

TRAFFICKING
OF NIGERIAN GIRLS
TO ITALY



TRADE AND EXPLOITATION
OF MINORS AND
YOUNG NIGERIAN WOMEN
FOR PROSTITUTION IN ITALY

Research report

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by

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FOREWORD

1. Objectives and start of the research

The objectives of the research are within the framework of the project designed by UNICRI with the aim of sustaining and increasing the possibility of fighting against the phenomenon of trafficking and exploitation of minors and women in Italy coming from Nigeria.

The research in this sense is part of a project, which not only aims at understanding, but is oriented towards the development of coherent and efficient actions in the fight against the criminals who manage such a phenomenon. It stems from the fact that the efforts of understanding, while appearing very important, have a particular value, aimed at providing useful indications for the possibility to develop action in the sector.

The main objective of the research is that of collecting and organising the elements, which permit a better outline of the dynamics and routes of the traffic, the organisational procedures of the criminal management structure, and the conditions and needs of the victims. In this sense, the aim is to better focus, update and thoroughly examine what is already known about the distinctive characteristics of the traffic aimed at sexual exploitation which involves minors and women of Nigerian origin, with particular attention to those aspects nearest to possible action, whether towards hindering the organised crime which manages the traffic and exploitation, or for help to the victims, limiting the risks of reproducing the conditions which favour their involvement.

According to the protocol of the assignment agreed upon between UNICRI and the Department of Social Science, research was undertaken through:

- a) Interviews with officials of NGOs active in this area;
- b) Interviews with women and young girl victims of the traffic and exploitation;
- c) Judicial cases analysed through the relative court documents;
- d) Interviews (face to face) with Law Enforcement officers who operate at national level or in some territorial spheres.

The criteria for the choice of the subjects to be interviewed were the following:

a) For the choice of *official privileged witnesses of NGOs* contacts were made where the presence of Nigerian women was greatest, and where a greater number of organisations/institutions providing support existed.

NGOs were identified operating in the following areas:

- Turin, Novara
- Milan

- Area of Triveneto (Venice/Verona/Padua/Pordenone/Trento/Udine)
- Emilia-Romagna coast
- Marche Abruzzo coast
- Rome
- Area around Naples (Naples/Caserta /Castelvoturno).

b) The same officials of the NGOs were involved for the choice of *women/victims* to interview, requesting them to place the researchers in contact with the women victims of the trafficking who were not only capable of describing their particular experience but also of giving a more detailed description of the subject.

c) To identify the *case files* of particular interest, research was undertaken at the General Repository of the Tribunal of Turin of all the criminal proceedings (whether presently being undertaken or already defined) of Nigerians accused of the crime of which Art. 12 para.3 (aiding and abetting illegal immigration) of d.lgs. 286/1998 (The Comprehensive Immigration Enactment) from 1999 to the end of 2002. Thirty-nine proceedings were identified, out of which 6 were chosen which were considered to be particularly significant and interesting because of the high number of accused involved and/or the instance contested and because they were already defined at least in the first instance. In a second stage, a second research was undertaken of all the criminal proceedings relating to *ex art.* 416 (conspiracy to offend) and *art. 416bis* (conspiracy for mafia activities) of the Penal Code and therefore a further penal case worthy of attention was identified. A further three penal cases of importance were identified in other areas of Italy.

The original idea was - for understandable reasons of *privacy* - to identify already defined criminal proceedings; undertaking the first research it was understood that in this way there was a risk of identifying only outdated material. It was therefore decided, in agreement with some Law Enforcement officers, to look at material of criminal proceedings that had not yet been concluded. So a custody order for a pending criminal proceeding was examined, holding an interview strictly connected to the papers in question. In a second case, a choice was made to undertake a more thorough interview, which covered the whole investigation, underlining the most relevant data: reasons of opportunity and *privacy* did not permit other access to the documents of the proceedings.

Even if not strictly connected to the subject of the enquiry and within the protocol of the mission it was also considered useful to read some custody protection orders issued to Nigerian citizens for activities relating to the drug trade.

d) As far as “*institutional*” *subjects* are concerned, Law Enforcement officials, those representing institutions in various functions involved in the fight against organised crime, the following were considered relevant:

- on the one hand, those responsible for structures and agencies covering the whole national territory, starting with the members of the *Task Force* (National Antimafia Bureau (DNA), Ministry of Interior, the Command of the Carabinieri, etc.);
- on the other hand, the judges and the personnel of the judiciary police who operate within the territory who are the most interested in the phenomenon

and who have identified the most significant judicial cases on which the analysis has been undertaken.

2. Investigative instruments: outlines, questionnaires, disclosure cards

The research was undertaken through in-depth interviews following a pre-defined outline of the different subjects mentioned above and, as far as the case files are concerned, through the analysis of the documents of the proceedings.

Starting with the outline and the questionnaires predisposed by UNICRI, having been used in similar research undertaken in other contexts, the research group worked at drawing up two outlines for interviews (for the NGO and the victims), a more detailed questionnaire (for institutional officials, Law Enforcement officials) and a disclosure card of data to be found in the judicial documentation.

The adaptation of the investigative instruments available was necessary:

- on the one hand, because of the peculiarity of the subject of the research and the fact it had already been studied in other investigations, such as to constitute a sufficiently solid fount of knowledge within the framework;
- on the other hand, due to the limited number of subjects to contact and of cases to analyse foreseen, which brought about a choice to work more than in the direction of systematic collection of data and information, in the direction of a thorough investigation of some revealing questions and above all of the analysis of the tendency evolved that it is possible to discern.

Given the project context in which the research work is to be found, in preparing the instruments, particular attention was given to the possibility of collection - by all the selected interlocutors - of evaluations, suggestions and proposals regarding possible preventative action, support and the fight which can be developed either in Nigeria or in Italy.

The criteria which guided the choice of order in the contents and in the form of the instruments available can be recapitulated as follows:

a) Interviews of privileged official witnesses of *NGOs* active in this area: the outline of open questions aimed in particular at rebuilding the essential elements of the inherent situation:

- the phenomenon in general;
- the changes over the course of the last years;
- the perceived tendencies which may emerge;
- the consequences of policies in Italy (Art. 18 d.lgs 286/1998, repatriation, etc.);
- the potential and limitations of intervention in support of the victims;
- the most efficacious and realistic instruments to prevent and contrast the phenomenon (in Nigeria, in Italy).

b) Interviews of the *women victims*: given the restricted number of subjects interviewed and the criteria with which they have been identified, reference to the personal story was considered only as a clue and a comparison to discuss in more general terms such aspects as:

- the similarities/differences with the stories of other women;
- factors which are at the origin of the phenomenon, with attention to the culture to which they belong, to the pre-representation of future conditions, to the structural conditioning elements, etc.;
- in general the situation of the Nigerian girls and women victims of the trade in Italy, with particular regard to:
 - means of management of people and time/space of work on the part of the criminal organisations,
 - forms of defence and self-protection put in place by the victims,
 - nature of the bonds between the victims/exploiters,
 - specificity of the gender relations,
 - blackmail,
 - ways of using the available help resources,
 - expectations and future projects, etc.
- perspectives of the tendencies of the phenomenon;
- the effects of the in place or presumed policies (expulsion, penalise street prostitution, etc.);
- the possibility of fighting against the phenomenon of the criminal trade in Nigeria and in Italy;
- the needs to be satisfied to guarantee better support for the victims in Italy and/or in Nigeria;
- the conditions and the instruments available to obtain results in Nigeria on prevention and adoption of support action to those who return.

c) Guidelines of *case files*: the guidelines already prepared by UNICRI for other similar research appeared suitable and complete, therefore it was maintained in its entirety, with some simplifications and small additions relating to the development of the process and to the process strategies put in place by the defendants (type of lawyer involved, defensive choice, etc.). In the documentation examined, it was not always possible to find all the information required by the cards: in particular, considering the objectives of the research the quantitative information was put aside. The number of trials taken into consideration makes some information (e.g. the data on the victims) totally indicative. In any case these appear sufficient to underline the characteristics of the organisations and the functional mechanisms that characterise them.

d) Interviews to “*institutional*” *subjects*, Law Enforcement officials: the questionnaire already tested in other situations by UNICRI was also used for the most part in this case, with slight variations. However, this instrument was used with a certain elasticity considering the double level at which the interview subjects are placed:

- on the one hand, for the subjects who hold positions of authority at the national level, the questions were aimed at reconstructing, starting with the interpretation and general analysis of available data, an overall view;

- on the other hand, for those involved in significant local contexts, the questions referred to the knowledge and data that emerged from a specific territorial context and/or from specific investigations undertaken or judicial cases dealt with.

The research team, directed and co-ordinated by Franco Prina (Department of Social Science of the University of Turin) was composed of:

Valeria Ferraris (responsible for interviews of Law Enforcement officials and analysis of judicial cases);

Gabriele Magrin (responsible for interviews of NGO exponents);

Roberta Valetti (responsible for interviews of victims, researcher from the *Associazione Rete Ricerca*).

LIST OF INSTITUTIONS INTERVIEWED AND CASE FILES ANALYSED

Law Enforcement institutions interviewed:

- *Questura* (local State Police Office) of Caserta
- *Questura* of Milan
- *Questura* of Turin
- *Questura* of Udine
- *Questura* di Venice
- *Direzione Nazionale Antimafia* (National Antimafia Bureau) - Rome
- Public Prosecution Office of Bologna
- Public Prosecution Office of Naples
- Public Prosecution Office of Turin
- Tribunal of Rome
- Lawyer of Turin District
- *Servizio Centrale Operativo*, Polizia di Stato (Central Operational Service, State Police)
- *Reparto Operativo di Roma IV sezione, Corpo dei Carabinieri* (Operational Division of Rome 4° Section)

NGOs interviewed:

- *Associazione Lule*, Abbiategrosso
- *Associazione On the Road*, Martinsicuro
- *Associazione Tampep*, Turin
- *Caritas Servizio Migranti*, Turin
- Caritas, Udine
- *Centro Fernandez*, Castelvoturno
- *Comunità Rut*, Caserta
- *Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII*, Rimini
- *Cooperativa Dedalus*, Naples
- Liberazione e Speranza, Novara
- Padri Comboniani, Castelvoturno
- Parsec, Rome
- USMI, Rome

Interviews with the victims, who, for obvious reasons, are not listed, have been carried out in Turin (5), Novara (2), Udine, Verona, Trieste, Mestre, Rome, Martinsicuro (2), Castelvoturno.

Case files analysed:

- Preventive detention order, criminal proceeding n. 6725/99, Naples
- Criminal proceeding n. 9997/1998, Rome
- *Operazione Edo* (Edo Operation), Udine
- Criminal proceeding n. 3962/2002, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 33885/2001, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 19084/2000, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 25849/2000, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 18646/2000, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 21373/2000, Turin
- Criminal proceeding n. 5115/1999, Turin.

INTRODUCTION

1. Immigration from Nigeria to Italy: overall view

Immigration from Nigeria has been the object of interest for Italy for about twenty years, but it was not such a phenomenon as to occupy the first position in the scale of citizens staying in Italy, or for new entries.

In 2001, for example, Nigeria was not even among the first 15 countries for which permits to stay were given during the year and Nigerians who were staying here were around 18,000 persons.

Table 1 - Immigrants staying: number and increase in national groups 1991-2001

	Country	Presences 2001	% of total immigrants	Increase % 1991-2001
1	Morocco	158,094	11.6	1.89
2	Albania	144,120	10.6	6.58
3	Romania	75,377	5.5	9.13
4	Philippines	64,215	4.7	1.77
5	China	56,566	4.2	3.59
6	Tunisia	46,494	3.4	1.12
7	U,S,A,	43,650	3.2	1.05
8	Yugoslavia	36,614	2.7	1.37
9	Senegal	34,811	2.6	1.44
10	Sri Lanka	34,464	2.5	2.84
11	Poland	30,658	2.2	2.53
12	India	29,873	2.2	3.01
13	Peru	29,627	2.2	0.27
14	Egypt	26,166	1.9	1.41
15	United Kingdom	23,617	1.7	1.36
16	Macedonia	23,142	1.7	N/A
17	Bangladesh	20,127	1.5	3.63
18	Brazil	18,776	1.4	1.71
19	Pakistan	18,624	1.4	2.67
20	Ghana	17,791	1.3	1.57
21	Nigeria	17,832	1.3	3.17
22	Switzerland	16,895	1.2	1.13

Source: Our elaboration of Caritas data, 2002.

Even if it is not, as can be seen from the table, among those countries with a significant number of immigrants present on Italian territory, it should however be

noted that Nigeria represents the fifth country with a higher major percentage variation in immigration between 1991 and 2001¹.

Among the most populated countries of the world (the most populated in Africa) - as can be seen in the following table - Nigeria has a high percentage of poor, a high unemployment rate, one of the lowest rates of GNP *per capita*, the lowest rate in the index of human development amongst those countries taken into consideration, and can be compared to that of Bangladesh.

One should not be confused by the presence of a percentage variation in the GNP which is not so low (equal to 3.5%): it is in fact necessary to remember that Nigeria is an important oil producer, even if a large part of the resources obtained go to the benefit of only a few, and have no effect on the conditions of life of most of the citizens.

All these elements, together with the very unstable political-social situation of the Gulf of Guinea, would lead one to believe that it is not a fount of exhausted immigration.

2. Distribution on Italian territory and reasons for stay

The distribution on Italian territory of residents coming from Nigeria is very unequal (as can be seen in Table 3), so much as to indicate some prevalent areas: Rome with more than 2,500 persons, Piedmont with 1,600 persons, the major part concentrated in the urban area of Turin, Lombardy, Veneto with slightly less than 3,900 persons and a strong concentration in the city of Verona, Emilia Romagna and finally Campania, between the provinces of Caserta and Naples.

In all cases the Nigerians present are to be found in medium and medium-large urban centres; as far as Rome is concerned there is the strong attraction of the capital and the entrances connected to the Catholic Church.

Turin and Verona are two cities where it is possible to find a community rooted over time and a strong presence of Nigerian prostitution, where therefore it is not difficult to imagine that the mechanisms of regularisation have favoured the stabilisation of women who were in the past prostitutes, some part of which, as will be seen, represent the nucleus of self-reproduction and perpetuation of the phenomenon of trafficking and exploitation.

¹ Unfortunately the data relating to the regularisation *ex l.* 189/2002 is not yet available. We can, however, reasonably presume that this last regulation will mainly involve individuals coming from East Europe, therefore increasing the gap between these populations and those of Nigerian citizens.

Table 2 - Socio-economic situation of the major countries of origin of immigrants from outside the EU in Italy

	Countries	Immigrant presence 2001	% of total immigrants	Population 2001 in thousands	% annual population increase	% poor population⁽¹⁾	% work force⁽²⁾	% unemployment 2000	GNP per capita 2002 (\$ USA)	% growth of GNP	Debt 1999 in millions (\$ USA)	% inflation 2000	Debt 2000 in millions (\$ USA)	Human Development Index 2000 (position)
1	Morocco	158,094	11.6	30,645	1.7	19.0	36.5	23.0	3,500	0.8	19,100	2.0	18,400	0.602 (123)
2	Albania	144,120	10.6	3,510	0.9	19.6	48.7	25.0	3,000	7.5	975	1.0	1,000	0.733 (92)
3	Romania	75,377	5.5	22,364	-0.2	44.5	42.8	11.5	5,900	2.2	9,400	45.7	9,300	0.775 (63)
4	Philippines	64,215	4.7	82,842	2.0	41.0	39.4	10.0	3,800	3.6	52,000	5.0	52,000	0.754 (77)
5	China	56,566	4.2	1,273,111	0.9	10.0	55.5	10.0	3,600	8.0	154,200	0.4	162,000	0.726 (96)
6	Tunisia	46,494	3.4	9,705	1.2	6.0	31.3	15.6	6,500	5.0	11,900	3.0	13,000	0.722 (97)
7	U.S.A.	43,650	3.2	278,058	0.9	12.7	50.6	4.0	36,200	5.0	N/A	3.4	862,000	0.939 (6)
8	Yugoslavia	36,614	2.7	10,677	-0.3	N/A	15.0	30	2,300	15.0	13,000	42.0	14,100	N/A
9	Senegal	34,811	2.6	10,285	2.9	N/A	N/A	N/A	1,600	5.7	3,700	1.5	4,100	0.431 (154)
10	Sri Lanka	34,464	2.5	19,409	0.9	22.0	34.3	8.8	3,250	5.6	9,500	8.5	9,900	0.741 (89)
11	Poland	30,658	2.2	38,634	0	18.4	39.6	12.0	8,500	4.8	54,300	10.2	57,000	0.833 (37)
12	India	29,873	2.2	1,029,991	1.6	35.0	N/A	N/A	2,200	6.0	94,400	5.4	99,600	0.577 (124)
13	Peru	29,627	2.2	27,484	1.7	49.0	28.1	7.7	4,550	3.6	32,300	3.7	31,000	0.747 (82)
14	Egypt	26,166	1.9	69,536	1.7	22.9	27.8	0.5	3,600	5.0	30,400	3.0	31,000	0.642 (115)
15	U.K.	23,617	1.7	59,647	0.2	17.0	49.1	5.5	22,800	3.0	N/A	2.4	N/A	0.928 (13)
16	Macedonia	23,142	1.7	2,046	0.4	25.0	29.4	32.0	4,400	5.0	1,400	11.0	1,400	0.772 (65)
17	Bangladesh	20,127	1.5	131,269	1.6	35.6	43.3	35.2	1,574	5.3	17,500	5.8	17,000	0.478 (145)
18	Brazil	18,776	1.4	174,469	0.9	17.4	42.8	7.1	6,500	4.2	245,000	6.0	232,000	0.757 (73)
19	Pakistan	18,624	1.4	144,617	2.1	40.0	27.3	6.0	2,000	4.8	34,400	5.2	38,000	0.499 (138)
20	Ghana	17,791	1.3	19,894	1.8	31.4	20.5	20.0	1,900	3.0	6,900	22.8	7,000	0.548 (129)
21	Nigeria	17,832	1.3	126,636	2.6	45.0	34.7	28.0	950	3.5	29,400	6.5	32,000	0.462 (148)

(1) Values referring to period 1992-2000; (2) values referring to period 1994-2000

Source: Caritas Statistic Dossier on data of Ministry of Interior, World Bank, CIA, UNDP.

The data on Caserta with 764 persons is interesting. The province of Caserta and, in particular the town of Castelvolturno was interested, already in the years following the earthquake of 1980, by a huge arrival of Nigerian citizens (initially mainly men) as farm workers for picking tomatoes and for working in zoo technical and construction activities, from where they have installed themselves even bringing about the expulsion of the old residents.

“Castelvolturno is a place which in the ‘60s had an enormous construction development, construction of low quality, an intensive development at low cost. There many people bought houses for very little. Then there was the earthquake of 1980 and these houses - which were already degraded - were nearly all occupied by the homeless which left behind a situation of even worse degradation (...) many of these houses were abandoned by their original owners, somehow sold, rented, they found various solutions. In the meantime there was an agricultural vocation because in the immediate hinterland there is an area of quite intense agricultural development, there was the necessity for seasonal workers and therefore immigrants who were engaged in this seasonal work, found it convenient to find housing a few steps away on the littoral. There was therefore this settlement which continued (...). This has long roots, dating back to the 80s, twenty years ago. This brought about a progressive flight of the original inhabitants who had a second house and settlement by these immigrants who have remained there” (Public Prosecutor - Naples).

Other data of considerable interest is represented by the number of immigrants regularised on subsequent occasions. As will be seen from table 4, Nigeria has a large number of citizens who have benefited from the various curative statute, above all when compared with the number of immigrants present.

Table 4 - Foreign citizens regularised through the various curative statutes

Law 943/86		Law 39/90		Law Decree 489/1995		D.P.C.M. 16/10/1998	
Morocco	27,615	Morocco	48,670	Morocco	34,258	Albania	38,996
Tunisia	8,769	Tunisia	26,318	Albania	29,724	Romania	24,098
Senegal	8,502	Senegal	15,966	Philippines	21,406	Morocco	23,850
Philippines	6,647	Philippines	13,684	China	14,437	China	16,778
Yugoslavia	6,521	Yugoslavia	8,924	Peru	12,753	Senegal	10,727
China	5,025	China	8,580	Romania	11,099	Egypt	9,467
Egypt	3,956	Egypt	7,632	Tunisia	10,362	Nigeria	7,354
Sri Lanka	3,607	Ghana	6,517	Senegal	9,889		
Ghana	3,233	Poland	5,366	Ex Yugoslavia	9,173		
Iran	3,004	Sri Lanka	5,258	Egypt	8,174		
Ethiopia	2,492	Somalia	4,912	Nigeria	7,993		
Mauritius	1,517	Pakistan	4,510				
Somalia	1,487	Bangladesh	3,861				
Pakistan	1,216	Mauritius	3,314				
India	1,193	Nigeria	3,308				
Cape Verde	975						
Nigeria	952						

Source: Our elaboration of Caritas data, 2002.

The number of citizens regularised indicates that Nigerian citizens have often reached a grade of integration which permits them to benefit from the provisions of regularisation: as will be seen, even Nigerian criminals have managed to benefit from this possibility.

It is worth noting that until the D.P.C.M. of 16 October 1998² regularisation was practically the only way to obtain a valid way to stay in Italy: the numbers which seem particularly high, not only for Nigerian citizens, represents in effect a good percentage of regular presences in Italy in those years.

But for Nigeria the more complex photograph of the motives to stay highlights a net prevalence of reasons of work - with a high incidence of autonomous work - and of the family (together representing 91.5% of the total), a low percentage of families joining, while almost absent are those authorisations for study reasons. In the distribution of authorisations for social protection reasons *ex Art. 18 d.lgs. 286/1998* (which we will mention in depth later), those originating from Nigeria appear to be the most represented.

² The DPCM 16 October 1998 is the Decree of the President of the Council of Ministers which disciplines the procedures of regularisation of the so-called Turco-Napolitano Law which should have been the last provision for regularisation at the same time as the start of a policy of immigration based on regular fluxes of entry.

Table 5 - Social protection permissions to stay granted at 31 December 2001: prevailing countries and division by area

Country	North West		North East		Centre		South		Islands		Total		of which minors
	v.a.	%	v.a.	%	v.a.	%	v.a.	%	v.a.	%	v.a.	% F ⁽¹⁾	
Nigeria	72	43.9	46	28.0	27	16.5	9	5.5	10	6.1	164	93.9	2
Moldavia	22	14.3	37	24.0	32	20.8	61	39.6	2	1.3	154	95.5	10
Ukraine	13	11.1	33	28.2	32	27.4	17	14.5	22	18.8	117	94.9	1
Romania	29	29.9	26	26.8	25	25.8	15	15.5	2	2.1	97	85.6	9
Albania	5	33.3	3	20.0	4	26.7	3	20.0	0	0.0	95	86.3	14

(1) The males are subjects which have collaborated to contrast the criminal organisations.

Source: Our elaboration of Caritas data, 2002.

On the other hand, it is very complex to calculate in a credible manner the number of irregular citizens who are present on the territory. Beyond the approximate estimates provided by migrant services, or elaborated in research undertaken of the local context, the only objective reliable data is that of the numbers of expulsions and those turned back. Other interesting data could be that of entries in the Centres of Temporary Stay, but this relates to unavailable data.

The available data - even in its partiality - permits observance of data relating to Nigeria, even in its irregular form, which does not represent a particularly strong migratory pressure (it is sufficient to think the data for Albania of nearly 20,000 persons between those expelled and turned back), even if the number of subjects turned away is not indifferent.

Table 6 - Administrative measures adopted for Nigerian citizens from 1/01/2001 to 31/12/2001

	Air	Maritime	Land	Total
Denied entry at border	363	12	103	478
Rejected by the Police				25
Total Rejected				503
	Males	Females	Minors	Total
Re-admitted	71	29	1	101
Expelled accompanied to the border				1,069
Expelled in compliance with judicial authorities				19

Source: Our elaboration of data of Ministry of Interior.

3. A glance at foreign criminality

It is obviously not within the economics of this work to take up the rather complex question of the reasons for criminality³ of foreigners. We will limit ourselves to propose the most recent statistical data and account for the principal analytical prospects, leaving aside the already vast literature on the subject.

The data relative to foreign criminality provided by the Ministry of Interior singles out the number of persons charged with some crimes and the percentage of foreigners, diversified by the crimes taken into consideration.

The period considered from 1988 to 2000 - even if the data related to this last year is only partial - is vast enough to permit us to discern some interesting trends. In particular, the exponential increase, until the mid 90s, of foreigners charged with exploitation of prostitution is absolutely evident: the predominant nationalities in this type of crime are the Albanians and the Nigerians⁴, so much so that one could talk about foreign organised crime in relation to facts related to the exploitation of prostitution⁵, and an involvement of foreign citizens in all levels and phases of the trafficking.

The table shows that there are many foreigners who are authors of crimes against property, crimes which respond to an economic need or are driven by the confrontation with the well-being in the arrival country, crimes which need little organisation⁶. The role that this type of crime causes to persons obliged to lose assured resources for legal activities should not be underrated: the loss of work for various reasons such as conflict with their superiors, the expiry of a contract or judicial cases even of only administrative nature, often brings about an involvement, sometimes only temporary, amongst which predatory crimes undoubtedly represent one of the first opportunities⁷.

For these crimes, the ethnic specialisation so stressed in the case of exploitation of prostitution, is not noted: ex-Yugoslavs, Moroccans, Algerians, Tunisians and from the latest Romanians are the groups to be found more frequently in the law courts involved in these crimes⁸.

³ For a synthetic exhibition of the theories on criminality, see also for the bibliography cited, Dario Melossi (2002, page 295 and following).

⁴ In 2000, according to the data quoted by Marzio Barbagli (2002, page 59) the percentage of complaints was 54% of Albanians and 7% Nigerians.

⁵ Ministero dell'Interno, Dipartimento di Pubblica Sicurezza (2001, and in particular page 3-67).

⁶ Cf. Colombo (1998, *passim*, and in particular page 109 and following, 223 and following).

⁷ Cf. Colombo (1998, *passim*, in particular page 141 and following).

⁸ On this point see Barbagli (2002, page 159).

Table 7 - Number of persons charged by type of crime and percentage of foreigners charged (1988-2000)

Charged	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000*
Against families	3,733	3,420	2,758	3,175	3,876	4,328	4,248	4,083	4,333	4,222	4,186	4,218	3,492
% foreigners	1	2	2	5	7	6	7	7	10	9	11	12	14
Carnal Violence	1,092	883	770	788	1,001	1,027	1,039	1,201	1,302	1,282	404*	214	173
% foreigners	9	8	15	19	20	22	22	34	21	24	22	23	21
Lustful acts	963	879	633	682	856	1,073	1,041	1,158	920	788	281*	162	77
% foreigners	7	9	8	13	9	11	10	14	9	9	9	9	8
Obscene acts	2,016	2,028	1,733	1,853	2,795	3,803	3,901	4,092	3,363	3,304	3,086	2,677	1,573
% foreigners	8	11	18	17	20	26	27	30	27	29	29	28	25
Exploitation of prostitution	948	757	664	843	1,049	1,393	1,920	2,162	2,440	2,326	2,382	2,866	2,552
% foreigners	9	13	24	22	26	37	46	52	53	55	56	56	56
Smuggling	1,693	1,673	2,414	2,621	2,155	1,739	1,459	1,883	1,810	2,056	1,591	1,264	461
% foreigners	25	21	32	43	36	54	47	46	45	53	50	42	44
Tax Evasion	2,667	2,901	3,257	4,056	3,660	3,627	4,196	4,426	4,953	5,190	5,563	6,875	6,385
% foreigners	4	5	4	5	5	6	9	8	10	11	12	15	17
Illegal arms possession		18,668	15,678	18,700	20,033	19,544	18,736	18,937	18,898	17,273	17,101	17,506	13,572
% foreigners	6	7	10	10	10	11	12	14	14	17	17	19	19
Violence, resistance, abuse	12,101	12,248	12,534	15,565	18,101	20,582	21,097	22,296	22,645	24,481	24,593	24,481	24,593
% foreigners	10	14	16	17	18	19	21	23	25	26	27	29	35
Production, trading, and drug distribution	28,685	26,116	24,635	30,760	38,843	33,146	36,123	32,652	32,987	33,262	33,347	34,284	33,516
% foreigners	13	14	17	16	15	19	22	23	22	28	32	29	29
Theft	50,534	51,872	55,030	60,062	61,480	61,860	64,438	65,262	65,514	65,122	63,529	63,124	46,441
% foreigners	14	17	23	23	25	27	29	32	31	35	38	39	40
Robbery	7,765	7,683	8,080	8,845	8,568	9,310	9,258	9,039	9,435	9,382	9,729	10,202	8,589
% foreigners	6	7	12	13	14	15	17	19	19	21	23	25	28
Damages	10,624	9,840	11,833	12,147	14,438	15,013	15,511	15,296	15,322	15,612	15,977	16,831	13,651
% foreigners	4	5	8	11	9	11	13	15	15	17	19	19	19

* It should be noted that in 1996 a new variety of sexual violence was introduced which substituted carnal violence and lustful acts.

Source: Ministry of Interior, Report on the state of safety in Italy, 2001 (data relating to 2000 is provisional).

It is also interesting to note how for certain crimes the number of foreigners even if increased, does not show a notable increase. This indicates that already before the most recent massive entry of foreigners in Italy, there were crimes that involved persons of foreign nationality. Examples are smuggling, trafficking and the retail distribution of drugs. In the case of smuggling it appears evident that the characteristics of the crime make involvement of foreigners indispensable, while it is in the weak condition in which the migrant lives the reason for which foreigners are involved as the last link in the chain of the drug trade.

Certainly foreigners are not the only ones responsible for such a trade, even if they are often singled out as such. But we know that their over representation in the criminal statistics is due to the fact that they carry out jobs which are more exposed to institutional reaction also because they are undertaken in visible places such as the road⁹. It should be noted however that in recent years the number of foreigners, in particular of certain nationalities, involved at a medium-high level in the drug trade seems to be progressively increased, partly in relation to the success of the law force in the fight against the drug trade managed by local criminals¹⁰, partly because of the search for a new form of investment and earnings on the part of the foreign organisations implicated in other illegal activities or in the same trade in other countries (and this is the case of Nigerian criminals as we will see in Chapter V)¹¹.

Another interesting indicator (still always partial) of the involvement in illegal activities by foreigners is represented by the incidence of these over the total of the prison population, sub-divided by sex and type of crime.

The statistical revelation (as appears in Table 8) confirms the high incidence of foreign detainees in relation to predatory crimes, crimes related to drugs, and that of falsification. Instead it is obvious the low percentage of foreigners involved in those crimes that require a high specialisation and a profound knowledge of the Italian command¹². But the data above all bears witness with much evidence, to the fact that the crimes of the foreign detainees are percentage wise more represented (arriving at being more than 75% of the total) are those which bear a relationship to exploitation of prostitution.

Again it is interesting to note how the percentage of foreign female detainees - whether for violations connected to drugs, or for crimes against property - are higher compared to those of foreign male detainees. It is difficult to find a reason; it can be observed, specially for some ethnic groups how women play an active role even in the illegal market: it is thought that in particular for crimes connected to an economical need such as theft where the woman, also to satisfy the prime necessities of the family or the group, becomes a particularly active subject¹³.

⁹ Cf. Colombo (1998 *passim*, and in particular page 130 and following, 223 and following.); Cfr. Barbagli (2002, pages 72-80) also for some critical remarks on how the Italians have been substituted by foreigners in the unqualified undertakings of the drug trade and in particular for the trade in heroin.

¹⁰ Giorgio Napolitano (1996).

¹¹ The involvement of Nigerian and Albanian citizens in the traffic is well known, even for large quantities, of cocaine, *white and brown*. In literature one can see the remarks and data by Marzio Barbagli (2002, page 76 following.).

¹² Cf. Crimes against public economy, against religious sentiment and pity for the dead, the bankruptcy and financial crimes.

¹³ For some reflections also on the ethnic distribution of female delinquency, see Marzio Barbagli (2002, page 69 and following).

Table 8 - Detainee population sub-divided by type of crime and sex (at 31.12.2000) - absolute and percentage incidence of foreigners

Type of crime	Total Women	Foreign Women	% Foreigners	Total Men	Foreign Men	% Foreigners	Total Detainees	Total Foreigners	% Foreigners
Mafia type association (art. 416b)	33	3	9.09%	3,854	33	0.86%	3,887	36	0.93%
Drug law	1,705	692	40.59%	32,637	10,920	33.46%	34,342	11,612	33.81%
Firearm law	160	21	13.13%	11,686	905	7.74%	11,846	926	7.82%
Public order (regulations against criminality)	394	71	18.02%	25,482	1,337	5.25%	25,876	1,408	5.44%
Against patrimony (theft, robbery, damage, swindling, etc...)	1,144	316	27.62%	40,410	5,437	13.45%	41,554	5,753	13.84%
Connected to prostitution	287	193	67.25%	1,954	1,526	78.10%	2,241	1,719	76.71%
Against public administration (Outrage, resistance to a public officer, etc.)	143	25	17.48%	4,995	1,327	26.57%	5,138	1,352	26.31%
Public safety (massacres, fires, etc.)	24	5	20.83%	1,192	77	6.46%	1,216	82	6.74%
Public faith (spending false money, etc.)	155	49	31.61%	3,999	1,060	26.51%	4,154	1,109	26.70%
Public morality (offence to decency, obscene acts, etc.)	7	1	14.29%	187	37	19.79%	194	38	19.59%
Against the family	27	10	37.04%	610	60	9.84%	637	70	10.99%
Against persons (homicide, personal injury, sexual violence, etc.)	678	158	23.30%	22,300	4,142	18.57%	22,978	4,300	18.71%
Against the State (attack on the Constitution, Contempt, etc.)	95	1	1.05%	362	23	6.35%	457	24	5.25%
Against the administration of the Law (false testimony, slander, accomplice, etc.)	135	8	5.93%	3,150	149	4.73%	3,285	157	4.78%
Public Economy	0	0	--	57	1	1.75%	57	1	1.75%
Third book of contraventions (drunkenness, illegal possession of arms, etc.)	64	6	9.38%	3,194	284	8.89%	3,258	290	8.90%
Laws regarding foreigners	96	91	94.79%	1,087	991	91.17%	1,183	1,082	91.46%
Against religious sentiment and reverence towards the dead (concealment of bodies, offence towards the state religion)	15	1	6.67%	747	27	3.61%	762	28	3.67%
Bankruptcy, bankrupt R.D. 267/1942	9	0	0.00%	506	4	0.79%	515	4	0.78%
Financial crimes	19	1	5.26%	1,701	82	4.82%	1,720	83	4.83%
Issuing cheques without funds to cover	10	0	0.00%	276	0	0.00%	286	0	0.00%
Other crimes	22	8	36.36%	460	64	13.91%	482	72	14.94%
Total	5,222	1,660	31.79%	160,846	28,486	17.71%	166,068	30,146	18.15%

Source: Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP)- Ministry of Justice, 2001

Passing on to examine the ethnic distribution of the detainees it can be observed that on 31 May 2002 foreign citizens present in the prisons were 30,2% of the restricted (about 17.095 units), the prevalent groups being Morocco, Albania and Tunisia.

Nigeria, while not being part of the prevalent groups, is characterised by the high percentage of women, equal to more than a quarter of the subjects of the same origin; only Ecuador has similar values.

If for Ecuador and Peru we can speak about data, which is partly to be foreseen, considering that it involves two regions of prevalently female immigration, for Nigeria however, we cannot speak about a feminisation of migration, but we can make intuitive correlations of a wide group of irregular woman who are brought to Europe and destined to the prostitution market and the high number of women involved in the exploitation of such a market.

Table 9 - Foreign detainees present in the penal institutions at 31/5/2002 sub-divided by origin and sex

Country	Foreign detainees	% of foreign detainees	% women
Morocco	3,797	22.2	0.4
Albania	2,790	16.3	2.5
Tunisia	2,109	12.3	0.9
Algeria	1,538	9.0	0.5
Yugoslavia	902	5.3	12.6
Romania	736	4.3	6.9
Nigeria	576	3.4	27.1
Columbia	516	3.0	26.2
Croatia	213	1.2	13.1
Senegal	202	1.2	1.0
Ecuador	165	1.0	27.9
Egypt	165	1.0	1.8
Turkey	156	0.9	1.9
China	153	0.9	10.5
Peru	145	0.8	20.7
Total	17,095	100.0	6.0

Source: Caritas, 2002.

4. A first glance at Nigerian criminality

Nigerian criminality has been for a number of years indicated as a pervasive criminality, spread throughout Europe as in the United States and in South America, principally dedicated to the drug trade, the trade in women for sexual exploitation and falsification of documents, activities which predominate.

In the last twenty years Nigeria has affirmed itself on the international scene:

- by the presence of drug traffickers: notwithstanding that it is not a drug producing country, it is active with a strong nucleus of criminals dedicated to substances destined for re-exportation rather than for the local market, which makes it one of the main crossroads of the drug trade in Africa;
- for the trade in Nigerian women mostly originating from the south of the country and in particular from Edo State with the aim of sexual exploitation.

One of the points of force of Nigerian criminality is its capability of “losing its tracks”: changing the places connected to the drug traffic, constantly utilising false documentation, employing very numerous young labour (not only Nigerian, but also coming from nearby countries) knowing how to weave relations with American or European citizens for certain activities to be carried out in the west (such as drug couriers within Europe or false employers for regularisation).

Strong links with the mother country, a network of relationships on an international level, an apparent low profile make up the three strong points of Nigerian criminality.

The presence of strong links with persons resident in the country, linked with the possibility to trust the knots in the criminal network spread throughout Europe

and the United States enables this criminality to move rapidly, to react to new situations. The capacity to act in silence, to not be a source of social alarm, to even hide from its “workers”, the real entity of trafficking allows these groups to make the organisation level invisible concealed behind the activities undertaken.

In Italy the Nigerian criminal presence is concentrated in some areas and principally in the North, in Piedmont and in Veneto; the south is noted for the absence of such criminality with the notable exception of Campania and, even if in a minor measure, of Lazio.

Campania, or better the Domitian area between Naples and Caserta, is a stable installation since about twenty years, of regular and irregular¹⁴ Nigerians, in particular in the city of Castelvoturno. The criminality installed here should obviously discount the hegemony of the Italian organisations, and in particular in the area of Caserta, the clan of the Casalesi: the local organisation is essential to allow criminal activities to be undertaken.

