. When the victims arrive in Italy, by the end of pregnancy, the madam sees the opportunity to raise the victim’s debit adding 10 thousand euro, with the excuse of being a matter of inconvenience for the lack of work productivity (Pascoal, 2012). If, instead, the girl arrives in her first months of pregnancy, even if the time to a legal abortion has passed, the madam obligates the girl to abort, at her house, with the use of voodoo rituals and pills (cytotec). This drug used to cure stomach ulcer, yet for its contraindication on pregnant women, it is often used as a pill to have an abortion. The pill, when induced in a large quantity has strong collateral effects, provoking uterine contractions and consequently, vomiting, diarrheal, nausea and hemorrhage. Furthermore, the trafficker obligates the girl to induce poison herbs, mixed with the woman’s blood and fetus. Other traffickers tend also to menace and threat the women with violence and obligate them to work during the pregnancy in order to induce miscarriage (Dispositif Ac.sé, 2015).

The pregnancy leads the victims to a higher level of vulnerability, since a pregnant Nigerian woman without a partner is frequently object of social repression from her conational. For a Nigerian woman, a child outside the marriage is not normally accepted in society. Moreover, it becomes even harder if the child is a boy, because, if it is a daughter, when she will marry she will acquire the surname of her husband, but if it is a boy, he will carry the maiden name of his mother forever (Dispositif Ac.sé, 2011). Profiting from the cultural prejudice of single mothers, some of the conational approach the girls before the disembarkation at the port and ask them to declare being married at the Identification moment. By declaring their marriage, the men facilitate their legal permanence in Italy (Giornale di Sicilia, 2014), since they can ask their residence permit through article 30 of Testo Unico sulla Migrazione (286/98). The residence permit guaranties to the parents the possibility to live legally in Italy in case there is an effective cohabitation and that the scope of marriage is no the one to obtain the visa.

When the proposal is made by their conational, they are interested in remaining legally in Europe, declaring to be the fathers of the child. Unfortunately, the fake husband tends to abandon the girl along with the child, or he profits from her situation to gain some money. The vulnerable situation of these women is not only due to their living isolation, but also due to their emotional and inferior condition imposed by their cultural and traditional patterns in their origin community, push them to frequently search for a partner. However, often their conational scope is to be with a girl involved in the sex industry, even if exploited, in order to profit from them economically of their situation. According to a social assistant working on a shelter for Nigerian mothers, victims of human trafficking, some conational approach the girls with children, while in Italy in order to recognize their children. Even though the women are aware that the man can be using them in order to get the residence permit, they are not aware about the power that the man might have regarding to the child. Furthermore, the social assistant has recognized that probably the man can also use the child as a coercive method, in order to re-induce the ex-victim in sexual exploitation.

On October 2012, a Nigerian girl that was an asylum seeker hosted in a shelter in Sicily was brutally beaten and raped from her partner that was trying to obligate her to engage in prostitution (Marchese, 2012). Her partner, engaged in a small conational criminal group that managed drug trafficking in Palermo, as well as prostitution, has took advantaged from her vulnerable situation and seduced her through the lover boy method, which is normally known in the Eastern organized crime for sexual purposes. This method, even if is mainly used in Eastern human trafficking for sexual ex-
exploitation, has been developed, as we have noticed previously, as a coercive instrument by Nigerian traffickers.

In this case, the girls’ boyfriends are their exploiters, which try to convince them that they are in love with the girl, in order to have a child along with the girl (Pascoal, 2012). This choice does not rely only in a loving attachment, but it has the main purpose to acquire a legal status in Italy, through the article 30 of Testo Unico della Migrazione. In an interview with a social worker in a Palermo’s kindergarten of immigrant children, she declares that there are complex dynamics between these children’s parents, i.e. between the mother and the exploiter.

“Sometimes it happens, some months ago, two exploiters, from these girls, they were also the fathers of these children. I am talking about two different cases with the same scope. He was the child’s father and then we came aware that he obligated his partner into prostitution. Often, the women cannot even be free and this means beaten and raped.”

The mother’s limited condition, sometimes, is reflected in their children’s behavior in public environments. According to a psychologist in an association that supports migrants in Palermo, she had witnessed some situations, in which the children presented irregular and alarming behavior. Some of these cases were mentioned to the social services that lack from having a specific training on the subject and often take away the children from their mothers, declaring that their mothers were engaged in prostitution. In fact, for the kindergarten’s staff it is evident that the mothers have limitations in raising their children, reporting that sometimes the mother brings their children to school already dressed up and with make up to go after to the street or the “sisters” come to pick up the children from the kindergarten.

Despite that motherhood is often used by the traffickers to maintain the women in the European territory or to increase the victims’ vulnerability, motherhood has also proven to be one of a few strengths that permit the victim to stop with the exploitation. According to Ac.sé Dispositif (2015), motherhood can establish a link between the victim and associations that advice to exit prostitution in benefit of the child. Furthermore, this link also allows the women to have more acknowledged of their rights and benefits from social services and third sector association. With the offered protection, as well as with the support given to human trafficking victims in France, some women are finally able to exit from their exploiters. In France, motherhood does not permit foreign mothers to have access to a residence permit, living in an absence of rights and conditions as it was previously demonstrated the women. Therefore, when the women understand that being involved in sexual exploitation can be a risk to the guardianship of their child, they tend to start a process along with stakeholders from the third sector to recognize their exploitative status. The attribution of the residence permit for human trafficking victims allows the mothers to have access to several rights that were not previously recognized and therefore to finally be able to exit from their abusers.

Conclusion

Human trafficking for sexual exploitation purposes is a very particular research’s issue, as for its features of difficult access to the focus groups, as for the thematic complexity. The present research shows that the victims’ isolation from the society and their insertion in an origin community used to this phenomenon exposes the victim to a high vulnerability level, difficult to escape from the coercive dynamics. Furthermore, the traffickers use constant psychological and physical violence (Cher-ti & Pennington& Grant, 2013) that the girls are not able to identify themselves as victims. The mother’s role, being exposed to violence episodes, as well as limited geographic and social conditions, does not improve the victim’s situation. On the contrary, it aggravates her exploitation situation. Furthermore, the mother’s situation reflects on her children’s life, that being indirect victims of the phenomenon suffer the same inhuman conditions as their mothers.

Unfortunately, human trafficking is still an unknown phenomenon especially to social services. The lack of training of social services and law enforcement agents is reflected in their assistance that does not evaluate the situation in its complex, mainly the women’s vulnerability, but the children’s
lack of conditions, which often results in separating the child from the mother. However, if from one side motherhood becomes a double vulnerability to the Nigerian women engaged in sexual exploitation, from the other side, a child’s birth can represent an occasion to an alternative path. According to the activist Isoke Aikiptanyi: “The presence of a minor can push the mother into finding the strength to put an end to her sexual abuse.”

References


Lo Iacono, E. (2015). Conference to the activist Isoke Aikiptanyi: “The presence of a minor can push the mother into finding the strength to put an end to her sexual abuse.”