One should say however that a balance has been arrived at in which the Nigerians are allowed a good margin of autonomy, to undertake the drug trade and in particular to work undisturbed in the exploitation of prostitution. If for the drug trade we can imagine the existence of an agreement between this ethnic group and the Camorra clan, for the trafficking in women for sexual exploitation the situation appears to be that of total autonomy, apart from the exploitation by Italian criminality of the possibility of profit that such an activity offers them by the loan of collateral services (for example the renting of apartments or management of commercial activities) and the control of the territory.

The Domitian littoral is noted as being a dominating presence on the road of Nigerian women and the city of Castelvoturno is one of the centres of residence of a good part of the *madams* even though operating in other territories of Italy. According to the operators of a community which for years has worked in this city, the Nigerian citizens are so rooted in the territory as to have created well structured contacts with the other Nigerian communities in Italy and to have fixed within that context the thinking head of the organisation which manages the traffic and the exploitation of prostitution.

Such affirmations are difficult to support with statistical data, but it is undoubtedly true that the Domitian littoral appears to be the territory in Campania where the areas of irregularity and criminality are mainly concentrated involving the migrant population, with particular reference to the Nigerians, Albanians and North Africans (drug traffic, exploitation of prostitution, exploitation of workers, etc.).

Piedmont is characterised with the concentration of Nigerian criminality in the capital of the region, which is the principal place of habitual residence of the women who prostitute themselves in the provincial, regional territory and in certain cities such as Novara, Milan, Genoa and Piacenza.

In Triveneto there is also an important presence of Nigerian prostitutes in the area between the provinces of Padua and Treviso and around Verona. In the past

¹⁴ For data on citizens staying see Table 2 and the considerations in paragraph 1.

(mid '90s), even in the area of Udine a massive presence of Nigerian prostitution could be seen: today, however, prostitution on the road is absent, probably because of the extensive investigations following the explosion of a bomb on 23 December 1998 when three policemen were killed: the massive control of the territory, the widespread investigations made of foreign citizens has probably made this territory inhospitable.

In all the territories considered the presence of numerous services of money transfer and other commercial activities managed by Nigerian citizens can be noted, in some cases with penal precedents for drug trafficking, or exploitation of prostitution.

CHAPTER I

Ways and phases of recruitment in Nigeria

1.1 The contact: who is recruited and the type of approach

The traffic of women for sexual exploitation in Nigeria involves a target of young women, all coming from the same geographic area.

It involves women who are generally of age, but young, rarely however more than 30 years old. If in origin one noted the arrival of women of even thirty, today women of an age around 20 are predominant¹⁵.

One cannot exclude the fact that there are minors, but according to the common opinion of Law Enforcement officials and the NGOs (public social services, private social and religious associations) one cannot say that it is a phenomenon of sexual exploitation of minors:

“It is always a very young group, around 18, 20, 21; this is the obviously more covered group. There are also younger girls but according to me not because they are singled out as a product of the Nigerian prostitution of minors; the population is very young and there could also be some minors, but according to me if you speak about prostitution of minors as a subject of the criminal phenomenon we are talking about a much younger group and these are from other countries” (Corpo dei Carabinieri - Rome).

It should be remembered that it is difficult to ascertain the age of women of the street either because of their features, or because frequently they do not tell the truth about their age.

The women we interviewed told us however that there is a notable lowering of the age of the women to be found on the street and that we should assume that in many cases they are minors.

“Now they are younger, before there were no girls of 18, only from 25 and above, now there are also girls of 15 years, but they will not say so, they say they are 18” (Interview Victim No. 9).

Although minors represent more an exception than a systematically pursued objective, nevertheless the interest of the market and the need to respond to the

¹⁵ To confirm this common impression of the operators one can observe that – even if it is not significant data – in the trial analysed the more mature women are to be found in the most noted criminal proceedings – of mid and end ‘90s – and are absent in the succeeding years.

competition of other groups seems to have brought about the lowering of the age of the women recruited and trafficked. To this should be added the interest to have more docile persons, more unprepared, to avoid the risk of being reported or of insubordination.

The area of origin of the women is that of the South, South East of Nigeria in particular from Edo State - with a net prevalence from the area around Benin City - but also from the area around Onisha (in Delta State), Port Harcourt (River State) and the urban area of Lagos, even if this last area one can consider to have lost a great deal of relevance; regarding the economic conditions, these are people that live in poor conditions, or poverty; the prevalent ethnic origin is Benin.



Figure No 1 - South East area of Nigeria.

In most cases, the woman or her family are approached by someone who suggests a departure for Europe with the prospects of easy work, safe and well-paid (and in minor cases to study and work part-time in Europe). This person is nearly always a person who is not unknown, but is part of the family nucleus¹⁶ or has friendship links with the family nucleus, or is a person who is known locally, “famous” (in this last case contact with the woman or her family comes through mediation with a component of the family or from someone known).

¹⁶ Family nucleus in the sense of the extended family.

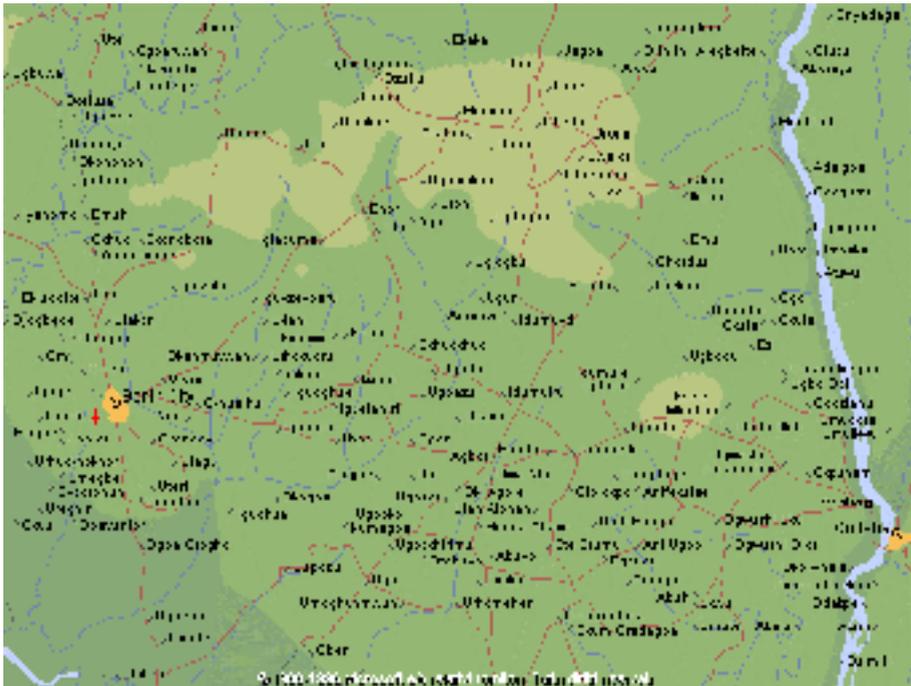


Figure No.2 - Edo State.

It is not certain that the person who makes the first contact is that person who will really provide logistic support for the journey: often the subject will introduce to the victim a person who has the financial ability to organise the journey (the so-called “sponsor”). In many cases the very first contact (the person who suggests the idea) is an intermediary who has the exclusive function of the first contact and who can be either a man or a woman.

It is very difficult to say whether it is the desire for a different life of the woman which encourages this type of contact; undoubtedly in many cases it is to help the desires manifested by some young women, but one cannot say that only girls and women who actively seek to go to Europe are “hooked”.

Undoubtedly, however it is the prospect of improvement of the conditions of life or that of the family which constitutes the decisive push, such as to put aside any doubts or fears:

“There is basically a need to improve the conditions of life on the part of the girls that pushes them to accept the prospects of a transfer or a move. Sometimes in some court cases it appears that above all it is the family to offer those who are then exploited” (National Antimafia Bureau - Rome).

The common impression of different operators is that there is on the part of the recruiters a careful study of the situation¹⁷, the right mediator is able to make contact with the girls who - for reasons mainly connected to their economic and

¹⁷ So that when the person approaching the woman is unknown, the contact comes about on a friendly basis and at the end of a slow approach.

family situation - it is presumed can accept the risks of journey to a far away place, if faced with the possibility of a high income.

Identical reasons can apply to the family: although knowing that the daughter faces a long journey, and aware of the risks - in certain cases even that the possibility to work is connected to prostitution - the mirage of an easy future such as that which one can admire looking at the houses of the families where the women went a few years earlier to Italy, makes it possible to overcome any obstacle.

The “hooking” completed, a female figure appears on the scene (the so-called Nigerian *madam*) who will be fundamental in the contacts with the *madam* in Italy¹⁸ and who often plays an active part in convincing and re-assuring with regards to the journey.

Sometimes this *madam* - who always remains in Nigeria - also assumes the role of *sponsor*, financially guaranteeing the journey towards Europe: in this second case we are faced with a subject who has acquired a certain amount of importance and considerable prestige in the eyes of the community, and who has important economic resources.

1.2 Deception and awareness

A very controversial point is whether the woman before departure is aware of the work activity waiting for her in Italy.

To attempt to give an answer it is necessary to take a step backwards and to follow the story of the birth of the phenomenon until today. From the accounts of the victims it seems that the first cases of women who left Nigeria to come to prostitute themselves in Italy, date back to the end of the 80s and beginning of the 90s. At that time it was mature women, often widows or separated with children. The image of such women appeared much stigmatised and the information transmitted (to be interpreted either in a metaphoric or real manner) seems to have been intended to frighten the young girls, who fled from the idea of being forced to have unorthodox sexual behaviour according to their culture.

“At one time the women were older, already married, divorced, with older children who came here to Italy. That mature woman when she returned to the country everyone said that she made love with a dog (...). Many people believed this, the young were afraid that here you make love with dogs, so the young did not come (...) because in my country the reason is that if someone makes love with a dog, they have to die. You cannot live if you make love with dogs. (...) Then everyone knew that you cannot make love with a dog, here you make love with people, so since 1994, 1995 the younger girls arrived” (Interview Victim No.9).

Over the years, at the same time as the arrival of the younger girls, attracted by alluring work offers and the dream of a life in Europe, the information spread in

¹⁸ On point, see chapters IV and V.

Nigeria. From 1996 in Benin City and in Edo State, the origin of the majority of girls sent to prostitution in Italy, the work of many Nigerian women is well known.

In addition, there has been an increase in the number of forced repatriations provoking a certain reverberation in Nigerian public opinion. Further as in Italy has grown the activity of associations, NGOs, social services occupying themselves with the phenomenon has grown, and has contributed to increasing the knowledge by the girls to be able to have legal and material support to escape the exploitation of prostitution.

Since 1998, various women interviewed affirm *“those who come here and say they don't know are telling lies”* (Interview Victim No.5). The impression is confirmed by nearly all the social operators interviewed, who however have rarely collected direct testimony about the knowledge of going along a path of prostitution. There is in existence a strong resistance to admit this fact by the victims, who seem mainly to recount the stereotyped accounts which negate the evidence. The interpretation of the operators regarding these accounts, however, goes in the direction of recognising a level of intermediate understanding between deception and self-deception.

One can talk about self-deception given that the same victims want to believe what is being offered them, being trustful of the good faith of the persons in the family or acquaintances. Despite the fact that the situation of Nigerian women in Italy is already known, they want to convince themselves that for them it will be different; they want to believe in those who offer other types of work in Europe.

“This is a thing that I tell you that at Benin City from 1996-1997 it was already known...yes, there was someone who did not yet believe, but it was something that was known...that you go to Italy and 99% you finish up in the prostitution game, but there is someone who says no, there is a lot of other work, if you want money you can even go to prostitute yourself...and then there are other that do not believe...why do we trust persons who then make us finish up as prostitutes. How disgusting! I think that many girls are still there until today” (Interview Victim No.7).

In different cases the girls refer to the fact that it is known that in Italy the Nigerian women prostitute themselves, but this *“vox populi”* concerns only Italy; therefore, faced with an offer to travel to another destination (Spain in particular) they feel re-assured.

“Because they told me that I was going to Spain and not to Italy (...). In Nigeria everyone knows that in Italy the girls come to make prostitution. But we who are here now know that also in Germany, Spain, etc. make prostitution (...) if you return to Nigeria and say that you arrived from Germany, Holland they think that that person went to do regular work” (Interview Victim No.8).

“There is someone who made fun of me and told me that if I wanted to go to Germany to work in a school, I would teach English (...) in Nigeria I taught for two years in secondary schools (...) then one day before departure they told me that there were problems to go to Germany so I had to come here to Italy, then after a few weeks someone come and take me to Germany. But it wasn't so” (Interview Victim No.15).

The increase of information and awareness on the part of the girls already present on Italian territory, and the considerable number of those who leave Nigeria, means that these are becoming more difficult to manage by the organisation of the *madam*.

This is one of the reasons why since three or four years the recruiters prefer to contact even younger girls coming from villages in the rural areas where there is much poverty, the information available is scarce and where the ties represented by the *woodoo* rituals are still very strong.

“In Nigeria it is known, but the problem is that the pimps have changed their ideas, they no longer go to the city to get girls, they go to the small villages where the story has not yet arrived” (Interview Victim No.4).

“However there is some that live in the country and who do not know what it is to make prostitution in Italy. So in these years pimps went to the country, to take the girls to bring them here. Because in the country they don’t know that here prostitution is made” (Interview Victim No.8).

These women are extremely weak subjects both from the cultural and material point of view and therefore easy to manage and subdue.

The evidence collected by the operators agree that the active role is often that of close relations, the extended family or members of the community in the process which brings the victims to start along the road of the traffic and of prostitution. The relationship with the family appears frequently as a decisive step, even if the type of pressure exerted on the victim is extremely variable.

In some cases a decisive role is played by the mother of the girl who, although knowing the type of work offered to the daughter, reasons that the choice is made out of the necessity that a member of the family sacrifices herself for the well being of the entire family nucleus.

In other cases it is the extended family that is the determining support and stimulus. For example the uncles and aunts, that is to say persons who are linked by close ties or who frequent each other, to take on the function of the first contact with those who organise the journey and to reassure the girl, they wait to recruit, and her family. In this case the deception appears as treachery of the faith given to a person they consider worthy of this faith. There are different judgements which appear on the part of the victims: passing from a heavy condemnation of the family member who deceived them to the thought that even they are an unconscious victim of the recruitment system.

The evidence therefore shows heterogeneous actions managed by different means and with diverse interests. In very many cases the pressure on the girl are those of moral duties which bind the members of the extended family. But at the base of the choice there is nearly always a pressing economic need: the poverty of the family, a close member of family sick and in need of medicine, the impossibility of obtaining health assistance because of the high costs, etc. But the most important parameter is the mirage of a rapid personal and family social ascent, possibly thanks to the remittances of the girl.

In this variegated framework, the deception/self-deception dynamic is carried out through the active role of the family and passes through the activation of loyalty of belonging of the victim (even using, as we will see, a magic-religious pact).

The opportunity offered to girls with precarious economic situations and/or with great aspirations, is a strong grip on them as it is seen as the only possibility to leave Nigeria and to have an easy life for her and the family. Belief in what has been promised without much study of the truth of the proposal because deep down no one wants to give up their own dreams, above all if it is your family that is pushing you.

According to many operators, among the reasons that push the family “to pretend not to see” or even to knowingly send the girls on the street of trafficking and prostitution, as well as being at the base of the autonomous determination of some girls and women, a role which is not secondary, is represented by the strong permeability of the Nigerian culture to values of riches and well-being promised by the West¹⁹. On the other hand one should consider that Nigerian prostitution in Italy has as a result in Nigeria, the sudden and evident enriching of some family groups who before were in situations of poverty. Examples of success and terms of paragon are used to show to the girls that need to be convinced to undertake the journey. Such activity is seen as the quickest and most effective means to change the social status of the entire family group.

“Because there they have this way of thinking «If she went, and returned to Nigeria so rich, you are more beautiful than she is...». And if you reply «But Mummy there are those that die in Italy». And the mother «But that is not your destiny my daughter, now I am going to those who make woodoo to see how this story of the journey is». The mother goes and is told «Everything will go alright, she will return very rich». She comes back and says to you «go, I am behind you»” (Interview Victim No.8).

In this case the deception or self-deception is in denying the dangers and the failures and referring only to examples of success.

And these examples are also the reference for the girls who seek to find a way to depart on their own or accept the proposal of some acquaintance without there being an active role of the family or even against the will of the parents. In fact, there is no lack of cases where the family and the parents are against the departure, aware of the dangers which the girl will face. It is difficult to evaluate the strength of the contrasting situation, but what emerges from the evidence is that there are several cases of flight without the consent of the parents.

¹⁹ A police operator remembers what a woman said “*this girl had a good cultural preparation, a diploma or degree and expressed herself very well in English; she also had a normal social position in Nigeria, I can't say wealthy, but she was comfortable she came here to find a better economic situation (...) so she told me what the problems were in Nigeria which pushed all these girls to come to prostitute themselves: they were from the South, in this part of the South of Nigeria bordering the sea there are oil wells of Agip and other oil companies there was some economic availability and therefore the Italians and Europeans who worked there to have sexual intercourse “had to go to” the prostitutes and therefore it was they who made the network understand that prostitution could pay?*”.

“How did I come? There was a friend of mine, we went to school together, she said to me «You are so clever at school, but you know that if you go to Europe you will be a success», and so I said «Alright, I will try». But she told me “Don’t say anything to anyone», and I said «But are you coming too?». «No, no I will stay here», she replied, «but you will go with a friend of my father», I went back to the house happy, and I told my father and he said «No, no you mustn’t go» shouting at me, and I said «But aren’t you happy?», perhaps he understood I don’t know, I was the eldest daughter and he told me «Don’t try» (...). But this stuck in my throat and I said “but if I want to go and study in Europe, why should he say no (...). That day that I should have departed I said to my father: «Today you won’t see me when you get back from work». He understood and locked me in the house and I escaped through the window...I was a bit hard headed, because it was as if one prevented a child from obtaining a dream” (Interview Victim No.10).

There exist cases of women who voluntarily choose to come to Italy to prostitute themselves, pushed, without doubt by economic necessity (supporting children born outside marriage, being abandoned by the man who is father of their children, elderly parents, or other family members who need support, etc.), but at the same time stimulated by the mirage of easy and important gains to spend in material goods, symbols of their social escalation.

For all of them, even those aware of the choice, the conditions of work and amount of liberty conceded in terms of management of time, money and their own independence²⁰, remain obscure.

“Now they all know that you come to make prostitution, but they don’t know that you have to go on the street, they think it is in the house, as they do in other countries, only in Italy do you work on the street. They don’t think that it is so cold here. They think that there is money here and they come to make money. In Nigeria they see that those who once did not eat three times a day, now eat, dress well, so they say even my daughter must leave to earn a bit of money” (Interview Victim No.8).

“Before leaving Nigeria I knew what I was coming to do, but I did not know it was on the street. They told me that I would have repaid in two months, but it was not like that” (Interview Victim No.4).

“I knew that here you made prostitution, I came here with my own money, I did not come through a pimp. But I did not know how to get here. Where I lived there was a woman who had already been here, I said that I also wanted to go to Italy. She said to me «Alright you pay me and I will take you». I told her no, that I have my own money. She said «Alright, I will help you, prepare all the documents you need, like that you go». However that women lied (she deceived me) she took my money and gave me to an agency so when I arrived here I had to pay (...). If, when I was in Nigeria, I had known that you have to pay to be under other persons who tell you, do this, do that I would not have come (...). If I had known that you come here to pay, to become a child under other persons, I would not have come ever” (Interview Victim No.9).

²⁰ On point, *infra*, Chapter IV.

In the interviews made by the social operators, this aspect always emerges very clearly: in all the personal stories relating to the traffic - and also in cases where from the very beginning the woman knew what she was coming to do in Italy - what remained completely unknown was the subjection, control, privation of freedom. -Before departure the material conditions of life that they will face are also unknown.

The most authentic and generalised deception perpetrated on the Nigerian women does not seem therefore to relate to “what” they will do in Italy, as much as “how” and at what cost in terms of autonomy and personal dignity.

In the accounts of the victims, the discovery of how effectively they obey the relationship of faith towards the *madam* is always a moment of painful incredulity. A relationship of absolute subjection was not foreseen, within which the daily schedule, the payment of the debt, the conditions of work are totally controlled from the outside, at a cost of physical and psychological violence in the case of not obeying the rules. Improvised accomodation was also not foreseeable, often in a room which also hosts ten girls, without the possibility to dispose of some small amount of autonomy, of their own time.

The material impossibility to get out of the situation of control and the generalised prohibition to send money to the family completes the picture. We will see this in Chapter IV.

1.3 Subjection to magic-religious practices: the rites and the compulsion bonds

The magic-religious tie is a fundamental aspect of the traffic of girls and women from Nigeria which characterises it in a peculiar manner: it is the element which on a symbolic and psychological level strongly subdues the women and ties their destiny to the pledge undertaken, the debt incurred and therefore to the wishes of the *madam*.

This is a magic practice denominated *woodoo* or *juju* which the Nigerian *madam* celebrates or makes the witch doctor celebrate (the so called *native doctor*) on the girls destined for the prostitution market in Europe.

“Before leaving they take you to a witch doctor who tells you «you are obliged to pay» and you haven’t yet left. Then he says «when you arrive in Italy all the money which you earn (you must give them), if you take one euro you will die (...) Swear!» And you swear, they all swear” (Interview Victim No.5).

The strength of these rites and oaths which will be used by the *madam* as a warning or threat is due to the fact that they are based on widespread beliefs of the population of the south of Nigeria. According to the animist cult, when the pledges undertaken in the rites are not observed, one can become victim of evil, becoming mad and die, not only for themselves but also their family members.

“Benin City is one of those States in Nigeria where they believe a lot in this woodoo thing (...) therefore it is for that reason that the pimps always seek [the girls, Ed.] there. These girls are raised since they are children knowing that woodoo exists” (Interview Victim No.4).

Even if the dominant religion of Nigeria is Christian (Catholics and Protestants), the supernatural-traditional dimension is very much felt: it is described as *“A society rich in superstition, where the rational and magic are joined and the monotheistic religion joined with spiritism”*²¹.

From the evidence supplied by the victims of trafficking, there emerges a certain freedom of choice, which translates into the co-presence and living beside people of different appurtenance, even within the same family group. In the majority of cases, however, such freedom is very relative, from the moment that animism, if it is practised by the head of the family, prevails over the other religious practises. The cultural and social pressure reinforces and supports the animist roots. It follows those ambivalent religious beliefs, an Animist-Christian synchronism, which co-exists in the same person and in the entire community.

“This is my culture, I was born and raised there, I feel the things that happen, this is my religion, this is my culture, I think that [woodoo, Ed.] will exist forever (...). So it is something in which one believes, growing, seeing my grandparents, my parents, it is something within you. When the girls come and they tell me «I believe», I don't judge them, because it is their religion (...). Catholic, in Africa, in general, means that you are mixed with others. You go to church, you are catholic, yes, you are Muslim, yes, you are Buddhist, yes!!! (...) the strong thing depends on what your parents do because with us it is said that the children grow from their origins, of the head of the family. You can go to church if you want, you can go and be a Buddhist if you want, you can go to the Muslims if you want but when father has to do what he does, you must be present. You are there. So, I have always believed that I am Catholic because I was raised in Lagos [with the uncle, Ed.] and my uncle is Catholic. On Wednesdays we are at mass, Saturday afternoon, Sunday morning, there are problems if you do not go to mass. But if you are in Benin City [with the parents, Ed.], I tell my mother that I am going to mass and she replies «But what mass, sit here». My mother was never a Catholic, my father is half Catholic and half doing his own thing and says «I make my woodoo, I go to church, I am only looking for a way to thank God»” (Interview Victim No.7).

A Nigerian sister of the congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Benin City referring to this says: *“We always say that one does not need to believe because it doesn't matter. But it is difficult. Even the priests speak against woodoo, but they don't feel (...) it is something connected to the culture, they can practice, come to church and make woodoo” (Fernandez Centre - Castelvolturno).*

The types of rite to condition and ratify the undertaking of the women to obey and to pay the contracted debt consist in taking underwear from the same and wrapping it inside these small locks of hair, pubic hair and nails from the hands and feet. All this is folded in a piece of paper, and on the outside the *madam* writes the name of the person who swore allegiance and subordination. The wrapping then

²¹ Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (2001).

formed is put beside three other substances (black powder taken from bones or horns of animals and other organic material, such as soap or vegetable extracts) and joined together with the objects symbolise a bond or a subjection.

In origin the rite seems to have been done for the first time at the moment of arrival in Italy; today instead, the rule seems to be the celebration in Nigeria, followed by successive celebrations, reminders, reinforcement, and repetitions in Italy.

This is the reason for which even now some of these fetishes are to be found during the searches undertaken for the investigations: in some cases there were small pieces of wood to which there was attached a piece of iron bent as a hook or a horseshoe tied with cord or string, in other cases little padlocks tied up with string, all this impregnated with a sticky organic substance, like pitch: these objects were then placed above the envelope containing the underwear of the women and different corporeal material²². In other cases photographs of the victims have been found with one or two pins inserted.



Figure No.3 - Source: Operation Edo - final notes on the Nigerian Mafia - *Questura* of Udine, 1998.

With respect to the type of rite undertaken in Nigeria the information provided by the victims is very scant. There is a certain reluctance and modesty (perhaps partly superstition) to tell how *woodoo* is practised. Often reference is made to the fact that it is “*Something African*”, difficult to understand by westerners. Those who tell, immediately back away, asserting that they do not believe in such things.

The little information available makes a variegated picture, in which various types of *woodoo* emerge, practised in special places of cult, with organic substances which must be swallowed by those sealing the pact, cuts made on the body of those who swear and collection of skins, hair, nails, liquids of the person undergoing the rite to bind them through the possession of parts of their body.

²² For example in a written report from a search was written “*in the bedroom of the new arrival, inside some drawers beside the bed was found: No.1 cardboard box, dimensions about 25x20x20 centimetres, containing No.4 padlocks and No.8 pieces of iron in a U form (5 larger ones coloured black and 3, smaller and coloured red) all wrapped by black thread to a not better identified organic matter*” (criminal proceeding - Turin, 2000).

“We are going to a place where there are all types of woodoo that you can imagine, outside there were all the figures (...) those who go there know that they are going to make woodoo (...), it is like a building, there are all sorts of types of figures that you can imagine, monsters, etc.” (Interview Victim No.7).

“If you see what they do it will frighten you” (Interview Victim No.2).

“There are various ways, they use water, all sorts of herbs that smell, perhaps they have put a six month old herb, they always use that water, they cut you, many things” (Interview Victim No.7).

“You go inside the room and you immediately know, there is a strange smell, impossible to explain. They do it there with crude things, meat, chickens, goats; they take the heart and eat it crude. You must share it and swear” (Interview Victim No.10).

“I went to this witch doctor; they had taken the head of a dead man, then put water inside and made me drink it” (Interview Victim No.5).

“For woodoo they take off your panties, brassiere, and wait until you menstruate, they take off the sanitary pad that you have used for the menstruation, they take away your hairs under your armpits, they take everything” (Interview Victim No.5).

Despite the fact that from the testimony of the victims, there emerges the obligation to do the rite before the departure for Europe, in some cases this was not done because of the firm refusal of the girl. The reasons for the refusal can be rooted in a strong religious belief of the girl, and therefore in the lack of acknowledgement of the value of *woodoo* as a pact between the two parties involved, or in the fear of such practices which comprise an oath in which they do not fundamentally believe to be all-binding.

For such subjects and for those who, despite the rite undertaken before departure, appear to be controlled with difficulty by the *madam*, because too rebellious and independent, then the next step is menaces, which often come about, to make *woodoo* in Nigeria against them. In this case, the nature of the rite is changed, from a strict bond between two consenting parties, to what appears more as a magic practise to damage the person aimed at. Such menaces often result in being an efficacious means also for those who previously were able to not fall into the trap of the mechanism of *woodoo*.

“I wanted to go and she told me that I was not going anywhere. She called me one morning about six o'clock, and told me «today you give me your nails, your hair and your panties and I must take a photograph of you in the nude. If you pay me the debt, I will give it back to you». That day I went to work and cut my nails short because I did not want my nails cut while I was sleeping” (Interview Victim No.4).

The subjection to the rite is a fundamental element in exploitation of prostitution of the Nigerian women and is one of the steps that permit to say that one is faced with a form of very strong psychological and moral subjection.

Various privileged witnesses of the police referred to their initial difficulty and their scepticism when faced with this situation whereby the increase of knowledge was transformed into the understanding of being faced with an extremely binding mechanism, for which, independently from the project of life that the victim had from the start she remains trapped.

The tie is so strong not only because of the terrible risk of falling into disgrace and in ills at psycho-physical level, but also for its significance on the level of relations with the family and with the community. From accounts gathered there appears to be in fact a great importance attached to the assumption of the promise to the community: the rite does not only tie on the magic-religious level, but also ties on the social level, and, not respecting it, constitutes an element of dishonour in front of the entire community.

In addition the belief that someone possesses part of the body of another is a well rooted belief and therefore occupies a position of supremacy.

“You are tied to them, you are tied to this oath, you are obliged to respect it. And there are those who, I don’t know how to explain it, those who command you because this oath exists. They must command you, control you, and you are obliged to respect it” (Interview Victim No.7).

In the interview made with a psychologist, who since many years has worked in a community which takes in Nigerian victims, this aspect has been carefully studied. For the Nigerian girls: *“The contract is a language based on signs, on agreements of words, on a faith mediated by words (...) the Nigerians still play on this: the word is the most important thing. The woodoo sign according to me is only an ulterior sanction, because the bargaining is at the beginning. We, with our western mentality have perhaps stopped at the concrete sign, woodoo, but the pact is pre-existing”* (On the Road Association - Martinscuro).

One of the reasons for which it is so difficult for the Nigerian girls to escape the conditions of the pact, resides therefore also in the sentiment of loyalty to their own community, which was sealed by a solemn promise, which morally binds, of which *woodoo* is only the formal dressing.

Not by chance, under the psychological profile, the sense of treachery towards the community of belonging is the most difficult to fight for victims who consider the possibility of flight. This, as will be seen in Chapter VI, is one of the aspects which makes difficult accompanying the victims towards a new life.

According to the opinion of some of the police, the level of subjection in part is tied to the social extraction and cultural level: in some cases - which however are referred as being isolated and sporadic - a good cultural level, together with a strong Christian religious faith, has enabled the victims to liberate themselves, even quickly, from the fear provoked by *woodoo* rites. On the magic level the strength of a faith in God acts by cancelling the powers of the rite and those who officiates it. On the level of formal undertaking, Catholic morale guarantees the maintenance of the undertaking made.

“As he knows that I am a person who lives in my little honesty. I grew up in a Christian family who is afraid of God and he knows that I cannot say that I cannot

pay, then from the first day that they told me that someone will come to make me swear that I will pay, they told me that he was ill, that he could not go out and said «No, she is too religious there is no need to do this»” (Interview Victim No.3).

More frequent are the cases of witnesses collected by the police that report on a total subjection to *woodoo*, subjection that we could define as an “immaterial” form of reduction to slavery: “*They are terrorised, really terrorised by these rites, so they are careful...even faced with our intervention and the fact that the madams were in handcuffs, arrested, an objective fact, indisputable...not even this has convinced them to say something (...). Its crazy, you have no idea what a woodoo can do*” (*Questura* of Venice).

The interesting aspect is that believing in the rite, in its “capacity to determine good or evil” is shared even by the *madams*.

In numerous interceptions of telephone calls it emerges that the *madam* present in Italy asks the Nigerian *madam* advice on how to keep the *Questura* (local State Police office) away, or asks to have some things (objects, powder, animals) sent to celebrate a propitious rite, to stop the girls escaping or against the intervention of the same *Questura*.

“*We had the telephonic interception of a pimp who had first acquired a sheep to make a rite against us, then a crocodile. It is like that, in their culture*” (*Questura* of Turin).

“*To speak about ‘popular credibility’, faced with cases like this, will not permit capturing the essence of this instrument. Here, in fact, we do not face a magician who, consciously, abusing the ‘popular credibility’, with artefacts and tricks, plagiarisms, pins in money to the unfortunate placing before him a future of misery and misadventure, that only his potions, filters, etc. can avoid, inasmuch as he knows well that the black future foreseen will not occur, or if it should occur, it depends on other things. In our case, conversely, there is the understanding from the slaughterer and the victims to find themselves faced with something that transcends human nature and is certainly capable of determining, changing the course of the events. It is the same who believes in the magic rite, because she herself resorts to this when she thinks that events are moving against her, and it is the evaluation of this aspect that makes swearing that instrument of pressure and threat, perhaps more ‘convincing’ and dangerous than a weapon, as commonly understood, if, as in our case, victim and aggressor believe in “the rite” thinking that this must be honoured if one does not want to draw the wrath of the gods*” (Preventive detention order, criminal proceeding - Naples, 1999).

1.4 Debt and the contract

Every Nigerian woman, forced to prostitute herself on Italian territory, departs with a debt to those who have given her the possibility of reaching Italy, the amount of which today is around 50,000-60,000 Euros.

In the first years of the traffic of women from Nigeria the debt was certainly lower, around 50 million Lire (about 25,000 Euros) but with the passing of the years it has progressively increased.

For what reason? According to the major part of those interviewed it is not possible to establish any relationship with the type of girl or the cost of the journey: the debt itself does not vary according to whether the victim is a woman potentially able to earn more because she is younger, beautiful or because a longer journey to reach Italy was complex and costly.

“It is a historical fact, in the beginning it cost less, now it costs more” (Questura of Udine): faced with this apparent absence of explanations we can imagine that there is, instead, the knowledge that the risks of losing a girl upon arrival has increased by an eventual expulsion or, *in itinere*, because leaving the work on the street and denouncing those who have profited, or otherwise because of the increase of violence on the part of the clients, it is economically more advantageous and prudent to request a larger sum of money. Another motive may be the increase in the costs of the intermediaries or the greed of different subjects that participate in the undertaking of the project, who think they can profit more for the same risks.

It should also be said that faced with these greater requests for money there was not any particular rebellion: the rebellion, as we will see further on, is connected if at all - but not always - to “not maintaining the pact”, to the modification of the sum due or to resort to subterfuges.

The failed rebellion to the initial request of a large sum in many cases is due to the absence, on the part of the victim, of a clear perception of the significance of that sum, of what it means to be able to earn such a sum of money:

“She tells me that I should prostitute myself for her and pay 70 million. I say, what is 70 million because I don’t understand Italian money, she tells me that in our money it is 3 million and 500. With that money you can buy 3, 4 apartments. I say «But how does one pay? How many years?». She says «Even one year, there are many who pay that sum»” (Interview Victim No.8).

“They explained to me how much this is in Nigerian money, 40,000 dollars, a sum with two thousand zeros. Only when the girls come here do they understand... for some girls the cultural level is also so low” (Questura of Venice).

Such a financial pledge in some cases is made official through the signature of a “contract” before a so-called notary: little is known about what this signature implies, the impression, however is that it is a pledge with legal validity in Nigeria inasmuch as in some court cases it is said that the family is formally contested with the lack of payment of such a sum and for that reason the members of the family are sent to prison.

Apart from legal validity of the contract, it is sure that the family becomes guarantor for the payment and, in the case the girl escapes, the payment is directly requested to the family in Nigeria on the part of those who followed the initial phases of the traffic.

According to some the real true contract assumes an importance in particular for the women and the family further away from the animist beliefs: one could think that if the threat connected to the *woodoo* rite is sufficient in most cases, in others the bond of respect for the pledges undertaken are manifested in the form of a formal contract, which one could say is very tight, because from this the honour of the family depends.

From the testimony of a cultural mediator it emerges that similar formulas, substitutive or integrative of *woodoo*, were already present at the beginning of the '90s, at the birth of the phenomenon of the traffic in Nigerian girls for prostitution in Italy. In those years the family was called to guarantee the maintenance of the pact through the assumption of a sort of mortgage on one of the properties, generally on the owned house.

“It is something that started in 1998. Before, 1990, 1991, they took the measurements of the house of your parents. When the daughter finished paying, the parents went to the family of the pimps to take back the planimetry of the house, if however the girl did not pay, they sold the house for the debt. But in these years they make a contract which costs 200 Euros, which for us is a lot of money, there are not many people who can pay that sum. The contract is between the girl and the traffickers, if there are parents who are in agreement it is between the parents and the traffickers” (Interview Victim No.8).

But the present type of contract foresees payment by the girl or her family even of that which can be defined as “legal fees or registration” of the contract.

“Now they ask for money to register, to make a contract” (Interview Victim No.8).

“I was there (...) a friend of hers with a daughter arrived, they wanted to pay 30,000 of our money (300 dollars) because before leaving they ask for this money to register, because they go to a lawyer to say «you must pay, you must not denounce me», to also go and do this woodoo that they do before departure” (Interview Victim No.5).

The contractual bonds of a moral pledge, of a ritual magic type, or of a legal nature, have a strong hold on the conscience of the same victims. Nearly always, despite being aware of the injustice of the situation in which they find themselves living, they keep faith with the pledge undertaken and only after having extinguished the debt do they eventually decide to lodge a complaint.

In this case, some operators of the police report having received a complaint by women who have finished paying their debt. In that moment they were finally relaxed on the psychological and moral level and at the same time realised that, having finished to pay the debt, the complaint was the only way to get out of the illegal context and the irregular situation.

Not necessarily, as we will see, does this imply that one is faced with false or pretentious complaints, but certainly they are complaints that are difficult to deal with, as they refer in many cases to facts and situations going back a long time.

Finally, it is useful to mention here that the debt is not the only financial pledge to which the victims are subjected to: once in Italy, as we will see, they are held to

pay considerable sums for lodging, food and a position of work (the so-called *joint*). All this makes this traffic very advantageous and, according to the police, also permits those who manage it to wait for some time for the final payment of the debt, because however a fixed and periodic income is assured.

CHAPTER II

The journey towards Italy

The journey is a fundamental moment in the traffic of women for exploitation of prostitution from Nigeria: and it is the first step towards the exploitation which will be undertaken in European countries.

In the following two paragraphs the routes and roads are presented as they emerge from the interviews of the operators and the material analysed. It has been decided to arrange the information received from the privileged witnesses by the identification of the different roads followed and to present later the testimony of the victims, which confirm the routes described by the operators and offer interesting knowledge on what could make one want to undertake such a journey from Nigeria to Europe.

2.1 The journey: routes and organisation

We shall see what has been possible to know through the operators of the Law Enforcement and the NGOs involved in the sector, as well as through the results of some investigations by the police, of the phases which follow the recruitment and which concretely make possible the arrival of the girls in the countries of destination in Europe, in this case in Italy.

The journeys are not all the same and we can affirm that over the years there have been some important modifications of this aspect of the phenomenon. While in the beginning a direct air journey appeared absolutely essential, over the years one has witnessed not only a diversification of the departure and arrival airports, but also the appearance of journeys by land through Africa and, in the last period, journeys having an intermediate stop in East Europe.

It should be noted how the traffickers seem to be able to very easily redefine the routes, whether to respond to the intensification of controls, or to take advantage of international events (such as the football World Cup, occasions of pilgrimage or trips of some musical groups) which involve a notable increase in air traffic and/or a quantitatively significant transfer of citizens not belonging to the European Union.

It is without doubt that such facility is connected also to a capillary presence, in various parts of Europe, of persons that can undertake a role of “first reception” for the exploited woman in transit. Over the years many Nigerian citizens have emigrated from their land towards Europe, but also to the United States or South America. Besides many emigrants who work legally in these countries, there are, as occurs in all migration situations, persons who live on illegality and act as points of contacts for the criminal networks that manage the traffic of persons or drugs.

The routes

We find at least three types of journeys which are undertaken over different routes and involve different organisational means.

a) Air journey with direct destination in Western Europe

This route has seen, in the first years of the development of the phenomenon, the main airport of departures as that of Lagos, in Nigeria. Successively Accra in Ghana and in a minor way Cotonu in Benin or Abidjan in the Ivory Coast were used, but also noted were departures from airports situated in Togo, Burkina Faso and Mali.

In many cases the victims recounted that they managed to get over the controls at the departure airport easily, to have noted a familiar attitude by the person escorting them with those officials at the check points and, in some cases, to have seen also an exchange of money.

The movements within Africa having as a destination the chosen airport are undertaken by bus, in some cases also in cars and on motorcycles, especially if the trip is short. The overland movements can also foresee transportation of a relevant number of persons, whereas on the flights in general only 2 or 3 persons are embarked, supplied with documents and regular “visas”²³.

The main destination airports are Paris, London, Amsterdam, Frankfurt, Vienna, Madrid, Brussels, and Zurich. The direct destinations in Italy were Rome, Fiumicino Airport and Milan, Linate Airport, but today it seems that direct arrivals in Italy have greatly diminished following an intensification of the controls.

From the stops in Europe the arrival in Italy is assured through rail transport or in some cases through the use of cars.

The arrival in Italy is therefore an arrival from the North which sees Turin often as a fundamental stop, even if the victims are directed as their final destination, elsewhere. Turin functions, therefore, not only as a final destination, but in different cases as a technical stopover, logistical stop, with a view to a destination in the South or North East.

The areas of Italy where the principal residential nucleus of Nigerian women are registered (although, as will be seen, in many cases they also move very many kilometres to prostitute themselves) and the *madam* with the organisation that moves around are: Turin, the area of the North East and in particular Verona and Padua, Rome, the Neapolitan and Caserta area, in particular the city of Castelvoturno. The area of emerging residence would appear to be that of Umbria, around Perugia.

To better visualise what is described we can make use of a figure from the documentation relating to the first investigations of a certain note undertaken in Italy as far as the traffic in women from Nigeria is concerned, the so-called “Operation Edo”, conducted by the *Questura* of Udine in 1998, which clearly illustrates this type of route.

²³ For documents, see Chapter III.

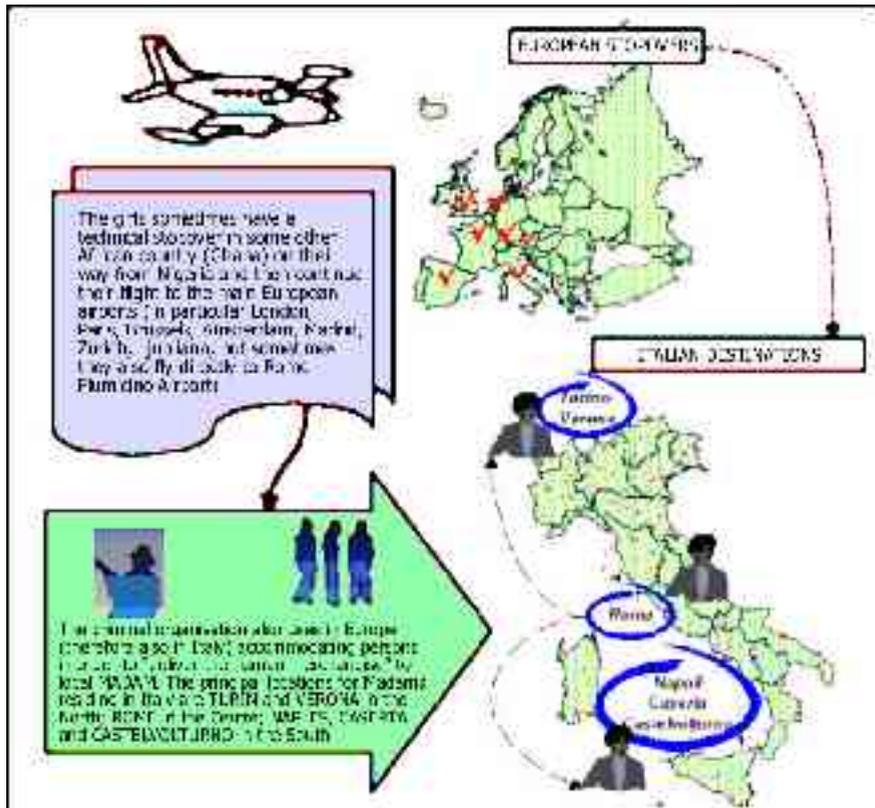


Figure No.4 - Source: Operation Edo - final notes on the Nigerian Mafia - *Questura* of Udine, 1998.

b) Air journey with transit in Eastern Europe

This second route represents, according to many operators, a variation brought about in a another moment: the journey - in this case from one of the African airports already mentioned (Ghana, Benin, Ivory Coast) - foresees a direct flight to Moscow, Warsaw, Prague or Budapest which in general is followed by another flight to the ex-Yugoslavia and an overland continuation. In some cases, the second flight is missing and the journey proceeds directly overland.

Another route foresees the arrival with a flight to Turkey and from there a continuation overland through Greece, Bulgaria, Hungary, the ex-Yugoslavia.



Figure No.5 - Trafficking routes through East Europe.

c) Overland journey

The journey undertaken completely overland is without doubt the most tiring, the longest and that which comprises major risk.

The trajectory followed is various, but it seems possible to outline two with arrival in Morocco:

- the first is that departing from Nigeria, through Niger (and sometimes also or alternatively Mali, through Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso) and Algeria;
- the second, which instead passes more to the west, through Benin, Togo, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mali and then again Algeria to Morocco (with variations of passage through Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Senegal).

The journey through Africa, that can last several months (some witnesses talk about journeys which last even six months), ends with the crossing of the Strait of Gibraltar and arrival in Spain from where they proceed to Italy in car or by train.

According to some operators some arrivals are also noted in southern Sicily starting from North Africa²⁴ (Tunisia and Libya), but the impression that there are systematic arrivals of Nigerian women in southern Italy is not confirmed by reliable proof, so we do not believe that in this case it is in effect an alternative route to the others.

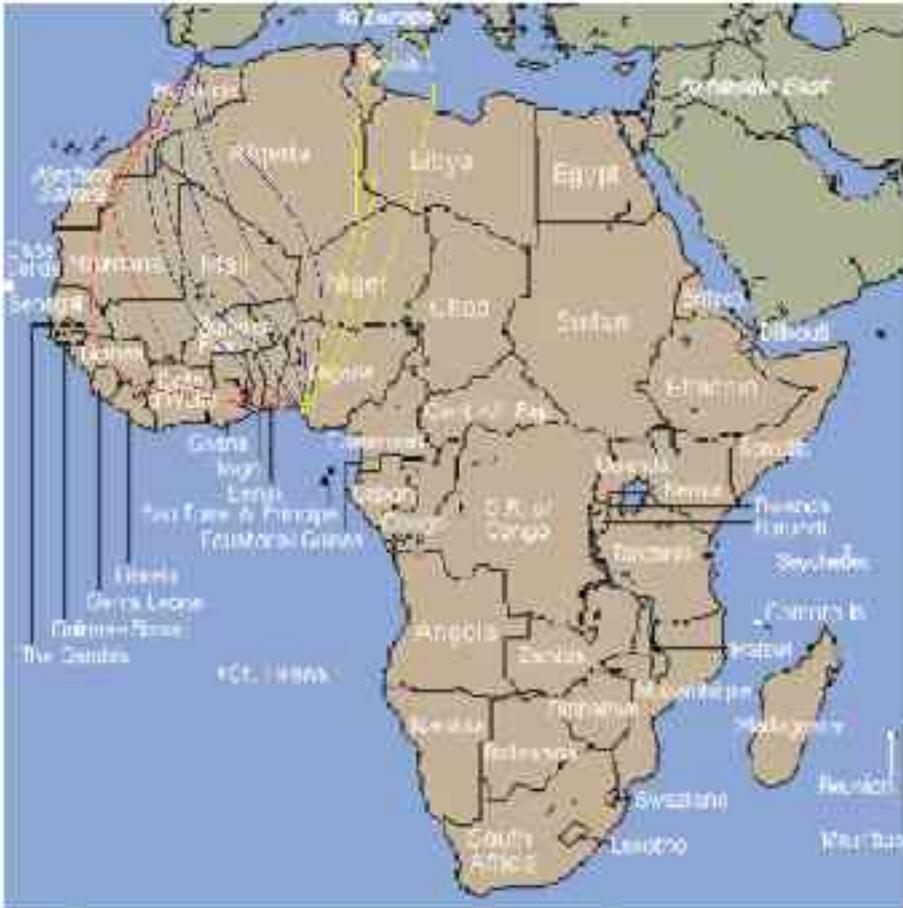


Figure No.6 - African map showing the three routes directing to Spain and South Sicily.

Organisational means

Whatever the type of the journey is, the women never arrive at the final destination in a group; the air journey or the movements from Spain and from Eastern Europe (usually from ex-Yugoslavia) to Italy are carried out seeking to pass as much as possible unobserved and therefore moving one or two women as a seemingly normal journey.

The women are nearly always accompanied: it can happen that in some parts they are left alone, but normally there is always someone escorting them who is usually a male. Rarely the person accompanying is the same throughout the whole journey.

²⁴ These are sporadic arrivals confused with many other illegals, who depart from Tunisia and Libya.

The journey overland through Africa is one which sees the major number of persons involved: often the *passeur* changes at each border and however stops before crossing the sea towards Europe.

The person assigned to the sea journey (who sometimes is one of the many *passeurs* who transport illegal immigrants from North Africa) leaves the victim on the coast where she is collected by a new person who will be responsible in some cases for transportation until the final destination. In other cases, the woman will be escorted to the nearest airport or railway station where the victim is taken in charge and accompanied until the destination.

The single *passeurs* are paid²⁵ “*in itinere*”, along the road, and it is not rare that they have a cheating attitude towards increasing the price or even abandoning “the merchandise”: “*There is this very sad negotiation of handing over money which is made in stages: coinciding with the arrival in city X, State Y, there is a transfer of money in a certain hotel*” (*Questura* of Milan).

The exchange of money in the case of flights is less. We find those responsible for the transportation towards the nearest airport and then the person escorting during the flight who, often, on arriving at the airport, leaves the woman to someone who will effectively accompany her to the destination. Even the person escorting or the final persons who accompany, reaching Italy and having “handed over”, rapidly leave Italian territory.

In this case the person escorting at the end immediately requests the payment in cash, while the intermediate people accompanying are paid during the journey and in many cases keep the women until the payment is made.

Whatever is the means chosen, it can happen that during the journey there are forced stopovers, due to delays in paying the *passeurs*, who refuse to continue to accompany if they do not receive the payment agreed upon, or due to a moment of difficulty of the *madam* in Italy who does not have logistic and financial availability to collect the “merchandise” on arrival.

In any case, it seems that we can confirm the absolute principle that: “*the merchandise must arrive at the destination by any means*”. All observers agree on the fact that there is a consolidated ability (made up of knowledge, resources, support and information networks, capacity for adaptation and of re-defining the tactics useful for overcoming anything unforeseen or any difficulty), such that the victim manages always to reach the final destination, even if this involves additional money or a modification in the foreseen route or transportation means. A clear demonstration of this capability for reacting to the difficulties encountered is found in the way the *madam* manages. In any case, to reach the woman whenever she is intercepted by the police upon arrival on the coast or in an airport.

In several cases it appears that the women are given an order to tear up the documents upon arrival. As a clandestine, without valid documents able to identify them, they are accompanied to a centre of reception/permanence where they remain for a certain amount of time. Here they are heard by a judge who issues an expulsion order.

²⁵ For payments made through *money transfers*, see Chapter V.

The same thing happens to the women arriving in Spain via the Strait of Gibraltar who generally are intercepted by the Spanish police and accompanied to a centre of reception/permanence.

When they go out of the centre of reception/permanence, after having received the expulsion order, the woman finds waiting for her a person (either the *madam* or a man working for her) who accompanies her in Italy, eluding the controls.

It is very evident that this type of intervention is possible only thanks to the existence of a wide *network*, flexible, with ramifications in Nigeria and in the other African countries, as well as Europe.

2.2 The journey seen through the account of the victims

In the testimony of the victims the experience of the journey may occupy a short space or become a long and detailed account of an adventurous experience. In the first case, the concision can be due to the fact that it was a rapid transfer from Nigeria to Western Europe or Italy, via air; otherwise it could depend on the fact that, even if the journey lasted months, it is very hard to remember. One should also add the total lack of knowledge of the countries, passed through and their geographical position in relation to the final destination, on the part of the women transported for long stages inside a lorry or covered wagon and by foot, often at night, on the tracks in the desert or on mountain trails.

The girls generally are accompanied by so-called *trolleys*: men, not always of Nigerian nationality, who can change during the various stages of the journey or can be the same for the whole journey.

In some cases, for those who depart from the airport of Lagos, the presence of some escort, who normally finishes his work at the airport, facilitating the passage of the woman through the police controls prior to embarking, may not be foreseen.

“The trolley should have escorted me to inside the airport, he should pay the police who were there who help me enter the aircraft” (Interview Victim No.4).

“I left on my own (...) then I arrived in Hungary at Budapest with the plane, they had given me the address, I called this hotel and arrived there, they gave me a room and I was there for three days. I called to say I was in Budapest, I called Nigeria and I called X who was in Rome. He told me «Be calm I send someone to collect you»” (Interview Victim No.5).

In general this type of organisation is only for single girls. At the destination airport the girls may find an accompanier or may have the address of the pension, hotel or house where they should report as a reception post to find the necessary support to reach the final destination. From some accounts it has emerged that even in the case of women who, arriving at the intermediate stage of the journey, had to telephone the *madam* in Nigeria or whoever should have met them in Italy, to have

new dispositions and contacts to continue the journey. In this case the women enjoy a certain autonomy for a part or for the entire duration of the journey. They manage autonomously their travel documents and money (generally 1,000 USD or Euros) provided to them on departure. Once arrived in Italy, the documents and remaining money are taken away and with this any illusion of autonomy.

Sometimes the moving by air takes place in small groups of 3 or 4 persons. In this case there is generally an escort and each of the components of the group interprets a role corresponding to what is written on the travel documents.

“There were four of us. So I was the friend of his wife, another girl was his wife, the other two were going to do business, but we were all accompanied” (Interview Victim No.7).

Such small groups, once the air journey is finished can continue the journey with the same accompanier or divide up and follow different routes with different accompaniers responsible for the different parts of the journey. Along the journey the girls often find hospitality in houses of co-nationals which are reception and sorting points.

Speaking with the victims it appears that with short journeys by air, with departure from the airport of Lagos and destination in Western Europe, there have recently been difficulties because of more controls. Such difficulty has in part been overcome through different choices of the departure airports (from other African countries such as Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Mali) and/or the use of disembarkation at airports in Eastern Europe. Amongst these airports, Budapest seems to be particularly used.

From the accounts there emerges an organisation dedicated to the traffic of human beings well placed in the Eastern European territory and which the Nigerian criminals use to bring the girls illegally into Italy to place in prostitution. From the accounts of the women it seems that among the “white” people accompanying them, who operate to permit the passage between the Eastern European countries and in particular the crossing of the Italian-Slovenian border, there are Italians.

Generally, after arrival in Budapest with a direct flight from Nigeria or other airports in nearby states there follows a stopover period, which can vary from some days to some weeks, during which the victims are hidden in rooms, or underground in private houses. The reason for such stopovers probably is because of the necessity to regroup a conspicuous number of persons to undertake the long move towards Italy. What characterises this route is in fact the presence of large groups composed of immigrants of different nationalities.

The journey, which starting from Budapest arrives at the Slovenian border, includes a long overland journey in covered trucks or wagons and on foot over impervious ground, usually at night. The journey can last a few days, or even months: *“depending on luck”*, state the victims. What is certain is that the traffickers finish their work using every method to overcome the difficulties that they encounter along the way and to bring their *“merchandise”* to destination.

As far as the other possibility, represented by overland journeys, with cars, buses or other means, the witnesses speak about long and often tragic movements

of the groups, even in part on foot in the desert, to the coast of Morocco. Reaching Morocco, the victims can wait months, closed in support houses or in hotels, before their turn comes up to embark clandestinely to reach Spain. During the wait it is necessary that the *madam* sends money essential so that the girls can survive and in some cases, when the moment to embark arrives, they can pay the *passeur*. The Strait of Gibraltar overcome, the group is separated and the women, through the clandestine immigration routes, reach Italy by train, either alone or accompanied.

Now we will see, through accounts of the girls and women trafficked, the journeys which brought them to Italy.

a) Air journey with direct destination Western Europe

Interview victim No. 3

Z. departs in 1999 alone from the airport of Lagos with Vienna as the destination. Her accompanier, who in this case is the same person who contacted her in Nigeria (specifically, it is the husband of the *madam* who is waiting in Italy), remains blocked at the airport, and is not given permission to embark. Z. had never undertaken a journey of this type and is a little afraid, but this is her only opportunity to reach Europe, find work as a hairdresser (she thinks) and conduct an easier life.

“As it was the first time that I left, I was alone, I said «but how is it possible?» (...) He said to me, «You are intelligent, with the address you can also go to America». And I left with a plane. I knew that I was going to Italy because his wife is here”.

She embarks on a flight Lagos-Vienna and in Vienna takes a train to reach Rome. At the Termini Station a Nigerian boy is waiting and escorts her to the house of the *madam*. The journey was concluded with the illusion of having reached “paradise” in a simple and rapid manner: *“they made me take a shower, I slept, I thought that I had really arrived in paradise, I did not ever think of leaving the house to come to Europe”.*

The illusion vanished all too soon.

Interview Victim No. 7

“It was in 1998” says Y. *“I remember that it was very quick, simple, simple, in two days I was here”.*

Y. departed from Lagos for Paris with three other girls and with her Nigerian employer who had promised her work in his shop in Rome.

At the airport in Paris they find two men waiting for them who take them to a hotel. The accompanier gives back the passport which is in the name of his wife, but in which appears the photograph of Y., and gives her USD 3,000 in order to pretend in the case of controls, to be a woman who is going to buy merchandise in Naples.

Then he sends her in a taxi to the station telling her: *“There is a boy at the station, he will come to you and tell you to follow him, don’t ask him anything, pretend you do not know him, and you only have to follow this person”*.

For Y. it is the moment of impact with Europe, she can hardly believe she is in France, she is excited and happy. The presence of so many “whites” makes her curious. *“I was curious, the whites!!! I had that sensation; I was curious, happy to see them. It was very impressive. I had already seen them, I even have a sister in law who is American, but that was something, in my life I find myself among 5 million people and 4 million and 999 are white! It was lovely, lovely for me. You don’t need much to make me smile. It was beautiful, heavens, the hair!!! (...) If I could have gone to stroke the hair, how lovely, how lovely! I made my scenery (...) we returned to the station, and it became the saddest, most hateful adventure, and became something that you don’t want to talk about”*.

Arriving at the station, Y. followed the instructions given to her and waited at track 21 for someone to take her. A “white” man appeared, *“that face remained in my memory. I don’t know if he was German, French, English, or Italian, but he was white”*. The man looked at her, came nearer and said *“Follow me?”* For the entire duration of the journey he did not say another word, if not to tell her to show the ticket to the controller.

Arriving in Florence there is a Nigerian woman who was waiting for her at the station. The man all of a sudden found his tongue and talked for a long time with the woman. Y. did not understand the reason for the attitude.

She was taken to the apartment of the woman and *“there”* says Y. *“the nightmare of my life started”*. In the house she found the man with whom she had departed from Nigeria and the other girls she had left in the hotel in Paris. She asked for explanations of why she could not travel with them and it was explained *“With the documents that you had, you had to take that line there”*.

All of a sudden Y. felt isolated; her employer, that she had known for years and with whom she had had a good relationship had become a stranger and they all spoke in Italian so as to not be understood.

The continuous moving again for many days in the whole of Italy, with stays in hotels and in houses crowded with Nigerian girls and, affirms Y., *“It was as if I was still in Lagos”*. Arriving on 18 February 1998 in Florence, Y., finds herself on 19 February in Turin, the 20th in Naples, and in the days which follow again in Florence and from Florence to Rome where she will stay.

Only years after did she realise that the continued moving was connected to the difficulty to sell her...

b) Air journey with transit in the East

Interview victim No. 10

W. departs from Lagos in 2000 at 17 years old together with another woman and accompanied by the friend of the father of her school companion. From the

documents it shows that the man is her father and the woman her mother. They are going to Budapest and have a tourist visa for Hungary for the duration of one month. They stay for two weeks in Hungary in an apartment belonging to friends of the man.

When W. asked for the reason for the stopover they say: “*We do it in phases, like this we let you see Europe*”. In reality she was obliged to stay all day in the house.

After two weeks of reclusion finally she can go out, what is waiting for her is a journey by foot which lasts 13 days. They walk day and night in woods together with other persons, about 50. The three of them are the only Nigerians, the other companions of the journey are white, but W. is not able to indicate the nationality. They are all going towards the Austrian border.

W. started having the first doubts, she does not understand the reasons for this tiring move and does not dare ask anything, she is frightened that the man who accompanied her will leave her there and she is worried about her father who does not know where she is. She is unable to eat anything, despite the fact that the person escorting her brought bread, tuna and biscuits with him. Luckily it is August for which it is possible, without suffering from the cold, to sleep in the open; but W. is frightened of animals and is always on the alert.

Arrived at the Austrian border some persons are blocked, the others manage to escape, the man that is with her and the other Nigerian woman are amongst these.

In Austria her escort telephones someone and he describes the place in which they find themselves, and soon a car driven by a Nigerian boy arrives who will accompany her to Italy.

At the border with Italy there is no one, and the group passes unobserved. The first stage in Italy is in Verona where W. meets her *madam* with whom she will continue the journey to Turin.

Interview victim No. 5

It is 1998, T. is accompanied to the airport of Lagos by a man who was charged with facilitating her embarkation on a direct flight to Budapest. T. is travelling with a passport in which appears her photograph, but not her name, and has a tourist visa for Hungary for the duration of three weeks. On departure she is given 1,000 Euros for the hotel and other expenses of the journey.

Reaching Hungary she has a room in a hotel for which they have provided her with the address before departure and where she remains three days. From there she telephones Italy, to the man (B.) who offered her a job through a religious organisation in Rome, who assures her that he will send someone to collect her.

A short while later in fact a Nigerian man presents himself to her at the hotel, C., who takes her to his home. This man has resided for more than 15 years in Hungary, has obtained the nationality and is married with children. The house where he hosts T. is his own property.

T. remains in this house for 21 days and as the wife of the man is in hospital, it is she who takes care of cooking, keeping the house in order and doing the shopping. In the house there is another Nigerian boy who is the baby sitter. In the meantime, T. starts making braids in the food store owned by the person hosting her.

When the wife returns home C. tells her that he owns another house where he puts the girls that should depart for Italy, but in her case, from the moment that the person who is waiting for her in Italy has recommended not to place her with the others "*because she is not one of them*", he proposes that she lives until the moment of departure with his brother in law.

T. therefore stays a further 14 days in the home of the brother in law.

From the moment that the tourist visa was out of date, she is provided with a "*paper*" that permits her freedom of movement in the city. Often she goes and does the shopping for the girls hidden in the other house. T. describes like this the condition of these women: "*These girls could not speak, they were always closed in a room under the garage, there were many, many*".

The privileged position of T., given to the fact that in a certain way she was "recommended", but also to the fact that she was a few months pregnant, gave an illusion during the entire journey to be really destined for another type of work. Her visual angle therefore, due to her condition, is much richer and the information she provides is detailed. It is an account of a journey, as we will see, almost unique, not only for the particularly adventurous contents, but also because few other women exploited by trafficking could have reconstructed in such detail, since the majority of them find themselves in a condition of total reclusion and travel heaped in covered wagons.

At the end of two weeks, the journey to Italy begins. C. escorts T. to a hotel and hands her over to two "Italians"²⁶ who drive the covered wagon. They make her join them in the cabin, so therefore she is not aware that behind, under the tarpaulin, there are dozens of people hidden. She finds this out towards evening when they arrive in an isolated place and 30 people of Nigerian and Bengal nationality are put down.

"They made us descend because they were shouting that they were dying «I am dying, here it is hot», they were sick...so they stopped and told us to wait there until someone arrived".

They were stopped for a short while when a man joined them who explained that they had to cross the snow covered mountains that they could see ahead. "*They told us that when we arrive on the other side it is Italy*" remembers T. [in reality they were instead near the border between Hungary and Slovenia, Ed.].

The two Italians, who had accompanied them until that point, go back with the wagon and another 4 men of Italian nationality arrive.

²⁶ T. maintains that she can tell Italians because in Nigeria, since the migration started towards Italy, there were some words diffused in Italian (these were in particular swear words and insults).

They start the climb, proceeding in Indian file, with one of the escorts at the beginning to open the way, two are charged with picking up those who fell, and one as they proceed cancels the tracks left and closes the line. All had gym shoes provided before departure.

At seven in the morning finally they reach a house which from the outside appeared to be a small refuge, but had inside an enormous underground room. There were other 60 people, Philipinos, Chinese, Indians, Bengalis and Pakistanis. They were given bread, tea and apples and left to sleep until the afternoon.

At three in the afternoon D. arrived who, from the account of T., appeared to be someone of importance in the organisation of human trafficking. D. is half Yugoslav and half Italian and is married to an Italian woman. He announces that it is again time to make the journey and tells them he will accompany them up to a certain point, adding "*You must pray that if they do not stop us in Slovenia, tomorrow you will be in Italy, if they stop us, it will take six months to arrive in Italy*". They all get into two lorries, under the tarpaulins, except T. who travels in front with the driver.

At the border between Hungary and Slovenia one of the lorries was stopped by the Customs suspicious because of the noise coming from the back of the lorry. T. travelled on the other vehicle which had already crossed the border and which was followed and stopped. D. and the other members of the organisation were allowed to go.

The entire group was made to get into the lorries and taken by the Hungarian Police to Kiev in the Ukraine²⁷, where, after three days journey, they were placed in a reception/detention camp.

T. says: "*It was a camp. They treated us badly these soldiers, early in the morning they tell us to go outside, we go outside, the snow falls, you stand still, you don't do anything, they do not give you anything to eat, the snow falls, the snow falls, then it arrives at your knees, then at two they tell you to enter inside, we go inside and they give us dry bread, really hard...they give you this bread with tea and then at night they give you soup with beans, carrots, like that, horrible...but because of hunger one eats*".

After one week T. manages to obtain permission to telephone, first she calls Italy, but they tell her to telephone a woman in Nigeria: that she will give the instructions necessary to get out of the camp.

The day of the flight, T. receives a telephone call²⁸ in which they say "*It is today, you must try to play slowly*".

At night T. is approached inside the camp by two men dressed as soldiers that make her understand that she should go near the exit gate. While all the other

²⁷ The explanation for such a transfer lies, according to the interviewee, in the fact that following a search of the two lorries and their occupants, the Hungarian police found testimony of a stay in Ukraine of the Philippine group, concluding that the entire group had left there and that it was not therefore the responsibility of the Hungarians to deal with this, but of the Ukrainians.

²⁸ To receive telephone calls inside the camp was an exception that T. managed to obtain thanks to good relations with a policeman.

detainees go towards the refectory, T. manages to escape with the two men with the complicity of a guard who opens the gate. The same guard had enabled the two fake soldiers to enter inside the fence.

“The traffickers”, maintains T., “had already taken money so they worked to the end. If we are sent back 10 times, each 10 times they have to take us back, their work is by good or bad luck. Sometimes there is good luck for one month: they pass with 100, 200 persons, and are not stopped. (...) They [the traffickers, Ed.] want cash, it is not that you pay half and when you arrive you pay the other half, you pay all but at all costs they send you to Italy, their work is like that”.

After the escape T. is lodged in a house which is inside the cemetery of Kiev and in the basement of which are people of Philippine nationality. She spends a week there at the end of which one morning the two men that had liberated her (who in the meantime she discovers been Italian) return with two lorries full of persons who had been interned inside the camp.

“Then” she says “they took these lorries and changed the car plates, they had painted them, inside the cemetery they changed the colour, had written something in some language. One went away and returned with wood. Because before the people were all standing, bent over. It is a question of about half an hour, they said, but the journey never ends. They had made some seats inside the lorry, under and above in two levels. Outside they had closed the lorry so if they should scream, no one could hear them and they also put air-conditioning inside with a tube above. They made the work there, the people were underground and I could see from the window. I did not know what was going on”.

The stay inside the cemetery was prolonged for another week. From January, at the time of departure, it is almost March when D. reappeared and said *“Today you are free, we will enter Hungary, so that you can stay in a good house, and we will wait until we can leave”*. The group were loaded on to a lorry and departed in the direction of the border. After a few hours of travel they were stopped by the police. D. escaped and the other traffickers opened the lorry and let the people escape towards the wood.

The group walked through the entire night in mud and then on ice until the traffickers accompanying them order them to stop and wait. They are in the middle of the wood, it is cold and there is ice on the ground. Without guides they remain there for three days without eating or drinking.

“We slept and we woke, slept and woke, slept and woke, three days without eating, sitting in the middle of ice, we don’t feel the cold anymore. These Bangladeshis take the ice with their cloths, they tied it up and after there were some drops of water coming from the ice and they put this in their mouths [to drink, Ed.]. Even we Africans have started to do this”.

After three days two people arrived, different from the ones who had abandoned us, and they took us to the plains and transported us amongst bales of hay in small groups on tractors and carts pulled by horses. Arriving near a large plain they abandon the tractors and carts and stop in a house. After we had rested, the escorts make all of us 93 people mount horses in couples.

“There was a secret” - T. recalls - “because we could not cross that grass rolled up [hay, Ed.], because we were on ice. They made us dismount and walk towards the ice (...) they made us all mount on the horses, there was a mafia person in front and one behind; I was behind with him in front and we walked and he said «you must not all go together, one at a time because you must arrive at the end». The walk was half an hour, the horses were made to walk slowly, slowly ... we did not know anything...it was ice. Then (...) we had just arrived, we were 5, 10 who were finishing crossing this place in the open and we heard a crack...We started to fall, and then the man got down and pulled me out. And they all entered, he had said to them, go one behind the other and they had gone all together...and boom, they went and started to fall, fall, fall [into the water, Ed.]. Then I don’t remember anything more. When I awoke I was inside a house, there was no one else. All those people...and one of the mafia. There was only the man that had accompanied me, the other was no more. There was no one else. There was myself and another 30 persons. We were all Africans, we were alright, and we remained in 15 and 15 Bangladeshis. Of the Philipinos there was not one”.

The survivors started a long trip on foot until Hungary: *“every day we should walk a bit and arrive where we could hide”.*

They arrive in Hungary in April where they had to stop in a house hidden in a wood. After three days D. returned and announced a new departure. The 31 survivors started off again accompanied by new traffickers, around 7, 8 persons. They had to repeat the same route and climb the first mountain that they had encountered. They arrive after many hours walking in an inhabited place where they are once again abandoned by their escorts. The entire group was inside a village and after a short while were discovered by the police who took them to a refugee centre in Ljubljana.

According to T., it was D. who advised the Slovenian police that he had left people in the wood: this could have been a considered strategy by D., to rejoin, with the collusion of the Slovenian police, the objective to allow the entire group to cross the border.

They stay in the refugee centre for three days, and then they are transferred to a prison far from Ljubljana where they remain one month. In the prison chicken pox broke out and T. obtained permission to speak to the head of the police to ask if she could be released. That same day all the Nigerian girls are released and transferred again to Ljubljana near the refugee camp.

“When we were leaving M. [a policeman, Ed.] arrived and told us «You know now we will take you into an open camp? From this camp you can telephone, do what you want, and can even escape into Italy, if you take the bus», he told us all, he made a drawing, but we had to all walk again. Otherwise we are to call our families to take us away from the camp. He had said that from there you escape. This was an informer of D. They worked together, but they pretended not to”.

Arriving in the centre of Ljubljana they remain for two, three weeks, and then slowly the exodus towards the border with Italy starts. They go in cars, or by foot paying 1,000 Euros to the locals who offer to accompany them to the border.

At this point the organisation escorts are no longer necessary because “*that M. [the policeman, Ed.] had informed us how we should go to enter into Italy, because if D. would have to take us we should pay him again, understand? He had waited to see who would remain and perhaps then come with a small lorry*”.

T. departs with the last of them, escorted by an Italian girl in a car. She is by now in the last months of pregnancy and could not survive other long journeys by foot. The Italian girl leaves T., two other Nigerian girls and a Romanian boy a short way before the border. The four of them waded across the river and on Italian territory find another car ready to take them. They had just departed when they were stopped by a road block and taken to the Police station in Gorizia. “*They took our finger prints, we slept there and in the morning they gave us the expulsion papers. They asked us where we came from. All of us said the same thing, we said «I don’t know, with the boat we came here and I don’t know where I am». We should have said that. «With the boat we arrived in Europe, we walked very much and now we don’t know where we are». They gave us the expulsion papers and when they left us we went outside, then they came back and I asked «Excuse me, where is the station?» Then he said «Oh so you know where you are». And I «I don’t know but if I find the station I will find something to eat». Then he said «Oh, so you must eat!» And the other one «No, I must go to Milan» «Good grief, but what are you saying». They laughed and said «we will accompany you to the station*”.

T. and the other two girls take the train to Milan; the Romanian boy went in another direction. Reaching Milan the sister of one of the two girls collects us, the following morning a *madam* from Rimini came to buy the other. T. departs again the next day for Rome, with the fear that it is very far from Milan, but in the first hours of the afternoon she is in the capital, and waiting for her is B. who takes her to her house “*and there hell started*”.

c) Journey overland

Example of what an overland journey from Africa can be and the account of this woman taken from trial documentation:

“*When I went via Benin City it was May-June of 2000 (...) we reached Ghana where A. leaves us. We were joined by many coloured people, men and women. From Ghana however I did not depart by air as I had been promised, in fact we departed in three small lorries, each one transported about 30 persons, crossing Mali, Niger, Algeria and Morocco, I remember having crossed the desert sometimes on foot, then changing transport. During the trip one lorry was lost in the desert and I think that they all died. Someone tried to escape because the conditions were inhuman, we were all stacked together, but was obliged to get back on the lorry. I remember that from my lorry a man fell and died. He who indicated the route and who drove the lorry was the same man that we had met in Benin City, a friend of Madam A.*”.

“*We arrived in Morocco after about two months, precisely in the city of Rabat the same man took money from the Western Union Agency that had been sent by A., and this was to be used to pay the voyage by boat from Morocco to Spain. Each*

person paid 1,000 dollars for this trip, but I don't know for how many people Madam A. paid for. I had a telephone contact with A. as I did not want to continue the journey and she reassured me saying that she would personally wait for me in Spain”.

“In Morocco other people joined, we were about a hundred and from the city of Tangiers we were obliged to get small boats. I did not want to get in because they told me that many people after capsizing had died, but they obliged me with violence. We capsized three times and at the end we arrived in Spain crossing the Atlantic Ocean, it was the 19 August.” (Preventive detention order, criminal proceedings - Naples, 1999).

Interview victim No. 8

S. departed in 2001 from Benin City with two other girls and an escort for the North of Nigeria. The journey was made by car. In a village in the north, where they stopped, they met other five girls coming from other areas of Nigeria with relative *trolleys*. Altogether, with other cars they reached the border with Mali where they were forced to continue on foot for three days until they reached a place where it was possible to continue by car.

The trip to Morocco lasted one week and once arrived in Morocco S. waits five months before she is able to embark: “*There were many people waiting, we waited our turn to enter. It was full of people, a pregnant girl, one who had been there a year, one who had died. So many things happen there. You die of hunger*”.

“In Morocco” explained S. “*if the madams that are in Italy do not send money to the girls, they die of hunger*”. S. passed five months in a hotel in Tangiers, without the possibility of going out for fear that the police would catch her and send her back. Slowly as the day of departure arrived, the girls went closer to the place from where they would depart.

Finally the turn of S. arrived, and she crossed the sea that separated them from Europe on a clandestine boat. Arrived in Spain together with a *trolley* and the other two girls, she reaches Italy by train and in Naples meets her *madam*.

d) Other variations of the journey

Interview victim No. 4

R. was 19 when in 1998 she departed from Lagos by car to reach Togo and from there to embark on a direct flight to Portugal. The *trolley* escorts her to embarkation and has the responsibility to pay the police so that she gets into the plane without any problems.

Arrived in Portugal she was expelled because her travel documents were not valid. She waits two days in Portugal while the police find an aircraft to put her on. In the end she is put on a direct flight to Senegal and from there took another flight to Abidjan. From the Ivory Coast she refuses to return to Nigeria and spends 21 days in jail. She asks to not continue her journey by air, but by car and her request

was accepted by the Ivory Coast police who accompany her to Ghana and hand her over to the local police.

The Ghanaian police let her go, and with a bus R. returns again to Togo, where she again meets her *trolley* who was informed about her repatriation. From there she telephones to her *sponsor*, a friend of the family living in London, who reassures her: “*Don’t worry, we will give you a last chance to arrive*”.

The woman sends other passports, one for a Nigerian with British citizenship and another Nigerian: the indications are to utilise the Nigerian passport in the area Togo-France and, once in Europe, should there be problems, to destroy the Nigerian passport and use the English passport.

Arriving in Paris, R. calmly overcomes the controls without having to show the English passport.

“I ran like mad, I wanted to get out of the area of the airport, I was for the first time in Europe”.

She takes a taxi, and asks the taxi driver to take her to a not very expensive hotel; from there she telephones the *sponsor* in London who reassures her telling her she will send a man to take her. After two days she receives a telephone call from a man who is waiting for her at the station. They meet and he buys her a rail ticket for Nice. Arriving in Nice, waiting for her at the station is another man who makes a sign with his head: *“I started to follow this man, we were five girls following him”.*

At five o’clock the following morning they all depart for Italy accompanied by car by the same man. He advises them that in the case of controls they say they do not know him and that they had asked for a lift. R. discovers subsequently that this man is the fiancé of the woman that had bought her and where she will arrive after a few hours in Turin.

CHAPTER III

Documents

Illegal entry disguised as a legal entry through the use of false or counterfeited documents is one of the principal ways to elude the rules of entry into the countries of the European Union.

It is difficult to quantify the incidence, but we can reasonably presume that - besides illegal entry through ports and borders using emergency boats or through clandestine lifts in motorised vehicles by land - the falsification of documents and consequent passage through the border check points have a great importance, equal to those of illegal entry. They therefore deserve serious attention.

3.1 Documents attesting an identity: European and African passports, and permissions to stay

As we have already seen in the preceding chapter, the journey from Nigeria to Italy is in many cases undertaken using identity and travel documents which are apparently regular: the victims are made to journey shielded from the risks that could come about through passport or visa checks, both inside African territory and at the moment of entry into Europe.

Mostly these are original documents, or as such appear to be, but falsified in their contents. The resulting investigations underline a situation in which those who occupy themselves with the traffic of women from Nigeria have a relatively wide possibility of obtaining counterfeited documents. Different is the interception of telephone calls in which reference is made to the need to send documents with specific characteristics and in some cases passports have been found coming from Nigeria via courier. To this should be added the innumerable court declarations of women relating to the provision of photographs to the traffickers which were used to produce the document with which they arrive in Europe: normally it is a document where the photograph of the person travelling to Italy appears, but with completely false data and generalities.

“This man hosted me for three days in a hotel, procuring for me a Nigerian passport with my personal data. In the passport my photo that the same X had taken appeared” (report of summary information, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2001).

Not always is it a Nigerian passport; in many cases Ghanaian passports are used that are prepared during a logistic stopover undertaken in Ghana before departure.

“P.M. «In Ghana were you given an identity document?»

B.E. «Yes, I was given a Ghanaian passport which is what I used to travel to come to Italy»

P.M. «Yes, do you remember the name on this passport?»

B.E. «Yes (omissis)» (record of evidences took in the pre-trial stage, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2000).

Normally a “specialised” person takes care of the finding of documents: this person, within the group of traffickers, has such a specific job and often is limited to this, delivering the documents to the person hosting the woman while waiting for departure or directly to the escort on the journey.

The documents are never “casual” but correspond “*to the part to be recited during the journey*”, specially if it is a direct flight: we will have, for example, a document which attests to the existence of a marriage tie between the victim and her escort, or a document which attests that the woman trafficked is the daughter of her escort, and so on...

“*He pretended he was my father, he changed my surname, and the other pretended to be his wife (...) we had a tourist visa for a month for Hungary*” (Interview Victim No.10).

“*There were four of us! So, I was the friend of his wife, another girl became his wife, other two were...were going to make business, but we were altogether*” (Interview Victim No.7).

“*The documents that I had were of a woman who makes business, who buys stuff and resells*” (Interview Victim No.4).

“*I told T. that I had not yet passed by her as they had telephoned that the two girls were in Paris, the man that had brought them passed one of them off as his wife and one as the sister of his wife*” (transcription of telephone interception, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2000).

A slight variation is noted for the journey overland through Africa: in this case, often not only is a Ghanaian or Nigerian passport provided, with which to cross the entire continent, but also another document with which to travel calmly with the escort for the European journey until the destination. Even in this case the document corresponds to “*the part to be recited*”.

Often the women depart already with two passports: one Nigerian and the other of some Nigerian with European citizenship (normally English). Embarkation from Nigeria, or from other African states, takes place with the Nigerian passport, but this can be destroyed at the moment of entering Europe and the European document is shown.

“*I had two passports, one English, the other Nigerian. With the Nigerian passport I must take the airplane, when I arrive in France, if I see there are problems I must destroy the Nigerian passport and pull out the English passport*” (Interview Victim No.4).

In several cases the document in question is a permission to stay with the relative Italian document of another person (for example of a relative of the *madam* or the daughter).

“F. and her husband make the documents from here, they have a daughter who is born here, every so often they go and get a visa because the daughter should go to Hungary, London, with this visa they export someone from Nigeria, they put the photo of this person and they make her enter into the country where the daughter has to go, but the daughter never moves. Even their passports they sent down to bring people here. They declare that the passport of the daughter has been stolen from the car. I have the passport of the daughter. When these people come, they go to make the declaration” (Interview Victim No.5).

To make the re-entry of the person with an Italian permission to stay more credible, they even organise courses of Italian before the departure.

“I know what happened here. When they make you use these permissions to stay, they make you study Italian for months. Because there is a school of Italian there. Because you cannot have a permission to stay for five years and not speak Italian” (Interview Victim No.5).

While, as we have said, passports and visas are given by the competent authorities, that which concerns the Italian permission to stay is real falsification. Packets of permissions to stay are sent to Nigeria where they proceed to make a perfect reproduction of the original with the usual substitution of the photo. The originals are then sent back to Italy.

Those travelling with an Italian permission to stay do not generally arrive directly in Italy, but are in possession of a visa for France where there is someone to wait for them with a car, and with this they easily reach Italy.

However, in other cases the woman is left without documents as soon as she arrives in Europe, even if she has not yet arrived at the destination: sometimes because the person who has escorted her until that moment returns to Nigeria with her document, sometimes to avoid escape. In any case the organisation seems to be able to mould the supply and make use of the documents according to needs that during the various journeys can emerge.

The documents with which the woman travels are not ever her real documents. On the contrary to what happened in the first years of the traffic of women from Nigeria, it seems absolutely residual the case where the victims travel using their real passport, then taken away at the time of arrival at the destination: the taking away of the document is no longer a means for blackmail and pressure to convince the woman to become a prostitute.

“To take a passport hostage is something that no longer exists, there is no longer this exchange as in the past...Perhaps, and it is my idea, perhaps once when we went to make searches of the houses of the exploiters we searched for passports and there was then the proof of passports hidden in some place. Now we can no longer get them” (Questura of Turin).

Now the documents are “hired”: they are used to guarantee arrival at the destination of the woman and immediately taken away, like this they can be re-used for a successive entrance substituting the photograph.

This implies, as we will see shortly, that if the woman extinguishes the contracted debt with the traffickers she is “liberated from exploitation”, but finds herself in a situation not only by not being legal regarding the permission to stay for foreigners on Italian territory, but also without a valid document to identify her.

Sometimes, however, out of necessity related to the activity of prostitution of the girls, a document is provided that, not only has to be paid for, but also however, is controlled by the exploiter:

“To go into a hotel with a client you need a passport because otherwise they will not let me in, I made photo, it was sent to Nigeria, they sent it here, but the passport is false because it is not regular, but it is useful to go into hotel because they don’t know anything. I paid 700,000 lire for this passport. She always controls” (Interview Victim No.15).

3.2 Visas

The visa is an authorisation given to the foreigner for the entry into Italian territory to be evaluated - as we can read on the official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - in the light of the *“exigencies connected to good international relations and with the protection of national security and public order”*.

Nigeria is one of the countries where there is an obligation to have a visa to enter Italy.

The competence to grant visas is given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its diplomatic-consular offices, which are responsible for ascertaining the possession and evaluation of the requisites necessary to obtain the same visa.

The office responsible for granting a uniform Schengen visa (which is necessary for transit or for a short stay), is the representative of those Schengen states present on the spot that constitutes the unique or principal destination of the journey. If it is not possible to discover - among the various stops of the journey - a principal destination, the granting of this type of visa is the representative of the Schengen state of first arrival. The visa granted by such Italian diplomatic representatives permits entry, for transit or for a short stay (up to 90 days), whether in Italy or in the other countries within the Schengen Convention. At the same time a visa granted by the diplomatic-consular representative of other countries that apply the Convention, permits access also to Italian territory.

For the granting of a national visa (necessary for longer stays) the representative of that of the Schengen state which represents one of the destinations of longer stay of a foreign citizen is responsible. The entry visa for a long stay of a foreign citizen permits however the access to the sole territory of the State which has granted the visa and the possibility of transit through the other countries.

The visa can be individual - granted to a single requesting person and put on an individual passport - or collective, granted to a group of foreigners, all having the same citizenship.

To obtain a visa the requesting person should present a written request, on a specific form, filled in and handwritten by him/her and containing a passport photograph. Those requesting the visa should, according to regulations, request it from the diplomatic-consular representative, personally, so as to be questioned regarding the motives and circumstances of the stay. The foreigner should attach a valid travel document to this request (in the case of Nigeria, normally a passport) and should declare the reasons for the journey, the transportation means also for the return, the means of sustenance during the journey and the stay, the conditions for lodging.

Evaluated the acceptability of the request for a visa according to the documentation produced by the person requesting, and by what has emerged during the discussions - normally direct and personal - the representative undertakes to make preventive checks of security, consulting the list of foreigners not admissible in the Schengen area.

Once having obtained the visa for entry into Italy, the foreigner in order to be permitted to remain in Italy should present himself to the Police of the competent area where he/she will undergo photographic, typewritten checks and the permission to stay will be issued for the same reason and for the same time as the visa. However, the victims of exploitation in Italy with a regular visa never make a request for permission to stay, even if they legally entered in Italy; therefore, they become irregular and for the Italian State, disappear.

It should be recalled that, given the free circulation within the Schengen area, once entered in Europe in one of the member countries the circulation between the states is quite easy. For this it has become more important that the policies on immigration and the strategies to contrast criminality involved in the traffic of migrants are supported by common orientation and procedures.

“Paradoxically, Schengen has increased the facility of the traffic because now, as long as you have a valid document for one of the member countries, that document becomes valid also for the other countries and therefore the fact in itself that the checks extra EU are carried out in the first country of entry, then the flights are within EU...therefore the problem is to have a typology of common controls, otherwise the weak links in the chain are used” (Public Prosecutor - Bologna).

Sometimes the visas granted by the authorities do not foresee Europe as a destination, but often the flights for extra-European destinations have stopovers in European airports. In this case the victim ends her flight at the transit airport and overcomes the controls thanks to a European passport in her possession.

This is the case of a Nigerian woman interviewed who departed from Lagos with her passport and a visa for Hong Kong. Arriving in Germany, where the aircraft made a stopover, she showed the passport of a Nigerian from London, and in this way entered into Europe, not continuing her journey for the Asian city.

It is understood however that the visas most used for entry of the victims of the traffic from Nigeria are those for tourism, visas for study reasons and collective visas for tourism connected to pilgrimage²⁹.

As can be seen from the table 10, all these visas for entry require the pre-disposition of suitable documentation.

Table 10 - Types of visa for entry in Italy

TYPE OF VISA	REASON	REQUIREMENTS AND CONDITIONS
Study	Permits stays of a short or long duration, to the foreigner who intends to follow university courses, study or vocational training courses in recognised qualified Institutions.	For those of more than 14 years of age; documented guarantees regarding the study course; means of support regarding measures foreseen by law; insurance policy to cover health expenses.
Tourism	Permits entry, of a short duration in Italy and other countries of the Schengen Area, to the foreigner intending to travel for tourist reasons.	Sufficient financial support means (documents of credit, bank guarantees, policy guarantees, etc.) not inferior to that established by the relative laws, possession of return ticket (or reservation); documented availability of lodging (hotel reservation, declaration of hospitality, etc.) eventual declaration of the host undertaken by an Italian citizen or foreigner regularly resident, in which the declaration contains the availability to offer hospitality in Italy for the person requesting the stay.

Source: our elaboration of Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) sources.

If and how this documentation is produced³⁰ is a mystery.

The court declarations of the victims are rather scarce as far the procedures for obtaining the visa or what type of visa used are concerned: nearly always they speak about having provided the photographs to someone who undertook the work. Given the procedure just described, in reality the woman should personally present herself and witness the possession of different requirements, but this never seems to happen. What the procedure is, thanks to which the traffickers manage to obtain the visa, in the light of the present court proceeding results, it is not possible to know, also because rarely during the searches does one find trace of the visas used by the Nigerian women.

For this reason it would certainly be useful to invest more investigative resources on this point. A close monitoring of the types of visa requested and the people requesting them could be one of the systems to better contrast the traffic of women for sexual exploitation or at least to widen the knowledge of the mechanisms which make this traffic work. In case the individual or collective

²⁹ This is the common impression of the operators interviewed by us, but on this point there is no quantitative data.

³⁰ During some investigations one had the sensation that some travel agencies had preferential channels to obtain visas, but in no way was this “*investigative tip*” transferred into a “more concrete” path.

tourism visa is requested only exclusively by women, perhaps the level of attention to this phenomena could be increased³¹.

3.3 Connivance and controls

To affirm that there is connivance on the part of officials for the granting of passports or visas is always difficult and risky, it is particularly complex to discover if one is faced with a single unfaithful employee or instead if one is dealing with a diffused phenomenon of corruption at the institutional level.

As far as the visas are concerned, it can be recalled that some years ago there was a criminal proceeding against two employees of the Italian Embassy in Lagos who granted with ease, against payment of a sum of money, visas with Turin as a destination.

The evidence which follows refers to events which occurred in 1998: *“The Embassy is his. He goes in the morning and leaves in the afternoon with 20 passports. At the airport of Lagos they did not even look at me because everything had already been bought”* (Interview Victim No.7). After that isolated case, there have been no other judicial cases.

Nevertheless, it would be very useful to monitor requesting persons and typologies of visas issued.

However, regarding the passports, investigations have brought about some results at least on the knowledge of the phenomenon. In various telephonic interceptions a person from Italy orders, through the interlocutor in Nigeria, a passport, indicating the data that it should contain. In some cases Nigerian passports sent by private courier have been found³².

How these documents are procured and with what connivance is difficult to say. From the interviews with an official of the police, who had the occasion in Nigeria to meet some Nigerian officials, we know that it is not possible to issue a passport in Nigeria without the physical presence of the person requesting it: therefore it is obvious that such documents are, at least ideologically, false.

In the first investigations undertaken from the declarations of the women and telephone interceptions, it appeared that some local authorities were corrupted in such a way as to obtain passports and also certificates of nationality, but so far there has never been a complete report on this involvement.

On the basis of the declarations of the victims, in Nigeria there do not seem to be in existence real counterfeiters who falsify passports because in reality, upon payment, one can obtain any passport.

³¹ On this point see Chapter VII.

³² On this point see Chapter VII.

“There is no Nigerian passport which is false; it is not a thing that you can make at home. You pay and they will make it, where they are made. There are not two places; you get them where they are made” (Interview Victim No.9).

From some accounts of the girls it seems that there are sometimes intermediaries who manage to obtain the documents from the authorities: *“He went with me and another two, we went to a fairly big office in Lagos, there were two or three male persons, that do this business, then they made me a photo, they did everything, they have contact with the airport, make false passports, all false because in my country they do not respect the law, with money you can do what you like, you can also kill someone and nobody cares”* (Interview Victim No.14).

The sensation is therefore that in each case there is a certain facility to obtain the documents, even if it is difficult to gather elements of proof of such so as to be sustained in court.

The last sore point is the impossibility to make timely controls; there do not exist in effect relationships between the Nigerian authorities and the Italians that would permit verifying with certainty and rapidly if the documents are authentic or not.

3.4 The false concept and identity

The victims are not personally concerned with the documents, nor are they involved in any way during their preparation. The only request which is made to them is to furnish a photograph after which, in a relatively short time, a few weeks, the documents are ready and they can depart.

The presence in the passport of their own photograph, even if accompanied by another name and the personal data which does not correspond to the truth, often gives the illusion that in some way the document is valid. If this is later accompanied by an original visa, the perception of its validity increases.

To better understand the origin of this attitude and to take with a sense of proportion what for us is understood as undoubtedly false, one should bear in mind the fact that *“In Nigeria it doesn't mean anything if the name is not yours”*. A cultural mediator explains: *“You can say «I am A.». The Nigerians don't think that that name is false. If you go on the streets and ask «What is your name?» I say «I am A.», but this girl has other names. I have 8 names. So also do other people. Now I am B., if now other people call me by another name you think that that name is false, but it is not like this, because in Nigeria when a child is born all the family sits down, and each gives a name, there are African and English names, your father will give you a name, your mother, your brothers, uncles, cousins. There are people that use all these names. It is not that they invent these names, there is not a Nigerian that has one name, if he has only one name I think that this person has fallen from the sky, he has no family. If you have family you have a lot of names”* (Associazione Tampep - Turin).

Personal identity is not defined by a name and surname, not even by an identity document, which does not exist, and which would limit to only one name and to some physical features the multiple identities of which a person is composed. The name in Nigeria changes according to the person with whom the subject is in contact and the context of where she is, showing different personal relationships and characteristics. Outside the extended family nucleus the different names with which a person is called constitutes the basis of the recognised family identity, such as the identity that makes the person in question a human being and not someone “*fallen from the sky*”.

Therefore it is obvious how a false document can seem “normal” in a reply of the victim to such a question by the defending lawyer (in the course of a trial) on how she could have thought it possible to go to Europe and become a florist if one had already left from Ghana with a false document: “*I didn't think anything (...) it was normal, seeing as I wasn't Ghanaian. So, not being Ghanaian, I had to provide a passport to enter and leave the border with Ghana (...) to pretend I was Ghanaian and therefore so I could leave it was necessary to have a false Ghanaian passport*” (report of evidence taken in the pre-trial stage, criminal proceedings - Turin, 2000).

CHAPTER IV

Living and working conditions of the victims and the management system of the exploitation

4.1 Start and management of the exploitation: living and working conditions of the victims

First impact and start of prostitution activity

The women trafficked, once arrived in Italy, are delivered to the Italian *madam* and taken to the apartment where they will live. Often it is the apartment of the *madam*, but there are also houses in which only other victims are present, or where they live together with a figure who acts as a “guardian” (the so-called *controller*), employed by the owner. Normally it is a woman who has extinguished her debt and is accumulating the money necessary to buy a girl and to start herself working as a *madam*.

We have also collected the testimony relating to a *madam* who directly manages a pair of women and administers another nine on behalf of a man, who is slightly higher up in the criminal organisation. He comes to Italy several times a month to collect the profits and make his authority known, often resorting to physical violence on the victims.

In many accounts, the arrival of the victim in the lodging is described in a positive manner: finally they have arrived at the destination and the reception offered gives the illusion to imagine a rosy future in Europe. At the moment of the arrival often the lodging is empty and the new arrivals go to rest ignorant of the fact that when they awake they will find a totally different scene: the illusion is destined to crack with reality. There follows a reaction of being displaced and difficulty in understanding what is happening.

“When I arrived at the house there was no one, towards ten o’clock at night there was no one (...) I arrived and I said: «Is it still possible to register, do it quickly before the registrations end at University». (...) I woke up we were thirteen. Then I saw that they were counting money, then when I saw that they had a prophylactic in hand I said: «But what is it?» They said: «You are new, how old are you?» «Seventeen». «Welcome». I said «but what do you mean?» I looked, then I had not even had a boyfriend, imagine” (Interview Victim No.10).

The moment of the discovery of the reality is described as the beginning of a nightmare. For many girls this moment coincides with the understanding of the real debt that they and/or the family had underwritten through the strict pact with the exploiters in Nigeria. In some cases such a pact is reinforced or defined *ex novo* in this phase, through the obligation to undergo a *woodoo* rite.

Even for those who choose to come to Italy knowing that they are coming to prostitute themselves, the discovery of the way of work, the entity of the debt that must be repaid and the conditions of life and work, ahead of them, produces discouragement and re-thinking.

What prevails at this point is a sense of impotence and isolation. The girls find themselves in a foreign country, without family support and without any possibility of contacting friends and parents possibly present in Italy or Europe. Once entering into the apartment they are effectively without any agenda, notebook or anything in which to put telephone numbers or addresses. Without documents, taken away, or immediately destroyed, without the minimum idea of how to escape their destiny, frightened by the threats of action against the family and with the fear of the negative influences of *woodoo*, sometimes subjected to physical violence, they wind up doing the will of their “owners”: starting the activity of a prostitute.

“You refuse to do it, but in reality you have to face life. Yes, you can escape, but where do you go? You want to talk. With whom? You are destroyed. I remember that I refused to do so for five days. I always said no, said yes, and said no going backwards and forwards. Then nothing, I cried continuously for five days...they put me on the road of Tarquinia in Rome” (Interview Victim No.7).

“I said to them, if you take me back to my country I will return the money just the same, they said that such a thing was not done. I looked for help, in that moment you are new, you don’t know how to speak” (Interview Victim No.10).

The decision to go on the street was explained by one of the victims interviewed as the only possibility to get out of isolation and to have relations with the outside world.

“I thought inside me, if I say no, I cannot even meet anyone, I cannot leave here, I don’t know the language. Here they do whatever they want. I asked her «Why didn’t you give me another job? Make me pay more». She said that I should not disturb or discuss with her otherwise I will be in trouble” (Interview Victim No.3).

Not all the newly arrived are immediately sent out on the street, some pass a few days up to one or two weeks before “*taking up the place of work*”. In some cases the illusion to have come to do another type of work is prolonged a bit.

“After three days I saw the girls that lived in the house, they were three, those who were preparing, went away and returned, went away and returned, above all at night. I started to think and I asked her (...) «The work that I must do, in which shop is it? Why I did not bring my instruments?» She said to me: «We will go and buy». Practically we went to buy the things needed to make the braids for the girls, without knowing that this was a bluff to make me calm. Then after a week she said: listen things change because in this country you do not have a choice, because I

have no shop and then there is no possibility to work here, you won't earn anything, and then they will not take you, you have to join the girls to work on the street. «What!?!» «Oh yes dear, this is the work that we do here» (Interview Victim No.3).

The women are instructed on how to behave with the clients and accompanied to the position by the *madam* or by the other girls. The *madam* shows them the bank notes and explains the value of each one. She recommends accepting exclusively Italian clients, avoiding Albanians and Moroccans, considered to be too dangerous. She gives a glove, handkerchiefs and prophylactics, she makes the girl dress with “work dresses” and she sends her together with the others, that have the job of teaching the work, on the street.

“At night she came to show me «This is 5 Euros, this is 10...» and she had bought me clothes. But it was cold and I asked «how is it possible that I put on these small clothes?»” (Interview Victim No.12).

“They gave me a glove, they gave me handkerchiefs, they gave me a miniskirt to put on, they gave me boots because I was cold” (Interview Victim No.2).

The first period is recalled as the worst: many women tell how they cried for days, even at work, not even managing to get one client. This behaviour makes their position worse and, once returning to the house without money they are threatened and hit.

This phase overcome there begins a tight rhythm of work, which finds many women engaged day and night for the complete restitution of the debt.

Living and working conditions

The majority of the women live heaped up in small lodgings or grouped in one room.

“In the house I lived in we were 13, with me 14. In one room.” (Interview Victim No.10).

“It was a mini-apartment, room and kitchen and there were two beds in the kitchen” (Interview Victim No. 8).

“I was in the house with 7 girls, two rooms and a kitchen. Including her (the madam) we were 8, when I arrived 9” (Interview victim No.5).

There are also cases in which the victim lives alone with the *madam* and her companion or her husband. This is in cases in which the *madam* is at her first experience, so she has not yet enough money to buy many girls or lodging, sometimes in another city, in which the so-called *controller* can manage on her behalf, a group of women. In this case the choice is that keeping one woman with her may depend on the necessity for greater control of the victim in question, or other reasons of a practical nature.

“She did not have girls in the house, there was only me and they gave me a room where there was only a bed. On the Castilian however there was a very big house, 4 rooms and there lived 15 girls” (Interview Victim No.5).

For the woman interviewed the reason for the different treatment was in the fact that she had arrived from Nigeria in an advanced state of pregnancy. If in the first moments this was the reason for an excited contrast between the *madam* and who had sold the woman, successively the birth of a child represented an instrument of blackmail of the woman, obliged to prostitute herself not only to pay the debt, but to be able to keep the child with her. The *madam* in this case managed the child as if it were hers, being at the same time the baby sitter and jailer. In spite of the fact that she was perhaps very attached to the child, she used the child as a blackmail weapon controlling the times and ways of meeting the mother and threatening to sell the child every time she did not behave according to the rules imposed.

There are also cases of women who lived in lodgings on their own, without the presence of persons officially in charge of control. As we will see, this way, even if giving the illusion of more liberty, hides the more shifty control mechanism, based on competition within the group of girls.

The lodging is used during the day to sleep or watch TV for those who work at night, while those who work both at night and day spend few hours. Only in one case the house was also a place of work, being positioned in the neighbourhood of the place of work of the woman interviewed.

There are not infrequent changes of lodging due to the buying and selling of the victims from one to another, or to the incompatibility of character between the *madam* and the girl or following incursions of the police in the original lodging.

“When I saw that my money was not so much to give I started to respond. One day she threw my things out [of the house, Ed.] (...) my boyfriend found me a house, but I still owed money that I should give” (Interview Victim No.2).

“In the end she said «I don’t want one with her eyes so open, I want my money back». I went a second time to Genoa and they sold me another time to Verona” (Interview Victim No.4).

“I was in Naples, I worked for a year and then there was a lot of trouble between me and her and she sent me to her friend here (in Veneto)” (Interview Victim No.8).

“Then there were problems of police and the house was full, she put me in another house, always in Turin” (Interview Victim No.12).

The transfer of the girls is not necessarily connected to personal difficulties. The operators often talk about a *turnover* of the victims not only in neighbouring places, but also on Italian territory, with an exchange of the girls between two or more *madams*. Two main explanations emerged during the interviews. The first reason was the fear that the girl could escape the logic of the pact: often the transfer is the consequence of a too tight relationship created between the victim and a client, or connected to the perception that the girl is acquiring excessive margins of autonomy. The second reason calls upon the logic of rationalising the organisational network: the need to optimise in economic terms the exploitation of the victim, placing her in areas where the market is the most florid³³.

³³ Data which suggests the existence of a very well organised network, very well structured. We will return to this point in the following Chapter.

The cost to manage the house and the maintenance falls completely on the victims who, as well as the debt, find themselves having to pay rents out of proportion in relation to the value of the apartment, unbelievable bills, and expenses for food.

“I paid 150 [thousand lira, Ed.] for electricity each month, we were 4 persons, the rent was 500 thousand” (Interview Victim No.4).

“I had to pay the rent which was 500 thousand lira and we are 7 or 12, each one paid 500 thousand lira, see how much money comes in. When the bill for gas arrives, no one saw the bill; we paid 350 thousand lira for two months. To eat, to buy mashed potatoes, each one must put 20 thousand lira; we are 9” (Interview Victim No.10).

“For rent I must pay 500 thousand lira each month, to eat 200 thousand lira each week. Always the same, we are 3” (Interview Victim No.8).

“We were 11 in the house and every week we gave 150 thousand lira to eat” (Interview Victim No.7).

The majority of the girls in the houses move by train or by bus to reach their place of work and often such transportation represents the only time during which they can sleep.

“I used to leave the house at 6, or at 5.40 in the morning, and entered at 3, 4, in the morning, I slept an hour, an hour and a half (...) if I don't sleep on the train. I remember how many times I wound up in Pisa. You go to sleep; the journey lasts one hour and 15 minutes. Then you get up quickly to take the next train to arrive at Tarquinia” (Interview Victim No.7).

“I worked morning, nights, I never slept. One perhaps sleeps three hours per day” (Interview Victim No.2).

Those who work at night then manifest the difficulty of not knowing the city, of not being able to find the way and know a minimum of daytime life: *“You go in the street at night, in the day you sleep, you only live at night. Like this I don't know how the city functions. I know nothing of Turin”* (Interview Victim No.12).

The isolation level in each case is quite high also for those who work during the day, especially in the beginning; they only know the way that takes them to the place of work. During all the coercive period, depending on the *madam*, the social life of the victim is forced within the limits of meeting the other girls: from the sharing of transportation means to get to work, the place of prostitution, to the house in which they live, up to the consumption of video cassettes of Nigerian soap operas, acquired in the “parallel” sales circuits: the social life of the victims seems to be in an autonomous universe, self-referring. Clients excepted, they have few and unstable contacts with the external reality.

Exoneration from work in the case of illness is not foreseen, unless serious, not even when they menstruate or if they are pregnant.

“Every day you must go on the street, when you are menstruating they put cotton not to let it come out, can you imagine to how many girls it ended up in the stomach?” (Interview Victim No.2).

If the woman is pregnant in most cases she is made to abort and for that they ask another 1,500 Euros (if the pregnancy is already in the fourth month it becomes 2,500) to add to the debt and the other expenses³⁴.

From many testimonies emerges the weight at the psychological as well as physical level, to put up with for a year or two (this is the average duration for the payment of the debt) a style of life which foresees about 15, 20 sexual intercourses per day with people unknown, often violent or of whom they are afraid.

The constant fear is to find themselves faced with danger for their safety, which constitutes another element of discomfort: many girls say that each time they go out they do not know what could happen to them. They are frightened of being killed, hit, or of becoming ill.

According to the opinion of several privileged witnesses, in the relationship with the clients, physical and moral violence is not rare, often accentuated, in the case of the Nigerian victims, of attitudes and requests for “extreme” sexual practices that visibly betray the sense of a perceived cultural superiority, if not racial, on the part of many Italian men.

In this sense the testimony of an operator from Castelvolturno is emblematic: the social fibre is severely degraded on the coast area of the north of Naples where the daily context of sexual relations is characterised by physical violence and moral oppression

The Law Enforcement officers also register multiple violence by the clients, in particular to the damage of the Nigerian women “*A group attacked her and tortured her with the neck of a broken bottle*” (*Questura* of Venice).

It is difficult to say if the Nigerian women put up with more violence in comparison with those from other ethnic groups, but their clients are often those from the edge:

“*Nigerian prostitution is directed towards the low end of the market (...) it is symptomatic of the fact that they are in the suburbs, they have lower charges therefore even the clients belong to the lower end of the customers*” (*Corpo dei Carabinieri - Rome*).

To make a precise complaint against the authors of the violence undergone is often very difficult: if, as nearly always happens, the attacker is Italian or however a white, the woman has nearly always difficulty in reconstructing a precise identikit, because in her eyes the somatic lines of whites are hardly distinguishable.

Risks of violence derive sometimes from problems with other organisations for the management of the territory, problems that are “sorted out” putting pressure on the same girls, as is evident from the testimony which follows:

“*Then I had a problem there. Six months had passed when an Albanian arrived who told me «get out of here». I went to the house and I said that I had been told to go away, and that I was afraid of the Albanians. She said: «This is my place and*

³⁴ Faced with these situations, it appears evident how important is the aid provided by those organisations that operate in health protection and harm reduction, and that can sustain the women to access and benefit from the social health services of the territory.

mine since a long time, he can't». She told me: «You don't go away; you must stay here because it is mine». The next day I went there, the Albanian had sent other two people, one was in the trunk of the car, the other was in the car but I did not know he was Albanian because he had cut his hair, he didn't have any more hair. He asked: «How much?» I said: «50». He said: «Get in». They hit me so I nearly died. (...) As I had been hit in the morning I should have gone to the Hospital instead my pimp did not allow me to go to the Hospital, she made me dress to go to work» (Interview Victim No.2).

There is also corroboration from investigations, as the following telephone interception will show:

“A: «No, no, it wasn't me ...it was S. who called you, she also called me...she was the one who put her girls in her joint³⁵»

B: «Uhm...»

A: «She called me and told me that she had called you several times»

B: «Uhm...»

A: «What do the girls that are in that place say?»

B: «I was there yesterday and there was some problem, they wanted to hit the other one...They said that they had some problem with the place which they had not yet resolved and so they left there, I went again today, but I haven't yet seen the other one to ask how things were going...»

A: «Exactly, she told me that she had been there with them and that she had already told them not to go there tomorrow, but she changed her idea and told them to go there and that she will stay again with them...»

B: «Uhm...»

A: «She said that she was there today with them!»

B: «They must resolve the problem, from what they said it is as if they want to send S. away from there...»

A: «Yes, they want to take the place away from her!»

B: «This is true and the people we gave them to put there, none of them are strong...»

A: «None...»

B: «The girl told me that they wanted to hit her and that she...(C.) took the train with them to go to Naples, from what they said yesterday, I understood that they wanted to send C. away from there, that is to say the person with whom she has problems there...I don't know this person, J. suggested to me to go there together, but I said no, and that the place is not mine and the girls have to pay for the place, therefore it should not be me to fight for the place but the owner...»”
(Preventive detention order, criminal proceeding - Naples, 1999).

³⁵ The *joint* is the work post, which we will discuss later.

The expansion of the offer of prostitution has of necessity brought about a market of self-regulation: the pimps of different origin have divided up the territory and the girls from Nigeria have been pushed towards the suburban areas of the city and province. As it clearly emerges from the testimony often the girls pay themselves for the fluidity or lack of clarity of the agreements between the criminal organisations.

Within this framework the resort to alcohol in large quantities (above all beer) by the girls should be noted and in some cases, the use of stimulants and drugs. The operators talk about certain “pills”, rarely do they resort to cocaine, and to the consumption of “Morocco” (substance consumed only by the Nigerians, apparently derived from cannabis) which accentuates the sense of loneliness, which characterises the victims of the Nigerian traffic. The deep schism between the life conducted and the external reality is, on the other hand, one of the possible explanations of the fact that, as most of the operators interviewed mention, the case of women in need of psychiatric assistance are particularly numerous amongst the Nigerian victims.

4.2 The management and control system of the exploitation

The exploitation of prostitution of the women coming from Nigeria is presented as being peculiar, in respect to that of women of other origins, from different points of view.

As a start, the management is operated by the same subjects that have prepared and followed the traffic from Nigeria or however belonging to the same group: you can speak of “traffickers-exploiters”³⁶, all from the same origin. Behind this apparent low profile (from a superficial glance one could think to have business with an ethnic group who manages business in an artisan manner) there hides a system well articulated on an international level - in Europe as in the country of origin and in other areas - capable of managing recruitment, the journey, arrival in the West, the connections on the “market” and the daily exploitation.

Secondly, the phenomenon is characterised by management “by women”; men are relegated to a largely secondary function, however marginal, at least according to a superficial glance³⁷.

The final particularity is connected to the apparent freedom of movement which the women enjoy, freedom which is however possible only because of the existence of a tight control operating from the top.

³⁶ For such expression and to identify the various types of ties between exploitation of prostitution, traffic and market see Stefano Becucci (2003, page 32).

³⁷ Many sustain that the men are present with roles at the top inside the organisation, even if not resulting as being present in the daily life of the women. On this point see the following Chapter.

A feminine management

In analysing the type of relations which are installed between the victim and the exploiters, it is necessary to bear in mind the fact that in the major number of cases a relation between women is concretised on a daily level. The common denominator of the female exploiter and victim, in fact, results in being an important element to understand the mechanisms that concern the management of Nigerian prostitution in Italy.

The hub of prostitution exploitation for the Nigerian women is the female figure of the *madam*: to her the direct management of the victims is given.

The *madam* who resides in Italy maintains a direct and preferential link to her female homologue figure in Nigeria (the so-called Nigerian *madam*, often belonging to the same extended family) who has a fundamental role to guarantee the link of subordination deriving from the magic-religious pact and in the subjection of the family of the woman immigrant.

“A. calls her mother in Nigeria, she greets her and asks her how she is. Then the mother tells her that she went to see where the girl is that should be sent. A. replies that they had said that she left Nigeria today. A. asks her mother if she can send her something to stop the girls from escaping”.

“A. tells her mother that her girls are not working and therefore she should send her something to make them work and adds she should also send something to keep the girls. The mother asks if she has to send her again that thing that she had sent last time. A. replies yes, and asks her to go also to that place to get advice from a “witch doctor”, something for the girls and something for her. The mother of A. replies that you can’t ask these things in the place where she goes to the meetings as the parents of some of the girls are there and therefore would come to know that she is subjecting them to woodoo...she continues to ask the mother for something to put in the food to give to the girls so that they are subjected to her. A. reminds her to do the rite every morning so that the police will keep away”.

“T. calls Nigeria and speaks with her mother who tells her that they have not sent her the powder to put in the food, but another that you should pass over the head of the girl which will stop her from running away it is something you do so that the police don’t catch her.” (Transcription of a telephone intercept, criminal proceeding, Turin - 2001).

Normally the women trafficked live in the house of the *madam*, or however in a house controlled indirectly by her³⁸, and they are instructed by her on how to behave at work. She will collect the profits of the prostitution activity daily, or periodically.

It is interesting to note how, according to the opinion of different operators of the police, there does not seem to be a real “duty to earn” daily³⁹: the *madam* in fact may tolerate moments of minor earning or however even modest earnings, as long

³⁸ This is one of the many functions of the so-called *controller*, which we will deal with more in the next Chapter.

³⁹ The figures on average are around 50 Euros per day and therefore about 500 every ten days.

as she is sure to earn a fixed amount each month, around 500 Euros, given the fact that the women are made to pay the rent of the house, food and the so-called *joint*, the work place.

As we will see, however, on this point the opinion of the victim is different from that of the operators as they have particularly underlined the fact that not bringing money to the *madam* is sanctioned heavily.

It is not necessarily the *madam* who exploits the woman that is also the “grantee” of the *joint*: from the telephone interceptions⁴⁰ emerges that in some cases the joint is paid to another *madam*. This female figure sometimes manages also her own women and offers, against payment, some work places to other *madams*; other times, instead, she seems to occupy herself exclusively with the rent of the *joint*.

The Law Enforcement operators do not seem to attribute much importance or a particular significance to such eventual sub-division of the roles, unlike the women who consider the *madam* who alone manages the *joint*, a more important and more powerful figure than the “normal” *madam*.

It is always the *madam* who also manages the arrival of the women from Nigeria. It is often her, in first person, who occupies herself with recovering the women who for some reason have not directly reached the destination.

It should be noted that in the testimony of many social operators the link with the *madam* seems to be characterised by an extreme variability.

Two different types of acquisition of victims are noted. In the first case, the Italian *madam* waits for the arrival of the new girls and it is in preventive contact with the person who will conduct them to her. In the second, instead, the girl is recruited and conducted to Italy, and only at the time of her arrival is she “put on the market” and acquired by a *madam*. Some testimony refers, in fact, to long journeys of the girl through Italy, necessary to obtain the sale, before the victim reaches destination with “her” *madam*.

The variability of the links concern the management of the money and handing over the amounts to the *madam*. It can be daily or periodically, with the important difference that, in the first case, the victim is subjected to a heavier and continuous control (which also concerns the amount of autonomy of the victim to go to the place of work and go shopping). The second indicates that a relationship of faith exists between the victim and the *madam*.

This feminine mediation deprives the traffic from Nigeria of some odious aspects of exploitation of prostitution which characterises other aspects (such as sexual violence by the pimps), but denotes ambiguity. The *madam* in fact is a slave-driver, but at the same time also a figure worthy of respect, sometimes nearly maternal when, deep down, she is known as a benefactor. Once the debt is paid the *madam* may in fact help the girl to earn money for herself and her family and support her in the successive passage from prostitute to *madam*.

⁴⁰ The telephone intercepts are numerous, where they speak about buying and selling *joints*, in different proceedings analysed.

“There are many pimps that when you have paid the debt they tell you «now you have to find your own money to do something in Nigeria», there are those that help these girls, that take money to the country, who help the girls buy a house in the country” (Interview Victim No.9).

From the interviews undertaken with the Law Enforcement operators one deduces that, mainly for these characteristics, the probatory ascertaining the crime of exploitation is more complex. At the superficial level it would appear that the victims are in agreement and, even being able, they do not rebel, even if placed under heavy forms of control, not immediately perceptible by those who do not share the culture and the Nigerian mentality.

The fact that the *madam*, (inasmuch as being a woman, and often previously a prostitute) knows perfectly what involves, at physical and psychological level, a life on the street and prostituting oneself, make conditions of constriction and exploitation a more acceptable to some of the victims.

“If a woman tells you to go on the street you accept because she is like you, she has already done so. But if it is a man you would say «make a cut on the stomach and you go!» You respect them because at least they know what they are talking about” (Interview Victim No.5).

Further the move up made by some *madams* from victims to exploiters represents for many girls a real perspective to look upon with favour.

From some witnesses it emerges that there is a different vision which would tend to prefer men as exploiters as they are less interested in this type of activity and therefore less demanding.

“There are also men who are pimps, but there are not many like the Albanians. But the men are better. It is better to have a man as a pimp, many men if you pay a bit, then they let you free, instead with the women you have to pay all. But the major number are women, men do not like to do this, send a girl on the street and work for them” (Interview Victim No.9).

Generally, however, the men have other roles inside the organisation and even in the case where they have bought some girls, it is nearly always a woman who has the responsibility to control and collect the money earned on their behalf. Only in the case where the *madam* has a problem with the law and is obliged to leave Italy does a fiancé enter on the scene, a friend of this woman with the duty of continuing her work.

These persons, often present in the houses where the girls live, are described by the latter as doing nothing, being maintained. Rarely they are in charge of the management with the *madam*, while there exists other male figures controlling and carrying out, if necessary, physical violence.

Often the state of complete subjection and dependence imposed by the *madam* is difficult to accept, especially for those who have chosen to come to Italy to prostitute themselves and find they have to work in conditions of slavery. What emerges from the testimony is that what weighs upon them all is not to have the possibility to start immediately to earn for oneself, but is having to give all their own earnings without having anything in exchange.

“For me it was sad to see that I went to work and she remained here to sleep, I came back in the morning, I was not at ease. If I had to work for myself, alright, but not that I had to give all to you” (Interview Victim No.4).

For this reason, there are cases of rebellion, even if not frequent, on the part of the victims, but above all there are frequent fights with the *madam* who, in situations of difficult management, can decide to re-sell those who create problems. The girl to be placed is called in slang “*fish*” or you speak about “*fabric*”, “*big fish*” or “*lovely fabric*” if she is a particularly beautiful girl and therefore more expensive, but who promises major possibilities of earning.

From the accounts of the victims the buying/selling takes place through a network of people known by the *madam*. When the girl must be sold, reciprocal visits take place, during which the victim is observed and evaluated.. The girls judged “too lively” are very difficult to place, from the moment that no one wants to have problems with the management of her “*business*”. On the other extreme but equally difficult to sell, are those that are too naive, who according to the *madam* are the first that denounce because incapable of pretending in front of the police.

Areas and forms of control

The isolation in which the victims find themselves living depends on the strict control exercised on them by the *madam* through certain people (normally these are men) appointed for this task. The control is expressed in many aspects of behaviour and relations and assumes different forms.

The control of movement

The fact that movements are foreseen, often many kilometres on public transport, to arrive at the place of work, could make us think of relative freedom; the threat of control, even if it is not effectively enacted, exercises a heavy weight on the behaviour of the victims. The presence of men that patrol the house of the *madam* and of which the women do not know the effective roles, bears witness to the existence of a wide control, undertaken from a distance: *“They never come near (...) at Tarquinia we went to this market, and did our shopping, having some friends who had just finished paying you can ask them to keep your clothes, and then you pass and collect them. There were also shops who knew us where you bought things, you left them there, and said «When I come back around seven I will take them». We left them there. Towards seven, a girl said «I think I saw the boy who I had seen with the boss once» We made fun of her: «You saw a ghost, (...) wake up we are in Tarquinia», in the beginning we thought that she was making fun of us. She said she had seen him, but he had disappeared. We forgot about it. In the evening we returned and took the bag. We took the train, arriving in Rome, descending from the train, the boy descended, but did not come near us. We continued to say, «He saw us, he didn't see us...» we were worried. If you deny that you did not see it is worse, so we went near «Ciao, ciao. Are you coming back?». He pretended there was nothing and we returned to the house. At the house (the boss) was there and said «Well, how did you dare to go shopping without my consent? How did you dare spend money without telling me?» and with his belt «bum, bum, bum»” (Interview Victim No.7).*

“I arrived in Piacenza by train, at the station I took a taxi to the area near the cemetery (...) I returned to Turin around seven in the morning and arrived at the house by bus. There was no one waiting for us. When we arrived in the morning in Turin and returned to the house, we were not free, as we were locked in X. house, they locked us in, only she could go around free as she had finished paying ”

“I have seen Y. many times at the station in Turin”.

“Y. came to find us in Piacenza when I did not return to the house. I don't know how, but she always knew how to find us” (Report of summary information of victims, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2000).

According to some people, the control is undertaken in a constant manner throughout the day, even in the times not dedicated to work, as many of the places outside the work area frequented by the girls are in some way controlled by the same organisation⁴¹.

In many cases the organisation is so spread out over the territory to manage to control the women indirectly, through individuals who are linked to those who exploit them. A clear indication of this is the rapidity with which the *madam* manages to know that a woman did not go to work, and can immediately contact her, requesting the reason.

“A: «Where are you?»

B: «At the house.»

⁴¹ On this point see the following Chapter.

A: «No and you did not go to work.»

B: «I am at the house of X, I was tired, I was not well but he gave me money»

A: «Get up and go back to the house, you can't do what you want» (telephone intercepts, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2002).

The control on earnings

The strictest control relates to the rhythm of work and the woman's capacity to earn. Some *madams* ask daily for the earnings. Each girl, in the morning should hand over the earnings obtained during the night or the preceding day inside a container situated in the bedroom of the *madam*. Often it is not a pre-decided amount, but in the case of low earnings the woman may be shouted at, threatened or hit.

In other cases the collection occurs at fixed times, or every week or every fifteen days. The sum to be handed over is about three million lire per month but, according to the testimony of the women, it can be much higher, arriving at two million per week. Also in this case, if the woman does not earn much, she can be hit, and threatened with violence to her family. In some cases for those that are slow to pay, the sanction consists, apart from violence, to an increase of the debt: "He hit a girl named A. and left her without two teeth. He hit her because A. worked very little, she earned very little (...) they use the money for business, you cannot keep it. If each year you didn't earn half of your debt, 10 million more. It was his way of working" (Interview Victim No.7).

The control system can extend itself also to Nigeria: if it is noticed that the parents of the woman have started to conduct an easier way of life, they accuse the girl of sending money home without the consent of the exploiters.

The control through sanctions and punishment

The behaviour to punish is therefore multiple and the sanctions can be of a physical or monetary type. In the majority of the cases, but there are exceptions and variations, the victims are not free to move around, excluding the journeys to go and come from work. They cannot spend the money earned (even clothes and products for body care are provided by the *madam* and the amount, often more than tripled in respect to its effective value, is deducted from the debt), nor send it to the family left at home. In addition, as we have seen, it is not in any way permitted to contact persons of the family or friends present on Italian territory or resident in Europe.

The girls are warned about eventual contacts with the police and the associations which operate in the field (for example with those units on the street). Sentimental relationships with Nigerian boys or Africans in general are not permitted, because they are considered dangerous for maintaining the relationship of subjection of the victims to the *madams*.

Physical punishments can be made by the *madam*, or in more serious cases, where an example must be given to the other girls, by a man who can have a more important role within the organisation, the role of “hitter”.

For those who appear difficult to dominate through physical violence, the method of a “*fine*” is used, that is to say the increase of the sum due, of the remaining debt.

“In the end I was always at 50, 52 million. The last time before I escaped, when she deducted 10 million, I had gone to send money to my mother 600,000 lira; stupidly I had left the receipt in my bag. I sent it with Western Union, always through other people, because I did not have a passport, nothing (...) so my madam was never able to touch my bag, in the beginning she tried, but I attacked her and said «Don’t try»...but she always knew that I was not frightened of her. That time, however, I did not know that he was there; I returned home and found him in front of me. He took my bag and found this. I said «I sent my mother 600,000 lira, it is not the end of the world» I knew that he could not touch me and so he called her and said «How much has she already given you?» and she «48», he said «Becomes 38». But he did not touch me.” (Interview Victim No.7).

Control through competition and tip-offs

Control of the activities and behaviour of the victims, as has been said, is undertaken through informers, and/or with searches on return to the house. More often, however, it seems that control is exercised on each other by those same victims, inside the same group of girls who live and/or work together, to assure themselves favourable treatment by the *madam* or to avoid some punishment.

The two ways generally live side by side, even if some women, probably reflecting on such a well known experience, maintain that control on the part of the exploiters does not exist and that it is all based on mechanisms of survival and competition between the victims.

“They are not like the Albanians, there is no one to control, you only have to bring money home. Perhaps there is another girl near you who spies on you. Because I remember once that I gave someone 100,000 lira to give to my mother, and the other girl went and told the pimp. It is not that they come to control, perhaps there is another girl who tells about what you do. She is a spy so she is treated better” (Interview Victim No.2).

Elusions and weakening of control

Despite all these series of constrictions and ties, especially after a period of time, the women manage to elude the controls and keep a space of economic and personal autonomy for themselves. They start for example to understand how they can save money for themselves and have ingenious solutions to hide their savings.

“At the work place you take a tin of coca-cola. you drink, you take an envelope, you put money inside and you throw it on the ground, those watching think that it is a tin of coca-cola, instead there is money inside. You hide it, when you get an idea, you open it” (Interview Victim No.7).

“When I went to work, she entered my room looking for money, etc. So if I have to hide money, I hide it in the room of my pimp so she did not think that I was hiding money in her room. We used to go there to clean” (Interview Victim No.4).

After a certain period of time in Italy, the women manage to make friends with other Nigerians outside the prostitution environment. In their stories, people appear who have a function of help and support, whether psychological or practical.

The places where they meet are often on transportation, but also at the work post and other places (such as discotheques and public places) where the victims go accompanied by clients. These are often people that give their help in exchange for money.

Following is such a case: *“At that time when I was in Rome, there was a Nigerian boy named A., but he was good, nice. That A. got on the train, made friends and then asked «Do you want to send money to Nigeria?» You gave 150, he said «Give me 20 and I will send it for you». So he earned a little bit but did what you asked. Obviously you can do it with those who do, otherwise, you hide it”* (Interview Victim No.7).

Often there are girls who have finished to pay the debt and who undertake the role of support.

“Having some girl friends that have already finished paying you can ask them to keep clothes, and then you go by and collect them. There was a girl named A. (...) who had finished to pay and had become a friend of lots of people. She hid the things you bought at her house; you could give her money” (Interview Victim No.7).

After some time has passed from the beginning of the exploitation the *madam* seems to “accept” to receive the daily or weekly amount, without verifying if the woman has gone to work or has in another way found the necessary sum of money.

“If you earn more it is not that you have to give it all to them, it depends on you (...). If I go with a client to dance and if she asks me, I don’t say that I was in a discotheque. I must say that I went to work and have the money to pay. I don’t have to tell the truth” (Interview Victim No.6).

Slowly as the women become more cunning in managing money, so as to not provoke *madam*’s suspicions, and slowly as the debts diminish, they start to have more freedom of movement which could permit them to start a social life, until then impossible, or to think about the possibility of abandoning such a life.

It is the case of B. who managed to contact an NGO she met on the street and to start with them a road to freedom.

“Tampep. They made visits, they gave me their address, the day after with the excuse that I was going with someone, I went to them. First when they came nearer with the van, you did not have the freedom to speak with them because the other girls would tell on you (...) I had put money aside and told them that I was going with someone, so when I came back I gave the money that I had put aside” (Interview Victim No.10).

Control between psychological subjection and resort to violence towards the victim and her family

The control exercised on the women is, according to numerous interviews, an extremely intense and pervasive control, even if it is manifested in forms that are very different to those of our culture and is usually considered as an instrument of subjection and coercion.

As we have seen the Nigerian women often have a wide possibility of movement: working outside the city, sometimes hundreds of kilometres from the place of residence, they move in trains or by bus for long journeys without any apparent control. One could ask the reason why they don't escape from this situation, considering the fact that normally the women live in groups in the house of the *madam*, as well as the motives for the lack of rebellion or collective escapes.

The answer is not connected to a particular acceptance or indifference towards the discomfort and suffering of the Nigerian women, nor is it a better capacity to accept the work of prostitution in comparison to women of other origins: these stereotyped images are the result of a false representation of their culture. The apparent absence of rebellion is instead tied to rather more complex factors.

In the first case the woman is tied by a rite and a pact which she has undertaken in the community: even if she does not really believe, intimately, in the threat of the *woodoo* rite, she is tied to maintaining the tight pact with the community, the interruption of which is a source of dishonour and disgrace. The conditioning is so strong that one can say it is a part of her character.

In the second case, as evidenced previously, controls exist, notwithstanding the fact they are seemingly absent: the women are sometimes accompanied to the place of work or at least to the railway station from where they take the train during the day. In some cases, the collaborators of the *madam* undertake reconnaissance checks and sometimes, at the end of the "shift", someone re-accompanies them to the house; often once at the house they are not free to go out.

Obviously there is a certain variation: the situation that they can encounter show different grades of control, varying not only from one person to another, but also in relation to the various phases of the exploitation. For example it is quite frequent that in the first months the *madam* controls the contacts of the woman with her family in Nigeria, controls which, as the months pass, become considerably less.

One should however remember that the margin of self-determination left to the woman, sometimes apparently wide, is at the total discretion of the exploiter and her collaborators: the possibility of moving, communicating can be taken away or widened without being influenced by the wishes of the woman in any way. In this sense we can talk about, at least in certain phases of the exploitation cycle, of "*reduction to slavery*", undertaken however without constant constrictions and physical violence⁴².

⁴² It should be mentioned that the Supreme Court, *Corte di Cassazione*, (Cass. S.U. 20.11.96/16.1.97 No.261, ced. No. 206512) recognised that the reduction to slavery is identified by a *de facto* situation, for which the conduct of the agent to effect the reduction of the person offended in a material condition of

In addition not even in the Nigerian case is violence completely absent in the relationship between the victims and exploiters. The context in which the women find themselves living is a violent context or, to use the words of a judge in the court of Rome interviewed by us, of “*environmental violence*”. By such an expression it is intended that the context is however dominated by violence and oppression, even if not imparted with a hard, physical and direct violence in a systematic manner.

This is the crucial aspect so as to understand the specific means of exploitation. The women may not suffer physical violence directly, but the fear of retaliation and violence on the family or the stories of what happened to victims who rebelled is often sufficient. Obviously at investigation level - in absence of evident physical violence and the lack of certainty regarding what happens in Nigeria - it is not always easy to demonstrate the existence and relevance of such environmental violence.

On the other hand, according to several people interviewed, the level of direct violence is increasing and is always more frequently passing from a psychological and symbolic level, to a level of reality. There is a curious change taking place: in some areas, while the Nigerians are moving to more violence because of the increasing difficulties in managing the women (also because of the interventions of the street units and pressure by the police) the Albanian exploiters, instead, are “*Letting up on the violence, also because they understand that with the mobile units, and protection programmes, they risk that the women escape and denounce them, so they are becoming slightly more soft seeking to involve them, starting to allow them to participate in some form of earnings...*” (Cooperativa Dedalus - Naples).

The Albanian exploiter, who was always considered the most violent⁴³, is therefore passing to softer systems of managing the victims, based on the division of profits. These are systems that make the victim in part an accomplice, risking to greatly weakening the position and credibility with the police and the NGOs who must be able to adapt their interventions even with this type of change. It should be noted however that sometimes the tight pact between the woman and her exploiter is broken or modified and this can become a stimulus for complaints “*The Ukrainian, Moldavian, Romanian, Albanian girls now know what they are coming to do, they know that there is the famous 50 and 50. The complaint starts when they arrive in Italy and on the street, where they know they have to go, there is no longer the 50 and 50, there is 10 and 90 and the hitting starts*” (Questura of Venice).

In each case it appears evident how the different organisations of exploitation model their strategies in relation to the needs of an efficacious reaction to the initiatives of contrast, such as that represented by the permission to stay for social protection reasons.

Returning to the Nigerian victims, these are also sometimes beaten (it is nearly always direct corporal violence, but they never use firearms and hardly ever other

slavery. That is her exclusive subjection to the power of disposition of someone.

⁴³ This is what emerges from the testimony of the women and the operators.

arms), tortured in many different forms⁴⁴, if the rules are broken, or there is incorrect behaviour: to have hidden part of the money earned, to be late talking to a client, etc. In the major number of cases, however, the means of expression for compulsion are more frequently subtle and shift: it is not rare that on the first slip, the woman is pardoned and encouraged to earn more or she is “instructed” again on how she should work and only later do the sanctions start, to underline the fact that the *madam* does not want to punish, but is partly forced to by the continued negligence of the woman.

Violence may arrive to high levels: even if not being a means of daily management of exploitation, there are numerous cases of violence, very cruel, often used as a warning to the others (for example, burning the body of a woman with an iron and showing the burns to avoid any rebellion).

In these last cases it is never the *madam* herself: the *madam* manages, with the collaboration of some men (according to the tales of the victims, even Moroccans and Italians are paid to go and hit and frighten the woman), the daily violence “of ordinary administration”, but when it is needed to raise the profile specific Nigerian figures intervene, who have the role of “hitters”. These enter on the scene on the orders of the *madam*, when the violence must go beyond the ordinary. Often the victims are petrified with terror of some of the male figures noted in different local contexts.

These men are presented normally as friends or at least family friends, but the “hitter” is hardly ever a “man of the *madam*” who in general continues to have a marginal role and does not have a more violent behaviour.

The threat does not cease with giving up prostitution or with complaints : numerous are the testimonies of victims who, under ex art.18 d.lgs. 286/1998, meet people near the *madam* or the *madam* herself and who are reminded of the debt payment and threaten “retaliations” in case of the lack of respect for the pact. Sometimes the threats are pushed, silently, even to court: “*Even in the course of the debate there was a woman who could not say...In the preliminary investigations she told us she had been exploited, threatened, that the family had been threatened. However, during the debate she denied everything; following this I received a letter personally addressed to me which said that in the court there were two Nigerians present - that therefore they knew about the case - and she could not say anything because they had already gone to the house of her mother and sister, and if she had spoken up they would have died*” (*Questura* of Udine).

Numerous are the replies about the violence perpetrated on the families. On the one hand, to corroborate what the victims declare, there are the declarations of the women that have decided to denounce the exploitation as well as the telephone intercepts. On the other hand, in some cases, it has been possible to obtain real documentary proof (for example photographs which show scared family members), indicative of how real the threats to the families are. It should be noted that often the threats are activated immediately after the rebellion of the woman, to

⁴⁴ For example forcing the women to remain naked on their knees for hours until the moment to return to work, obliging the woman to remain immobile for hours holding very heavy objects on her head, pouring saucepans of boiling water on the legs, hitting them with electric cables, hitting them with a stick, biting them.

demonstrate how close the links of the organisation are with those in Nigeria who can bring about the retaliation.

Following such violence often the families invite the victims to respect the pact, to honour the debt for fear that the retaliation on them increases, something that can effectively happen, as cases show in which the level of physical violence increased and was accompanied by other actions, such as destroying the house of the victim.

The victims have also talked about periods of detention in prison suffered by the family, following the complaints made by them and following the non payment of the due sum, due to the contract underwritten through a notary or public official⁴⁵ which would appear effectively to be legally valid or at least useable as a means of pressure by those who can count on support and connivance in legal institutions or the police.

The direct violence on the families opens unresolved problems: if in fact, the victim in Italy can obtain help and protection thanks to programmes of social protection ex art.18 d.lgs. 286/1998, the families in Nigeria are without any guarantee. In abstract, there exists the possibility to apply the norms on the collaborators of justice⁴⁶, but it must involve a situation so serious as to justify its application⁴⁷. In abstract the possibility exists of taking advantage of the procedure to have the families join them, but in this case either a preferential channel is activated or one must wait for the duration of the bureaucratic procedures, giving due account also to the restrictive modifications introduced by Law 189/2002 - the so-called Bossi-Fini.⁴⁸

From the elements collected one can therefore affirm that we are not only faced with an “affair between women” of limited criminal relevance, but a capillary network, well structured, possessing a widely spread control system which poses a series of questions on the character of the criminal organisation, on the management of the proceeds of the activity of exploitation of prostitution, on the links with other illicit trade carried out by Nigerian subjects and, not last, on the efficacy of the contrasting action undertaken until now.

⁴⁵ Little is known about the person before whom these contracts are signed; one could talk about a “notary” because from the declarations of the victims it appears that it is an act legally signed in front of someone endowed with certification powers.

⁴⁶ Obviously with not a few difficulties if the family is still in Nigeria.

⁴⁷ This is law 15 March 1991, No. 82 as modified by law 13 February 2001 No. 45 which has extended the measures of protection also to the witnesses of justice (see in particular Item II and IIb). For careful disheartenment see: Bernasconi (2002, page 75); for the analysis of the original regulation and a systematic picture: Bernasconi (1995).

⁴⁸ Reference is made to the modifications introduced to Art. 29 of d.lgs 286/1998 and in particular the cancellation of the possibility of the joining of relatives within the third grade with inability to work, and the limitations for the parents who are free to join “if they do not have other children in the originating country or that of departure” or in the case of “parents above 65 years old, as long as the other children are unable to sustain them for serious health reasons”. On this point, see also the Chapter VII.

CHAPTER V

The organisational system of the trafficking of minors and women for sexual exploitation

5.1 Organised crime?

One of the most interesting aspects of the organisation dedicated to the traffic of Nigerian women for sexual exploitation is its capacity to appear as “low profile”, to avoid spectacular exploits and work in silence. This apparent low profile in reality is a very compact and well structured network.

In all probability it is not a structured organisation according to a strongly hierarchical model (as the Italian mafia organisations), but numerous criminal groups linked to each other on a horizontal plane, characterised by strong flexibility, high level of specialisation, a system of network links which is not easily visible from the outside⁴⁹.

There are numerous advantages to this type of organisation.

In the first place, not being an hierarchical organised group, it benefits, at least in the first phase, of this “disorganisation” and therefore in fact has the appearance of a little structured system of exploitation of prostitution, which does not have ties on Italian territory and which adopts means of action in a certain “artisan” and precarious way.

In the second place, the strong organisational flexibility allows it to take rapid decisions and to re-adapt immediately the tactics and action strategies to meet all needs and conditions. The feature of the organisation dedicated to the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation is, besides a strong stability and the capacity to move according to well tested patterns which are repeated over time, the possibility to rapidly effect all the adaptations necessary in concrete cases. If the means of recruitment, the journey, the management system appears to be always the same it is because the mechanism is so well tested to almost regulate itself automatically when faced with obstacles (the lack of documents to travel regularly, the “treachery” of the *porteur*, the pressure of the police, the interventions of the NGOs, and so on).

In the third place, the parcelled structure, even if endowed with high internal competence, is based on magic-religious ties and a high code of silence level, so

⁴⁹ For a critical view of the characteristics of the new criminal groups see Monica Massari (2003 a), pages 55-82 *specim* 78-82.

that rarely are other subjects called upon to discharge their responsibilities, allowing the organisation to have a strong capacity for resistance to penetration from the outside.

“Collaborators? No, they deny until they can...then, generally, they choose to admit to access to either compromise or to the abbreviated rite; not for which I am concerned, in no case absolutely” (Public Prosecutor - Turin).

“A confident as such is difficult...” (Questura of Milan).

“Even the informer...we have few, they have told little, in some cases things happened at strange times, strange times when we had perhaps certain investigations...and they came to tell us things that made us perplexed therefore, if we can, we avoid them” (Questura of Turin).

In some cases⁵⁰ associations of a cultural and religious type have been constituted: behind a legal front the organisation dedicated to the traffic of women for sexual exploitation is hidden. Such associations are based on a strong internal cohesion, on the existence of internal rules which, if broken, bring about expulsion from the group, so much as to have been linked, in a recent criminal proceedings, with a clan of the Camorra, even for the means of resolving problems connected with the activity of the group, similar to those used by Italian criminals (criminal proceeding - Naples, 1999).

Finally, it should be said that in general the Nigerian presence has not proved to be invasive and threatening to the hosting community: externally it does not have violent behaviour and in general seeks to avoid creating occasions of visibility. Rarely the Nigerians involved in illegal activities attract the attention of the police force with behaviours that disturbs the public. The interventions are mainly caused by the women on the street who clash with each other over presumed reciprocal improper behaviour.

Despite this it is evident that one is faced with a type of criminal organisation, which, even if different from Italian criminal organisations, has its own characteristics. Even in the Nigerian case *“the exploitation of the market of prostitution is becoming more structured according to crime models of an associative type”*⁵¹.

5.2 The ramification of the structure

The Nigerian criminality dedicated to the traffic of women for sexual exploitation is characterised by a network structure with ramifications not only on Italian territory and the country of origin, but also in many European and extra-European countries.

⁵⁰ In particular reference is made to a recent criminal proceeding started in the area of Naples and the indications provided by the *Servizio Centrale Operativo* (Central Operational Service) of the Italian State Police.

⁵¹ Scagliarini (2001, page 55).

Each penal procedure on the subject always singles out the presence of a starting point in Nigeria: each *madam* maintains constant contacts with numerous persons in Nigeria often through the mediation of the so-called Nigerian *madam*.

In Nigeria there are people who occupy themselves with the identification and successive recruitment of the victims, the intimidation of their families, of the pre-disposition of the documents necessary for travel and also, in part, of the re-employment of the proceeds⁵² of the exploitation of prostitution.

Given the absence of systematic collaboration with the Nigerian authorities, all those involved in the traffic who reside in Nigeria are never reached by the contrasting action of the police force, apart from the case where, for some reason, they arrive in Europe and are intercepted here.

Within Italian territory there are numerous links between those who manage the exploitation of prostitution: not by chance many *madams*, even if operating in an area of the peninsular, have residences elsewhere or have a permission to stay from Police which is not that of the territory where they are domiciled. All this is the result of the capillarity of the network, which allows an immediate exchange of information and favours (for example how to obtain a false employment certificate in order to obtain a permission to stay).

Also telephone contacts are very frequent, and not only, between different subjects throughout the whole peninsular:

“A. refers to B. that she spoke with the mother of B., and to have told her about the debt she has with the friend of the mother of C. A. continues saying that when she goes to Naples for the meeting, if the woman does not give her money, she will knife her. During the conversation she refers again to this saying when she goes to Naples for the meeting she will knife her and no one should say anything”.

“B. says she knows that the girls have not left, but that she prefers that they leave after she returns from the trip to Rome”.

“A. says that with all the mess she has in the house, she can't go to Naples, even if she has to take money, therefore she has to ask her to come to Turin because she can't move” (Transcription of telephone intercepts, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2001).

Further traces of the existence of the network are found investigating payments effected by money transfer. In an investigation undertaken in Triveneto it has been ascertained that different payments, of not much money, were made in favour of persons of Nigerian nationality in various parts of Italy and always coming from other areas of the peninsular.

Within the same geographical area the contacts are connected with the management of business (arrivals of new victims, exchanges and sale of places of work, exchange of information on police activities, etc.) and are nearly all daily: even if each has her own girls to manage, there is a strong cohesion, a good exchange of information and necessary help is given.

⁵² See *infra* paragraph 5.4.

“T. telephones E. and says that one of the girls she has in the house does not have clothes to work, therefore she asks E., telling her that she cannot wait until Monday. E. says that is alright because in fact that girl cannot wait until Monday and that she will bring clothes and will also take the girl to her work post”.

“T. talks to E. about the difficulty of work for the girls because of the presence of the police and the necessity to control one of the girls who was in hospital; of the fact that the night is full of girls who work and that O. has sent her girls there” (Transcription of telephone intercepts, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2001).

The links, even if not daily, are frequent even within the national territory. Numerous telephone intercepts⁵³ have uncovered the existence of a tested sales system and exchange of girls within Italian territory (and in some cases also with other European countries). If a woman does not earn or it has become difficult to make her work because she has met a man with whom she has started a relationship, or there is the fear she will escape, the organisation is able very rapidly to move her to another zone and give her to another *madam*.

In this case the woman is given to the new *madam* against payment of a sum of money, or in exchange with another woman, or the new *madam* simply manages the victim on behalf of the other, keeping a part of the earnings or even enjoying, in an exclusive manner, the profits earned from the payment of board and lodging of the *joint*.

The relations between *madams* active in different places have also other reasons: in one criminal proceeding⁵⁴ for example, a telephone conversation was taped in which one *madam* says to another that she needs to have a woman brought from Naples to Turin to have an abortion and makes an agreement on how to manage this move as quickly as possible. The level of collaboration reached, therefore appears as high as to make a telephone call sufficient to agree on a move and on the type of service, even delicate, to be rendered.

The network, however, also appears spread throughout European territory. In different investigations, numerous appear to be the telephone contacts with people in foreign countries who offer hospitality to the women during the journey or who take it upon themselves to temporarily manage a woman while waiting for when there is the possibility to have her arrive at the destination.

If it is necessary to send a woman away from Italy for a certain period, when needed it is possible to call upon this network and to temporarily find another place: France, Spain, and the Netherlands seem to be the countries where there are major contacts for this type of brief transfer⁵⁵.

During the journey of her “merchandise”, the *madam* also has the possibility to rely on some persons present in the different territories where the victim should transit, who are able to intervene if something “goes wrong”.

⁵³ In nearly all the criminal proceedings analysed there are references to sales of women.

⁵⁴ This is a recent criminal proceeding started in the area of Naples.

⁵⁵ The interviews carried out to Law Enforcement officers and the telephone intercepts of different criminal proceedings contain various elements confirming this point.

Often it is the same *madam* who moves around inside Europe to go and “take” a woman who, because of the intervention of the police or due to other problems during the journey, had to temporarily stay abroad. If the *madam* cannot move she can rely on one of the affiliates present in the territory who, against payment, will accompany the woman to Italy. Also, when the women are repatriated, a well-tested system is put in place which permits immediate contact and the successive re-embarkation towards Europe⁵⁶.

The cluster development as a mechanism of self-reproduction

An important and characteristic aspect of the organisational structure is constituted by its ability to multiply itself and to always create new branches, even if only for some specific tasks.

In many criminal proceedings some persons “appear”, mostly women of the same nationality, to whom it is possible to give the victims for a certain period of time: for example in the case where a search by the police is feared or in the case where the *madam* must absent herself for a certain period of time and prefers to keep a close control over her women.

Often it is a sporadic collaboration, given out of economic necessity and which will not give birth to another knot in the exploitation network.

However there are numerous cases of ex-prostitutes who, having paid their debt and liberated themselves, start to manage other women following a type of sub-tender by their old *madam*: the so-called *controllers*.

As can be seen in Figure 7, taken from the investigation quoted (undertaken in Udine), it is in most cases women who, once having obtained freedom from the organisation find themselves without any documents and irregularly present on Italian territory. It is therefore very difficult for them to start any type of work and, on the other hand is practically impossible, to return to Nigeria without being able to demonstrate success regarding their migration.

Nothing remains but “to put oneself in business” collaborating with their old *madam* to manage some women, or otherwise acquiring one or two girls to start to manage them, under her supervision. In this way the *madam* manages to make money on a larger number of women and also succeeds to optimise her management, thanks to the help of the *controller* who in part allows her to evade the controls of the police.

⁵⁶ It is thought that already at the airport in the stay centres for women repatriated to Nigeria there is someone to meet them, take them, and place them again in the traffic.

This naturally does not mean that every woman freed from exploitation after having paid the debt becomes a *madam*, but it highlights how the system is such as to favour its continuous development in a sort of self-reproduction of its constitutive mechanisms, paradoxically favoured by legal restrictions and the institutional “defence” regulations put in place to fight illegal immigration. It is in fact the impossibility, once inside Italian territory, to regularise the woman’s position - one of the elements which favours the stay within illegal environments and the expansion of the same.

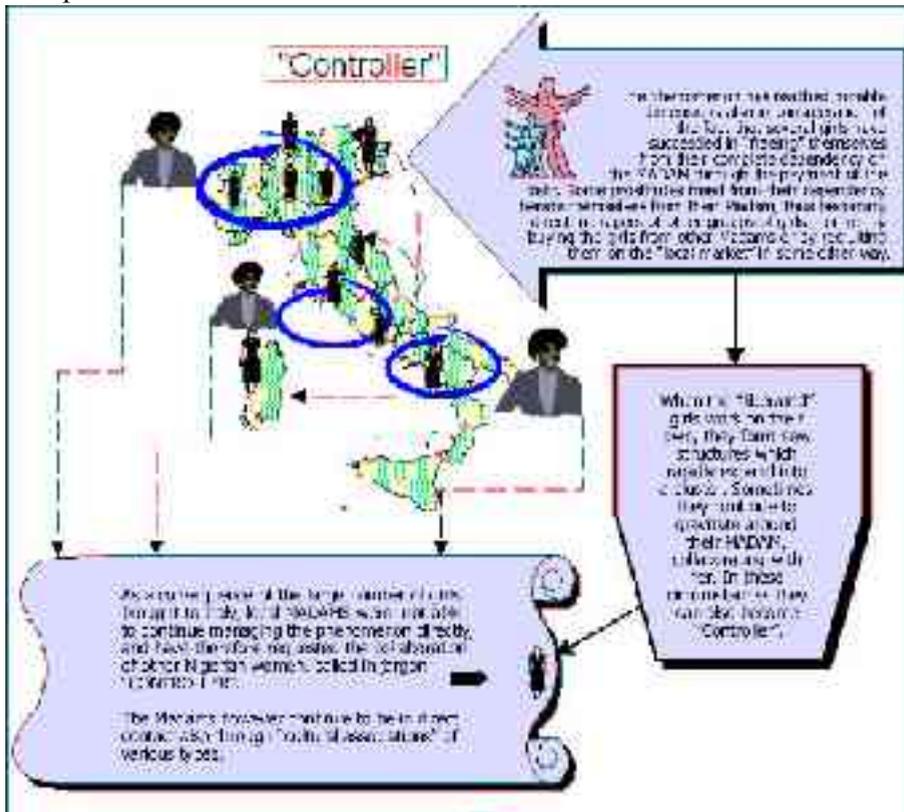


Figure No.7 - Source: Operation Edo - final notes on the Nigerian mafia - *Questura* of Udine, 1998.

The capacity to exploit occasions: the example of the request for asylum

A further demonstration of the capillarity of the organisation and also of its capacity to profit from every occasion is, for example, an investigation undertaken in the area of Udine⁵⁷ where many accused possessed false Somali passports. Being one of those years of one of the many conflicts that interested Somalia, the Nigerians managed to profit from the situation, obtaining false Somali passports (probably paying the men of war at that time) and thus having an easier access to Europe as refugees.

⁵⁷ This investigation refers to facts verified in 1994 and in 1997.

Even in numerous recent criminal proceedings,⁵⁸ not only before the Public Prosecutor in Turin, reference is made to the advice given by the *madam* to “her” women: when intercepted by the police they should request political asylum⁵⁹ talking about the war situation in the country of origin or saying that they came from the Ivory Coast (country where in recent times there was an intense civil war). *“If they ask for political asylum they will let them in; as with political asylum they can have work and continue to study”* (Transcript of a telephone intercept, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2001).

Previously Sierra Leone was the false country of origin most used: *“Then in the evening (in a hotel in Lagos) these three persons arrived and gave me a piece of paper, inside this paper there was a story about Sierra Leone, they had given me the story to read in a week, because you must read this paper and when you arrive there you must say that you arrive from that country, you must never say you are from Nigeria. All day I continued to study this so when I arrived in Italy or in some country first, if the police ask you some story, you can say this, because I declare that I am from this country, I have to say something. After a week I left (...) at six o’clock in the morning I arrived in London. They told me after two hours to go to the toilet, because I don’t have to arrive in London with two documents, you must cut them, destroy them, I must descend in London without anything because they made me a certificate from Sierra Leone, all false however, and I should show the certificate. In the airplane I destroyed everything, and the certificate remained, then nothing, you must stay calm. The other two had also done...(…) When we arrive I had to pretend I did not understand any English, I did this, they asked me for passport, «there is not passport!» «But how is, how did you leave?» I showed certificate from Sierra Leone. They said «but excuse me you arrive from Lagos!» «I don’t know how I arrived on this plane, I was in Sierra Leone, there was the war, then I left with a fiancé of my sister, then he told me wait here and I found myself inside the airplane, I don’t know where I am now!» (...) They gave me a paper for refugee for two months, after two months you must return and tell the same story (...) I after two months was already away”* (Interview Victim No.14).

Confirmation of this tendency is given by the associations which collaborate with the implementation of the National Asylum Programme in the area of Turin: according to some operators different Nigerian citizens do not participate in the activity of integration proposed to them and often absent themselves without justification from the reception place. All this, from one side, confirms the readiness of Nigerian criminal groups to adapt and, on the other side, risks impairing the position of real requesters of asylum if the Central Commission for the recognition of the status of refugee does not pay enough attention to the single personal situations, but takes decisions in a standardised manner on the basis of origin.

⁵⁸ This refers to criminal proceedings which refer to facts of 2001-2002.

⁵⁹ In this way expulsion is avoided for the moment, because the request for asylum gives the right to an initial stay of 3 months, renewable every 3 months for successive 90 days.

5.3 Ties to other criminality or other origins

The most usual affirmation regarding the traffic of women from Nigeria for sexual exploitation is that it is an organised traffic with an ethnic base which does not foresee the involvement of subjects belonging to other nationalities.

Even if responding to the truth, this affirmation requires some explanation.

The first regards the situation in the territories where Italian organised crime is present⁶⁰. In this case, such as that which concerns only the Campania area, the Nigerian groups (like those of other origins) are surely in a position of subordination and are held to respect some rules. In fact, the Camorra above all defines where the women cannot prostitute themselves⁶¹ and secondly, in some cases, it rents to the foreign criminals the territory where the women can prostitute themselves: *“To benefit from a territorial area where they can exploit their girls, the madams are obliged to pay a type of tax to the local organised crime which in the morning for example, rents an area to the Nigerians, and in the afternoon to the Albanians or vice versa and, in exchange receives payment of a ‘contribution’ ”* (Central Operational Service, State Police - Rome).

In the second place, there are those of Italian nationality, not necessarily belonging to organised crimes who offer some services to the foreign organisation: they act as a figurehead for the rent or sale of apartments where they live or as intermediaries to buy cars that are then sent to Nigeria.

In the areas where it is present, it is the Camorra in several cases which directly rents the apartments or sells cars⁶². In other cases and in other areas it deals instead, with subjects mainly of Italian nationality normally small criminals, or otherwise operating illegally in adjoining areas. Often the apartment is found through a chain of sub-rents that make the cost of the apartment rise at each change, but it also makes it appear that the apartment is regularly rented by a real estate agency: in this way everyone (from the ally of the Camorra, to the complaisant Italian, to the *madam*) earns money.

“Our Camorra is getting organised, taking advantage, clearly it rents houses, sells cars, profiting from the surrounding activity” (Questura of Caserta).

Amongst the rewarding activities there is also that of the Italians who offer themselves, against payment, as false employers or false husbands, so as to regularise the position of the *madams* in Italy.

“For the madams we have noted that often they are persons who are legally married to an Italian who, however they have never seen again. The Italian married them and that is enough...only so as to be regularised. There are also fake

⁶⁰ The Nigerian criminality seems to prefer territories where there is not a strong local criminality, with the interesting exception of the area in Campania.

⁶¹ It is noted for example that the residential areas of the Camorra bosses should not be “infested” with activities such as drugs or prostitution.

⁶² It should be noted that it is typical of local organised crime to profit from the legal or pseudo legal business (rubbish collection and building).

work arrangements (...) persons that have obtained permission to stay as an employee of such a company and then upon checking it is seen that they worked one month, then no one has since seen them (assuming that they had seen them in the first place). There is therefore an attempt to force the hand for regularisation” (Public Prosecutor - Turin).

It should be noted that the *madams*, like the majority of those who surround her, are normally in order concerning the rules regarding the stay on Italian territory. Either they entered Italy several years ago and put their papers in order during a pardon, or they were falsely employed by a fake Italian employer, who undertook to present all the documentation to call them to work in Italy from Nigeria, or they are formally united in marriage with an Italian citizen.

It is interesting to emphasize that, together with the great ease to obtain false documents, the possibility to easily profit from the occasions of regularisation place them under the shelter of any risk of expulsion.

Beside the Italians, the Nigerian organisation has also used Nigerian, Ghanaian or other African citizens for these services and, in the area of Triveneto, even American citizens working in the US military bases present there, demonstrating the ability for relationships of these individuals and criminal groups.

And lastly there are also connections with “marginal” groups of Italian individuals or foreign irregulars (normally from sub-Saharan Africa), available for jobs of low profile and with relatively low risk (such as drivers or to accompany women to the place of work).

No link, however, seems to exist between the Nigerian and Albanian criminals dedicated to the exploitation of prostitution. It appears that a division of the market has been made, thanks to a tacit agreement and to mechanisms of self-regulation, favoured by the fact that the Nigerian prostitution and that managed by the Albanian clans answer two different demands. When some conflict is created, the tendency of the Nigerian criminals is to retreat, without creating any noise, aware of the fact that “*problems between ethnic groups’ means the police, Carabinieri, repression and the work does not proceed”* (Questura of Venice).

Recently however, according to some people - at least in the area of Naples, Caserta and Castelvoturno - there is, besides the rise in the level of violence against the women, also a change in the relations with the other groups involved in the sexual exploitation of women: “*These men who are underground, who you don’t see, then at the right moment appear ...from a series of talks in the street it seems that when there was an attempt by the Albanians to send the Nigerians away from the street, the next night there were two cars full of Nigerian males, heavy and well built, also possessing suitable instruments that immediately changed the ideas of the Albanians ...”* (Cooperativa Dedalus - Naples).

It is still too early to say if there is a change in the way of managing the traffic on the part of the Nigerians or whether it is simply a local situation which made it necessary to act in that way.

5.4 The use of the proceeds of exploitation of prostitution: legal and illegal activities

One of the more delicate questions facing the illegal traffic where a considerable amount of money is earned, concerns the way in which the proceeds are used. The traffic for sexual exploitation from Nigeria produces considerable availability of money if it is considered that the money earned from the payment of board, lodging and rent of the so-called *joint*, together with the “work” (notwithstanding the fact that Nigerian women inside the prostitution market are today at the lowest grade of the available offer) amounts, for each exploited woman, to a considerable monthly sum, of at least 2,000 Euros⁶³.

How is this money used? Is it re-invested in the same illegal activity, in other illegal activities or “cleaned” thanks to its use in legal activities?

Re-investment in prostitution: the contribution or *osusu*⁶⁴

The first classic way of utilising the earnings from an illegal activity is to re-invest the money in the same illegal activity: certainly in the case of exploitation of prostitution of women of Nigerian origin, this happens regularly.

During many local searches, undertaken during investigations, hardly ever have large sums of money been found, even if numerous documents and declarations attest that these earnings, even huge, have been made.

Telephone intercepts have clarified the first way of concealing money and re-investment: the contribution or *osusu*.

It is a type of common petty cash, the result of an agreement with a group of *madams*, which consists in periodic deposits of a sum of money on the part of each, on an agreed specific date, and the possibility to use the total amount of the money invested given in turn to one. This continues until all the members have each benefited from the money accumulated.

In this way each of them participating in *osusu*, may have a large sum. The *madam* when it is her turn, can then pay debts or acquire new girls to exploit in prostitution more quickly than she could if she had to “save” on her own the money necessary for self-financing the “business”. At the same time, in this way the money “vanishes” more rapidly, diminishing the risk that it is intercepted by the police or is stolen.

Sometimes the *madams* have some difficulty to respect the date of availability foreseen for the contribution: “A. calls B. to say that she has sent to the Ghanaian

⁶³ For food, lodging and rent of the *joint* an amount of 500 Euros at least is requested (that can become very much higher if the *joint* is particularly expensive); to that must be added the profits from the prostitution activity, which assumes not very high earnings of 50 Euros per day, which makes around 1,500 Euros per month.

⁶⁴ The terminology “contribution” is used in criminal proceedings of the Public Prosecutor of Turin, the term “*osusu*” is that of Naples because that is how it is called by the *themadams* in the telephone intercepts.

man all the money she had in the house and now she has no money to make the contribution” (Transcript of a telephone intercept, criminal proceeding - Turin, 2001). To face the risk of a liquidity crisis they look for new contributors amongst the women that have finished paying the debt, so as to involve them in the network:

A: «Do you want to take part in ‘osusu’ again?»

B: «No Mummy, want to help my parents... I can’t participate in ‘osusu’ now!»

A: «Look it will start on the 10th»

B: «O.k., Mummy, but I can’t...»

A: «You can’t have a million?»

B: «No Mummy, I have to pay for the ‘Joint’ and there are other problems...»

A: «O.k., you came to pay for the ‘Joint’ in Europe, when you paid madam you managed to earn money for her and now you must earn it for yourself you can’t...»” (Preventive detention order, criminal proceeding - Naples, 1999).

It is not clear who takes care of this amount of money and whether part of the sum is given to other people in the organisation who reside in Nigeria. In the same criminal proceeding mentioned above, it is thought that “*the sums of participation in osusu are given in trust, clearly to another member of the society who takes care of the collection and subsequent distribution and who, obviously, enjoys a certain ‘respect’*”.

Sending money to Nigeria and its legal use at home

Considering that part of the organisation resides in Nigeria and that, however, Nigeria is the start of the traffic of women for sexual exploitation it is obvious that part of the accumulated money is sent to Nigeria.

The systems to send money to Nigeria are many. The first is surely those agencies of *money transfer*, the organisation that permits sending money to all countries of the world⁶⁵ in a simple and rapid manner.

The rapidity is because of the existence of a pyramid structure: the company of *money transfer* has a limited number of accredited agents in each country who however, on their part, have a very wide network of non-professional sub-agents and sub-senders (one only has to think of the number of *money transfer* points that are to be found in commercial places of another type, such as food shops, *phone centres*, hairdressers, etc...).

The simplicity is, on the other hand, given by operating procedures: the client goes to the sales point with a sum of money in cash⁶⁶ (for a maximum amount which until 2001 was 20 million lira) and fills in a form where personal details of the sender and the beneficiary are requested, the amount of the transfer and the

⁶⁵ It is sufficient to note that Western Union is present in more than 186 countries and in 2001 had about 90,000 sales points.

⁶⁶ The principal circuits (Western Union and Money Gram) accept only cash because the transfer is so rapid they could not assume the risk of accepting cheques.

receiving country. The operator transmits the data to the operating centre of the agent who on-line checks and authorises the operation. Once the authorisation has been received the operators takes the money and gives the client a receipt with the identification number of the operation. It is the responsibility of the client to communicate that number, which is indispensable for collecting the money, to the beneficiary.

It is evident that this rapid and light system is very useful to send money to countries where the banking system is lacking and is undoubtedly an indispensable resource for many immigrants who work far from their home country.

Together with this use, which does not conceal anything illegal, by its side is another which however conceals an illegal activity. From controls made⁶⁷ it seems that such a system is frequently used for light or medium transfers and, as far as the traffic of women for sexual exploitation is concerned, it is thought that sending money through the *money transfer* is used for payments to the *passeurs* (who collaborate in the journeys) and to compensate for various “favours” rendered Nigerian citizens resident in different parts of Italy or Europe.

Undoubtedly, an accurate investigation on this type of transfers of money, even if it would not allow to intercept large sums of money, would say a lot about the organisation network and its territorial dislocation.

Equally it should be observed that the different points that receive money to be transferred are managed by citizens from outside the European Union some even with specific criminal records (for example Nigerian citizens with criminal records for exploitation or abetting prostitution or for the illicit drug trade). One cannot exclude that they are tied to the organisation that manages illicit trafficking.

Considering the limits of the *money transfer* system, it is thought⁶⁸ that for sending conspicuous sums of money the method used is that of couriers: persons originating from central Africa, frequently not Nigerians, who transport over various tracts, by air and in part over land, the money to the home country.

In the country the money is certainly utilised for investments of a real estate type: while in Italy the *madams* normally live in modest housing, often rented, in Nigeria they build houses which, at least according to local standards, are very costly and luxurious.

“Surely the house discussion is true, the exploiters apparently build stupendous villas there” (Questura of Turin).

Frequently, as an alternative to sending money, is the sending of large cars purchased in Italy or Europe: it does not involve, for the most part of the cases, new cars, but used cars that sometimes cannot circulate any longer on Italian territory: *“It would appear that they send a lot of cars to Nigeria, but often it is cars that cease to circulate here, for example a car that is over 10 years old but still functions; they are cancelled from the car registration here because they hand*

⁶⁷ In the so-called *Operazione Edo*, as in other criminal proceedings, checks have been made on sending money undertaken with *money transfer*.

⁶⁸ The opinion is practically common with all the Law Enforcement operators interviewed.

in the plates and everything and the car, as a scrap metal, is loaded into a container” (Questura of Turin).

Not be excluded are other uses linked to particular interests or needs, but this is more opaque. In a penal case, which dates to the period when there was still a military dictatorship in Nigeria, confidential information was gathered⁶⁹: part of the money gained from the traffic was utilised for activities for the political fight against the military regime.

The links to the drug trade

Apart from the money reinvested in the traffic of women and buying of houses and cars, what remains to be explained is the final destination of other huge sums of money accumulated thanks to the traffic of women. The money sent by *money transfer* or courier to Nigeria and other parts of the world, and at least a part of the money which remains in Italy, how is this employed?

There are at least two hypotheses formulated, which do not exclude each other, but can also compete.

In the last report of the Investigative Antimafia Directorate, in relation to the Nigerian criminality, they write “*The exploitation of prostitution, together with false documents, represents the principal instrument of self-financing to develop more important illegal traffic*”⁷⁰.

According to many of the observers the main illegal investment is the traffic in drugs.

Since at least a quarter of a century, the groups from Nigeria have been active in the drug trade, in particular cocaine and *white heroin*. Even if it is not a producing country, in the ‘70s Nigeria became an important crossroad in the drug trade so much as to cover about 50% of the North American market for cocaine. It is thought that the saturation of the American market was the origin of the opening of the European market.

The organisation dedicated to the drug trade is characterised by a strong organisational capacity, high flexibility in the use of the routes to make the drug arrive in Europe, and the possibility of having many false documents which permit the affiliates and the couriers to move practically undisturbed between different countries, using the nationality and identity most adapted to the moment.

The system used for the drug trade is principally that of the so-called “*ovulators*”: persons who swallow ovules containing drugs and make the journey hiding the substance. The system is notably parcelled so as to avoid, in the case of an arrest of someone, the loss of a considerable quantity of the drug.

Such parcelling is possible because the organisation has on hand a wide number of individuals available as couriers, coming from different African countries, in particular Ghana and Liberia. In different cases it has also been noticed the use of

⁶⁹ This is *Operazione Edo*.

⁷⁰ Ministero degli Interni, Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (2002).

couriers, even less open to suspicion, Italians or even Europeans, with no police records, provided with false documents and in some cases even NATO passports.

Some of the characteristics of the drug trade, here rapidly described, remind one of the trades in women for sexual exploitation: flexibility of the routes and of the organisations, the use of labour coming from sub-Saharan Africa, the wide availability of false documents.

In different investigations⁷¹ however there have been found points of contact between the two trades: the *madam* had acquired a quantity, even modest, of drugs which she then sold; her companion or husband at the time was dedicated to the drug trade, or while undertaking some functions inside the traffic in women there were subjects with criminal records for trade in drugs.

There are cases in which the points of contact are more: in one criminal proceeding there was, for example, a woman with a South American passport who, apart from having become a *madam*, traded in large quantities of cocaine from South America with her companion, who had already been condemned for crimes related to the drug trade.

As we do not have at our disposal the criminal proceedings that have witnessed the consolidated links between the two trades, the hypothesis of the existence of a connection is supported by the points of contact found and by the analogies between the organisations involved, which suggest as improbable the possibility of being faced with two organisations dedicated to different trades without any relationship between them.

In addition the experience in relation to the re-investment of the illegal⁷² earnings indicate that normally the criminal organisations seek to diversify the type of illegal activities in which to re-employ the accumulated money. One part goes to foment the same illegal activity, another part is used in other illegal activities which may possibly provide an immediate economic return (as is the case of trade in drugs).

To better summarise and visualise the different hypotheses for re-investment and re-cycling the earnings of the exploitation of prostitution, the following design is very useful, obtained through the many times mentioned Operation Edo.

Investment in Italy in legal activity

Beside the trade in drugs, it is thought that part of the money is invested in legal activities, such as commercial, *phone centres*, *money transfer* agencies.

According to some privileged witnesses it is probable that the money earned with illegal trade (the trade in drugs, and the traffic in women for sexual

⁷¹ Referring mainly to criminal proceedings in Triveneto and the area around Milan.

⁷² Obviously this does not exclude the use in legal activities which was dealt with in the paragraph "Sending money to Nigeria and its legal use at home" and which will be dealt with in the successive paragraph "Investment in Italy in legal activity".

exploitation) has reached an amount such as to assume it is useful to invest in legal activities in Italy. Further, part of the legal activities can be directly useful to continue the illegal activities (for example the agencies of *money transfer*).

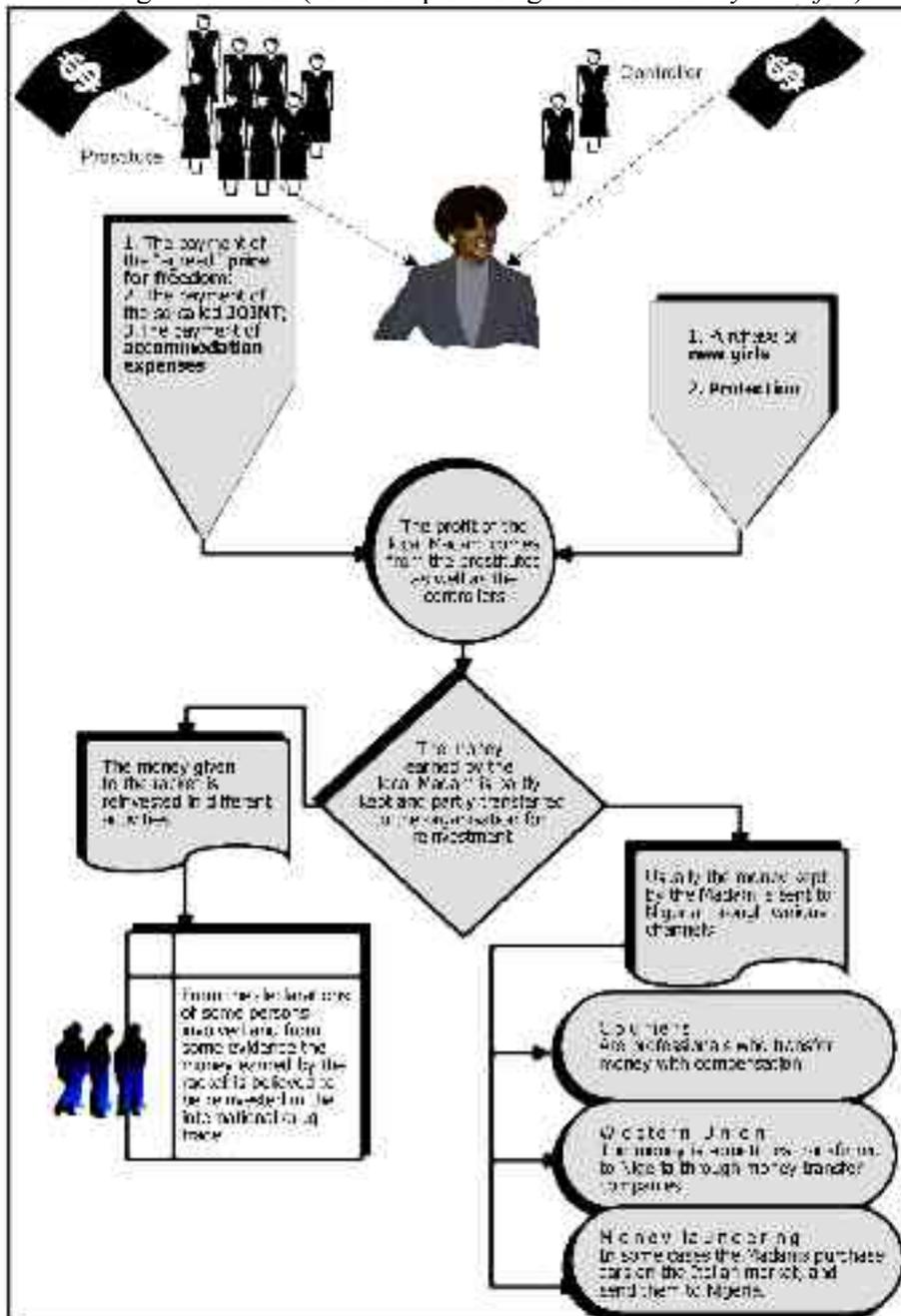


Figure No.8 - Source: Operation Edo - final notes on the Nigerian Mafia - *Questura* of Udine, 1998.

It should be noted that, even though proof through criminal proceedings has never been received, it is considered plausible that in some areas of the country different “ethnic” activities managed by people coming from Nigeria really belong to one or only a few men and are managed by a figurehead. These men are directly implicated in illegal trade and would use such activities not only to re-cycle and launder the money earned, but also, for example, to have a capillary presence, even if mediated, on the territory, able to keep the women under control even when they do not exercise the activity of prostitution⁷³.

The hypotheses advanced by some operators is that an organisation exists (composed of many *nuclei* in different territories) who diversify, according to criteria not yet clear, the activities and to which one should pay attention: the *madam* therefore is not a free operator completely autonomous, but is supposed to give a part of the money⁷⁴ to the organisation which re-utilises it investing in the purchase of drugs and legal activities.

No investigation has reached such elements as to permit sustaining this hypothesis with documental proof in court, but it should be underlined also that such an investigative hypothesis suggests that we are faced with a complex criminal organisation implicated in numerous illegal trafficking and with a good capacity for avoiding the always more insistent investigative pressure.

That is, given the actual knowledge, it is impossible to say if these *nuclei* report to a unique *cupola* existing in Nigeria or whether instead it is a network without one “thinking head”.

⁷³ Obviously it is not intended to say that every commercial activity managed by Nigerians includes illegal activities, but it is a sector which can easily be fed with capital from illegal activities.

⁷⁴ There are no elements to quantify in what measure this comes about and how much in respect of the earnings made.

CHAPTER VI

The end of the exploitation

6.1 Extinction of the debt and the choice of autonomy

As we have already mentioned, the extinction of the debt on the part of the girls does not follow generalised and constant rules. From time to time, in fact they vary: the amount of the debt, the reliability of the *madam* and the organisation in maintaining the agreement, the means of payment.

According to the testimony of the social operators and the *Law Enforcement*, the amount of the debt has considerably increased over the last years and today it is between a minimum of 30,000 Euros and a maximum of 70,000 Euros.

Also variable is the amount of time necessary for the victim to extinguish the debt. Testimony collected by the NGOs and associations interviewed speak about a period of between a minimum of one year and a maximum of three/four years.

The earning capacity of the victim, her behaviour and above all her faith towards the pact surely play an important role in accelerating the time for extinction. The unilateral review of the pact of the debt on the part of the *madam*, often related to a delay in the payments or to “bad behaviour” on the part of the girl, is very frequent. The progressive increase in the debt seems to be a widely diffused practise: it appears from the outside to be a penalty and has the effect of increasing the earnings of the organisation.

“I should have paid 120 million (...) originally it was 60, then 70, then 80... then 90. (...) She was bad, she said I had earned quickly. She did not want me to leave” (Interview Victim No.10).

In general, the impression from the direct and indirect testimony collected is that the organisation attempts - with good results - to feed itself offering new work and earnings opportunities to the girls that are about to free themselves from the debt, or are already freed. In this way, a fairly frequent result of the extinction of the debt is the transformation of the victim to *madam*. Naturally this is a gradual change of role, in which the assumptions can be made even before the restitution of the debt.

There are many cases of girls attracted by earnings from prostitution who continue this work for themselves for a year or two, often living with their ex *madam*, and then, with savings aside, buy one or two girls to exploit.

“*The problem*” explains another girl interviewed “*is that the girls who came here think: now that I have repaid everything, I will get one to pay me, so I will take this money. For this reason it is a long road, a chain, this is the problem*” (Interview Victim No.9).

Obviously there are women who intend to change their life: one of the victims interviewed remembers the day she extinguished her debt, the *madam* said to her: “*Put aside a bit of money, I will buy a girl for you so you won’t work any more, considering that you don’t want to work anymore*” (Interview Victim No.5). The person in question replied that money earned on the street did not interest her and that shortly she would find work in a restaurant.

However one must consider that the Nigerian women freed from the debt find many difficulties in ending the relations with the persons involved in the prostitution market and above all the affective and material links with the *madam*. Emblematic in this sense is the indirect testimony relating to different cases where the girl who paid her debt, even if she has found a job and chosen to change her life, continues to pay the *madam* for some functions or services.

These cases make one reflect on the strength exercised on the girls not only and not so much by the *woodoo* rite itself, as much as in general the implicit and pre-existing pact of faith of the word given before the members of the community (in which *woodoo* is only one of the distinctive signs). On the other hand these cases allow us to understand how important, and never expected in the results, is the action of accompanying the victim towards a new life which associations and NGOs undertake, being involved in the fulfilment of the projects *ex art.* 18 d.lgs. 286/1998, and in the fight against exploitation.

It is often said that the extinction of the debt is procrastinated over time. However, sooner or later the moment of extinction will arrive. This moment will often be accompanied by a party, rich and sumptuous, a universal demonstration that the *madam* is an honest and generous custodian of the pact. All the girls are invited to the party, the organisation of which, according to some testimony is directly made with the joint earnings of different *madams*, all equally interested to symbolically re-affirm the logic of the pact.

The end of the exploitation is ratified by a gift that the woman is made to give to the *madam*, as if thanks are due. The ambivalence of the figure of the *madam* is exemplified in this conversation between a *madam* and a woman, who has nearly finished paying her debt, who is asked with certain arrogance for a gift:

A: «*The fact is there is still 1.400,000 remaining, but bring me 1,000,000... (silent pause)...did you hear?*»

B: «*O.K.!*»

A: «*When will you buy my present?*»

B: «*Mamma mia Mummy! I haven’t yet paid the million and you ask for a present...I beg you Mummy!*»

A: «*You have to bring me a present of three million!*⁷⁵» (Preventive detention order, criminal proceeding - Naples, 1999).

The extinction of the debt sees the figure of a “client-saviour” not rarely involved, who helps the girl pay the remaining amount, in some cases even getting into debt. This figure sometimes represents an occasion for a real change of life, but in the opinion of different operators, is often a complicating factor, either because, if not loved by the girl, the logic of the relationship of prostitution is reproduced, or because such relationship can be an obstacle towards the process of gradual understanding, on the part of the victim on the edge of individual autonomy.

Sometimes, however, the women use these client-saviours to emancipate themselves, exploiting the possibility that this presence offers: “*Some marry an Italian man, many of them do this, and they think that if you marry an Italian, after 6 months you have a passport. Therefore they prefer to marry, by contract, by paying someone stupid, a figurehead. If you ask me how many of those that marry an Italian, how many are for love, I say 2%. To stay beside an Italian man...apart from the fact that the culture is very different and then it seems as if I was staying with one of my clients. And it is for this that I can't manage to have a relationship with an Italian man*” (Interview Victim No.4).

Different operators, even from the police, maintain that the women have by now acquired the capacity not to get involved in a relationship with the so-called client-saviour: “*They pluck the chicken well, and then goodbye*” (Caritas - Udine).

The simple extinction of the debt is not a sufficient condition for the liberty of the victim. In nearly all the cases, the woman does not have identity documents, or permission to stay; she does not have, or has little knowledge, of the opportunities and services of the city where she lives, nor “social capital”⁷⁶ to spend. Generally therefore, it is not even possible to imagine a normal life in Italy. Apart from staying in the prostitution circuit, an alternative is often to start legal activities or semi-legal activities managed by their countrymen: for example managing or working, without paying taxes, in a phone centre or other similar commercial activity. The women escaped from prostitution even help the women that are still there, for example by sending cash to the families.

The support of the Nigerian community in Italy is, at this stage, playing an important role, above all if the girl is not assisted and accompanied by the Italian organisations that work in the sector. It is the community, generally, to produce for the girl a choice of possibilities. Very important in this phase is, in addition, the role of the extended family that can affect in several ways the future of the girl,: supporting or negating consent to the continuation of the life on the street, taking the girl again into the family in Nigeria (very rarely), or having her accepted, provisionally, by relatives in Italy or in other European countries who will help her find a place and work.

⁷⁵ According to the testimony of the women, the present is even more costly, around 5 million lira.

⁷⁶ For social capital it is intended the patrimony of relations of which the individual is in possession, or the network of relationships that can be used to face individual needs and the needs of social functioning, as well as the capacity that she has to benefit from resources and to use the ties for her own use.

The Nigerian community and the extended family are the main resources for the girls that leave the prostitution game alone. To them the girls make reference first, with an unusual capacity in other ethnic groups to move rapidly and alone, to find new hospitality, help, and work. Beside practical and logistical support, the extended family plays an important role of moral sanction regarding the choice of the girl in this phase, in the sense that the consent of the family is often a necessary condition for the choice of future life.

There are then situations in which the end of the exploitation does not come from the payment of the debt, but coincides with the escape of the girl. Those who choose to flee normally have the support of a friend or parent resident in Italy who, after a long period and many difficulties, is fortunately contacted secretly; often this person participates in the escape, providing practical support and offering hospitality.

“I called my sister who is in Italy, who said to me «it is four months that I don't know where you are». She asked where I was, I said Turin, she said she was in Udine, which is far from Turin. I said I don't want to go on the street any more (...) my sister called her husband who came by car. I told the other girl (who was with me): come with me, no one will know we have escaped, they will think the police took us, but she was frightened (...) so I escaped” (Interview Victim No.12).

Often it is a friend/client the person who pushes the woman to escape, providing psychological and material support which she needs to take this step.

“M. was never with me, he is a friend, an old man, and one who has always given me the courage to escape, but I never had it, he always said «Escape! I will take you to the police, I will make you tell everything» but that courage was not there...he helped me very much (...). That day I said to M. that I wanted to escape and wanted to go to my cousin (...) only one girl who was my best friend knew. She should come with me, then at the last moment she did not have the courage because her mother was frightened to fight with these persons ” (Interview No.7).

It is important to underline the fact that support from the family and, even more, being able to understand or accept the refusal of the girl, is fundamental in the case that she decides to not pay the debt and escape. The retaliation on the original family nucleus is in fact immediate and the parents of the woman must be able to put up with it to allow the girl to feel free.

“Listening to my mother with courage I said «Thank God». I was frightened that they would go to do harm, then I understood that my mother would not allow it; my brother would not allow them to do anything (...) they went with the intention to blackmail. My mother said «My daughter, I cannot find her, you give me back my daughter and I will give you money, if I don't see my daughter forget it». He knew that my brother could make them pay; my brother said «You had courage to take my sister to Italy to become a prostitute, I will kidnap your children, I will make you pay sorely» (...). So when he understood my family wasn't joking, when he returned (to Italy) he went to my cousin and went to beg her that if she heard from me to call the house to say I was alright” (Interview Victim No.7).

Often the family is however not able to sustain the daughter and in many cases the continued requests for money and the expectancies on the girl by the entire original family nucleus prevent the woman any possibility of choice, obliging her to continue to prostitute herself for a long time even after having paid the debt.

Some women interviewed posed the problem of the pressure on the family as one of the principal points that prevent many victims to consider a different possibility of life. This is one of the main causes of falling again into the circuit of prostitution.

“Even if you do not have the money to pay the rent, you must the same send money home, it is not important for them that you can’t pay the rent. You have nothing here; you have no food in order to send money home. The exploiter is not the pimp, is your mother and father, which is more serious (...). If you want to denounce them you are denouncing your mother (...) your mother exploits you more than your pimp. It is slavery which starts from their family, not here, that is why they are used to it” (Interview Victim No.9).

In addition, one of the main problems, according to associations and NGOs interviewed, regarding this delicate phase, seems to be the relationship with money developed by the girls during the years of prostitution. The habit of seeing a lot of money circulate and to think that “easy earnings” are possible is often a serious obstacle to accepting “normal” work and the integration into a new working situation. This problem, which exists for the victims of exploitation of every nationality, seems to be particularly accentuated in the case of Nigerian girls, who perhaps pay more than the others the costs of the cultural shock.

One of the victims interviewed also notes a diffused concept of life “by the day” in which the principal value is that of money rather than life itself: *“Now I work, they give me 300 Euros, what can you buy with 300 Euros? There are many for whom it is not enough, on the street they make a lot. It is not easy like this. Those who think of life...Many Nigerians don’t think ahead, they think of today, making themselves beautiful, eating, they don’t think about the life. Many want to stay on the street and die on the street but have money. It is like that” (Interview Victim No.12).*

On the other hand some operators have underlined that, considering the small earnings of the young Nigerian women compared to other nationalities, potentially it should be easier to find work which guarantees them earnings in relation to that which they made for themselves out of prostitution: *“Earning those sums that I told you, 1.5-2 million, it is not impossible to find a work because they tell you if I find a work which permits me to earn what I earn on the street alright...if an Albanian told me so I would say <dream it>, if a Nigerian says so, there should be a possibility...” (Cooperativa Dedalus - Naples).*

However there is no lack of difficulties related to discriminatory attitudes on the part of Italian employers towards Nigerian girls. The idea which emerges is that the exclusion operated towards them has in the first place racist roots (they are excluded as blacks) and only at a secondary level does the prejudice relate to the nationality.

Multiple however are the factors which affect the possibility, for the Nigerian women, to find and maintain work: the economic environment of the area in which they live, the politics of entering the labour market put in place by the organisations that manage the social protection programmes⁷⁷, their capacity to adapt which seems, in many cases, high, but with some rigidity - as for example the respect for time - makes the efforts undertaken nil⁷⁸.

The finding of a satisfying job from an economic point of view is judged by all the victims interviewed as the major factor for someone who wishes to abandon prostitution completely.

“If you don’t find work you go on for two or three months, and you start to think that you have already done it...I will go again! An intelligent person says: I will not do it, even if I die of hunger, but you are weak...you say, only some times, only until I need money If there is work however you say: I want to do something serious” (Interview Victim No. 10).

6.2 Taken in charge by organisations

The most secure and consolidated path for leaving the circuit of exploitation of prostitution - known in Italy these last few years - is that of taking in charge of the victim by organisations known to operate within the project ex art. 18 d.lgs. 286/1998: associations, religious organisations, NGOs, public institutions. This is the “master way” towards the end of exploitation and the search for a new life for the victims.

Experience of this type (started with pilot projects in 1999 and then diffused in all Italy) tells a story of some years that, even if between light and shade, paints a decidedly positive picture.

This is not the place for a balance of the projects Art.18, which has been done elsewhere⁷⁹. We will limit ourselves to remember here, briefly, some elements which show a minor or major success of paths for the protection of victims of the traffic and exploitation:

- the existence of a “virtuous co-operation” between the *Questure* (local State Police Offices), Prosecutors and organisations;
- the diverse availability of *Questure* to accept the social paths, without a formal complaint;

⁷⁷ On this point see the timely reflections of Prina (2002 a, pages 513-515) and the case studies illustrated in AA.VV. (2002); *Associazione On the Road* (2002, pages 111-293).

⁷⁸ For an interesting exam of the policies for insertion in work, see Candia *et alii* (2001). On exit paths and insertion in work one can refer to *Associazione On the Road* (2002).

⁷⁹ See, AA.VV (2002); *Associazione On the Road* (2002).

- the different evaluations of the associations regarding the opportunity of supporting the path without complaint, when this is not opportune and possible⁸⁰;
- the ideological-cultural basic options of the associations, regarding prostitution and the most opportune policies to face the matter;
- the availability of work occasions on the territory and the orientation of the *Questure* on the conversion of permissions to stay for social protection into permissions to stay for work reasons;
- the attitudes of the *Questure* on the motives for revoking permissions to stay.

We will look at some of these aspects⁸¹ and the relapse that they have in the structuring of the exit paths of the victims from their condition. We will try to highlight the critical knots that characterise the exit of the Nigerian victims from the prostitution circuit, in a path undertaken together with the associations. We will do so, isolating those which, in the judgement of the operators, are the principal and most problematic phases of the taking in charge of Nigerian girls and women.

The first contact

The first contact between the support services and the victims of the traffic follow two different means. following to the decision of the victim to turn to one of the organisations seeking some type of help or, on the contrary, the organisations reach the girls and propose them the possibility to free themselves from the condition in which they live.

In the first case, very useful has been the toll-free number instituted by the Ministry, which distributes the calls of the victims at the local level. According to these appointed operators, however, the breaking of the publicity campaign in the mass media for long periods has greatly weakened this important instrument of contact.

The *tam tam* between the victims, particularly extensive among the girls of Nigerian origin, has on the other hand revealed the most efficacious and frequent contact channel. The organisations, particularly in the activity of drop-ins, are reached even daily by telephone calls and visits from women who ask for a wide range of interventions: from economic to health assistance, even as far as the explicit request for help to leave the life on the street. Only a small part of these contacts transform themselves however into an exit path.

Very important, in the testimony of the operators, has proved to be the caution and graduality, necessary to break the climate of silence and create a condition of faith in the victim, on which basis to start a proposal to take in charge.

⁸⁰ Some consider that the availability of victims to make a charge is a fundamental precondition for changing life and the interruption of the relationship of psychological harassment; others however are of the opinion that the absence of a charge is absolutely necessary in some cases so as to not exercise further violence on the women.

⁸¹ For scrutiny of all the aspects indicated, see Petrini-Ferraris (2002, page 33); Prina (2002 b, page 58); Petrini (2002, page 491); Prina (2002 a, page 499); Petrini-Prina-Virgilio (2002; page 529).

More complex and articulate instead is the contact undertaken at the initiative of the organisation, which is generally carried out through the street units. The latter often undertake work of assistance, moral comfort, first information and/or activity of “reducing the damage”, which only over a long period can favour the bringing to maturity of choices in the direction of redemption. Many women are contacted every night through the street units, but only some, often after some time, turn to the organisations to obtain information on exit paths.

Even if there is generally a consolidated relationship and reciprocal recognition with the police, there are many operators who point out an increasing difficulty in the contacts with the victims through the street units, because of the intensification of the so called “raids”, which provoke growing fears in the girls. The increase of the interventions to “clean the streets” has generated nearly everywhere a major dispersion of the places of prostitution, which has increased the difficulties for the street units and the diffidence of the victims.

“The other night, to tell you, the street unit went out and there was not even one in the streets where normally there were 30-40; then we learned that that night there was a serious accident and the police had intervened...” (Coopertiva Dedalus - Naples).

Generally, the requests that the victims formulate to the street units are of some form of assistance, mainly sanitary (from simple medical visits to the interruption of pregnancy), but also economic, lodging, legal, psychological and in a small number of cases, psychiatric. Compared to the victims coming from Eastern Europe, a major difficulty has been indicated for the Nigerian women to accede to all these services. There is a major shyness and diffidence towards the institutions, the result of a fundamentally different cultural and political system, which sometimes does not facilitate the work of the operators.

“I think that the Albanians and the Romanians are favoured by a more similar cultural system. For the Nigerians, used to a system in which everything is paid for, from typing a letter, to more important things, everything seems more difficult, more complicated. «Perhaps if I go there, then they will ask for money and I don't have any and then they will ask for documents» so that it is more difficult for a Nigerian girl to contact an office, and it is not by chance that the Nigerians never go to the Office for Foreigners” (Associazione Tampep - Turin).

The difficulty to create a relationship of faith with the Nigerian girls should not however be emphasised. In the major part of the cases analysed, together with the social operators, no insurmountable obstacles emerged, but instead particular needs, often not expressed. Many, according to operators of different NGOs⁸², are the cases of psychiatric disturbances in Nigerian women who prostitute themselves, who, on the other hand, are reluctant to obtain the benefit of psychological assistance.

⁸² In particular it relates to operators of *Caritas Servizio Migranti* - Turin; *Liberazione e Speranza* - Novara; *Parsec* - Rome.

The discussions on the possibility of breaking the pact

One of the most delicate steps of the action undertaken by the institutions that operate in the field is represented by the moment that the victim foresees the possibility to break the pact and eventually enter into the programme of guaranteed accompaniment envisaged by Art. 18. The discussions - generally made by a group composed of social operators, cultural and psychological mediators - are normally of short duration: one or two meetings to verify the real determination of the victim and to avoid second thoughts which are very frequent. The most problematic element of this phase is, in nearly all the testimony collected by the operators, the opportunity to file a report, that the major number of institutions, in agreement with the Police and magistrates, consider being the privileged path to accede to the exit programme. We will speak about this again in the following paragraphs, but there are also other difficulties.

Generally, the first and major difficulty encountered by the operators is the fear of the victim for the consequences of a transgression of the pact sealed by the *woodoo* rite. Above all, the victim must be given all the material reassurances on the protection she will receive (her placement safely in a "house of escape", if necessary, her being taken care of in economic, health, legal terms, etc.). But it also deals with supplying a *surplus* of moral, psychological and in some cases spiritual reassurance, regarding the sense of treachery of a pact which often morally obliges the victim not only towards the exploiters, but also towards the family and more generally towards the community to which she belongs.

This delicate phase of accompanying the girl towards the decision to turn her back on the life she is living comes about in different forms and with a great difference between the lay organisations and those of more marked religious inspiration. While in the first case the working means prevalently emphasises the prospect of gaining freedom and self-determination, in the second the means are prevalently a relationship which hinges on the emotive elements of faith and the sense of belonging to the community of the faithful: this last means finds strong reciprocity in spirituality and in the community vision of the existence of the Nigerians.

In other terms the reassurance coming from the faith has proved, to many Nigerian victims, to be an efficacious functional substitute for the pact which obligates towards the community, so as to configure itself subjectively as a convincing defence against physical and moral ills, feared for the transgression of the *woodoo* pact, an unassailable protection against curses.

In some cases the antagonism between the Christian faith and *woodoo* is fundamental in determining the success of the exit path by the victim. This situation has a Christian sub-stratum which gets the upper hand against the animist belief, thanks to the change in the context of life and to the weakening of the family and cultural bonds with the country of origin: "*I was always afraid of these wodoos, but now I go to church, I no longer am frightened of these things. When one believes in the Bible, if you are frightened read the Bible, your fear will pass*" (Interview Victim No.2).

On this point there is a strong agreement on the points of view of the social operators, whether of a lay type or of religious inspiration. Faith and liturgy seem to have a very important role in accompanying the victims of Nigerian origin towards liberation. Not only do they “*dip into the same imaginary symbol and ritual*” - as also recognised by a psychologist of lay orientation - but they contribute to restore the sense of belonging to a “new family”, and cancel the solitude experienced and the crisis of identity of the woman, which appear at the moment that the important links to their own community of origin seem to be less.

For this reason the idea of a “counter-rite”, that came out of an interview as a possible prospective to liberate the woman from the belief in *woodoo*, seems to be reductive. The operators appear to concur on the fact that it is the experience lived and shared by faith to un-snare the mechanism of blind obedience to the pact.

According to the testimony of a religious person who for many years operates in support of Nigerian victims: “*The mechanism, [of exiting the logic of woodoo, Ed.] starts when they realise, as is said, that God is stronger than woodoo. The second element which should start is that they feel loved by God (...) because this element of their spirituality is so strong that it is impossible to cancel it and very much affects their choices*” (*Caritas Servizio Migranti* - Turin).

A religious operator observes that for the Nigerian women do not consider Catholicism as the westerns: “*What is important is the concept of good; he who does good, cannot be badly paid*”; the women, even those that do not pray, “*have solid principles tied to tradition and to the culture of origin: they have morals, are very severe, even with us nuns*” (*Caritas* - Udine).

Besides the psychological dimension, the operators emphasise also in this phase the difficulty to collect reliable and circumstantial elements on the stories, ties, and aspirations of the victims, to not speak about the news useful to sustain a penal complaint to the persons who exploited them. The difficulty to reconstruct the real identity and name of the exploiters, the code of silence attitude sometimes on the part of the victims, the fact that often at the time of the complaint the circumstances of the exploitation have changed (possibly because the *madam* has already escaped): are all situations that can prolong or make investigations useless and lengthen the time to obtain the permission to stay.

Obligation to denounce or only adhesion to the social project?

Even if in some geographical areas (for example, Naples, Caserta, Rimini) the conceding of a permission to stay is frequent for reasons of social protection, through the paths, without complaint, the most widely used practise is that which sees the complaint as a “master way” to obtain a benefit.

It should be noted that the tie to the existence of filing a report, as a condition to accede to the social protection and integration programme, is significantly decisive on matters of overcoming the experience. The path which passes through filing a complaint is longer, complex, risky, and sometimes lived by the woman as an imposition and a violence. Under the psychological profile, it is a painful job to review her own experience and a complex attempt, which does not always produce

real results: to distance herself from the logic of the pact sealed with the *madam/exploiter* and with the family/community that has supported and guaranteed it.

The victims interviewed usually respond in a negative manner to filing a report, emphasising the danger for their own safety and that of their families.

“It is useless that here they say file a report, it will not resolve the problem, but increase it, because you sent this person to prison, but sooner or later they will be free and in the end it is not only you to be threatened, but also your parents. Therefore it is too easy: report this and they give you documents. Rightly a girl who arrives does not know how to read, doesn't know anything, requests a permission to stay, and then? What does she do? When that person comes out of prison, what does she do? What to do, you can't go to Nigeria? Italy is not everything, but even if you don't go anymore to Nigeria, there are your parents. In Nigeria there is no justice, those who have money win. The person in prison is richer than you, and uses all the money to punish you for what you did. This Italian law according to me is making a mistake in this thing. «You file a report against who sent you here and I will free you». You are fooling this person, you are not giving freedom. First of all I can't go to Nigeria, the girls don't know this, they discover this after, and it is like permission for political asylum. More or less like that. Second, we all are in fear of being followed, with the fear that someone kills me. They are killed and are never free, because the police in Italy can only protect you up to a certain point, and then?” (Interview Victim No.9).

“Filing a report is risky for the family and then you will never be free in your life. They can leave you now for three or four years, because: those who make the shit forget, those who pass after him and paid, never forget. With us even if 20 years have passed...gain more and kill you, your children and grandchildren. Who reports is in great danger” (Interview Victim No.5).

The operators - even those that consider filing a report an important instrument in combatting the links that feature exploitation - have often observed in the girls an instrumental attitude: the complaint is the means to obtain a permission to stay and start a new life more than an occasion of moral redemption.

At the same time when they understand all the implications⁸³, it becomes in the perception of the victims, a new tie which impedes complete freedom. In fact this involves the availability to collaborate (to be available, to be placed in a protected environment, etc.) even if, with respect to the more complex problems of survival, the sensation is that of being left to themselves, abandoned by the police and the institutions that have asked for and received such a complaint.

The only point of reference and support at this point is that represented by the associations, lay and religious organisations.

“The police abandon the girls, it's not right. If it wasn't for the associations, Caritas, we are dead in their hands” (Interview Victim No.7).

⁸³ Often, affirm the victims, one does not immediately realise what filing a report involves, and this is put in substitution of the payment of the debt: *“Normally when one is not able to pay the debt, then they report. If I could pay the debt then I would not have filed a report: if I don't want to be a pimp, I don't do it, but I won't risk reporting”* (Interview Victim No.2).

There are police that recognise the need to acquire the trust of the women and the importance of clarifying the path to take after filing a report. Unfortunately, however, together with operators who have acquired a professional approach which permits them to understand the difficulty of the women, one encounters operators without this characteristic.

Without taking into consideration that, for those who arrive at having to sustain a complaint in a court, it can be perceived as a lack of trust in a justice which often is based, according to the interviewees, on the power of money of the *madam* and on the lack of guarantees: tomorrow your lawyer will not defend that very *madam* that you are denouncing?

“My lawyer...tomorrow may be the one who madam asks to defend her. She will pay him more and what you say becomes a lie. According to me there should be lawyers prepared, even if you do not have money and they should not also defend the madam, they should defend the girls, if they defend the girls (...) if these lawyers are prepared to defend the girls, (the girls) have more faith, are more strong. If instead someone defends me and then defends the madam, you can't understand anything any more” (Interview Victim No.3).

Taken in charge and the start of a new life

The exit path often starts with the transfer to a “house of escape” or anyhow to a protected place, far away from the place of exploitation, and continues in a “house of reception” of a community type, in which the girls, in conditions of semi-autonomy, receive various types of assistance (psychological, economic, sanitary, legal, etc.) and follow training paths which generally are completed with the start of work, which may permit the woman to start a condition of full autonomy.

The paths of being accompanied to autonomy have various durations. On the formal way and the bureaucratic steps necessary to obtain the permission to stay, the variables which are principally required are precision and the reliability of the report, the facility to verify through investigations the circumstances denounced, the absence of formal obstacles (such as prior expulsions) and lastly the time for the Police and the Prosecutor to give their opinion concerning what is requested (which is much quicker in small centres than in large cities).

The time and the outcome depend on the active participation of the woman in the programme. The interviews carried out with the operators have shown some critical moments, mostly related to cultural elements: the community life, the respect of timing and regulations, the difficulties in some types of work, the relationship with money and the learning of its management.

The operators often mention the difficulty of integration of the Nigerian girls in the community life, which they encounter dividing the space with victims of other nationalities, or users from a different path of life. Faced with these difficulties, some associations have arrived at the decision to no longer propose co-habitation of Nigerian women with those of other nationalities. Others - and these are the majority - maintain however that the passage through a confrontation with persons

of a different culture is very important. The problem is often seen to be the vivacity of the Nigerian women, together with the tendency to recreate the conditions of an exclusive sharing with the girls of their own nationality.

The questions linked to a certain “cultural dissonance”⁸⁴ - for obvious reasons less marked in the victims from East Europe - emerge when it is necessary to fix and to respect some regulations, either in the community life, or in the experience of the start of work. In the testimony collected, the Nigerian girls clearly understand the hierarchical relationships, but they have difficulties in respecting some agreed rules, such as tidiness and punctuality. The work of the operators often is concentrated on these preliminary elements which can be fundamental in the moment of starting work. In some cases, the Nigerian girls seem to find it more difficult than others to respect the implicit pact which is present in the work relationship.

“The big work to be done in the phase of tutoring for insertion in work is to explain the rules of work well. Things which we usually consider normal are not normal; for example: to arrive on time, or to advise when you don’t go to work because you are ill, the fact that the employer is an employer and not an owner. It is necessary to communicate the regulations well” (Associazione On the Road - Martinsicuro).

Even if the market offers always more opportunities to work in the field of domestic and personal help (domestic, carer, baby sitter), some associations have mentioned a lack of success in starting the Nigerian girls in this type of work.

“The Nigerian women are not suited for domestic work, objectively, because of their culture. They want to work in a factory or autonomous work” (Centro Fernandez - Castelvoturno).

Factory work seems to be, overall, very much appreciated by the Nigerian girls inserted in projects *ex Art. 18*. Amongst the explanations emerging: the low level of schooling of many girls, the subjective perception of a “sure” job, the good disposition towards practical work. Frequent destinations are also hotel structures and commercial activities, tailoring, shoe making.

Autonomy

Autonomy of life of the victim is the objective which the organisations interviewed follow with different means and timing. Some consider that it is an objective to pursue as soon as the psychological, formal (permission to stay) and economic (possession of work) conditions permit. Others seem instead to prefer longer paths, in which the victim is free to choose and adopt, at least for some time, or to abandon, the life of community sharing offered by the organisation (generally clearly of religious vocation).

In the first case they try to stimulate the woman to seek, for example, an autonomous lodging, and work “on the market”, considered necessary for a free

⁸⁴ An operator interviewed has however, underlined the fact that the Nigerian women are more sincere and spontaneous, while more frequently the women of Eastern Europe have ambiguous attitudes in their daily relations.

life. In the second case instead it is preferred to support the woman by placing her to live in a community, near “protected” work, possibly in a social co-operative. What the two paths have in common is the objective to start the victim in a condition of life which guarantees the possibility of creating the prospective of a future in Italy.

The operators emphasise that even in the subjects that manage, with more success, to “integrate themselves” in Italy, perhaps creating their own family, the relationship with the family of origin however remains strong and is a determinant. It is difficult to say if the girls out of the circuit of the traffic and prostitution manage to feel themselves part of the Italian society in which they live, but it is sure however that a strong sentiment of belonging to the community of origin remains. Nearly always the women who manage to liberate themselves continue for a long time to send money to the family and often their desire is to return to their cities or villages when their economic conditions can assure also to the other members of the family a dignified life.

Cases of girls who have asked to return immediately to Nigeria and who are helped to do so, often through International Organisation for Migration (IOM), if they exist, are not frequent. An operator has commented: *“The Nigerian girls live the return as a defeat. It is not serious to be a prostitute in Europe; it is more serious to be unemployed, with the family without prospects in Nigeria”* (Caritas Servizio Migranti - Turin).

One aspect reported frequently by the operators, also in relation to the victims of other nationalities, concerns the strong initiative of the Nigerian girls, which is translated into a good will to change city, to rely on friends and acquaintances of the Nigerian community in Italy to find lodgings. The Nigerian women seem, in other words, to possess strong project capacity.

A social operator, regarding this, told us about a recent European project for research and intervention (NACO Project, Leonardo da Vinci Programme) which foresaw an intensive course for the victims of the traffic of various nationalities, with the aim of analysing and intervening on the potential, prospects, projects of the victims in the five years to come. The project has highlighted a marked dynamism of the Nigerian women.

“The girls from Eastern Europe finished the course with frequent crises of depression, tears, they see themselves without prospects and very little self-esteem, while for the Nigerians on the contrary, it was very positive, there was not one who cried, all very strong, very dignified, a lot of self-esteem, with clear ideas: (...) then after I go to Canada, become a secretary, an accountant. They make very precise projects regarding the future” (Associazione Tampep - Turin).

If they accept the difficulties connected with a full insertion into the social life - that always comes very slowly and is often hindered by a sensitive diffidence towards the victims - the general picture presented by the social operators is therefore characterised by a strong co-participation of the victims who decide to start on a path of separation from the condition of exploitation and the projects of re-insertion.

CHAPTER VII

Considerations in synthesis: situations, open questions, proposals and work tracks

7.1 The situation in synthesis

The preceding chapters have analysed and described the multiple aspects of the phenomenon of the traffic and exploitation, some of these are meritorious, in our opinion, of a profound reflection above all in function of the consequences that a more adequate focus and a correct interpretation can have on the implementation, or possible preventative action and contrast.

Following, in a brief synthesis, are analytical points that the research has raised, a sort of guideline which presents in a synthetic form the principal elements of the situation, as it is presented today. At the same time we will point out some still unclear aspects, which only further knowledgeable effort can highlight.

1. The areas of recruitment seem to have changed over time, in relation to the contexts (from the urban areas to more suburban, rural areas), in relation to age (which has lowered, with sometimes the involvement of minors), and in relation to the socio-cultural conditions of the victims (who in general are the most deprived, even if there is no lack of sporadic cases of girls with a level of instruction and from a higher level family).

The characteristics of the subjects “at risk”, or those more exposed to the flattery and pressure aimed at making victims of traffic and exploitation in the market of prostitution, are at least in part, differentiated. It would seem that if, on the one hand who undertakes the activity of recruitment aims - above all in recent times - at girls and young women totally under the thumbs of the wishes of the family (of the mothers in particular), easily fooled, fragile, faced with threats, unprepared enough to not question the power that derives from the magic-religious pact sanctioned with a *woodoo* rite, on the other hand there are also subjects more aware, autonomous and determined.

Also co-present there appears, in all the women who migrate from Nigeria - even if in different proportions - the two typical profiles of “migratory projects”: on the one hand the autonomous migratory projects of a family type, on the other, even if less, the autonomous migratory projects of an individual type.

As we know from the literature on migration, both profiles are characterised to be projects which concern young migrants who depart on their own for Europe seeking to fulfil a dream of an economic redemption. In any case, in the first case the project is shared, stimulated or even imposed on the boy or the girl (even minor) or to the young migrant by the parents or family and has as an objective the search abroad of the means to consent the whole nucleus a more dignified life, if not its enrichment. In the second instead, it is an individual project, in the planning and in the undertaking, developed by the subject without the approval or with the indifference of the family.

2. Usually in the migratory strategies, which involve minors or the youngest generations, the choice of the person to invest of the responsibility to leave does not fall on the most weak and unprepared of the family nucleus, but, on the contrary, on those who present and demonstrate certain gifts. This is amply demonstrated, in our case, by the girls that live the experience of prostitution in Italy. It appears evident - and the stories collected in this research amply bear witness to this - that, in general, they present some tracts of personality such as the capacity for relative autonomy (one thinks of the journey and the story of those who have been able to reach their goal having had very few indications on how to arrive there), the determination and the force of character faced with the difficulties, the resistance to suffering and fatigue, ambition and the desire to succeed, etc.

Naturally these are gifts more present in the young women who have actively sought to get out of the deprived conditions lived in Nigeria. But even thinking about the girls whose destiny is hetero-directed (by the family) and forced from the beginning of the migratory event, the impression is that they bear determined characteristics, the presence of which perhaps guides the research strategy and recruitment by who, in Nigeria, undertakes this function. This would explain, at least in part, the fact that, even being fully at the mercy of persons who exploit them, once in Italy the girls are (and in part obviously become) capable of a relative autonomy, sometimes of rebellion, often of a “strategic” adaptation to the changes which appear in the conditions of life and relations with the context, even capable of a good project idea concerning the future.

Obviously these are impressions that only a deep investigation on the spot - placing the attention in a comparative form of the characteristics of the girls recruited with those of their same age not concerned by this research study - could confirm. An investigation would be most useful to define which girls are “at risk” of being approached and recruited.

3. The family and/or individual needs, which represent the background favourable for the departure from the original context, are however very similar, even if differentiated in the intensity of the conditions of absolute deprivation and/or sentiments of relative deprivation⁸⁵.

⁸⁵ We are talking about “*relative deprivation*” to indicate the sentiment which is born from the confrontation between what one has and what one thinks is interesting, beautiful, right, useful to have,

In the case of the girls having more cultural instruments, nearer to the western culture, above all those who pursue a migratory project of an individual type, one can see clearly the role of the “*anticipated socialisation*”⁸⁶ to the values and models of Western life and consumption. In the others, the impact with the West is more traumatic and it is more evident the difficulty to find the road to adapt, at least partially, to the given situation, once arrived in our territory.

In any case the individual resources (intelligence, capacity to resist, autonomy, etc.) do not seem to play a secondary role in delineating the paths and means of “going through” and overcoming the matters connected to the return of the debt and to cultivate and carry out the plans for the successive phase of its extinction.

At the same time the Nigerian girls and women seem, as a whole, to have some characteristics which mark in a peculiar manner, in relationship with other cultures, the way to stay in the situation, or to discover and cultivate projects for “emancipation” (in the sense of reproducing the mechanism of exploitation towards new victims or the autonomous placement in a different dimension of life).

4. The “hooking” mechanisms have been widely described in the research. Normally it occurs within the framework of family relations, of a close or extended type, or in the context of the network of relations and ties that unite the group that shares the ethnic origins, the rules and the significance of the relations of a community type. This is important both for the role that the family has in the orientation and ripening of the decision to depart, as well as for the value of the pledge of the agreed pact to allow its concrete accomplishment.

The role of the close and/or extended family is to be found, as in other cases of migration of the youngest members of this group and their start in prostitution, in a *continuum* that contains different possible positions:

- the family participates actively in the recruitment with a view to placing the girl on the market of prostitution, to ensure the necessary income once the enrichment objectives have been reached, being aware of, if not directly implicated, in the activity of the management of the traffic and exploitation of prostitution;
- the family is forced to agree to such a situation, even if aware of the risks for the family member, out of desperation or for a condition of being of service to a specific individual or groups, for example to liberate themselves from a debt or to not put up with threats or retaliation;

confronting their existence with that of others considered more important, whose style of life and consumption one knows at first hand or indirectly. The expression counter proposed is “*absolute deprivation*”, which commutates the condition of one who does not have the possibility to guarantee means of subsistence for herself and her family.

⁸⁶ For “*anticipated socialisation*” it is intended that process of pre-socialisation to cultural models and styles of life of countries which are looked at as places for migration, which comes in the phase which precedes the migratory path and the contents of which are in part available in the media, in part from the exultant accounts of those who have had the experience.

- the family entrusts their own children to others without a clear knowledge of the consequences and forms of work and exploitation to which they will be subjected, moved only by the hope of redemption from economic difficulties;
- the family has lost its “grip” on (or has entered into conflict with) the girl who ends up breaking the relationship and goes away on her own, making reference to other adult persons or to “equals” also in difficulty.

5. In any case, the choice made by the family cannot be isolated from the extended context in which it is situated. In the case of the family of Nigerian victims, the context which determines the horizon of possible choices is characterised, in general, by serious economic problems, by the almost absolute absence of opportunities of actualisation and development, whether economic or social, if not by having recourse to some “extraordinary” means.

To these should be added such elements as:

- the models of life and consumption imposed on a “global” scale, that feed sentiments of relative deprivation in adults, and adolescents;
- the break in some traditional models of regulation of relationships within the ethnic group, the community, the extended and close family: the contacts with models of “westernised” life, the family nucleus, no longer protected by the mechanisms on which its own stability was founded, are destroyed with serious consequences above all for women and children;
- the conception according to which the children (and daughters in particular) - at different age, but in general more precociously than in western societies - have to undertake precise economic obligations for the family, that is to say they must play an important role in the search for means of sustenance for themselves and for the family.

6. Research has highlighted with sufficient clarity how the grades and contents of understanding of what is the destiny and the future in Italy for those who undertake the journey appear quite variable, depending on whether the girl and her family have more or less access to information on returning immigrants or the widely spread information in the contexts where young women have departed for Italy since a long time.

The deception can be absolute or relative, it can therefore go from the offer of prospects without any foundation (in the case for example of proposals to girls that live in a geographically marginal context and culturally more isolated), to forms of presentation of the possibilities for getting rich that implicitly refer to models different from “honest” types, underlining the facility to earn if one is disposed to pledge oneself, without taking the details into account.

This feeds, in the girls who are more aware of the reality lived by the companions that preceded them, the need for self-deception, which assumes the form of considering themselves a possible “exception” regarding the common destiny or to think that some alternatives are possible, once arrived in Europe or even, perhaps to be able to conciliate the obligations which one will have.

As has been many times noted, the conditions of life and work are those that represent the real hidden face of the situation, as no account seems to be able to make the girls understand, and above all the family, that the proposals made by those who intend to recruit are such to make them take enormous risks or to place them in a situation where the suffering and discomfort will be enormous. Anyway, even when they have access to some tale, they do not appear to be able to overcome, at least until now, the barriers or the ignorance or the hope and self-deception.

7. Much has been said about the characteristics of the magic-religious pledge represented by the *woodoo* rites. One should only underline here the fact that this appears to be one of the diverse means used to maintain the link and to obtain obedience on the part of the victims.

In other words, while it would not be correct to underrate its relevance, one should remember that the whole management and control system of the girls implicated in the activity of prostitution is based on multiple instruments. We can recall them here:

- the fear of consequences for herself and her family (illness, death, etc.) in the violation of the pact in its magic form, of superstition tied to the animist beliefs;
- the fear of social consequences if the obligations they assumed by contract are not met. That, at least apparently (for the honour of the family), has a “virtuous” content, that is to say the help given by persons available to favour the departure of the girl to guarantee to her and her family a prosperous future;
- the isolation and strict control of the life of the girls to prevent them to find - at least for a short time - support and help outside the network that gravitates around and in the organisations that sustain the activity of exploitation;
- the threat is put into place in forms of pressure and blackmail (discretionary increase in the debt during the work, is typical), and also the use of indirect or direct violence (it is said, “*of an environmental type*”), psychological or physical, on the person and her family.

In this sense one can speak about a “pact” endowed with force because those who manage the work know how to utilise many instruments, know how to profit from a learned interlacement of elements linked to the tradition (the magic beliefs) and of their own modern instruments (formalisation of the contract with the emphasis on those guarantees of the possibility for the woman to enter into the world of business, international business⁸⁷). A management which adapts itself to the conditions and the reactions of the victims, with an always original modulation of the forms of deception and blackmail, but also of the prizes and incentives; which works on the group and on the person, making leverage on the solidarity between persons who share the experience, but also on the differences and the competitiveness between these same victims.

⁸⁷ Such is the contract-type, of which the Nigerian researcher colleagues speak in their report (a sample of which is attached as Appendix).

In this sense it deals with a complex interlacement that, altogether, delineates a picture in which the victims can be defined as submissive and coerced, through that which we have called “*immaterial form of reduction to slavery*”, but which is moulded and diversified according to the reactions and the “adaptations”, over time, of the same victims.

8. The flexibility and the capacity to confront and resolve, with patience and invention, every unforeseen problem or difficulty, denotes, as we have seen, the choice of strategy and tactic relevant to the organised journeys allowing the victims to arrive in Italy. The flexibility and the inventions are applied all over: in the choice of routes, in the escorts, in the means of transport used, in the counterfeited documents in such a way that the persons can “*play a role*”.

The factors which orient the organisational choice are essentially constituted by a careful calculation of the cost-benefit relation, of the evaluation of the risks, for example connected to the geo-political changes, of the opportunities which present themselves in determined circumstances, the possibility of alliances.

What is essential in this picture is obviously the connivance and coverage which can be obtained at different levels. This concerns, in the first place, the institutional sphere in which one has access to documents (passports and visas) useful for expatriation, which appears characterised by evident organisational dysfunctions and lack of controls. But it extends to the whole situation in which the corruption of private citizens and public officials consents in obtaining benefits, help, lack of controls, etc. Some stories of journeys are, under this profile, highly emblematic and witness how the connivance is multiple and is manifested in different points of the hubs of the organisation.

Even from this point of view, the picture presented is variable and above all, in many cases with blurred surroundings. Consequently it is difficult to attack through investigations or criminal proceedings, even if, as we will see in the next paragraph, some better aimed control strategies could, if not eliminate, at least reduce the margins of manoeuvre of the criminal organisations.

9. The nature of the experience of prostitution of the Nigerian women appears, in a certain way, similar to those of all analogous situations but, in another way, presents peculiar tracts.

In any case it is always more evident that the position of the Nigerian women in the prostitution market remains tendentially marginal. Not from the quantitative point of view, but:

- under the profile of dislocation over the territory: from the central zones and more profitable in the large cities, the Nigerian girls and women have been pushed towards the suburbs, the provincial roads, the most depressed areas of the country, by the presence of other criminal groups, once again, even if as we have said, it was more a spontaneous retreat rather than an explicit agreement or a submission to other forces;

- under the profile of the “quality” of the client, featured as well as “marginal”, or of a low socio-economic level, which sees in the Nigerian prostitution the only possibility to enjoy sexual services against payment, from the moment that this has, for the effect of adaptation between the demand and the offer, a limited cost.

It should be noted that the marginal placement on the territory (in places less visible) and the characteristics of the clients (not rarely possessing a culture where they see in a “black” woman an inferior being, who has no sentiments and sensitivity like that of white women) place the Nigerian girls in major risks both on the level of physical safety as well as on that of victimisation in the widest sense (humiliation, force with regard to the service pretended, hold ups, and stealing money, etc.).

10. The principal peculiarity of Nigerian prostitution is represented, as has been repeated many times, as that of being if not exclusively, certainly principally “a women’s affairs”. As much as this represents a lower form of exploitation, as ambivalent as it is presented to the eyes of the observers the ties between the exploiter and the victim, as much as finally the role of the first is seen as a possible objective for the second, all this marks in a particular manner the whole business which we have dealt.

Certainly there is no lack, in the evaluation of the girls that have lived this experience, of strongly severe criticism of the *madams* and their methods, as there is no lack of the impression that the men (with the exception of the “hitter”) are considered more positively (and potentially more tolerant exploiters). However what without doubt is that, with all the exceptions, the respect of the pacts and some behaviour rules, above all with the passing of time, allow many girls and women to “manage” through the period necessary to free themselves from debt.

But once again it should be noted that this does not concern all the victims. Even in this case a thorough investigation of a comparative type between a certain number of situations could confirm that which can be considered only a hypothesis: that the different capacities of “strategic” adaptation, the different intelligence used, the different grade of knowledge of the reality and the different “social capital” define trajectories more or less in terms of control, marked pressure, violence, blackmail and deception. From here the different grade of suffering: some situations that seem to pass undamaged, psychologically, through the experience and others who, on the contrary, give in and have psychiatric disturbances or even find refuge in alcohol or other psycho-active substances.

The relevance of the relationship with the context, whether that of the Italian reality in which the girl is placed, or that of her countrymen not implicated in the network of exploitation of prostitution (for example the Protestant and Catholic churches that see many Nigerians get together for the services and as a form of aggregation), also appears variable because dependent on individual capacity of finding - at least in the phase in which the control of the *madams* or the organisations is slackened - useful references to build alternatives or to live a life not limited to the environment of prostitution.

11. We have talked a lot about the network model, its organisation and its characteristics: the capacity of adapting, the slight visibility or indeed the attention to not appear threatening to the environment.

It has also been seen how the various units can count on subjects and groups (not only those of countrymen and not only of Africans) each of which possesses a functional specialisation: hooking the victim, pre-disposition for documents, transportation, escorts, logistical support, assistance and solutions of control problems, transfer of proceeds, legal re-investment, re-investment in illegal activities.

That which none of the interlocutors and none of the investigations examined have been able to throw a light on, is the nature of the relations between the single knots of the network, the levels of interchange and shared use of “specialised” resources, but above all if there exists and what type is a relationship of a vertical type which configures a pyramid model of criminal organisation, perhaps in Nigeria and correlated to the belonging to an ethnic group (in its dimension, for example, of the extended family clan) or another form of association of interests.

Certainly it appears hardly credible - if the analysis which many undertake on the tight relationship between exploitation of prostitution and investment in activity such as the drug trade is true - a vision of the criminal phenomenon connected to exploitation as very split up, and without connections and ties (for example of forced contributions and respect of the regulations imposed) with groups of criminals who manage such traffic and who appear even more structured.

But, as we have said, it is a level of analysis which is still little explored, which would merit further investigation, possible only if it is possible to define forms of close and organic collaboration with the Law Enforcement operators in Nigeria

12. The results of the individual exploitation are, we have seen, the expression of different ways that single victims have developed to manage the relational dimension of the experience, to evaluate its negative aspects and those if not positive, at least useful, to follow the tracks to proceed, with progressive adaptation, in the direction of overcoming the conditions of mere suppliers of earnings to those who exploit. Also, as we have seen, the ties to the family left in Nigeria, the stimulation that they are able or unable to offer, the needs that they express and the demands and ties which they make count a lot.

The outcomes are therefore conclusions, sometimes provisional, of different tracks each of which is the expression of an interlacement of elements and factors, either correlated to the subjective characteristics of the persons, or to situations and occasions that from time to time are encountered, and also to the maturation of ideas and convictions.

The transformation of the victims into exploiters - principal source of the reproduction of the mechanism - is certainly one of the possible frequent outcomes, that can be taken into consideration for various reasons, but which allows the

person to obtain either relevant resources within a reasonable time, or the connection to a system of relationships already known and experimented.

The forms of autonomous exit are, on the contrary, the expression of the capacity of making a web of new relations, to profit from, for example, some solidarity or interests (for example, ex-clients who offer their help), to single out insertion possibilities, to adapt themselves to conditions still, and for a long time, precarious and not certainly corresponding to the dream of enrichment and realisation. It seems that various situations of the victims evolve in this way, which demonstrates that many of them are in possession of competence, intelligence, of resources at the high relationship level (the “social capital” of which we have spoken).

The arrival of help structures (for example those delegated, in these last years, to the management of social protection, *ex Art. 18*), results in being the other possible type of trajectory. We have talked and will talk again about this in the concluding part of this chapter.

In this environment it is evident that both the potential of the instrument (being that the Nigerian nationality is that most present in the statistics relative to individual projects under way, at least based on available data), as well as its limitations, if one does not consider the specific characteristics of the various targets and the differences which denote the various criminal organisations, are emphasised. This applies in particular to the question of the obligation to file a report and to the management of the same in the various phases of the investigation and the proceedings.

We have talked about the role of religion (or better religiousness), about both its relevance in repelling the superstitions regarding the ominous consequences of the break in the tie undertaken in the *woodoo* ritual, as well as the consent to aggregation to a nucleus of believers, representing valid support for the prospects of life. Also in this case, on the other hand, the importance of the attitude of the family emerges whether to face the various possible threats and blackmail that the same breaking of the pact by the daughter may provoke, or in understanding the steps that the same daughter is undertaking, either to accept the request for help to join another context, or, even if in rare cases, to accept her return not accompanied by the desired success.

7.2 Proposals and work tracks

If this is the synthetic picture of the situation, one can now seek to enucleate what could be - in the light of the many suggestions that the research work has supplied and the reflections which followed - the possible hypothesis of a work track to improve and increase the contrast actions under the profile of the fight against criminality, support to the victims and, finally, prevention and intervention in the Nigerian context. We will start with the instruments of control and repression to pass on to the social policies.

The fight against criminality

Evaluate the efficacy of the fight against criminality in this specific sector is a rather complex undertaking. In the pages that follow we will therefore limit ourselves to giving a picture of the existing situation of the regulations and the investigation and judicial cooperation, providing, if not an exhaustive reply, at least some points of reflection on the subject. Lastly we will try to provide some evaluation element of the recent proposals for modifying the legislation on prostitution, with particular reference to the possible consequences on the phenomenon considered.

a) Criminal juridical cases

The fan of incriminating criminal juridical cases that are used for the proceedings connected to the traffic of women and minors for sexual exploitation is rather wide, even before the introduction of the specific offence of traffic of persons (Article 600 as modified by law 11 August 2003 No. 228). These criminal juridical cases are to be found in the Penal Code as well as in special legislation.

Above all Art. 12 d.lgs. 286/1998, recently modified by the Law No. 189/2002: this punishes those who “*make direct deeds to procure the entry into the territory of the State of a foreigner or direct deeds to procure the illegal entry into another State of which the person is not a citizen and does not possess a permission of permanent resident*”, foreseeing, in the third paragraph, a more serious punishment⁸⁸ for those who undertake this activity “*in order to obtain a profit*” or if the fact is committed “*by three or more persons together or using international transportation services or forged or counterfeited documents however illegally obtained*”.

Further more serious punishment is foreseen under paragraph 3 *bis* whenever the entry or illegal stay of five or more persons is obtained, or there is a situation of exposure to danger of the life or safety of persons for whom the entry and stay is obtained, that is to say that such persons have been exposed to inhuman and degrading treatment.

It is worth underlining that, starting from the interpretative difficulty that some of these adjectives pose, not only are the activities regarding entry sanctioned, but also those regarding the stay: entering, therefore, in the framework of behaviour liable to punish all activities of those who in whatsoever manner have contributed to the illegal stay of persons, in the territory of the state (for example procuring a lodging).

Paragraph 3 *ter* foresees that, “*if the facts of paragraph 3 are undertaken to recruit persons to place in prostitution or even sexual exploitation that is to say regarding the entry of minors to employ in illicit activities with the aim of favour exploitation, the punishment applied is from five to fifteen years in prison and a fine of 25,000 Euros for each person*”.

⁸⁸ The hypothesis foresees an alternative punishment to prison of up to 3 years and a fine of 15,000 Euros, the increased hypothesis of the third paragraph: prison from 4 to 12 years and a fine of 15,000 Euros for each person.

Numerous are the criminal juridical cases of the so-called Merlin Law (Law dated 20 February 1958, No. 75) which ended the system of the houses of prostitution and abolished any listing and obligatory health treatment for prostitutes. Punished by prison from 2 to 6 years and a fine of from 258 to 10,329 Euros are the various activities which go from exploitation to aiding and abetting prostitution, renting of apartments where this is undertaken⁸⁹. That which is of concern to us are the particularly revealing forecasts of numbers 6) and 7) of Art. 3 of the law which punishes:

“whoever leads a person to the territory of another State or however a place different from that of their normal residence, in order to exercise prostitution or places themselves to assist the departure”;

“whoever undertakes an activity in association with national and foreign organisations dedicated to the recruitment of persons for prostitution or exploitation of prostitution, or in whatever form and with whatever means aids and abets the action or the scopes of such associations or organisations”.

The closing juridical case is foreseen in number 8) which sanctions whosoever, and in whatsoever manner aids and abets the prostitution of others. To this should be added the juridical cases of the Penal Code which protect persons from violence (private violence, threats, lesions, blows, kidnapping of persons, sexual violence) and those who reduce to slavery or in similar conditions to slavery. To this end it should be remembered that the reduction to slavery is characterised by *“an individual who - by means of the explicit activity of others on their person - finds themselves (even if nominally having the status of a subject of a legal system) reduced to the exclusive property of the accused, who materially uses, gains or profits, or disposes of, similar to the way in which - according to historical knowledge, converged in the present socio-cultural patrimony of the members of the collective - the ‘owner’, at one time, exercised the ownership of the slave”* (Cassazione a Sezioni Unite, 20 November 1996 - 16 January 1997, n. 261).

Beside the reduction to slavery, Art. 601 of the Penal Code punishes *“the traffic or commerce of persons in similar conditions to that of slavery”*. The law of 3 August 1998, No. 269 - which introduced the new juridical cases regarding exploitation of prostitution, pornography, sexual tourism to the detriment of minors - has added to such an article a second paragraph which in a specific manner sanctions those who *“make exploitation or even commerce of minors under eighteen years with the objective to committing them to prostitution”* foreseeing a prison sentence from 6 to 20 years⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ The conduct described by No. 1-5 of Art. 3 of the Law can be re-assumed as follows: 1) to have a property or exercise whatever form of control of a house of prostitution; 2) the rent of an apartment for the exercise of a house of prostitution; 3) the habitual tolerance of persons who inside a place in which one is the owner or manager are prostitutes; 4) the recruitment for prostitution or aiding prostitution; 5) induction of an adult woman to prostitution, or undertake acts of artifice.

⁹⁰ Contextually repealed part of the aggravating circumstances foreseen in Art. 4 No. 1 of the Law No. 75/1958, today re-instated in this provision.

The behaviour sanctioned is that of who “*undertakes a vast action of recruitment, even coercive, of transport and buying-selling minors*”⁹¹ to the detriment of more minors, of a continuative character and using a minimum organisational structure: what remains excluded from such a provision is the single, isolated, occasional act of commerce to the detriment of only one minor.

The other provision is of particular interest, introduced by the said law against paedophiles (l. 269/1998), represented by Art. 600 *bis* which sanctions, in the first paragraph, the behaviour of those who “*induce to prostitution a person of an age inferior to that of eighteen years, or who favours or exploits prostitution*” with prison sentences from 6 to 12 years, and the fine from 15,493 to 154,937 Euros and, in the second paragraph, punishes those who commit sexual acts with a minor of between 14 to 16 years in exchange for money or other economically useful recompense with the alternative prison sentence (from 6 months to 3 years) or a fine (not less than 5,164 Euros). The disposition is interesting for two reasons: because it enucleates the position of a minor as a fact in itself with respect to numerous other behaviours foreseen by the historical Merlin Law concerning prostitution (l. n.75/1958) and because for the first time the regulation decides to punish the client, who uses the sexual services of a minor of between 14 and 16 years.

The regulation has notably simplified the behaviour punished, in respect to that foreseen by Art. 3 and Art. 4 of the Merlin Law, sanctioning exclusively the induction, aiding, abetting and exploiting, but has reconfirmed the desire, particularly of this legislature of 1958, to punish not only the conduct of who obtains some benefit, an unjustified advantage from the prostitution of minors, but also that of those who through the behaviour of aiding the induction⁹² and abetting⁹³, facilitates such an activity.

It is therefore evident that a remarkable amplitude of punished behaviour⁹⁴ remains and the legislator has chosen to punish apart from the consensus given by the minor with respect to the activity of prostitution. That is to say without in any way considering the possibility of a free and informed consent, practically assuming the impossibility for the minor to self-determine himself/herself on his/her sexual freedom and the harmfulness of the activity of prostitution.

The only relevance that the legislature has given to the age of the minor who prostitutes, disregarding the consensus, is within Art. 600 *sexies*, where an aggravating circumstance for who induces, aids and abets, or exploits the prostitution of a minor of 14 years is foreseen: the increase in the punishment is of one third to half of the basic punishment.

⁹¹ Santoro (1998, page 51).

⁹² For induction to prostitution it is intended the activity of persuasion, determination, reinforcing the decision to prostitution already thought of by the subject or which emerges because of that activity.

⁹³ For abetting it is intended whatever activity that in some way would bring about conditions favourable or more favourable for exercising prostitution.

⁹⁴ The judicial elaboration on conducting abetting arrived for example at punishing the prostitutes that together rented an apartment to exercise professional activities of prostitution, considering that one was responsible to abetting the prostitution of the other (Cass, Sez. III, 9 July 1998, No. 2525).

If the accused claims to not knowing the age of the person offended (not being a regulation, such as Art. 609 *sexies*, that for acts of sexual violence excludes the relevance of ignorance of the age of the offended) the general regulations foreseen for the accusation of the circumstances are applied, hence to impose the aggravating circumstances foreseen by Art. 600 *sexies* on the accused, who should at least have had the possibility of realising that the minor was under fourteen years.

The most innovative aspect, with respect to the entire preceding regulations is certainly represented by the second paragraph which introduces for the first time in the legal system, the punishment for the beneficiary of paid sexual services of a minor. This provision was introduced on the assumption that there exists a *continuum* between the client and the exploiter inasmuch as both, even having very different roles, enter into the same circuit of demand and offer which is at the centre of the offence against a minor.

The provision punishes with an alternative sentence the client of “*a minor of an age of between fourteen and sixteen years*”⁹⁵, unless the fact constitutes a more serious offence. The protecting clause is that if the fact is committed by an ascendant, even an adopting parent, a tutor or other person for reasons of care, education, instruction, guard or custody the minor is entrusted to, or who has a relationship of living with the minor, then the more serious provision of Art. 609 *quater* paragraph 1 No. 2 Penal Code is considered.

Recently, Parliament approved Law No. 228 of 11 August 2003, which introduces some interesting modifications to the framework of regulations concerning the trafficking of human beings.

The crime of reduction to slavery foreseen under Article 600 of the Penal Code is modified, describing in detail the activities punished, and above all adapting the regulation to the new forms of slavery characterised by the trade and trafficking of persons.

The regulation sanctions the behaviour of those who:

- exercise powers over a person corresponding to those of property rights;
- reduction or maintenance of a person in a state of continuous subjection, forcing them to provide sexual services, or to beg, or whatsoever services that comprise exploitation.

The reduction or maintenance in a state of subjection takes place when the conduct is carried out:

- through violence, threats, deception, abuse of authority, profiting from a situation of physical or psychological inferiority, or from a situation of necessity;
- through promises, or giving sums of money or other advantages to those who have authority over the person.

Beside the work of re-styling Article 600 of the Penal Code, the legislator radically modifies the juridical case contained in Article 601 of the Penal Code -

⁹⁵ It should be remembered that on the basis of the law on sexual violence (l. No. 66/1996) to perform sexual acts with a minor of below 14 years is always considered sexual violence.

which previously punished the trade and commerce of slaves or persons and, in the second paragraph, the trade and commerce of minors in order to induce them to prostitution - transforming it into a crime which punishes:

- trafficking of persons (minors or not) who are found in conditions of slavery or bondage, as described in Article 600 of the Penal Code;
- induction or forcing, through violence, threats, abuse of authority or profiting from a situation of physical or psychological inferiority or from a situation of necessity, or through promises or giving sums of money or other advantages to the person who holds authority over the person - to permit entry or to stay or to leave State territory, or transfer the person within the State, with the aim of committing crimes of reduction or maintenance in slavery or bondage.

The new disposition is not therefore limited to punishing the behaviour of trafficking with the aim of exploitation of prostitution but is enlarged to every type of behaviour, considering however - analogically that which is foreseen under Article 600 of the Penal Code - the minor age of the victim, the objective of exploitation for prostitution or for extracting organs, as hypotheses of aggravation of the basic punishment. The basic punishment of imprisonment from 8 to 20 years may be increased by one third to one half in this last hypotheses.

Analogous sanctions are established even for the hypothesis of acquiring and alienation of slaves under Article 602 of the Penal Code.

Of not minor importance as well is the introduction of associative behaviour directed towards committing one of the crimes foreseen under Articles, 600, 601 and 602 as a specific prevision and aggravated by Article 416 of the Penal Code.

On the trial side it is established that the competence for these crimes passes from the Court of Assizes to the Tribunal of a collegial composition and that the public prosecutor in charge of the investigations will be the prosecutor of the Republic of the district court, analogically to that which occurs for crimes related to organised crime.

For the new criminal juridical cases, the practice of under cover investigative activities and wider amplitude of cases for which telephonic interception may be undertaken is allowed.

Moreover, the public prosecutor is permitted to delay the emission of liberty restriction measures and of those of seizure if it is proved necessary to acquire substantial elements of proof, or the identification or capture of those responsible. Identical powers are given to the officials of the judicial police for provisions under their responsibility.

Finally, the preliminary investigations are of a longer duration which can be protracted up to 2 years for the new crimes introduced under the Law.

b) The co-presence of deflationary trial mechanisms and penal and penitentiary prizes

Frequently the result in terms of sanctions inflicted in trials relating to the traffic of persons for sexual exploitation “leaves a bad taste in the mouth”: even without measuring the efficacy of a penal system in terms of major or minor

sanctions, sometimes, also in presence of serious violence against the person and notwithstanding the contestation of “important” criminal juridical cases, one has the impression that all the investigations undertaken are directed towards an unsatisfactory result.

The causes of this situation are various. In the first place often in the trials related to the exploitation of prostitution the accused arrive at making a full confession, aware of the benefits that this may bring at penal and trial level: above all, if with a clean record, the *madams* opt for a procedure of applying the punishment at the request of the parties (the so-called “plea bargain”) or, after having opted for the abbreviated trial, they admit the accusations bringing about the rapid end to the trial, avoiding further investigations.

The confession is so that in many cases they are permitted the generalised extenuating circumstances (Art 62 *bis*) which, together with the lowering of the punishment for the rite chosen and the reduction given to the fact that normally it deals with crimes united with the tie of continuation, determines a considerable lowering of the sanction.

In a judicial case of second grade, the possibility of the so-called “*plea bargain in appeal*” (Art. 599 Penal Code Procedures) - if not opted for in the first degree - permits a further reduction in the sanction. The generalised impression is that in the second grade of judgement there is a general favour for this system which allows the general prosecutor to avoid debates, therefore saving time, and the panel of judges to “not deliver a sentence”; the risk is to not pay attention to concrete cases, but to always grant such reduction.

To this picture one must now add the recent widened plea bargain introduced by the Law No. 134 of 12 June 2003. This law raised the ceiling within which it is possible to ask for the application of the sentence at the request of the parties (it passes from 2 to 5 years net of circumstances and the reduction of a third, for which the basic sentence can also be of 10 years)⁹⁶, so that crimes like homicide, sexual violence, aggravated hold-ups, corruption or extortion can be included.

The accused may be judged according to this rite only when the public prosecutor gives consent: as it was for the other forms of plea bargain it will be the responsibility of the public prosecutor to make the right choice in a concrete case, seeking to avoid generalised applications that can invalidate the objectives of the criminal policy for the fight against the traffic of persons for sexual exploitation.

The other sore point of the new regulations is the total lack of consideration of the position of the victim and the injured party: the sentence, in fact, is not valid in the civil courts so, to obtain satisfaction, one must start an *ad hoc* civil proceeding. Moreover, the penitentiary benefits and alternative modalities of execution of the sentence⁹⁷, are today inserted on sanctions which are already greatly reduced during the proceeding. This was part of a system in which this multiple mechanism to reduce the sentence in the penal process did not exist, but where the correction of the duration of the sentence was up to the judge.

⁹⁶ The objective is the reduction of the workload of the judiciary and efficiency, but on this point whether this is translated into efficacy is dubious. On this point, see Kostoris (2003, page 9).

⁹⁷ See for an exhaustive treatment Canepa and Merlo (2002, page 211 and following).

The accused for facts connected to the traffic of persons are those who, in general, have a good technical defence: hardly ever are they “unprepared”, without a trusted lawyer and badly defended; it follows that they know very well how to profit from the penal and procedure mechanisms to their own advantage.

c) Expulsion as an alternative measure to detention

One of the important novelties of the Law No. 189/2002 was the introduction of the expulsion measure as an alternative detention in prison for clandestine and irregular foreigners⁹⁸ condemned to a sentence of detention, even residual, of two years.

Already in the original text of d.lgs. 286/1998 a facultative hypothesis of expulsion was foreseen for at least 5 years in substitution of the sentence of less than two years.

The novelty of the hypothesis of an alternative measure to detention consists in the first place of its obligatory character, for which the competent judge for surveillance of the concession does not seem to have any discretionary power, once the assumption is verified and, in the second place in the possibility of intervening also on residual sanctions. It follows that it no longer acts only on sentences threatened for minor crimes, but also on crimes of a notable seriousness for which the subject has already passed part of the sentence in prison⁹⁹.

It should be said that excluded from the application are the crimes included in the Comprehensive Immigration Enactment (and therefore, for what is of interest, the hypothesis *ex* Art. 12 paragraph 3 and following) and the crimes included in Art. 407 paragraph 2 letter a) (and therefore Art. 416 *bis* Penal Code), but there remain numerous questions on the utility of the measure for the fight against the traffic.

In fact having considered automatic expulsion once the ceiling of the sentence is verified, there is the risk to repatriate subjects for which the return to the country of origin is advantageous so as to continue their illicit traffic. The predominance of the logic where expulsion is always the best solution to contrast foreign criminality could reveal itself to be false and not help the fight against the traffic. Also the measure poses many interrogatives on the compatibility with Art. 27 of the Constitution¹⁰⁰.

⁹⁸ The Law refers to the situation which in Art. 13 paragraph 2 of the T.U. immigration and that is when a foreigner: a) has entered into the territory of the State avoiding the border controls and has not been sent back under Art. 10; b) has remained on the territory of the State without having requested permission to stay within the prescribed terms, apart from if the delay depends on *force majeure*, or that the permission has elapsed for more than 60 days and a renewal has not been requested; c) this belongs to one of the categories indicated in Art. 1 of the Law of 27 December 1956, No. 1423, as substitute for Art. 2 of the Law of 3 August 1988, No. 327, or in Art. 1 of the law of 31 May 1965, No. 575, as substitute for Art. 13 of the Law of 13 September 1982, No. 646.

⁹⁹ As has already been said previously the punishment effectively served can also be quite low.

¹⁰⁰ On this point, see Miro (2002, page 91) and the question of constitutionality brought up by the Surveillance Court of Alessandria with an ordinance 10.12.2002, published in “*Diritto Immigrazione e Cittadinanza*”, No. 4/2002, page 224.

d) Investigative and judiciary co-operation and controls

“*The frontiers are open for everyone except for the police*”: although a bit sarcastic, this could be the synthesis of the situation of the investigative and judiciary co-operation in European countries.

Notwithstanding the numerous collaboration relations started, there remain legislative and applicative differences from which the criminals seek to profit: an example is the different legislation regarding the possibility of undertaking personal x-rays of those who are suspected of transporting drugs, on which there is a lack of one common law for all of Europe.

Even the investigating and judiciary collaboration between Nigeria and Italy results in being a decisive element, if one wants to increase interventions of protecting the victims and their families, and identify the people responsible for the traffic of minors and women for sexual exploitation who are to be found in the country. At the same time such collaboration between the destination countries and Nigeria would permit better cross check controls on transfer of funds with the *money transfer* and/or controls of visas and passports.

In general, however, it is indispensable to increase the amount of controls at the top, as one cannot think of fighting against organised trans-national crime undertaking verifications and controls exclusively from the bottom: the control, for example, on the people receiving the money by *money transfer* would permit shedding a light on how this system is used and what are the connections and international relations of Nigerian criminality.

Also extremely useful would be more attention to the issuance of visas and to a serious control of the documentation presented to obtain these. One could imagine indications on the part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the embassies in different countries, so as to increase the attention given to some visas which could be considered sensitive: for example diplomatic representatives in Nigeria should give greater attention to visas issued for tourism to young women or collective visas. At the same time the Nigerian Government could increase the controls on their officials involved in issuing passports, avoiding in this way the carelessness which favours the possibility of having the availability of multiple documents.

Better European cooperation is indispensable (considering that today it is sufficient to enter into one of the Schengen countries to have access to all the countries of the European Union), giving life to a common policy on immigration in which the questions are dealt with at the community level and not as national problems of the single country where major exposure is to be found to a particular migratory pressure.

Of undoubted usefulness is to continue along the road of computerising the services and of a better transfer of information: if each passage of the border with a certain document is registered, one could always verify at each successive passage which movements that document has made and with what personal data. According to many of those interviewed, in many cases the loss or thefts of documents in foreign countries are not communicated by the embassy to the offices in the territory of the country of origin.

Finally, it would be opportune to invest in monitoring legal activities (*money transfers*, commercial activity) used as systems for recycling money, keeping them under control, evaluating the owners, and the money earned.

e) Curative statutes and requests for asylum

Of all the processes it emerges that many irregular *madams* have obtained regularisation through a curative statute.

Many common opinions are that the “policies of curative statutes” do not help the fight against organised crime, but in many cases make it possible to regularise those who have links to criminality, who often have a capital of useful relations to guarantee the necessary requisites.

On the other hand, it is noted that until the Comprehensive Immigration Enactment of 1998 the provisions of regularisation were the only real possibility to obtain a valid permission to stay in Italy, due to a lack of a serious policy on non-emergency immigration. It is therefore evident that many foreign citizens who in Italy lived and worked, even in an irregular manner, found in the various curative statutes the way to regularise their own position in the Country. Only a coherent policy on immigration, which permits regular entries and helps the start of an action to contrast the foreign criminality and not immigration, as such, would permit avoiding the use of emergency regulations, often also “criminogenous”.

Apart from taking advantage of situations given by the regularisation, criminality seems to be able to profit from the possibilities offered by the methods of the requesters of asylum: many telephone intercepts suggest that there is a use of the requests for asylum in a pretestuous manner, to temporarily guarantee a stay in Italy. The question is very delicate: the guarantee to a requester of asylum to remain on Italian territory for three months renewable until the pronouncement of the competent Commission is indispensable to “place in safety” those who are in a risk situation in their own country. At the same time undoubtedly the request of asylum is one of the few possibilities of obtaining a valid permission to stay, when one is already in Italy. It follows the necessity for a scrupulous attention to check the request, so as to avoid deciding in a standardised manner on the basis of nationality of the origin of the person interviewed.

f) The prospects of “de iure condendo”

The possible legislative modifications in this matter, presently under discussion in Parliament, regard on the one hand the introduction of a specific crime which punishes the traffic of persons, on the other hand the change in the law on prostitution (Law No. 75/1958), the so-called Merlin Law.

The Bill of the Council of Ministers of December 2002 on the modification of Law 75/1958 is characterised by the prohibition of prostitution on the street and to the even minimum regulation of prostitution in apartments. The text, after a series of modifications and financial retouching, was presented to the Chamber at the end of March 2003¹⁰¹, but its examination has not yet commenced.

¹⁰¹ The text can be found on the internet site www.cittadinolex.kataweb.it under *Costume*.

The reform foresees, under Art. 1, punishment with administrative pecuniary¹⁰² sanctions of the prostitute, who for the first time, violates the prohibition of prostitution on the street, in the case of a repetition of this behaviour, the sanction is transformed into a criminal punishment (arrest of from 5 to 15 days and a fine of from 200 to 1,000 Euros). At the same time the client of prostitution on the street is also punished: first with an administrative sanction then with a fine¹⁰³.

Article 2 eliminates the crime of reciprocal aiding and abetting among prostitutes who help each other and collaborate in the activity, and decrees that the renting of private apartments, in which to exercise prostitution, does not constitute a crime; it is left to the inhabitants of the building and the instruments which regulate relations under civil law the choice to forbid or limit prostitution in the building.

Already the first articles have produced doubts, perplexity and preoccupation in those assigned to the work who express their fear that the law will end up hiding prostitution, making the persons who exercise this more “invisible”, less reachable by the social operators, thus increasing the victimisation and exploitation.

The bill decrees the non punishability of those who, found prostituting themselves in the street, “*result as being obliged to prostitute themselves through violence or threats*”: it is easy to think that the criminality will adjust their own organisational means to the new regulative picture, with the risk of making the conditions of life worse for the women who would lose the possibility of contacting the operators today guaranteed on the street.

Not by chance have some of the interviewed operators already imagined, if the proposal is approved, to help the women to start small business activities, perhaps under a form of a co-operative to self-manage the activity in an apartment.

And in any case it is difficult to imagine a closed up prostitution, exercised freely and which reduces the risks (for example health) for the users, simply working on the instrument of penal sanctions, without a series of regulations (for example following the Dutch model or the attempts at zones of other places in Europe) which could affect the phenomenon and avoid or at least make less diffused the processes of victimisation and traffic of which so many young and very young women are the protagonists.

Improvement in the support action for the victims

The forms of intervention foreseen under Article 18 at more than four years since their first experimentation, have given important results not only for support provided to the Nigerian victims, but also in the fight against the traffic. According to the operators, in some local context - the area on the border between Marche and Abruzzo, the urban areas of Rome and Turin, for example - there seems to be some correlation between the start of Art. 18 projects and the reduction of Nigerian prostitution. It is however difficult to evaluate in what measure the overall

¹⁰² The sanction is from 200 to 3,000 Euros.

¹⁰³ The administrative sanction is from 200 to 1,000 Euros; the fine from 2,000 to 4,000 Euros.

reduction of the presences on the street, registered by the social operators, can be imputed to Art. 18. The sure element is that the trials made by victims bringing a charge have contributed to the increase of arrests and therefore to create problems for the organisations.

Serious support to the actions based on the incentive on the part of the victims to report cannot but impress major incisiveness to fight.

The sensitive change in the policies represented by the Law Bossi-Fini and the consequent increase in resorting to round-ups, centres of permanence, expulsion, have rendered the picture more complex. The increased attention by the police towards the phenomenon of prostitution on the street is not always accompanied as it was hoped by an increase in the collaboration in the application of Article 18.

In the words of many social operators, there emerge expressions of concern for the policy of expulsion which risks weakening the possibility of access of the victims to exit paths. On the one hand, the round-ups have made the organisation distribute the victims more widely over the territory, with the consequence that *“the women are more dispersed in the province, they work less in-groups and are always more difficult to contact”* (Associazione Tampep - Turin). On the other hand, the policy of *“cleaning the streets”* has generated a major difficulty in the relations of collaboration between the social operators and the police.

“Before it often happened that they [the police, Ed.] asked us to mediate and to start the discussions, when they considered that there were perhaps people held that maybe needed Art. 18, because particularly motivated, or because it could be useful with regard to a series of complaints (...). In the last period however, after the Bossi-Fini law, this did not happen, they repatriate them immediately and they do not contact us” (Associazione On the Road - Martinsicuro).

“For example only yesterday evening a girl who has a decree of expulsion pending but went to the lawyer to make a request for a permission to stay because she had filed a report, was arrested immediately, and the police said «Excuse us but we must arrest». The climate has changed” (Associazione On The Road - Martinsicuro).

Among the themes strongly felt by the social operators, there is therefore still the necessity to improve the relations of active collaboration with the institutional organisms: first among these are the *Questure* (local State Police offices) and Prosecutors. Four years since the application of the new norms, nearly everywhere there has been much progress in the collaboration between the institutions, on the one hand, and associations, religious entities, NGOs, on the other; however there is no homogeneity between the different local contexts and all over there is the possibility to improve.

In the case of victims filing a report, the major slowness and uncertainty of the time required for the proceedings has emerged in the Prosecution Offices of large dimensions (Turin, Milan, Rome, Naples) compared to those of small dimensions (Novara, Rimini, Caserta). In the first because of the work load, the criminal proceedings are often longer and therefore can cause delays in receiving the opinion of the Police. The length of the process pushes back in time the moment in

which the woman can definitively turn her back, even under a psychological profile, on her past as a prostitute.

Another element of difference between the different local contexts concerns the discretion of the acceptance of the request for permission not accompanied by a charge, even if foreseen by law as a path for “*social insertion*”. Such requests are not generally accepted, with the exception of some local contexts, such as Caserta, Rimini and the Marche-Abruzzo area.

The principal margins of possible improvement pointed out by the social operators concern the relations with the *Questura*. One first problem regards the time that is taken to obtain the concession of permissions to stay. Even in some cases the time for the concession of permissions to stay have been considerably reduced (in Novara we registered the case of a permission to stay conceded in one month), the need to single out fixed interlocutors and operation protocols is very much felt, overcoming the obstacles with more ease and reducing the waiting time. The institution in the *Questura* of someone *ad hoc* responsible for the victims of the traffic is still rare and could ease the work of the operators.

Some associations, (*Comunità Rut* - Caserta; *Caritas* - Turin) have signalled as a turning point to have been able to find women interlocutors in the *Questura*.

“*The immigration office in the Questura has been feminised and this aspect has changed the attention towards the women of the street and has obliged even the mobile squad to have a different attitude*” (*Caritas, Servizio Migranti* - Turin).

The women present in the immigration offices appear more sensitive to the needs of the victims and more available to sensitise in their work environment, but it is only a tendency which is in the minority. Apart from the hoped for feminisation of the police personnel on cases of the traffic, there remains however a wider problem of a different sensitivity and attention on the part of the different persons of the *Questura* and of the police in general, with respect to the victims.

The social operators often denounce strong inconsistent behaviour in the police, mainly ascribable to the absence of co-ordination, which is translated into unforeseen changes in repressive actions for repatriation and of collaboration in the implementation of Article 18. One of the possible forms of interventions, little experimented, is the institution of an information window in the *Questura* and police stations for the victims of the traffic. The possibility to inform the women stopped about the possibility of accessing the path of Article 18 could give positive effects, also in terms of sensitisation of the police.

In this picture the very delicate subject of the attitude of single police officers towards the victim of traffic is to be found. During the course of the research, testimony was collected in relation to the policemen who habitually have sexual intercourse with the victims.

“*Sometimes when we are on the street, we see some police who are clients. One girl told me that she had a policeman as a client, who warned her not to go on the street when a round-up was envisaged. This is not good. They should do their work*” (*Centro Fernandes* - Castelvoturno).

Even if it is always an individual case, it is however important to note that the existence of this attitude damages the image and the credibility of the police.

If one abandons the field of the institutional relations and looks instead at the proposals which could make the support actions of the victims more efficacious in the future, there are some priorities.

In the process of the exit of the victims from the prostitution circuit and the difficult search for autonomy, one of the decisive passages is represented by the search for a new work situation. Work offers the women a source of sure earnings, the possibility to send money to the family, a new social context, the opportunity to reconstruct a life. On this point there emerged the growing difficulty on the part of the associations, NGOs, and religious organisations of autonomous support of the costs of starting the victims in work. The associations point out on the other hand a growing reduction over the years of state financing to support exit projects. The drop in public support has obliged in certain cases the reduction of the number of interventions and/or diminishing the resources set aside for the most costly activities, such as grants and the training paths. The financial support of the local organisations has often proved decisive, and it is more so since the resources destined to Article 18 projects started to decrease. It would be important in this direction to also involve employers and labour associations, who up to now have marginally contributed to sustain projects for insertion into work.

As far as prevention and health assistance, more attention should be paid to the existing alarm of a considerable increase, over the next years in deaths due to AIDS of the Nigerian women today HIV positive (*Comunità Rut - Caserta*), given the exponential increase in the spreading of the virus in Nigeria. In this direction new forms of collaboration with the health institutions should be prefigured and specific paths defined for the social and work insertion of those who have health problems.

Possibilities of prevention and intervention in Nigeria

The interviews with the victims and the social operators, who more intensely work in Italy on the phenomenon of the Nigerian traffic, give a picture of strong pessimism on the possibility of being able to intervene with efficacious prevention actions in Nigeria. Decidedly generalised is, in fact, the obvious consideration that the phenomenon of the traffic is a direct product of poverty, cultural privation, in the absence of prospects for an entire nation.

The reasons of the possible preventive actions bring us, in the major number of the cases, to reflect on the necessity to act “at the top” on the reduction of the causes of poverty, on the search for occasions of work, on the incentives of scholarship. On the other hand often the reflection on possible actions in Nigeria brings about a request to make the local fight against criminality more incisive, even through the reinforcement of the scanty Italian staff within Interpol in Nigeria (*Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII - Rimini*).

Having abandoned the idea that an action or a series of resolute interventions can be put into action, above all in the short term, the conviction remains that something must be done urgently. All the subjects interviewed - victims, privileged

witnesses, social operators - agree on the fact that the information and sensitisation campaigns of the families should be increased and organised in a more capillary way than has been done up to now. Some victims have insisted on the opportunity of a communication through mass media.

“There are many people in Nigeria that don’t know that their daughter left for Europe and died crossing from Morocco to Spain, you know many died there, many died walking from Nigeria to Morocco. Many advertisements should be made in the newspapers, shown on TV: those who have had experience come and talk about these things (...). They should also start with a programme on TV on Italy which talks about these things. If the people continue to hear, perhaps sooner or later the people will say stop. One thing to make the families understand that this promise to the pimps is false, your daughter is the victim, they hit her, they mistreat her, she does not eat, she works, gets sick, maybe they kill her. There are many ways of dying on the street” (Interview Victim No. 4).

In all these testimonies emerges the importance of a direct communication, without censure, which demonstrates, even through *shock* images, the more extreme aspects of the conditions of life in which the women trafficked are obliged to live. Privileged destination of this communication should be the family and the schools.

Considerations relative to the Nigerian social structure and the unequal enjoyment of the mass media in the different areas of the country bring us however to believe that, to have major efficacy, a direct communication to the family and the community, through the testimony of emancipated victims of the exploitation, is required. The forms and places of this type of communication can be diverse: testimony of the women in associations and religious institutions, in schools, in family reunions, in social moments of the community and villages.

“In Nigeria one should only talk with the parents, show them the cassettes, tape the girls who are on the street, there are girls that are knifed, hot water thrown on them, take these photographs, show them to the parents, translate them in all the languages that exist in Nigeria” (Interview Victim No.7).

“A meeting could be arranged for the families to make the people understand how the situation is here, which is not easy, above all for the youth, 16, 18, 20 years that come here. We have made our bad life. Now we need to pray that the mothers do not let their children come here. Because now many mothers are in agreement with their children” (Interview Victim No.2).

A victim chose to recount her story to the family and the community sending a letter which, with the help of her brother, was distributed to all the family. She chose to appeal to the sense of honour of the family. She maintains that her gesture can help other girls to not follow the same outcome.

“I wrote my entire story and sent it home, they must photocopy everything and divide it amongst the family and during reunions of the family read it, like this those who say «my daughter is in Italy» should be ashamed. I wrote nearly 10 pages and said «when this arrives, make photocopies» the last Sunday of each month there is a family reunion, all the elderly and adults come, I said “go there, count these people who are there, and leave a photocopy for each one, tell them to

read or to ask someone in the house to do so. After you have read this piece of paper, if you go out and say my daughter is in Italy, you should be ashamed»” (Interview Victim No.5).

Initiatives of sensitisation of this type, to have real effect, should be carefully organised, with a wide involvement of the NGOs, local associations, religious organisations, schools, and government institutions. The moment for information should not be disconnected from the life of the community.

What appears to be important is the indication of a social operator according to whom the moment of information should always be accompanied by “*a work on the alternatives*” (*Associazione Tampep* - Turin). It is evident in fact that even the most careful information has blunt weapons against the extreme need which, often, induces the family to push the daughter towards a “risky” migration path. Poverty generates a disposal to believe, or to pretend to believe, in the promises of the exploiters, as a victim acutely explained: “*If you are in need, you always believe*” (Interview Victim No.7).

The information towards the family could therefore produce major results in terms of prevention, as long as it is integrated with concrete support actions: in vocational training of young women and above all in their accompanying to work. “*You must be aware however that these are long term actions*” (*Associazione On the Road* - Martinsicuro). Particularly efficacious in these projects, could be, at least on a symbolic level, the direct involvement of ex victims, disposed to work contemporarily on the level of the witness and on the level of preventive action. Even in this perspective, it would be important to evaluate the experiences and the already existing projects for the support of the repatriated victims.

The social operators agree, however, in maintaining that only a small number of repatriated women are materially available to carry out a direct role of sensitisation. The major obstacles are the social stigma, the financial and human difficulties that always accompany the forced repatriation.

Two complementary paths can be envisaged for the direct involvement of the ex-victims. The first path aims at evaluating the testimony of those who voluntarily chose repatriation, after a knowledgeable path of emancipation or however of the women trafficked and still resident in Italy, but ready to re-enter Nigeria to undertake the work of testimony. The second path is rather more arduous and passes through the capacity to transform the forced repatriation into an occasion of redemption. The reception, assistance, and accompaniment to the social re-insertion in Nigeria of the repatriated women could be placed at the service of prevention. This challenge however needs an autonomous thorough close examination.

Concerning the help action for the repatriated victims, the attention of the NGOs, associations, religious organisations that operate in Italy in support of the Nigerian victims is very high. In all the operators interviewed there is the knowledge that the forced repatriation today is for the victims a surplus of suffering and a hard condemnation: in the best of the cases, to the social emargination in the context of origin; the repetition of sexual exploitation - in Nigeria or whether through the re-starting of the circuit of the traffic - in the worst case. It is urgent

and necessary, therefore, to think about possible forms of intervention for the repatriated women, taking advantage of the experience gained in these years.

The repatriated women are generally collected at the airport of Lagos and then conducted to the centre of detention, where they stay in very hard conditions for a limited period of time (around two weeks). The very frequent result of the period of detention is the “re-hooking” of the victims on the part of the criminal organisations of the traffic, or by new exploiters. In any case, there exists very few possibilities that the repatriated victims can autonomously return to their own family: this is because of the social marginalisation which awaits those who have been a prostitute, or the fear of presenting themselves to the family without being able to offer them any financial support, or still the absence of realistic prospects for work.

One of the most concrete operative indications, within the framework of a project articulated for the assistance of repatriated victims, was given to us by one of the operators interviewed (*Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII* - Rimini). The proposal has its strong points in the idea of creating a “buffer” phase between the moment of arrival at the airport in Lagos and the transportation to the centre of detention, as well as of providing all the repatriated victims with the opportunity of a moral and logistic support. This foresees in each passage the close collaboration with institutions and local reality and is articulated in three moments:

- 1) above all it would be important to create a “direct line with the Embassy”, which would inform a *task force* concerning forthcoming repatriations to Lagos;
- 2) at the airport in Lagos a “free zone” for the talks should be instituted, managed by a task force, in which it is possible to propose to the victims the possibility of being received in a community, or however provide support in the search for contacts with the family;
- 3) the final result of the intervention could be to accompany the victim along a re-entry path with the original family or her reception in a protected structure, managed in close collaboration with the local institutional reality, associative and religious organisations.

The good results of such an intervention strategy depends on the capacity to support the organisations (religious organisations, international organisations, NGOs) today involved in projects of reception for the repatriated victims, even through the creation of a network and coordination, and obviously presupposes the willingness to collaborate on the part of the local authorities.

CONCLUSIONS

The effort to completely analyse the many and variegated aspects of the phenomenon of exploitation and Nigerian prostitution in Italy has permitted to highlight the peculiar characteristics and, at the same time, to pick out the parts which make them not dissimilar from the more widespread phenomenon of trafficking in persons and placement on the market of paid sexual services which, for many years, involves persons of different origins in not very different ways and paths.

The specificity of the context studied should not, in other words, let us forget that the possibility of recruitment, the management of the transfer from the countries of origin to those of the destination, their placement on the market, the same presence of a demand that such an offer in fact supports, are recorded in some basic parts of social and cultural dynamics which characterise the contemporary era.

Even with their peculiarities - that we have so many times emphasised in considering the synthesis of the previous chapter - the network of Nigerian organised crime, which organises the traffic and manages the exploitation of young and very young women, are fully placed within the framework of the illegal economies of trans-national character which appear to characterise the era of globalisation.

As emphasised by Monica Massari (2003, p. 202), *“the strongly territorial vision of the nature of these groups - Albanian criminals, Chinese, Nigerian, Columbian, Turkish, Russian, etc. - are grafted, therefore, on the extra-territoriality nature of the main illicit markets, which are structured in a space composed of countries and geographical areas often quite distant from each other. Local and global - even in the case of criminality - make up two opposed and yet complementary faces of the same phenomenon”*.

The criminal potential of single groups is guaranteed by its roots within the local context, but at the same time is assured by the capacity to weave profitable relationships with other groups and with the resources available in different contexts.

The Nigerian case, however, appears to be the prototype of organisational forms which, taking the example of a legal type of entrepreneurial form, today characterise the most efficient criminal organisations: reduced dimensions of the operational nucleus, capacity to build networks, whether intra-ethnic or with subjects from other cultures and other organisations, capacity to build alliances and to exploit all opportunities presented to them, great flexibility, weaving - relationships with submissive and exploited persons - and the use of the force of ties together with the use of pressure and threats.

But the parts of the culture which characterise the “post-modern” phase are also to be found in the motivations and aspirations of not few of the victims. Certainly

in many cases they are driven to the desire to emigrate and to settle themselves in the western context by the processes of anticipated socialisation permeated by complex needs and sentiments, by models of life and consumption which have become a patrimony to everyone within the processes of globalisation of the aspirations and widely known and described styles of life in recent sociological literature.

Finally, can we also assume that the demand expressed in the context of a society such as ours - according to some, very little thematically as a factor which in effect feeds on the exploitation and the maintenance of the interests of organisations that manage it - is strongly featured by the cultural imperatives which characterise the present time.

The imperative of the consumption of easily accessible paid sensations, the exaltation of the dimensions of the journey and of another place as a means of indispensable realisation, the need to maintain relationships of domination (of a type or race) which can only be reproduced on the market, and other elements are ever more present in the dynamics of a demand which never ceases to be quantitatively relevant.

Moreover - in the case of the demand directed to the Nigerian target, placed often in marginal positions on the market and also prevalently “enjoyed” by a not very sensitive clientele composed of marginal individuals - with some odious accentuations of such tendencies, which frequently produce victims, and humiliation to the women protagonists.

All this brings us to the need for articulated strategies and the complexity of the possible intervention to effectively fight the phenomenon and above all to prevent its replication. The repression action against the exploitation networks cannot be separated from action tending to guarantee an adequate local development within a framework which, above all, appears fragile if it is not grafted on to wider processes, capable of questioning the entire system of economic and social relations which characterise the era in which we live, on questions of sense and prospect not only for those who are involved in these problems, but for everyone.

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